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Defining a Desirable, Achievable End State in Military Operations Other than War: The Role of The Operational Commander

by

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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I. It's a Brave New World

Back in the days of yore, war was simple. The good guys in white hats fought the bad guys in (you guessed it) black hats until the latter cried uncle, earning the good guys the right to live happily ever after, often after reforming the bad guys and thereby earning extra credit. Well, perhaps it was not quite as easy as all that: the truth is, winning took far more than simply squeezing out a high pitched cry of uncle. People died, sometimes millions, before the white-hatted ones could claim victory, and certainly the paths taken to obtain said victory were fraught with friction and fog, to list a few obstacles. Still, it is fair to say that when the operational commander took to the field, he* had a dang good idea of his objective--to fight and win--and defeat of the enemy spelled success and earned entry into the happily ever after stage, at least in the broad sense. Even as recently as World War II, these truths remained intact. With the advent of the Korean War, however, this clarity of vision concerning desired outcome (or end state) became hazy (notwithstanding Gen MacArthur's prounouncement that there was no substitute for victory), and the Vietnam War made it murkier yet.[1] The "Weinberger Doctrine" attempted to require a renewed clarity of mission with its second tenet, "Intervention must occur wholeheartedly with a clear intention of winning,"[2] as a prerequisite to committing troops to an operation, but this approach has not been conclusively followed since the Gulf War. In the current age of military operations other than war (MOOTW) as the rule rather than the exception, the desired end state is sometimes not defined at all before American soldiers are committed to action. This vacuum in no way lessens the responsibility placed on the shoulders of the operational

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*For the purposes of this paper, the words "he" and "his" should be taken to include both genders.

commander, however, to whom the old expectation of victory is still applied even if it is undefined.

One needs only to look at recent MOOTW in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia to understand that it is easier to enter than to exit, easier to commit military forces than to withdraw. Even the successfully executed Gulf War, which had clear objectives and a solidly defined end state, continues to retain "dangling participles" in the way of US-maintained no-fly zones--with no anticipated end in sight. Madeline Albright, our newly appointed Secretary of State, has "pushed for what she calls the 'doability doctrine' that America should use its military power in flexible ways to achieve practical, if limited goals."[3] Given that the Secretary of State is the one principally responsible for recommending when and where military force should be used,[4] this potential methodology for the commitment of forces spells increased muddlement for the future, at least from a military perspective. This becomes even more unsettling when one considers a past comment of Ms. Albright's to Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Colin Powell during a discussion centering around the Bosnian conundrum, "What's the point in having this superb military that you're always talking about if we can't use it?"[5]

Every good war college student knows those famous Clausewitzian dictums: "War is a continuation of policy by other means,"[6] and "The aim of war should be . . . to defeat the enemy."[7] But what if we are not precisely going to war? What if our aim in using military forces is not exactly "to defeat the enemy"? Although Clausewitz was never exposed (or subjected) to the term "MOOTW," he did note, "Only if statesmen look to certain military moves and actions to produce effects that are foreign to their nature do political decisions influence operations for the worse. . . . which demonstrates that a certain grasp of military affairs is vital for those in charge of general policy."[8] What

Clausewitz does not address is the serious quandry in which an operational commander (and his troops) is placed if statesmen do not have this "certain grasp of military affairs." If a plan is being considered to use military force in a way "foreign to [its] nature," what is an operational commander to do?

Although Clausewitz opines that politicians ("the cabinet") should assist in military decisions, he does not suggest the reverse, that soldiers should participate in political decisions.[9] Even our own joint military doctrine declares that the National Command Authorities (NCA) should define a desired military end state before committing troops to action.[10] The only downside of this concept is that it iss too good to be true. Most of our political leaders have no military experience to speak of, let alone at the operational/ strategic level. While in a "big picture" sense this is not necessarily a detriment, it does mean that in order to make sound decisions regarding the commitment of troops to support national objectives, political leaders need advice from military leaders that is both perceptive and specific relative to the contribution military forces could conceivably make to help achieve a given national objective, while clearly defining the limitations of military action.

Though the operational commander might not be the actual mouthpiece to the president, he is certainly the one best positioned to develop specific rationale for predicting the potential outcome of using military forces in a given situation. At the heart of this rationale is the end state: what is desirable, what is achievable, and what will it take to get there? While the military input is obviously only part of the ultimate solution, it is absolutely critical to ensure the best possible decision is made concerning the use of military forces in terms of whether or not to deploy said forces, and if so, how many, to what objective or end, and at what risk. Given the opportunity, there are several criteria the operational commander should consider in formulating a recommendation. If the commitment of forces has already been made due to political pressures or other

circumstances, the operational commander should still expect to play a key role in helping define a desirable, achievable end state, although the task is presumably more difficult once the ball has been set in motion. Regardless of whether or not the operational commander has had the luxury of providing recommendations before the whistle has been blown, he will need to continue to examine the "defined" end state and recommend appropriate modifications as the situation develops.

Like Clausewitz's concept of absolute war, even a perfect framework for decision-making will be imperfectly applied in the real world. One could cite friction, fog, entropy, or any number of physical laws to account for this, but for our purposes it is simple enough to note that it always looks easier on paper. Still, especially in an imperfect world of short deadlines and missing information, a basic framework can be invaluable when evaluating a crisis situation in terms of potential military application, objective, and end state. To that end, a sequence of questions to be used by an operational commander in preparing his input for political decision-makers is enumerated, along with historical illustrations where appropriate. Following that framework, which is primarily geared toward the decision-making process prior to deploying troops, the discussion moves to the operational commander's role in maintaining or modifying the declared military end state after troops are in place and the MOOTW has officially commenced. First, the types of operations encompassed by the term MOOTW are briefly examined, as well as some inherent differences between war and MOOTW, to provide a solid basis for the framework and discussion to follow.

II. MOOTW and War--Key Differences

An extraordinarily wide range of operations falls under the MOOTW umbrella, including humanitarian assistance, non-combatant evacuation operations, peace

keeping, peace enforcement, and counterdrug operations, to name a few. While the objective of war is to fight and win, MOOTW focus on deterring war, resolving conflict, promoting peace, and supporting civil authorities in response to domestic crises.[11*] Certain MOOTW may be initiated and completed in a short span of time, and others may stretch on for years with seemingly no end in sight. Some operations are strictly non-combative (although troops should always be prepared to protect themselves if the situation demands it and commanders must stay closely attuned to any potential threats and changes to the operating environment), while others by their very nature require almost a full complement of combative hardware and an expectation that lives will be lost.

Perhaps the most significant characteristic separating war from MOOTW is the level to which political considerations permeate. Although it is conceivable that a tactical action taken during a war could have strategic, hence political, implications, the likelihood of that happening is extremely low. A MOOTW, however, provides a plethora of opportunities for tactical actions to have far more impact than anticipated or presumably desired by the individual performing the action. Hence, political involvement and oversight does not stop at the strategic level. Highly (some might say "overly") restrictive rules of engagement (ROE) are generally set in place during MOOTW to minimize potential undesired fall-out of military actions and thereby reduce the chance of escalation, a very real risk during combative MOOTW.

MOOTW present the operational commander with some unique challenges when compared to war: harder-to-nail down objectives vice a straightforward "fight and win," generally more restrictive ROE, and often even a role as a supporting agency

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*This paper will focus on peace operations, to include peace enforcement, peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance.

instead of as the lead player, a given assignment in war. While these differences significantly increase the difficulties of defining a desirable, achievable end state, however, they in no way diminish the necessity of doing so.

III. Before the MOOTW Begins--A Framework for Decision-Making

The answers to five key questions provide a framework from which the operational commander can develop a well-supported recommendation for use by political decision-makers in evaluating whether or not military forces should be used to help resolve a given crisis situation, and to what end. While some of these questions mirror several in the Commander's Estimate of the Situation (CES),[12] they may or may not be initially addressed as part of that process, depending on the point at which the operational commander is brought into the decision-making process. Specific courses of action (COAs) are not addressed here because the purpose of these questions is to evaluate in a big-picture sense whether or not military forces should be committed. Of course, if these questions are answered as part of a CES, then COAs would be considered during that process. These questions are devised to stand alone, however, to support a preliminary evaluation regarding the use of military forces. The focus is on the presumed strategic results of military involvement, with careful attention given to identifying and evaluating political implications which might place limits on military actions and restrict flexibility.

1. What is the political objective?

Although this may seem like an obvious question, it is critical that the operational commander thoroughly understand the declared political objective as specifically outlined by the NCA. In many cases, the operational commander will have to distill the

military objective(s) from political guidance,[13] so it is imperative that he understand any nuances or subtleties which may not be clearly spelled out. Further, the very nature of the political objective may limit the military to certain actions or levels of activity which the operational commander must identify from the start so he can take these limitations into full consideration when defining the military objective.

2. What is the military objective?

Again, this may not be specifically defined by political authorities. Additionally, the operational commander must realize that the military may not be the agency providing the primary contribution toward achievement of the national objective. That said, the operational commander must still fashion a clearly understood military objective to define the role of the military in supporting the strategic aim. It is incumbent upon the operational commander to ensure the political leaders understand precisely what the military can and cannot accomplish. For example, there is no purely military solution to the situation in Bosnia. The military can help deliver food and provide for security, but these actions do not and cannot correct the root problem of ethnic rivalry and hatred. They only provide some stabilization which is inherently a transient property; as soon as the forces are pulled out, the conflict will reengage, unless diplomatic actions have been taken to quell the feud.

The concept of using limited military force as the muscle behind political actions is contained in the national security strategy[14] and is clearly one way of using the military to support strategic objectives in which other agencies take the lead. In these particular instances, the exact understanding of the actions connotated by the word "support" is crucial. In the planning process, the actions to be performed by the military must be clearly defined in order to clarify the boundaries of military involvement as well as reasonably estimate military force requirements. Once an operation has commenced,

all players, military and otherwise, need to understand the military objectives so they can work cooperatively. Although Operation RESTORE HOPE (Somalia) had four seemingly well-defined military objectives, confusion was created by the fourth, which said, "assist the United Nations/non-governmental organizations in providing humanitarian relief."[15] Some joint task force officers interpreted that to mean they would directly assist in food delivery, while other officers considered the security they were providing to fulfill this objective, albeit indirectly. The inconsistency displayed on the part of the military created needless confusion in the ranks of the relief workers as well as deployed military forces. This is a fairly benign example which did not derail accomplishment of the objectives, but it does illustrate the importance of writing military objectives that clearly define the very specific part the military will play to support the overall political objectives.

3. Are military capabilities sufficient to achieve the military objective?

In evaluating the numerical adequacy of available military forces and equipment, the operational commander needs to consider the mix of forces best suited to accomplish the mission. Although political influences (including those within the military) can attempt to artificially influence the mix of forces for reasons other than mission accomplishment, the operational commander must base his requirements on the characteristics of the defined mission. Further, he must examine the qualitative preparedness of the forces to achieve the defined military objective. Do current doctrine and training support the objective or will the forces need to receive specialized training before being deployed? Finally, he should consider the capabilities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private voluntary organizations (PVOs), whose expertise and regional knowledge could very possibly increase the

effectiveness of the deployed military forces while decreasing the amount of military resources required.[16]

4. How will progress be assessed?

To ensure a clearly defined and appropriately focused objective, assessment criteria or "measure(s) of effectiveness" (MOE) must be outlined, preferably before action is initiated. Although one could debate whether or not Vietnam could be counted as a MOOTW, a lesson regarding the principle assessment measure used in that conflict is certainly applicable. To track progress made in attriting the adversary's forces (arguably the most emphasized military objective), the MOE was enemy body count. This seems reasonable even in retrospect until one considers the difficulty involved in counting dead enemy bodies, especially given the terrain, lingering dangers from guerillas, and the frequent inability to distinguish combatants from non-combatants--all of which resulted in inflated body count reporting. A more subtle and complex problem with this particular MOE is that it emphasized efforts which were, if not counterproductive to achieving the desired end state, at least not particularly helpful, yet the MOE gave the appearance of progress. Hence, the MOE selected should provide a method for ascertaining progress as well as an additional check on the defined military objective to verify its alignment with the political objective(s). Finally, it should be understood that while time lines can be drawn up (and presumably should be) to estimate how long it will take to complete specified events, the provision of a date by which action will be completed does not substitute for actual progress assessment criteria.

5. What is the desired military end state? What is the exit strategy?

This is perhaps the most difficult area to address, especially when so much information about the crisis at hand is still lacking, yet that makes it no less critical. While

the objective might be somewhat generally described as "restore peace in the country" or even somewhat more specifically as "support the restoration of the legitimate government," the question here requires a specific description of how the situation should look at the point that military forces can be withdrawn without endangering the longevity of the solution just wrought. For example, if the military objective is to support the restoration of the legitimate government, the desired military end state is probably not simply that the government has been restored. Presumably, a period of extended military support will be required to ensure the government's stability. So how does one determine when the reinstated government will be stable enough to allow the withdrawal of military forces? Here it may be helpful to recall that the military should not be working in a vacuum and as mentioned earlier may not even be the lead organization in handling the crisis response. Coordination with the lead agency (assuming the military is filling a supporting role) as well as political leaders in defining the military end state is essential, particularly in a fuzzy situation such as the one described here. It is quite likely that it may not be possible to define a precise military end state during the planning stages due to the numerous unknowns. In the example provided above, for instance, there may truly be no way to credibly pre-determine how long it will take to achieve stability once the legitimate government is in place. Even in this case, however, an exit strategy should be developed beforehand to be implemented when the operational commander is convinced real time that the desired end state--continued stability of the reinstated government--has been achieved.

An "exit strategy" outlining the process of terminating an operation and withdrawing military forces can be implemented regardless of whether or not the stated objectives have been met, although the preference is to exit after achieving success. If recent MOOTW are any indication, it is reasonable to expect that future exit strategies

will often involve the turning over of American-led operations to United Nations (UN) forces as opposed to simply "exiting left" and leaving the host nation(s) completely on its own. A very precise exit strategy was defined prior to the initiation of Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY[17] (Haiti) and was accomplished on schedule,[18] with the UN picking up responsibility for follow-on actions in an organized fashion. The success achieved in this transition was due to interagency coordination up front during the planning stages, clearly defined objectives to be accomplished by US forces prior to the transition, and agreement by US and UN leaders when the objectives had been reached. The antithesis of positive exit criteria such as the objectives put forth in Haiti are those circumstances which would cause troops to be withdrawn before an operation has been successfully completed, but these also are exit criteria and should be identified before commencement of an operation. For example, not long after 18 American servicemen were killed during UNOSOM II, the UN-directed peacekeeping effort in Somalia, all remaining US troops were pulled out and US participation in the MOOTW was abruptly concluded without achievement of the stated objective. Although it would be difficult to identify every possible criterion which might cause premature withdrawal, it is prudent to consider the more likely and obvious circumstances as part of the decision-making process.

If the operational commander is well satisfied with the answers he has derived from this framework, he can then press on with coordinating his proposals with higher authorities. If, however, he perceives significant disconnects, it is incumbent upon him to objectively present his concerns up the chain of command. These issues could take many forms, from a perception of misaligned political and military objectives, to fears that politically-induced restrictions could put toops at unacceptable personal risk and/or reduce the effectiveness of the military (thereby requiring another look as to whether or

not the military is the best "tool" to use), to a concern that strict exit criteria based on American public opinion could cause premature operation termination, and so forth. Raising these issues should not in any way imply that the operational commander doesn't support the mission; however, they must be satisfactorily addressed to ensure the appropriate, reasonable use of force, particularly in situations where vital national interests are not at stake.

IV. During the MOOTW

Until the MOOTW is brought to a conclusion (successfully or otherwise), the operational commander must continuously reevaluate the questions just described to ensure the appropriateness of the actions underway. In particular, he must stay attuned to any changes, however slight, to the political objective, on which the military objective and all supporting actions are based. If the political objective shifts even a modicum, he needs to ascertain whether or not modifications need to be likewise made to the stated military objective. Similarly, if the situation itself changes, such as an increase in the threat to troop security, he must evaluate how such changes will affect the ability of the operation to continue. Communicating a description and evaluation of the changed environment up the chain of command is absolutely critical for several reasons, including possible changes to the ROE, adjustments to the mission, and the overarching point, potential political effects.

Even if the objectives remain as initially stated, the assessment criteria should be carefully analyzed once troops are in place, since inevitably the situation will not be identical to the one the planners envisioned from afar. Key considerations should include the ability to objectively obtain the designated data as well as verify that the

gathered data is in fact providing a useful measure of progress being made toward the achievement of the military objective.

In spite of the operational commander's best efforts to secure a defined end state prior to the beginning of the operation, it is very possible that he will find himself directing military forces and working toward the completion of objectives while still lacking either a defined end state or an exit strategy. This was the experience of the Implementation Force (IFOR) Commander, Bosnia, after being sent to establish security in the region as an outcome of the Dayton Peace Accords.[19] Although an annex to the signed agreement listed some very clear and concrete military objectives (an accomplishment that can be credited to a planning process which gave military leaders the opportunity to explain military capabilities and limitations to political decision-makers) along with a timeline for accomplishment, neither an end state nor an exit strategy was defined. At the core of defining an end state for this particular situation is the abstract issue of securing confidence that fighting will not resume once peacekeeping forces are pulled out. Without the ability to objectively assess the mind-sets of the opposing sides, only a subjective, real-time determination that the momentum has significantly shifted toward peace is possible--an exceedingly difficult end state to identify. An exit strategy might be minimally less difficult to formulate, but barely so. Given that the opposing sides are not yet ready to quit fighting for good, a follow-on civilian security force would be required to take the place of the current UN and associated military forces upon their "exit left." But what organization(s) can provide such a force?

This example, as yet unresolved, illustrates some of the complexities of MOOTW for which there are no simple solutions. Thus, we return to the question raised earlier, "what is an operational commander to do?" In such a situation, the operational commander must do everything he can to influence progress toward the

perceived goal (in this case, lasting peace in the region), while continuing to provide political leaders candid assessments of current and potential progress or the lack thereof, as excruciating as those evaluations might be.

Above all, this continual monitoring and assessment of objectives, conditions, and progress cannot be performed in a military vacuum, particularly if the military is playing a supporting role to another agency which has been designated with the lead. The establishment of a Civilian-Military Operations Center (CMOC) can be invaluable in building unity of effort among US military forces, NGOs, PVOs, other US government agencies, other countries' forces involved in the operation, and host nation organizations.[20] It is pertinent to note that even if the military is in a supporting role, it will still probably fall upon the operational commander's shoulders to initiate a CMOC due to the extensiveness of military resources as well as organizational abilities.[21]

V. Conclusion

The operational commanders of today are faced with situations far more complicated than those faced by their predecessors. More than simply being warriors, they must be peacemakers and peacekeepers who understand how to apply limited military capabilities in support of political objectives which address important, but not vital, US concerns. Further, they must be adept at working in concert not only with other government organizations, but NGOs and PVOs as well to achieve national aims in military operations other than war.

One of the operational commander's most important responsibilities is to provide soundly based advice to political leaders when they are considering the involvement of military forces to help resolve a crisis. It is incumbent upon the operational commander to ensure political decision-makers understand precisely what

end results are within the military's capabilities to achieve, particularly when political concerns limit the traditional use of force. Although the military's principal mission remains "to fight and win," the reality is that we have entered a brave new world in which more often than not the military is being asked to make or keep the peace so that 20-somethings in Birkenstocks can deliver food to the starving masses, or peace can finally reign where ethnic rivalries have held sway for hundreds of years. The operational commander will continue to be the holder of the reality check as the United States, as the last remaining superpower, aims high in trying to right the world's wrongs. May the force be with him.

NOTES

[1]Peter Lewis Young, "What Did We Learn from the Vietnam War?," Asian Defense Journal, Nov 1994, 19.

[2]Casper W. Weinberger, "The Use of Military Power," speech to National Press Club (Washington, DC, 28 Nov 1994).

[3]Harry G. Summers, "Understanding the Military 'What-fors'," The Washington Times, 16 January 1997, 14.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Carl Von Clausewitz, On War (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 87.

[7]Clausewitz, 595.

[8]Clausewitz, 608.

[9]Ibid.

[10]The Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub 3-0: Doctrine for Joint Operations (Washington: 1995), III-2.

[11]The Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub 3-07: Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other than War (Washington: 1995), I-1.

[12]U.S. Naval War College. "Commander's Estimate of the Situation Worksheet," NWC 4111 (Newport, RI: 1996).

[13]Joint Pub 3-07, II-3.

[14]The White House. A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement (Washington: 1996), 19.

[15]Jonathan T. Dworken, "Restore Hope: Coordinating Relief Operations," Joint Forces Quarterly, Summer 1995, 18.

[16]The Joint Chiefs of Staff. Joint Doctrine Capstone and Keystone Primer (Washington: 1995), 47.

[17]Margaret Daly Hayes and Gary F. Wheatley, "Interagency and Politico-Military Dimensions of Peace Operations: Haiti~A Case Study," (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1996), 26.

[18]Hayes and Wheatley, 49.

[19]Telephone Interview with Admiral Leighton Smith, Cmdr IFOR Bosnia, 20 Dec 95-31Jul 96, 3 February 1997.

[20]Joint Pub 3-07 (Washington: 1995), IV-7.

[21]Telephone Interview with Admiral Smith.

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