

# Handbook for Joint Urban Operations



17 May 2000





**THE JOINT STAFF**  
**WASHINGTON, DC**

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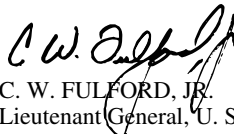
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**MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR, JOINT STAFF**

Given the increasing rate of global urbanization and a national security strategy of global engagement, the Armed Forces of the United States must prepare now for the likelihood of conducting joint urban operations in the future. Joint urban operations involve a variety of unique operational considerations such as extensive man-made construction, large noncombatant populations, and complex sociological, political, economic, and cultural interactions within those populations. To overcome these challenges, US military forces must be able to apply the full range of tools available to a commander tasked with conducting joint urban operations.

The *Handbook for Joint Urban Operations* is a primer on joint urban operations. It is intended to provide joint force commanders, their staffs, and other interested parties with fundamental principles and operational-level considerations for the conduct of joint urban operations. Although the Handbook is consistent with joint and Service doctrine, it is not a doctrinal publication. As a primer, the Handbook is intended to *inform*, rather than *dictate*, the actions of joint forces conducting urban operations.

When US military forces deploy to urban areas, American lives and national security will depend upon the ability of commanders and staffs to understand and address the unique operational considerations of joint urban operations as presented in this publication. I challenge military leaders to read this Handbook and to use it as a resource tool in preparing for the conduct of joint urban operations across the full spectrum of conflict.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "C. W. Fulford, Jr.", is positioned above the printed name and title.

C. W. FULFORD, JR.  
Lieutenant General, U. S. Marine Corps  
Director, Joint Staff

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Corrections or suggestions for improvement of this Handbook are welcome. Comments should be forwarded to the Joint Staff, J-8, Land and Littoral Warfare Assessment Division, Room 1D940, The Pentagon, Washington, DC 20318-8000. The DSN telephone number is 225-4657, commercial (703) 695-4657, and fax extension 8031.

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# HANDBOOK FOR JOINT URBAN OPERATIONS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Introduce the roles and challenges of military operations in urban areas**
- **Provide an operational context for joint urban operations (JUO)**
- **Outline planning considerations for JUO**
- **Examine case studies of urban operations**

*JUO are planned and conducted across the range of military operations on or against objectives on a topographical complex and its adjacent natural terrain where man-made construction and the density of noncombatants are the dominant features.*

### **The Roles and Challenges of Military Operations in Urban Areas**

The US military has a long history of conducting urban operations, from the Revolutionary War (Boston and New York), to armed intervention in Beijing during the Boxer Rebellion, to recent noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs) in Sierra Leone and Albania, among others.

### **Historically Strategic Locations**

Urban areas often evolve in strategically important locations. Many urban areas were originally situated to defend and/or exploit key geographical chokepoints or lines of communication, such as ports and overland trade routes. As these urban areas prospered, their populations and importance grew.

### **The Symbolic Value of Urban Areas**

Urban areas often hold symbolic political, social, and/or cultural value. Military operations can target urban areas in order to exploit this symbolic value in order to attain broader campaign objectives.

### **The Concentration of Decision-Making Nodes and the Strategic Center of Gravity**

Urban areas generally function as the social, economic, and political center of societies. Important commercial, state, and cultural sites, such as religious and cultural centers, government offices, embassies, factories, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), among others, are usually located in urban areas.

*By definition, the two key characteristics that make urban environments more complex than other environments are man-made construction and density of noncombatants.*

*The likelihood of US forces operating in urban areas will increase should US national interests continue to promote global engagement.*

### **The Inherent Challenges of Joint Urban Operations**

JUO deserve serious attention from US Armed Forces due to the significant physical challenges and unique social characteristics of urban areas. These inter-related challenges and characteristics may include, but are not limited to:

- Increasing rates of urbanization
- Challenging terrain, shores, and waterways
- Large presence of noncombatants
- Presence of civil government institutions
- Presence of NGOs
- Presence of local and international media
- Potential sources of host nation support (labor, construction materials, and medical supplies)
- Complex social, cultural, and governmental interaction that supports urban life
- Location of key transportation hubs

### **The Operational Context of Joint Urban Operations**

#### **The Urban Area in War**

When other elements of national power are either unable or inappropriate to achieve national objectives or protect national interests, US national leadership may decide to conduct large-scale, sustained military operations. In the event of war, including warfare in or for urban areas, American military strategy calls for decisive operations aimed at defeating the enemy, attaining key political-military objectives, and minimizing casualties to US and allied forces as well as noncombatants.

#### **The Principles of War**

The principles of war are the foundation of US military doctrine, and the joint force commander (JFC) should fully understand how the principles of war relate to JUO. The principles of war include: **objective, offensive, mass, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, surprise, and simplicity.**

#### **The Levels of War**

The levels of war help commanders plan operations, allocate resources, and assign tasks with regard to operational and strategic objectives. When operating

*What is the desired strategic end state and how does the political-military control of an urban area contribute to that desired end state?*

*What operational objectives must be achieved in urban areas to support the overall campaign plan?*

*What units and tactics are needed to achieve control (if control is required) of an urban area?*

*The specific situation and setting will dictate the military capabilities necessary for an urban operation.*

*Isolating*

*Retaining*

*Containing*

in an urban area, commanders at every level must be aware that in a world of constant, immediate communications, any single event may cut across all three levels; in essence, tactical actions may have strategic consequences.

**The strategic level** is the level of war at which a nation, often as a member of a group of nations, determines national or multinational (alliance or coalition) security objectives and guidance, and then develops and uses national resources to accomplish these objectives.

**The operational level** links the tactical employment of forces to strategic objectives. The focus at this level is on operational art—the use of military forces to achieve strategic goals through the design, organization, integration, and conduct of strategies, campaigns, major operations, and battles. The decision to conduct urban combat is generally made at the strategic or operational levels of war.

**The tactical level** is the level at which battles and engagements are planned and executed to accomplish military objectives. Activities at this level focus on the ordered arrangement and maneuver of combat elements in relation to each other and to the enemy to achieve combat objectives.

### **Types of Urban Operations in War**

Urban area analysis should examine the physical and cultural environment in order to anticipate and prepare responses to a range of contingency situations.

The JFC should recognize that a number of different JUO might be an integral part of the campaign plan, including **isolating, retaining, containing, denying,** and **reducing** an urban area.

**Isolating** an urban area requires employing joint forces in a manner that isolates or cuts off an enemy force inside an urban area from other enemy forces or allies.

**Retaining** an urban area is a defensive action in which the fundamental objective is to prevent an urban area from falling under the political and/or military control of an adversary.

**Containing** an urban area describes those actions taken by joint forces to prevent an adversary's forces inside an urban area from breaking out.

### *Denying*

**Denying** an urban area is a defensive action taken outside the boundaries of an urban area in an effort to prevent approaching enemy forces from gaining control of the urban area.

### *Reducing*

**Reducing** an urban area is an essentially offensive action intended to eliminate an adversary's hold over all or part of the urban area.

*MOOTW principles include: objective, unity of effort, security, restraint, perseverance, and legitimacy. These basic principles help ensure success and minimize losses during JUO.*

### **The Urban Area in Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW)**

MOOTW focus on deterring war and promoting peace. The use of military forces may help keep day-to-day tensions between nations below the threshold of armed conflict, promote US influence, and protect US national interests abroad. Such operations include: **arms control, combating terrorism, counterdrug operations, maritime intercept operations, support to counterinsurgency, NEOs, peace operations, protection of shipping, recovery operations, show of force operations, strikes and raids, and support to insurgency.**

### **Planning Considerations in Joint Urban Operations**

#### *Categories of urban areas are classified as:*

- *Villages (populations of 3,000 or less)*
- *Strip areas (industrialized zones built along roads, connecting towns or cities)*
- *Towns or small cities (populations of up to 200,000)*
- *Medium cities (populations of 200,000 to one million)*
- *Large cities with associated urban sprawl (populations in excess of one million)*

#### **Characteristics of an Urban Area**

A typical urban environment is characterized by a concentration of structures, facilities, and population and is the **economic, political, and cultural focus** of the surrounding area.

An urban area is as diverse as it is complex. In order to map an urban area, the JFC should consider five essential characteristics:

- Physical
- Infrastructure
- Commercial
- Residential
- Socio-economic

Defining and understanding an urban area as a system of characteristics prior to operational planning may require extensive intelligence gathering and reliance on special operations forces (SOF), including civil

affairs (CA), psychological operations (PSYOP) units and human intelligence (HUMINT) assets.

### **Information/Intelligence Required for Joint Urban Operations**

Intelligence supports all aspects of operations in urban areas and provides the basis for action throughout the range of military operations. The JFC should utilize all available resources to both **see** and **know** the urban operational area. Sources of intelligence should include a combination of human, electronic, and archival data.

*HUMINT is essential to understanding and communicating with the local population and to developing situational awareness.*

The urban area hosts a number of nontraditional human resources that the JFC should consult in order to determine, direct, and coordinate missions. CA, PSYOP, and SOF personnel, terrain analysts, military patrols, military engineers, NGOs, United Nations (UN) military observers, and others who may have direct contact with the indigenous population can provide specialized and detailed intelligence to the operators and planning staff essential to developing and fulfilling the JFC's intent.

### **Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) in Joint Urban Operations**

Effective C4ISR employs a synergistic architecture linking joint task force command, control, communications, and computer (C4) systems with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets. Well-planned execution of operations with the appropriate C4ISR systems gives the JFC the advantage of making timely and effective decisions. The JFC should consider the following C4ISR implications of JUO:

- **Urban area features may impose communication limitations.** Joint force units operating over, under, around, or within a city may experience internal and external difficulties communicating in the urban environment (e.g., Line of Site [LOS] communications, blockage from imposing structures, frequency spectrum interference, etc.).
- **Urban infrastructure may offer opportunities to facilitate telecommunications.** Many urban areas

are technological hubs. JFCs requiring additional telecommunications capabilities may find important communications resources accessible in the urban area of operations.

- **Aerospace assets offer unique C4ISR capabilities** that include real-time intelligence and the relay of transmissions from forces within and around an urban area.
- **SOF may be able to offer unique C4ISR capabilities to the JFC in a JUO.** SOF are trained, equipped, and organized to undertake highly specialized intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions that may prove useful in JUO.

### **Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)**

The threat of WMD occurs across the range of military operations and may be used in isolation or as an adjunct to conventional combat power. Nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) defense operations present many unique challenges to commanders operating in an urban area. The greatest problem from a civil-military operational perspective is the decontamination of infrastructure, the decontamination and possible relocation of the civilian population, and the decontamination of joint forces. A clear understanding of the effects of WMD, along with the implementation of the principles of NBC defense, can significantly reduce these challenges.

When operating in an urban area, the JFC has a priority to protect friendly forces and noncombatants and safeguard strategic centers of gravity throughout the range of operations in urban areas. The JFC should employ active security and defense measures, conduct deception operations, and be prepared to provide logistic and medical support for probable NBC defense operations. Medical operations can support and protect US personnel and enhance mission capability. JUO may require medical specialists from Reserve Component units (RC) and/or individuals not found in the armed forces, especially during post-operational activity.

*A JFC operating in an urban environment must be prepared to deter and defend against NBC weapons.*

### **Civil-Military Operations (CMO)**

The increased importance of noncombatants and the likelihood of media presence magnify the importance of CMO during urban operations. The ability to communicate and collaborate effectively with allied forces, governmental agencies, NGOs, international organizations (IOs), private voluntary organizations (PVOs), the media, and the public will be critical to the success of any JUO. One method to facilitate information exchange and build unity of effort is to establish a civil-military operations center (CMOC) to coordinate civilian and military actions.

In addition, civil-military support activities, such as CA and PSYOP, can help fulfill specific military, political, and economic objectives. Civil-military support activities help to:

- Create an awareness of military goals and actions during an operation
- Secure support from the civilian population
- Forge positive relationships with host nation counterparts and government officials
- Promote specific opinions, emotions, attitudes, and/or behavior of a foreign audience in support of US or coalition objectives

### **Public Affairs (PA)**

PA is important because news media can significantly affect the execution of military operations, and particularly JUO. This is due to the complex relationship among information, the public (international and domestic), and policy formulation. The mission of joint PA is to expedite the flow of accurate and timely information about the activities of US joint forces to the public and internal audiences, and to ensure that public information is consistent with national and operational security.

### **Interagency Communication and Coordination**

Commanders and military planners may have to integrate and coordinate their activities with those of other organizations addressing needs that are beyond the capabilities of military forces, including pre-hostility, combat, and post-hostility responsibilities.

*Military means alone may be insufficient to meet national or coalition objectives.*

Such organizations may include governmental agencies and their components, such as the US State Department and the US Agency for International Development; as well as a variety of NGOs, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

The JFC has a number of tools to establish the infrastructure for interagency cooperation: the country team, CMOC, executive steering group (ESG), liaison sections, humanitarian assistance coordination center (HACC), joint force assessment team, and political advisor (POLAD).

### **Multinational Coalitions and Urban Operations**

Coalition urban operations are normally fraught with doctrinal, cultural, and language differences that challenge the overall coordination of the mission and the ability to achieve unity of effort. Lack of understanding and misperceptions can result in unanticipated and counterproductive constraints on the operation. Respecting multinational partners and their ideas, cultures, religions, and customs is essential to the success of any JUO. In addition, the JFC should ensure that missions are assigned appropriately with regard to each multinational partner's capabilities and resources.

*The effectiveness of multinational operations will be improved by establishing rapport and harmony among multinational commanders.*

### **Operating as a Joint Team**

The JFC should understand the preeminent need to conduct JUO as a joint team. Urban areas present multi-faceted challenges to military forces. This is exacerbated by the fact that a single JUO may include missions as varied as humanitarian assistance and combat. Operational and environmental complications will require the application of diverse capabilities that transcend typical Service boundaries. This means that the JFC should: **plan** for JUO with the full range of joint assets in mind; **train** interactively from the task force level down to the lowest tactical level with these joint assets; **use** the most appropriate combination of joint assets; and **cooperate** with all relevant military, government, and nongovernmental agencies.

*The availability of non-lethal weapon systems offers a greater range of options to forces operating under challenging urban conditions. ROE must be clearly articulated and understood to establish the role of non-lethal weapons as an additional means of employing force, for the specific purpose of limiting the probability of death or serious injury to noncombatants or, in some circumstances, to enemy combatants.*

*A good legal advisor is a force multiplier and is essential to the JFC's ability to accomplish the mission in a lawful manner.*

## Rules of Engagement (ROE)

The proximity of forces, number and location of noncombatants, media presence, and other factors can rapidly alter tactical and operational conditions. The JFC should determine ROE and legal restrictions/requirements in advance in order to understand the limits of command responsibilities to keep order, maintain essential services, and protect the local populace from acts of violence.

ROE dictate **when, where, against whom, and how** force can be used. These directives recognize an individual's inherent right of self-defense and the commander's authority and obligation to use all necessary means for unit and individual defense. ROE should be tactically sound, flexible, understandable, enforceable, consistent with core combat capabilities, and disseminated at all levels.

Establishment and maintenance of logical and effective ROE are crucial to force protection, given the complexities of the urban environment, and are critical to mission success. Inappropriate, unclear, or poorly written ROE may result in unnecessary collateral damage and the death or injury of noncombatants, seriously hampering an operation. This is largely due to the close proximity of noncombatants and their property to military forces during joint operations in urban areas. Additionally, many MOOTW take place in urban areas, which often raise a variety of controversial political-military issues.

## Legal Issues

Urban operations are likely to involve significant legal issues. For example, issues such as curfew, evacuation, forced labor, civilian resistance, and protection or use of property should be considered by the JFC. The JFC's staff judge advocate (SJA) should be familiar with the laws related to legal assistance, military justice, administrative and civil law, contract and fiscal law, and operational and international law. The entire campaign plan should be reviewed for compliance with domestic and international law. The SJA will be the most vital resource in the process of understanding the myriad of statutory, regulatory, and policy considerations that can complicate JUO.

### Logistics

A logistics element, such as a water purification company, may precede other military forces or may be the only force deployed for an urban operation. The JUO concept of sustainment is to “push” supplies and material to employed units until the urban objective is secured, then transition to a “pull” concept whereby engaged units obtain required replenishment stocks from designated sources of supply, and finally, to transfer responsibilities to a logistics civilian augmentation program (LOGCAP) as soon as possible. In the urban area, overtaking of resources may become a major factor. The J4 can help de-conflict these potential problems and coordinate individual component logistic requirements.

*These case studies represent the broad spectrum of urban operations and highlight the specific challenges that a JFC may face when operating in an urban area.*

### Case Studies of Urban Operations

The complexity of joint operations, the increasing capabilities of today’s forces, and the lethality and accuracy of modern weaponry exacerbate JUO operational considerations. Analyzing military history in the context of modern operational principles allows leaders and planners to apply the lessons learned from past conflicts to help solve the military problems of today.

Because urban areas complicate military operations, the JFC should devote special attention to the unique challenges that future JUO may present.

The case studies were chosen for their relevance to JUO and were researched using a rigorous methodology that focused on the key planning considerations that influence JUO. The case studies are by no means comprehensive operational histories; rather, each case study highlights a few of the major observations most applicable to future JUO.

#### *The Battle for Grozny*

The Battle for Grozny is an example of a high-intensity urban battle and provides significant lessons on the inherent difficulties of isolating an enemy in a city and the challenges of maneuvering in, around, above, and/or below an urban area.

#### *The invasion of Panama City*

During the invasion of Panama City, US forces demonstrated the importance of HUMINT in urban battlefield preparation and the utility of SOF as precision strike forces in urban areas.

### *Operations in Port-au-Prince*

Operations in Port-au-Prince illustrated the importance of understanding the political, social, and geographic realities in the urban area and demonstrated how the threat of force can be used effectively to achieve diplomatic solutions during humanitarian crises.

### *Operations in Mogadishu*

Operations in Mogadishu demonstrated the importance of understanding the political, historical, and cultural context for violence in an urban area before defining operational objectives. It also demonstrated the need for synchronization of the command and control architecture in the rapidly changing urban fight.

### *The British experience in Belfast*

The British experience in Belfast illustrates the ways in which a city can be divided by race, ethnicity, or religion and the complications that factionalism in an urban area can pose to a JFC.

### *Operations in Sarajevo*

Operations in Sarajevo illuminated the successful application of aerospace power to help modify, control, or support a force defending an urban area.

### *The NEO performed in Monrovia*

The NEO performed in Monrovia, Liberia in 1996 is an example of an operation that has become an increasingly frequent feature of the landscape of US military actions in the post-Cold War era.

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