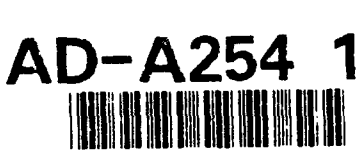

Do The Cincs Still Have a Job? Operational Command In Operations Short of War

A Monograph
by

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ABSTRACT

Do the CINCs Still Have a Job? Operational Command in Operations Short of War. By Major James A. Helis, USA, 44 pages.

The goal of this monograph is to investigate how the operatinal level of war applies to military operations short of war. The paper begins with a review of the theoretical linkages between military operations and political aims. Next, the author examines how law and joint doctrine define the role of America's designated operational commanders, the Commanders in Chief of the unified combatant commands, in combat and operations short of war. The bulk of the paper is a survey of several operations short of war from the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 through Operation Golden Pheasnt in 1988. These operations will be examined from the perspective of how military operations were developed and executed to support strategic aims.

The author concludes that the sensitivity of operations short of war and the availability of modern communications have created conditions under which the operational level of command in operations short of war is exercised by the National Command Authority and the Joint Chiefs of Staff rather than by the combatant Commanders in Chief. While this close contol over field operations has its potential pitfalls, it does serve to insure a strong linkage between strategic aims and military operations.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this monograph is to investigate how the operational level of war applies to military operations short of war. The political nature of the use of military power necessitates the exercise of an operational level of command at which political goals are translated into military objectives and operations. The thesis of this paper is that the sensitivity of operations short of war and the availability of modern communications have created conditions under which the operational level of command in operations short of war is exercised by the National Command Authority and the Joint Chiefs of Staff rather than by the combatant Commanders in Chief. This centralization of command is not necessarily a bad phenomenon. In most cases, and particularly since the implementation of the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, close scrutiny of military operations has insured a

strong politico-military linkage which has served the national interest.

This paper shall begin with a review of the theoretical linkages between military operations and political objectives as explained by a classical theoretician, Karl von Clausewitz, and a political-military analyst of the nuclear era, Thomas Schelling. I will then examine how law and joint doctrine define the role of America's designated operational commanders, the Commanders in Chief of the unified combatant commands, in general war and operations short of war. Next I will review several recent operations short of war, with emphasis on operations conducted since the implementation of the Goldwater-Nichols Act. I will not evaluate U.S. strategy in these cases but will look at how military operations were developed and executed to support strategic aims. Finally, I will attempt to analyze the available information to develop conclusions about operational command and operations short of war.

II. POLITICAL GOALS AND MILITARY OPERATIONS

The concept that political objectives and military operations should be linked is not new and is a consistent theme in the development of military theory. Clausewitz is perhaps best known for his dictum that "war is merely the continuation of policy by other means."[3] War is subordinate to politics. The soldier must never forget that the war he is waging is being conducted to further some policy aim of the government and that political considerations guide and limit the scope and nature of war.

The commander in chief of forces in the field is a statesman as well as a warrior. He must be attuned to the political aspects of war and how military operations impact on the political environment in which war is waged. Clausewitz felt the ideal situation was one in which political and military leadership could be merged in one person, as in the cases of Napoleon and Frederick the Great.[4] That condition insured that the hands that guided political and military policy were the same, which should prevent a fragmentation of effort and objectives.

If the political and military roles cannot be merged, then some feedback system must be created to insure that the commander in the field is responsive to the political authority that has chosen to go to

war and sets the political objectives for which the war is fought. War is the conduct of policy through battle rather than diplomacy.[5] That policy cannot be effective unless the official carrying it out (in war, the commander in the field) is fully aware of the political objectives his government requires him to achieve.

Clausewitz was mainly concerned with general war fought to completely defeat the enemy. In the case of limited wars fought for limited political objectives, Clausewitz observes that it is not always possible to obtain the desired political objectives through military action:

> Sometimes the political and military objective is the same--for example, the conquest of a province. In other cases the political object will not provide a suitable military objective.[6]

In such cases, military force can be used to help further the political process, to demonstrate resolve, or to gain bargaining chips for use in negotiating a political settlement. What is important is that in all cases, "from a war of extermination down to simple armed observation,"[7] the military instrument must be applied in consonance with political aims.

Classical theorists such as Clausewitz generally wrote on the use of military force to pursue political objectives through war. The Cold War and the nuclear

era produced an emphasis on the use of military force outside of war. Thomas Schelling wrote that military force now can be used to produce desired political objectives without resort to war. Clausewitz saw the primary aim of the military as destruction of the enemy. Schelling views military strategy as "the art of coercion, intimidation, and deterrence."[8]

The military is in its essence an instrument of destruction. Schelling offers that the threat of the use of the destructive power of the military can persuade an opponent to do one's will.[9] By threatening military action, a nation can offer an opponent a choice: to comply with our wishes and submit to our will, or face the prospect of punishment. If the goal is to deter certain behavior, then the threat is one of retaliation. If the aim is to compel particular behaviors, then the threat is that of punishment that will be inflicted by the use of military force. That punishment will not end until the desired behavior is produced.[10] In either case, the initiative is left to the opponent. Either he must do what is wanted (or refrain from some undesired behavior), or face the prospect of military action.

Schelling points out that the difficulty of this process is in insuring a close linkage between political goals--which are normally limited--and the

application of military force, which tends to be a blunt and often clumsy instrument. For coercion to work, it is necessary to send clear and unambiguous signals that define the linkage between political ends and military ways and means.'[11] The ideal campaign to achieve some limited political objective would begin with clearly stated strategic goals. Military operations would be conducted to send a clear signal of intent, but at the same time minimize the damage and casualties suffered by the enemy to avoid unnecessarily widening the conflict. The enemy must be made to clearly understand the link between military action and the desired political outcome and also know that military action against him will cease as soon as that outcome is achieved.'[12] For this type of approach to work, the military must be highly responsive to political authority, and military commanders must be sensitive to the political nature of the operations they are planning and executing.

The operational level of war--the planning and conduct of major operations and campaigns to accomplish strategic objectives within theaters or areas of operations'[13]--would seem to be where political goals are translated into military objectives and operations. There should be some equivalent of the operational level of war for

military operations short of war. For this paper, I will call that equivalent the operational level of command. The question I will pursue is how operational command is exercised and political objectives are translated into military operations in that murky area between daily routine peacetime operations and general war. I will begin with an examination of the legal and doctrinal roles of the American military's designated operational commanders, the warfighting Commanders-in-Chief (CINCs).

III. LAW AND DOCTRINE

For military operations to remain closely linked to political objectives, clear lines of authority from political leadership through the military chain of command must exist. Otherwise, military commanders may find themselves serving multiple masters who may or may not be providing the same political and military guidance. The failed Marine expedition to Beirut in 1983 is perhaps the best example of this phenomenon at work.[14]

The disaster that befell the Marines in 1983 gave added impetus to military reformers seeking to clarify and strengthen the chain of command from the National Command Authority (NCA) down to units operating in the

field. These efforts were reflected in the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986.

Goldwater-Nichols was a watershed in military reform. Among its critical components was a strengthening of the authority of the Commanders-in-Chief (CINCs) of the unified combatant commands. These regional four-star commanders received operational command over all forces operating in their assigned theaters of operation. Under Goldwater-Nichols, all forces in a theater answer to the CINC, and the CINCs answer directly to the National Command Authority. The chain of command is now clear: from the NCA to the CINCs to the forces in the field. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) may be used by the Secretary of Defense as a conduit for orders going to the CINCs, but command authority is held by the NCA and the CINCs.

One intent of the Congress in enacting Goldwater-Nichols was to give the CINCs--the commanders in the field--the authority to carry out their assigned duties and missions.[15] Another goal was to clarify and strengthen the chain of command so as to limit improper micromanagement of military operations.[16] If the chain of command was clearly established and the combatant commanders were directly responsive and responsible to political authority, then there would

be less need for political authorities in Washington to interfere with those aspects of military operations that are best left to the commanders in the field. The strengthened and clarified chain of command should insure a strong linkage between political goals and military operations.

While Goldwater-Nichols clearly established the CINCs' position in the chain of command, it did not spell out the details of the roles of and relationships between the CINCs and the NCA and the JCS in the planning and execution of military operations. It fell on the writers of joint doctrine to try to explain the CINCs' role in more detail.

Throughout joint doctrine, the CINCs are described as the principle planners and executors of military operations. The NCA, through the JCS, provides strategic guidance. The CINCs develop plans in accordance with this guidance. The National Military Strategy reinforces and supports joint doctrine by explicitly naming the CINCs as the focus of planning for all military operations:

> Assumptions, concepts of operation, and specific forces to be employed are determined by the theater CINCs and approved by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff in close coordination with the Services and defense agencies.[17]

The apparently broad authority of the CINCs is carefully caveated for contingency operations. Joint doctrine specifies that the CINCs are responsible for developing military plans for operations to be conducted in their respective theaters. But contingency operations are "usually managed at the highest levels of government."[18] This high-level control has direct impact on the planning and execution of operations and the role and authority of the CINCs.

Contingency operations are closely related to on-going political actions. Shows of force, strikes, and raids are conducted primarily for political purposes.[19] The scope of this type of operation will be limited to achieving specific political goals. Commanders should expect to operate under NCA- or JCS-imposed restrictions, particularly in the rules of engagement (ROE), that are designed to tie military operations to political objectives and limit political risks.[20] Command and control relationships may be modified to improve efficiency or raise the probability of mission accomplishment.[21] In short, centralization is stressed as a way to insure military operations achieve desired strategic aims. While the authority of the CINC is never directly questioned in joint doctrine, there is a distinct implication that

for operations short of general war military commanders at all levels, including the CINCs, should expect to operate under restraints that are imposed for political reasons.

The nuances surrounding joint doctrine for contingency operations raise the question as to what control the NCA and JCS exercise over military operations. Every operation is politically sensitive; military operations, after all, are conducted to achieve political objectives. And for the United States, the use of military force outside of daily operations is always a matter of public concern. Given political realities in the United States, one might expect all military operations to be subject to close control and scrutiny from Washington. So, do the CINCs in fact exercise command at the operational level, where political objectives are translated into military operations? Or do the CINCs execute military operations that are designed "at the highest levels" because of the political sensitivity of the use of military force? I will now turn to some recent military operations to examine the roles of the CINCs, the JCS, and the NCA in operations short of general war.

IV. HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

In recent operations short of general war, American commanders in the field have operated within narrow political restrictions and under a degree of supervision that the theater commanders of World War II did not experience. A review of operations conducted from the early 1960s through the late 1980s reveals that decision-making authority is centralized at the highest levels of government and decisions that were traditionally the prerogative of commanders in the field are now made at the strategic level.

The Cuban missile crisis is the first clear case in which operational and tactical decisions were controlled from Washington. The President and Secretary of Defense insisted they be kept appraised at all times of actions taken by commanders in the naval force maintaining the quarantine of Cuba. They could make this demand because

> Advances in the technology of communications made it possible for political leaders in the basement of the White House to talk directly with commanders of destroyers stationed along the quarantine line.[22]

When Soviet ships approached U.S. vessels, the President and Secretary of Defense received real-time reports from the fleet and issued orders directly to commanders at the scene.[23] The President personally

selected the first ship the Navy would stop and board. Not only did the President control the quarantine operation; he "supervised everything, from the contents of leaflets to be dropped over Cuba to the assembling of ships for the invasion."[24] In effect, during the crisis, all decisions made by commanders in the field were subject to immediate questioning, modification, or veto from the National Command Authority.

Many senior officers grated under what they viewed as usurpation of command prerogatives and "circumvention of the chain of command."[25] The President and Secretary of Defense felt it was essential that they maintain personal control over a very sensitive and risky operation. A lesson carried out of the crisis by civilian policy-makers was that military leaders are often out of touch with political considerations and thus require close control and direction.[26] In fact, after a U-2 reconnaissance flight was shot down over Cuba, the President decided not to implement contingency plans to attack air defense sites that fired on American aircraft. The President's decision not to retaliate barely reached the Pentagon in time to stop a strike that the JCS ordered in accordance with the President's earlier guidance. That incident highlighted the necessity of

maintaining close supervision of the military to prevent knee-jerk implementation of pre-planned responses from overriding changes in Presidential policy.[27]

America's intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965 was also marked by close National Command Authority management of military operations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the regional commander, CINC Atlantic Command, were excluded from much of the planning and execution of Operation Power Pack.[28] The Dominican operation was rife with confusion in the chain of command, conflicting and contradictory orders, and the concentration of decision-making authority in Washington. The ambiguities of Dominican politics and American strategic objectives further clouded the situation. Some commanders on the ground came to understand the complexity of the situation and the requirement for close linkage between strategic, operational, and tactical decision-makers. However, the issue of the appropriate degree of centralized control over military operations was not resolved.[29] The conflict between Washington and commanders in the field over control of tactical operations continued through the Vietnam War.[30]

The 1980s saw a continuation of the trend towards centralized planning and execution of military

operations short of general war. The Marine deployment to Lebanon in 1982-1984 was a case of field commanders receiving too much guidance, all of it intended to help further U.S. political objectives. The chain of command did not work well in Lebanon; CINC European Command was simply one of many authorities to whom the Marines perceived they answered, either directly or indirectly.[31] Unfortunately, no one assumed the operational level role of assigning military objectives to the Marines that would further U.S. political interests. No one in the government really assigned the Marines a meaningful military mission. Instead of being responsive to one clear chain of command, the Marine force found itself managed by a multiplicity of sources and at the operational level commanded by no one. This situation predictably produced disastrous military and political results.

In the aftermath of the October 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, it became clear that command procedures needed to be improved. Goldwater-Nichols was designed in part to prevent a repeat of Lebanon and insure that commanders in the field were protected from micromanagement and direction from too many different sources.

The first major military operation conducted under the provisions of Goldwater-Nichols was Earnest Will. From 1987 through 1988, Central Command (CENTCOM) conducted convoy escort operations in the Persian Gulf to protect friendly and later neutral shipping. Earnest Will was an almost flawless military operation. At the same time, Earnest Will demonstrated that the National Command Authority and the JCS could and would provide very specific guidance to commanders in the field, as well as intervene in operations to insure that national political objectives are met.

Earnest Will began when Kuwait was allowed to designate some of its oil tankers as American-flagged vessels. CENTCOM then increased its standing naval presence in the Persian Gulf so as to be able to escort these vessels through an area of international waters that had become a war zone.[32] While the U.S was ostensibly protecting the tankers from any nation that would attack them, the threat towards which U.S. efforts were directed was Iran.

The U.S. sought to deter the Iranians from further attacks on Gulf shipping. The Iranians found attacks on oil tankers an effective political and economic weapon in the Iran-Iraq war. The U.S. sought to demonstrate its determination to protect the free flow

of oil from the Gulf to the rest of the world. At the same time, the U.S. hoped its resolve would encourage the Iranians to abandon the war and enter into peace talks with Iraq. Finally, the U.S. hoped to limit Soviet expansion in the Gulf by denying the Soviets the opportunity to expand its military presence in the region under the guise of providing protection to Gulf shipping.

Naval forces operating in the Gulf were given strict ROE that were designed to insure that the U.S presence did not provoke an all out war with Iran, while at the same time permitting commanders on the scene to protect their forces from attack. The ROE allowed commanders to take defensive actions when U.S. forces or U.S.-escorted ships were attacked, but prevented them from subsequently taking retaliatory actions in response to Iranian attacks. The importance of strict adherence to the ROE was highlighted when the CJCS went to the Gulf and personally briefed naval aviators on the ROE and what actions they could and could not take during an attack on U.S.-flagged vessels.[33]

U.S. policy in the Gulf was essentially one of deterrence. While the U.S. would not initiate military action, any attack by Iran would be met with a swift response from the U.S. For deterrence to be

effective, it has to be credible. If the Iranians did launch an attack to test the U.S., a timely American response was absolutely necessary. However, U.S. policy was that any response would be "measured"--that is, appropriate in terms of the Iranian action. The U.S would not respond with overwhelming force, but would play a game of tit-for-tat. To insure that military force was used in a measured fashion, retaliatory operations in the Gulf would be directed from Washington. The detailed tactical plans developed by CENTCOM and the commanders in the Gulf would all be approved in advance by the NCA. All combat operations would be closely scrutinized and supervised from Washington.

The first public indicators that Earnest Will would be controlled from Washington emerged in August and September 1987 when CJCS made a number of decisions regarding organization of the force in the Gulf. First, CJCS revised the boundary between CENTCOM and Pacific Command (PACOM) to give CENTCOM control over naval forces supporting Earnest Will from the North Arabian Sea. All forces operating in or supporting escort operations came under the command of CINCENT. This decision made sense from the perspective of unity of command and was appropriate under Goldwater-Nichols. The boundary shift also made

it easier for the NCA to control actions in the Gulf, since only one CINC now commanded forces in the operation.

Next, CJCS ordered a Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU) to be moved into the Gulf area.[34] Normally, positioning of forces is left to the discretion of the CINC. In this instance, the deployment of the MAU sent the signal that the U.S. was prepared to use ground troops--even though in a limited capacity. The composition of U.S. forces and their deployments were political as well as military issues and therefore became subject to control from Washington.

The Chairman's next critical decision was initially kept in secret. He ordered Army special operations forces (SOF) helicopters deployed aboard Navy ships in the Gulf. Again, the JCS was becoming involved in the details of force composition. The JCS was establishing a range of capabilities for future operations in the Gulf. Neither the CINC nor the commander in the Gulf had felt a need for the MAU in the Gulf or the SOF helicopters, and there were some mild protests over both decisions. The JCS apparently believed these additional forces would be useful in coming operations.[35]

The first U.S. retaliatory actions came in September and October of 1987 in response to two

incidents. Mines had been a problem for the Navy from the beginning of Earnest Will, but there was no direct evidence available linking Iran to the mining. In an effort to gain political ammunition to use against Iran, the CJCS flew to the Gulf and ordered the commander of the naval task force to identify and capture an Iranian vessel laying mines in the Gulf. The Chairman directed that the Army helicopters he earlier dispatched to the Gulf be used to locate and identify a minelayer, and then disable it with rocket and machine gun fire. The Chairman instructed the Army pilots to shoot out the bridge and engine room area to damage the ship, but not destroy it.[36]

One night soon after the CJCS issued his orders, the Army aviators discovered a vessel, the *Iran Ajr*, laying mines in the Gulf. Acting under special ROE authorized for this operation, the naval task force commander ordered the helicopters to attack the *Iran Ajr* with rocket fire. After the Iranian vessel was disabled, a controversy emerged over whether Navy SEALs should board and seize the *Iran Ajr* immediately, or wait several hours until daylight. The President personally decided that the boarding would take place in daylight, as it would be less risky in terms of U.S. casualties.[37] The first time U.S. forces engaged in combat in the Gulf, the CJCS provided the commander

on the scene with very specific instructions, and the President made at least one tactical decision.

Several weeks later, the NCA denied the request of an on-scene naval commander to respond to requests for assistance from neutral shipping under Iranian attack.[38] Two days later, on 16 October, an Iranian Silkworm missile struck the U.S.-flagged tanker *Sea Isle City*. The U.S. prepared for a retaliation.

While the response to the Iranian attack would be a relatively small military operation, all details to include the time of the action, targets, and methods of engagement of specific targets had to receive the personal approval of the President. The President personally selected the targets. From among several options, he chose two Iranian gas and oil platforms used as military command and control centers. Attacks on those facilities would result in the fewest Iranian casualties, but their destruction would be a clear signal of U.S. resolve. The President also directed that the Iranian platform crews be clearly warned of the attack and allowed to leave the area before any firing began.[39]

The attacks on the gas and oil platforms were conducted on 19 October, three days after *Sea Isle City* was attacked. The Iranians were warned by the Navy, and no firing began until all the Iranians were

clear of the targets. The platforms were then destroyed by naval gunfire. The U.S. conducted a very small-scale tactical naval action, but it was done for specific strategic purposes--to send a signal to Iran. Accordingly, every aspect of the operation was scrutinized and monitored in Washington.

CENTCOM's first engagements in the Gulf were highly successful, both militarily and politically. All military objectives were met, and the Iranians moderated their military activities in the Gulf. However, in the spring of 1988 the Iranians resumed mining of the Gulf. In April, a U.S. naval vessel, the *Samuel Roberts*, was crippled by a mine. Once again, the U.S. prepared an appropriate, measured response that was to be named Operation Praying Mantis.

As in the 1987 actions, all aspects of Praying Mantis were approved by the President.[40] The ROE were established to limit Iranian as well as U.S. casualties. The CJCS would pull a 26-hour shift in the Pentagon to monitor and control the operation.[41] Two more Iranian gas and oil platforms in the Gulf that served as command and control centers were to be destroyed, but again not until the Iranians on board the platforms were warned and given sufficient time to evacuate.[42] The Navy was also to seek out and sink

one Iranian frigate.[42] The Iranians responded to the U.S. attacks on the gas platforms by dispatching two frigates and some smaller vessels to the area. Naval aviation and ship-to-ship missiles were used to engage the Iranians, and one frigate and one patrol boat were sunk. However, the Secretary of Defense and the CJCS, monitoring the action from the Pentagon, ordered the cessation of attacks on the second Iranian frigate after it was struck by one bomb and damaged. Later, the Secretary said he ordered the termination of the attack because the appropriate message had already been sent and the second frigate did not pose an immediate threat to U.S. forces.

Just hours after Praying Mantis ended, the Iranians retaliated by attacking a U.S.-owned tug with an American crew aboard, the *Willi Tide*. Navy attack aircraft were kept orbiting the sight of the attacks while the situation was relayed in turn to CENTCOM, the Pentagon, the President's National Security Adviser, and the President himself to gain his personal approval to attack the Iranian vessels firing on the *Willi Tide*. The President approved, and the Iranians lost another patrol boat to the U.S. Navy. Fortunately no one aboard the *Willi Tide* was injured in the attack. The entire relay process from the pilots to the President and back again only took a few

minutes.[44] The *Willi Tide* incident is perhaps the starkest example of how for the duration of U.S. escort operations in the Persian Gulf, decisions that in a general war would probably have been left to the commander on the scene were made by the JCS and the National Command Authority.

A second major operation conducted under Goldwater-Nichols that involved the use of military force short of war was Golden Pheasant, the deployment of a U.S Army task force to Honduras in March 1988. The operation was a show of force intended to deter further Nicaraguan military incursions into Honduras. Unlike Earnest Will, Golden Pheasant did not involve combat. Golden Pheasant was another selective use of military force to accomplish specific political objectives at minimal cost to the U.S.

In March 1988, Nicaraguan forces crossed the border into Honduras in an effort to destroy *contra* rebel base camps. Over a period of several years, the Nicaraguans had pursued the *contras* into Honduras and conducted raids to drive the rebels from their base areas along the border. The U.S had responded to these incursions by diplomatic and public political protest and later by providing helicopters to airlift Honduran troops into the areas of conflict. Through the mid-1980's the U.S. conducted exercises in Central

American to demonstrate support for emerging democracies and to show displeasure over Nicaragua's military build-up and support for insurgents in El Salvador. By 1988, political efforts to stabilize the region appeared to near fruition. Nicaraguan incursions into Honduras in March called into question Managua's sincerity. The situation also created the opportunity for the U.S to demonstrate its willingness to use force to protect friendly governments in the region.

Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) closely followed Nicaraguan military activities and planned for the contingency of deploying U.S. forces to the region in the event of Nicaraguan aggression.[45] However, when the March incursions took place, the focus of the planning effort shifted from SOUTHCOM to the U.S. and Honduras. The SOUTHCOM staff was kept out of much of the planning process.[46] The government of Honduras initially requested the U.S. provide intelligence on Nicaraguan military activities, surveillance along the border, targetting assistance for air strikes into Nicaragua, and troops for ground combat if that became necessary. The U.S Ambassador to Honduras suggested a symbolic training exercise in Honduras involving U.S. ground forces as a show of support. The Hondurans agreed and formally requested the deployment of U.S.

troops.[47] Senior planners within the Pentagon determined that the appropriate force would be an Army brigade, and the President approved the plan.

From the outset, Golden Pheasant was marked by confusion and a lack of coordination among the services and units involved.[48] Army forces were alerted for possible deployment several hours before the President made his decision, while the Air Force waited for a formal Presidential announcement of the operation to begin their alert procedures. The Army had planned for the first battalions to airdrop and the follow-on units to airland in Honduras. Because the Air Force delayed its alert and getting troops on the ground as rapidly as possible was a strategic objective, the airland forces moved first followed a day later by the airdrop.[49] SOUTHCOM's JTF Bravo in Honduras was not notified of the deployments in a timely manner, which hindered coordination between forces already in Honduras and those about to deploy.[50]

The role of CINCSOUTH in Golden Pheasant was never clearly defined. Although the operation took place in SOUTHCOM's area of responsibility, Forces Command (FORSCOM) in the U.S. determined the forces to be deployed, the sequencing of those forces, and allowed the 82d Airborne and 7th Light Infantry Divisions to

independently determine what equipment and supplies (including ammunition) their battalions would take to Honduras.[51] Even after the brigade arrived in Honduras, it still submitted reports to FORSCOM, which in turn passed them on to the JCS.[52] The brigade also reported to SOUTHCOM, although the brigade's command relationship with SOUTHCOM was "ill-defined."[53]

There were also problems as the the exact mission of the brigade. The purpose of the deployment was to conduct a show of force. From the perspectives of both the HCA and JCS, the rapid deployment of a brigade accomplished that mission. The political objectives of the operation were met as soon as television pictures of U.S. troops arriving in Honduras were beamed around the world. What those units would do in Honduras was another matter to which the JCS and SOUTHCOM seemed to pay little attention initially. In fact, there was no plan for what the units were supposed to do once they arrived in Honduras. When the commanders on the ground recognized that no detailed instructions were forthcoming, they went about conducting a series of exercises with Honduran forces to acclimatize U.S. troops, familiarize them with the terrain, and practice working with Honduran forces.[54] All of these

measures helped improve the readiness of U.S. forces to transition to combat if that became necessary.

Golden Pheasant achieved its desired political objectives. The Nicaraguans, in fact, withdrew from Honduras before U.S. troops even arrived in country. The U.S. clearly demonstrated its resolve and capability to intervene to defend Honduras in the face of Nicaraguan aggression. Unlike Earnest Will, the commanders on the ground had fairly broad latitude as to what tactical actions they could take. The low likelihood of combat and the fact that political objectives were met early in the operation contributed to the lack of interest on the part of the NCA. However, JCS did keep close tabs on the situation through both FORSCOM and SOUTHCOM and was in a position to intervene in the activities of the Army brigade if that became desirable. Interestingly, even when JCS and NCA backed off from managing operations, SOUTHCOM was not given clear control over the brigade, which raises the question of JCS' view of the authority and role of the theater CINC in a sensitive contingency operation. For Golden Pheasant, operational command was exercised in Washington and at FORSCOM headquarters.

V. ANALYSIS

Several trends emerge from an analysis of these operations short of general war. Those trends are tight control by the National Command Authority; limitations on the role and authority of the CINCs; and a blurring of the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. It should also be noted that in most instances, the use of military force in a limited role almost always achieved the desired political objectives (Beirut being the notable exception), which should be the definition of a successful military operation.

Tight control by NCA over military operations has become possible because of the communications revolution. From the Cuban missile crisis on, the NCA has had the capability to intervene in on-going tactical actions. Praying Mantis and the *Willi Tide* incident highlight how quickly and to what level of detail leaders in Washington can reach into military actions. Since it is now possible for the NCA and JCS to control tactical operations, they will exercise that option when they deem it desirable or necessary.

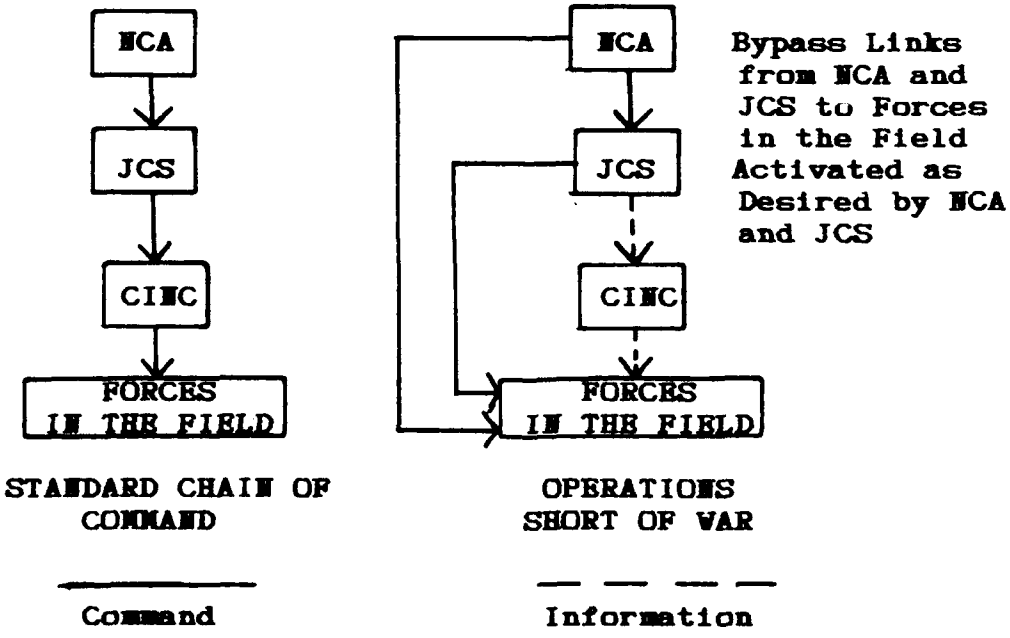
There are several valid reasons why Washington would choose to exercise tight control over military operations. In situations in which "the destruction of the enemy is not necessarily the required military

condition,"[55] it is not surprising that political authorities want to closely monitor and control the actions of the military. Military force is a blunt instrument, and the military trains to wield that instrument in conditions of general war. When operations are conducted for limited and specific political aims, the use of military force must be carefully controlled and managed. It should not come as a surprise to the military that political leaders will intervene to insure military forces remain strictly within designated operational boundaries.

Another factor that explains increased NCA control is the high visibility of military operations. Any time U.S. forces are engaged in activities other than daily routine operations, those activities come under close and immediate scrutiny from the Congress, the media, and the public. When the NCA and JCS expect to have to explain the details of an operation, especially if there is a failure, it is natural for the President, the Secretary of Defense, and their principle military adviser, the CJCS, to become involved with the details of that operation.[56] Also, if the U.S. has turned from purely diplomatic solutions to military options, again it is natural for the NCA to focus on military operations.[57] Any military operation is a political event; we should

fully expect political leaders who are accountable to participate.

The capability and willingness of the NCA to become more involved in military operations has resulted in limitations on the roles and authority of the CINCs. In fact, it could be argued that in some circumstances the CINCs have less authority than either the NCA or tactical commanders. When the NCA circumvents the chain of command, the level that is bypassed or relegated to the role of a communications relay is that of the CINC. The CINCs do exercise considerable influence in many areas. In operations short of war, particularly when combat is imminent or underway, the chain of command is often modified such that command runs from the NCA or the JCS directly to the field commander.



The CINCs may be bypassed to save time and eliminate layers of command that will impose their interpretations on reports from the field. Communications makes it possible for the NCA to receive information directly from the source, and provide rapid feedback to the commander on the scene. The sensitivity of a particular situation may also lead the NCA to desire direct and immediate communication with the man on the spot to insure orders are not delayed or misinterpreted by various levels of the chain of command.

The increased involvement of the NCA in operational and tactical decisions raises issues that may impact adversely on mission accomplishment. One of direct concern to military commanders is the loss of initiative. Commanders operating under the close scrutiny of the President and his senior advisers may feel so constrained that they will automatically call higher headquarters for guidance.[58] This may be especially true when the authority and roles of military commanders at different levels are vague, ill-defined, or misunderstood. During Earnest Will, the ROE were modified several times and were a subject of debate in Washington throughout the operation. As the response authorized U.S. commanders in particular circumstances changes, what yesterday was a correct

decision may today cause a political disaster. With the role of U.S. forces changing or subject to change at all times, commanders may feel compelled to turn to political authorities for guidance. Such a condition may lead to commanders becoming passive and unresponsive to changing conditions in the field and overreliant on Washington to solve their immediate tactical problems.

A problem associated with the loss of initiative by field commanders is the loss of perspective at higher levels. It is easy to fall into the trap of closely following a subordinate's actions to insure he stays within command guidance and always makes the "correct" decision when he may have to demonstrate some initiative. The combination of passive on-scene commanders and operational and strategic leaders focused primarily on tactical matters can result in no one dealing with the strategic goals that prompted military action in the first place. The Beirut experience is a tragic example of this interaction.

The easy answer is for everyone to stay focused at their particular level. Unfortunately, it is impossible to clearly define at what point the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of command begin and end. There is now a blending of all three levels, as tactical actions are undertaken for

strategic purposes. Military commanders at all levels must keep in mind the strategic intent and be prepared to act within in it when guidance is vague or contradictory. They must remain involved in decision-making and remember that political circumstances do not relieve a commander of responsibility for the actions of his force.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In military operations short of general war, the operational level of command is often exercised by the National Command Authority and the JCS. This is true for a number of reasons. First, military operations short of war are politically sensitive and are undertaken in fluid situations. As the strategic setting changes, political goals may also change. Merging the operational level of command and strategy helps insure that military operations are linked to political goals and reduces the level of political risk.

Second, in operations short of war, events that viewed in isolation look just like "individual tactical actions in a conventional war"[52] in fact may have strategic and operational significance. The seizure of the *Iran Ajr* was a minor tactical operation undertaken to achieve a very specific strategic goal--namely, to provide the international community

irrefutable evidence of Iran's minelaying operations in the Persian Gulf. It is natural that in pursuit of such a limited and specific strategic objective that the operation designed to achieve it should be planned at the strategic level.

Senior military leaders and operational and tactical planners must understand that all operations are conducted within a political framework. Operations short of war are more political in nature and thus will be significantly influenced by political considerations. In these cases, commanders must learn to operate successfully without the degree of freedom and initiative they would like.

ROE are critical to defining the limits within which field commanders can work.

> Rules of engagement provide the operational envelope within which commanders can and must operate. [ROE can] severely constrain freedom of action.[60]

It is up to military commanders to understand the strategic and operational setting and the national objectives, and then to operate within the ROE to achieve those objectives. I conclude that as long as the ROE do not deny the commander the right to protect his force, the use of originality and patience will yield ways military means can be used to achieve or at least further strategic ends.

NCA and JCS involvement has sometimes kept operational and tactical commanders on a short leash. But, at least since the implementation of Goldwater-Nichols, operational constraints have not prevented the military from performing well and making a positive contribution to U.S. foreign policy.

Although concerns about political influence over military operations is a great contemporary concern, the management of military operations by political authorities is not a twentieth-century American phenomenon. Clausewitz observed:

> When people talk, as they often do, about harmful political influence on the management of war, they are not saying what they really mean. Their quarrel should be with the policy itself . . . If the policy is right--that is, successful--any intentional effect it has on the conduct of the war can only be to the good.[61]

What was true for Clausewitz is still true today. Military operations are always undertaken for political purposes. For operations short of war, with their heightened political sensitivity, it is natural that the operational and sometimes tactical levels of command blend with strategy and that the National Command Authority and the Joint Chiefs of Staff exploit the capabilities of modern communications technology to exercise operational command.

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