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EMPLOYING THE OPTIONS: HOW A JOINT FORCE COMMANDER VIEWS ROLES AND MISSIONS

by

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Current service roles and missions are the product of the historical evolution of warfare, and technology has driven much of that evolution. Most of the major changes in doctrine and tactics have been pulled along by the art of the possible in the tools of warfare. Since this is true, the boundaries between traditional roles and missions of the individual services have become broader gray areas and jointness at all force levels has become a way of life.

Accordingly, as our total defense force structure draws down and resources become more constrained, it makes sense to approach decisions on roles and missions by prioritizing the functions to be performed and then seek the most cost-effective way to meet the requirements. The service roles and missions debate can profit by examining each of the functions that a joint force commander must be prepared to perform in any reasonable future contingency operation. Then, through an operations effectiveness analysis, the best way to perform those missions can be determined.

As the Roles and Missions Commission of the Armed Forces begins its work, a common framework is needed. The purpose of this paper is to provide that framework by addressing the critical elements which define the functions of a joint force commander.

Given a crisis or a series of incidents in some area of the world that we consider important to our national interests, the president may order the use of military force. In so doing, he will cause a joint force commander to be appointed or designated. The joint task force (JTF) assigned to this commander can include units that are from a single service or — and this will almost always be the case — units that come from the several services. These units come under the command of the JTF commander who has the authority — indeed, the duty — to employ them to optimum effectiveness and efficiency in achieving his assigned mission.

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The term mission introduces a second critical element in constructing this reference framework. Missions can refer to generic military capabilities of various services like conduct amphibious operations; achieve air superiority; conduct operations at sea; seize and defend land areas. However, as used in the reference framework that we are describing here, the word mission refers to the formal statement given to the designated JTF commander. For example:

Mission:

Deploy to the Orangeland peninsula. Stop the advance of Greyland forces into Orangeland. Eject Greyland forces from Orangeland and restore peace to the region.

There are literally hundreds of tasks and dozens of implied missions stemming from the assigned mission above. They will not be enumerated here. Rather, a selected subset of the more critical tasks will be discussed, and from these some observations can be made.

Tasks:

- 1. Seize and secure airport near the city of Ota adequate for C-5 cargo aircraft.** This task may well require an airborne assault followed up quickly by air-landed reinforcements. For such a requirement, the JTF commander would want the assault elements of the 82d Airborne Division and its essential support elements — all of whom are trained for this kind of operation. Seizing the airport may be difficult or it could be relatively benign. However, the techniques for ensuring that an enemy cannot use standoff attack weapons — like mortars and artillery — to fire on the seized airfield, nor use shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles — to attack vulnerable aircraft in their last two to three miles of slow landing approach to the seized airfield — requires doctrine, tactics, techniques and training that are the province of professional ground forces. A JTF commander would depend upon his ground component commander to know and execute the steps necessary to achieving a secure airfield simply by assigning the task — “seize and secure the Orangeland airport at Ota”.
- 2. Seize and secure the seaport facilities at the city of Nora.** A JTF commander knows that over 95 percent of his capability to sustain his force with supplies and, indeed, to bring into Orangeland the tanks, artillery and other mechanized units that he may need to accomplish his mission must come by sea and be off-loaded in a relatively prepared port. The U.S. Marine Corps has amphibious forces that are trained and equipped for exactly this kind of operation. The JTF commander would then assign the seaport seizure and security task to his Marine element.
- 3. Defend Orangeland.** The JTF commander knows that he must use offensive actions to eject the forces of Greyland. However, he also knows that he must go on the defense until he can build up sufficient forces in Orangeland to take the offense. Therefore, the JTF commander’s early planning would envision how best to conduct an Orangeland defense, halt the progress of Greyland forces, while simultaneously building up his own forces through the sea and airports that analysis tells him are sufficient to conduct a successful offensive campaign.

- 4. Achieve air superiority.** To use the air- and seaports for bringing in forces, the ports must be free from enemy air attacks. This means that the JTF commander orders his air component commander to achieve and maintain air superiority. This, in turn, means early deployment of U.S. fighter aircraft, and buildup of planes, supplies and equipment at support bases in the region that are relatively secure from Greyland ground attacks. At the same time, Army surface-to-air missiles to assist in protecting the air- and seaports would be deployed. Note here that the reality of competing requirements for limited sea and air transport capabilities becomes painfully apparent. For every deploying Air Force fighter aircraft into Orangeland — or nearby countries in the region — a C-141 equivalent of cargo and support is required. And Army surface-to-air missile systems (like Patriot and Hawk) also demand a significant amount of airlift. So, the JTF commander has to balance his early need to achieve air superiority with the urgent need for forces to seize and secure airports and seaports. In this connection he is assisted by the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine component commanders who are able to provide their specific recommendations on priorities.
- 5. Theater missile defense.** The Iran/Iraqi war, Desert Storm and even the recent conflict between North and South Yemen demonstrate the proliferation of tactical ballistic missiles (TBM) and the willingness of belligerents to use them. Our generic scenario could well posit TBM using nuclear, biological or chemical warheads. Air- or seaport attacks by these types of weapons would have devastating impact on the ability of the JTF commanders to bring in forces rapidly and in quantities necessary to achieve the tasks to accomplish the assigned mission. Consequently, another early need is for theater missile defense (TMD) weapons to protect the air- and seaports and arriving forces. Whether it be Patriot or the future Theater High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD), these weapons require a significant amount of precious airlift to move even small numbers of weapons. TMD then poses another critical, early demand on the strategic lift capabilities. The JTF commander has to deal with this competition for lift among the systems that are required for early arrival in Orangeland.
- 6. Defense vs. enemy infantry forces.** In task three the focus was on the broad category of defense. In practice, the JTF commander would have studied the Greyland force capabilities; and if foot infantry were the enemy's major force component, the JTF commander's priority for bringing in U.S. fighting forces would go to light forces first, with the heavier — more mobile — armored forces coming by sea later. The Marine forces seizing the seaport would be well-equipped and supported for operations against Greyland's predominantly infantry attacking forces. The Army's airborne and air assault divisions are trained and equipped for enlarging the airhead to keep the airfields secure from both ground attack and mortar and artillery fires.
- 7. Defense vs. enemy armored forces.** In the event that Greyland had a significant tank, mechanized infantry and armored artillery force, the JTF commander would put a premium on anti-armor defenses. The airborne and air assault forces seizing the airfield would need to have modern anti-tank fire capability like the Army's Javelin shoulder-fired weapon. Also, attack helicopters with Hellfire missiles, and in the future, Longbow, would be given high priority for early airlifted deployment. The JTF commander also would opt for Army heavy divisions with their Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles, Abrams Tanks, Paladin self-propelled 155mm Armored Field Artillery, and armored-vehicle-equipped support forces such as air defense, engineers, intelligence and resupply elements to quickly load out by ship. To oppose an armored-equipped Greyland enemy without fully armored defense forces can be done, but only at great risk, higher casualties and for a very short period.

Consideration:

The above discussion summarized only a small number of the many tasks and considerations that a JTF commander will factor into his planning process. For each task and for every implied mission he will be assisted by his staff and the expertise of his experienced land, air and sea component commanders. The capabilities of each component are well understood, since that is the *science* of war. The *art* of war is what the JTF commander and his component commanders lend to the concept of successful campaigns.

The Air Force can conduct offensive and defensive counter-air operations aimed at achieving air superiority. The Army's surface-to-air capability adds synergy to the air-to-air and air-to-ground strikes of the Air Force. The Army's Tactical Missile System (ATACMS), helicopters and sometimes artillery can assist in suppressing enemy air defenses so that Air Force air assets will take less casualties as they perform their roles. The naval arm can also contribute to this mission both by air-to-air attacks and by surface-to-surface (Tomahawk) and surface-to-air. What this means is that an enemy is faced with a wide range of threats from all U.S. component forces — all orchestrated by a single command structure.

The devil's advocate can allege that the services have redundant capabilities. However, the question that begs answer is: Do we need the redundancy? Do we have unnecessary duplication? The answers can be found in the vulnerabilities and strengths of each kind of system. Where enemy surface-to-air fires are too heavy, fixed wing air flies at a higher altitude for safety, but then suffers a loss in the precision of fires against enemy targets. The helicopter, artillery or Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) can fill in part of the gap — but not all. Artillery and ATACMS are not grounded by weather, as aircraft may be, but their range is much less than the aircraft of the Air Force. The same type paradigm can be constructed in intelligence, infantry and armor. When an enemy is faced by U.S. forces which can hit him by sea, air or land with integrated, 24-hour-a-day capabilities and with detailed knowledge of enemy positions and strengths, then the disadvantages become so great that the enemy cannot cope with the battle space situation nor use forces available with any degree of efficiency.

The inherent capabilities of the sea, air and land forces should always be subject to challenge to prove their cost-effectiveness in their assigned roles and the type and quantity of equipment they are supplied. However, these challenges should be made only in the context of the whole orchestra, not merely in one or two of the instruments. A JTF commander, of course, would prefer to look to his Marine component if an amphibious operation is in the offing. Equally so, he would want his Army component to take on the airborne operation or the mobile operation of a fully armored combined arms force. The Marine Corps does not need to be a fully armored force, nor the Army an amphibious arm. We do, however, want to threaten any future enemy with attack from the sea, by air attack from high performance jet aircraft, and by low-flying, hard-to-detect attack helicopters, while light forces threaten from woods and cities and armored attacks circle enemy flanks.

It is within this framework that the roles and missions debate should take place.

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