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**AIR EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMAND**

**STRATEGY IN OPERATION JUST CAUSE: A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS**

by

**Lyle M. Koenig**  
**Lieutenant Colonel, USAF**

**A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY**

**IN**

**FULFILLMENT OF THE CURRICULUM**

**REQUIREMENT**

**Advisor: Colonel James E. Roper**

**MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA**

**March 1994**

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## ABSTRACT

**TITLE:** Strategy in Operation Just Cause: A Framework for Analysis

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A complex series of events forced the US senior leadership into the realization that the invasion of Panama and removal of General Manuel Antonio Noreiga from power was imperative to protect US national interests. After careful consideration of US objectives and available resources, very specific plans and concepts were developed.

The campaign plan, although clearly articulated and precise, was influenced by many outside factors. Leadership, doctrine, strategy, technology, political-military integration, air power and joint warfighting all played a critical role in shaping these courses of action for Operation Just Cause, providing an excellent framework for analysis.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel Lyle Koenig was first associated with the special operations community in 1984 beginning with an assignment to Hurlburt Field, Florida, flying the MH-53 Pave Low helicopter. Following his tour with the 20th Special Operations Squadron, he was assigned to Air Force Special Operations Command(AFSOC) Headquarters as well as the Special Operations Division, Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations, Headquarters Air Force, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

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## **Strategy in Operation Just Cause: A Framework for Analysis**

Operation Urgent Fury, the American invasion of Grenada in October 1983, demonstrated the need for the United States military to effectively operate in the Low Intensity Conflict environment. The lessons learned from the fog and friction of Operation Urgent Fury were critical and on 17 December 1989 these were shown to have been overcome when U.S. forces executed Operation Just Cause in the Republic of Panama.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the strategy in Operation Just Cause and analyze specific influences on the development of those plans and concepts. In order to completely evaluate the strategy, three main areas will be addressed. First, a short background is necessary to fully understand the political, military, economic and social situation that faced our leaders in the months prior to Operation Just Cause. Secondly, the actual plans and concepts that were developed once our objectives, resources and alternatives were clearly identified, will be addressed using the Synder Model. Finally, leadership, doctrine, strategy, technology, political-military integration, air power and joint warfighting, highlighting the influence they played in shaping the courses of action, will be analyzed. In order to appreciate the challenges facing US senior leaders in the development of strategy for the invasion of Panama, a brief background must be discussed.

### **Background**

A complex series of events forced the US senior leadership into the realization that the invasion of Panama and removal of General Manuel Antonio Noriega from power was the only avenue

remaining to ensure US national interests were protected. The focus of US interests in Panama was and still is the Panama Canal.(1:16) However, President Bush had political reason for the invasion. Manuel Noriega had become more powerful than the US had anticipated and his involvement in international drug trafficking was an embarrassment. The 1987 Reagan administration drug indictment charges did little more than to harden Noriega's attitude and solidify his power within the country. Economic sanctions, producing losses in the agricultural sector alone of \$100 million, soon followed with the same results.(1:46) The Panamanian people now looked toward the White House as the villains.

Increasing US diplomatic and economic pressures prompted Noriega to step up harassment of American diplomats and military personnel. By February, 1989, US Southern Command(USSOUTHCOM) documented more than 55 cases of harassment which was a significant escalation of a coordinated campaign to selectively limit and control the movement of US forces in violation of the Canal treaty.(1:46) The failed coup attempt in October, 1989 resulted in U.S. forces tightening security at the bases and a serious escalation of U.S. economic sanctions banning all Panamanian-flagged ships from entering U.S. ports. The final incident which offered the US a 'smoking gun' and legitimate reason for severe action was the arrest, detention and beating of a Navy officer and his wife after they witnessed Panamanian Defense Forces(PDF) open fire on four American officers in their vehicle at a PDF roadblock.(1:49) Contingency plans and months of rehearsal had already been accomplished in preparation for the invasion of Panama. Once the presidential execute order was given, it merely required alerting units and launching aircraft. Operation Just



Cause was underway.

## **Objectives**

The Synder Model is an excellent tool that can be used in analyzing the strategy developed for the invasion of Panama. As explained by Dr. William P. Synder, strategy embraces three concepts: objectives, resources, and a plan for tying the two together(see figure 1). Dr Synder further develops this relationship in a military context and defines military strategy as a broad based concept which includes a military objective and a plan for achieving that objective by means of military resources.(13:61) This definition is very general and the word strategy can be used to describe a variety of relationships involving an objective and resources. The specific plans and concepts employed in Operation Just Cause were developed after careful consideration of U.S. objectives and resources. United States interests in Panama were clear and these interests were threatened. As Richard L. Millett, Director of Latin American Studies, Southern University of Illinois, pointed out during testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, "the violent struggles in Central America during the past eight years have raised questions about the security of the canal, the ability of Panama to maintain internal order and stability and the danger of communist subversion in that nation."(8:89)

The Reagan administration's policy of opposing Marxist movements in Central America was still very much alive. Noriega's close ties with Cuba threatened democracy in the entire region. Also, the U.S. remained very concerned about continuing control and ensuring access to the Panama Canal. Without it, our foothold in Panama offering trade routes and military sea lines of

communication(SLOCs), would be severely jeopardized. Finally, our efforts to combat drug trade in Central America would be much more effective without General Noriega's contributions. As Lieutenant General Edward Flanagan points out in his book Battle for Panama, Noriega's conduct included, "...links to Colombian drug lords, secret ties to Castro, gun-running for terrorists and insurgents in Latin America, money laundering for the drug cartels, and use of Panamanian airports as transfer points for shipments of drugs to the United States."(2:7) Therefore, Operation Just Cause was definitely a political, as well as a moral event. Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering summed up the situation in Panama by saying, "the root cause of the crisis in Panama has been the struggle between Noriega and his thugs and the people of Panama."(3:5) American diplomatic efforts to remove General Noriega and his regime were unsuccessful. As Lieutenant General Flanagan again highlights, "Noriega's imperious conduct in Panama and his blatant, amateurish 'nose-thumbing' at the United States had escalated U.S.-Panamanian relations to the 'critical mass' stage. Negotiations, third-party emissaries, liaison visits from White House staffers, and empty public bantering were no longer viable courses of action for the president."(2:46) The assault on the Navy officer and his wife invited military intervention.

The operation had four political objectives outlined by the President and the Secretary of Defense: protect U.S. citizens; support the democratic institutions in Panama; ensure the safe operation of the Panama Canal; and apprehend General Noriega, bring him to justice and destroy the power of the PDF.(3:12) In order to be effective, however, it was imperative that these political objectives be clearly translated into attainable, realistic military goals. As Carl von Clausewitz articulates, "the degree of

force that must be used against the enemy depends on the scale of political demands."(10:81) After careful evaluation, these military objectives were developed to achieve the political goals: destroy the military capability of the PDF; seize the critical canal facilities for protection of the canal; and seize General Noriega and release U.S. prisoners.(3:13)

Additionally, in an effort to clearly establish a link between the national goal of supporting democratic Panamanian institutions and military action, General Thurman brought in the three victorious opposition candidates from the 7 May elections nullified by Noreiga and orchestrated a secret swearing-in ceremony. As soon as the invasion began, videotapes of the ceremony were shown and the newly US-recognized democratic government of Endara, Calderon and Ford were presented to the people of Panama.(30,164)

A quick resource analysis of both countries clearly shows that U.S. political and military objectives were well within reach.

## **Resources**

As the Synder Model describes, after political and military objectives are clearly defined an evaluation of resources available to both sides must be accomplished before courses of action can be developed.(13:61) As previously discussed, the U.S. had decided that diplomatic resources were exhausted. Direct negotiation, international pressure and economic sanctions failed, leaving only military resources as viable alternatives. The entire spectrum of U.S. warfighting capability was available to national and military decision makers. In effect, the U.S. had unlimited resources available to fight a limited conflict. However, very specific circumstances dictated a different approach.

General Noriega had under his command a military organization

of about 12,000 soldiers, sailors and airmen. The PDF consisted of three infantry battalions, eight infantry companies, a cavalry squadron, an engineer company, a naval infantry detachment of about 550 personnel and various other specialized units.(12:10) These forces were spread throughout the country and no clear front, rear or lines of communication were established. As one scholar described the status of the PDF, "They were constructed of the local populace and could form rapidly and then melt away just as rapidly."(3:17) This required different operational and tactical approaches to achieve the military objectives. Destructive conventional weapons were useless in the effort to oust this third world dictator without inflicting such severe casualties and infrastructure damage that U.S. goals for post war recovery would be impossible. As Dr. Martin van Creveld, author of The Transformation of War, suggests, "The shift from conventional war to low-intensity conflict will cause many of today's weapons systems, including specifically those that are most powerful and most advanced, to be assigned to the scrap heap!"(9:205) Unconventional warfare conducted by highly tailored, specifically trained and surgically employed forces was the only answer. Therefore, after careful consideration, these units were tasked to participate in Operation Just Cause: 7th Infantry Division (Light), one parachute brigade of the 82d Airborne Division, a mechanized battalion from the 5th Mech Division, a battalion-sized task force of Marines, three battalions of the 75th Ranger Regiment, task forces of Sea-Air-Land(SEALs) and Special Forces from Naval Special Warfare Group 2 and the Army's 7th Special Forces Group and the in-place 193d Light Infantry Brigade. Additionally, air support came from the 830th Air Division, the 24th Composite Wing at Howard Air Force Base, and the 1st Special Operations Wing from Hurlburt

Field, Florida. In all, the assault force numbered over 27,000 airmen, soldiers, sailors and marines.(2:43)

Because Operation Just Cause required forces with specific capability, technology and methods of employment, both conventional and unconventional forces had to be successfully integrated in the courses of action(COA). A surgical operation eliminating Noriega would expose American citizens and the canal to PDF retaliation. Only a massive operation to simultaneously eliminate Noriega and disable the PDF would be successful. The employment of overwhelming conventional and unconventional combat firepower would remove Noriega, avoid a protracted military engagement and accomplish U.S. political and military objectives with minimum loss of life.(5:28) General Maxwell Thurman, Commander-in-Chief USSOUTHCOM (CINCSOUTH), would direct a surgical strike of 24,000 troops, 3,300 of which would participate, in the largest airborne operation since World War II. Additionally, twenty-seven separate objectives would be simultaneously assaulted to neutralize the PDF and decapitate the Noriega government.(5:28) To complete the Synder Model evaluation, a brief look at alternative courses of action is necessary.

### **Alternatives**

For at least five years, the U.S. tried many different approaches to ensure safe operation of the canal, support democratic institutions in Panama and try to remove Noriega and the PDF from power. Continuation of diplomatic dialogue or other nonviolent avenues were no longer options. The tailored force package employed was clearly the best alternative given the national military objectives and desired outcome of capturing Noriega. No other alternatives were available to U.S. policy

makers, making military intervention the best decision.

Conversely, Noriega had many options. He could have stepped down from power, compromised diplomatically or simply stopped American harassment. Any of these options would have certainly postponed Operation JUST CAUSE if not eliminated it from U.S. consideration. However, Noriega's short-sighted strategic focus and egotistical outlook eliminated viable alternatives that could have significantly altered the future of Panama. Kevin Buckley, in his book Panama: The Whole Story, perfectly summarized Noriega's attitude; "Noriega remained very much his same old self even though he was running out of money and the country smelled of collapse." (14:224)

When using the Synder Model to arrive at appropriate courses of action, it appears very straight-forward and direct. There were, however, continuous factors eventually molding the final course. Leadership is one of the best examples.

### **Leadership**

Many themes directly affect any model during the development of military strategy. Perhaps, leadership and specific personalities, play the most important role. The key military leaders in Operation Just Cause clearly vectored the development of plans and concepts at all battlefield levels to fit their background, experience and personal style. Because of his no-nonsense and hard-charging leadership style, the President appointed General Maxwell Thurman as USCINCSOUTH with clear direction to prepare for conflict. (27,95) USCINCSOUTH believed in "one war, one boss" and his approach to leadership, planning and execution clearly showed this view. Although USCINCSOUTH was the supported CINC, the actual operation was orchestrated by Lieutenant

General Carl Stiner, Commander of the XVIII Airborne Corps.(3:20) Months before the actual invasion, the decision was made to appoint General Stiner as Commander, Joint Task Force South (JTF-South) giving him full authority to personally massage the plans and concepts. This was perhaps the best command arrangement CINCSOUTH could have defined, directly leading to the most efficient leadership in any conflict. Of particular interest is Lieutenant General Flanagan's remark, "Thurman recognized the all important principle of 'Unity of Command' - one man in charge of all forces - neglected in such operations as Grenada and the hostage mission in Iran, and insisted on its application in the operation."(2:34)

Previously, civilian leaders at the highest level realized the value of this approach and in 1986 created the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act. This legislation ensured Unity of Command in battlefield leadership. One of the primary results of this Act was to place "requisite authority" in a single commander - the unified command's CINC.(3:20) Throughout the entire planing and execution process, a clear chain of command from the president to the airman, soldier and sailor existed. USCINCSOUTH gave the Commander, JTF-South command of the entire fighting force to ensure unity of effort. Army Field Manual 100-5 highlights the importance of this battlefield leadership and clearly points out, "Unity of Command means that all the forces are under one responsible commander. It requires a single commander with the requisite authority to direct all forces in pursuit of a unified purpose."(6:2-10) General Stiner always recognized for whom he was working. As he said in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, "There were no problems with ambiguous relationships or units receiving guidance from multiple sources. These were direct results of the Reorganization Act and Special

Operations legislation."(11:9) Another key aspect of leadership that shaped the development of plans and concepts concerned General Stiner's belief in a very basic Clausewitzian principle.

Flexibility, which is a critical part of maneuver, was expertly employed and in accordance with Army doctrine. In many respects the major battles of Just Cause resembled "set-piece affairs." Although General Stiner had verbally outlined his thoughts on subsequent moves to his commanders and staff, no written campaign plan had been prepared for actions past the initial assaults at either the unified command level or the JTF level.(11:8) Unifying his subordinates with a single vision of the commander's intent, General Stiner focused the fighting force toward the desired end state and campaign goals adding resilience without a restrictively written plan.(6:6-11) General Stiner was commanding very much in character with Army doctrine and commander's intent. Commander's intent is a concise expression of the purpose of the operation and must be understood two echelons below the issuing commander. As Army Field Manual 100-5 defines, "The intent statement is usually written but can be verbal when time is short. Its utility is to focus subordinates on what has to be accomplished in order to achieve success, even when the plan and concept of operations no longer apply, and to discipline their efforts toward that end."(6:6-11) This directly led to increased flexibility by relying on the field commanders to make accurate, real-time decisions. General Stiner recognized that utilizing commander's intent was the best way to trust experience and training, directly contributing to excellent battlefield results. These two examples of empowering subordinate commanders and linking commander's intent with flexible maneuver highlighted the influence of successful leadership on the development of strategy. However,



one example of leadership failure must be examined.

The most critical mistake of any leader involved in Operation JUST CAUSE lies with the leadership failure of General Noriega. In spite of many overt signals of an impending invasion, Noriega was truly strategically surprised and did not develop any courses of action to adequately prepare. Over the previous two years, U.S. conduct in Panama drastically changed. The U.S. had deployed security enhancement forces to Panama on six separate occasions, troop strength on the ground had increased more than 30 percent, the U.S. had conducted a series of exercises designed to reassert treaty rights and, finally, U.S. forces had traded shots PDF intruders at a petroleum site off and on for 20 months.(11:11) In spite of these overt American acts, Noriega's behavior did not change. From his perspective, the U.S. did not have the will, public support or international courage to take decisive action. In his book, Kevin Buckley reveals that Noriega was certain there would never be a large scale U.S. invasion in Panama: "The U.S. is like a monkey on a chain," Noriega used to say, "all you have to do is play music, and the monkey performs."(14:59) Unprepared and arrogant, the PDF and its leadership were certainly no match for the highly tailored American invasion force. Although individual leadership style played a significant role in shaping the courses of action on both sides, other influences were present during the development of strategy.

### **Doctrine**

Joint Publication 1-02 describes doctrine as the fundamental principles by which military forces guide their actions in support of national objectives. Doctrine is authoritative, but requires judgment in application.(29,1-13) The doctrine employed during the

invasion of Panama was custom-fit for this type of warfare.

As the world situation changed, national policy makers adjusted the focus of the armed forces to meet a new challenge in the growing spectrum of low-intensity conflict. Military leaders recognized the need to respond to the full spectrum of warfare and perfected unconventional doctrinal applications. Low-Intensity Conflict is defined in Air Force Manual 1-1 as contingency operations or crisis management situations requiring the use of military force to enforce or support diplomatic initiatives, to respond to emergencies, or to protect the lives of United States citizens.(16:54) Because our nation had the foresight to institutionalize unconventional warfare doctrine, the U.S. was able to employ appropriate force at the appropriate level. As Dr. van Creveld emphasizes, high power weapons, such as tanks and other heavy armored equipment, employed in a low intensity war can result in completely missing the target.(9:203-205) Operation Just Cause was a complex, intricately planned military operation that was possible only through clear, concise and perfectly executed orders that took months of rehearsal to refine.

As previously discussed, Operation Just Cause was not a linear battlefield but a series of separate operations. The battlefield resembled a lethal mosaic of separate attacks conducted by land, sea and air from the four points of the compass.(11:12) These separate operations required that combat troops and equipment be delivered to the theater at distinct times and places. Only specifically defined doctrine could accomplish this challenging feat. Because the U.S. possessed specific forces trained to conduct unconventional warfare, our plans and concepts were tailored to take advantage of this capability. As author Philip A. Crowl would submit, concern over past successes and failures did

not develop into a fixation that blinded our strategists to changed circumstances requiring new and different responses.(15:216) We learned, developed alternatives and used them with overwhelming success. This victory was achieved, however, with very specific circumstances that must be carefully acknowledged.

Operation Just Cause was executed with an infrastructure that was reasonably well developed, a thorough knowledge of the area of operations based on decades of presence, a treaty guaranteeing access to and movement within the country, which permitted the prepositioning of forces, and a situation that developed over a two-year period allowing detailed planning and rehearsal to occur in advance.(4:19) Even though the invasion was accomplished with very specific circumstances, the influence of senior military leaders to effectively apply unconventional doctrine directly led to appropriate and successful plans and concepts.(31,IV-3) Without this basic doctrinal understanding, which was documented in Joint Test Pub 3-05 and available to the CINCs, U.S. armed forces would have faced a unique threat without possessing the proper tools to ensure victory.

### **Strategy**

Clausewitz quotes, "No one starts a war -- or rather, no one in his senses should do so -- without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it."(10,579) The goal a nation attempts to achieve in war is defined by political purposes and can be clear, but the strategy needed to achieve the goals of war is often difficult to define. Military strategy, or the art and science of employing the armed forces of a nation to secure the objectives of national policy by the application of force or the threat of force, is the key in

achieving those national objectives.(23,231) As the Synder Model points out, strategic effectiveness is achieved when a nations' military leaders successfully link political goals with strategic objectives in the form of a theater campaign plan.(13,61) In Operation Just Cause, the theater campaign plan General Stiner orchestrated was extremely effective.

As previously stated, the national goals were to: protect U.S. citizens; support the democratic institutions in Panama; ensure the safe operation of the Panama Canal; and apprehend General Noriega, bring him to justice and destroy the power of the PDF. When the military objectives of destroying the military capability of the PDF, seizing the critical canal facilities for protection of the canal, and seizing General Noriega are examined, a close parallel between political goals and military objectives is apparent. This matching of goals and objectives was the first step General Stiner took in cementing the strategic effectiveness of his campaign plan. Without this close relationship between political aims and military objectives, the operation could have ended with needless loss of life with Manuel Noriega still seated in power.

Another major factor demonstrating that Operation Just Cause was a strategic success can be seen by evaluating the types of force used in meeting the contingencies needs. Due to the overarching requirement to apprehend Manuel Noriega and defeat the PDF in an urban setting, Special Operation Forces(SOF) were the clear choice to plan, lead and execute the invasion. Specific training, special equipment and unique doctrinal approaches to unconventional warfare made SOF the best choice to minimize risk. Recognizing the PDF as Noriega's center of gravity led to the development of the COA which employed the right mix of forces on the right objectives which directly resulted in strategic success.

Additionally, the goals did not exceed military capability nor present an unacceptable risk to the soldiers.

By steering clear of ambiguities, identifying clear political goals and carefully matching military objectives, the NCA and senior military leaders developed a COA that was clear, appropriate and strategically sound. Although strategy is a large influence on the development of the COA, without a technological edge even the best designed theater campaigns can fail.

### **Technology**

The objective of overpowering the PDF and apprehending Manuel Noriega without massive casualties required stringent ROE as well as using high technology weapon systems. General Thurman stressed the need to employ violent and overwhelming firepower, primarily at night, in order to exploit America's long suit in high-technology weapons while forcing the PDF to fight on US terms. Additionally, crushing the Noreiga regime with excessive firepower would only alienate a current group of people who had the potential of being tomorrow's ally.(25,31) The appropriate use of force to effectively achieve the military objectives rapidly became the centerpiece for the campaign plan.

During Operation Just Cause, our military forces were able to accomplish their objectives under the cover of darkness with such agility and precision largely because they were equipped with night vision devices that had been developed and fine tuned over the past 30 years by the US Army and Air Force.(17,34) Every crew member on all of the aircraft involved was equipped with the latest in night vision goggles(NVGs) designed for aircraft crew use. More sensitive under lower light conditions than previous generations of light-intensifying night-vision devices, they allowed crews to

operate safely in tight landing zones, avoid transmission lines and distinguish US troops from their adversaries of the ground.(19,27) NVGs were used so extensively by rotary-wing pilots that if the same flight operations had been flown during the day, many crews would have been shot down.

The NVG technological edge offering unrestricted nighttime maneuver was not limited to aviation assets. During the entire operation, soldiers used these devices while conducting assaults, driving vehicles and clearing dark alleys or buildings.(17,37) The ability to effectively confront the enemy during the hours of darkness in urban terrain put the fog and friction of war at a level from which the PDF did not have the technology to penetrate.

Simple technological advances can be just as significant force enhancers as complex, expensive solutions. A very simple nighttime technique used by US forces aided immeasurably to battlefield flexibility. Because US troops wore arm bands and tape patches that were easily visible through the NVGs and other night-vision devices, helicopter crews, as well as AC-130 Gunship crews, were able to easily distinguish friend from foe at the assault sites. This simple but effective method allowed aviation crews to provide accurate and very effective suppressive fire.(19,27) The advantage gained by this reflective tape proved to be extremely beneficial to US forces by adding to the fog of warfare being experienced by the PDF. Without this identification technique, freedom of maneuver would have been drastically reduced and fratricide much more likely.

Precision strike capability was also a giant technological leap directly adding to the success of Operation Just Cause. The precision offered by Army Apache attack helicopters and Air Force F-117 stealth fighters and AC-130 Gunships was a key factor behind

the operation's success. The desired goal of limiting friendly and hostile casualties, coupled with the fact that many assaults were being conducted in heavily populated areas, led General Stiner to rely heavily on airpower's precision attack capability.

Surprisingly little collateral damage occurred.(19,32) A striking example of this precision was exemplified by the AC-130 gunship during a mission against a PDF investigative service building. Circling several thousand feet above Panama city in the morning darkness, the AC-130 sprayed the building with 20-mm cannon fire while nearby buildings directly behind and across the street from the PDF facility went totally unscathed.(19,32) With the stringent political goal of protecting US citizens and limiting collateral damage, this type of precision attack was the only viable strategy in an urban setting.

Operation Just Cause demonstrated that precision night operations conducted by properly equipped and trained soldiers, sailors and airmen are a tremendous force multiplier. Technological advances, such as night vision goggles for the ground soldier as well as the aviator, provided US forces an overwhelming advantage against the PDF. Without the high level of readiness coupled with the technological advantage of night vision equipment and precision attack capability, Operation Just Cause may have turned out drastically different.(17,38)

### **Political-Military Integration**

For the first time in 330 days of his administration, President Bush was faced with a decision to commit American soldiers, sailors and airmen to battle. During the final briefing from General Powell, the President asked many detailed questions concerning troop involvement, target selection and operational employment.

President Bush continued to question the CJCS until he was satisfied, saying without hesitancy, "OK, let's do it." (2,52) Operation Just Cause had just received the Commander-in-Chief's approval, shifting the burden of proof to the military leadership and troops in the field. For the first time in US history, the senior civilian leadership would leave the fighting to the generals and draw an appropriate line in the sand between political and military control of theater operations. Never before had the National Command Authorities (NCA) given such a free hand to the Pentagon. The days of military fiascoes such as Desert One were over and Operation Just Cause was ready to prove it. (2,53)

The harmony between the political goals and military objectives in Operation Just Cause also illustrates the political-military integration of a successful theater campaign. After President Bush outlined the desired political objectives, the senior military leadership drafted a theater campaign that accomplished all four political goals. General Powell, in his role as both the principal military advisor to the president and Chairman of the JCS, supervised the developing campaign plan with General Thurman ensuring political appropriateness as well as military feasibility.

Operation Just Cause was hallmarked by a superb understanding from the White House to the platoon leaders. President Bush however, deserves a great deal of the credit. After making the decision to execute Operation Just Cause, the President stood aside displaying a great deal of confidence in his military leaders. This lack of political meddling prevented a distraction that could have interfered with the entire theater campaign. (26,190) As Bruce Watson and Peter Tsouras point out in Operation Just Cause: The US Intervention in Panama, when President Reagan was not awakened



during US strikes on Libya in April 1986, he changed the political-military relationship with the Pentagon. Reagan believed that the on-scene military commander was best equipped to make an accurate decision and operational 'Washington' decisions would jeopardize the outcome. Operation Just Cause was a clear indicator of how political-military integration had evolved since Operation Urgent Fury and definitely indicated how successful this newly defined relationship would be in Operation Desert Storm.(26,189)

History has shown that successful campaigns are planned and executed by military leaders without civilian interference.(26,121) Equally important, history has also shown that the contributions of air power can be almost as critical.

#### **Air Power**

Although ground forces were the decisive factor in the invasion of Panama, the projection and application of overwhelming combat power was made possible by air power. Without the ability to project decisive combat strength through airlift and other special missions, national goals and military objectives would not have been attained.

Air Force and Army SOF aviation assets played the major role in the invasion, employing the largest number of special operations aircraft in history. The initial assault was conducted at night and included 185 fixed and 179 rotary-wing assets.(26,118) Since the majority of SOF aviation training is conducted at night, they performed extremely well, executing the missions with precision and lethality. Dozens of SOF aircraft operated in close proximity to the other missions, with no ground-based radar controllers to ensure aircraft separation. No accidents or even near-misses were reported.(19,26) Without the ability to employ specialized air

power and simultaneously attack different targets with precision, under the cover of darkness, the chosen COA would have looked very different. In any military operation however, much of the success can be traced to assets behind the scenes. Air power is no different.

Inspite of an established logistics infrastructure, Just Cause required a tremendous amount of airlift and other unique air support, demonstrating our nations ability to project power worldwide. Military Airlift Command(MAC) provided strategic and tactical lift which proved to be the critical link to success. MAC deployed 111 aircraft on the night of the invasion, all arriving at their correct destinations at the proper time.(26,117) Eighty-four aircraft supported the parachute drop, while the remainder of forces deployed on 27 additional aircraft and airlanded in Panama.(19,26) Additionally, Strategic Air Command(SAC) and Tactical Air Command(TAC), providing both aerial refueling support and operational support, were expertly integrated in this plan which resulted in the best orchestrated air campaign to date. The complexity and precision of this operation are evident in that the forced-entry, night air assault involved a mix of air assets from forward deployed units as well as CONUS based units, all arriving at their targets within 53 hours of President Bush's decision.(19,26)

During the air campaign planning, General Stiner was aware of the tremendous airlift requirement and while briefing the air order of battle to the CJCS he stressed that "I will not be party to a piecemeal operation...I feel confident with this plan provided we've got the airlift and can do it all at once."(28,79) Due to preplanned air routes, strict adherence to ROE and a highly developed command and control structure, air power achieved

surprise and delivered such overwhelming lethality the PDF never recovered.

### **Joint Warfighting**

Joint Warfare, as defined in Joint Pub 3-0, is the integration of all US military capabilities -- often in conjunction with forces from other nations, other US agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and United Nations forces and capabilities -- and is required to generate decisive joint combat power.(21,II-6) Throughout the entire operation, the JTF Commander integrated unique service capabilities with split second timing resulting in the most complex operation ever developed. This overwhelming joint force, combined with night operations and surgical accuracy, produced the most potent combat capability possible. In spite of the challenge of urban warfare in an unconventional environment requiring limited collateral damage, General Stiner was able to orchestrate his joint operation without a snag. The cornerstone to success was perhaps the very clearly understood joint rules of engagement(ROE) which were published before forces were committed and continually evaluated. Every soldier knew exactly what the limits were, directly contributing to effective decisions at the lowest level on the battlefield.

In spite of the geographically small area, an incredible amount of aviation assets were used throughout the operation due to the mission requirements. Almost every unit involved in Operation Just Cause utilized aviation assets from all services for air assaults, fire support, surveillance and resupply. Airspace management was critical and without extensive joint planning and perfect execution, friendly casualties would have been unavoidable. During D-day operations, there were 185 fixed-wing and rotary-wing

aircraft operating under night-vision goggles in an area of 140x45km.(18,30) As Joint Pub 3-0 effectively points out:

"At H-hour the parachute assault forces, forward presence forces, SOF, and air elements of the joint force simultaneously attacked 27 tactical and operational-level targets. It was a classic coup de main."(21,IV-16)

Without efficient joint warfighting, any COA of this magnitude was headed for failure. Clear command, clear ROE and professionally trained soldiers directly led to successful joint warfighting, making Operation Just Cause a joint campaign planning model even though General Stiner verbalized much of the scheme.

When more detailed analyses of Operation Just Cause are complete, other critical factors will be identified as key to our overwhelming success. The most meaningful however may be the 1985 Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act, which gave the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff(CJCS) and US regional commanders clear-cut control over military operations. Before Goldwater-Nichols, control was fragmented and clear command links were vague. This ambiguous command relationship promoted service parochialism and logrolling more than it did crisp decision-making and accountability.(20,5) After this legislation however, the role of the CJCS has been strengthened, jointness promoted and operational effectiveness enhanced. This view is hard to argue when comparing the strategic performance of this nation in Operations Just Cause, Desert Storm and Provide Comfort with Vietnam, Desert I and Grenada.(22,15)

In Grenada for example, as Bernard Adelsberger points out in his 1990 Army Times article, the military was criticized for bowing to service constituencies for a piece of the action. Days after

the invasion of Panama, however, former senior military officials said the selection of specific units from different services showed that the different floors of the Pentagon were coordinating successfully.(24,3) General Edward "Shy" Meyer, former Army Chief of Staff, continued to articulate that Operation Just Cause "emphasized the fact that for every operation around the world, you have to tailor your force."(24,3)

Without this clear and sound basis to approach the art of operational warfare, a decisive COA for Just Cause may never have been orchestrated. The influence Goldwater-Nichols had on the invasion of Panama, even in an unconventional environment, was far reaching by developing a solid command foundation leading to the best display of joint warfighting, prior to Dessert Storm, in US history.

America had yet to face a crisis in which Goldwater-Nichols was tested to see if the CJCS would truly be the principal advisor to the President and if Washington would really let a regional CINC plan and execute the war he was charged with winning. Grenada involved multi-layered, multi-service involvement. Additionally, due to the ad hoc nature of planning the operation in Grenada, which did not occur in the theater, force employment decisions were continually changing as the Joint Force Commander's(JFC) vision evolved.

In contrast, the invasion of Panama was planned by General Thurman and General Stiner, reviewed and approved almost without changes by the JCS and executed without interference from the National Command Authority. During Operation Just Cause, the only layer between the CINC and his tactical forces was General Stiner, the JTF Commander. General Colin Powell, sworn in as JCS Chairman just hours after the failed coup attempt in Panama on 2 October

said, "There was no logrolling on this one." (20,5) Operation Just Cause proved how capable, well-trained soldiers and airmen can perform when given a clear mission, clear chain of command, sensible ROE and the strong support of the senior leaders. As Benjamin Schemmer points out in his editorial on Panama:

"For all the critics who say, 'We never learn,' we learned...the returns are in now, and Panama makes it clear that Goldwater-Nichols works. We owe thanks to the 23 Servicemen who died in Panama: their sacrifice ushered in the rebirth of professional soldiering. We also owe thanks to the late Bill Nichols and to Barry Goldwater: without their road map, the toll might have been far higher." (20,5)

### **Summary**

The success of Operation JUST CAUSE can be attributed to many factors. As discussed, the analysis of strategy employed during the invasion of Panama must take into account many factors and special circumstances. First, outlining a short background was necessary to fully understand the political, social and economic climate that faced our national decision makers. Secondly, reviewing the actual plans and concepts that were developed and how the Synder Model can be used as a framework for analyses was critical. Finally, analyzing the leadership, doctrine, strategy, technology, political-military integration, air power and joint warfighting highlighting showed how these themes affected the development of the courses of action. In the years following such a dramatic success as JUST CAUSE, there is a tendency not to critically examine US performance and learn from it. Additionally, because Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm occurred a very short time later, a great deal of evaluation is being focused on the larger conflict. (3:41)

The invasion of Panama however can only be a limited guide to future contingencies because the situation in Panama was very unique. Congressmen Les Aspin, as Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, pointed out that the United States had a large contingent of forces already in place and US based units frequently rotated into the country for periodic training. Also, our units had familiar terrain with the ability to rehearse on the same ground on which they would fight which greatly reduced planning concerns. Lt. Gen. Carl E. Mundy, the Marine Corps' chief war planner, also articulated these points in a Navy Times interview noting that rapid deployments go a lot easier when you have a logistical support base in place, a receptive airfield and a command and control system already operating.(20,5)

Future success depends on knowledge from the past and understanding how to do better in the future. The global threat to the United States requires increased attention be given to contingency operations and low-intensity conflict. If we overlook one scale on the spectrum of warfare, we risk relearning history and the US cannot afford to mortgage the future by ignoring the past. Loosing even the smallest skirmish will effect our credibility world wide, slowing our progress in attaining a versatile, deployable and lethal force. In January 1990, General Carl Vuono, Army Chief of Staff, argued that "the nature of the United States' interest around the world, and its coalition-based strategy, will require that U.S. forces be globally deployable, often with little or no warning, from the United States or from forward bases." He might have been describing the capabilities of the units that conducted Operation Just Cause.(28,412)

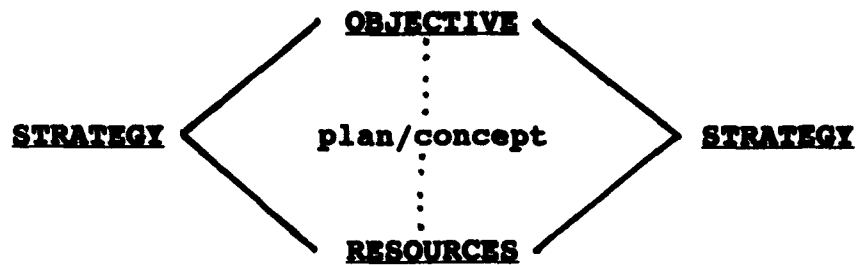


Figure 1 \*

\* Figure 1 depicts the Synder Model in a military context showing that strategy is a broad based concept which includes a military objective and a plan for achieving that objective by means of military resources.



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## **GLOSSARY**

<b>CJCS</b>	<b>Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff</b>
<b>COA</b>	<b>Course of Action</b>
<b>CONUS</b>	<b>Continental United States</b>
<b>JCS</b>	<b>Joint Chiefs of Staff</b>
<b>JFC</b>	<b>Joint Force Commander</b>
<b>JTF-South</b>	<b>Joint Task Force, South</b>
<b>MAC</b>	<b>Military Airlift Command</b>
<b>NCA</b>	<b>National Command Authority</b>
<b>NVG</b>	<b>Night Vision Goggle</b>
<b>PDF</b>	<b>Panamanian Defense Forces</b>
<b>SAC</b>	<b>Strategic Airlift Command</b>
<b>SEALs</b>	<b>Sea-Air-Land</b>
<b>SLOC</b>	<b>Sea Lines of Communication</b>
<b>SOF</b>	<b>Special Operations Forces</b>
<b>SOUTHCOM</b>	<b>Southern Command</b>
<b>TAC</b>	<b>Tactical Air Command</b>
<b>USCINCSOUTH</b>	<b>Commander-in-Chief, US Southern Command</b>