War in the Mega-City		★★★1/2☆

Period	Modern	Publisher	On Small Step/CounterFact
Conflict/Battle	Generic	Designer	Joseph Miranda (Ty Bomba dev)
Force Size	Asymmetric. ~ Div/Corp	Date	2018
Mvr Units	Abstracted. ~Bn-Bde for Government, plus SOF coys etc.	Grid Size	Topological, 30 nodes across the city
DOWNness	~3DOWN	Map Size	Whole notional city
Players	2	Turn Dur.	~2 days to 2 weeks "depending on tempo"
Player Roles	Cmdr of Govt forces Cmdr of Insurgents	Playing Time	~4 hrs first time

Introduction

Subject of the game	A government and its forces trying to contain a major insurgency in a megacity – "a simulation of hypothetical near future battles fought in metropolitan areas with populations of 10m or more.
Scope	The kinetic and non-kinetic but direct effect elements of the immediate conflict. Doesn't include the political side, and the info-war element is marginal.
Components	~A1 topographic map. 20pp rule book (magazine insert), incl 3pp of tables. CRTs on map along with trackers.
Presentation	**Good:** Nice topological map. Clear counters. Reasonable rule layout. **Bad:** Dreadful proof-reading, lots of typos/grammar issues. Big disjoint between the rules, map and counters with terms being changed, bits missing, counter values not mapping rules/deployment etc. Desperately needs a QRS.
Designer's focus/objectives	No designer notes but a few comments in the rules: - "The objective is to show the spectrum of operations – conventional, special operations and unconventional – in this type of fighting on the grand tactical level." - "Players should examine the CRTs closely before starting play. It is possible that the side that wins the conflict (gains points) will nevertheless lose strength by having units reduced and vice versa"
Overall system description	This is fundamentally an area control game, with the most important areas being defined by each sides chosen focus (choice of 3). Infowar points are gained by winning combats and holding areas, and then spent on a range of conventional, unconventional and "netwar" capabilities. 3 CRTS are provided, one kinetic and 2 meant to represent unconventional engagements. The "sudden death" victory appears to be based on loss of all infowar points rather than all forces or areas – although given other rule issues this is not 100% clear.
Real Battle Notes	N/a – although might be interesting to compare to Gaza.

The Game System

Principal areas of reality represented in the game	The asymmetric nature of the combat – particularly in terms of forces involved and some capabilities. The fact that big Army units are totally powerless against insurgents operating covertly (unless get ISR/SOF help) is nice. The Infowar counters gives some flavour of the mix of modern capabilities. The focus of the fight on particular nodes gives it some coherence – it's not just seize every area.
Important abstractions	Units are all just strengths and capabilities, not related to formal formations. Despite having "crowd" counters and concepts like "burn out" and SWEAT (water/power) cut-off there is no real sense of effecting the population or the buildings/infrastructure. In particular the Government can bomb with impunity. No subterranean
Types of decisions required	Which areas to take and which to hold. What force mix to put in place, initially for the open fight in an area and then for the covert fight. How to spent the Infowar points, and whether to gain points or reduce the en points.
Effects of the game system's mechanical requirements on the player's decision making	A lot is based around the Infowar points, whether to gain them in combat or reduce the en's points, and then what to spend on. InfoWar capabilities are randomly drawn which prevents any proper planning, although units are openly bought. Having two movement/combat turns between each mobilisation (Infowar spending) phase means capabilities need to be husbanded.
Likes/Good Elements (inc ease of play; really good below)	Once you sort the issues the game plays really well and has a structure that could be used for other scenarios.
Contributions to the wargaming state of the art	The difference between covert and overt combat, and the different CRT types for kinetic and non-kinetic combat. The ability to reduce en points instead of increasing own. Game ends by lack of points, not units or areas. In a combat one side might get the IW points but also suffer the most damage – probably quite realistic in urban/asymmetric.
Deficiencies	All the typos and errors/mismatches. No real treatment of civilians or infrastructure/fabric. Better track adverse reaction/prestige, separate fm resource points Random selection of Infowar capability makes for a quicker game, but less "serious". No subterranean.

Improvements? (beyond fixing above)	Tends to have step loss values on the obverse of counters, not reverse Not much difference between Disrupt and Confront tables MTBs quite weak but air strikes v powerful - ought to have a chance of burn out/cause collateral Does have a tendency to big stacks - ought to limit AH ought to be netwar counters/single use not units Crisis counters are more like minor events Colour code districts by type - icon too hard 5pts for 1:1 truck bomb cf 3pts for 2:1 airstrike !! Helos shouldn't be able to hold a district on its own No limit to airstrikes per area? Neither side ever felt points constrained, more lack of opportunities or right counters
Evaluation of the system's success at achieving the designer's goals	The game that meets the goal is probably in here somewhere, but initially frustrated by the errors, and then probably really needs to dig a bit deeper in reflecting the "net war" aspect, rather than just the asymmetric aspect (which is does tolerably well). Despite the "megacity" tag, this is really just a city (~100k pax and up?) game. For the megacity would probably need to bring in many more factors such as flows, feral districts, criminals etc

Overall Evaluation

Evaluation of the player's experience	A good game with constant choices to make, and never really budget (although possibly resource) constrained, but frustrating given all the production issues.
Does the game work? Is it a good (enjoyable) game (Veracity)	Yes, once you get through the production issues
Does it have real world validity?/Insights? Is it useful game?	Definitely leans more towards game than "simulation", but if fixed not a bad introduction to some of the issues of large city conflict. Would be interesting to compare to a more COIN-series take on urban or DC:Maracas.
Replay value	High, given range of strategies, objectives and resources.
Who would be most interested in the game?	Anyone interested in modern urban combat and/or insurgency operations.
Is the game good value?	$14.95 on wargames vault for PnP. Definitely, despite the errors.

Third Party Reviews	"Overall, I found this WITM to be a really interesting design that was quite a bit of fun to play once I was able to decipher the rulebook and figure out what I assumed the author "actually meant" about some of the rules. This game could have been a legendary design with more play testing and development. I'd like to see the game fully play tested and re-released as a boxed

	game with a different name, because the concept is absolutely fantastic." – spot on https://centurionsreview.com/war-in-the-megacity/war-in-the-megacity-review/

MECHANICS (relative to Urban/PhD)

(include Intricacy of the system, and the mechanical ease of play)

Aspect	Mechanic
Activation/C&C	IGOUGO, all units activate, no friction
Comms	Not implemented
UxV	Simple ISR counter to help with ops vs covert elms
CEMA	Not implemented, even the NetWar counters don't really touch on it
Other ISR	All open, no hidden information, blinds or dummies
Movement	MA - # of nodes. Must stop at en, but covert units can sneak past – nice.
Damage	All or nothing. CRT results are either 50% units loss & 50% retreat or all lost (on Kinetic CRT), or lose (or raise) Steps (units are 0-4 step).
Direct Fire	Bound up in CRT
Assault	Bound up in CRT
Indirect Fire	Air strike counter for govt. Equiv to a 2;1 attack. VERY powerful, but can't target cover units.
IEDs	VBIED counter for insurgents. Only a 1:1 attack and more expensive than airstrikes. No-Go-Zones represent barricades and smaller IEDs.
Morale	Game over once a side as 0 Infowar points. NGZ (No Go Zone) cancels ay retreat for Insurgents. Crowds and militia fade away if left in a contested or en area. Can strip en IW after combat rather than adding to own, which sort of reflects deteriorating morale and psyops.
Opinion	I suppose its meant to be bound up in the Infowar points, but too mixed in with everything else, and only affects spending and victory.
Victory Condition	Either sudden death (0 infowar points, NOT 0 units/districts), or by tallying IW points plus bonusses for strategic goal districts.
UTZs	Districts only differ by their IW points to the victor or holder. No sense of terrain differences.
Building Damage	There is a "burn out" condition through combat, and emergency service units to limit, but only haves the points value.
Civilians	Crowd counters, but no sense of injurying civilians.
Subterranean	Not covered
Other Urban Specifics/Notable	Has a SWET (cf SWEAT) action to turn off utilities to areas if you own a utility area, but only halves the points value.

[Per scenario/run through]

Date	19 Oct 23	Scenario	Base game
Players	DB	Constraints	None

SET-UP

As per standard

HOW IT PLAYED

Tried to lay out as "realistic " rather than rules win optimised
- Turn 1A
- Insurgents strike across city. Big distasteful at the N airport, stalemate in elite residential, but take Financial District and the docks
- Government airborne assault reinforcement takes back control of the airfield. Overt units in CBD KO'd, but guerillas still hang on underground.

- Turn 1B
- Insurgents flood areas with civilians to ensure presence. Take Liberation Plaza and Victory Sq. Starting to focus on goals - telecoms and ents.
- Massive Government airstrikes on Power Station and Elite Residential destroy en before big TFs can move in. In the financial district Guerillas put up a staunch defence. Again focussing a bit more on Residential and Ents. Take back control of central ministry.

- Turn 2A
- Black Hawk Down - placed in stadium (ought to be random)
- Insurgents get resort, but otherwise prep for govt onslaught
- Govt messes up trying to take out UG Divs with Kinetics, can't so ends up losing helicopter unit. Also Combat Edge countered by Insurgents. Ongoing battle in CBD. Big battle in Victory Square. Insurgents double, gives attackers <1:1 - half of attacking force lost.

- Turn 2B
- Insurgents get Telecom Central, now control all of Downtown expect the Ministry
- Huge Bde/Div op vs Res3, booted out main force but crowd left - but dispersed over night. Govt shuts of power to Stadium and the Resort

- Turn 3A
- Turning target areas into no go zones. Take Docks and Res1 to consolidate city centre hold
- Crisis - economic meltdown. Both lose 8pts
- big govt push but bombing raid fails. Big Div push on the Uni fails. SOF and airborne sent in against underground hold-outs.

- Turn 3B
- Govt has initiative
- 2nd assault on Uni still doesn't take it. More SOF raids to take out protestors.
- Insurgents increasingly reactive

- Turn 4A

- Another chopper down - randomised to the Mall.
- Another big bombing raid. IND1 bombed flat. Ditto docks, and Mall - pilot rescued. Far more successful. Land forces might now just be able to tidy up the pieces. The NGZs are the biggest blocker. Ins Cdo holding out at Victoria Sq but only 6 districts now held, only Liberation Plaza in force.
- CRISIS - enviro catastrophe, points swop, net to Ins
- Insurgents only on defensive now, sensing end near

- Turn 4B
- Govt big push grinds to halt as has to deal with underground unconventional forces - needs a change of tack.
- Insurgents pass

- Turn 5A/5B
- another huge govt airstrike reduces insurgents to almost only NGZs and underground
- govt making effective use of heli borne SOF teams to clear out the underground whilst ground forces bulldoze the NGZs
- Insurgents left with 4 districts. Govt should have used wins from last few turns to remove Insurgent points

- Turn 6A
- Final all out assault by govt, massive bombing strikes clear remaining no go areas and SOF and police go in to clear up remaining underground insurgents. Insurgents never had the time to regroup. ENDEX.

RESULTS

Points
- Insurgents, c. 60
- Govt: 11x5+50+16+50=170 -> 110 diff = strategic

Major government victory.

THOUGHTS (c.f. RL AND URBAN, only for subsequent plays)

Initially looked like the insurgents were doing well, but then the Govt realised how effective airstrikes where and started carpet bombing everything, then rolling in with the big armd bns and leaving SOF to mop-up. Not sure how Insurgents can counter that?
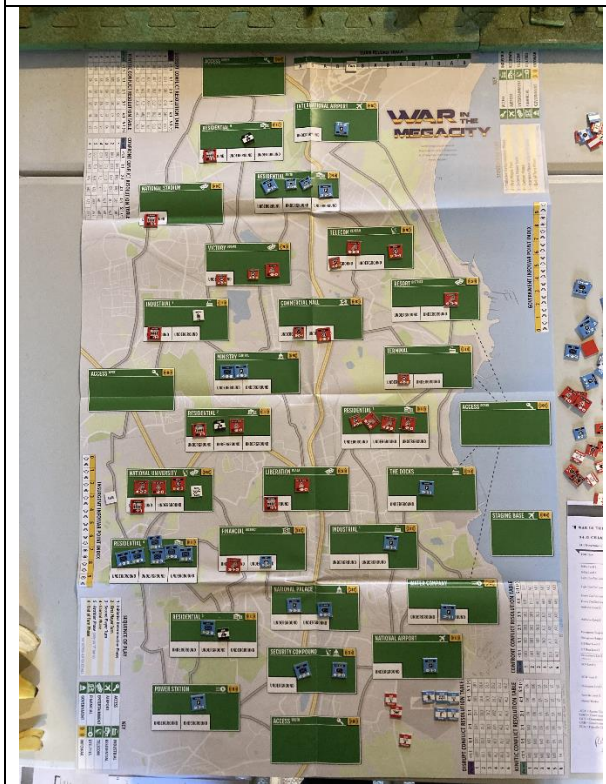
IMAGES

STARTEX

Detail

Mid-Game

Start of last turn