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CONFLICT TERMINATION:  
IT'S NOT JUST FOR POLITICIANS ANYMORE

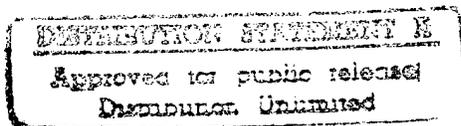
by

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

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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## **ABSTRACT**

Numerous studies have been conducted and books written about the origins of, conduct of and termination of war. The vast majority of the writings concerning the origins and termination of warfare are focused primarily at the strategic level of war. At the operational and tactical level, the actual conduct of warfighting has also been extensively studied. What has been lacking is a thorough examination of war termination from the operational commander's viewpoint. As recently as 1990, U.S. Joint Publications made no mention of war termination considerations. This is beginning to change and is vitally needed, for it is the operational commander who translates strategy into tangible results once a conflict starts. A clear road map is needed to go from lofty strategic aims to concrete achievable objectives. The operational commander is the cartographer of that road map and must know what the final end state is, in order to develop a feasible plan on how to get there.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the end of World War II, the United States has used military forces over three hundred times in support of national objectives, often without clear expression of the desired end state or requirements for conflict termination.<sup>1</sup> In part, this lack of a clear desired end state contributed to the Chinese intervention in Korea, our failure in Vietnam and our less than total victory in the Persian Gulf War. While the political leadership is responsible for the decision of when and for what purpose military forces are to be employed, it is critical that the operational commander understands clearly what the end result should be. Five critical areas the operational commander needs to have clearly established in his mind, before the conflict even begins, will be discussed in this paper. As the world's sole superpower, the United States will continue to be involved in conflict resolution worldwide. These conflicts will likely increase in number and frequency of occurrence, as ethnic rivalries surface, resources become more scarce and the world's population increases. The operational commander (regional Commanders-in-Chiefs) will be assigned the task of resolving these conflicts in terms favorable to the United States and enhancing stability.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce B. G. Clarke, Conflict Termination: A Rational Model, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1992), p. 1.

mention of war termination considerations. This is beginning to change and is vitally needed, for it is the operational commander who translates strategy into tangible results once a conflict starts. A clear road map is needed to go from lofty strategic aims to concrete achievable objectives. The operational commander will be the cartographer of that road map, with the political leadership editing and revising his map. Therefore it is imperative not only for the political leadership, but also for the operational commander, to not take the first step without considering the last.<sup>2</sup>

### THESIS

Conflict termination is one of the most important and difficult aspects of warfare for which the operational commander must plan. More often than not the guidance a commander receives concerning the desired end state or war aims from political leaders is stated in broad, vague and general terms. From this general guidance the commander must develop concrete military objectives and a clear picture of what the desired end state will look like. This single aspect of warfare will have a profound influence on how the war will be fought, what types of forces must be employed and what defines the war's victory criteria. The commander must clearly convey to subordinates what they are to achieve and to the political leadership what the envisioned end state will look like. Some argue that conflict termination is the primary responsibility of politicians. This view is overly simplistic and fails to take into account the fact that as the on scene representative of his government, the military commander will often be the individual negotiating peace and the one responsible for post conflict operations. Generals Grant and Lee at Appomatax, General MacArthur

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<sup>2</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 584.

accepting the Japanese surrender onboard the USS Missouri and General Schwarzkopf's negotiations at Safwan are a few examples.

In order to successfully terminate a conflict the following critical factors must be addressed:

1. The military commander must obtain clear guidance from his political leadership on the desired end state. If the guidance is unclear as more often than not it will be, he must develop a desired end state based on his understanding of the political intent. This fully developed end state should specify what the military can do and what will be required of other United States and International agencies. By thoroughly developing the desired end state the commander will ensure that the political and military goals are synchronized.

2. The root cause of the conflict and the value each side places on its aims must be clearly determined. The source of the conflict may be such that it could be resolved through negotiations, with relatively modest expenditures of effort. The value placed on the war's aims may be such that the complete capitulation or annihilation of one of the participants is necessary. This may require the expenditure of large amounts of resources. Both situations may require long term commitment of effort and resources based on the desired end state.

3. The culture, history and customs of the adversary and one's own people and government must be clearly understood and addressed when developing the desired end state. A lasting peace, will be one that is acceptable to both sides, which may have diametrically opposite views as to what is just and fair or vastly different cultural values.

4. Given the unpredictable nature of war, the operational commander must develop branch plans that provide a point of reference should the war not proceed as planned. These

branches should include less than favorable outcomes as well as overly successful outcomes. Without these branches, the commander may find himself in uncharted waters, reacting to circumstances, wasting resources and risking defeat.

5. America's superpower status and the proliferation of information technology (the Cable News Network (CNN) effect), make the commander's assessment of war termination criteria and post hostility actions crucial to achieving the desired end state. Each of these factors will be discussed, beginning with:

### **POLITICAL GUIDANCE**

The clear guidance given to military commanders during World War II, the complete and unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan, is the exception and not the rule. In World War I and almost without exception during the period after World War II, American political leaders have stated their objectives, when using military force, in vague general terms. These have included: to deter aggression, contain communism, promote stability and to establish a favorable world order. While lofty aims, these terms provide little assistance to the military commander, who is often tasked with obtaining them. It would seem that this is a deficiency that should be addressed by the political leadership. In reality it is a problem the military commander must recognize and seek to resolve during his planning. The reasons this problem exists are many, but they are best described by General Maxwell Taylor when he wrote:

“For one thing, busy senior officials capable of providing it (political guidance) are usually so engrossed in day-to-day tasks that they have little leisure for serious thought about the future beyond the next federal budget. Also, it is risky business for a senior politician to put on public record an estimate of future events which, if wide of the mark, would provide ammunition to his adversaries. Similarly, a president who announces specific policy goals affords the public a measure of his failure if he falls short of his hopes. Hence it is common practice for officials to define foreign policy goals in the broad generalities of peace

prosperity, cooperation, and good will--unimpeachable as ideals, but of little use in determining the specific objectives we are likely to pursue and the time, place, and intensity of our efforts."<sup>3</sup>

A notable attempt to rectify this ambiguity was made by Secretary Weinberger in his formulation of the Weinberger Doctrine. He proposed that before the United States committed military forces to a conflict the following six tests had to be met:

1. The conflict should be of vital interest to the United States and its allies.
2. Intervention must occur wholeheartedly with a clear intention of winning.
3. The country must have clearly defined political and military objectives.
4. The relationship between the objectives and the forces must be continually

reassessed and adjusted if necessary.

5. There must be a reasonable assurance that the American people and Congress will support the intervention

6. Commitment of U.S. forces should be the last resort.<sup>4</sup>

Strict adherence to the Weinberger Doctrine does little to assist the operational commander. The first problem lies in what defines a "vital" interest. Korea, Vietnam, Lebanon, Panama, Haiti, Bosnia, Somalia, etc. all were vital enough to the decision makers in power at the time to commit forces, but one could question if the survival of the United States was threatened in any of these cases. A vital interest may even be defined as U.S. prestige or world leadership. Concerning the second test, it is hard to imagine commitment

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<sup>3</sup> Maxwell Taylor quoted in Stephen J. Cimbala and Keith A. Dunn, Conflict Termination and Military Strategy: Coercion, Persuasion, and War, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), p. 179.

<sup>4</sup> Caspar W. Weinberger, "The Use of Military Power," speech, National Press Club, Washington, DC, 28 November 1984.

of U.S. forces in a situation where there is any intention of losing. Finally, the fourth test did little to keep our involvement in the Vietnam War from spiraling out of control.

What is needed is clear guidance to the military commander of what is to be accomplished in addition to the determination that U.S. military forces are in fact required to achieve the desired end state. Lacking specific, concrete objectives, it is often incumbent upon the operational commander to develop the desired end state. The commander should provide feedback to the political leadership as to what the envisioned end state will be and how the assigned resources will be utilized. Specifically, the commander must identify those tasks which can be achieved with military forces, those that require other agency support and attempt to quantify how long the commitment of United States resources is foreseen to obtain the objectives.

#### **IDENTIFYING THE CONFLICTS ROOT CAUSE**

“In war, the result is never final, that even the ultimate outcome of a war is not to be regarded as final. The defeated state often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date.”<sup>5</sup>

This statement clearly shows the difficulty in determining how to end a conflict permanently. The permanency of the solution will depend largely on the root cause of the conflict and the importance that each participant in the conflict places on obtaining his objective. This again would seem to lie in the political realm, but the military commander must have a solid understanding of these factors, to know how much and what type of forces are required as well as identifying what must be accomplished.

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<sup>5</sup> Clausewitz, On War, p. 80.

The Vietnam War provides an example of where both the United States political and military leadership failed to identify the true source of the conflict. North Vietnamese aggression was believed by both to be the root cause. This led to the massive buildup of American forces and strategy to deter North Vietnamese intervention, when the South Vietnamese government's lack of support from its own people was the major problem to be solved. American conventional military forces were ill-suited to solve this underlying weakness. Additionally, the American leadership failed to correctly determine the value that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong placed on a unified Vietnam. Had they done so, they would have determined that any involvement in Vietnam would require a long term, extensive commitment of U. S. resources.

Even during the Persian Gulf War, the root cause of the conflict was not accurately determined. Saddam Hussein publicly stated that, all of Kuwait legitimately belonged to Iraq. This claim dated all the way back to the British withdrawal from the region in 1961, when Kuwait was granted independence. It was aggravated by Iraqi claims of Kuwaiti slant drilling into Iraqi oil fields and Iraq's huge debt, that mushroomed during Iraq's war with Iran. With the source of conflict between Iraq and Kuwait so deeply and historically rooted, conflict resolution would be extremely difficult to achieve.<sup>6</sup> When Iraqi and Kuwaiti negotiations failed to resolve the conflict, Saddam Hussein sought to resolve it by invading and annexing Kuwait, an end state unacceptable to the United States. The Gulf War restored the territorial integrity of Kuwait, but left the cause of the conflict unresolved. Saddam Hussein remained in power and retained enough military strength to continue to threaten Kuwait.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf, (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1994), p. 7.

Subsequently, both the Bush administration and General Schwarzkopf have been criticized for failing to topple Saddam's regime to prevent further aggression. The destruction of Saddam's regime was not the desired end state, whereas the long term sovereignty of Kuwait and U.S. access to Middle East oil was. Therefore it is arguable that a precondition for the cessation of hostilities during this conflict, should have been an Iraqi guarantee of Kuwait's sovereignty. No such demand was planned for and as Coalition forces pursued the retreating Iraqi Army, events unfolded too quickly for General Schwarzkopf and the administration to come to this conclusion. The result has been a continuous state of conflict, that will require the commitment of U.S. forces to the region for an undetermined amount of time.

#### **CULTURE, HISTORY AND CUSTOMS OF THE PEOPLES INVOLVED**

Military commanders are becoming increasingly aware of the necessity to understand the culture and customs of the people in their area of responsibility. This is of particular importance for the war termination phase of planning. Military forces may achieve total success on the battlefield and even the destruction of the adversary's regime, but they often are ill suited for the post conflict requirements for services and government, except for short periods of time.

Here the commander must go far beyond just the planning for the conduct of the war and envision what will occur after the cessation of hostilities. What type of infrastructure will remain in place? What if any government will remain? What type of government are the people accustomed to? Who can provide stability and governmental services? Would it be international organizations such as the U.N., indigenous parties, coalition members, or will the U.S. government be responsible?

The U.S. intervention in Panama is a case that illuminates the importance of almost all of these issues. From the beginning, military planning for operation Just Cause focused solely on the military objectives of the conflict. The stated objectives of American intervention were to protect American lives and property, protection of the Panama Canal, the removal from power of Manuel Noriega and the installation of a democratically elected Panamanian government. From these objectives the military commanders developed their plans, which were highly successful, toward neutralizing the Panamanian Defense Force and Noriega's source of power in the country. What was not thoroughly planned for was the post-conflict phase of the operation. This narrow focus on military objectives was described by General Thurman, Commander-in-Chief, United States Southern Command during the intervention as follows:

“The war fighting elements are mainly interested in conflict termination as to post-conflict restoration, which is admittedly a problem for us in the military establishment. If I had been the XVIII Corps commander, I might have very well said Blind Logic (the plan for post hostility actions) is going to be residual. My task is to conduct the strike force operation and get out. I think the proclivity was to leave the fighting to the war fighter and the restoration to the people who were in country.”<sup>7</sup>

In Panama there was no history of democratic government. With the capture of Noriega and the elimination of the Panamanian Defense Force, the newly installed political leadership, which had no experience in democracy, was faced with providing governmental services without a police force or other functional agencies. This led initially to civil unrest and a long term commitment of United States forces.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Maxwell Thurman quoted in, Richard H. Shultz, Jr., In the Aftermath of War, (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1993), p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5-17.

These factors have been and will become increasingly important as U.S. forces are employed to conflicts in areas that do not share our Western European culture or 200 year history of democratic government. As in Panama, the requirement for the operational commander to plan past the cessation of hostilities will continue. Each case will be unique based on the area's culture and history and it will be incumbent upon the commander and his staff to thoroughly understand that culture and history. Failure to do so will result in long term commitment of forces and continued unrest in the commander's area of responsibility.

### **BRANCH PLANS**

“In war more than anywhere else things do not turn out as we expect.”<sup>9</sup> This maxim is well understood by military leaders in developing branch plans for the conduct of war. However, branch plans also need to be developed for war termination. The time to make such plans is before the conflict starts, so that the possible outcomes are already thought through. Failure to do so will result in the military commander becoming reactive or making decisions that might possibly change the entire nature of the war.

Initially in the Korean War, the United States desired end state was the restoration of the territorial integrity of South Korea. Facing defeat and the loss of all of South Korea, General MacArthur's bold landing at Inchon in September 1950 saved the United Nations forces in Korea. The success of that landing and the subsequent unexpected collapse of the North Korean Army, led MacArthur to expand the war aims from the simple restoration of South Korean territory to the destruction of North Korean forces and a unified Korea. This was the decision that changed the nature of the war by triggering Chinese intervention. No

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<sup>9</sup> Clausewitz, On War, p. 193.

plan had been envisioned to terminate the war if the United Nations forces proved more successful than planned, which resulted in the fateful decision to rapidly pursue the enemy to the Yalu River.

This same situation occurred during the Persian Gulf War, with quite different results. Instead of prolonging the conflict, the rapid and unanticipated advance of Coalition forces led to the unilateral cessation of fighting by Coalition forces and a less than desirable outcome.

General Schwarzkopf stated:

“The rapid success of the ground campaign and our subsequent occupation of Iraq were not fully anticipated. Thus, some of the necessary follow-on actions were not ready for implementation. The prolonged occupation of Iraqi territory, necessitated by the absence of a formal cease-fire agreement, has been further complicated by the unforeseen civil unrest that has occurred throughout Iraq since the cessation of hostilities. Documents for war termination need to be drafted and coordinated early.”<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, during the Vietnam War no branch plan existed for war termination. Branch plans could have been developed before U.S. forces were deployed and reviewed as events unfolded. The result was an inflexible plan, that had no clear cut determination of war termination criteria. Branch plans could have included, employment of differently configured military forces if objectives were not being achieved, increased involvement of U.S. agencies other than the Department of Defense or the extraction of U.S. forces. Instead the United States entered a continuously upward spiral of conventional military force commitment.

### **SUPERPOWER STATUS AND THE CNN EFFECT**

America's superpower status, especially since the demise of the Soviet Union, plays a large role in how the military commander envisions conflict termination. The commander

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<sup>10</sup> Gordon and Trainor, The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf, p. 515.

must take into account the view, most adversaries will promote, that the United States is the world's bully. This must be seasoned with the expectation of many countries, that the United States is the only country which has the resources and therefor the moral responsibility to provide leadership and stability. This superpower status, coupled with the explosion of news and information services and technology, will result in the commander's actions and decisions being scrutinized by the entire world's population almost instantly. In light of this intense scrutiny, war termination and post-hostility actions must be planned in detail.

World War II was probably the last conflict, where actions could take place in remote parts of the world without this intense scrutiny. One has only to look at the increased coverage and information available from the Korean War to Vietnam to the Persian Gulf War, to gain an appreciation for this dramatic change. The North Vietnamese understood the importance of both aspects of this factor and manipulated World and American public opinion, against U.S. efforts in Vietnam while garnering support for their own efforts. They skillfully used all available media sources in portraying the United States as an aggressive, large country, attempting to force its will on a poor, oppressed people.

This also played an important role in the United States' decision to end the Persian Gulf War after 100 hours of ground combat, even though the stated objective of destroying the Iraqi Republican Guard had not been achieved. The Bush administration, based largely on Generals Schwarzkopf's and Powell's concern for the pictures of destruction on the "highway of death", called a unilateral cease-fire. All key individuals in this decision were concerned with the "piling on" appearance of the world's only superpower, that would almost instantaneously be transmitted around the world. Closely associated with the CNN

factor described was the fear by the decision makers as to what the United States obligation would be if the Iraqi government totally collapsed, while it's forces were being attacked by the U.S. military. This would have left a huge power vacuum in the Persian Gulf, that could be exploited by Iran, and would have obligated the United States to provide long term security and governmental services in Iraq itself. <sup>11</sup>

These factors will also play heavily on the American public. As the world's only superpower the American people will expect short, relatively bloodless wars. This point is only exaggerated by the overwhelming success achieved during the Persian Gulf War. News coverage of long protracted and bloody battles, will only increase the pressure on the operational commander to terminate the conflict rapidly. This pressure could lead to less than desirable outcomes, unless the commander has developed detailed plans for war termination.

## CONCLUSION

Conflict termination is a matter that is of the utmost importance to the operational commander. It is an area that needs to be thoroughly addressed from the operational level of war and not left at the strategic, or political level. There is no easy solution or checklist that will ensure success. Each and every conflict has been and will continue to be different and events rarely unfold as planned. This will necessitate comprehensive study, planning and continuous evaluation of the situation as events occur. It also means that planning for conflict termination must occur before the conflict begins, to avoid the mistake of reacting to events or not having adequate time to develop a comprehensive plan to a complex problem.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 476.

As the individual tasked with achieving U.S. objectives, the operational commander must:

1. Have a clear understanding of the desired end state. The commander must realize that obtaining the required guidance from the political leadership has and will continue to be difficult. This may require the commander himself, to develop the desired end state based on his understanding of the political intent.

3. Have a clear understanding of the root cause of the conflict and thorough knowledge of the participants. His actions should not only be focused on winning the war, but also on winning the peace. The conflict must be viewed in its entirety and not just from the viewpoint of achieving military objectives and victory.

4. Understand the culture, history and customs of the adversary and his allies. These factors will effect how and when he negotiates, as well as what will be required in the post hostilities phase of the war. The likely employment of United States forces outside the Western European sphere of influence will only increase. The commander must educate himself and his staff on how the cultural differences in his area of responsibility will influence his plans for conflict termination.

5. Thoroughly think the war through, from beginning to the end of U.S. military involvement. This will require extensive planning, to include branch plans should the conflict not develop as foreseen. The United States superpower status and the explosion of information systems will effect not only how the commander will fight the war, but how and when the war ends. War termination must be carefully planned before the conflict begins, for

once hostilities begin, events may occur so rapidly that a reasoned approach to war termination is impossible.

Properly planned, the cease-fire documents or whatever mechanism envisioned for the cessation of hostilities will be in hand long before the conflict begins. Post-hostility plans must be detailed and include, what is required for stability, who will provide resources and a proposed chain of responsibility. It is absolutely critical that this early planning take place to ensure the desired end state is reached. Without this early and detailed planning, the conflict may not be resolved in the best interests of the United States, assets may be inefficiently utilized and indefinite employment of U.S. military forces may be required to maintain peace.

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