KEY LEADER ENGAGEMENTS BUILD ALLIANCES

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Key leader engagements (KLEs) have been in practice for centuries, since the first recorded alliances were formed between nation-states. KLEs stand to supply substantial contributions to strategic efforts, namely that of strengthening alliances in an age where those partnerships are critical to furthering national security and strategic interests. There is minimal literature associated with KLEs, and even less that provides a common definition or specifically examines strategic implications. This thesis fills that gap using qualitative research through an explorative case study methodology. The study coupled data collection through personal interviews and focused coding analysis to identify core concepts relevant to understanding KLEs and measuring their strategic contributions. All interview participants unanimously acknowledged the criticality of KLEs in current and future operations, but diverged in opinions over defining KLE, and implementing potential changes to military doctrine and/or education. This thesis establishes a shared understanding of KLE, proposes a standardized definition for KLE to be integrated across U.S. Joint doctrine, and affirms the strategic contributions and relevance of KLE.

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ABSTRACT

KEY LEADER ENGAGEMENTS BUILD ALLIANCES, by MAJ Cristina C. Gomez, 126 pages.

Key leader engagements (KLEs) have been in practice for centuries, since the first recorded alliances were formed between nation-states. KLEs stand to supply substantial contributions to strategic efforts, namely that of strengthening alliances in an age where those partnerships are critical to furthering national security and strategic interests. There is minimal literature associated with KLEs, and even less that provides a common definition or specifically examines strategic implications. This thesis fills that gap using qualitative research through an explorative case study methodology. The study coupled data collection through personal interviews and focused coding analysis to identify core concepts relevant to understanding KLEs and measuring their strategic contributions. All interview participants unanimously acknowledged the criticality of KLEs in current and future operations, but diverged in opinions over defining KLE, and implementing potential changes to military doctrine and/or education. This thesis establishes a shared understanding of KLE, proposes a standardized definition for KLE to be integrated across U.S. Joint doctrine, and affirms the strategic contributions and relevance of KLE.

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ACRONYMS

AAR	After-Action Review
BG	Brigadier General
CDR	Commander
CMO	Civil-Military Operations
COCOM	Combatant Command
COIN	Counterinsurgency
COL	Colonel
CPT	Captain
DIV	Division
DOD	Department of Defense
FSEC	Force Strategic Engagement Cell
GEN	General
IO	Information Operations
IRC	Information-Related Capability
JDN	Joint Doctrine Note
JP	Joint Publication
KLE	Key Leader Engagement
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel
LTG	Lieutenant General
LSCO	Large-Scale Combat Operations
MG	Major General
MISO	Military Information Support Operations
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
PA	Public Affairs
PME	Professional Military Education
SC	Security Cooperation/Strategic Communication
STRATCOM	Strategic Communications
TF	Task Force
U.S.	United States
USARPAC	United States Army Pacific

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The more you start to talk about key leader engagement, the more you
realize it's not as straightforward and simple as you might think it is to begin
with.
— BG (R) James P. O'Neal, interview with author,
Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 30 March 2020

Background

Key leader engagements (KLE) have been in practice since the era of the earliest

alliances, even if not specifically by name. The term itself was introduced to the U.S.

Armed Forces vernacular in the early 2000s, in correlation with counterinsurgency

(COIN) operations. Professionals across the military offer a wide understanding KLEs

based on their experiences with the capability. A service member could be placed in a

KLE-specific position because of branch qualifications or simply because of personnel

shortages. He/She could even be tasked to manage KLEs, irrespective of position or

branch, to fulfill mission requirements. This occurs at all echelons and in almost any

organization, in support of multiple mission types despite KLEs' origins in COIN

operations. The researcher was introduced to KLEs at the Army Service Component

Command level and was not familiar with the term or concept, having recently completed

company command as a logistician. The next three years resulted in very distinct

experiences with KLEs in three very different organizations: U.S. Army Europe, North

Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Allied Land Command and the United States

Military Academy at West Point. Although the task of "facilitating KLEs" followed with

each new duty assignment, the diverse experiences only compounded the complexities of KLE.

In trying to understand and navigate these intricacies, the researcher faced multiple challenges in executing KLE operations, and in the most recent experience, in establishing the capability. The purpose and effectiveness of KLEs was constantly under in question - whether it was by the researcher, having been newly introduced to the idea, or by the organization, skeptical of an emerging staff section. The definition was not standardized across doctrine, partly because the three organizations did not share the same foundational literature, but also because, the literature that does exist is minimal. Lastly, the responsibility to manage KLEs in each of the three organizations fell to a different staff activity, and in some instances was debated and adjusted within the same organization. These frustrations mark the root of this study. How was it that senior leaders, at three star and above levels, could be employing a practice so extensively, and yet support staffs were having to rely on ad hoc, ill-refined processes? If this was such a widely and historically used tool, why were staff officers having to re-learn and/or re-establish procedures with each new assignment? These initial inclinations mirror some of the literature in the next chapter. Originally, the researcher intended to examine opportunities for refining KLE processes. Upon further consideration, however, such an approach appeared to be too systems-oriented, or operations-centric, to best address the fundamental complexities of KLE. Rather than trying to enhance solutions to the problem, the researcher instead focused on better defining it. Furthermore, before time and energy can be allotted to improving processes across the military, that investment must be justified in relevance and need. As such, this study aimed to achieve a shared

understanding of KLE and affirm its contributions at the strategic level. Given the extensive applicability of KLEs, the researcher chose to focus on the particular effort of strengthening alliances and partnerships. Such operations are common among the three organizations mentioned earlier and emphasized across national guidance.

<u>Problem Statement</u>

Currently, senior leaders across the U.S. Armed Forces utilize KLEs to further strategic objectives regardless of the type of organization or associated mission. This capability, however, has very limited literature dedicated to detailing a common definition, context for purpose and use, and potential for strategic contribution. Instead KLE is buried amongst related fields, despite its substantially high degree of employment. To best address this issue, one must first consider the significance of KLE. If this capability is not strategically contributive, then there is no need to enhance KLE understanding or refine corresponding literature and processes. This project aimed to determine that relevance, specifically within the context of the current climate depicted in national guidance, which demands strengthened alliances and partnerships.[1] The study addressed the following research questions.

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[1] Secretary of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, (Washington D.C.: US Department of Defense, 2018), https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf.

Do key leader engagements, conducted specifically between U.S. general (GEN) officers and foreign stakeholders, contribute to the U.S. strategic effort of strengthening alliances and partnerships?

Subsidiary Questions

Within that overarching concept, there are four subsidiary questions that facilitated the research and helped organize the methodology design:

1. What are the doctrinal and theoretical foundations for KLEs?

2. In what organizations and contexts have KLEs been used?

3. How have strategic leaders employed KLEs by echelon?

4. What was the strategic effect of senior leaders employing KLEs?

Significance of Study

The study KLE is significant to the military profession, national security specialists, and other scholars because of the prospective strategic contribution it stands to provide the U.S. Armed Forces – especially in an age where alliances are critical to furthering national interests. Current national strategic guidance, to include the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, the Army Strategy and numerous posture statements from combatant commanders (CDRs), stress the importance of alliances and partnerships. KLEs can directly support this effort. Furthermore, as a method of public diplomacy, KLEs offer a potentially overlapping technique between the diplomatic and military instruments of national power – crucial for military senior leaders navigating the strategic and grand strategic arenas. Applicability to the instruments of national power

and potential from strategic influence warrant the further study of KLE. This particular focus on strategic relevance coupled with analysis gathered from scholarly and firsthand sources has not yet been captured in existing literature. This thesis fills that gap by exploring the significance and efficacy of KLEs to achieve an enhanced and shared understanding of this extensively utilized capability, as well as affirm its contributions to strategic efforts.

<div align="center">Qualifications and Bias</div>

The researcher's professional experience with KLEs serves as a sufficient knowledge base to take on this type of exploratory project. Having worked in this field for other three years, within three distinct organizations, the researcher has witnessed firsthand the litany of strategic effect KLE offers to military senior leaders. Despite considerably different missions and environments of these organizations (United States Army Europe, Allied Land Command and United States Military Academy), senior leaders at all three actively employ KLEs to further strategic objectives. By filling different duty positions, the researcher was able to observe a singular capability be widely applied to multiple objectives, and work within the field in various capacities (i.e. executing, planning, managing, and/or assessing engagements). Admittedly, although this experience contributed context and motivation to the project, it held the potential to manifest as a personal, cognitive bias. Knowing this, the researcher deliberately reviewed a wide spectrum of literature and attempted to include a diverse array of interview participants to aptly offset this bias throughout the research process.

<u>Assumptions</u>

There were two critical assumptions facilitating this research study. The first, KLEs have been in practice throughout history even if conducted under different terminology. The second, strengthening alliances and partnerships will continue to be a national strategic effort, at least through 2028, as described in the current Army Strategy.[2]

<u>Limitations</u>

There were three limitations that directly impacted research efforts: participant recruiting, time allotted, and content classification. The first, and most significant, limitation affected which personal interviews would be included in the study. The researcher used past and current professional networks to recruit participants. One such connection led to over half of the total population, achieving the approved range of interviewees quickly. Although this enabled immediate and continuous research, it resulted in a data sample of U.S. Army officers only, as opposed to the originally intended multi-service participants. Next, this study was constrained to the eight months allotted within the U.S. Army Command and General Staff Officer Course academic year, which limited the possible breadth of research, but proved to be non-hindering. Lastly, in order for this study to be widely published upon completion, its content and supporting research had to remain below the "for official use only" (FOUO) level, limiting the pool of sources and data. The interview population included GEN officers

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[2] HON Mark T. Esper and GEN Mark A. Milley, *The Army Strategy* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2018), https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/the_army_strategy_2018.pdf.

who have operated, or currently operate, strategic-level echelons, which often intersect national security issues. Any associated literature or recounted information classified as "for official use only" or higher was not incorporated into the study.

<div align="center">Delimitations</div>

Given the innately broad description and application of KLE, there were a few delimitations that helped define the scope of study and facilitated focused research efforts. To begin with, this study was intended to focus on strategic-level experiences and influence, which shaped the criteria for interview participants, as well as the interview questions. Interviewees consisted of active and retired staff officers and GEN officers, who have supported and/or conducted KLEs. This, in turn, limited the period captured through personal interviews to approximately the last three decades. Additionally, the researcher incorporated only one of the many possible KLE audiences – allies and partners – by electing to solely examine the corresponding U.S. strategic effort. Although KLEs may be applicable to a wider range of strategic objectives, the time constraints associated with this study called for a more succinct approach. Lastly, with regards to the doctrinal portion of the literature review, this study only analyzed U.S. joint publications (JPs). The time allotted for this study did not allow for a more thorough comparison across all U.S. military services, or among allied publications. This was intended to correlate with the originally sought-after multi-service interview participants. Unfortunately, the limitations presented by the researcher's recruiting network hampered that effort.

Key Terms and Definitions

For clarity and understanding, below are a few of the key terms and definitions used throughout this thesis. Those terms preceded by an asterisk denote terms that began with an originally established definition for the purpose of the study (described here), but that was open to adjustment based on the finds of the study (discussed in later chapters).

Key leader: a participant of a KLE.

*KLE: an exchange between two individuals for the sake of furthering a purpose or objective.

Senior leader: (for the purposes of this study) an individual with a GEN officer rank or above.

Stakeholder: (for the purposes of this study) an individual with a personal stake in the organization, objective, or idea in question.

Strategic communication: (Although no longer included in joint doctrine, for the purposes of this study, the researcher will refer to the historical joint definition.) Focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.[3]

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[3] Headquarters, Joint Forces Command, *Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy*, Version 3.0 (Suffolk, VA: Joint Warfighting Center, June 2010), GL-9.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

> First of all, KLE applies to tomorrow's PT.
> — MG (R) William L. Nash, interview with author,
> Fort Leavenworth, KS, 27 March 2020

Doctrinal Review of JPs

Introduction and Overview

The first section of this literature review focused on the JP references. Given the amount of time available for this study and the specified focus on GEN officers engaging foreign leaders, these were the only doctrinal references examined for the project. JPs hold a complementary and informing relationship with doctrine across all military services, thus providing succinct and comprehensive insights to the larger military force. Additionally, the corresponding online database, the Joint Doctrine, Education, and Training Electronic Information System, facilitated a holistic and efficient search, which was critical to navigating this study. Twenty-four JPs described, mentioned, or alluded to KLEs: twenty-two JPs and two joint doctrine notes (JDNs). The variety of publication topics ranged from information operations (IO), to communication, to civil-military operations (CMO), and even counter improvised explosive device activities. Collectively, these publications referred to KLEs throughout all levels of war, tactical, operational, and strategic. No dedicated "KLE" or "KLE" section surpassed two pages in length. Also, it is important to clarify that in the context of joint doctrine the term "defined" connotes being officially included in the corresponding publication glossary and the *JP 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. In doctrine, those

terms outside of the *JP 1-02* are only "described" rather than "defined," regardless of the context. For the purposes of this review, where the terms "defined" or "definition" are used is aligned with common, non-doctrinal vernacular to better distinguish and explain varying degrees of dedicated text, and to allow consistency with non-military literature. Whereas in joint doctrine "defined" and "described" have a clear distinction, as used in this study the two are essentially the same.

For ease of understanding, these publications were grouped based on the attention and relevance each paid to KLEs. Only three, more relevant publications provided explicit definitions for "KLEs," along with dedicated, narrative-form sections. The remaining publications either provided limited context from which to infer a definition or purpose or did not provide any context at all. Of these, only seven exhibited dedicated sections or subparagraphs regarding KLEs. Lastly, review of these JPs exposed certain commonalities and inconsistencies worth noting.

More Relevant: Include Definitions and Dedicated Sections

The three more relevant publications within the doctrinal review were *JP 3-13, Information Operations*; *JDN 2-13, Commander Communication Synchronization*; and *JP 3-61, Public Affairs (PA)*. All three of these references provided distinct and explicit definitions for "KLEs," as well as dedicated, narrative sections describing their purpose, characteristics, application, and/or associated activities.

First, *JP 3-13*, it defined KLEs as "deliberate, planned engagements between U.S. military leaders and the leaders of foreign audiences that have defined objectives, such as

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change in policy or supporting the Joint Force Commander's objectives."[4] This definition specifies that the engaged audience be foreign, and requires "defined objectives."[5] *JP 3-13* referred to KLEs as applicable across the tactical, operational, and strategic realms, and identified KLE as a "military capability," or more specifically as an "information-related capability" (IRC).[6] Although this publication acknowledged a wide application range for KLEs, it specifically stated that they "can be used to shape and influence."[7] KLE appeared among other activities which contribute specifically to IO, such as strategic communication, PA, and CMO to name a few. However, the KLE capability was not shown within a figure depicting the notional framework of an IO cell (or section).

The second relevant publication is *JDN 2-13, Commanders Communication Synchronization*. It provided a substantial reference to, and description of, KLEs. As a simple metric, when searching for either "KLE" or "KLE," the terms appeared in this publication thirty-six and twelve times, respectively, while appearances throughout the other JPs did not surpass twenty-nine or nine, respectively. *JDN 2-13* described KLEs as

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[4] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-13, *Information Operations, Incorporating Change 1* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, November 2014), II-13.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

a subset within the larger category of "engagement."[8] It was the only publication to explicitly make this distinction between types of engagements. The associated text delineated between "KLEs" and "soldier engagements," and further offered "dynamic" and "deliberate" as other forms of categorizing engagements. This publication did not provide a clear definition "engagements," but did mention that they have "traditionally ... only focused on the key leader."[9] It also stated that "[a]ll engagements should be characterized by the following; they should be consistent, culturally aware, credible, adaptive, balanced, and pragmatic."[10] *JDN 2-13* then defined KLEs as "engagements between joint force military leaders and the leaders of approved audiences that have defined goals such as a change in policy or supporting the Joint Force Commander's objectives."[11] Although incredibly similar to the last definition from *JP 3-13*, this version did not specify that the engaged audience(s) be foreign. It did include, however, the required alignment between KLEs and specified goals/objectives. Augmenting this definition, the joint note provided a figure illustrating "military communication capabilities and activities comparison."[12] This chart depicted the purpose, function, audience, effect, dimension, and supporting capabilities or activities for a litany of

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[8] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 2-13, *Commander's Communication Synchronization* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2013), II-4.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., II-6.

communication capabilities, including KLE.[13] The most noteworthy aspect, the purpose

of KLEs, was to "educate, influence and persuade key leaders."[14]

The remaining remarks of KLEs were within the framework of a notional CDRs

communication synchronization process. In describing this process through narrative

form and supporting design figures, the publication alluded to how KLEs, the section or

agency responsible for their execution, and the associated products all integrate across

other communication capabilities. *JDN 2-13* alluded to certain products unfamiliar to the

researcher, but also did not provide corresponding examples for reference, such as a

"KLE Decision Matrix." It introduced an organization titled "the KLE cell" used

throughout a number of the other publications in this literature review. Only this doctrinal

note, however, thoroughly detailed the role of that agency within the communications

process – both through narrative description and design figures. Terminology became

convoluted about halfway through the process description in that "KLE" appeared to be

replaced with the term "engagement," without explanation as to why (i.e. simplifying

language, introducing soldier engagements, etc.). The researcher assumed that the more

generic term encompassed, but was not limited to, KLEs. Throughout this publication

KLEs was referred to as: a communication-related activity, a capability, a function, an

intelligence source, and/or a product; and it was listed among IO, PA, military

information and support, civil affairs, and political advisor.[15] Furthermore, this note, like

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[13] JCS, JDN 2-13, II-6.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

some of the other JPs, introduced similar but yet differentiating terms, such as

"community engagement," "senior leader engagement," "media engagement," "public

engagement," and "focused engagement," to name a few.[16] A more extensive and in-

depth analysis of the term "engagement" across joint doctrine would have to be

conducted to better understand its definition, overlapping relation to KLE, and

appropriate application.

The third and most relevant publication was *JP 3-61, Public Affairs*. This

publication dedicated the most space to discussing KLEs: almost two pages, in two

separate sections. KLEs appeared initially amongst "PA Roles," as "Support to

Community and KLE (KLE)."[17] Within this context, the JP referred to, "community and

KLE" as "a critical part of the Joint Force Commander's Operational Plan."[18] The PA

was described as aiding to "shape the KLE" prior to its execution and providing

'feedback from the KLE" after its completion.[19] The next section of mention – self-titled

"KLE/Community Engagement" - was incorporated into PA Planning Considerations, in

the context of "PA Within Joint Operations." *JP 3-61* stated that "KLE is not a primary

PA responsibility, but PA can serve in an advisory role."[20] Although there was no distinct

definition for KLE, this publication described KLE and Community Engagement as

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[16] JCS, JDN 2-13, II-6.

[17] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-61, Incorporating Change 1, *Public Affairs* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 2016): I-4 - I-5.

[18] Ibid., I-6.

[19] Ibid

[20] Ibid., III-13.

"involv[ing] key local and regional leaders throughout the operating environment."[21] Additionally, this section offered that, "KLE/community engagement works best by building relationships over time with enough strength and depth so that they can then support U.S. military goals and objectives."[22] Subsections within this area discussed "KLE Cells," "KLE/Community Engagement Assignment and Periodicity," and "KLE/Community Engagement Assessment."[23] The first described KLE cells as including "personnel from PA, plans directorate of a joint staff, IO, and civil affairs (CA)."[24] It referred to this KLE cell as a tool that "ensures that whenever CDRs meet with leaders, they are delivering an effective, consistent message that supports the command's goals."[25] The next subsection of "Assignment and Periodicity" explained the method behind "appropriate assignment of KLE/community engagement responsibility across the area of operations;" the need for regular meetings and subsequent management of that burden; and preparation considerations for KLE participants.[26] It proposed "expanding assignment of KLE/community outreach responsibility beyond the typical set of commanding officers/GENs, to include deputy CDRs, chiefs of staff, and even some

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[21] JCS, JP 3-61, III-13.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., III-13 - III-14.

[24] Ibid., III-13.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., III-14.

key directorate heads."[27] It also detailed the following list of preparation factors for KLE participants:

A. Understand and focus on the objectives.

B. Portray a demeanor of mutual respect.

C. Follow local meeting etiquette.

D. Be patient and a good listener.

E. Know when to speak.

F. When using interpreters, look at the host, not at the interpreter.

G. Promise only what you can definitely deliver.

H. Instill local ownership in solutions.

I. Conclude the meeting by confirming or clarifying agreements.[28]

The final subsection focused on assessment, and stated that "a debriefing immediately after the KLE/community engagement is critical to assessment and supporting well-planned, focused future events...while memories and impressions are fresh."[29] It also provided a possible template or examples of factors to be included in said debrief: "what issues were discussed, key leader positions on the issues, messages/themes delivered, requests made, agreements reached, other considerations surfacing, and impressions."[30] While oriented toward preparing PA personnel to support KLE, this publication provided the most detailed descriptions across joint doctrine.

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[27] JCS, JP 3-61, III-14.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., III-14 - III-15.

Remaining Publications: Include Dedicated Sub-Sections and Minimal Mention

This section will focus on the remaining twenty-two JPs which did not offer an explicit definition of the term "KLE," but in some instances did provide context for inference, and/or briefly mentioned the term within the narrative. The first six publications within this category included a subsection or subparagraph dedicated KLEs, while the rest exhibited minimal mention and/or related descriptive language.

JP 3–57, Civil-Military Operations, referenced KLEs as a supporting activity to CMO, within the larger construct of IO. Although it did not designate a specific level of war, it did mention that CMO are conducted across all levels, which would then suggest the same of any supporting activities. *JP 3-57* stated that KLEs can support CMO "by establishing and maintaining liaison or dialogue with key [host nation] personnel."[31]

JP 3-33, Joint Task Force Headquarters, referred to key leader engagements most directly through its section titled "KLE cell."[32] Although not explicitly stated, the publication's focuses on a joint task force suggested that related activities would influence the operational and strategic levels of warfare. It explained that the "KLE cell should establish and maintain a human information database, recommend KLE responsibility assignment, deconflict KLE, conduct pattern analysis, develop a detailed background brief on each key leader, suggest specific approaches for encouraging support for joint task force activities/objectives, ensure debriefs are conducted following

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[31] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-57, *Civil-Military Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, July 2018), III-6.

[32] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-33, *Joint Task Force Headquarters* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, January 2018), VII-10.

engagements, and update the map with current information and intelligence and debrief information."[33] The KLE cell was shown within a supporting figure which depicted a notional joint operations section, suggesting its linkage to operations and the J3 realm. *JP 3-33* also briefly mentioned KLE as a means used within the J9 section, civil military operation and inter-agency directorate.[34]

JP 3-29, Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, alluded to KLEs while examining the joint functions that "influence no-notice execution of foreign humanitarian assistance operations," under the umbrella of the command and control joint function.[35] It described KLEs as they support the joint force CDR, insinuating its application at the corresponding level of warfare. *JP 3-29* also stated that KLE "can facilitate both public and private communication opportunities."[36]

JP 3-0, Joint Operations, referred to KLEs within the spectrum of "joint force capabilities, operations, and activities for leveraging information."[37] Further described within an information-related context, this doctrine named KLEs as "specialized capabilit[ies]" listed among civil affairs and military information support operations (MISO). It stated that "most operations require CDRs and other leaders to engage key

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[33] JCS, JP 3-33, VII-10.

[34] Ibid., XIII-4.

[35] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-29, *Foreign Humanitarian Assistance* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, May 2019), IV-1.

[36] Ibid., IV-3.

[37] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Operations,* Incorporating Change 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, October 2018), III-22.

local and regional leaders to affect their attitudes and gain their support."[38] *JP 3-0* offered

examples of types of KLEs with both friendly and neutral actors such as "face-to-face,

meetings, town meetings, and community events."[39] Although this publication referenced

supporting the joint force CDR, it also explained that "the Joint Force Commander

emphasizes the importance of KLE to subordinate CDRs and encourages them to extend

the process to lower levels, based on mission requirements."[40] Meaning, this doctrine

acknowledged the holistic potential for application across all three levels of warfare.

     JP 3-07.3, Peace Operations, mentioned KLE within CDRs communications

synchronization, listed among PA, IO, social media, cyber and liaison. KLE was also

referred to in the contexts of risk mitigation measures, supplemental efforts to

peacemaking activities, and monitoring measures for assessment. Within its dedicated

section, KLEs were described as having "a variety of purposes such as to foster

relationships, clarify intentions, establish desired conditions to support future efforts,

convey messages (including promises, threats, condolences, or apologies), or address

problems confronting the peace operations."[41]

     JDN 2-16, Identity Activities, is the last of the publications that offered a

dedicated subsection for KLEs. It listed KLEs as a primary function within a task force

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[38] JCS, JP 3-0, III-22.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., II-2.

[41] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-07.3, *Peace Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, March 2018), II-9.

J3/J5 as "related to the execution of identity activities across the operational area."[42] This doctrinal note, like *JP 3-33*, outlined a section describing a "KLE cell." It stated that "[a] KLE cell may be established to map, track, and distribute information about the key nodes within the human environment in the joint operations area."[43] *JDN 2-16* did not co-locate KLE with information or communication related activities. It did refer to support for the geographic combatant commands (COCOMs), and as such, the associated strategic and operational levels of warfare.

  The remaining JPs for review only referred to KLEs within the narrative text of varied contexts and topics – some not even including the term in their associated glossaries. These are listed in no particular order other than that which they were chronologically reviewed by the researcher.

  JP, 3-24, Counterinsurgency, referred to KLE as a military capability for achieving such effects as informing, educating, persuading, and/or influencing.[44] It stated that "KLEs can be used to shape and influence foreign leaders at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels and may also be directed toward specific groups such as religious leaders, academic leaders, and tribal leaders."[45] *JP 3-24* also denoted KLEs as example actions for creating non-lethal effects. *JP 3-31, Joint Land Operations*, listed

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[42] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 2-16, *Identity Activities* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 2016), III-19.

[43] Ibid., IV-10.

[44] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, April 2018), VII-20.

[45] Ibid., V-6.

KLE among information activities supporting CDRs communications synchronization. Though not explicitly stated, its support was assumed to transcend the operational and strategic levels of war, in conjunction with joint land operations. *JP 3-60, Joint Targeting*, referred to KLE as a "non-lethal capability," listed among other non-lethal capabilities such as civil military operations, MISO, and PA. It stated that the use of nonlethal capability "can also influence adversary decision makers' choice of actions, local public condemnation of adversary actions, and directly impact domestic and international support of the adversary."[46]

JP 3-07, Stability, referenced to KLE as a means of supporting security and intelligence efforts in order to prevent and counter mass atrocities. It introduced the term indirect quick impact project as a means of facilitating KLEs as they "focus on influencing perception and gaining consent."[47] *JP 3-22, Foreign Internal Defense*, described KLEs as a foreign internal defense capability for the United States Marine Corps associated with security cooperation activities, as well as IRC.[48] Within the latter context, KLE was listed alongside MISO, CMO, and civil affairs operations, as capabilities that "affect the perceptions and attitudes of adversaries and a populace or group in the OA."[49] *JP 3-06, Urban Operations*, referred to KLE as an activity that "can

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[46] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-60, *Joint Targeting* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, January 2013), II-17.

[47] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-07, *Stability* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 2016), III-38.

[48] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 2018), IV-17.

[49] Ibid., VI-1.

also provide a force with greater leverage in operations."[50] KLEs were briefly included in the planning considerations section of the publication. *JP 3-20, Security Cooperation*, mentioned KLEs as a supportive means for security cooperation operations. By definition, "[security cooperation] strengthens the U.S. network of allies and partners that can improve the overall warfighting effectiveness of the Joint Force and enable more effective coalition operations."[51] Within this particular publication, KLE was not co-located with IRC. *JP 3-01, Countering Air and Missile Threats,* referred to KLEs as "enabling capabilities," within CDRs communications synchronization. It listed KLE with other IRC such as "electromagnetic spectrum, operations security, [and] military deception," utilized to deny "the adversary knowledge of friendly counter air capabilities and their locations."[52] *JP 3-09, Joint Fire Support*, alluded to KLE as a shaping effort conducted by the CDR, along with interaction with other CDRs and battlefield circulation, geared toward "maintain[ing] a personal sense of the progress of the operation or campaign."[53] It also referred to KLE as a means with which to measure assessment.

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[50] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-06, *Joint Urban Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, November 2013), III-18.

[51] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-20, *Security Cooperation* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, May 2017), I-4.

[52] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-01, *Countering Air and Missile Threats, Validated* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, May 2018), III-19.

[53] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-09, *Joint Fire Support* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, April 2019), V-1.

JP 3-08, Interorganizational Cooperation, referenced KLE as a "continuous function" conducted by the Joint Force Headquarters across the range of military operations, specifically in support of interorganizational cooperation.[54] It also referred to junior leaders as an engaging group, suggesting KLE support across all three levels of war. *JP 3-13.2, Military Information Support Operations*, mentioned KLEs as "information sources to assess the effectiveness of MISO,"[55] listed among "intelligence products, public opinion data, focus groups, open source data."[56] *JP 3-15.1, Counter-Improvised Explosive Device Activities*, referred to KLEs as an information source with regards to identifying a threat network.[57] It introduced a new term for consideration: "network engagement." This publication stressed that "[t]he joint force needs to be prepared to conduct KLEs at any time with key leaders that arise at any opportunity," and that "[c]ommanders conduct KLEs with friendly and neutral leaders and even the threat."[58]

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[54] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-08, *Interorganizational Cooperation, Validated* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, October 2017), II-30.

[55] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-13.2, *Military Information Support Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, November 2014), V-7.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-15.1, *Counter-Improvised Explosive Device Activities* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, July 2018), IV-11.

[58] Ibid., IV-16.

JP 4-10, Operational Contract Support, briefly mentioned KLEs in a notional exert, as a task to support the over-arching mission, within a "flag officer-led interagency TF."[59] *JP 5-0, Joint Planning,* referred to KLEs as a means of increasing understanding of the operational environment, specifically for the CDR, much like *JP 3-09*. It also described KLEs as a source of assessment indicator collection.[60] Lastly, *JP 6-0, Joint Communication System*, referred to KLEs as a type of information that should be shared in support of force protection.[61]

Commonalities and Inconsistencies

Among the twenty-four JPs there were notable commonalities and inconsistencies in definition and context. First, the majority of these references associated KLEs with IRC, communication activities, and/or IO. However, most publications acknowledged a wide range of applicability. Next, sought-after, or targeted audiences for KLEs seemed to be specified in some publications and not in others. Collectively, these audiences could include friendly, neutral, or adversarial individuals or groups, with varied categorizations, such as political, academic, and/or military. More often than not, the level of warfare directly supported by KLEs was not explicitly stated, but rather alluded to within the context of the JP under review. Additionally, some references described junior executors

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[59] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 4-10, *Operational Contract Support* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, March 2019), III-26.

[60] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Planning* (June 2017), VI-10.

[61] Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 6-0, Incorporating Change 1, *Joint Communications System* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, October 2019), IV-7.

of KLEs, thus integrating the tactical level of war into this consideration. Some themes that existed across the collection of JPs included but were not limited to: "shape and influence," "build relationships," "perception and attitude," and "trust and confidence." Four publications offered a wide array of types of "engagements" different from "KLEs," such as "network engagement," "soldier engagement," "focused engagement," "public engagement," "community engagement," "media engagement," and of course, "engagement" alone. There was also a group of terms, or topics, which seemed to be frequently associated with KLEs, regardless of the publication context, such as "communication," "relationships," "stakeholder," "non-lethal," and/or "diplomacy." Lastly, there was a distinct similarity in terminology of targeting and of types of engagements: dynamic and deliberate. Both adjectives were used to describe types of targeting, as well as types of engagements.

In summary, although the term "KLE" seemed to span a wide breath of publication topics, it did so with limited depth or description. More extensive research and cross-referencing in terminology, specifically the terms "engagement" and "key leader," could enable better understanding across doctrinal literature. It was also worth noting that all seemingly related activities, such as PA, civil military operations, and MISO, had a dedicated JP, while KLE did not.

<u>Scholarly Articles</u>

Introductions and Overview

The literature available in scholarly articles presented similar limitations to those shown throughout the doctrinal review. Much of the literature was not strategically focused, but rather operationally or tactically focused. KLE-specific articles reflected

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personal experiences from variously ranked service members, most commonly field and company grade officers. Although a few included one or two senior military leaders, the researcher found no articles that collectively captured the perspectives of multiple GEN officers. A majority of the publications discussing KLEs were from military-related sources, which was to be expected, given that the term "KLE" is, in fact, a military term. The term itself proved rather limiting given its close ties to the early 2000s era, and COIN operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Searching associated terms such as, "strategic communication," or "stakeholders," or variations of either vastly widened the breadth of literature. Lastly, many KLE-related sources were inter-referenced among one another. A small handful were cited continuously throughout the literature and by multiple authors. This inter-referenced relationship highlighted the lack of available literature, or perhaps the lack of clearly associated literature.

These characteristics were the foundation for organizing the scholarly articles into three groups, for the purposes of this study: *most relevant*, *highly applicable,* and *associated text*. The first were those publications *most relevant* to the study and served as the bedrock of the literature review. These articles were largely referenced across multiple publications and more strategic in nature. This category also included a source closely related to this study. The second group of scholarly articles were those considered to be *highly applicable* to the research. Meaning, these, too, were found in multiple source databases, commonly referenced, and reflective of the predominant perception throughout KLE-related literature. Each of these publications shared an inter-referenced relationship with at least one of the *most relevant* publications. The *highly applicable* articles, however, were not just strategically focused, but rather, spanned all levels of

war: tactical, operational, and strategic. The format among these sources was that of an individuals' or units' experiences, with lessons learned and recommendations. Within this group there were publications from the peak KLE timeframe, circa 2010, as well as more current publications from 2018 to the present. The last set of scholarly articles were those of *associated text*, or publications linked to KLEs by proxy to a different associated term. This grouping reflected the literature available when researching such terms as "communication strategy," or "strategic communication" – both related to KLE. They presented similar concepts to those sources that were KLE-specific, but rarely used the term "KLE" itself. Finally, as with the doctrinal review, the researcher identified common themes and key differences among all scholarly articles, summarized at the end of the chapter.

Most Relevant Sources

The first of the *most relevant* publications was the *Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy* (SC/CS) Version 3.0. This document, although not doctrine, was produced by the Joint Warfighting Center of the U.S. Joint Forces Command and provided a good bridge in source type between purely doctrinal and scholarly articles. This "pre-doctrinal handbook" aimed to fill the gap of "very little doctrinal guidance" associated with "strategic communication and related activities strategy."[62] Based on feedback collected across the U.S. Armed Forces, the Joint Warfighting Center sought "to help joint force CDRs and their staffs understand

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[62] Headquarters, Joint Forces Command, *Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy.*

alternative perspectives, techniques, procedures, 'best practices,' and organizational options."[63] Given that this was published in 2010, it seemed to have informed the more current doctrine reviewed in the last section. Although the term "strategic communication" is no longer used in U.S. joint doctrine, this publication remained relevant to the study because of its sustained availability in research, its reference in other related sources, and its historical ties to the study of KLEs as a concept. The term itself was not defined in the handbook but listed in the acronyms portion of the glossary. Of note, in the introductory executive summary and overview sections, the authors identified a key change from the previous version as "provid[ing] a more robust explanation and guidance for KLEs, including KLE assessment."[64] The CDRs overview also noted that this publication "identifies the need to shift and broaden key engagement."[65] KLEs were mentioned in three main areas throughout the handbook. KLE was initially mentioned among other "Doctrinal SC Enablers," more specifically as an example of defense support to public diplomacy.[66] Later, "KLE" served as the title of its own section, within the chapter of "Current Practices and Initiatives."[67] Lastly, "KLE" appeared throughout multiple appendix products in the form of a product title, planning consideration, delivery vehicle, and means of measuring effectiveness. The handbook explained that "[t]he

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[63] Headquarters, Joint Forces Command, *Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy*.

[64] Ibid., iii.

[65] Ibid., xi.

[66] Ibid., II-6, II-8.

[67] Ibid., III-7.

predominant military activities that support SC themes, messages, images, and actions are

IO, PA, and defense support to public diplomacy," but then acknowledged other "SC

related activities and capabilities that must not be overlooked."[68] Within this context,

KLE was referred to as a type of "relationship-building activity with individuals and

groups to influence behaviors."[69] It was also listed as an example of defense support to

public diplomacy. The portion of "Current Practices and Initiatives" dedicated to KLEs

very closely mirrored the information in *JP 3-61, Public Affairs*. Certain sections were

almost word-for-word the same. It followed the same outline and structure as *JP 3-61*,

with similar sections addressing "KLE Cells," "KLE Assignment and Periodicity," and

"KLE Assessment."[70] Additionally, it included a section entitled "KLE Plan," which

referenced an April 2008 Lessons Learned report stressing the criticality of "a detailed

KLE Plan for engagement of local leaders."[71] Augmenting a shared concept, the

handbook stated that "KLE is not about engaging key leaders when a crisis arises," but

rather, as stated in *JP 3-61*, "it is about building relationships over time with enough

strength and depth, so that they can then support our interests during times of crisis."[72]

Unlike *JP 3-61,* the *Commander's Handbook* specifically referred to U.S. Central

Command throughout the section. Also unique to this publication was a quote from then

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[68] Headquarters, Joint Forces Command, *Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy*, II-6.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., III-8 - III-9.

[71] Ibid., III-8.

[72] Ibid.

GEN James Mattis punctuating the importance of personal relationship within a network of key leaders: "trust is the coin of the realm."[73] Prior to supporting appendices, KLEs were referenced in one section as a means and venue for dialogue, and in another in the context of "MNF-I Best Practices." The latter proved to be noteworthy as it directly linked to the next source in this literature review. Lastly, KLEs were also included in the section of "SC/CS Support to the Joint Operations Planning Process", and multiple appendices: Communication Strategy Synchronization and Execution Matrix Example; Communication Strategy Vignette; and SC/CS Process Map.

The next *most relevant* publication was a piece offered in the Letort Papers of the U.S. Army War College by Jeanne F. Hull entitled, *Iraq: Strategic Reconciliation, Targeting, and KLE.* This paper was the most referenced source across the literature; so much so that was even cited in a PA qualification course material booklet.[74] Hull recounted lessons learned, challenges, recommendations, and best practices from her experiences in Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), more specifically with the Force Strategic Engagement Cell (FSEC). The report aimed to illustrate the value of incorporating KLEs within "existing targeting, IO, and intelligence doctrine for COIN

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[73] Headquarters, Joint Forces Command, *Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy*, III-8.

[74] The Center of Excellence for Visual Information and Public Affairs, "Key Leader Engagement," Qualification Course: Conduct Public Engagement Course Material, (The Defense Information School, Fort George G. Meade, MD, 2015), 1-7, https://fliphtml5.com/ttss/uepz/basic.

operations."[75] It further clarified that KLE was not "a new concept," nor was it the most important contributor to achieving mission accomplishment in Iraq; rather, KLE incorporation could "be a valuable tool for military, diplomatic, and other intervening forces in COIN operations."[76] This paper emphasized the processes and procedures enacted by the FSEC, and specifically focused on "insurgent engagement." Hull argued that by engaging insurgents, CDRs could focus efforts on building relationships, as opposed to combative interaction.[77] She acknowledged that the FSEC operations were "only one example of how units operating in Iraq used KLE to initiate and further reconciliation."[78] She also recognized skeptic challenges that the FSEC faced in its establishment. Distinct from other "KLE cell" descriptions, this dedicated directorate was dubbed as "filling a diplomatic gap."[79] Support for its establishment and prioritization seemed grounded in the MNF-I CDRs endorsement – then, GEN David Petraeus, whom Hull mentioned throughout the report. Although this organization operated at the strategic level, the author referred to KLE operations, in some form or fashion, across all three levels of war. She built a foundation by first describing "the principles of COIN and conflict resolution," and then continued in describing the different facets of the FSEC, to

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[75] Jeanne F. Hull, *Iraq: Strategic Reconciliation, Targeting, and Key Leader Engagement,* The Letort Papers (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, September 2009), 4.

[76] Ibid., 4-5.

[77] Ibid., 40.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., 13.

include its "organization, structure, and conduct of operations."[80] Following this, Hull described the incorporation of KLE into the targeting process and how the engagement cell operated in that context. The paper concluded with challenges, recommendations and risks linked to FSEC lessons learned. Hull's challenges and recommendations were both technically and culturally categorized. Those in the former included: lack of a "formalized mechanism" to synchronize engagements; "lack of a synchronized engagement strategy;" lack of continuity in military personnel; and lack of diplomatic capabilities.[81] To each of these, respectfully, she offered the following recommendations: establishment or incorporation into an existing targeting board process; institutionalized KLE and subsequent reporting; required two year military assignments; and corresponding diplomatic training provided to incoming personnel.[82] The other set of challenges, those culturally categorized, encompassed timing and expectation, and inter-agency challenges.[83] The first captured the concept of incorporating patience when operationalizing KLEs and understanding that a sequence of engagements rather than a single engagement was necessary for achieving a desired effect.[84] As for difficulties in

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[80] Hull, *Iraq: Strategic Reconciliation, Targeting, and Key Leader Engagement,* 4.

[81] Ibid., 31-34.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., 35.

[84] Ibid.

inter-agency requirements, Hull recommended that diplomatic entities also integrate the targeting process, or some other like technique.[85]

Much like the other publications of the time, this paper did not define KLE, but rather was written under the assumption of its existence, use and importance. It focused specifically on COIN operations, and even more exclusively on insurgent engagement, as recounted by MNF-I efforts in Iraq. Hull presented two terms not found any of the other publications: "veto players" and "insurgent outreach." The former, a political science term, did not appear in KLE-associated searches or sources across the literature. The latter highlighted "outreach" as yet another interchangeable term for "engagement." Surprisingly, Hull did not reference the *Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy*, even though lessons learned from MNF-I were captured in both.

The third and last of the *most relevant* articles was a report from the Swedish Defense Research Agency by Jenny Lindoff and Magdalena Granåsen, entitled "Challenges in Utilizing Key Engagement in CMO." This publication, like the rest in this category, was found in many search databases as associated with KLEs. It referenced the previous paper by Hull, as well as another article discussed later in the chapter. Its relevance was further substantiated in that it was the most similar to this thesis study. The authors aimed to describe "what KLE is and how it can be used by CDRs in CMO."[86]

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[85] Hull, *Iraq: Strategic Reconciliation, Targeting, and Key Leader Engagement,* 37.

[86] Jenny Lindoff and Magdalena Granåsen, "Challenges in Utilising Key Leader Engagement in Civil-Military Operations," (Collective C2 in Multinational Civil-Military Operations Presentation, 16th International Command and Control Research and

They acknowledged almost immediately that, "[t]here is no well-recognised definition of KLE and there are differences in opinions regarding what KLE is and how it should be used."[87] This concept is just as true today as it was in June 2011 when the article was published.

As a means of facilitating their research, the authors first established "a broad interpretation of KLE."[88] Their research structured closely mirrored that of this study. They performed a literature review, followed by two phases of interviews with Swedish civil and military personnel, and concluded with an analysis of those interviews. Lindoff and Granåsen began their chapter on existing literature by reiterating that "the meaning of KLE is not universally understood nor documented within doctrines."[89] As such, the authors attempted to formulate a definition, or description, by investigating: the definition of key leaders, preparation and execution of KLEs, planning considerations attributed to KLEs, debriefing processes, incorporation into the targeting process, and challenges experienced in Iraq.[90] They provided a "proposed definition" extracted from a Swedish military exercise: "KLE is a method whereby the commitment of our own CDRs is applied in a systemic and organized way to affect key persons with influence in an area of

Technology Symposium (ICCRTS), Québec City, Québec, Canada, 21-23 June 2011), 2, https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a546911.pdf.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid., 3.

[90] Ibid.

operations."[91] Additionally, they listed specific associated activities, as outlined in a *NATO Bi-SC Information Operations Reference Book* from 2009. In examining key leaders specifically, this publication set itself apart. Lindoff and Granåsen stated, "Rightfully or not, when we talk about key leaders in this paper, we do not refer to our own leaders; we refer to the formal or informal leaders that are powerful in a society and can influence a target audience in a way that is beneficial for our operation."[92] Next, when discussing preparations for KLE, they offered another idea, unique among associated literature: a "NATO Key Stakeholder Analysis Tool" – also extracted from the 2009 reference book.[93] This depicted how the authors interchanged the words "key leader" and "stakeholder," and presented a way of identifying those individuals. Additionally, in the section regarding preparation, the authors explained that "the Info Ops cell is responsible for coordinating the CDR's KLE Plan."[94] The authors then detailed "some GEN rules of thumb and best practices for KLE."[95] These "best practices" were centered on cultural awareness and "conveying the right message."[96] The following subsection focused on debriefing, and what that should encompass, emphasizing that "[i]t

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[91] Lindoff and Granåsen, "Challenges in Utilising Key Leader Engagement in Civil-Military Operations," 4.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid., 5.

[94] Ibid., 6.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

is essential to debrief and document every KLE."[97] The last two sections of their literature review regarding the targeting process and challenges within Iraq application referenced and followed Hull's paper.

In the first phase of Lindoff and Granåsen's methodology, they interviewed six individuals, inquiring "about which key leaders they had interacted with; how they prepared, conducted and documented the KLEs; issues to consider for successful KLEs; and what challenges and pitfalls they had identified during their engagements."[98] These interviewees represented the following organizations: Swedish Armed Forces, Swedish International Development Corporation Agency, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia.[99] The different positions held by the interviewees included: "Political Advisor; Development Advisor; Head of Tactical PSYOPS Team (Chief Tactical Psychological Operations Team); Secretary-GEN for Swedish Committee for Afghanistan; Chief of Provisional Office Sar-e-Pol;" and the Head of Operations in the European Union Monitoring Mission.[100] Notably, the sixth interviewee presented a slightly different perspective from the other five, not specific to Afghanistan, but reflective of his vast experience in other areas – providing differences and similarities to the preceding interviews. Upon completion of the first set of interviews, the authors identified a gap in

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[97] Lindoff and Granåsen, "Challenges in Utilising Key Leader Engagement in Civil-Military Operations," 7.

[98] Ibid., 10.

[99] Ibid., 9.

[100] Ibid.

their results. As such, they conducted a second phase with military personnel "who work with KLE and IO (Info Ops)" to "gain a better understanding of when and how KLE was introduced in Sweden and investigate how it [was] currently viewed from an Info Ops perspective."[101] This was meant to bridge the gap between experiences with KLE and its relation to Swedish doctrine.[102] Those two interviewees were from the Nordic Battle Group 11 (F) headquarters, "one as Deputy Joint Effects Director and also Head of Nordic Battle Group 11 Info Ops, and the other as a staff officer in Psychological Operations."[103] "[T]hey were asked questions regarding the definition of KLE and to what extent it was implemented in Sweden."[104]

The paper's fourth chapter captured findings and analysis in eight subsections. First the authors addressed those key leaders that were engaged by the interviewees. They were found to be purpose or mission dependent; although "all of the interviewees identified governors and/or governmental representatives as important key leaders."[105] Next, the authors discussed coordinating efforts for KLEs and found differing opinions with regards to the difficulty of selecting and/or finding key leaders. They attributed this disparity to "access to information."[106] The "Coordinating KLEs" analysis noted "that the

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[101] Lindoff and Granåsen, "Challenges in Utilising Key Leader Engagement in Civil-Military Operations," 3.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid., 9.

[104] Ibid., 10.

[105] Ibid., 12.

[106] Ibid.

interviewees stated that there was no formalized structure for how to conduct and coordinate KLEs, which may explain why no one experienced any friction."[107] This concept was divergent from the norm established across KLE-related literature. The authors examined the value of KLEs, stating both that they "should be a vital part of every operation," as well as acknowledging that "[t]here are also situations when KLEs should not be conducted."[108] The Secretary GEN of Swedish Committee for Afghanistan explained that "[i]t is important to be careful not to empower the wrong actors."[109] This was another notable concept as literature to that point had only explained methods of refining KLE rather than examining situations in which KLEs were not applicable. Next, the authors explored the preparation of KLEs. Those experiences specific to Afghanistan were noted as "consistent with the preparation process that is prescribed by NATO."[110] Interviewees commented on gaining as much knowledge as possible related to the key leader, and the circumstances surrounding the KLE. Some recounted on the use of interpreters and cultural advisors as being valuable. The Head of Operations of European union Monitoring Mission in Georgia also emphasized knowing "what we can accept and what we cannot accept."[111] The next subsection of analysis presented a collection of

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[107] Lindoff and Granåsen, "Challenges in Utilising Key Leader Engagement in Civil-Military Operations," 13.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid., 14.

[111] Ibid.

"good examples" or best practices collected across the participant population.[112] Many

annotated techniques were specific to Afghan culture and those corresponding

experiences, but the authors offered these as a means for potential use "in different

settings."[113] Many of these methods were grounded in cultural awareness and "cultural

sensitivity," such as engaging in small talk, utilizing words or phrases of the local

language, and making eye contact.[114] Other interviewees noted the use of having

prepared statements and arguments ahead of time, remaining adaptive throughout the

progress of the KLE, and establishing "a good climate for continuing negotiations."[115]

Lindoff and Granåsen presented a brief analysis on documenting KLEs, noting that

"[n]one of the interviewees used special templates of any kind to document the

interactions."[116] This was also a new concept presented in the literature that was linked to

debriefing, but specified the requirement to document KLEs. One interviewee, the Chief

of Provisional Office Sar-e-Pol noted that although documentation was manageable, he

found that actioning the collected information was more challenging.[117] The final section

of analysis captured "common pitfalls and challenges," many of which were specific to

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[112] Lindoff and Granåsen, "Challenges in Utilising Key Leader Engagement in Civil-Military Operations," 14.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid., 15.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid.

experiences from Afghanistan.[118] The authors highlighted the importance of "only giv[ing] promises that will be kept," "develop[ing] a relationship before key issues can be addressed," and "establishing trust."[119] These were all in response to other detailed challenges, such as difference in language, and understanding which key leader with whom to interact.[120] Once again, the challenges seemed to be culturally based, where the interviewees' experiences illustrated the importance of understanding the culture one was engaging.

Finally, Lindoff and Granåsen outlined concluding remarks and recommendations, much of which were a synopsis of those findings already reviewed. Of note, the authors offered another definition for KLE in the conclusion of their piece: "KLE is a means to send a message, a way of influencing, without having to use weapons – it can be used to show strength or to build relations."[121] The report noted that "KLE must be carefully defined, so it does not include all types of meetings – otherwise the process [would] be overwhelming."[122] The authors also stressed that: "pre-deployment training needs to include cultural awareness training;" "careful preparations, including rehearsals, are of essence;" "the documentation of KLEs needs to be improved;" and "the

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[118] Lindoff and Granåsen, "Challenges in Utilising Key Leader Engagement in Civil-Military Operations," 15-16.

[119] Ibid., 16.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid., 17.

[122] Ibid.

personalities of the individuals conducting [KLEs] need to be considered."[123] They concluded with a call for more research specific towards "a need to develop the concept of KLE and clearly relate it to existing doctrine."[124] The paper provided the platform from which to continue a broader KLE discussion and a basis for this thesis study. Analogous to Lindoff and Granåsen's focus on Swedish defense assets and NATO doctrine, this study sought to research KLE from the aperture of U.S. Armed Forces and joint doctrine.

<div align="center">Highly Applicable Sources</div>

The next category of scholarly articles for the literature review were those *highly applicable* to this thesis study, which was further divided into two subgroups based on publication date. The first three articles were written in 2010, reflective of the heightened interest on the topic at the time, while the last two were written in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Although there were commonalities between both sets, it was important to divide to illustrate continued relevance over time and to distinguish the context in which KLEs have been discussed. "KLE" was more profoundly used in the 2010 publications, however, the experiences recounted in the more recent articles were very similar despite decreased use of the term itself. All but one article were firsthand experiences from the author while serving in a specific unit. The final source was presumably developed from the author's firsthand experiences but did not allude to a specific unit or conflict.

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[123] Ibid., 17-18.

[124] Lindoff and Granåsen, "Challenges in Utilising Key Leader Engagement in Civil-Military Operations," 18.

All three of these 2010 articles described KLEs executed at multiple echelons across the U.S. Army to include a corps, a division (DIV) and the support battalion for a brigade combat team. All articles were written by U.S. Army officers, though the researcher did not deliberately seek that demographic.

The first article was written by Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Chad Jones, entitled "Operationalizing KLE: Adapting the Targeting Cycle to Win Friends and Influence People." It was an article from the September-October 2010 *Fires Bulletin*. As the title stated, the author aimed to show the value of incorporating KLEs into the targeting cycle based on his time in "I-Corps (formerly Multi-National Corps Iraq)."[125] While in Multi-National Corps Iraq, the author served as the Chief of the KLEs Cell and had previous experiences with IO. He introduced the topic by stating that "KLE is not only just as important" as IO and PA, "it is absolutely critical to accomplishing the mission."[126] The author "defined 'key leaders' as foreign leaders (Iraqi Security Forces or government of Iraq) we sought to influence; as opposed to U.S. or coalition leaders (visiting GEN officers, elected representatives or political appointees) we sought to inform."[127] It heavily referenced the *Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication and*

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[125] LTC Chad Jones, "Operationalizing key leader engagement: Adapting the targeting cycle to win friends and influence people," *Fires: Growing Strategic Leaders*, (September-October 2010): 18, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA559910.pdf.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid.

Communication Strategy, outlined adapted steps from the joint targeting cycle that incorporate KLE. The steps include:

> Step 1: CDRs objective
>
> Step 2: Engagement, target development
>
> Step 3: Capabilities analysis
>
> Step 4: CDRs decision and force assignment
>
> Step 5: Mission planning and execution
>
> Step 6: Assessment.[128]

It echoed the importance of building relationships and cited that concept from the *Commander's Handbook* by stating that "KLE is not about engaging key leaders when a crisis arises; by then, it is almost always too late."[129] The article also stressed the need to have a process associated with the employment of KLEs like the one enacted by I-Corps.[130]

The next publication was featured in the September-October 2010 issue of *Military Review Magazine*, entitled "Disarming the KLE," and written by Major General (MG) Richard C. Nash and Captain (CPT) Eric P. Magistad of the Minnesota National Guard. Of all the *highly applicable* sources this article was, by far, the one that appeared across multiple search databases. It, like many others, offered a refining method for KLE employment based on the experiences of the DIV CDR and an IO officer serving in the

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[128] Jones, "Operationalizing key leader engagement: Adapting the targeting cycle to win friends and influence people," 18-19.

[129] Ibid., 19.

[130] Ibid.

34th Infantry DIV. More specifically, the authors recounted their KLE efforts as the DIV

assumed control of Multi-National DIV-South in Iraq from 2009-2010. Unique to the

other *highly applicable* articles, they not only provided a definition of KLE, but also

continually elaborated on the concept. The purpose of the article was to provide better

understanding of the KLE process, "establish its place in current operations," and provide

"recommendations for an Army training strategy using vignettes."[131] It introduced the

term "disarming KLE," which it deemed "a home grown method the 34th Infantry DIV

used to facilitate the information engagement process."[132] Ultimately, the article

illustrated that by using a "disarming" method CDRs could more effectively employ

KLEs. By "disarming," they "subscribe[d] to the notion that the KLE should be

'disarming': that is, allay suspicion or antipathy."[133]

       Like Jeanne Hull, the authors acknowledged common shortfalls of "ad hoc" KLE

methods and how they are "rarely integrated into strategic operations."[134] In response,

MG Nash and CPT Magistad initially stated that "a KLE is nothing more than a

diplomatic tool to influence, inform, or educate a key leader."[135] They illustrated the

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[131] Jones, "Operationalizing key leader engagement: Adapting the targeting cycle to win friends and influence people," 11-12.

[132] Ibid., 11.

[133] Ibid., 11-12.

[134] Ibid., 11.

[135] MG Richard C. Nash and CPT Eric P. Magistad, "Disarming the Key Leader Engagement," *Military Review* (September-October 2010): 11, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/militaryreview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20101031_art005.pdf.

circumstances within which they deployed, "A New Engagement Era."[136] Within this

section, the authors emphasized the common concept of building relationships, and

further described the abilities one needs to reach that end. Once again, they echoed Hull's

concerns of immediate desired effects across the U.S. Army culture, and how they hinder

the patience needed to build effective relationships.[137] As for personal attributes, MG

Nash and CPT Magistad used the term "soft skills," describing those most supportive of

their endeavors. This included such "qualities like active listening and relationship

building."[138] The article also encompassed the unique "civilian background in industry"

that the Multi-National DIV-South CDR could use to his advantage during such

operations. "[H]e found it easy to be candid and showed genuine concern for the other

person."[139] This "business oriented engagement approach," though related to other skills

described in the literature, was a distinctive concept.[140] The article commented on

cultural considerations identified in other publications, such as the importance of "small

talk," and how "in many Middle Eastern cultures, it is important to develop a relationship

before asking someone to reciprocate."[141] The authors also explained that because of the

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[136] Nash and Magistad, "Disarming the Key Leader Engagement," 12.

[137] Ibid., 13.

[138] Ibid.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Ibid.

reality of how long it took to develop relationships, it was necessary to employ "a robust KLEs schedule."[142]

This DIV-centric article highlighted the employment of a "KLE cell," the use of cultural advisors and interpreters, the importance of proper preparation and rehearsal, and the use of a political advisor.[143] The authors noted that "[a] CDR receives no formal diplomatic training, so it is essential for him to engage his audience using the support of his assigned political advisor."[144] They then described the Multi-National DIV-South-specific strategy and its employment of KLEs. The piece depicted procedures mirroring the target process and aspects addressed in previous articles, save preparation of "a KLE package," and the use of a data storage tool.[145] The aforementioned package included the following:

- Zone of possible agreement.

- Events in the military and global information environment.

- Educated guesses on what motivated the key leader.

- Predictions for how key leaders would behave and speak publicly in the near future.

- Themes, messages, and talking points.

- Information requirements.

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[142] Nash and Magistad, "Disarming the Key Leader Engagement," 13.

[143] Ibid., 14-17.

[144] Ibid., 14.

[145] Ibid., 15-16.

- The desired effect.[146]

Though some sources emphasized the use of debriefs, this article went as far as to recommend the use of "the Combined Information Data Network Exchange database so [KLEs] could be referenced for future engagements."[147]

Within the content of a training strategy, the authors stated that "[a] CDR needs strategic depth and interpersonal adaptability if he is to conduct a disarming KLE that will help him interact effectively and build trust in the field."[148] They then offered a litany of lessons learned such as mission rehearsal exercises and KLE cell requirements – noting the dependency "on the personality of the GEN officer conducting the engagement."[149] Noting "that KLEs do work," the authors proposed possible applications for conflicts in Afghanistan, ultimately recommending that "the disarming method" be utilized at GEN officer levels.[150] MG Nash and CPT Magistad concluded that when used appropriately, "a 'disarming' engagement program would prove to be an effective strategy."[151]

The third article in the 2010 *highly applicable* category was included in the March-April issue of *Army Sustainment Magazine*. Although this article detailed some

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[146] Nash and Magistad, "Disarming the Key Leader Engagement," 16.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid., 17.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid., 19.

[151] Ibid., 20.

similar concepts regarding KLEs, such as the importance of relationships, it provided a more tactically-focused perspective, recounting lessons learned from the 15th Brigade Support Battalion of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry DIV. The author, LTC Christopher J. Whittaker, was the brigade support battalion CDR when this unit was deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He described his experiences with engaging different entities of the Iraqi Army, to include the 12th Motorized Transportation Regiment, the 12th IA DIV G4, and the Locations Command.[152] The article did not suggest that LTC Whittaker had any background in IO, which one could assume to be true given his position as a brigade support battalion CDR. Aside from his unique perspective, the article also offered two other notable contributions to the literature review. First, it alluded to "the KLE Course at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana."[153] LTC Whittaker stated that this training "was an invaluable crash-course on Arab life, culture, and politics."[154] This was one of the only formal training elements mentioned in the literature. Secondly, LTC Whittaker emphasized trust as a vital element for successful KLEs. Though this was linked to relationship building, and mentioned correspondingly within other sources, it was a key point of this particular article. LTC Whittaker stated, "[t[he challenge in KLEs is to build

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[152] LTC Christopher J. Whittaker, "Starting a Partnership Through Logistics Key Leader Engagement," *Army Sustainment* 42, no. 2 (March-April 2010): 29, https://alu.army.mil/alog/issues2020/ MarApr10/pdf/mar_apr10.pdf.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Ibid.

trust first, then consensus – as the Iraqis say, 'Friendship before business.'"[155] The article

reinforced a recurring theme and stressed its importance even at the tactical level.

Additionally, Jenny Lindoff and Magdalena Granåsen referenced this article in their

paper reviewed in the previous category.

More Current Highly Applicable Sources

These scholarly articles, though still within the *highly applicable* grouping were

published more recently. The first was an article from *Military Review Online Exclusive*,

published in March 2018 by LTC Matthew J. Sheiffer, entitled "U.S. Army IO and Cyber

Electromagnetic Activities: Lessons from Atlantic Resolve." Like many across the

literature, this source recounted lessons learned from firsthand experiences in the 4th

Infantry DIV while supporting Operation Atlantic Resolve in Europe. LTC Sheiffer

recommended optimizing the employment of IO and CEMA operations, specifically as

witnessed through "a combination of command emphasis and effective staff

organization."[156] This article was also not strategically focused and referred to KLEs as

an IRC, along with PA and MISO. LTC Sheiffer "served as the Chief of IO for the 4th

Infantry DIV from June 2015 to May 2016."[157] He was also the CDR of the 1st IO

Battalion, 1st IO Command (Land) at the time of this article's publication. This piece

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[155] Whittaker, "Starting a Partnership Through Logistics Key Leader Engagement," 31.

[156] Lt. Col. Matthew J. Sheiffer, "US Army Information Operations and Cyber-Electromagnetic Activities Lessons from Atlantic Resolve," *Military Review* (March 2018): 7, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2018-OLE/Mar/Army-Info-Ops/.

[157] Ibid., 2.

reflected much of the current KLE-associated literature as it was IO-centric, process-centric, and less strategically focused. Similar to the previous articles, it stressed the value of incorporating a dedicated element within the staff to assist with KLEs, or "a KLE cell."[158] It did state that "[c]reating Army doctrine and staff organizations that explain and capitalize on the convergence of IO and CEMA are resource-neutral options that could translate into immediate operational benefits."[159] LTC Sheiffer stressed the need for doctrinal changes to account for maximizing the use of IO activities, which in this case included KLEs. Though highly U.S. Army-focused, the article depicted the relevance of KLEs in a more current environment and timeframe – even if not the main focus of the article.

The last of the *highly applicable* articles was published through the Center for Army Lessons Learned, in the News from The Front series, entitled "The Engagement is the Mission," by CPT Guy "Dean" Kelley. This, unlike the other articles in this category, did not recount firsthand experiences specific to any one person, unit, or theater. It, instead, offered a general approach to examining the importance of KLE and refining its employment. Also, a unique contribution to the literature review, this article linked KLE to combat advising. It was assumed to be tactically focused based on the echelons at which combat advisors support, the rank and presumed experience of the author. As opposed to describing the targeting process approach, this article offered a more maneuver-based approach. CPT Kelley argued that "[i]ronically, however, the same

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[158] Sheiffer, "US Army Information Operations and Cyber-Electromagnetic Activities Lessons from Atlantic Resolve," 7.

[159] Ibid.

planning principles used to conduct combat operations absolutely apply to, and should be employed for, KLEs."[160] He highlighted "specific areas the combat advisor [could] focus on when planning individual engagements and setting long-term advisor goals."[161] This highlighted the utilization of KLEs at a tactical level. The author organized his recommendations into five categories reflecting those areas he felt required focused energy to best employ combat advising and KLEs. Those included: "Clearly Understanding the Objectives," "War-Gaming," "Interpreter Preparation," "Understanding What the Questions Mean," and "The Recorder."[162] There were certain themes that overlapped with previous articles, such as the trust and rapport necessary to building successful relationships; the need to rehearse engagements and discuss certain aspects in preparation; early and extensive incorporation of the corresponding interpreter; and assessing the engagement. This article did not cite any of the publications reviewed, but only referred to Army Technical Publication *3-21.8, Infantry Platoon and Squad*, for context.

<div align="center">Associated Text</div>

The final category of scholarly articles are the *associated texts* of this study – those that captured the essence of KLEs, but only briefly utilized the term within a separate, yet associated context, such as strategic communication or communication

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[160] CPT Guy "Dean" Kelley, "The Engagement is the Mission." *News From The Front*, Center for Army Lessons Learned, June 2019, https://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/publications/NFTF_Engagement_CPTKelley.pdf.

[161] Ibid.

[162] Ibid.

strategy. These were reflective of a broader scope of available literature. Unfortunately, the interchangeable use of associated terms, such as "strategic communication," simultaneously augmented and stifled the research process, revealing an incredibly large breadth of sources with little certainty of substantia, related content – thus requiring exponentially more time and resources to fully investigate. Nonetheless, these articles were included in the review to illustrate these intersections in literature.

The first article, representing a NATO perspective, was written by CDR Daniel Gage of the United States Navy in 2014, for *The Three Swords Magazine,* entitled "The Continuing Evolution of Strategic Communication within NATO." The aim was to explore further understanding of strategic communication, or "StratCom," more specifically, "what it is, what it isn't, what its limitations are, and how it can benefit – or impede – a mission."[163] CDR Gage was a former Chief of the PA Office for the Joint Warfare Center, so although not an IO officer, still someone with a background in IRC. One of the author's recommendations for employing StratCom was to "[h]ave a robust KLE programme."[164] He further stressed, "[i]f there is anything truly strategic about communicating on the battlefield, it is this."[165] Such was the extent of specific "KLE" mention in the article, and yet it played a large role in the overarching concept. CDR Gage admitted that "[t]he U.S. military has moved away from the StratCom term in its

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[163] CDR Daniel Gage, "The continuing evolution of Strategic Communication within NATO," *The Three Swords Magazine*, no. 27 (2014): 53, http://www.jwc.nato.int/images/stories/threeswords/NOVSTRATCOMevolution.pdf.

[164] Ibid., 54.

[165] Ibid.

daily lexicon."[166] He continued to qualify this observation by stating, "[t]hat is not to say

that the U.S. has abandoned the concept, but instead it has come to accept StratCom as a

mindset, rather than a tangible product or person."[167] This could also be true for the

concept of KLEs – an idea potentially worth further investigation.

The next *associated text* publication was a paper in the Carlisle Compendia of

Collaborative Research, from the U.S. Army War College. It was written in April 2016

by Colonels (COLs) Jerry A. Hall and James C. Sharkey, entitled "Communicating

Pacific Pathways." This piece focused on assessing the Pacific Pathways 2013 program

and offered corresponding recommendations. The program was conceived by U.S. Army

Pacific (USARPAC) and embodied many strategic communication facets, as described

throughout the literature. More specifically, "USARPAC developed Pathways at a time

when the Army, as a whole, struggled to tell its story, convey its relevance, and explain

its importance."[168] Within this broader concept, the authors alluded to KLEs as an

assumed part of this capability. KLEs were mentioned in a number of supporting figures,

depicting USARPAC products. "This essay overview[ed] the 2013 Pacific Pathways

strategic information environment, analyze[d] implementation of the Pathways

communication strategy, and offer[ed] recommendations for more effective

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[166] Gage, "The continuing evolution of Strategic Communication within NATO," 55.

[167] Ibid.

[168] COL Jerry A. Hall and COL James C. Sharkey, "Communicating Pacific Pathways," *Pacific Pathways 2014: Assessment and Recommendations* (April 2016): 20, https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/carlislecompendia/issues/jun2016/communicating.pdf.

communication of future iterations of Pathways."[169] Although this piece did not define

KLE, it did assume its inherent integration into a communication strategy. In describing

the communication strategy and the lessons learned from those methods, the authors

addressed some of the common themes already discussed in the literature review, such as

the importance of relationships. They also described the "new Strategic Effects

Directorate," created by the, then, USARPAC CDR, GEN Vincent K. Brooks – a

dedicated element encompassing "all of the 'soft power' staff sections into one

directorate."[170] One could also deduce the importance of KLEs given its relation to one

of the concluding recommendations. Of the six provided, the first recommendation was to

"perform early stakeholder coordination," innately requiring KLE.[171] They qualified this

further by explaining that "[t]hey also failed to determine when to engage senior

stakeholders in the coordination process."[172] Overall, this was an example of literature

that focused on the broader communications realm and assumed the incorporation of

KLE, as well as its importance, without providing further, focused examination of the

term or the capability itself.

The last article reviewed was published through the Deployable Training DIV the

Joint Staff J7, in May 2016. This paper, entitled "Communication Strategy and

Synchronization," was the first edition of the Insights and Best Practices series headed by

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[169] Hall and Sharkey, "Communicating Pacific Pathways," 8.

[170] Rumi Nielsen-Green, USARPAC PAO, telephone interview, quoted in Hall and Sharkey, "Communicating Pacific Pathways," 9.

[171] Hall and Sharkey, "Communicating Pacific Pathways," 17.

[172] Ibid.

the Deployable Training DIV of the J7. Once again, this was more broadly-focused on communication strategy, though also strategically-oriented in that its scope was defined as being "[f]ocused at the COCOM and joint task force headquarters."[173] This article included "senior flag officer insights from across the force," and shared them "to leverage the information environment in support of mission accomplishment."[174] Although not considered doctrine, "[t]his paper buil[t] upon joint doctrine and the existing body of focus papers developed by the Joint Staff J7 Deployable Training DIV."[175] One of the main sections, though not specifically titled "KLE," but rather simply "Engagement," exhibited the essence of the former. It encompassed common themes from related literature, to include the importance of relationships, debriefs as part of assessment, and best staff practices for employment of engagements. The article further described the roles of different support staff sections not seen in other sources throughout this review, such as the J3 and the CDRs Action Group. Although the authors "found that CDRs and their staffs realize the importance of engagement," this piece, like many others, focused on how to best refine engagements rather than the concept itself, or its importance. As the most current article of the *associated text* category, this paper showed that KLEs were still widely practiced across the joint force, despite the scarcity of the term in such

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[173] Deployable Training Division (DTD), *Communication Strategy and Synchronization*, Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper (Suffolk, VA: Joint Staff J7, May 2016), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/fp/commstrategyandsync_fp.pdf.

[174] Ibid, i.

[175] Ibid.

sources. It, too, reflected the difficulty in applying focused research to "KLEs," given that the term is sometimes interchanged with or lost among associated terms.

Common Themes and Key Differences

In summary, the researcher organized the related scholarly articles of this review into three groups: *most relevant*, *highly applicable*, and *associated terms*. Across these categories were common themes that transcended all, if not the majority, as well as key differences worth mentioning. To begin with, much of the literature focused on conflicts in Iraq or Afghanistan, which could have accounted for many of the similarities. Of the common themes, the importance of building relationships and how that impacted KLEs was apparent in over half of the articles. The majority of these publications were written from firsthand experiences of the author, within a specific unit, during a particular conflict, with two exceptions. One was the Swedish Defense Research Agency paper, which captured personal experiences from not those of the author. The second was from the News from the Front series, which was a generalized article, assumed to be based on the author's experience/expertise. Many of the authors exhibited a background in IO or other IRC, or served in some form or fashion, in a KLE-related position. Many of the articles mentioned links to diplomacy, suggesting an innate relationship between the diplomacy and military instruments of national power, within the realm of KLEs. A majority of the publications, regardless of the level of war, examined the procedural aspects of KLEs and offered refinement recommendations or best practices – focused on the "how," rather than the "what" or "why" of the topic. Only the Swedish Defense

Research Agency authors thoroughly explored "The Notion of KLE."[176] Even Jeanne

Hull's piece, which was the most referenced of all the scholarly articles, aimed to

recommend an optimizing tool for mission accomplishment. Those articles that did

address the definition of KLE offered a broad definition or description of the concept,

which in and of itself, reinforced that lack of a singular, standard definition. Additionally,

all authors associated KLEs with being purpose driven, and/or end-state driven.

Conversely, one key difference across the literature was the varying levels of war

represented. The most common key difference was the interchanging of different terms to

include, "stakeholders," "engagement," "insurgent outreach," and "strategic

communication." These terms contributed to the difficulty of applying focused research

specific to KLE. These scholarly articles reflected the non-doctrinal, KLE-related

literature available for this study. Though unintended, a majority of the articles were from

a U.S. Army perspective, and all of the publications were from military-related mediums.

This literature review provided current and sufficient information on KLEs to facilitate

this study and begin addressing research subsidiary questions.

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[176] Lindoff and Granåsen, "Challenges in Utilising Key Leader Engagement in Civil-Military Operations," 3.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

> You must seek first to understand before you demand to be understood.
> — LTG Walter E. Piatt, interview with author,
> Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2 April 2020

<u>Introduction and Overview</u>

This was a qualitative research project that employed an exploratory case study methodology to analyze the concept and effectiveness of KLEs at the strategic level, answering the primary research question: *Do KLEs, conducted specifically between U.S. general officers and foreign stakeholders contribute to the U.S. strategic effort of strengthening alliances and partnerships?* The literature review in Chapter 2 partially addressed the first three subsidiary research questions: 1) *What are the doctrinal and theoretical foundations for KLEs?* 2) *In what organizations and contexts have KLEs been used?* And 3) *How have strategic leaders employed KLEs by echelon?* The case study, conducted through personal interviews, addressed all four subsidiary questions, augmenting the first three and fully supporting the fourth, pertaining to strategic efficacy: 4) *What was the strategic effect of senior leaders employing KLEs?* These questions aimed to achieve two over-arching goals, understand KLE and measure its strategic contribution, and in doing so, answer the primary research question. Figure 1 depicts the methodology and how the research techniques align to address the individual subsidiary questions, which then inform the primary research question by achieving those over-arching goals.

Do key leader engagements (KLE), conducted specifically between U.S. general officers and foreign stakeholders, contribute to the U.S. strategic effort of strengthening alliances and partnerships?

LITERATURE REVIEW		What are the doctrinal and theoretical foundations for key leader engagements?		UNDERSTANDING "KLE"

In what organizations and contexts have key leader engagements been used?

How have strategic leaders employed key leader engagements by echelon?

PERSONAL INTERVIEWS — What was the strategic effect of senior leaders employing key leader engagements?

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MEASURING STRATEGIC CONTRIBUTION
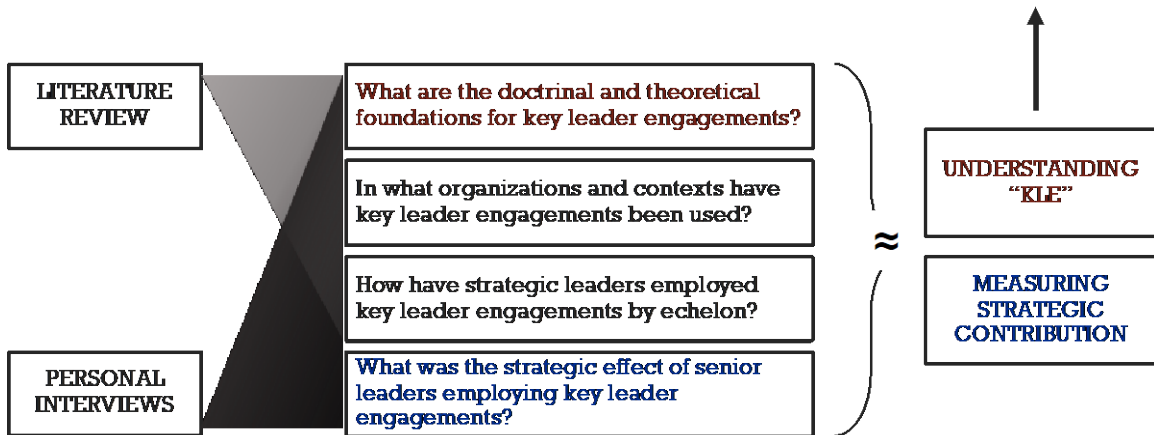
Figure 1.   Methodology

Source: Created by author.

The methodology design coupled data collection through personal interviews and focused text coding analysis. The researcher interviewed active duty and retired GEN officers who had conducted KLEs, as well as active and retired staff officers who had supported senior leaders in conducting KLEs. The interviews focused specifically on those KLEs conducted with foreign stakeholders and explored the understanding of KLE and its contributions at the strategic level. The interview questions, listed in Appendix A of this thesis, were grouped in such a way as to inform these over-arching goals, facilitate focused coding analysis, and ultimately ensure all research questions are properly addressed. While examining the basic topics underlying the interview questions, the researcher extracted seven core concepts to simplify, organize, and focus the resulting data during the coding process. Figure 2 exhibits how the basic topics aligned with the two over-arching goals and overlapped to reveal the seven core concepts. To be clear, the first and last core concepts, *Define KLE* and *Efficacy,* did not overlap, but rather were

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individually and respectively informed by *KLE Criteria* and *Perceived Efficacy* data. The

five middle core concepts – *Key Leaders, Scope, Employment, Education, and*

Assessment – did encompass overlapping data from both the *Understanding KLE* and

Measuring Strategic Contributions topics. The diagram shown in Figure 2 illustrates how

those core concepts, in turn, align with and address the subsidiary research questions.
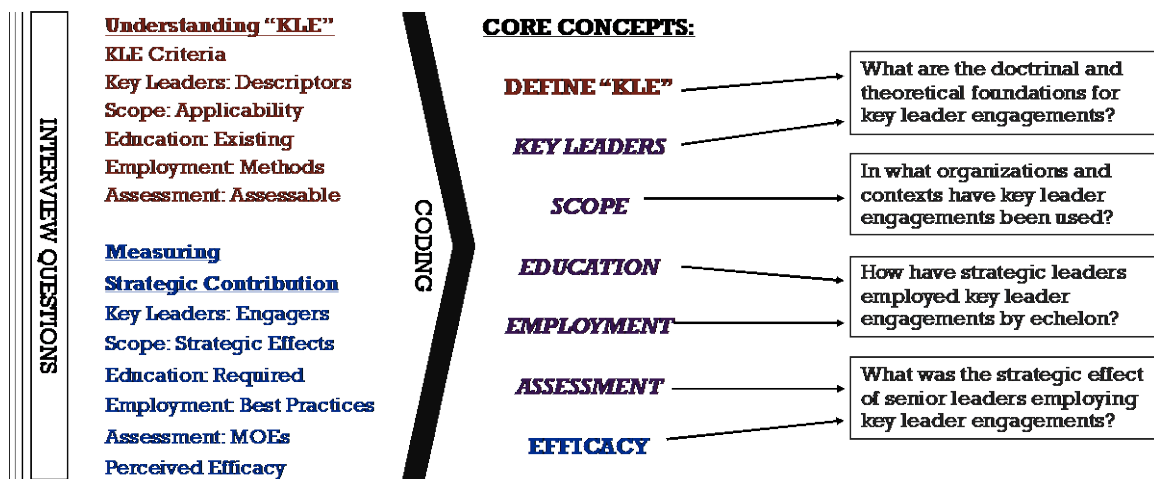
Figure 2.   Core Concept Correlation to Research Questions

Source: Created by author.

Interviews were conducted using the techniques and principles outlined in the

second edition of *InterViews* by Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann. The researcher

took appropriate care of the participants by adhering to ethical considerations, conducting

clear and consistent sessions, and safeguarding the corresponding data. Once completed,

the researcher applied coding analysis in accordance with the steps referenced in John W.

Creswell's *Research Design*.[177] Creswell offers R. Tesch's eight-step approach to coding, which augmented the comprehensive and structured framework of this methodology. The following sections further detail the design and techniques of this exploratory case study.

<div align="center">Personal Interviews</div>

Conducting personal interviews enabled data collection within current and relevant contexts and allowed the researcher to circumvent and overcome those challenges described in the literature review, generally associated with convoluted terminology and limitations in scope. Interview participants were intended to be active or retired, staff officers or GEN officers, who had supported and/or conducted KLEs with foreign stakeholders. Two subjects; however, supported or conducted KLEs not as staff officers, but as field grade-level CDRs. In seeking out "officers who had supported KLEs," the researcher inadvertently assumed that such participants would be staff officers – reflective of background experience and bias. Instead, these two field grade offers provided tactical-level, CDRs perspectives of KLEs, widening the data sample, and adding value to the study. Additionally, they offered alternatives to the researcher's original assumption of KLE-supporting officers. The study consisted of thirteen interviews, including eight active and retired GEN officers, and five active and retired field grade officers. All subjects were male, aged between thirty-five and ninety, and commissioned officers in the U.S. Army. Of the thirteen, three were on active duty at the time of the study, while the remaining ten were retired from service. Collectively, these

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[177] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009), 186-187.

officers had served in the U.S. European Command, Central Command, Indo-Pacific

Command, Southern Command, and Northern Command areas of operations. These

participants had deployed in support of at least one of the following conflicts: the

Vietnam War, Operation Joint Endeavor, Operation Joint Guard, Operation Joint

Guardian II, Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). All eight GEN officers served at the DIV, corps,

Army, Army Service Component Command, and/or COCOM level, with six having

commanded in at least one of those echelons. Of the five field grade officers, two had

backgrounds in IO, having attended the IO Qualification Course, and serve/have served

as IO officers. Three field grade officers had served on a brigade, DIV, and/or Direct

Reporting Unit Staff in supporting KLEs, while the other two officers had supported

and/or conducted KLEs as field grade-level CDRs (battalion and brigade). These

demographics illustrated a wide range of variance in the interview population,

representing trends from almost the last three decades and across worldwide cultures. As

with any interview project, participation was highly dependent upon availability within

the time constraints of the study, and more importantly, amid the restrictive

circumstances of the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. The researcher achieved data

saturation with the eleventh interview, making the total set of thirteen interviews more

than sufficient for this study. To best employ the techniques of personal interviews, the

researcher aptly addressed the ethical considerations, methods of conducting the actual

interviews, and those actions taken to manage and safeguard human research data.

Ethical Considerations

Adhering to ethical considerations, this study followed the four guidelines described in Kvale and Brinkmann's *InterViews*: "informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and the role of the researcher."[178] In terms of informed consent, each participant received a full explanation of the research project prior to his involvement. The researcher ensured that all individuals understood the overarching concept and scope of the study, as well as the purpose of the interview within the context of the methodology design. Each participant was provided a copy of the proposed interview questions (Appendix A) and given full autonomy of desired participation and arbitration. This research study was found exempt from requiring a full institutional review board review; signed consent forms were not required.

The researcher employed precautions to protect the confidentiality of each participant. Some of the questions were rather objective in nature, such as asking the subject to recount methods of KLE employment. Others were subjective and required opinion-based responses, exposing the interviewees to higher levels of scrutiny and vulnerability – especially in the case of arbitrated or disclosed responses. As mitigation, each interviewee was given options for selective arbitration or anonymity. If the participant chose to remain completely anonymous, then specific names, dates, and organizations would have been concealed accordingly. This way the participant remained protected from an external reader discerning his identity through collective details.

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[178] Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009), 68.

The results of the study held little to no chance for producing negative consequences for the participants, nor did the interview sessions pose any physical risk. This was an unclassified study, with mirroring content expected from the interviews, and no spillage issues. As a precaution, had the participant deviated in that direction, the researcher was prepared to halt and adjust the interview as necessary. As stated earlier, the subjective nature of some of the interview questions could present minimal risk, but the mitigation measures of selective participation and arbitration addressed those possibilities. A final measure to protect against any unforeseen consequences stemming from the opinions of the participant was mitigation through the participants' final review of his corresponding transcripts. Each participant was given the opportunity to review the transcript of his interview and make any desired changes prior to the data analysis and integration into the study.

Lastly, the role of the researcher encompassed the responsibility of conducting each interview appropriately, as well as stewarding the qualitative data in such a way as to protect the corresponding participants. The researcher maintained professional and constructive interactions with each interviewee while planning, preparing, conducting and analyzing the interviews. As suggested in Kvale and Brinkmann's *InterViews*, the researcher did due diligence to seek assistance from colleagues and professors, to garner best practices and ensure the best quality possible. Most importantly, the researcher appropriately stewarded the data collected to protect each participant. More details of the specified techniques to do this are outlined in the following sections.

Conducting the Interviews

Each interview required five steps to progress from preparation to completion. First, the researcher contacted each participant, explaining the research study and requesting his participation and assistance through a personal interview. In order to maintain consistency and objectivity throughout the study, the researcher used pre-scripted email correspondence whenever possible. In this phase, the email request would detail the design of the study, its purpose, and the utility of behind incorporating a personal interview. Next, once a participant had agreed to take part, the researcher offered two means for conducting the interview: over the phone or via email, or a combination of the two. Regardless of the medium, the researcher followed the same process with each interviewee. With the interview scheduled and the medium identified, the researcher sent a pre-interview package to the participant detailing the options for selective participation, requesting confirmation of informed consent, and providing a copy of the proposed questions (see Appendix A). Since a majority of the participants used non-Department of Defense (DOD) email servers, encryption was not possible. Additionally, due to COVID-19, the researcher worked from home, using a personal laptop that was unable to encrypt the emails between DOD email servers. Once an interview was scheduled, the researcher proceeded to the next phase of conducting the interviews, what Kvale and Brinkmann call "setting the stage."[179] The researcher would orient the participant to the interview environment and recounted the overview of the study and purpose of the corresponding interview. For an interview conducted via phone,

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[179] Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 128.

the researcher brought attention to and explained the use of an audio recorder. Pre-interview preparations and area set-up allowed the researcher to identify any external, environmental factors that could hinder audio quality of the interview. Conversely, if an interview was conducted via email, the researcher sent a copy of the questions to the subject and awaited his responses. Upon review of the initial response, the researcher either declared the interview complete, or sent no more than one round of follow-up or clarifying questions to the participant and awaited the second response.

Post-Interview and Data Management

After each interview, the researcher transcribed, managed and stored the resulting data. The researcher used Sonix, a commercial, online, automated transcription software to capture each audio file in text. This eliminated the need to introduce another person, external to the study, who would require a nondisclosure agreement. It also provided a faster means of preparing the data – crucial to a study with such time constraints. The software achieved an average of 75 percent accuracy in the resulting transcript, which the researcher then reviewed and refined in further detail. Once complete, the researcher sent the transcript back to the participant for revisions and approval for use in the study. Each participant was given the opportunity to make any changes or redactions necessary. Storage of audio files, corresponding transcripts, digitally emailed responses, and any other products containing personally identifiable data were stored in the researcher's personal online data storage account. This type of "cloud-like" storage was best-suited given the substantial amount of collective data and size of individual files, and the Microsoft Office 365 personal vault storage file offered two-layer verification security. At the completion of the study, the researcher destroyed the audio files from both the

online storage folder and the audio recorders memory card. The researcher then applied

coding analysis, as prescribed by Creswell and Tesch, to identify recurring themes and

trending opinions of KLEs.

Coding Analysis

In his *Research Design*, Creswell described a foundational process for "Data

Analysis in Qualitative Research."[180] In the fourth phase he alluded to Tesch's eight-step

approach to "Coding the Data."[181] The researcher elected to follow these guidelines as

they offered the best means for thorough, holistic, and organized review of a substantial

amount of data. The researcher applied the first step, "get[ting] a sense of the whole," to

each individual interview, fostering a broader understanding of the data set.[182] With each

interview, the researcher took focused, free-hand notes, augmenting the content collected

by the audio recorder, and allowing the researcher to highlight key ideas in real time.

Moreover, the review and revision of each transcription offered an additional round of

interaction with the data. The researcher then performed Creswell's second and third

steps simultaneously, selecting four interviews – one from a retired GEN officer, one

from an active duty GEN officer, one from a staff officer, and the shortest. Rather than

waiting to identify the "underlying meaning" of each transcript first, the researcher began

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[180] Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, 185.

[181] Ibid., 185-186.

[182] Ibid., 186.

"mak[ing] a list of topics" (step 3) as part of this individual review.[183] Although the

researcher did not employ a complete preliminary codebook, the researcher did use the

over-arching goals and core concepts, illustrated earlier in Figure 1, to focus the coding.

Some of these concepts served as predetermined codes, facilitating a priori coding;

however, the researcher deliberately worked to incorporate in vivo coding to the fullest

degree to accurately capture the participants' original thoughts. Creswell recommends

that "researchers who have a distinct theory they want to test in their projects" use "a

preliminary codebook."[184] Ultimately, much of the emergent information matched that of

the predetermined codes. Using a simple chart, the researcher was able to extract and

group topics from these initial four interviews into the pre-determined sub-concepts,

while also identifying key quotes for potential future use. Next, in the fourth step, the

researcher returned to the data, applying this working list to "see if new categories and

codes emerge[d]."[185] After reviewing the entire data sample, the researcher "turn[ed]

them [the topics] into categories" and reflected the range of data within each

corresponding concept.[186] The researcher then determined which would be the final core

concepts and organized the associated codes (step 6).[187] The researcher was able to

"perform a preliminary analysis" (step 7) based on the organizational framework but did

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[183] Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, 186.

[184] Ibid., 187.

[185] Ibid., 186.

[186] Ibid.

[187] Ibid.

not "recode [the] existing data" (step 8).[188] Sufficient analysis was collected to address

both the primary and subsidiary research questions, as well as highlight areas suited for

future research and further analysis with a single round of coding.

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[188] Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, 186.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

> So maybe we ought to look at how to do it in the best manner possible,
> model that and have it become a part of our training bailiwick, if you will.
> — BG (R) Stanley F. Cherrie, interview with author,
> Fort Leavenworth, KS, 25 March 2020

As discussed in Chapter 3, the seven core concepts uncovered during the coding process served as a framework to organize basic topics from the interview data, into more discernable groups aligned with the subsidiary research questions. Examining them sequentially enabled the data to progressively build upon itself in achieving the two overarching goals. The first six core concepts supported understanding KLE: *Define KLE – KLE Criteria; Key Leaders – Descriptors; Scope – Applicability; Education – Existing; Employment – Methods;* and *Assessment – Assessable.* While the latter six core concepts supported measuring strategic contribution: *Key Leaders – Engagers; Scope – Strategic Effects; Education – Required; Employment – Best Practices; Assessment – MOEs;* and *Efficacy – Perceived Efficacy*. As a result, five of these concepts mutually represented information pertaining to both overarching goals, but also facilitated a more linear approach to addressing the research questions. This chapter was structured to mirror the flow of data depicted in Figure 2 of the last chapter. It is divided first by overarching goal, and the subsequently by supportive core concepts and their associated topics. This technique helped capture identifiable and apportioned responses to the four subsidiary research questions.

Understanding KLE

Define KLE – KLE Criteria

The first core concept was *Define KLE*, informed by KLE Criteria, including

proposed definitions from the participants. Nine provided a distinct definition, while the

remaining four described KLEs through criteria. Eleven interviewees discussed the key

leaders themselves as part of their definition or description; however, only four made it a

point to address the concept of what a "key leader" is, which will be discussed in the next

section. All of the participants referred to a KLE as an interaction – a "meeting," a

"session," a "discussion" – some sort of interaction that could also be considered a form

of communication. Essentially, the exchange of information was a fundamental part of

defining KLE. This validated the doctrinal association between KLE and IRC, as well as

the association in wider literature between KLE and strategic communication. Within

their proposed definitions, six participants included a specified purpose, even if only

broadly described, within their definitions – a concept that recurred throughout the data,

especially in relation to KLE criteria.

Purpose-Oriented

In describing the criteria or characteristics of KLE, the responses centered around

being purpose-driven, qualifying that purpose, and classifying the type of interaction.

Looking first at purpose GEN(R) Vincent K. Brooks, former Commanding General (CG)

of USARPAC and U.S. Forces – Korea, commented that a KLE "ought to have a

purpose."[189] It must be "key to something, key to a policy decision, key to an insight, key

to communicating a point, key to gaining a permission."[190] The majority of the

participants agreed with this sentiment, if not by direct quote, through narrative. When

discussing purpose alone, some participants linked it to being "relevant to [the]

missions/endeavors," and requiring "an element of preparation."[191] Subsequently, there

were two themes that emerged, revered by some as the main purposes of a KLE, and by

others as inherent to any KLE for facilitating the corresponding objective(s). Lieutenant

General (LTG) Walter E. Piatt, currently serving as the Director of the Army Staff,

aggregated both themes as being fundamental to KLEs: "understanding the environment"

and "relationship-building."[192] The first was mentioned by some of the participants in

terms of "know[ing] the environment," or "gather[ing] 'atmospherics,'" generally for the

sake of "foster[ing] trust and cooperation," or potentially in one case, "to create some

leverage."[193] This emphasized the importance of understanding one's environment and

the criticality that KLEs play in trying to establish that awareness. The second theme,

"building relationships," was apparent throughout the entire data sample. Although not

each participant named the exact term as a criterion, all of them mentioned relationships

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[189] GEN(R) Vincent K. Brooks, interview with author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 18 March 2020.

[190] Ibid.

[191] Various interviews by author.

[192] LTG Walter E. Piatt, interview with author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 02 April 2020.

[193] Various interviews by author.

in some manner, suggesting an innate link to KLEs. For example, MG (R) William Nash,

former 1st Armored Division (AD) CDR, when describing KLE, stated that "it's team

building."[194] The relationship aspects of KLE were also linked to the idea of conducting

multiple KLEs as a collective effort, as opposed to singularly.[195] Iterative KLEs build

synergy in relationships, which then support common interests, especially in an alliance.

<u>Formality of Interaction</u>

The next criterion examined was the type of interaction constituting a KLE. This

topic yielded a wider range of variance than that of purpose. BG (R) James "Pat" O'Neal,

former Assistant DIV CDR for 1st AD, offered a broad spectrum in stating that KLE was

anything, "outside your sphere of direct command and control," which overlapped with

and complimented the other, more specific criteria. Some participants felt that social

interactions could be encompassed within the umbrella of KLEs, while others felt that

they were "not a social call."[196] Relationships also impacted the degree of social activity

linked to KLEs. For instance, BG (R) O'Neal mentioned having attended weddings and

funerals on occasion. Such recounts brought to light another variable in interaction

classification: formality. LTG (R) Frederick "Ben" Hodges, former CG of United States

Army Europe, offered three types of KLEs that in essence formed a range of formality:

official "visits," "distinguished visitor days" (distinguished visitors), and more "personal"

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[194] MG (R) William L. Nash, interview with author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 27 March 2020.

[195] Various interviews by author.

[196] COL(R) Anthony E. Deane, interview with author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 03 April 2020.

exchanges.[197] These three types of KLEs illustrated how formal or informal an interaction could be. LTG Piatt argued that KLEs were "just meetings," not in so much as to diminish their importance, but as a means of highlighting how formality could hinder the personable relationship potential.[198] LTG (R) Hodges and COL (R) Gregory Fontenot, who served as a brigade CDR in 1st AD, both alluded to the old adage, "no casual conversations with GEN officers."[199] COL (R) Fontenot, however, took this a step further and offered that there were "no casual conversations in an operational environment when you're dealing with others."[200] Such is to say, even if an interaction was informal, or social in nature, "casual" was not a term linked to KLEs, especially at senior military echelons. Additionally, within this context, a small handful of participants described KLEs as a negotiation-type setting, reinforcing the inherence of an underlying purpose. LTG Piatt, on the other hand, specifically noted that it "isn't a negotiation" as he reemphasized the importance of the interpersonal aspects of a KLE.[201] Although seemingly divergent, it is possible to have an interaction that encompasses an underlying purpose requiring preparation, much like a negotiation, but that does not lose its relationship-like interpersonal qualities amidst the formality.

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[197] LTG (R) Frederick B. Hodges, interview with author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 06 April 2020.

[198] Piatt interview.

[199] Various interviews by author.

[200] COL(R) Gregory Fontenot, interview with author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 25 March 2020.

[201] Piatt interview.

Function of Interaction

The last variable in classifying the type of interaction associated with KLE was its function. The researcher consistently referred to KLE as a capability. Although a majority of the interviewees agreed with, or did not correct this reference, two offered alternatives. COL (R) Fontenot stressed that KLE is a "responsibility ...not a capability" of senior leaders.[202] LTG Piatt proposed that KLE is "a decisive form of maneuver," applying a more operational lens.[203] Regardless of the specific function, all of the GEN officers suggested that it was an intrinsic part of being a senior leader. MG (R) Nash recounted: "That's where my role was."[204] Similarly, GEN(R) Brooks explained that it was "the heart of what it is [he] did as a senior CDR."[205]

In addition to KLE criteria, participants introduced a number of alternative terms to KLE, such as: "strategic engagement,"[206] "Soldier Leader Engagement,"[207] and "social engagement," which COL (R) Fontenot actually expressed was not, in his view, a KLE. These alternate terms reflected the challenges discussed in Chapter 2 of the complex and convoluted terminology associated with KLE. Although these terms provide some insight into better understanding KLE, they over-complicate and hinder efforts to define it.

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[202] Fontenot interview.

[203] Piatt interview.

[204] Nash interview.

[205] Brooks interview.

[206] Brooks interview.

[207] LTC Jason G. Thomas, interview with author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 02 April 2020.

Before yielding an effective definition, however, these KLE criteria must be supplemented with key leader descriptors.

Key Leaders – Descriptors

Although only four participants made a distinct point of discussing *Key Leaders*, all the participants provided descriptors that helped build that concept, specifically regards to rank, position, and influence.

<u>Rank and Position</u>

One variable for describing key leaders, which was the least commonly used, was that of rank. BG (R) Stanley Cherrie, former Assistant DIV CDR of 1st AD, offered that "key leaders" refer to officers ranked "two-star and above," or those in a "two-star billet that counts."[208] The latter of these descriptors linked the broader category that most participants used for description: position. In addition to this rank requirement, BG (R) Cherrie expressed that "DIV CDR" was the title and echelon he associated with KLE.[209] Conversely, when discussing rank, MG (R) Nash explained that key leaders exist from the squad leader position up through the battalion CDR and higher.[210] Many of his vignettes recounted "key leaders at the brigade level."[211] Mr. Scott Farquhar, a retired IO officer who supported KLEs while serving at 7th Army Training Command (ATC), stated

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[208] BG (R) Stanley F. Cherrie, interview with author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 25 March 2020.

[209] Ibid.

[210] Nash interview.

[211] Ibid.

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that "key leaders were tactical CDRs in a time and place."[212] BG (R) O'Neal provided a wider aperture, admittedly, "an omnibus view," that key leaders could be "anyone that you're dealing with in an operational setting."[213]

Influence

Descriptors became more specific as the participants linked position to influence. BG (R) Cherrie's words "that counts," spoke to this focus.[214] LTC Jason Thomas, currently serving as an IO instructor for the IO Qualification Course, offered that a key leader was anyone in a "position of power or influence."[215] GEN(R) David Petraeus, former MNF-I CDR, claimed that a key leader could be anyone "who really mattered on the really important issues."[216] This concept grew in complexity when one participant expressed that "unofficial positions have key influence," suggesting that influence outweighs position when delineating key leaders.[217] LTC Thomas introduced an aspect of applicability to aid in identifying key leaders, and stated that those who were "more applicable to ... major events," were sought after for engagement. Additionally, a majority of the interviewees alluded having multiple key leaders within any one

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[212] Farquhar interview.

[213] BG (R) James P. O'Neal, interview with author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 30 March 2020.

[214] Cherrie interview.

[215] Thomas interview.

[216] GEN(R) David H. Petraeus, interview with author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 25 March 2020.

[217] Ibid.

organization. GEN(R) Brooks stressed that KLE and associated plans should be "bigger than the CDR."[218] He recounted a number of key leaders within his USARPAC command group, each with a specified focus and audience. MG (R) Nash described similar practices from his time in Bosnia, alluding to what he called "parallel engagement" by multiple key leaders, and further emphasized that "building a team of key leaders is fundamental to [KLE]."[219] This related back to the earlier idea of conducting KLEs not in a singular fashion, but in a "series of strategic engagements," potentially occurring simultaneously.[220] One divergent theme within the discussion of seniority was its potentially negative effects. LTG Piatt commented that although one of higher position could be "seen as powerful," he/she may also be perceived as "not as sincere," vice someone of a lower stature being "seen as more credible, maybe more sincere."[221] BG (R) O'Neal somewhat echoed this concern in stating that often the more senior the key leaders, the more it "dilutes the engagement."

KLE Definition

Key leader descriptors, when coupled with KLE criteria, provided enough of a theoretical foundation to inform a proposed definition, as well as address the first subsidiary research question. Although BG (R) O'Neal offered a unique recommendation that KLEs may be best "bound" in specified parameters, rather than defined, the

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[218] Brooks interview.

[219] Nash interview.

[220] Brooks interview.

[221] Piatt interview.

researcher concluded that this study yielded sufficient date to propose a definition for

KLE:

A KLE is an interaction among individuals able to yield

strategic influence that fulfills an underlying purpose.

Scope – Applicability

The third core concept was that of *Scope* which encompassed the evolution and applicability of KLEs.

Evolution

The participants agreed that KLEs have been in practice for decades. Three participants alluded to World War II examples of KLEs – even if categorized under a different term. Specific to this study's data sample, participant's experiences exhibit the use of KLEs as ranging from the mid-to-late 1990s, to the present. Different vignettes linked KLEs to Air-Land Battle concept; the Dayton Peace Accords and associated Balkan deployments, such as Operations Joint Guard and Operation Joint Guardian II; COIN operations in Iraq and Afghanistan; Desert Storm and Desert Shield; and the more great power competition. LTC Brian Novoselich, currently serving as the Director for Strategic Effects and Engagements at West Point, commented that KLE has become "part of our vernacular," and will "become a much, much greater part of an officer's portfolio."[222] MG (R) Allen Batschelet, former Chief of Staff of U.S. Strategic Command, recounted that as he progressed in rank, KLE "changed in scope, scale and

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[222] LTC Brian J. Novoselich, interview with author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 6 April 2020.

consequences."[223] When analyzing the potential for evolution into near-peer large-scale combat operations (LSCO), the majority of participants expressed that KLEs will remain relevant, and become "more paramount."[224] LTC Thomas commented that tactical level implications may "prove challenging," but still acknowledged the role of KLE in LSCO at the operational and strategic levels. Discussing how U.S. Armed Forces are expected to fight in such an environment, BG (R) O'Neal commented, "We're not going to, to put it succinctly, go to war alone"– emphasizing the role of KLEs in strengthening alliances and partnerships. MG (R) Batschelet offered a unique concept in this area as he pointed out that KLEs could be impacted "as AI and advanced weapons systems make automated decisions."[225]

Applicability: Panoramic Approach

  The researcher then evaluated applicability of KLEs through a "panoramic approach," across the levels of war, the range of military operations and the instruments of national power.[226] The predominant view was that KLEs generally apply to all: "all campaigns," "all phases," "across all," "all types of conflict."[227] These were just a few of the codes extracted from the different interview transcripts, suggesting extensive

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   [223] MG (R) Allen W. Batschelet, interview with author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 19 April 2020.

   [224] O'Neal interview.

   [225] Batschelet interview.

   [226] Fontenot interview.

   [227] Various interviews by author.

applicability. GEN(R) Brooks stated that "there was never [a] time where it didn't apply, not once."[228] LTC Novoselich provided a slightly different thought in stating there was a "time and place where [KLEs] don't matter anymore, with regard to the enemy."[229] However, even his comments were specific only to the enemy, and he later acknowledged that KLEs would remain useful in terms of allied operations. Augmenting the majority sentiment of wide applicability, some participants presented qualifying concessions. LTC Thomas, for instances, explained that although applicable across all levels of war, KLE has a "different role" at each.[230] MG (R) Batschelet commented that KLEs, "increase in importance and consequence the higher up [one goes in echelon.]"[231] Some participants also highlighted those operations best supported by KLEs. LTC Thomas explained that within the current construct of great power competition KLE is "a primary activity" in phases zero and one.[232] GEN(R) Brooks, who strongly emphasized wide range applicability, echoed LTC Thomas' thoughts when he stated that KLE "must be most active in phase zero" – though, he stressed that focusing and preparing for a LSCO environment "doesn't replace the need to engage."[233] In this context, some

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[228] Brooks interview.

[229] Novoselich interview.

[230] Thomas interview.

[231] Batschelet interview.

[232] Thomas interview.

[233] Brooks interview.

participants observed that KLEs facilitate "setting conditions."[234] More specifically in

LSCO, COL (R) Anthony Deane, former CDR of Task Force Conqueror in Ramadi,

offered that KLEs are "imperative to set the conditions for Phase 4."[235] Similarly, LTG

Piatt linked KLEs to fulfilling the "prevent war or deter war" requirements that precede

large-scale conflict.[236] Additionally, some participants named "stability operations," and

"peacekeeping operations," as being most linked to KLEs.

Shifting perspective to KLEs across the instruments of national power

(diplomacy, information, military, economy), all participants acknowledged the role

within the "big 'M' " and presented a variety of responses for the remaining three

instruments.[237] A majority of the participants recognized a connection between

diplomacy and KLEs, and even alluded to the criticality of that association. MG (R)

Batschelet, instead, stated that "[m]ilitary KLE are very different than diplomacy"[238] –

diverging from the majority opinion. Only a few participants commented on the

remaining instruments. LTG (R) Hodges offered that all KLEs occur "in information

space."[239] Mr. Farquhar described KLEs in support of economic-related efforts by

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[234] Thomas,interview.

[235] Deane interview.

[236] Piatt interview.

[237] Thomas interview.

[238] Batschelet interview.

[239] Hodges interview.

tactical level leaders, linking it to "stability in a region."[240] Once again, a substantial

majority commented on the applicability to allied and partner operations, especially in

terms of "relationship building" and relationships in general.[241] GEN (R) Brooks

underscored this by stating that KLE, that "strategic investment determines the

composition of a coalition," which could significantly impact future LSCO as U.S.

Armed Forces fight in an alliance.[242] A few of the participants recounted the amount of

investment they exercised through KLEs. GEN(R) Petraeus remembered having to

conduct them, "Endlessly!"[243] LTG (R) Hodges described having "invest[ed] so much

time and energy into the alliance."[244]

       In summary, the historical evolution and operational applicability of KLE

presented insights into the associated types of organizations and context, which addressed

the second subsidiary research question. Based on the participants' responses, KLEs

occur across all three levels of war, from brigades to COCOMs in contexts that spread

across the range of military operations and facilitate all instruments of national power,

even if some more than others. Moreover, KLEs directly support current and future allied

operations, warranting a significant investment from military senior leaders. Such a

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[240] Scott Farquhar, interview with author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 17 April 2020.

[241] Various interviews by author.

[242] Brooks interview.

[243] Petraeus interview.

[244] Hodges interview.

requirement would assumedly demand equal level of education and training to be conducted effectively.

<div align="center">Education – Existing</div>

The next core concept under review was *Education*, more specifically, for understanding KLE, existing education. For the purposes of this study, the researcher conflated military training, professional military education (PME), developmental skills and attributes, and doctrinal resources under the title, or categorization, of education. Participants commented on the educational opportunities available to prepare them for KLEs, and the subsequent successes and shortfalls they encountered.

<u>Education Available</u>

First, the participants recounted what education existed throughout their careers, whether it was formalized, related but not-KLE specific, or garnered from personal experiences. The most common example of formal training discussed was that which was offered at the combat training centers. Despite the fact that a few participants, "do not recall"[245] formal training, a larger number alluded to some sort of training, even if considered "not sufficient."[246] COL (R) Fontenot and Mr. Farquhar were directly involved in implementing KLE-related training and education at some point in their careers. COL (R) Fontenot recounted having "introduced KLEs… into battle command

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[245] Petraeus interview.

[246] Brooks interview.

training program exercises."[247] Mr. Farquhar remembered having "built and resourced engagement training 'academics' and its conduct."[248] Others commented on the more recently available training opportunities, such as a "KLE Lane" or other scenario-based structure, as well as "pre-deployment training."[249] Concurrently, LTC Thomas stated that there was "no comprehensive doctrine" available on KLEs, though he did reference a U.S. Army publication, currently still in draft, which he assisted Mr. Farquhar in developing: *Army Technical Publication 3-13.5, Soldier and Leader Engagement.*[250] Although Mr. Farquhar commented that KLEs have been "codified in Joint and service doctrine," the literature review in Chapter 2 illustrated the limited extent of that codification.

Though not specific to KLEs, some participants recounted alternative formal education opportunities that assisted them in executing or supporting KLEs, including: the "School of Advanced Military Studies" Course, the "IO qualification course", "negotiation" instruction, "training in PA," "language" classes, and the "Military Advisor Training Academy Arvin Course," Mr. Farquhar also added a few specific from his progression as an IO officer: the "Combat Advisors Training Course ('07), Red Team Members Course ('15), Security Cooperation Planner's Course ('15), and IOQC ('18)."[251]

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[247] Fontenot interview.

[248] Farquhar interview.

[249] Thomas interview.

[250] Ibid.

[251] Farquhar interview.

Though some of these courses included blocks of instruction or lessons on KLEs, they were merely auxiliary or augmenting, rather than specifically focused on KLE.

Almost all of the GEN officers commented on how personal, practical experiences directly enabled their ability to perform KLEs, whether through "iterative learning," as GEN(R) Brooks mentioned, or simply through observation. LTG (R) Hodges recounted his time in support of senior leaders, calling it "a masterclass" in KLEs. Both GEN(R) Brooks and GEN(R) Petraeus echoed the influential role of observing senior leaders as field grade officers, and how that best prepared them for future KLE demands. MG (R) Nash stated that working within higher echelon assignments "matured [him] in understanding a bigger picture."[252]

Successes and Shortfalls

In terms of successes, COL (R) Deane and Mr. Farquhar both mentioned associated training offered at JMRC with favorable recollections of its value. LTG Piatt noted that the more recent training efforts at the combat training centers improved "later on during the war."[253] He went on to say that the exercise sets "became so much more sophisticated."[254] Conversely, LTC Thomas recounted his experiences at NTC training as "being reactionary,"[255] and LTC Novoselich stated that such training was "more for ...

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[252] Nash interview.

[253] Piatt interview.

[254] Ibid.

[255] Thomas interview.

developing rapport for training the host nation military and police forces, not KLEs."[256]

Both of these examples exhibited training only at the tactical and, at times, operational

levels of war. LTC Thomas also shared his thoughts on training shortfalls specific to "the

planning" aspects of KLEs. On a different note, LTG Piatt explained that the "real time"

and "real person" aspects of KLEs were difficult to mimic in a training environment.[257]

Recounting this collection of experiences with existing education – formal or

informal, specified or auxiliary – began to address the third subsidiary research question

by depicting the educational foundation which supported senior leaders in how they

employed KLEs.

Employment – Methods

The fifth core concept was that of *Employment*, informed specifically by

recounted methods, which aided in understanding KLE. Three major themes emerged in

the data, technique, responsibility, and the "in the room" team, also serving to organize

the resultant data.[258]

Technique

The theme of technique exhibited the widest range of discussion. LTG Piatt

acknowledged that he witnessed "so many techniques" just in his own career.[259] Amongst

all of vignettes, however, was a common characteristic of deliberateness. GEN(R) Brooks

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[256] Novoselich interview.

[257] Piatt interview.

[258] Various interviews by author.

[259] Piatt interview.

emphasized that KLEs should be "a much more deliberate process to be highly effective"[260] Others alluded to the same, but by different name. LTG Piatt spoke of having "operationalized" KLEs through one of his staff sections, while MG (R) Nash emphasized that KLE should reside in mission analysis, "include[ing] an analysis of the key leaders."[261] LTC Novoselich highlighted that KLEs could also be considered "targets of opportunity," warranting deliberate preparation, in order to best capitalize upon them.[262] Regardless if the technique mirrored the targeting process, "a fires matrix," or "the Joint Military Commissions", which MG (R) Nash and COL (R) Fontenot described, it was a deliberate effort.[263] Even in the context of prioritizing KLEs, whether by mission objectives or the "urgency of the need," all of these techniques were centered on deliberate versus "ad hoc" employment.[264]

Where opinions began to diverge was when deliberateness overlapped with formality. LTG Piatt commented that he was "not a fan" of formalized KLE processes.[265] In his view, making it "too formal" could hinder efforts to achieve a sound understanding of the environment, and/or "run the risk of taking the human relationship building out of

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[260] Brooks interview.

[261] Various interviews by author.

[262] Novoselich interview.

[263] Various interviews by author.

[264] Ibid.

[265] Piatt interview.

the process."[266] He continued that KLEs should be "open-ended."[267] Similarly, LTG (R) Hodges emphasized that "part of this is human."[268] BG (R) Cherrie did not specifically voice opinions on formalized KLE, but did recount how engaged audiences often exhibited a "reticence to have [KLEs] formally logged."[269]

Another aspect of KLE technique was the degree of integration across an organization, which overlapped, somewhat with deliberateness and formality. MG (R) Nash explained that he had "three meetings a day" to integrate the information garnered from KLEs, while LTC Thomas described a "working group" setting with decision boards in series.[270]

Responsibility

The second *Employment* theme, linked to integrating efforts, was the delegation of responsibility for KLE employment. This also presented a wide range of responses, where some named individual officers or staffs, and others alluded to a conglomerate of staff activities or even the need for an entirely new element. GEN(R) Petraeus explained that the responsibility "[d]epended on the level of headquarters," as well as the engaged audience.[271] LTG Piatt specified that his G-3 was charged with operationalizing KLEs,

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[266] Piatt interview.

[267] Ibid.

[268] Hodges interview.

[269] Cherrie interview.

[270] Various interviews by author.

[271] Petraeus interview.

while other participants identified the chief of staff, secretary of the GEN staff, or CDRs initiative group (CIG) as alternatively responsible sections. COL (R) Deane stated that KLEs were "mandated for CDRs," subsequently designating the responsibility to them at the tactical level.[272] Those that recounted involvement by multiple sections generally based participation on the needs required for the KLE. Higher headquarters often had more staff activities available, and thus more resources to obligate against KLE requirements.[273] GEN(R) Brooks argued that simply "staff[ing] this to the G-5 or J-5, [was] not sufficient."[274] Under his command, he established a dedicated element for strategic engagement. LTC Novoselich currently serves in a similar section on the West Point staff, which oversees strategic engagements and effects. Even at the tactical level, COL (R) Deane alluded to having "developed a Battalion S9" position to assist with KLE.[275] COL (R) Fontenot offered a divergent opinion in this discussion, stating that one should not "want to create another staff section to do this."[276] He, instead, specifically referred to "information officers" for undertaking KLE responsibility.[277]

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[272] Deane interview.

[273] Various interviews by author.

[274] Brooks interview.

[275] Deane interview.

[276] Fontenot interview.

[277] Ibid.

<u>"In the Room" Team</u>

Similar to, but distinct from, responsibility for KLE was the "in the room" team theme. This was consisted of those individuals that a senior leader brought with him to a KLE. Almost all of the GEN officers alluded to a translator being a part of this team.[278] GEN(R) Brooks introduced a team member which he called a "process observer," someone "who is there to partially take notes, but also to see beyond the conversation."[279] BG (R) O'Neal spoke specifically of the value that warrant officers offer when included in such a team, given their vast experience and candidness. A majority of the GEN officers alluded to having at least one note taker, even if in the case of GEN(R) Brooks, that coincided with the "process observer." LTG (R) Hodges described how he rotated different individuals into the team for "cross-fertilization" of the information, allowing different staff activities to garner knowledge from a KLE firsthand.[280] With respect to size, "[g]enerally speaking, smaller [was] better."[281] Meaning, it was best to incorporate enough individuals to be supportive, but not so many as to detract from the interpersonal nature of the KLE – "small teams, with very trusted advisors."[282]

These recounted methods of employment, coupled with the preceding section encompassing existing education, illustrated how military leaders have employed KLEs,

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[278] Various interviews by author.

[279] Brooks interview.

[280] Hodges interview.

[281] Ibid.

[282] O'Neal interview.

by echelon, thus addressing the third subsidiary research question. Admittedly, one aspect of *Employment* not included in this context was assessment. It, too, was discussed by many of the participants. *Assessment,* however, rose to the level of its own core concept during the coding process and will be explored further in the following section.

Assessment – Assessable

The final core concept linked to understanding KLEs (sixth overall) was *Assessment* – specifically, the idea of KLE being an "assessable" capability based on recounted assessment practices. Two themes in performing assessment that appeared most in the data were metrics-based practices and after-action reviews (AARs). Metrics-based assessment was generally related to "objectives," "observable actions," and/or "agreements made."[283] Although, as LTG Piatt stated, KLEs were "[h]ard to measure," objectives and agreements provided, at the very least, a framework or foundation for assessment.[284] However, LTC Thomas stressed that often "no immediate indicator" was available after a single KLE.[285] Instead he recounted having to collect metrics "after many meetings."

Augmenting the metrics-based approach was the use AARs, or like sessions. Many of the GEN officers described, as GEN(R) Brooks did, an "initial hotwash," immediately following a KLE.[286] LTG (R) Hodges explained that he conducted these,

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[283] Various interviews by author.

[284] Piatt interview.

[285] Thomas interview.

[286] Brooks interview.

"probably 99% of the time," with the "in the room" team, like most of the other GEN officers.[287] In performing these AARs immediately after the KLEs, senior leaders and their staff were able to share multiple perspectives of the KLE while "things remained fresh on [their] mind."[288] Additionally, GEN(R) Brooks described meeting with a "strategic debriefer," not common amongst the rest of the participants.[289] Though COL (R) Deane similarly alluded to "a written report sent into INTELLIGENCE channels."[290]

These assessment practices formed the framework for capturing measures of effectiveness (MOEs), as well as the foundation for addressing the strategic effects of KLEs by senior leaders – the fourth subsidiary research question. Furthermore, the existence of this framework affirmed the "assessability" of KLEs.

<u>Measuring Strategic Contributions</u>

Having achieved a shared understanding of KLE through the subsets of the first six core concepts, the researcher began analyzing those core concepts aligned with measuring strategic contributions. As explained in Chapter 3, this collection included five concepts which mutually supported both overarching goals. As such, the structure of this section mirrors that of the last but was informed be differing basic topics.

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[287] Hodges interview.

[288] O'Neal interview.

[289] Brooks interview.

[290] Deane interview.

Key Leaders – Engagers

    This study revealed alternatives to the assumption that *Key Leaders* must be a strategic or senior leader to yield strategic contributions. Understanding that "unofficial positions have key influence," revealed that the potential for strategic contribution was not depended on rank or position.[291] When recounting the wide range of actual engagers involved in KLEs, many participants, like LTG Piatt, commented that they met with individuals from "farmers to governor[s]."[292] Though all of the participants recounted KLEs with senior military and diplomatic leaders including chiefs of defense, chiefs of armies, defense ministers and even presidents.[293] Others also noted KLEs with foreign civilian agencies such as "the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Office of High Representative. ... and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees."[294] Even within the more exclusive populations of senior engager, the potential for strategic contribution was still vast. For instance, GEN(R) Brooks recalled being in a conference and meeting "15 different ambassadors," which meant interacting with "15 different capitals."[295] It is important to note that all the participants, when discussing KLEs, either by vignette or in GEN, referred to engagers both within and outside of the allied and partner community, such as U.S. senior military and diplomatic leaders, as well as, non-

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[291] An interview by author.

[292] Piatt interview.

[293] Various interviews by author.

[294] Nash interview.

[295] Brooks interview.

government associated figures. Despite the abundance of senior leaders named within this context, the data highlighted that strategic contribution is achievable by a variety of engagers – a key facet worth adding to the theoretical foundation of KLEs.

Scope – Strategic Effects

The *Scope* of continued evolution and vast applicability of KLEs, as described throughout the data, indicated the propensity for strategic effects in future conflicts and across a multitude of operations – namely, allied, and LSCO. Specific to fighting in an alliance, a majority of the participants spoke to the criticality of KLEs by using such descriptors as "[v]ery important," "crucial," and "building a team."[296] LTG (R) Hodges took that concept a step further by explaining that, "the center of gravity is the cohesion of the alliance or the coalition."[297] If U.S. Armed Forces are to fight alongside allied and partner nations in a LSCO environment, KLEs will significantly contribute to the strategic asset that is the coalition. This punctuated the fact that KLEs transcend multiple types of organizations and operational contexts.

Education – Required

Implementing matured, required KLE *Education* could substantially optimize its employment, thus increasing the potential for strategic contribution. Many participants echoed this point. BG (R) Cherrie stated that "supreme effort" was needed "to do [KLE]

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[296] Various interviews by author.

[297] Hodges interview.

correctly."[298] GEN(R) Brooks highlighted that the ability to perform KLEs well "opened countless doors."[299] Mr. Farquhar stressed that "[a] senior officer or official untrained or incapable to conduct engagement is ineffective."[300] The participants examined possible adjustments to doctrine, corresponding requirements in PME and training, and those developmental skills and attributes needed to perform KLE effectively.

Doctrine

When asked if KLE-specific doctrine should be developed the participants presented an array of favorability, with some fully supporting the concept, and others unsure as to the extent of which doctrine could actually assist in enhancing KLEs. Though no one participant starkly opposed doctrinal change, some strongly cautioned the pursuit of that option without first further considering the implications and/or alternate means through other education. Both BG (R) O'Neal and GEN (R) Brooks were in favor of "a doctrinal adjustment."[301] The former emphasized that "Doctrine is essential – it is the key to enter the topic into the institutional Army."[302] COL (R) Fontenot offered a qualifying concession to implementing doctrine, and stated that it should "be descriptive, not prescriptive."[303] LTC Thomas echoed that "[h]aving a doctrinal foundation is

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[298] Cherrie interview.

[299] Brooks interview.

[300] Farquhar interview.

[301] Brooks interview.

[302] O'Neal interview.

[303] Fontenot interview.

beneficial, but that doctrine also needs to be reinforced throughout PME."[304] Similarly,

MG (R) Batschelet commented that any doctrinal change should be "backed by the

cognitive science of human relations/interactions."[305] Mr. Farquhar, with has experience

in doctrine development, offered a more specific source to help inform such an

adjustment: "[t]he module from Red Teaming and IOQC."[306]

PME and Training

In terms of education and training, BG (R) O'Neal proposed that this should be

available "from the beginning of a career," for both officers and NCOs.[307] MG (R)

Batschelet thought it necessary to "[m]ake it part of every exercise."[308] LTC Novoselich

specifically focused on possible inclusion within the "larger multi-domain operation

framework."[309] LTG (R) Hodges cautioned that there was only "X amount of bandwidth"

that people could take on, suggesting the potential for breaching diminished marginal

returns in adding too much KLE education and/or doctrine.[310]

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[304] Thomas interview.

[305] Batschelet interview.

[306] Farquhar interview.

[307] O'Neal interview.

[308] Batschelet interview.

[309] Novoselich interview.

[310] Hodges interview.

<u>Skills and Attributes for Execution</u>

To better classify what required education would be needed to optimize KLE, the researcher asked participants to comment on the developmental skills and attributes needed to execute and/or plan KLEs. Examining execution requirements first, "cultural awareness," "emotional intelligence," and other similar traits were most commonly described. [311] The "interpersonal skills" associated with these attributes transcended across a majority of the participants' opinions.[312] LTG Piatt highlighted the importance of "[h]ow to treat other people with dignity and respect" – a skill that he argued most people were trained on "while growing up."[313] Still within this context of personal awareness, other participants specifically named "negotiation" and "conversationalist" skills, or "soft skills," in their descriptions.[314] Additionally, LTC Novoselich stressed the importance of "written and oral communication" skills.[315]

<u>Skills and Attributes for Planning</u>

Planning skills and attributes referred to those that an officer supporting senior leaders in KLE should harness. Among the different suggestions, "staff skills" and "design" skills were the most prominent.[316] Based on his staff level experiences, LTC

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[311] Various interviews by author.

[312] Thomas interview.

[313] Piatt interview.

[314] Various interviews by author.

[315] Novoselich interview.

[316] Various interviews by author.

Thomas claimed that the skills needed to support KLEs were not very different from those needed to be a good staff officer. "[P]lanning, timing, synchronization," and "integration skills" were essential in supporting KLE.[317] GEN(R) Brooks noted an "appreciation for strategy," or "campaigner" skills, were best to design KLE Plans.[318] A majority of the participants named "preparation" as fundamental skill to both executing and planning KLEs – many linking the quality of preparation to the quality of the engagement.

<div align="center">Employment – Best Practices</div>

GEN(R) Brooks best captured the relationship between optimal *Employment* and strategic contribution: "the efficacy comes often from the quality of the planning."[319] Identifying those best practices for employing KLE revealed those methods needed to optimize KLEs holistically in order to yield the highest possible strategic contribution. Admittedly, both GEN (R) Brooks and BG (R) O'Neal emphasized that in KLEs "everything" served as "a lesson learned."[320] However, in terms of KLE execution, implementing a deliberate process; ensuring preparation, especially through rehearsal; and understanding the environment were the most common best practices. For instance, GEN (R) Brooks explained that those successors who chose to do away with the

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[317] Thomas interview.

[318] Brooks interview.

[319] Ibid.

[320] Ibid.

dedicated cell "found themselves losing momentum on the strategic engagements."[321] Although deliberateness in KLEs proved invaluable regardless of the specified technique, this was one instance which showcased the strategic contributions, or lack thereof, which were a direct result.

Additionally, though tied more closely to developmental skills and attributes, sincerity and minimizing risk to the relationship were two lessons learned that stood out across the data. LTG (R) Hodges emphasized that "if you're not genuine, if you're not consistent, then it undermine[d] what you're trying to do."[322] On the same token of sincerity, but an aspect slightly different from showing respect to the engaging audience, BG (R) Cherrie offered that you should, "equivocate your side's honest capabilities," and "tell it like it is."[323] GEN (R) Petraeus introduced a unique term in recounting lessons learned, and stressed the importance of avoiding that which is "non-biodegradable" – "something that will significantly damage the relationship and never go away."[324]

These best practices, proven to have the potential for, or already yielded, strategic contributions, not only provided the means for maximizing that efficacy, but also shed further light on how senior leaders have employed KLEs.

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[321] Brooks interview.

[322] Hodges interview.

[323] Cherrie interview.

[324] Petraeus interview.

Assessment – MOEs

With the "assessability" of KLEs affirmed, such tried and true *Assessment* practices as metric-based assessment and AARs, presented practical means for measuring strategic effects, or contributions, through corresponding MOEs. Combing these practices enables any organization in measuring efficacy through quantifiable objectives, and/or qualifiable intangibles. This assessment foundation is especially important for such officers as LTC Novoselich who are "not always in the room," and as such, have to observe if the organization, or a specified effort, progresses in a "positive direction" over time to discernably measure the strategic contributions of that KLE, or those KLEs.[325] These assessment tools also provided a way to communicate effectiveness clearly to describe the strategic effects of KLEs by senior leaders.

Efficacy – Perceived Efficacy

In addition to recounting their experiences with measuring MOEs, the participants offered their perceptions on the *Efficacy* of KLE as a capability, and as an instrument for senior leaders, especially when working to strengthen alliances and partnerships. All interviewees agreed that KLEs were significant for senior leaders. However, BG (R) O'Neal agreed "with some reluctance" and explained that "mid-rank leaders" might arguably have more effectiveness than senior leaders, given that seniority tends to "[dilute] KLEs."[326] However, the overwhelming majority used words such as: "[a]bsolutely," "essential," and "[v]ital," to illustrate the criticality of KLEs.

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[325] Novoselich interview.

[326] O'Neal interview.

When examining KLE as a capability, as well as its efficacy in that context, once again, a sizeable majority expressed undeniable and fundamental necessity. GEN (R) Brooks commented that KLE was the "most important of [his] repertoire. Without a doubt."[327] Another officer stated that KLEs were a "mission essential task."[328] LTC Novoselich diverged slightly, offering that KLEs were just "another tool," though not in the context of diminishing its individual efficacy, but rather highlighting the point that it's comparability to other "tools" was more equal.[329] Ultimately, the perceived efficacy of senior leaders and officers who have conducted, and/or supported, KLE illustrated the notable extent of its strategic effects.

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[327] Brooks interview.

[328] Interview by author.

[329] Novoselich interview.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

> If we end up in large scale combat operations it's because we failed in our engagements before that.
> — GEN(R) Vincent K. Brooks, interview with author.
> Fort Leavenworth, KS, 18 March 2020

Conclusions

The intent of this study was aimed at achieving a shared understanding of KLEs and measuring their strategic contributions as a means of answering the primary research question: *Do KLEs, conducted specifically between U.S. general officers and foreign stakeholders, <u>contribute</u> to the U.S. strategic effort of strengthening alliances and partnerships?* To that end, there were four subsidiary questions that facilitated the research and helped organize the methodology. The first subsidiary question directly addressed the subject of the study, <u>*KLEs*</u>*: 1) What are the theoretical and doctrinal foundations for KLEs?* Without this foundation, it would not have been possible to thoroughly analyze efficacy. The fourth and last subsidiary question addressed the tested variable of the study, <u>*contribute (or contribution)*</u>*: 4) What was the strategic effect of senior leaders employing KLEs?* These aligned with the two over-arching goals of the study: Understanding KLE and Measuring Strategic Contribution. The second and third subsidiary questions addressed the parameters of the study, <u>*strategic effort*</u> and <u>*strengthening alliances and partnerships*</u>, by examining the organizations, operational contexts and employment of KLEs: *2) In what organizations and contexts have key leaders engagements been used? and 3) How have senior leaders employed KLEs?* These also provided information to augment the two over-arching goals.

As explained in Chapter 3, the seven core concepts identified during the coding process were used to discernably organize the resultant data and address each of the four subsidiary questions. The first and second core concepts, *Define KLE* and *Key Leaders*, offered theoretical foundations for KLEs, complementing the doctrinal foundation resulting from the literature review. The doctrinal review depicted KLE as an IRC. Data from the personal interviews validated this notion and offered the inherent criteria of being purpose driven. Additionally, key leaders were deemed to be individuals, regardless of rank or position, capable of influencing strategic contributions. With that, the researcher proposed the following definition for KLEs:

A KLE is an interaction among individuals able to yield

strategic influence that fulfills an underlying purpose.

The third core concept, *Scope,* aligned directly with the second subsidiary question and illustrated what organizations and in what contexts KLEs have been used. Although performing distinct roles based on operational setting, KLEs are applicable across the range of military operations, in support of all instruments of national power, and can transcend the three levels of war. KLEs have been utilized from the brigade level up to the COCOM level and higher. They have evolved with each new historical conflict and will continue to do so through near-peer competition and LSCO. The fourth and fifth core concepts, *Education* and *Employment,* addressed how strategic leaders have employed KLEs – the third subsidiary question. KLE education has been available through both formal and informal mediums but has commonly focused on the tactical and operational arenas. This study did not identify a clear option for educational adjustments but highlighted the need for change in order to optimize learning, and by proxy, employment,

and efficacy. KLEs are used at all levels of war through a variety of distinct methods, the best of which reflect a deliberate process. The remaining core concepts, *Assessment* and *Perceived Efficacy,* addressed the final subsidiary question regarding the strategic effect of senior leaders employing KLE. Metrics-based assessment and AARs provided a foundation for measuring efficacy through MOEs. That, coupled with the perceptions of senior leaders and KLE-experienced officers, emphasized that the contributions at the strategic level has been rather significant.

The four subsidiary responses collectively formed a response to the primary research question. The answer being, as MG (R) Nash put it, "of course," KLEs contribute to the U.S. strategic effort of strengthening alliances and partnerships. KLE provides a purposeful capability for U.S. and allied senior leaders to interact and achieve strategic effects across multiple power domains and military operations, regardless of the level of war at which they are engaging.

With this shared understanding established and strategic contributions affirmed, current and future leaders can now more precisely investigate ways to enhance KLE, knowing that the investment of time and resources is justified. Ultimately, this study reinforced the relevance of KLEs, illustrating that they have not only produced tremendous strategic effects, but that they have built alliances.

Recommendations

Continuing to Understand KLE

Although the data collected in this study was sufficient in answering the primary research question, the challenges associated with addressing the first subsidiary question and the abundance of rich data resulting from personal interviews suggested that there

was much more to explore. This study included participants that were all male, U.S. Army officers. Admittedly, the researcher mitigated a subconscious assumption that "officers supporting KLEs" were exclusively staff officers, by including two field grade CDRs in the study. However, despite this value-added and the notable variance in the participant population, there were still opportunities for expansion. Further research could analyze the generalizations collected in this study to determine if their consistency across other military services, genders, and ranks.

Refining the Process

Although the original intent of the study was to focus more on the strategic contribution, rather than the operational processes of KLE, the cognitive bias of the researcher was still reflected in the interview questions. In the end, the resulting information proved valuable as a means of understanding KLE. Having affirmed the strategic contribution, the findings of this study could be coupled with those "operationally-filtered" studies mentioned in the literature review, in a continuing discourse of how to best refine this deliberate KLE process. Further research could examine different techniques practiced across the different military services, in the civilian sectors, such as non-government organizations, and even corporate America, to garner multiple perspectives on how to best enhance this process.

Educational Adjustments

The researcher originally assumed that the suggestion for a doctrinal adjustment would be met with resounding favoritism, but the data discussed in Chapter 4 suggested that such a solution was not so simple. Although this study proposed a definition for *KLE*

to be considered for inclusion into joint doctrine, which could be the extent of a doctrinal adjustment at this time, given the hesitations presented by the participants. Other methods for educational change such as introductions into PME and/or combat training, warrant further investigation. Additionally, the counter argument to defining KLE is that this military community may have potentially already overcomplicated the topic. In using another term for basic "interaction" and/or "relationship." This, too, warrants further research in that, frankly, the solution could be to diminish the complexity of associated vernacular and approach KLEs as "relationships among key leaders." The outreach program at the Army Cyber Institute (ACI) relates outreach with the synergy of a relationship, suggestive of current, on-going efforts in this area. In hindsight, when considering doctrinal adjustment, it may be effective to research the service specific doctrine first, prior to that at the joint level. In the time that this study was being conducted, the U.S. Army was developing and drafting its own doctrine, *Army Technical Publication 3-13.5, Soldier and Leader Engagement.* Although indicative of the need for new doctrine, the title being different from KLE, further prompts a candid look at how the military community, as a whole, may be over-complicating this topic.

<div align="center">Research Methodology</div>

Although the coding process employed by the researcher proved successful in organizing and analyzing the data, it reflected of cognitive biases. The focused coding aligned with the core concepts and underlined the interview and research questions. Given the unexpectedly wide array of rich data which resulted from personal interviews, one could replicate this study with a grounded theory approach and eliminate focused bias. Such a study may reveal underlying theory not yet apparent to a military researcher.

Conversely, historical case study is another research methodology that could be fruitful in the study of KLEs. Multiple participants alluded to the practice of KLE in World War II, although not referred to as such. The findings of this study, especially those surrounding assessment and efficacy, could be applied to historical cases and potentially uncover trends in this practice extending beyond the last three decades.

In the end, this study successfully illustrated that KLEs yield strategic contributions, especially in terms of strengthening alliances and partnerships. It also highlighted that this efficacy and relevance, which is historically grounded, still exists and will sustain future operational environments. As such, it is crucial that the U.S. Armed Forces invest resources into understanding this complex and effective capability, to optimize its employment in current and future conflicts. We must build our alliances.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you define KLEs?

   Are there any characteristics or criteria that you would link to or attribute to KLEs?

2. What level of war do you think KLEs support? Why?

   How would you describe the role of KLEs across diplomacy, information, military, and economy?

   How would you describe the role of KLEs across ROMO (range of military operations)?

   What missions/objectives do you think KLEs can best support? Why?

   How would you describe the role of KLEs in relation to strengthening alliances and partnerships?

3. Can you describe your first introduction to KLEs?

   How have KLEs evolved throughout your career?

   How do you think they will continue to evolve, especially as we continue to plan for LSCO?

4. When did you receive training, and/or professional development specific toward preparing you for KLEs, if at all?

   What skills does an officer need to successfully support/conduct KLEs?

   Would developing KLE doctrine enhance KLE employment – in general and/or specifically in support of strengthening alliances and partnerships?

Do you think there is anything we can do in the military to enhance KLE employment?

5. Did/Do you support/employ KLEs? Why or why not?

    If used, how were they prioritized within the organization?

    If used, how were they employed?

    If used, did/do you prepare differently for externally requested engagements vs. internally planned engagements? If so, how?

    If used, where within your staff did the capability reside – which section was responsible for its management? Why?

    If used, how did they integrate with other staff processes/activities?

6. What types of individuals participated in the KLEs you conducted/supported?

    How did/would you distinguish between "senior leaders," "key leaders," "stakeholders," "critical actors" etc.?

7. Did you experience any critical lessons learned in conducting KLEs?

8. How did/would you assess KLEs once complete?

    How did/would you compare their efficacy to other tools/capabilities for strengthening alliances and partnerships?

9. Would you consider KLEs a critical capability at senior echelons? Why or Why not?

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