

Chapter 3

Prospective Analysis of Special Forces Operations in Megacities: Colombia and Brazil^{*}

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Abstract: New threats in urban environments stand out as one of the significant challenges for States. Addressing changing threats requires combining different methods and means, especially when urban growth or conurbations can lead to the creation of megacities. Large concentrations of inhabitants create the potential for disputes that can result in internal conflicts. This study presents an empirical analysis comparing the urban centers of Rio de Janeiro and Bogotá, D.C. It employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, including an analytical proposal, an explanatory proposal, and a case analysis. The research offers a prospective view of Special Forces, considering aspects such as operational design, the determination of threat centers of gravity, Special Forces doctrine in megacities, and operational and strategic scope in megacity conflicts.

Keywords: urban conflict; strategy; Special Forces; megacity; urbanization.

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Introduction

Urban warfare is not a new phenomenon. Cities have been a setting for violence since humans began building them. Wealth disparities have led to the formation of urban criminal ecosystems (a term that is convenient for examining the correlation between outlaw groups and the geographic environment).

The above allows us to observe the urban criminal ecosystem and determine the setting in which outlaw groups, the civilian population, and other interdependent actors interact. Criminal ecosystems are usually located in slums or red light districts. The stories of Aleppo, Mosul, Marawi, Mogadishu, Donetsk, and Mekelle serve as examples, confirming that both towns and cities will be future strategic military targets.

The unplanned and disorganized population growth of urban areas in the world's major cities is advancing rapidly. Some studies provide alarming data projected for 2050, indicating which urban centers will face the most complex security and defense challenges (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2017).

If we add to this the pursuit of improved quality of life, the strategic value of cities is reinforced, and it becomes evident that they are becoming vital hubs for nations. Consequently, the unique physical terrain and a large population considerably increase the complexity of collateral risks when conducting operations in urban environments.

Megacities are a difficult scenario to predict, as they require the conduct of joint, coordinated, inter-institutional, and multilateral (JCIM) operations to counter transnational organized crime (TOC). It should be noted that this is the fundamental basis of the doctrine adopted by the Commander-in-Chief of the National Army

to address current challenges (Escuela Superior de Guerra [ESDEG], 2021). Thus, the scenario is a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) operational environment, which characterizes the nature of some difficult conditions and situations (Wigmore, 2017).

Another advantage of the threat is the use of information technologies, which enhance behavioral stereotypes. This has added an additional layer of difficulty to traditional conflict spaces and, as a result, changed their usual dynamics. Global access to the virtual environment has created countless opportunities to foster online conflicts that affect online domains (computer systems), cognitive domains (people's attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs), and physical domains. Consequently, this means that war would no longer be limited to armed adversaries but would expand to encompass all aspects of the human experience (Álvarez et al., 2018).

Accordingly, this research document makes a prospective analysis of the Special Forces (SF) Operations in Bogotá, D. C., and Rio de Janeiro, two Latin American cities that are not alien to the evolution of deviant globalization¹ and which reflect their "dark side": the proliferation of illicit trade (enabled by the same technological means) and the prosperity of licit globalization (which has increased global mobility) (Zambrano & Álvarez, 2017).

Additionally, studying the challenges faced by the SF of Latin American States in this scenario allows us to propose the relational hypothesis that the emergence of megacities implies a greater potential for conflict. Consequently, this necessitates enhancing state security apparatuses to protect individuals and institutions. In this regard, the following questions are posed: What are the implications for SF Operations in megacities as a conflict scenario? How does a comparison of other experiences (such as those occurring between Rio de Janeiro and Bogotá, D.C.) contribute to investigating the phenomenon of urban conflict in future South American megacities?

This chapter is composed of three main topics. The first is the investigation into the nature of urban conflicts and the scenario of demographic intensification, aspects that encourage reflection on the challenges of containing multidimensional threats. The second is the search for political and strategic responses related to the tactical and operational adaptation capacity of SF to address the situation identified in the first part. The third is a proposed case study comparing Rio de Janeiro and Bogotá, D.C. The research results reveal differences and similarities between Brazil

¹ That is, one in which individuals commit all kinds of crimes by taking advantage of the benefits of technology.

and Colombia, highlighting the need to continually modernize the mechanisms that ensure the neutralization and suppression of threats in an urban environment.

The Formation of Megacities and Conflict Scenarios

Urbanization is undergoing a continuous expansion that relies on connectivity to integrate transportation, energy, and communication. These factors enable it to make a quantitative leap in the mobility of people, goods, resources, and knowledge, shaping the global network civilization of the 21st century. As part of planetary urbanization, by 2030, more than two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities, and there will also be fifty clusters of megacities (including Rio de Janeiro and Bogotá, D.C.) in an environment where cities seek to be part of the global value chain (Khanna, 2016a).

In "Architecture, Globalization and Identity," King (2008) explains the important and observable trends that foreshadow the future of war. For example, he points out that cities have always been meeting points where goods and services are exchanged and that their inhabitants receive protection in exchange for subordination to a political power. Furthermore, he adds that there are several factors fueling the dynamism of the urban transition: on the one hand, people feel pressure to migrate from the countryside to escape poverty and threats to their security; on the other, they do so because they are attracted to a city that promises a more complete way of life, interconnected with globalization.

In addition, statistical evidence points to a challenging future for the urban environment. Population expansion in cities and the changes resulting from this reconstruction of space create a context of uncertainty, which underscores the need to establish effective plans to manage security mechanisms. According to UNESCO (2017), urban centers will undergo a challenging transformation:

For the first time in history, more people live in urban areas than rural areas, a proportion that is expected to increase by 2050. With cities growing vertically and populations becoming denser, urban centers will become increasingly congested, complex, and interdependent (p. 22).

The UNESCO (2017) report highlights a reality that will significantly impact the security of the international system. Aware of these conditions, members of

the United Nations (UN) propose lines of action that detail the analyses conducted by its Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Thus, it is evident that the conflict scenario has shifted to the urban environment, which comprises a wide range of social structures within a given space. To help contextualize the research objective, it should be noted that the terms *city* and *urban* are often used synonymously, but they can denote different concepts:

City refers to the statistical grouping of people in a single area, while urban refers to the transformation of mentality that occurs in cities. In other words, the concept of urban generally denotes altered patterns of social, economic, political, and cultural interaction. (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe [CEPAL], 1989, p. 72)

As will be seen later, these characteristics make it necessary to study a variety of variables to generate doctrine.

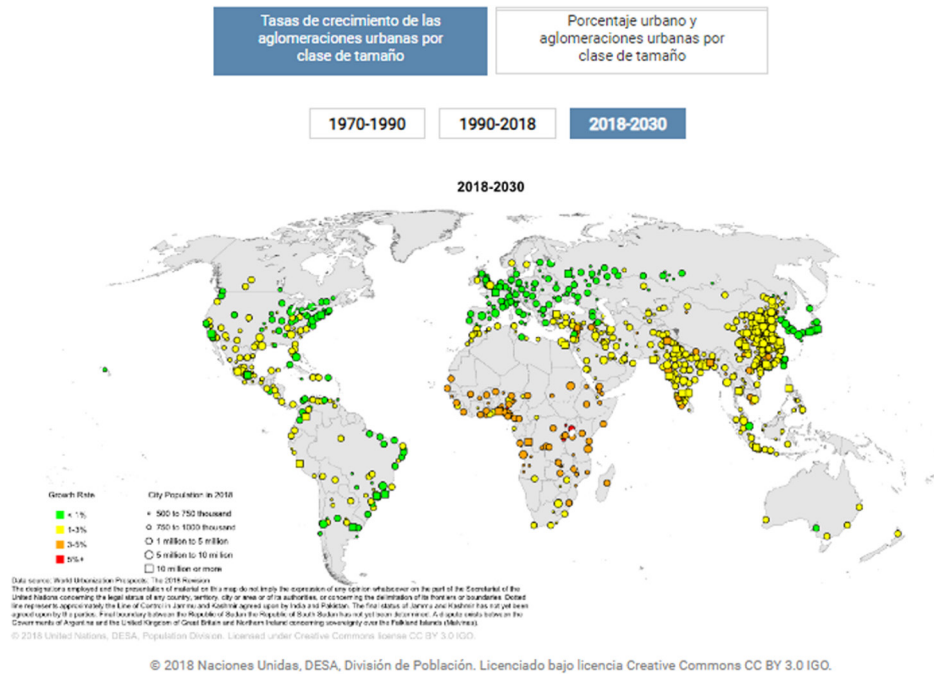
However, the growth of cities represents a challenge for public management in the present and the future. Some characteristics stand out in reflections about cities, such as demographic expansion, the disorder in the logic of expansion, and conurbation, among other elements. In this process, the international community presents policy options, such as the proposal for the New Urban Agenda (Urban Agenda Platform, 2022), which was adopted by the UN at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador, on October 20, 2016.

In this context, members of the organization and other stakeholders have mobilized to implement urban development at the local level. In fact, through Resolution No. 70/1 of the United Nations General Assembly (September 25, 2015), 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were established, one of which, SDG 11, aims to ensure the creation of inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities (UN, 2015).

However, data provided by various international bodies raises concerns from a multilateral perspective. For example, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs published a study on the growth of urban agglomeration indices (UN, 2018), which forecasts alarming urban growth rates for the coming years (Figure 1).

Forecasts point to an increase in urban growth rates in the coming years (Figure 2). The statistics show significant data for South America, but less alarming than for other regions of the world, a fact that Milton Santos (2004) describes as "urban macrocephaly." However, the prospects for urban agglomeration constitute a scenario of uncertainty in cities with high population concentrations.

Figure 1. Urban Agglomeration Growth Rate (2018–2030).



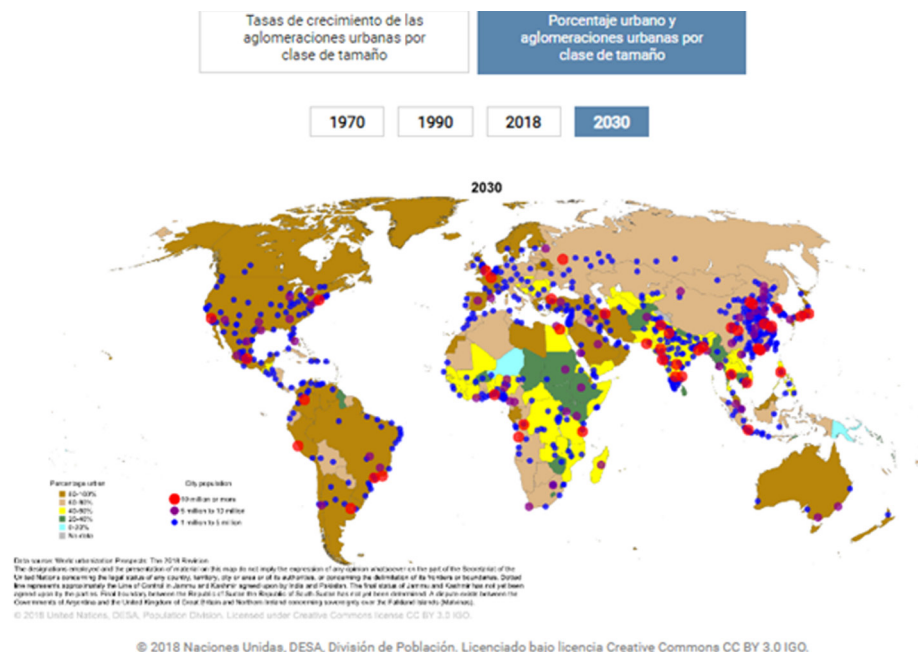
Source: UN (2018).

According to the United Nations (2018d), a megacity is defined as a city with more than ten million inhabitants. There are currently 24 megacities, and it is estimated that at least 27 cities will be classified as such by 2025. Furthermore, it is projected that 752 million people will live in megacities by 2030, i.e., 8.8% of the world's population.

Based on the above, it can be stated that megacities and metropolitan areas are a key element of geopolitical reconfiguration on a global scale. According to Iberdrola (2020), the largest megacity today is Tokyo, Japan, with a population of more than 32 million inhabitants in an area too small to accommodate them.

Another characteristic of megacities, especially those in the developing world, is their association with high poverty rates, social disintegration, poor infrastructure maintenance, deficiencies in basic services, very high birth rates, limited job opportunities, and disease transmission, among others.

Figure 2. Urban Percentage and Urban Agglomerations for 2030



Source: UN (2018)

Regarding modern States, there is concern about the situation in large cities, which reveals an increase in various forms of crime. The growth of urban areas and various illicit activities allows criminal groups to entrench themselves in less fortunate sectors, posing a challenge to national security and defense (NSD). The concept of the “gray rhinoceros” (Izquierdo, 2018; Wucker, 2016) indicates that the problem is visible from afar, but the necessary measures are not being taken to contain the future threat.

Urban Conflicts between and/or within States

In the 21st century, humanity's priority is to achieve sustainable urbanization, which requires technology, knowledge, and public policies. However, inequality in various aspects creates friction among the population and often triggers conflicts.

Despite being an ancient phenomenon, the nature of conflicts needs to be differentiated. On the one hand, there is the type of combat caused by a conflict

between States, whose war can occur in an urban area; on the other, there is urban conflict, in which a State must enter into conflict against its own citizens, which is conceptualized as “non-war” (Alves, 2018).

Although conflicts between States must be the subject of constant analysis, the main focus of the research proposed in this document is to verify intrastate conflicts (one of the great challenges facing Latin America). However, it is considered important first to evaluate the unique characteristics of the Armed Forces' actions in the urban environment.

Military operations involve multiple types of risks, such as tactical risks (including the possibility of soldiers being injured or killed, or mission failure) and accidental risks (including the possibility of civilian deaths or the destruction of critical urban infrastructure). These factors must be considered during planning to study their potential implications and instruct units on legal frameworks.

In this respect, a forward-looking view of operations carried out by SF must take into account not only that urbanization is a relentless trend, but also that as cities grow and expand, armed conflicts and violence become urbanized as well (Lehmann, 2015). This has been evident in cities such as Aleppo in Syria, Sana'a in Yemen, and Mosul in northern Iraq, which have suffered siege warfare, aerial and artillery bombardments, as well as heavy street fighting (Espinosa, 2017).

Based on a detailed analysis of recent urban battles and their historical background, King (2008) argues that exploration of the changing topography and evolving tactics of the urban conflict landscape demonstrates that operations in today's cities have become distinctive. This does not mean that all the methods used in urban warfare are new, but rather that urban warfare has transformed into grueling microsieges waged by combatants fighting through individual buildings, streets, and districts.

Implications for Special Forces Operations

The uncertainty and complexities of the urban environment demonstrate the present and future challenges facing the Armed Forces. In light of this, we propose to investigate the three main lines of modernization of SF: 1) the new requirements regarding operational design and the determination of centers of gravity; 2) the doctrine of SF in megacities; and 3) the operational and strategic scope of SF in conflicts in megacities. These elements reveal common challenges that can be verified.

New Requirements for Operational Design and the Determination of Centers of Gravity

Urban centers present challenges of greater scale and complexity because they contain strategic territories interconnected with local, national, and, in some cases, international centers of gravity. Although it has been addressed for several decades, the concept of “center of gravity” is fundamental in current conflicts, and its use must be assessed in different social and historical contexts (Cazumba, 2021).

Those responsible for planning urban operations need tools that help them make sense of a complex confrontation environment and develop an acceptable level of situational awareness, which is essential to separate the relevant from the irrelevant, the central from the peripheral. The importance of the center of gravity in military planning is reflected in four criteria: improving understanding, emphasizing planning, enhancing efficiency, and eliminating distraction.

The urban environment has unique qualities. It consists of disorganized three-dimensional spaces that create significant logistical and navigational challenges. Its man-made terrain features angular shapes that rarely appear in non-urban areas: a flat planimetric pattern and a third dimension, where verticality is crucial because it forms barriers that are difficult to breach and offers defense through another artificial height, such as tall urban ground levels, and often includes a subterranean layer.

However, in the particular case of Latin America, urban violence, fueled by the TOC, stands out. Part of its formation consists of alliances with different armed groups, which not only leads to criminal convergence between insurgents and criminal groups but also generates a network that shares the same interests and expands to different countries.

Some examples worth mentioning are Mexico and Brazil, which have some of the highest homicide rates in the world (Morán, 2021). It should also be mentioned that in Colombia, multiple cities, ranging from medium to large, serve as epicenters of urban conflicts caused by the TOC to maintain dominance and supremacy in the micro-trafficking business. This crime eventually connects with others and has gradually displaced the drug cartels of the 1980s and 1990s, whose modus operandi was very different.

In this context, the critical importance of urban operations requires a well-structured force with top capabilities and skills to face the threat. Two notable events in Colombia are worth recalling: the first is the siege of the Dominican Republic embassy in Bogotá, D.C., in 1979. At that time, there was no trained or

experienced unit capable of rescuing the hostages, which prevented a military rescue and resulted in Cuba mediating. The second is the guerrilla siege of the Palace of Justice in 1985 by the self-proclaimed Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19), also in Bogotá, D.C. This incident had devastating consequences for Colombian society, from which it has not yet recovered.

Actions like these occurring in urban areas made it necessary to have trained, equipped, and certified military forces to prevent, detain, or respond effectively. As a result, through Ministerial Resolution No. 2270 of April 30, 1986, the Urban Anti-Terrorist Special Forces Group (AFEAU) was established with the specific purpose of having a unit capable of handling crisis and hostage situations in urban environments when the nation's interests are seriously threatened (Valdés & Rodríguez, 2020). To date, this unit has been trained, qualified, and certified in techniques, tactics, and procedures for managing urban crisis situations, with specific missions.

It is important to mention that, within the Table of Organization and Equipment (TOE) of the Military Forces, the AFEAU is part of the Joint Special Operations Command (CCOES) (Comando General de las Fuerzas Militares [CGFM], 2016), a unit that represents a strategic trident based on the combination of capabilities, training, and interoperability to combat a completely amorphous and irregular adversary.

For its part, the Ministry of National Defense (MDN) has adopted the idea of urban combat as a pressing need to confront terrorism by Organized Armed Groups (OAGs), which have threatened the national security and defense of Colombian territory.

The Doctrine of SF in Megacities: Case Study and Lessons Learned

Throughout history, military theorists have acknowledged that defense is the most powerful tactical stance. In fact, it requires more force to attack and overcome an enemy in a fortified and well-designed defense than in an open area. This is especially true in urban terrain, where many physical structures provide immediate, military-grade defensive positions for the defender.

Typically, most citizens adopt a position in the midst of conflict, based on their ability to act, limit, block, or displace ongoing urban operations. For example, John Spencer (2022), who focuses on urban warfare studies at the Modern War Institute (West Point), published a series of messages on Twitter (now X) on February 26, 2022, addressing civilian resistance fighters in Ukraine, particularly in the country's capital, Kyiv, with a population of approximately three million. This

professor believes that if the capital's adults mobilize and make Russian forces fear that a gun could be pointed out of every window and that every street could be a death trap, they could turn Kyiv or other cities into "enormous porcupines" that can successfully confront any soldier, no matter how advanced (Spencer, 2022).

Regarding this example, it should also be noted that physical dominance is a prevailing concept in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict because either side can use it. Basically, the ruins of old buildings and downtown or commercial areas can be used by committed forces, which will undoubtedly guarantee them adequate protection, since urban terrain provides a significant advantage to the defending force, even the weakest. Therefore, assessing the difficulty of warfare in a specific environment requires considering the scenario itself as one of the military capabilities available to accomplish the mission.

Another conflict that served as a benchmark for the use of Urban Special Forces took place in Mosul, a city in northern Iraq's Nineveh Province. Its seventy square miles are crossed by the Tigris River, which flows through the city from northwest to southeast (Arnold & Fiore, 2019). This battle began on October 16, 2016, and ended on July 20, 2017, after Iraqi soldiers had cleared the last pocket of the defending Islamic State forces.

This example undoubtedly represents a unique urban conflict, as despite the Iraqi forces having the essential technology and equipment, it was very difficult for them to recapture the city because they encountered aggressive jihadist resistance using snipers, bombs, and vehicles loaded with explosives. Some sites in western Mosul had narrow streets that impeded the passage of armored vehicles and forced infantry troops to retreat and remain unprotected. Another challenge faced by regular forces was the number of tunnels, which delayed or impeded their advance.

These experiences also show that the challenge in future urban conflicts will be to mount a successful psychological operations campaign, with providing information being essential to persuading civilians to leave the city. In Mosul, for example, the attempt to disseminate messages to the population via cell phones, the internet, and leaflets, to eliminate them safely and quickly, and then to provide shelter, food, and medical support to prevent further casualties from the violence on both sides, could only be considered partially successful. In fact, "Mosul demonstrated that this may be impossible" (Amnesty International, 2017).

As can be seen, the war is fought in urban areas, and people today are accustomed to monitoring these scenarios through various technological means to stay informed. Cities, in particular, are centers of power that concentrate the

economic, political, and social control of any modern civilization; hence, Russia's need to take over Ukraine's main cities in this war—a situation it has struggled to achieve. Additionally, urban areas concentrate resources and elements that can be used to hold the civilian population hostage, which calls into question the right to war and the intervention strategies adopted by humanitarian organizations.

In their book, *Tridente del poder estratégico: Inteligencia, Operaciones Especiales y poder ciber en el siglo XXI*, González-Martínez and Montero-Moncada (2020) refer to the applicability and readiness of Urban Special Forces to face Colombia's future challenges. Furthermore, they establish that the country's Military Forces must devise a doctrine to prepare strategies for combating the new threats that have emerged due to diverted globalization.

Events such as the siege of the Dominican Republic embassy in Bogotá, D.C. (February 28, 1979), the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York (September 11, 2001), and the invasion of Iraq (2003) created the need to adjust the mission of the Military Forces and, in particular, of their SF. In the Colombian case, according to data from the National Commission of Historical Memory, between 1965 and 2013, all armed insurgent actors in the internal conflict frequently used the strategy of taking over towns and municipal capitals, which drew regional, national, and global attention.

Currently, Colombia is facing multiple challenges. For example, the so-called "front line" has become a challenge in the urbanization of the conflict, given that it uses peaceful protest as a perfect shield to carry out its actions. In this regard, it is important to recognize that these protests have resulted from both the serious economic and social imbalances the country has endured for decades, as well as the impact of new technologies and media, from the internet to social media.

This type of threat to the nation's interests and security is what Guattari (2017) calls a "dissipated molecular revolution." This mode uses the ideas expressed by Antonio Gramsci as historical sources, emphasizing the need to carry out the revolution from the "superstructures" by combining nonviolent and violent means. The theoretical foundation is the assumption that the "molecular revolution" is a universal system of social struggle and emancipation (Guattari, 2017).

Based on this phenomenon, Security Forces, specifically the National Army, outline in their new doctrine (called Damasco) the capabilities to support urban operations (Ejército Nacional de Colombia, 2017a). These are established as part of the Army's operational concept (Unified Land Operations [ULO]) and are conducted in Unified Action (UA) as part of decisive action. Specifically, they carry out Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) tasks, which have seven main

purposes: saving lives, restoring essential services, maintaining or restoring law and order, protecting infrastructure and property (public and private), supporting the maintenance or restoration of local government, shaping the operational environment for interagency success, and supporting the social recovery of the territory (Ejército Nacional de Colombia, 2017a).

Operational and Strategic Scope of Special Forces in Megacity Conflicts

Uncontrolled urbanization could contribute to the growth of insurgency, terrorism, and other forms of violence when the demands of cities exceed institutional capacities. Local governments are often overwhelmed by the proliferation of informal and/or criminal practices that foster territorialization by criminal groups. Consequently, it is essential that the Armed Forces and the Police, depending on the country and context, have units trained to act as a unit or disaggregated into combat teams—made up of four men with specific individual specialties—that enhance interdependence and freedom of action during an assault.

As mentioned, the Colombian Armed Forces have the AFEAU, whose main mission is

to conduct special counterterrorism military operations and other Special Forces missions in urban and semi-urban areas, designated by the high command, against military targets of high strategic value (OMAVE) and military targets of national interest (OMINA) that contribute to the fulfillment of the objectives of the Higher Command. ((Ejército Nacional de Colombia, 2021, p. 32)

Due to its high level of training and specialized equipment, an SF unit is not limited exclusively to conducting counterterrorism operations. Depending on the analysis of the operational environment, it can employ one or more of its distinctive capabilities, such as hostage rescue and personnel recovery, assistance to security forces, internal defense abroad, non-combatant evacuation, direct action, and special reconnaissance. In this regard, it is important to mention this unit's outstanding participation in the military competition known as "Fuerzas Comando." This competition began in 2004, when the United States Southern Command, under the responsibility of Special Operations Command South (SOCSOUTH), created and sponsored competitions to measure the capabilities of each team,

strengthen relationships among members of the continent's Armed Forces, and share knowledge and experiences acquired in the fight against terrorism.

Furthermore, the Joint Special Operations University addresses a series of vital topics for Urban SF Operations, such as adversary approaches in political warfare, strategic blind spots in modern conflict, and human rights as a weapons system (Joint Special Operations University, 2021). The latter is based on the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, 2021), in order to minimize the impact of urban warfare, wrote a manual that serves as a guide to the main applicable frameworks of International Humanitarian Law in urban operational environments, aimed at commanders at all levels.

Case Study: Brazil and Colombia

Prospective analyses of intrastate-motivated urban conflict reveal the challenges that SF will face in the future. The tactical and operational implications for addressing threats indicate substantial changes in security management. In this context, to illustrate the proposed theoretical approaches, a comparative case study between Brazil and Colombia is presented to identify convergences and divergences in how to “operationalize” effective redesigns to combat this problem.

Brazil

Latin America stands out for having achieved the fastest urbanization in the 20th century. Brazil is the largest country in South America and one of the most populated, with a density of 22.5 inhabitants per square kilometer and a population that has tripled since 1950. It has a vast area and includes vast virgin forests and uninhabited regions. Nearly 86 % of the population lives in cities, of which about a third reside in the country's ten largest metropolitan regions alone (Datosmundial, 2022).

Although this case study focuses on Rio de Janeiro, it should be noted that the other largest cities in Brazil are São Paulo, Brasília, Salvador, and Fortaleza. In addition to its tourist attractions, Rio de Janeiro is known for its high rates of violence and crime and, along with São Paulo, stands out as a center of tension in Brazil. According to Lawrence (2019), “megacities are becoming epicenters

of human activity across the planet and, consequently, will cause the majority of frictions requiring military intervention" (p. 529).

The violence in São Paulo is more related to the 1,300 attacks committed by various groups linked to the drug trafficking gang Primeiro Comando da Capital, as well as riots in 73 prisons in the city (Harris et al., 2014, p. 18). The violence in Rio de Janeiro, on the other hand, is related to the use of more than 3,000 police and military officers to put an end to acts of violence that were spreading throughout almost the entire city after having begun in one of the 600 communities (Langewiesche, 2008).

In the contemporary context, economic globalization has given rise to a new world order. Queiroz et al. (2022) detail their impact on highly underdeveloped States, where politically motivated actors emerge unconnected to national States, seeking to impose their position through force due to a lack of state representation.

These "new threats"—insurrections, organized crime, drug trafficking, piracy, and terrorism—remove the State's monopoly on war, as they present a challenge to military institutions as a whole. For example, in some cases, the "asymmetric warfare" modality they propose ignores the International Humanitarian LAW (IHL) and the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC), which is governed by the terms of the Geneva Convention.

Certain elements of association between criminals and pseudo-religious groups are also part of an emerging phenomenon in urban conflicts in Rio de Janeiro. In fact, criminals have found common ground with the growth of the evangelical movement, which has unleashed "narco-Pentecostalism," which treats believers of African origin as enemies in a kind of tropical jihad—movements like Bonde de Jesus, and criminal territorializations like Complexo de Israel.

At this point, it is important to note that the process of forming a unit of men capable of conducting unconventional military actions (Special Operations) requires a combination of factors that depend fundamentally on national security policies, the initiative and military force in question (Navy, Army, or Air Force), the financial contribution allocated for this purpose, the availability of time (operational training), existing resources (men, equipment, and weapons), technological adaptation and modernization to employ the acquired skills, and combat experience (Denécé, 2009; Lisboa, 2017).

Colombia

Located at the crossroads of Central and South America, Colombia serves as a conduit for legal and illegal global trade. For Zambrano and Álvarez (2017), this characteristic makes it a gateway State or region, as it plays an extremely important geostrategic role by uniting different parts of the world, facilitating the exchange of people, goods, and ideas, and fulfilling various positive economic and social functions. However, in some cases, due to diverted globalization, these functions can become more problematic (Zambrano & Álvarez, 2017, p. 290).

Regarding the dynamics of demographic expansion, Colombia faces the forced migratory flow of people from neighboring countries, along with its associated social, economic, political, and national security implications. This country has five major cities: Medellín, Cali, Cartagena, Barranquilla, and Bogotá, D.C., the capital of Colombia, located in the center of the country. It wields great geopolitical power (Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi, 2022) and has a triple constitutional status: capital of the Republic, capital of the department of Cundinamarca, and Capital District with a special regime. Furthermore, according to Parag Khanna (2016b), it is projected to become a megacity in the coming years.

Regarding security, it has a long history marked by various events over the past thirty years. The rise of different criminal groups—sponsored by organizations with global networks and financed through drug trafficking—has facilitated terrorist acts, causing significant social panic. This issue is not new, but it leaves deep and lasting effects on the minds and hearts of the population.

This increases the potential for unrest, disruption, and large-scale disorder. In this regard, Kilcullen (2013) predicts a world centered on megatrends and highlights the following factors: urbanization, coastalization, conflict, and rapid population growth. For this reason, security forces face multiple challenges in providing adequate protection to strategic assets and the population. Current threats have access to new technologies and use this valuable support tool to hide, coordinate their criminal activities, and carry out armed actions with irregular and sabotage means in urban environments, which differ from rural ones.

In this regard, Rojas (2017) points out the need for the Colombian National Army to focus on overcoming the challenges it currently faces and anticipating those of the future. This reality requires it, within the context of its strategic management systems, to continually consider modernization and adaptation processes to

develop capabilities that provide timely, effective, and sustainable responses to the strategic requirements arising from the study of the battlefield.

Urban Conflict in Rio de Janeiro and Bogotá, D.C.

Rio de Janeiro and Bogotá, D.C., symbolize cities challenged by violence and crime, reflecting conflicts in the urban environment. Nevertheless, they preserve their unique characteristics, representing natural and intangible human diversity and overlapping trends. These features help us understand their status as megacities (Khanna, 2016b) and the urban conflicts that afflict them (Fidalgo et al., 2010; Mendonça, 2018). In structural terms, the post-Cold War era shows increased intrastate conflicts involving non-state actors, offering concrete data that emphasize the complexities of criminal behavior in the 2.0 world order, as outlined by Queiroz et al. (2022).

In the comparative exercise between Rio de Janeiro and Bogotá, D.C., each city represents a culture and offers divergent imagery, highlighting positive aspects (such as tourism) and negative ones (like the feeling of insecurity).

The climate of insecurity involves different criminal organizations and militias. Since the end of the 20th century, conflicts around the world have mutated and acquired a more intrastate than interstate nature due to the emergence of violent non-state armed actors. In this regard, Muggah (2017) argues that this new type of conflict arises from the convergence of organized crime and open warfare, which has challenged the traditional rules of urban confrontation.

The emergence of urban conflicts demands the constant evolution of capabilities, weapons, and command, control, and communications doctrine. This, in turn, has an undeniable influence on the daily lives of millions of citizens living in the slums of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, where state control is limited or nonexistent.

Criminal groups such as Comando Vermelho and Terceiro Comando Puro (Bartolomé, 2019) have thrived in Brazil due to limitations in policing and ineffective security management. In this scenario, urban criminals have taken advantage of the State's inability to address socioeconomic disparities. Arms and drug traffickers, militias, gangs, and even pseudo-religious groups destabilize state mechanisms and terrorize community residents, holding them hostage while maintaining control over the government and its institutional apparatus.

However, in these scenarios, the Brazilian president can decree operations to ensure law and order (GLO), in accordance with Complementary Laws 97/1999

and 117/2004 (Presidência da República do Brasil, 1999, 2004), according to which the Armed Forces can be called upon to assist in taking control. Precisely, one notable difference with Colombia is the expansive role that the Brazilian Armed Forces can assume.

Regarding the city of Bogotá, D.C., the analysis reveals unique parameters. Considering the background information, the current dynamics of its conflict are more complex and involve multiple combinations of actors, unlike the historical events that marked the violence of the 20th century. Without a doubt, the turning point of the Colombian conflict was the assassination of presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, which occurred in the capital on April 9, 1948, sparking a series of riots and demonstrations by the people known as “El Bogotazo.”

Until the 1980s, the violence in Bogotá was due to the armed conflict; there were no actions by drug trafficking or organized crime. However, it is also essential to consider the aforementioned events regarding the sieges of the Dominican Republic embassy and the Palace of Justice by the M-19.

Some of the methods used by conflict actors since the 1980s have become a hallmark of Bogotá, D.C., to maintain, impose, or contest their territorial control: homicide, human trafficking, extortion, micro-trafficking, etc. A significant portion of the phenomena experienced in recent years is due to the lucrative micro-trafficking business, the dispute over control of localities, and the presence of several criminal groups coordinated by external leaders. One of the most dangerous areas in Bogotá is the so-called “Bronx,” as it is home to several crimes and a high rate of unmet basic needs (UBN) (Avendaño et al., 2019; Escobar, 2020).

As an epicenter city, it receives a large number of displaced people fleeing the country’s internal conflict. This increases crime rates, unleashes a wave of violence and struggles for control of micro-trafficking, and causes collateral damage to development and civic coexistence.

As can be seen, both Rio de Janeiro and Bogotá, D.C., have been hotbeds of criminal gangs that have taken over certain areas in the face of the challenges of an ineffective State. They have created an environment of fear in the community, allowing them to maintain absolute control over what happens in their territories. These gangs generally use micro-trafficking to expand their businesses and obtain resources to finance long-established mafias, creating internal wars between mini-cartels and leading to an escalation of the conflict.

Thus, it is found that crime is more concentrated in densely populated areas, interrelated with conflict and sustained by weak governments and political

instability. This allows for empirical verification of the direct relational hypothesis that the greater the degree of state fragility, the greater the likelihood of conflict-related actions anchored in the use of violence and force to provoke a state of terror in pursuit of the political and/or ideological objectives of criminal groups (Queiroz et al., 2022).

Conclusions

This research aimed to analyze the challenges facing SF in future megacities. These challenges were empirically verified by comparison in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Bogotá, D.C. Furthermore, a prospective analysis was proposed regarding the constant evolution of conflicts in megacities as a conflict scenario and the use of security forces through SF units.

Conflict studies infrequently consider cities as a backdrop for confrontation, and it is often unclear whether they are directly or indirectly impacted by hostilities. Indeed, throughout human history, cities have been destroyed using specific techniques of urban conflict, such as sieges in Antiquity or the Middle Ages.

Regarding the security and defense of States, September 11, 2001, marked a benchmark for the capabilities and scope of threats when two planes crashed and destroyed symbols of the United States' economic and military power. This fact demonstrates the vulnerability of cities as targets for different types of terrorist attacks.

The phenomenon of threats in urban areas, examined from different perspectives, is unified in a common concept of criminality: convergence (Luis Alexander Montero Moncada, interview conducted by M. A. Cabra in 2022). Several factors come together, such as transnational organized crime and criminal networks, which operate as interconnected entities aiming to weaken democracy and governance, with the goal of creating conditions to infiltrate or control cities.

Background information, such as that discussed in this chapter, supports the trend for urban operations to dominate 21st-century conflicts. The continual growth of urbanization, societal diversity, and persistent threats and dangers contribute to the escalation of conflict, as there are many political and economic incentives for state adversaries to choose this setting as their center of gravity.

In this context, it is important to apply and mainstream operational law within the Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP). Among other challenges is the decision to establish the yardstick for the use of force in each situation. It is also crucial to adjust and consider the use of principles that guide actions during hostilities, including military necessity, distinction, proportionality, limitation, non-reciprocity, humanity, and precaution in attack (Ejército Nacional de Colombia, 2017b).

Regarding the actions of the Armed Forces, the research findings highlight the need for further consideration. For instance, the use of weapons during military operations must adhere to a legal framework and be governed by a broad range of rules, principles, and norms of conventional origin. Similarly, its legitimacy must be grounded in the application of the guiding principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL), which are legal frameworks that complement, coexist with, and converge in non-international armed conflicts (NIACs), in accordance with the Geneva Conventions (Ejército Nacional de Colombia, 2017b).

In this regard, SF must continually analyze and evaluate lessons learned, including those from the Armed Forces of different countries. This will enable them to consult on defense and security matters regarding responses to crisis management situations to address the evolving and adaptable nature of criminal activities.

The research demonstrates that alliances with countries sharing the same threat dimension enable strengthening consultation and improving interoperability through ongoing collaborative efforts. These contexts are suitable for assessing the appropriateness of conducting multinational crisis management operations and establishing suitable mechanisms for exchanging procedures and intelligence for military cooperation with governmental and non-governmental agencies, multinational forces, and other inter-institutional partners.

The main contribution of this study is that it highlights the crucial role of SF. It emphasizes the need to develop versatile mechanisms to devise detailed, suitable, and effective plans, with an appropriate allocation of resources that help identify the enemy's center of gravity (its source of power and moral resistance) and restrict its freedom of action. This allows for the effective direction of military efforts.

In this respect, it is essential to highlight that the Armed Forces of Colombia and other countries have been adapting to a changing scenario, ensuring that SF military units are always trained, qualified, certified, and specialized in critical capabilities according to sociopolitical needs.

Finally, while the comparative case study between Brazil and Colombia presents both similar and contrasting points, it reiterates in a prospective scenario that crime tends to take various forms and suggests that SF will always face additional challenges not investigated in this work. The best way to address conflicts or crises in urban environments is to recognize the need to maintain a dynamic nature that enhances protection effectiveness. Preventing, adapting, and planning ahead is the best way to effectively accomplish the mission in a conflict scenario in megacities and guarantee the stability and security of the population.

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