Urban Close Air Support and Non-Lethality

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Abstract: Global urbanization is rapidly changing the face of the world and guarantees that combat will occur in urban areas. Enemies of the United States will utilize the complex infrastructure of cities to asymmetrically counter the technological superiority of U.S. forces. The density of non-combatants in urban areas and the intricate infrastructure present monumental challenges to the U.S. military, particularly with regard to collateral damage and non-combatant casualty. These challenges are evident in the Russian experience in Chechnya. This urban conflict is emblematic of the security challenge the U.S. military will face in the future, and is reviewed with a focus on the implications for the employment of Close Air Support (CAS). This paper examines the use of CAS during military operations on urban terrain (MOUT) and the potential benefit of the use of non-lethal weapons (NLW) from CAS platforms. The combination of CAS and NLWs enhances the combat effectiveness of ground forces while minimizing non-combatant casualty and collateral damage. When used synergistically with lethal weapons, NLWs can increase the lethality of U.S. forces, and also provide a graduated response capability to the commander for any combat situation. CAS and NLWs are not fully incorporated into MOUT training and doctrine. Commanders must develop robust, joint MOUT training to integrate all elements of the combined arms team in the urban environment, and the effects of NLWs must be fully incorporated into mission planning and execution. The time is now to prepare for the challenging and inevitable urban battlefield.

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« Back to search