US Army document on urban warfare advances strategy for “contemporary Stalingrads”

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The United States Army War College published a document this month outlining US plans for waging total war in major metropolitan cities around the world.

The 163-page report, “Military Contingencies In Megacities and Sub-Megacities,” is written by two military academics, Dr. Phil Williams and Werner Selle. Employing cold and calculating military jargon, the authors advance proposals that would likely result in nuclear war.

It is likely, the article begins, “that the United States will find itself at some point in the not-too-distant future engaged in military contingencies in large cities.” Elsewhere in the document, the authors call the invasion of major world metropolitan cities “as challenging as they are inescapable.”

The document pictures a future filled with historically unprecedented levels of death, destruction and human suffering. Urban warfare “ensures that the battlefield will be densely populated. Civilians will no longer be mere bystanders able to be circumvented or avoided, but an integral component of the battlefield.”

The authors recognize that such battles might result in massive civilian and soldier casualties. “Such cautions notwithstanding, an inhibition cannot be allowed to become a prohibition. If there is a highly compelling strategic rationale for action, the United States might not have the luxury of avoiding the dangers of an urban contingency.”

Preparing for “contemporary Stalingrads”

The authors explain that the closest comparisons for the urban battles of the “not-too-distant future” are the battles of Stalingrad and Berlin during the Second World War.

“[B]oth of these battles ultimately resulted in the utter destruction of the dense urban areas,” the authors note. “A more modern scenario, which although unlikely is by no means inconceivable, could involve a battle in Seoul, in the Republic of Korea. In some ways, such a scenario exemplifies the potential for a contemporary Battle of Stalingrad.”

Given the population of Seoul (23 million) and the exponentially more lethal military weaponry available today, such a battle would likely kill far more than the estimated 3 million who died in Stalingrad or the 700,000 who lost their lives in Berlin. The authors’ response is to propose better destructive armaments for the US occupation forces in South Korea: “The more US military forces are educated, trained, and equipped for a dense urban conflict, the more likely the numerical advantage of North Korea would not prove nearly as decisive as Pyongyang might anticipate.”

The authors explain that such “contemporary Stalingrads” would occur primarily in poor cities—what the military refers to as “fragile” or “feral” cities as opposed to more developed, “smart” cities. The destruction of the poorer neighborhoods will be a necessary component of “pacifying” the population.

“Given the trends in urbanization, especially in the global south and the concomitant problems of instability and fragility, it is more likely that the US Army will find itself in a fragile or feral megacity than in a smart city.”

US military strategy: “Bulldoze the slums” and target poor and working class districts

Large slums and shantytowns in impoverished cities present a unique challenge to American invasion:

“Megacities and dense urban areas also contain numerous slums or ‘sheet metal forests,’ which are very different from ‘concrete canyons’ [i.e., commercial centers]…These areas can provide significant concealment to the adversaries and even become strong operational bases. *Apart from moving the population out and bulldozing the slum, there is very little that can be done* .” (Emphasis added).

The military proposes to target young poor and working class men. Growing slum populations result in “a surplus of unemployed males with little to do but join gangs or engage in crime as a source of income. Joining extremist or terrorist organizations might also appear attractive as a way out. At the very least, in the event of some kind of conflict, these young men would provide a pool of potential recruits for those opposing the United States. In short, slums would be an inordinately difficult battlefield.”

The only alternative suggested by the US Army War College to razing the slums is for the US forces to ally with “forces of alternative governance,” including “criminal entities.” “A tacit or explicit agreement with the forces of alternative governance might make it possible to prevent adversaries from utilizing these ‘sheet metal forests.’ Of course, there would have to be something in return, even if only an implicit understanding that US military forces would not interfere with the illicit business of the criminal organizations.”

This admission reveals the fraudulent character of all the democratic, humanitarian pretenses given for US military intervention. To suppress opposition among the poor and working class, the military proposes to either bulldoze the slums or to give criminal gangs free rein to rape, kidnap, kill, extort, and sell into slavery the most impoverished and defenseless section of the population.

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Crushing "civil unrest" and "anarchy"

The military is preoccupied by the likelihood of social opposition to a US invasion. The authors of the war college document list "civil unrest" as a main problem that will "plague the governance of such cities and play significant roles in the military operations conducted within them."

There is a danger posed by "precipitating the collapse of a fragile city into a feral one. One only has to look at the experience of New Orleans under the impact of Katrina to see how a city can rapidly degenerate into anomie and anarchy, with the normal rules and norms of urban life abruptly jettisoned."

The authors quote a leading industry strategist who writes: "The urban dilemma" involves "a risk of insecurity among the urban poor." This applies beyond the global south: "Even cities like Amsterdam, London, New York, Paris, and Tokyo are not immune."

The US Army War College article quotes an academic who explains that the problem stems in large part from "class conflict," which "might greatly complicate the post-combat, pacification, and occupation periods."

Where social opposition emerges, the authors note that "the restoration of order and stability would have to accompany if not precede major disaster relief operations. This effort could also create opposition."

In its efforts to crush opposition, the military fears the "problem" posed by transparency:

"The other problem when dealing with cyberspace in relation to megacity contingencies is that adversaries can exploit the almost automatic transparency that it creates—both to show US forces in bad light and their own actions very positively."

As a result, invasion plans must involve efforts to shut down the internet, cell phone service, and ensure the local media publishes only US military propaganda: "Part of IPB [intelligence preparation for the urban battlefield] prior to any action in a megacity or sub-megacity must be to identify the services providers for both telecommunications and the Internet. It is also important to identify online opinion-makers who could have a major impact in any controversy over US military intervention."

The authors also note how "here in the United States, the release of videos showing killings by police has led to significant protests and political movements."

Alongside Internet and telecommunications blackouts, the document places key importance on dominating the city's infrastructure in order to "control the population."

"There are certain areas you will always need to understand when entering an urban area—with the purpose of then controlling it and the population. These are the building layout and composition, transportation, electrical, sewage and water, and natural gas systems and the locations/status of key subcomponents—bridges, gas stations, power stations, high tension power lines, neighborhood substations/transformers, underground sewage canals, water purification plants, gas lines and their depth under roads…"

The war college authors praise an Israeli Defense Force commander who wrote that during its 2002 attack on the Palestinian uprising in the West Bank city of Nablus, the IDF "used none of the city's streets, roads, alleys or courtyards, or any of the external doors, internal stairwells and windows, but moved horizontally through walls and vertically through holes blasted in ceilings and floors. This form of movement, described by the military as 'infestation,' seeks to redefine inside as outside, and domestic interiors as thoroughfares. The IDF's strategy of 'walking through walls' involves a conception of the city as not just the site but also the very medium of warfare—a flexible, almost liquid medium that is forever contingent and in flux."

Mass surveillance

The US Army War College report includes plans to establish a real-time map of an entire metropolis' inhabitants, including their movements, social networks, friends, family and political thoughts. Quoting a group of European researchers, the authors state:

"The basic notion is that citizens with smartphones have become mobile sensors, reporting on events in the city with tweets, photos, messages, and the like. 'This transforms human beings into potential sensors that not only have the ability to process and interpret what they feel and think but also to geographically localize the information (sometimes involuntarily) and spread it globally through the Internet, thus drawing people-generated landscapes.'"

At the same time, "Human intelligence assets will be able to offer far greater insight on adversaries because of their ability to capture emotions and relationships—things that will long remain outside the purview of even the most sophisticated drones."

In other words, the US military will spy on the entire population of the cities it plans on invading, using drones and cell phones as real-time "sensors" to monitor entire populations. "Human intelligence" refers to the use of informants and government agents to infiltrate political groups and communities in order to suppress opposition.

Censorship and "the battle of the story"

Key to the military's efforts to pacify and occupy major cities is its ability to win what it calls "the battle of the story." The authors explain:

"Presenting compelling narratives can enhance legitimacy and authority in the eyes of many stakeholders (such as the urban population). Understanding the utility and power of digital media, therefore, allows for enormous reach and breadth that can indirectly alter the battlefield. The user-friendliness of mass media and mobile technology allows adversaries to manipulate and garner favorable public opinion and recruit support. For these reasons and more, civilian and military leaders cannot afford to ignore the requirement for compelling narratives."

This fight over narratives is especially important in cases where the military is occupying American cities:

"In the final analysis, the battle of narratives and the contradictions of security are likely to be at the forefront, especially as the most likely contingencies will be humanitarian or stabilization operations. Moreover, such operations could even take place within the continental United States, as demonstrated by the Los Angeles riots and the responses to Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy. Presenting a positive image of the military to the American public is indispensable for continued support."

The American ruling class prepares for future war crimes

The US Army War College article could serve as "Exhibit A" in a prosecution of leading military figures for war crimes. The article shows that US plans for invading, occupying and "pacifying" cities with tens of

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millions of residents are in advanced stages. In fact, the authors of this article consider such invasions “inescapable.”

No corner of the world is free from the threat of US invasion. The document lists several cities—including many in the United States—as hypothetical targets for invasion. Among those cities mentioned in the document are Mumbai, Beijing, Rome, London, Los Angeles, Abuja, Baltimore, San Salvador, Paris, Tokyo, Amsterdam, Dhaka, Nairobi, Delhi, Aleppo, Caracas, Rio de Janeiro, Frankfurt, Zurich, Hong Kong, Sao Paolo, Mexico City, Seoul, Manila, San Francisco, Tehran, Istanbul, Guangzhou-Foshan, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Rangoon, Alexandria, Jakarta, Johannesburg, Shanghai, Kabul, Cairo, Riga, Tallinn, Vilnius and Mogadishu.

The article flows from the US military’s analysis of its own activities over the last several years. The authors reference the National Guard’s occupation of Ferguson, Missouri during protests against a police killing in 2014, the occupation of parts of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, as well as foreign city operations like Kabul, Mosul, Fallujah and Baghdad. The US military is aware that it is preparing both to attack cities abroad and to suppress social opposition by the working class domestically.

If the US military is allowed to carry out its plans to invade major world cities using the tactics mentioned in the US Army War College document, tens or hundreds of millions will die while the number of refugees will be orders of magnitude higher. Capitalism presents a future of unprecedented death and destruction. Only a social revolution based on the international unity of the working class can prevent American imperialism from carrying out its plans.

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