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## **Book Review: Small Armies, Big Cities: Rethinking Urban Warfare**

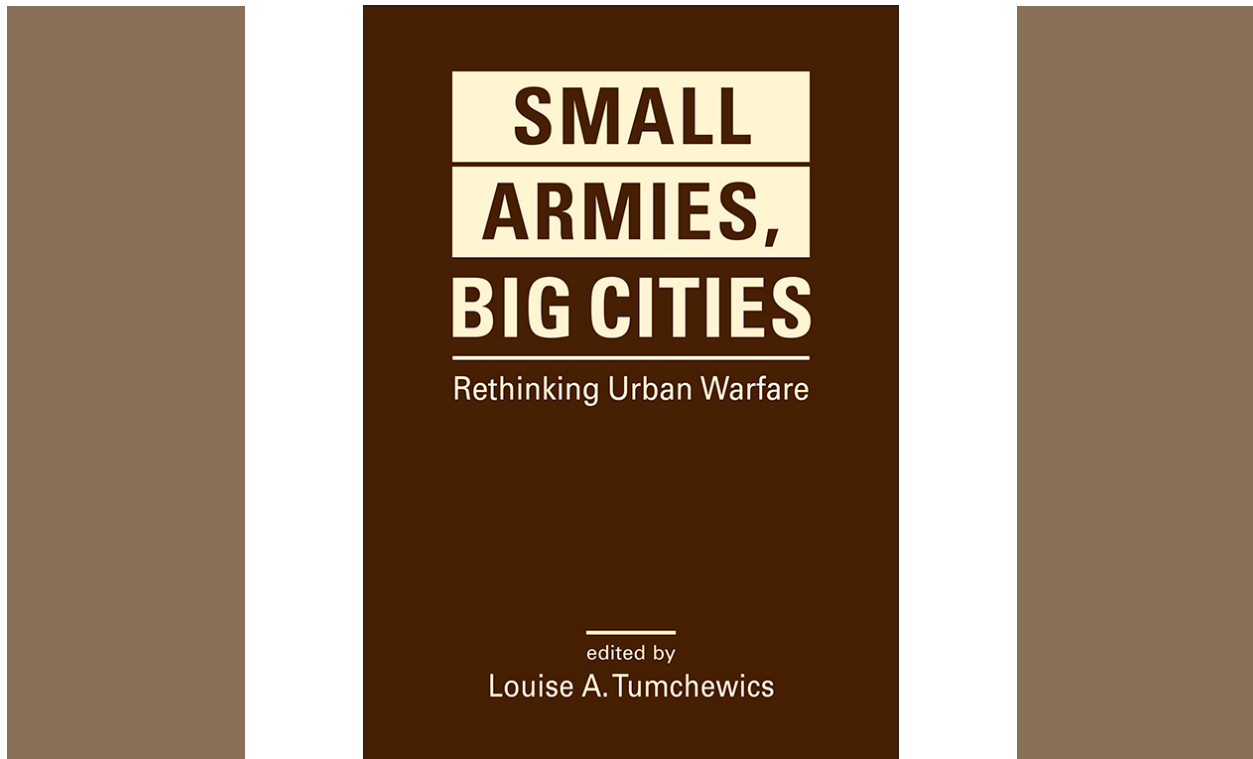
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**U**rban warfare remains a persistent challenge despite conventional wisdom's avoidance of urban operations due to their complexity and myriad operational difficulties, including high casualty rates, efforts to protect noncombatants, and intense resource commitments. At the time of this review, both existent and potential urban operations—ranging from hybrid warfare, criminal conflicts, insurgencies, and large-scale combat operations—punctuate news reportage and strategic discussions worldwide. These conflicts include urban gang warfare in Mexico, Brazil, and Ecuador; urban battles in Ukraine and Gaza; and aerial bombardments, which have increasingly involved drones or unmanned aerial systems and incorporated hybrid means.

*Small Armies, Big Cities*, a collection edited by Louise A. Tumchewics, surveys historical antecedents and current urban operations challenges. Tumchewics, a senior research fellow at the British Army's Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research, wrote the introduction on "Fighting Wars in Cities" and divides the anthology's 13 chapters into three main parts: "Urban Warfare," "Operational Arts," and a conclusion. The title signals the scope of the book. It is not encyclopedic and does not cover all facets of urban warfare. "Small Armies" refers to the force structure that drives engagements in dense urban terrain, while "Big Cities" refers to that "attractive" terrain. The book surveys the major themes of urban operations and provides insight into their nature, challenges, and corresponding advantages.

The six chapters in part one provide a review of major urban themes, including discussions on urban armies; the evolution of urban warfare; the "totemic" value of cities, using the emergence of symbolic "cyborgs" in Ukraine's Donetsk Airport battles (May 26, 2015–January 21, 2015) as an example; and an assessment of the value and limitations of urban operations, illustrated by the

Battle of Marawi (May 23–October 23, 2017). These chapters are followed by one of the collection's most valuable contributions to the understanding of urban operations—Patrick Finnegan's chapter 6 "The Power of 'Place.'" This chapter recounts the counterinsurgency challenges experienced in Crossmaglen, a small village in County Armagh, Northern Ireland, during the Troubles. The discussion on "liminality," or the interaction between built-up terrain and rural or exurban spaces, provides insight into the synchronization of intelligence, influence, and kinetic operations.

The five chapters in part two offer excellent insight into the many facets of operations conducted in urban settings. The issues addressed include "Influence Operations," "Siege and Intrusive Operations," "Drone Warfare," "Surrogate Warfare," and "Mass and Maneuvers." One of the book's core contributions is a discussion of siege in chapter 9 by John Spencer, a retired US Army major and urban operations specialist, who recounts the Battle of Sadr City (March 23–May 12, 2008) in eastern Baghdad, Iraq. Spencer's firsthand experience honed by research shows how combined arms maneuver using tanks and armored infantry fighting vehicles; effective intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operations; and precision strikes utilizing walls and concrete barriers to draw lessons from conventional siege and overcome the traditional defensive advantage in a dense urban area. The chapters on drones and surrogate warfare are also important but would benefit from additional discussions on weaponized commercial aerial drones (small unmanned aerial systems, or sUAS), hybrid surrogates such as private military companies (the Wagner Group, for example), and criminal armed groups.

Finally, Lieutenant General Andrew Graham's conclusion in chapter 13 combines the preceding content into an assessment of the importance of urban operations to twenty-first-century warfare, outlining systematically how the future of urban warfare may unfold. This final chapter looks at strategic context and emerging trends and identifies the interplay of hybrid and compound warfare—both critical issues for the future. While it contains significant insight and theories on potential warfare, the final chapter would benefit from greater depth of discussion to flesh out some of the core concepts.

In sum, *Small Armies, Big Cities* is an important anthology. At times, it is dense and may be difficult for nonspecialists to read. Nevertheless, it provides great insights and deserves a place on the bookshelves of commanders and planners of future urban operations.

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**Keywords: urban warfare, urban operations, cities, operational art**

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