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CONFLICT TERMINATION IN THE PERSIAN GULF: HOW DID WE FALL SHORT?

by

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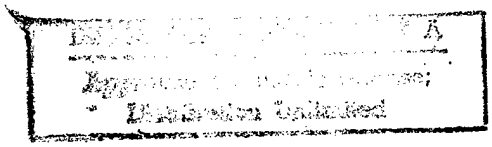
A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

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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15.Abstract: Much has been written recently regarding the subject of conflict termination and how it relates to the operational commander in planning and executing military objectives to be victorious at war. Prior to the Persian Gulf War, conflict termination was focused primarily at the strategic level with political objectives in mind and little thought of how the national desired end state is transformed by the operational commander to satisfy the military objectives. The Joint Chiefs of Staff more recently have come to realize that conflict termination is a very important and integral part of campaign planning and have included it their planning for joint operations. Conflict termination provides an essential link between national security strategy, national military strategy, and post-hostility aims. The issue of conflict termination centers on the national will and freedom of action. Further, it must be considered from the outset of planning and should be refined as the conflict moves toward advantageous termination. As the link between a war's end state and the post-hostility phase, conflict termination poses one set of difficult issues for the grand strategists and different but equally challenging questions for the operational commander. Herein lies the complicated task for the operational commander. That is, transforming the desired national end state into definable and achievable military conditions which meet the military objectives

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written recently regarding the subject of conflict termination and how it relates to the operational commander in planning and executing military objectives to be victorious at war. Prior to the Persian Gulf War, conflict termination was focused primarily at the strategic level with political objectives in mind and little thought of how the national desired end state is transformed by the operational commander to satisfy the military objectives.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff more recently have come to realize that conflict termination is a very important and integral part of campaign planning and have included it in their planning for joint operations. Conflict termination provides an essential link between national security strategy, national military strategy, and post-hostility aims. The issue of conflict (or war) termination centers on the national will and freedom of action. Further, it must be considered from the outset of planning and should be refined as the conflict moves toward advantageous termination. As the link between a war's end state and the post-hostility phase, conflict termination poses one set of difficult issues for the grand strategists and different but equally challenging questions for the operational commander. Herein lies the complicated task for the operational commander. That is, transforming the desired national end state into definable and achievable military conditions which meet the military objectives.

Therefore, the operational commander must develop a mission statement based on the national objectives, coordinate that mission statement with the political authority, and develop an acceptable end state— satisfying economically, militarily, and politically.

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INTRODUCTION

"The object of war is a better state of peace—even if only from your won point of view. Hence it is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace you devise."[1]

In today's world environment of instability and economic chaos, the military will be called upon to fight in limited and complex situations. The operational commander will be assigned the task of resolving these complex situations on terms favorable to the United States. As the link between a war's end and the post-hostility phase, conflict termination poses one set of difficult issues for the grand strategists and different but equally challenging questions for the operational commander.[2]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) have come to realize that conflict termination is a very important and integral part of campaign planning and have included a discussion of its importance in recently published joint doctrine. "Conflict termination is an essential link between national security strategy, national military strategy, and post-hostility aims."[3] Unfortunately, this doctrine still relies exclusively on the National Command Authorities (NCA) to provide the termination strategy. In reality, the CINCS and CJCS must provide the NCA with clear and compelling recommendations and advice on the military conditions required for successful resolution of the conflict. Included in the military conditions should be elements that directly support effective transition to post hostilities operations and long term efforts to reach the desired end state. Without this input, conflict termination will be ill designed and may impede rather than enhance efforts to ultimately get to the desired end state. "Conflict termination should be considered from the outset of planning and should be refined as the conflict moves toward advantageous termination."[4]

The Joint Chiefs define "end state" as the set of required conditions that achieve the strategic objective. The complete strategy for victory must contain all the vital instruments of

power--political, economic, and military. It is important for the operational commander to not only understand these elements and how they are related, but he must also consider them when formulating the military conditions necessary to achieve (or help achieve) the strategic objective. This would greatly enhance the chances of the military conditions supporting and strengthening the overall desired end state that includes much beyond the military elements.

Herein lies the complicated task for the operational commander: defining achievable military conditions that support the overall desired end state. The Joint Task Force Commander's Handbook for Peace Operations cautions that "it is critical that you have a definable end state. The end state may be a moving target, one that needs continuous refinement throughout your operation. You must work toward a clearly understood, agreed upon, and measurable mission end state."[5]

So what does this mean to the operational commander? First, the operational commander must develop a mission statement based on the national objectives, and articulate an acceptable end state— satisfying militarily, politically, and economically. Second, he needs to coordinate that mission statement with both the NCA and with other agencies and organizations who will play important roles in the various phases of the operation. The coordination process is key as the conflicting viewpoints (and resultant objectives) can have a tremendous impact on the ability of the operational commander to develop and execute a successful plan. Furthermore, the breadth of national objectives makes them prone to many differing interpretations. Without proper coordination and refinement, the military objectives may never come close to the national objectives resulting in an unachievable end state.

This paper will examine the requirement of today's operational commander to transform national objectives into an understandable and achievable end state. One of the

key ways to ensure this leads to success is to meld conflict termination requirements into his operational plans from the beginning. I will seek to examine the interrelationship between the military and non-military objectives, and the requirement to incorporate conflict termination into the campaign plan. I will use the Persian Gulf War as my case study in this analysis. Finally, based on my analysis, I will provide recommendations and conclusions.

There are four questions that are imperative for the operational commander to consider when faced with applying military force.

1. What military conditions must be produced in the operational arena to achieve the strategic goals? (Ends)
2. What sequence of actions is most likely to produce that condition? (Ways)
3. How should the resources of the joint force be applied to accomplish the desired sequence of actions? (Means)
4. What is the likely cost or risk to the joint force in performing that sequence of actions? (Risks)[6]

The subject of conflict termination is imbedded in the first question above. Conflict termination must be an integral component of the military condition. In Joint Pub 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations, it states that "before forces are committed, Joint Force Commanders must know how the National Command Authority intends to terminate the operation and ensure its outcome.[7] Clausewitz has emphasized that a nation must begin conflict termination planning prior to hostilities—not taking the first step without considering the last.[8] Thus, political leaders must clearly define the war's purpose or national objectives (ends) before committing troops.[9] By applying regressive planning, that is planning backwards, this requirement can be satisfied.

CONFLICT TERMINATION IN THE PERSIAN GULF

"No one starts a war—or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so—without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it."[10]

I have used the Persian Gulf War as my case study because it is still fresh in our minds, and it provides good examples with which to illustrate my thesis. First off, President Bush developed and communicated very understandable and clear national objectives to be achieved in the conduct of this war. Likewise General Schwarzkopf, the operational commander, was able to take those objectives and transform them into his military objectives in order to achieve the military condition he needed to win the war. Unfortunately, the process of transforming the national objectives into the military objectives to meet the military condition did not result in achieving the desired end state.

Within days after Iraq invaded Kuwait, President Bush established the following national objectives for the war:

> "Immediate, complete, and unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait; restoration of Kuwait's legitimate government; security and stability of Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf; and safety and protection of the lives of American citizens abroad."[11]

Supporting these objectives, the President garnered a strong and cohesive international coalition of forces, further strengthening his economic, political, and military strategies. The President remained firm on these objectives throughout the war, a fact which made it easier for General Schwarzkopf to maintain his military objectives.

The President kept close communications with the Secretary of Defense, Mr Cheney, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Powell, and General Schwarzkopf, the Joint Force Commander. Although the resources requested by Generals' Powell and Schwarzkopf were made available to them, this war showed to the world that there was only

one person who had the responsibility to make the decisions—the President. There was no doubt in anybody's mind who would make the decision to intervene, who would make the decision to begin the air war, who would make the decision to begin the ground war, and who would decide to call it off—the President.[12]

With the national objectives and command structure in place, General Schwarzkopf had at his disposal the "ends" and the "means" with which to plan his campaign. He defined "two policy goals, restoration of the legitimate government of Kuwait and regional stability."[13] He transformed these broad goals into the following military objectives:

> "Neutralization of the Iraqi national command authority's ability to direct military operations;
>
> Destruction of known nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons production and delivery capabilities, to include Iraq's known ballistic missile program;
>
> Assistance in the restoration of the legitimate government of Kuwait;
>
> Ejection of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and destruction of Iraq's offensive threat to the region, including the Republican Guard in the Kuwait Theater of Operations"[14]

This meant that the Iraqi military had to withdraw from Kuwait, something that might be obtained by force or through negotiations. To achieve these objectives, the coalition military leadership planned (and the political leadership approved) a sequential campaign of air and ground assaults designed to weaken the Iraqi stronghold and to establish preconditions necessary to reestablish a stable regional environment.

Strategic victory in Desert Storm is debatable because the end state or a vision of what the area should "look like" following hostilities was "fuzzy."[15] The President, the military leadership, and others in the coalition had differing visions of security and stability in the Gulf region. As a result, no common well-defined end state existed. This has led to

questions about whether there was a true victory in the Gulf war. "As victory suggests the decisive defeat of an opponent, there was none."[16] A captured Iraqi general stated, "You have destroyed the body of the snake, but you missed the head."[17] He was referring to the fact that Saddam Hussein was still in power and would be able to inflict harm in the future. Based on the President's subsequent support for covert actions, public rhetoric, and post-war comments, one can argue his end state included the removal of Saddam Hussein from the Iraqi Presidency.[18] It was not however, ever a stated objective. Likewise, the military did not see this as a condition for victory. Therefore, although Iraqi military command and control was targeted, its political leadership was not.

The military believed regional stability required a "weakened" not "dismembered" Iraq.[19] They saw regional stability as a degraded Iraqi military unable to threaten its neighbors. With Americans still in the region today, regional stability has not been totally accomplished: according to General Powell in My American Journey, "In none of the meetings I attended was dismembering Iraq, conquering Baghdad, or changing the Iraqi form of government ever seriously considered."[20] In the end, "an Iraq still standing, with Saddam overthrown" was desired, but "his elimination was not a stated objective."[21]

As the war progressed very quickly, conflict termination also quickly came became an urgent issue. During a press briefing by General Schwarzkopf on 27 February 1991, he stated that the mission had been accomplished, most of the offensive capability of the Iraqi forces had been destroyed, and that heavy tanks and artillery were being contained.[22] In other words, Iraq no longer posed a military threat in the region.

Prior to the briefing (and contrary to the thrust of his briefing remarks), General Schwarzkopf told General Powell that he needed another day of combat to accomplish his

objectives. General Powell in turn told President Bush that another day was needed to adequately complete the ground offensive.

The President was now faced with deciding whether to allow the military another day of fighting or to stop the war. He was also faced with the highly televised reports on the "Highway of Death." The President feared if the fighting continued for another day, Washington could be "accused of a slaughter of Iraqis who were simply trying to escape, not fight."[23] He did not want to face the public cry of another Viet Nam. Although the President had to consider the political and public perceptions dealing with the "Highway of Death," it appears that he focused even more on the war reaching the 100 hour point than understanding and satisfying the required military objectives. The President made the decision to end the war at 100 hours, without another day of fighting, on 27 February 1991. With the fighting over, the post-conflict negotiations were set to begin.

Earlier the same day, 27 February1991, General Powell asked General Schwarzkopf to draft a set of military conditions that Iraq must meet in terminate the fighting. At this point, neither the Allied military nor the political leadership had any kind of conflict termination plan. This was graphically illustrated in General Schwarzkopf's statement that he was going to go to the negotiation table and "wing it."[24] The General was totally unprepared, as was Washington. In fact, after about an hour of thought he drafted the conditions, sent them to Washington, and they were approved nearly as written. This clearly illustrates how unprepared the political and military leadership was for conflict termination.

The swift military success and territorial occupation gave considerable potential leverage to General Schwarzkopf in his negotiations with the Iraqis. However, as we quickly realized, General Schwarzkopf had not received any political instructions for the

negotiations. A senior Bush administration official said, "Norm went in uninstructed, he should have had instructions."[25] As seen from the pictures of the negotiations in the tent, there were no civilian representation of the United States or any other coalition partners. It was a military show.

When General Schwarzkopf was told that he would negotiate with the Iraqis, he commented, "That took me by surprise. It had never crossed my mind that I'd have to sit down opposite Iraqi generals..."[26] Some would argue that negotiations are the responsibility of civilians, not the military. In this war, it appeared that the civilians were not going to have a hand in the conflict termination process. Politically and militarily, we were unprepared for the termination of hostilities.

At the negotiating table, the Iraqis quickly accepted the basic terms presented to them by General Schwarzkopf. However, as the talks continued, they requested several concessions. The two most important concessions were allowing armed helicopter flights in Iraq and the quick withdrawal of allied troops from Iraq. General Schwarzkopf agreed to both of these terms as he felt they were legitimate and didn't see them as a threat to what the coalition had accomplished militarily.

What General Schwarzkopf did not see was the advantage he gave the Iraqis by allowing them the use of armed helicopters and by letting Iraq quickly reestablish its presence in the area. Because he so quickly and easily agreed to Iraq's requested concessions, many in Washington were dismayed with General Schwarzkopf's negotiation performance.[27]

PLANNING ISSUES

"To bring a war, or one of its campaigns, to a successful close requires a thorough grasp of national policy. On that level strategy and policy coalesce: the commander-in-chief is simultaneously a statesman."[28]

The operational commander must consider several factors before initiating his planning process:

1. The guidance from the political authorities must be clear in terms of the desired end state. This will allow the commander to focus on military conditions that take account of and support eventual attainment of the overall desired end state.

2. Factoring in the culture, history, and origins of the anticipated enemy is critical. The reasoning behind this is that the desired end state for the United States may never be accepted or even considered by the enemy based on their values. This also requires an enormous amount of preplanning to have a sound basis of understanding of what to expect from the enemy.

3. Finally, the planners must prepare for conflict termination at the very beginning of the planning phase and allow for branches in the process. As war progresses, it may not be in the desired direction of the plan or it may take a direction that was never considered. Therefore, the planners must be ready to adjust and refine to the ever-changing fog and friction of war as it relates to conflict termination.

These factors must be fully developed by the commanders planning staff as soon as he is notified of impending action. This will allow him the most amount of time to define and refine his mission as well as ensure complete understanding by the NCA.

The Persian Gulf War points to some particularly challenging issues towards winning the peace in any future conflict. These issues need to be incorporated into future campaign planning.

The first issue is that the "bridge" to the post-hostility phase of the operation must be part of the campaign plan prior to hostilities.[29] According to General Schwarzkopf, the rapid success of the ground operations and the unexpected consequences caught the CENTCOM staff unprepared for follow-on actions.[30] In fact, General Schwarzkopf's chief foreign policy

advisor at CENTCOM stated "We never did have a plan to terminate the war."[31] It is apparent that nothing was done to address the process of war termination if one considers that the military conditions for victory were not met. Planners need to fully integrate conflict termination requirements in the planning process.

Moreover, our political and military leaders need to better comprehend the limits of the military as a means to achieve national objectives. Diplomatic efforts between the United States, the coalition partners, and the United Nations were key parts of the pre-war efforts to achieve the national objectives. Detailed planning and coordination went into this part of the overall plan. The same effort did not go into the military or civilian planning for termination. This resulted in the instruments of power being unevenly balanced causing serious disconnects.

Another issue is that current service doctrines do not support the operational commander in war termination. Army manuals hint at conflict termination but fail to provide direct guidance on how to relate the military conditions of war to the national objectives. Marine Corps doctrine goes a little further by providing some guidance but, leaves much to interpretation:

> [The] focus on the military strategic aim is the single overriding element of campaign design....Given the strategic aim as our destination, our next step is to determine the desired end state, the military conditions we must realize in order to reach that destination, those necessary conditions which we expect by their existence will provide us our established aim....From the envisioned end state we can develop the operational objectives which, taken in combination, will achieve those conditions.[32]

I suggest that to ensure operational planning effectively serves the requirements of national military strategy, both joint and service doctrine must address understanding and

reaching the desired end state in sufficient detail to effectively support the operational commanders campaign planning process.

Considerations that impact on future operational planning include:

1. That planning will be extremely challenging requiring experienced planners;
2. Political and military objectives must be clearly stated and understood;
3. The objectives and military condition to support those objectives are a moving target and require continual refinement;
4. And finally, there must be direct and open communications between the operational commander and the political leadership to ensure complete understanding and acceptance with the plan.

Military planners must be a part of the process of determining the end state and ensure it is within the means of the military to support. Plans must include for branches and sequels to redirect as the war progresses. Planners must take into account that the opportunity for termination may pop up unexpectedly and be ready to ensure termination terms support and help lead to the desired end state.

A third issue is the common disconnect between the military and the political vision of the end state, resulting from the lack of a commonly accepted well-defined end state.[33] The shared political-military objective in the Gulf War was to restore Kuwait's government; however, contained within this objective was the goal to move it toward a "more democratic mode," but this was not defined in the military mission.[34] Because this goal was not clear and fully understood, the military could not produce the military condition to help satisfy the political objective. Another case of a lack of a well-defined end state was the disconnect between the military's vision and strategy for security and stability in the Gulf region (degraded Iraq) and the U.S. Government policy's unspoken—but in retrospect clear—desire

(the overthrow of Saddam Hussein).[35] This view is not without opposition as Secretary of State James Baker is one who did not support this as an objective. The lack of a common vision prevented unity of effort and hampered civil-military operations.[36] Again, the military condition could not be obtained. Without a face-to-face meeting between the political and military leadership to discuss and comprehend the full meaning of the objectives, the potential for a failed strategy exists.

Finally, to successfully terminate a war with appropriate post-hostility operations, the above steps must be taken to achieve unity of effort within the entire U.S. Government. This requires "interagency coordination" and planning at all levels.[37] The process of ending a conflict clearly shows the necessary level of involvement between both the political and military components. To deny the political component is to risk making war something other than the servant of policy; equally, to deny the military dimension is to risk failure to attain the policy aims for which the war was fought.[38]

Colonel Reed has stated that "It is not self-evident that the business (or, more exactly, the politics) of ending a war is one which properly admits the military commander. Paralleling a Western tendency to see a clear division between war and peace, many observers tend also to see an equally sharp demarcation between political and "purely military" activities. Under such a view, the process of war termination displays greater political than military content and thus is more properly the province of civilian policymakers rather than military leaders."[39]

Although the civilian may be better suited for conflict termination activities based on having a greater understanding of the political and economic situation, the military commander is in a better situation to adequately assess the effects military leverage has on

the enemy. Therefore, the military commander, working closely with the civilian components, is best suited to recommend when the conflict termination process should be initiated. He is also in the best position to determine what military capabilities of the enemy must be eliminated, if not on the battlefield, then at the negotiating table. The military commander must understand this process and be prepared to address termination procedures before the first weapon is fired.

Like any other kind of an operational plan, termination plans require time, coordination, and the capability for modifications. Since the ground war in the Gulf progressed so quickly, the planners had concentrated on the war plans and had not gotten around to drafting any kind of conflict termination plans. This illustrates and emphasizes the need to incorporate termination plans into the planning process and certainly before any hostilities take place. Additionally, planners must expect as war progresses and objectives change, plans for termination will be affected and certainly will require refinement.

CONCLUSIONS

In the past, consideration of conflict termination has been centered almost exclusively at the strategic level. Wars ended because of attrition or exhaustion of one side; capitulation by one party; imposition of a settlement by a third party; or the internal dissolution of one of the belligerents.[40]

The Persian Gulf War illustrates the importance of conflict termination at the operational level as well. Moreover, the Gulf War also showed us that a clear, unambiguous end state is essential to a successful campaign. The President had one end state in mind and the military another. Proper military planning had not been initiated and conducted as a result. It becomes much like a bridge that transitions from conflict to peace operations. As the bridge between war and peace, conflict termination doctrine should address the issue of when and how to move from a military-dominant role into the post-hostilities phase. Conflict termination epitomizes the relationship between political aims, and military strategy, and as a continuous, dynamic, and interactive process, it never ends.[41]

Because the military and national end states did not match, General Schwarzkopf was unprepared to adequately handle the post-hostility operations. His statements to the press when he announced that the military mission was complete reduced the President's diplomatic and economic leverage. During the negotiations when General Schwarzkopf allowed the use of armed helicopters by the Iraqis and promised the rapid withdrawal of coalition forces, he silently strengthened Saddam Hussein's power in the region. Again, the United States lost leverage and the President was unable to achieve his end state. In total, the failure to coordinate the political and military goals weakened the overall unity of effort, the strategic-operational link, negotiations, and post-hostility operations.[42]

Conflict termination is so critical to the strategy and operational art of war that the operational commander must obtain a clear and precisely defined end state so unity of effort in plans and operations at the operational and strategic level are achieved to produce victory. The military has the responsibility to evaluate not only its ability to achieve a military victory, but its capacity to convert such a victory into a strategic end state and clearly articulate it to the National Command Authorities.

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