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Blood and Concrete: 21st Century Conflict in Urban Centers and Megacities. Edited by Dave Dilegge, Robert J. Bunker, John P. Sullivan, and Alma Keshavarz. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2019.

***Blood and Concrete: 21st Century Conflict in Urban Centers and Megacities.* Edited by Dave Dilege, Robert J. Bunker, John P. Sullivan, and Alma Keshavarz. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2019. ISBN 978-1-9845-7375-9. Notes. Sources Cited. Acronyms. Photographs. Notes on Contributors. Pp. xi-705. \$22.99**

Review by Michael L. Burgoyne, MA and Ph.D. Student

At the outset of the post 9/11 US military interventions, the only knowledge gap among military leaders more pronounced than insurgency/counterinsurgency was in urban operations. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, generations of officers and non-commissioned officers focused on defeating conventional forces across European rural landscapes and later the deserts of Southwest Asia. At Combat Training Centers, the player unit and the opposing force (OPFOR) faced off on a pristine simulated battlefield—not a town, non-combatant, or piece of infrastructure in sight. The recommended procedure for dealing with a built-up area was bypass. When US forces found themselves in tough fights in Baghdad and Fallujah, bypass was no longer an option. In fact, it never truly was an option, and today, more than ever, understanding how to fight in urban areas is an inescapable necessity. That is why *Blood and Concrete: A Small Wars Journal Anthology* is essential reading for practitioners and scholars of modern war and security.

From its inception, *the Small Wars Journal* has filled gaps in traditional professional military education. *Small Wars Journal* has been an invaluable hub for knowledge of often neglected complex threats and operations. Urban operations hold a special place at *Small Wars Journal* as the journal began as the Military Operations in Urban Terrain homepage and later the *Urban Operations Journal*. Published in 2019, *Blood and Concrete* captures nearly a decade and a half of articles and observations into a single volume. The work is edited by three experts in terrorism and non-state actors: Robert Bunker, John P. Sullivan, and Alma Keshaverz. Importantly, the anthology represents another example of the legacy of knowledge and debate left by its fourth editor, Dave Dilege, a founder of *Small Wars Journal*.

Blood and Concrete is an expansive work with 49 chapters, by an array of academic researchers, military officers, and law enforcement professionals. The preface, provided by insurgency expert David Kilcullen, sets the tone of the book, “we ignore or forget urban operations at our peril” (p. xxxvii). His admonishment is reinforced by John Spencer, whose *Mini Manual for the Urban Defender* informed Ukrainians resisting the Russian invasion, “Let not another needless drop of blood be spilt on concrete for the wanting of a lesson already learned or a question already asked” (p. xlv). Although many new chapters based on the war on Ukraine are being written, *Blood and Concrete* still provide a broad collection of lessons and answers across a spectrum of conflicts and threats, both unconventional and conventional.

As with counterinsurgency, ground (conventional) forces of developed nations would rather not deal with urban operations and dread the combination of insurgency and urban operations, which can negate technological overmatch. Urban insurgents and terrorists, following the guidance of thinkers like Abraham Guillen and Carlos Marighella, attempt to take advantage of this complex terrain. In chapter one, Russell Glenn notes that “cities are the richest terrorist targets.” In his contribution, Luke Allison provides a frightening assessment of mass hostage taking as a serious vulnerability. In his contribution, Alex Calvo’s “London Riots: Decentralized Intelligence Collection and Analysis” points to the use of technology to identify criminals and insurgents in an urban environment.

Since publication, the expansion of artificial intelligence, computing power, and ubiquitous technical surveillance have only reinforced Calvo’s conclusions. Other chapters by Jeffrey Demarest, John Sullivan, and Adam Elkus examine powerful criminal organizations and their use of urban spaces. Criminal groups continue to challenge nation states. In 2019, the Sinaloa Cartel rose in the city of Culiacan in response to the arrest of Ovidio Guzman Lopez. The militarized criminal group was powerful enough to cause the Mexican government to release Guzman and back down. Insurgents, terrorists, and criminal organizations all seek to take advantage of urban terrain, the analysis in *Blood and Concrete* provides valuable insights into how to address these actors in cities.

Conventional warfare in cities is also inherently challenging. Sun Tzu cautioned that the “tactic of attacking fortified cities is adopted only when

unavoidable.” Attacking or laying siege to cities was a recipe for exhaustion and high casualties. The increasing density of modern cities makes the scale of fighting unfathomable for military planners. A few blocks of high rises can swallow a brigade and, at the operational level, generating sufficient force to seize a megacity of over 20 million people is a seemingly insurmountable challenge. However, as growing urbanization makes avoiding cities unlikely, *Blood and Concrete* provides useful counsel. With Jomini like efficiency, Geoff Demarest lays out a seven-point template to “hold or take a big city” (p. 370). While some argue for units specialized in urban operations, Adam Scher points to the need for urban tactics and training for general purpose forces. Armed with information from the book, a practitioner has a better chance of achieving success in the modern urban battlespace.

If *Blood and Concrete* has a weakness, it is that the world has moved quickly in the four years since its publication. Communications technology, cyberwarfare, drone technology, artificial intelligence and simulations have made significant advances which impact operations in the urban space. Most importantly, heavy urban fighting in Ukraine has provided a wealth of information on modern warfare in cities. Integrating new *Small Wars Journal* articles like Amos Fox’s “The Russo-Ukrainian War and the Principles of Urban Operations,” will be a must for the next addition of the anthology. Yet, the core message of the anthology, as expressed by Margarita Konaev, remains as true today as in 2019: “the future of global security will be determined by what happens in cities” (p. 651). *Blood and Concrete* are a critical resource for those focused on urban operations, but understanding this complex terrain is essential for everyone interested in war and security.