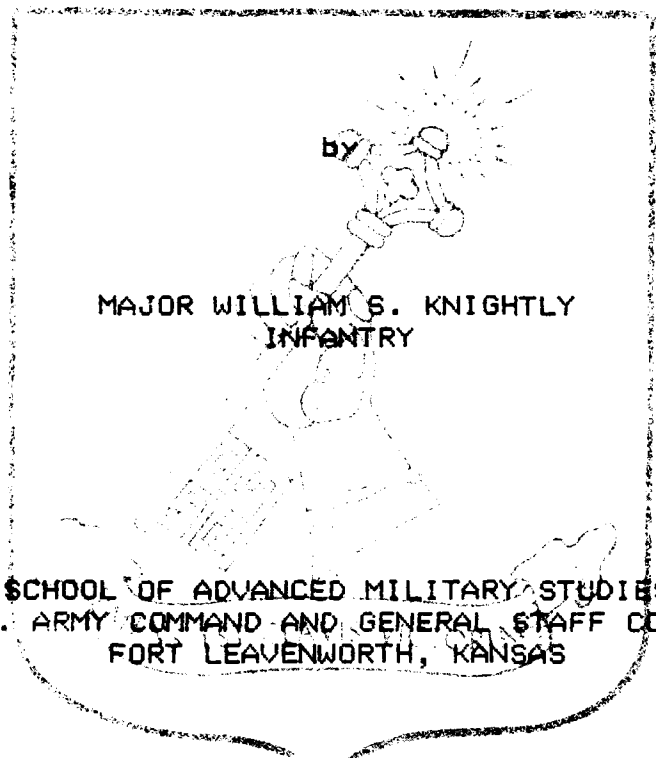


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CAMPAIGNING IN THE SECONDARY THEATER: CHALLENGES FOR THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER



by  
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ABSTRACT

CAMPAIGNING IN THE SECONDARY THEATER: CHALLENGES FOR THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER by Major William S. Knightly, USA, 28 pages.

This monograph addresses the conduct of the operational art within the secondary theater of war. Specifically two aspects of the secondary theater are addressed. First the art of conducting campaigns within the secondary theater is examined, with the aim of determining if there are distinct campaign principles that ought to be applied within the theater. Two campaigns conducted by the British Middle-East form the basis for the historical review. The second aspect of the secondary theater that is examined is the relationship of the strategic guidance in the theater to the overall political-strategic aim. Here the problems of executing the strategic guidance without adversely affecting the primary theater or the overall political-strategic objective is examined. The actions of Field Marshal Irwin Rommel and General Douglas MacArthur are used to illustrate the problem of executing the strategic guidance in a secondary theater.

The conclusions reached in this monograph suggest two findings. First, the general principles of campaign design, described in the monograph, are just as applicable to campaigns conducted within secondary theaters as they are to campaigns conducted in primary theaters. Application of these principles tend to contribute to success while disregarding the principles increases the chances for failure.

The second conclusion reached in the monograph is the indication that secondary theater commanders have a special responsibility to insure their strategic aims support the overall strategic aim. Commanders must resist the temptation, especially if their theater has a negative aim, to expand their operations beyond the limits of their guidance.



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## SECTION I. INTRODUCTION

The renaissance of thinking in the area of operational art has produced many valuable studies of major operations and campaigns. The major campaigns of World War II have been expertly and exhaustively examined by a number of authors. The German campaign in France (1940), the German campaigns in Russia (1941-1945) and the Allied campaigns in Europe (1944-1945) are a few examples of campaigns that have been the subject of intense historical analysis. The one thing many of these campaigns had in common was that they were fought in the primary theater of war. As a result, they were the focus of their respective nation's efforts and resources. But what about those theaters of war (or operations) that were considered secondary? What has been learned from operations and campaigns conducted within these theaters? Are there differences in the ways in which major operations and campaigns are conducted in secondary theaters as opposed to primary theaters? Are the principles of campaign design and execution fundamentally different within secondary theaters? What challenges and responsibilities, if any, are unique to the secondary theater commander?

In order to answer these questions, two particular aspects of secondary theaters will be addressed. First, campaign



planning and execution within the secondary theater will be examined. Secondly, the relationship of the secondary theater as a whole to the overall political-strategic aim will be studied.

The methodology will first attempt to identify a working group of general campaign planning principles. These principles will be derived from current US doctrine and historical evidence. Ideally these general principles can be used as a base of comparison when examining campaigns in secondary theaters.

The methodology will next examine selected campaigns that were conducted in a specific secondary theater. The experience of the British in the Middle-East theater of World War II will be the focus of this historical review. Specifically two campaigns will be examined: Operation Compass (December 1940-February 1941) and Operation Lustre (April-May 1941). Compass was conducted in North Africa while Lustre was conducted on the mainland of Greece. The fact that one campaign was conducted with a positive aim (Compass) and one was conducted with a negative aim (Lustre) should provide us with a broad perspective on campaign planning within a secondary theater. The purpose of this part of the monograph is not to codify a checklist of campaign principles. The aim is to simply determine whether a broad set of principles generally accepted for campaign planning in primary theaters is valid for campaigns within secondary theaters of war.

The next step in the methodology will address relating the strategic guidance for the secondary theater to the overall

political-strategic aim. What unique problems and responsibilities do secondary theater commanders have in relating their theater's aims/guidance to the overall political aim? Do these problems vary if the secondary theater has a positive aim versus a negative aim? In order to answer these questions, the experiences of Field Marshall Irwin Rommel in North Africa and General Douglas MacArthur in Korea will be briefly reviewed. Both men were secondary theater commanders who ultimately had difficulty in executing their strategic guidance.

Finally, the methodology will present conclusions and attempt to answer the questions posed in this introduction.

## SECTION II. PRINCIPLES FOR CAMPAIGN DESIGN AND EXECUTION

In order to determine whether campaigns conducted in secondary theaters are or should be fundamentally different in their design and execution, it is necessary to establish some basis of comparison with campaign planning in general. Although there are many professional opinions on exactly what constitutes the principles for effective campaign design, only four broad principles will be used in this study. Historical evidence seems to indicate that at least a general adherence to these principles is necessary to produce an effective campaign. These principles are:

- \* clearly define and understand the aim (strategic goal) of the campaign.
- \* Match the available means to accomplish the assigned end.

- \* Orient on the enemy force.
- \* Maintain operational flexibility.

A short discussion of each of these principles is appropriate.

Clearly define and understand the aim of the campaign.

For the theater commander the aim of the campaign will be a direct product of the strategic guidance he receives. "Operational planning begins with strategic guidance to a theater commander . . ." (1) This guidance normally contains the strategic goal to be accomplished within the theater. Other elements contained in the strategic guidance include resources available, restrictions and constraints. These elements combined with the nature of the threat and the geography of the area of operations constitute the parameters within which the campaign must be conducted.

The more precisely these parameters are known and their impact understood, the more likely will be the design of effective and achievable operational plans. (2)

Without clear, unambiguous aims that remain at least relatively constant, designing a successful campaign becomes difficult if not impossible ". . . altered strategic aims can seriously endanger effective military operations, and in the extreme risk outright defeat." (3)

Match the ends with the means.

A major challenge to any theater commander is to design a successful campaign that uses the means available to him to accomplish the aim or assigned end. The ends and means must always be kept in balance. "There is always risk in war, but inadequate means, ill defined ends or unclear ways increase that risk to a gamble." (4) In the campaign plan, the commander visualizes the way in which the campaign will be executed. Within this plan the commander has the responsibility to fit his means to accomplish his strategic goal or end in his particular theater. If he determines that his means are inadequate to accomplish his assigned end, he has the responsibility to inform the senior political-military authorities of this fact.

Orient on the enemy force.

Campaigns must ultimately focus on the enemy. "In war subjugation of the enemy is the end, and the destruction of his fighting forces the means." (5) While this may be obvious in an offensive campaign, it applies equally to a defensive campaign. Even a campaign with a negative aim of preservation must eventually orient on the destruction of the enemy in order to be effective.

It would be a fundamental error to imagine that a negative campaign implies a bloodless decision over the enemy . . . of all possible aims in war, the destruction of the enemy's armed forces always appears the highest. (6)

### Maintain operational flexibility

Friction and the fog of war dictate that the wise operational commander have the flexibility to change his plan during a campaign. "Whatever its design and objective, the campaign plan must be flexible enough to accommodate change." (7) One way to maintain flexibility is to anticipate change. " . . . arrangements to change plans are features of a good campaign plan." (8) Preplanned changes in a campaign plan are known as branches and sequels.

Branches are contingency plans in case a campaign has to change direction, and sequels are plans on how to continue the planned phases of a campaign. (9)

By developing branches and sequels, the operational commander prepares his forces for the possibility of change. As his means change, the operational commander must continually evaluate the prospect of seeking a change in his assigned ends. Likewise he must always be open to seize unexpected opportunities that might lead him more directly to his assigned end. History has shown repeatedly that one of the distinguishing marks of a successful commander has been the ability to adapt rapidly to changing situations.

These four general campaign principles do not represent a formula for campaign planning. There are, of course, any number of other valid campaign planning considerations. These principles will, however, provide us with a concise group of guidelines that will assist in evaluating and understanding the

historical examples in this study. It is assumed that these principles are valid for campaign design in primary theaters. The next part of the monograph will examine their validity in secondary theaters.

### SECTION III. THE SECONDARY THEATER

Keeping in mind the four broad campaign principles previously discussed, it is now useful to examine a historical example of a secondary theater of war. Unfortunately the classical theorists were not exact in defining the term theater of war, which only adds to the problem of defining a secondary theater of war.

A current US doctrinal definition of "theater of war" is applicable to this study:

A theater of war is a geographical area within which land, sea, and air operations by all participating forces are directed toward a common strategic objective. (10)

Theaters of war may be divided into theaters of operations when multiple simultaneous campaigns are conducted. In this case the campaigns are still linked by a common strategic framework but are separated geographically and may have distinct operational goals.

Normally the operations in a theater of war are directed against a single enemy or coalition of enemy forces, (such as the German-Italian coalition that opposed the British in North Africa). A theater of war, therefore, can be defined as an

independent geographic area within which multi-service operations are conducted toward a strategic aim. The theater is normally commanded by a unified commander. A secondary theater is distinguished primarily by having different strategic aims and a subordinate priority in operational and logistical support.

The experiences of the British in the Middle East theater of World War II provide useful insights into operations in secondary theaters. Gen. Sir Archibald Wavell initially commanded the theater at the outbreak of World War II, and was the commander during both Operations Compass and Lustre. "No allied commander in the Second World War could flourish a list of operations comparable for their range or for their almost unqualified difficulty." (11)

This theater, which Michael Howard referred to as a "subsidiary theater," was geographically enormous. (12) It ranged from North Africa across the Middle East to Iran. Wavell had at his disposal 36,000 troops in Egypt; 9,000 in the Sudan; 5,500 in Kenya; 1,475 in British Somaliland; 27,000 in Palestine, and approximately 3,000 others spread in small detachments throughout the theater. (13)

When Italy declared war on 10 June 1940, the imbalance of forces in the theater was dramatic " . . . the approximate strength of Marshall Graziani's forces, from the Egyptian frontier westward into Tripolitania was 250,000. The East African garrison under the Duke of Aosta was rather larger; some 300,000." (14) In raw numbers the Italian artillery outnumbered

the British two to one. (15) The Italian air force also heavily outnumbered the British. Wavell found " . . . his strategical position an all but impossible one." (16) He found that he was on the strategic defensive throughout his theater. (17)

During the first eight months of the war Britain's main effort had been devoted to supporting the expeditionary force in France. This resulted in a shortage of resources throughout the Middle-East theater. (18) The Battle of Britain and the British fear of a German invasion acted to keep Wavell's theater secondary for much of the early part of the war.

The strategic aim established in 1940 for the Middle East theater was negative - to preserve the vital possessions of the empire. " . . . while our ultimate aim would be the defeat of Italy, the immediate task must be to defend Egypt." (19) As we shall see, Wavell undertook both offensive and defensive campaigns within his theater under the umbrella of the strategic defense.

#### SECTION IV. OPERATION "COMPASS"

. . . A defensive campaign can be fought with offensive battles . . . so the defensive form of war is not a simple shield, but a shield made up of well directed blows. (20)

Clausewitz

Although on the strategic defensive throughout the Middle East theater, Wavell looked for ways quickly to take offensive action within his theater. " . . . General Wavell did not intend



to leave the initiative with the Italians a day longer than necessary." (21) In what J. F. C. Fuller called "one of the most audacious campaigns ever fought," (22) Wavell seized the initiative and dealt a stunning blow to Italian power in North Africa. In Operation Compass (December 1940) Wavell ordered his Western Desert Force under Major General Richard O'Connor to attack the numerically superior Italian 10th Army. The Italians, having moved into Western Egypt upon declaration of war, had deployed their forces in a series of seven fortified camps. Total Italian strength in this area was believed to have been 80,000 troops supported by 120 tanks. The Italian air force outnumbered British air by three to one. (23)

O'Connor's Western Desert Force consisted of 31,000 men organized into two divisions (7th Armored and 4th Indian).

Wavell decided not to wait for the Italians to make another move before attacking. In early December he decided to strike. The official British history of the Middle East theater describes the British dilemma:

As for the British plan, it was fully realized that only the boldest and most vigorous action would be likely to succeed and that it would be very difficult to ensure the timely deliveries of petrol, food and ammunition for anything but a short encounter . . . the margin could not have been narrower. (24)

Supply was the only area that really worried O'Connor:  
" . . . it absorbed much of his time, and the arrangements adopted testify to his originality and resourcefulness." (25)

For example, in order to solve the formidable logistical problems, O'Connor used his three available transport companies (300 lorries) to preposition field supply depots with rations, ammo and petrol. This freed up the transport companies to move troops during the actual attack. (26)

The British plan of attack was simple yet bold. Patrols had discovered uncovered gaps between two of the Italian camps. By penetrating this gap with armor and motorized forces, the British planned to take the five remaining Italian camps from the rear. The results of the British offensive were highly successful. Within three days, O'Connor had ended the Italian threat to Egypt through a series of rapid attacks to the enemy's flanks and rear. These successful attacks provided the impetus that enabled O'Connor to turn what had originally been planned as a limited five-day raid into a full-scale pursuit.

Operational problems were overcome with surprise, speed and boldness. The results of Compass were remarkable " . . . between 7 December and 7 February an army of four corps, comprising nearly ten divisions was destroyed and 130,000 prisoners, 400 tanks and 1,240 guns were captured at a cost of 500 killed, 1,373 wounded and 55 missing." (27)

Complimenting this campaign J. F. L. Fuller remarked: "As so frequently happens when audacity is in the saddle, everything went to plan." (28)

Because of the preparation for the campaign in Greece, Wavell's desert campaign ended before his Western Desert Force could deliver the final blow to the Italian Army in Africa.

Though robbed of total victory, Compass was highly successful. What factors made the campaign successful? Did the British commanders adhere to sound campaign principles such as those described earlier in this study? An analysis of the campaign indicates that Compass was indeed successful due in large part to an adherence on the part of the British to sound campaign principles. First, the ultimate aim of this campaign, the destruction of the Italian army, was clear to both the theater commander and his subordinate O'Connor. Even though the British offensive started out as a limited five day raid, its very success helped to solidify the overall strategic aim of the campaign. "The aim was a simple one -- to cut off and destroy the enemy's entire army." (29) The fact that the aim was achieved so quickly was probably a surprise to both Wavell and O'Connor.

Secondly, Wavell and O'Connor expertly matched their ends to their means. Avoiding a frontal assault, O'Connor used his smaller force to defeat the Italians by attacking them from the rear. Referring to the use of the Western Desert Force during Compass, British historian Maj. Gen. Playfair has written: "Throughout this campaign its employment was a model of well judged adjustment of means to suit the end." (30) Playfair further observed that: "The whole campaign showed not only great

imagination, but a firm determination to do the utmost with the resources available." (31)

Both Wavell and O'Connor displayed flexibility during Compass.

"O'Connor did more than think of ways to win a first round. He laid plans for exploiting the success he felt sure he would have. It was not a five-day raid he was contemplating, but a campaign which would bring the desert war to an end." (32)

Turning Compass from a five day operation (as originally planned) into a 62 day campaign clearly demonstrated the ability of the theater commander to maintain flexibility. As Wavell stated before the campaign with amazing foresight:

The difficulties, administrative and tactical, of a deep advance are fully realized. It is, however, possible that an opportunity may offer for converting the enemy's defeat into an outstanding victory . . . I do wish to make certain that if a big opportunity occurs we are prepared morally, mentally and administratively to use it to the fullest. (33)

This sort of flexibility, confidence, skill at matching the ends and means and the tenacity to continually focus on the destruction of the enemy resulted in success. Author Corelli Barnett accurately summed up this campaign:

It was a model campaign . . . of great originality and faultless execution, continuing with a relentless pursuit with improvised supply services and ending with a daring strategic march . . . (34)

Unfortunately, political-strategic decisions were being made by the British leadership that would drastically affect British fortunes in the Middle East theater. On the verge of decisively

defeating the Italians, O'Connor's corps was dissipated to provide the nucleus of the expeditionary force for Operation Lustre in Greece. As we shall see, these forces would have been better used in North Africa than Greece.

#### SECTION V. OPERATION LUSTRE

One country may support another's cause, but it will never take it so seriously as it takes its own. A moderately sized force will be sent to help; but if things go wrong the operation is pretty well written off and one tries to withdraw at the smallest possible cost." (35)

Clausewitz

Clausewitz could not have envisioned how accurately this passage from On War would describe the ill-fated British campaign of 1941 in Greece. As brilliantly planned and executed was Operation Compass, the Greek campaign, Operation Lustre was equally poor in its planning and execution. "The British campaign on the mainland of Greece was from start to finish a withdrawal and a disaster." (36) Why did this campaign fail? Why did Wavell risk his scarce theater resources of men and equipment on a campaign that from the outset seemed plagued by poor planning and lack of strategic direction? The answers to these questions may be traced to faulty campaign design.

Britain's entry into Greece was brought about by the threat of German and Italian forces staged in the Balkans. Greece, already fighting the Italians, initially refused the British offer of assistance. However with the mounting German threat the

Greeks agreed to accept British help in March 1941. Some have suggested that the Greek expedition was an example of Churchill's political aims overriding the military considerations of the theater commander. Britain did have a treaty with Greece and did not want to take the political risk of failing to aid an ally. However, the evidence seems to indicate that the Greek campaign was just as much a failure on the part of the military leaders (campaign design) as it was of the civilian leadership.

" . . . If responsibility for the tragic expedition to Greece is to be correctly assigned, then Wavell's name must be on the charge sheet." (37) Instead of vigorously opposing a risky campaign that would engage a large portion of the theater's scarce resources, Wavell acquiesced to the political desires of the British government. Historian Ronald Lewin claims that

. . . Wavell would have always been within his rights as a commander-in-chief in a theater of war if he had signaled to London on military grounds Lustre looked hopeless . . . (38)

Wavell did not do this and consequently British Commonwealth forces deployed to Greece between March 7 and March 31. These forces consisted of the British 1st Armored Brigade, the Australian 6th Division, the New Zealand Division and the Australian 1st Corps Headquarters. The force numbered over 31,000 men. (39) Other forces were earmarked for the campaign but never arrived. On April 6, 1941, the Germans invaded Greece with two armies including two Panzer Corps. They faced a battered Greek army without mobility or modern arms and the

disorganized Commonwealth forces of Operation Lustre. Although the mountainous terrain offered potentially good defensive positions, the Commonwealth forces had no time to prepare a defense. As Major General Sir Francis de Guingand observed from his position on the theater staff, "We were not in a position to start large scale operations in the Balkans . . . We did not have the military resources." (40) What evolved for the Commonwealth forces was a hurried retreat followed by a Dunkirk type evacuation. About 62,000 British troops had reached the Greek mainland by the time the withdrawal began and about 50,000 were evacuated. Commonwealth forces suffered over 2,000 battle casualties and lost 10,000 men as prisoners of war. (41)

Operation Lustre failed for many reasons. From the start it appears that the strategic guidance for the campaign was flawed or at the very least ill-defined. A successful military endstate was never defined, and prospects or requirements for success were never spelled out. As one author has bluntly stated: ". . . the only terms on which Lustre could be properly undertaken were as a calculated act of duty and despair, not because of even the most minimal expectation of military success." (42) A campaign conducted without a clearcut strategic goal quickly degenerates into a series of unrelated actions.

Since the aim of this campaign was ill-defined, it was extremely difficult for the planners to design appropriate ways and means. From the outset the military disadvantages were far in excess of any potential advantages.

Of the military problems I have studied during this war, I never came across one which appeared so unattractive. A planner is often apt to foresee too many difficulties but with this problem the military advantages appeared to be nil. (43)

Squandering essential men and equipment on such a dubious venture as Lustre showed a lack of realism in matching the ends and means. In this campaign the failure to match ends and means seems to be the dominant flaw in the campaign design, a flaw that historically has proved disastrous. "Reaching for ends beyond the capabilities of available ways and means is a virtual prescription for failure." (44) The campaign threatened Britain's overall strategic posture in the resource-bare theater.

. . . the result was that we had lost many lives, all our valuable equipment and jeopardized our whole position in the Middle East. (45)

Flexibility was non-existent in the campaign due primarily to the fact that there was no real campaign plan from which to develop branches and sequels. "The contrast between the meticulous preparation for "Compass" and that for "Lustre" is striking." (46) In planning for Compass, O'Connor actively took guidance from the theater commander and in conjunction with him developed a plan that as events showed allowed for tremendous flexibility. This was not the case in the Greek campaign. The operational commander General Maitland Wilson, being appointed late, merely reacted to plans in which he had no authorship.

It is only right that the commander who is to lead the troops should be the one who makes the plan. . . . On occasion circumstances make all this very difficult,



and such was the case when we decided to send a force to Greece . . . General Wilson was given command just in time to arrive with the leading units of the expedition. (47)

The end result of Operation Lustre was a failed campaign. Commonwealth forces were placed in a situation in which they could only react to the enemy actions, never really having the slightest chance to gain the initiative. Decisive victory in Greece came for the Germans who never surrendered the initiative.

Retrospectively it appears that the theater commander disregarded all of the campaign principles establish earlier in this study. The strategic aim for the campaign was never clearly identified nor was clarification demanded. The means were not suited to the ill-defined ends. The Commonwealth forces, reacting to German initiative, never had even a slight chance to orient on the enemy. Finally, in an operation where " . . . the planners were not asked to produce a paper giving their views as to the feasibility of the project," (48) flexibility was almost non-existent. The commander was tied to a course of action almost from the outset that, because of its high risk and confusing ends, never had a chance.

The evidence from studying Operations Compass and Lustre suggest that campaign principles remain the same regardless whether the theater be primary or secondary. Although likely to be constrained by resources, geographic flexibility and strategic guidance, the secondary theater commander must still design his campaigns using the principles established in Section II. The

evidence also suggests that when these principles are abandoned as in Operation Lustre, the results can be catastrophic.

#### SECTION VI. THE STRATEGIC AIM AND THE SECONDARY THEATER

While we have seen in the previous historical examples that the conduct of campaigns within secondary theaters are similar in principle to those conducted in the primary theaters, the strategic guidance for secondary theaters may have unique implications. In this section we will briefly examine the relationship of the secondary theater as a whole to the overall political-strategic aim. Recent history suggests that many secondary theater commanders either did not fully understand their strategic guidance or chose to ignore it with resulting adverse consequences.

Field Marshal Irwin Rommel is an example of a commander who went beyond the limits of the strategic guidance provided for his secondary theater. Although German Field Marshal Albert Kesselring was in fact the Axis theater commander in the Mediterranean (Commander-in-Chief South), it was Rommel as Africa Korps and later Panzerarmee commander who designed and executed most of the German campaigns in North Africa. Rommel's influence over Hitler and the German high command made him in many ways the de facto theater commander. His free hand in planning operations was no doubt frustrating to Field Marshal Kesselring, who was on many occasions forced to go along with the plans of his subordinate. After Rommel's successful operation resulting in

the capture of Tobruk (1942), Kesselring remarked that: "Hitler . . . told me not to meddle with Rommel's operational plan and to back him to the hilt." (49) Rommel's dominance in operational matters in this theater is a subject for a separate study. It is sufficient to say, however, that his influence was paramount.

Essentially Rommel's theater had a negative aim, which was the prevention of an Italian collapse in North Africa.

The German commitment of land forces to the North African theater was an emergency measure prompted by Italy's expulsion from eastern Libya . . . (50)

When the diminutive AFRICA KORPS under General Irwin Rommel was originally sent to Libya in February 1941, the sole idea was to preserve Tripoli for Mussolini after a disastrous series of Italian defeats in the Western Desert. (51)

Despite the theater's negative aim, Rommel chose a tactically and operationally offensive course of action that tended to widen and perhaps surpass the limits of the theater strategic aim. Eventually this resulted in the drawing of vital German resources away from other more important theaters. Rommel's tactical success had the effect of drawing a disproportionate amount of attention and resources into what was still a secondary theater. Even limited reinforcement of Rommel's tactical successes strained German resources and could not accomplish a positive aim that was never intended.

The Army lost in North Africa largely because Rommel's victories raised the theatre to high-priority status at a time when little or nothing could be done to reinforce the Axis forces there. Thus Rommel's victories proved . . . empty. (52)

Rommel was drawn to achieving tactical success without measuring the consequences outside his own theater. Tactical victory seemed to take on more importance than the theater strategic aim or overall German strategy.

As a strategist, Rommel was shortsighted . . . refusing to accept that political or strategic considerations might demand a course of action that seemed tactically unacceptable. (53)

Historian Martin Van Creveld has alluded to the fact that the overall German strategic decision to commit troops to North Africa was sound. What was unsound was Rommel's venture beyond what his guidance directed:

. . . Hitler's original decision to send a force to defend a limited area in North Africa was correct. Rommel's repeated defiance of his orders and attempts to advance beyond a reasonable distance from his bases, however, was mistaken and should never have been tolerated. (54)

Fundamentally, Rommel seemed to lack the perspective that his theater was secondary and that his actions had to conform to a wider political-strategic aim. This is one mistake that secondary theater commanders cannot afford to make. It is difficult to assess with any accuracy what the results would have been in North Africa had Rommel pursued a fundamentally defensive campaign. By the time of the German surrender in North Africa in May of 1943, " . . . a quarter of a million German troops had been ripped from the strength of the German Army." (55) Perhaps these troops could have been saved and used later in the war had

they not been committed to offensive tactical operations that, regardless of their success, proved meaningless.

Historian Liddell-Hart has placed the ultimate Axis defeat in North Africa in an interesting context. Referring to the Axis surrender he stated:

The most important effect was that it deprived the axis of the bulk of its battle tested troops in the Mediterranean theatre which could otherwise have been used to block the allies' coming invasion of Sicily - the first and crucial phase of their re-enty into Europe. (56)

During the Korean conflict, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, the theater commander, had similar problems in executing the strategic guidance for his theater. Although the scene of major combat operations, the Korean theater was a secondary theater. "Korea had never been more than a peripheral theater to the Joint Chiefs; their principal concern was the Soviet threat to Europe." (57) This was a situation that MacArthur was unwilling to accept. During the Korean War he regularly requested additional troop strength, losing out to the greater priority in Europe. MacArthur just could not accept that his theater was not primary.

The Truman administration and the Joint Chiefs of Staff disagreed with General MacArthur's proposal to widen the war . . . because they thought Korea and Asia were not the main theater of conflict with the Communists but a diversionary theater. They still feared an all-out Soviet attack on Western Europe . . . they feared in fact that the North Korean invasion of South Korea was a feint to draw away their attention from the vital theaters . . . (58)

As one historian noted, ". . . the Korean effort must be finite, a prospect which the General, either then or later, could not accept." (59) This failure to accept the status of his theater was tantamount to not understanding the overall political aim. Perhaps this can be understood when it is remembered that MacArthur was on the frontier of limited war, a concept which was totally alien to a man conditioned to total war and total victory.

To his intense annoyance, MacArthur found his freedom of action restrained for what he saw as political reasons, a situation that ran counter to the U.S. Army's concept of how wars should be conducted. (60)

Like Rommel, we see a theater commander at odds with the scope of his strategic guidance. In MacArthur's case the strategic guidance was somewhat complicated. His theater at first had a negative aim - to preserve the integrity of South Korea. After the Inchon landing the theater aim became positive with the destruction of the North Korean army as the goal. After the introduction of Chinese troops, the theater again switched to a negative aim. This negative aim of preserving the United Nation's forces and maintaining contact with the enemy was too much for MacArthur to accept. He requested to the JCS that ". . . no further military restrictions be imposed upon the United Nations command in Korea". (61) Ultimately he was relieved of command for his failure to follow his strategic guidance. His fundamental failure appears to be that he was incapable of accepting the limits (restrictions, constraints) of

his strategic guidance. He once said "if a nation wasn't willing to make a total military commitment, it shouldn't fight at all."

(62) Unfortunately he didn't realize that total military commitment is never possible for the secondary theater commander, especially when the theater aim is negative.

Even today it is easy to think of Korea in 1950 as a primary theater of war. However, placed in a strategic-global context its secondary nature becomes apparent. The political-strategic authorities must always weigh the advantages/disadvantages and above all the risks of any strategic course of action. Operational commanders must understand that this is essentially a political decision which must be supported by adhering to the strategic guidance which they are given. To make a tactical analogy, commanders should never become fixated on current operations at the risk of ignoring future operations.

#### SECTION VII. CONCLUSION

The fundamental conclusions that the historical experiences and analysis addressed in this monograph suggest are twofold. First, the "technical" principles of campaign design and execution remain constant. The fact that a campaign is conducted within a secondary theater as opposed to a primary theater does not significantly alter this fact. Operation Compass can trace a large measure of its success to the fact that sound campaign principles were applied. On the other hand, Operation Lustre, conducted in the same theater by the same theater commander

failed at least in part because these campaign principles were ignored. The fact that one campaign had a positive aim (conquest) and one had a negative aim (preservation) does not alter this first conclusion. There appear to be no special or distinctive principles based on the aim. The application of sound campaign principles, as suggested in Section II, while not guaranteeing victory, certainly indicate a basis for sound campaign design.

The second conclusion that emerges from this study suggests that secondary theater commanders have a unique responsibility to relate the strategic aim in their theater to the overall political-strategic aim, and to the strategic aim in the primary theater. This includes curbing what appears to be a historical tendency to expand the strategic aim. It could be argued that both Rommel and MacArthur attempted to stretch their strategic guidance from a negative aim to a positive aim. Today in an age of limited war, and limited resources, secondary theater commanders must appreciate their role in the overall political-strategic context and resist the temptation to expand their strategic guidance beyond its intended limits. This may be especially appropriate for secondary theaters having negative aims. As the historical review demonstrated, MacArthur could not accept a negative aim for his theater in place of the positive aim of totally destroying his enemy.

Theater commanders must be continuously conscious of the political context of military operations and must



realize that the total destruction of opposing theater forces may be strategically inconsistent with operational desires . . . (63)

Failure to reconcile operational and strategic goals in the secondary theater can risk drawing resources away from other more important theaters or at worst threaten the overall political aim.

In the event that the strategic guidance is unclear, the theater commander must press for clarity so that his parameters are fully defined.

The operational commanders first and greatest challenge . . . is to . . . force precision in the development of the strategic guidance under which he will operate in war. (64)

Having done this, the secondary theater faces the subsequent challenge of achieving success within the limits of his guidance.

#### SECTION VIII. IMPLICATIONS

What implications are relevant for US military operations based on the preceding conclusions? The implications are most serious in a scenario involving global war with the Soviet Union. The current Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger has laid out the challenge for theater commanders in this type of scenario:

Our long-term goal is to be able to meet the demands of a worldwide war including concurrent reinforcement of Europe, deployment to Southwest Asia and the Pacific, and support for other areas . . . given the Soviets' capability to launch simultaneous attacks in [Southwest Asia], NATO, and the Pacific, our long-range goal is to

be capable of defending all theaters simultaneously.  
(65)

Secretary Weinberger has also made it clear that he feels the Soviets possess the resources to threaten the US in multiple theaters.

. . . we must recognize that the Soviet Union has enough active forces and reserves to conduct simultaneous campaigns in more than one theater. (66)

Not only do the Soviets and their allies possess the capability to conduct multi-theater operations, but current US strategic thinking assumes that it is likely that they will do it.

. . . The central premise of the Reagan administration military strategy is that any shooting war with the Soviet Union, wherever it might start, is likely to spread quickly to other theaters of operations. (67)

The mandate of "defending all theaters simultaneously" has obvious yet profound implications for US military operations. This policy pre-supposes that certain theaters (most likely Southwest Asia and the Pacific) will become secondary theaters. The argument can also be made that these secondary theaters will have the negative aim of preserving/defending the integrity of the theater. This is logical due to the shortage of resources available to support expanded US commitments in these theaters. Former Army Chief of Staff General Edward Meyer has stated: "We are accepting tremendous risks with the size of forces that we have to do what we have pledged to do." (68) In the Southwest Asia theater (CENTCOM) for instance, proposed US intervention

forces are composed almost entirely of units already committed to the defense of Europe and Northeast Asia. (69) In a global conflict it is hard to imagine this theater commander receiving anything but the minimum essential forces necessary to conduct an economy of force operation. Only one theater will be primary, and barring any unforeseen political-strategic upheaval, that theater will be the European Theater. This means that all the other potential US theaters of war/operations realistically should be preparing themselves as secondary theaters. Assuming that competent theater commanders will apply sound campaign design principles, the major implication remaining for them is to operate successfully within their strategic guidance. This means avoiding the natural tendency to assume one's own mission, objective or aim is the most important. At the theater level these secondary theater commanders must accept and understand their subsidiary role by understanding and supporting the political-strategic aim.

The British writer, Lord Chalfont, once wrote that Rommel's imagination, initiative and competence ultimately accounted for little because "he was never able fully to accept the fact that for the German High Command his role in North Africa was largely a diversionary and subsidiary affair . . ." (70) Accepting this fact is one of the greatest challenges for the secondary theater commander.

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