

# TURNING PAGES

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## Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla

By David Kilcullen. *Out of the Mountains: The Coming age of the Urban Guerrilla*. University of Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-19-973750-5 (hardback). <http://www.amazon.com/Out-Mountains-Coming-Urban-Guerrilla/dp/0199737509>

A book review by MAJ Nicole E. Dean

**C**rowded, coastal, connected cities fighting counterinsurgencies: that's the future of combat operations according to author and veteran Dr. David Kilcullen in his recently published missive *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*. The danger of fighting "the last war" is becoming too focused on the small towns and rural pockets of habitants in Afghani mountain valleys and Iraqi date farms, according to Kilcullen. More importantly, our failure to learn from the urban experiences of the surge in Operation Iraqi Freedom has set us up to choke cities in an effort to squeeze the insurgency, often killing the very city we were intending to protect. A city breathes, adapts, and dies like a living organism. At any given time, an urban environment will experience dynamic disequilibrium. Urban instability manifests with conflict. The best cities, the urban greats, resiliently adapt to conflicts, seeking stability for survival. The predictable ebb and flow of daily life is crucial to that resilient adaptation and survival. The drastic security measures taken, the constriction of an urban environment when battling an insurgency, often stifles the recovery process and hinders predictability. It denies movement of vital commerce and urban life-support, and it often encourages a populace to seek alternate means of stability from the insurgent leadership, creating dangerous shadow governance. All of this has led Kilcullen to examine the future of urban conflict based on his experiences in Baghdad during the surge of 2007. More importantly, he examines the future from the most likely course of enemy action: seeking a guerrilla fight in crowded, coastal cities with growing digital connectivity and burgeoning instability.

If this truly is the future of modern warfare for ground tactical and operational leaders, what does this mean to Army Aviation? How does an Attack Reconnaissance Squadron or Assault Battalion develop a standard operating procedure or company commander's task list that reflects fighting an adaptable insurgent force that is rapid-fire Tweeting from a littoral megaslum in a Pacific Rim nation, following a massive tsunami that has

destabilized the legitimate government?

If nothing else, Kilcullen's theories on future urban conflict are a wake up call for Army Aviation. As we prepare to reach back to the annals of large scale conflict to prepare for enemy armor formations or brigade-scale air assaults, the lessons learned from the past decade of persistent stability operations cannot be dismissed. In fact, we must adapt our flying formations and planning staffs to think about fighting the T-72 in open terrain, as well as battling potential non-state insurgents in urban environments. The ability to plan for rapid port opening and expansion for contingency airfields, which includes deconfliction of civil and military aviation operations, will be vital to rapidly meeting the needs of a disenfranchised urban populace. The necessity of air mobility will keep friendly forces well supplied and responsive to urban civil needs, preventing further decay of stability in the wake of natural disaster or man-made conflict. The understanding and management of social media and digital connectivity will prevent leaked attack aircraft gun tape from becoming a hindrance on the World Wide Web, rather than a crucial learning tool for aerial gunnery. How will aviation planners and leaders become aware of competitive control organizations attempting to undermine legitimate governance, like gangs or warlords, in an urban environment through the insertion of surreptitious normative systems in megaslums? The closer the ties to ground forces facing urban enemies and urban fights, the better the mutual situational understanding of ground and air forces will be in an urban, littoral conflict.

*Out of the Mountains* offers a unique perspective on the future of conflict. Aviation's greatest skill has always been adaptability to meet the needs of a ground force commander. If nothing else, David Kilcullen provides a glimpse at a problem set for future warfare that the Army's ground leaders may face. Army Aviation would do well to read and take note.

**OUT OF THE MOUNTAINS**  
THE COMING AGE OF THE URBAN GUERRILLA  
**DAVID KILCULLEN**

