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THE AFFECTS OF COALITION POLITICAL RESTRICTIONS
ON OPERATIONAL MANEUVER

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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ABSTRACT of

THE AFFECTS OF POLITICAL RESTRICTIONS ON
OPERATIONAL MANEUVER

Operational maneuver warfare achieved major acceptance in the United States military in the 1980's. This new doctrine has not been accepted by our allies or possible coalition partners. There is a potential for confusion and conflict between doctrinal theory, the application of operational maneuver, and politically motivated restrictions, especially in coalition endeavors. This study summarizes the main ideas of ground operational maneuver against a conventional threat. It uses two recent examples showing how coalition and allied restraints limited operational commanders. The United States Army's new doctrine of maneuver warfare seriously concerned NATO and the German Government. Another example was evident in the 1990-91 Gulf War when coalition restraints affected General Schwarzkopf's ability to exercise operational maneuver.

As our experience in NATO and the Gulf War demonstrated, we will not fight future wars without regard to the views of our coalition partners. Combined planning and training with allies and future coalition partners during peacetime contributes to an understanding of doctrine and interoperability.

THE AFFECTS OF COALITION POLITICAL RESTRICTIONS
ON OPERATIONAL MANEUVER

*Battles are won by slaughter and maneuver.
The greater the general, the more he contributes
in maneuver, the less he demands in slaughter.*
- Winston Churchill¹

The Cold War may be over but the world continues to be a dangerous place consisting of rival states with a wide range of military, economic, and technological capabilities. Our National Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement outlines the need for fighting as part of a coalition to deter or defeat regional aggression.² With the expansion of the military's roles and missions, operational commanders will find themselves leading combined forces in pursuit of collective interests with greater frequency. As a result, the coalition political restrictions imposed on these commanders may limit their ability to practice operational maneuver.

This paper summarizes the main ideas of ground operational maneuver against a substantial conventional threat. It will use two recent examples showing how politically motivated restrictions imposed by allies or coalition members limited operational commanders. For instance, in the 1980's, The Federal Republic of Germany advocated a forward defense at the dividing line between the West and the Warsaw Pact. The objective was to prevent any loss of ground and limit damage. The United States Army's new

doctrine of maneuver warfare seriously concerned the German Government.³ This study will examine the impact their concern had on the operational commander's maneuver strategy. Another example was evident in the 1990-91 Gulf War when coalition political constraints were imposed on the use of national forces. The Gulf War campaign is relevant to this study as these restrictions affected General Schwarzkopf's ability to exercise operational maneuver.

As the historical examples will illustrate, there is a potential for confusion and conflict between doctrinal theory, the application of operational maneuver, and politically motivated restrictions, especially in coalition endeavors. While operational commanders focus on military victory, they must also be aware of the broader concerns of strategy. The higher the echelon of command, the more likely that political decisions will affect the commander's freedom of action. In the age of instant communications, dramatic news presentations can rapidly influence political opinions forcing changes with no prior indication to the commander in the field.⁴

OPERATIONAL MANEUVER

The Army's Field Manual 100-5, *Operations*, describes maneuver as the movement of forces in relation to the enemy to gain positional advantage. Maneuver warfare stresses continuous operations, flexibility, agility, initiative, and

synchronization. Effective maneuver keeps the enemy off balance and protects the force.⁵ At the operational level, maneuver is the means by which the commander determines where and when to fight by setting the terms of battle. Operational maneuver seeks to concentrate and synchronize forces at the enemy's operational depth. Its intent is to attack or isolate the threat's center of gravity.⁶

Maneuver warfare is non-linear, with wide and often unequal gaps between units. This is significantly different from our previous doctrine that emphasized linear attrition warfare. There were no gaps between units; the emphasis was on tying the flanks tightly together. Using today's doctrine, commanders can extend the battlefield to destroy the enemy in depth. By sending aerial or ground forces deep he can disrupt command and control, destroy combat support assets, cause logistical units to relocate, and attack follow-on or reserve forces. The accompanying confusion, combined with losses in the rear area, will likely affect the enemy's resistance. In the defense, forces engaging in non-linear maneuver warfare may deliberately leave gaps in their lines. Most of the forces are positioned far enough back to force the attacker to expose his flanks or overextend himself so we can quickly counterattack. The intent is to regain the initiative from the attacker.⁷

The definition of operational maneuver suggests that merely moving large forces deep into territory beyond the forward line of troops is not operational maneuver. Rather, maneuver is directed against an operationally significant objective that will force the enemy to react operationally.⁸ Operational maneuver helps commanders remain flexible to present the enemy with conditions that he will not anticipate and that will jeopardize his mission. Unconstrained operational maneuver is what every commander desires because he has the freedom of action to employ his forces throughout his area of operation.

The American Army's doctrinal concept is sound but coalition political constraints may hinder its effective employment. Unity of effort is critical for success. The complexities of synchronizing, coordinating, and controlling maneuver operations are difficult for the operational commander in the best of circumstances. Battlefield depth is necessary to provide the time and space to synchronize the maneuver of all available forces at the decisive time and place. To avoid attrition warfare, commanders require initiative and the freedom of action to effectively execute operational maneuver.

Coalitions add to maneuver's complexity by bringing different objectives, doctrines, control measures, languages, and command relationships. This highlights the dilemma for

the commander; for operational maneuver to be effective, it must be politically acceptable to all members of the coalition. The NATO Alliance provides an excellent example of how political restrictions affected the military commander's freedom to employ operational maneuver.

NATO

The United States military invested tremendous resources and time developing new doctrine in the 1980's to counter the Soviet threat in Europe. The Soviet strategy against NATO was a quick attack to penetrate the forward defenses and rapidly advance to strategic depths of the Alliance. The AirLand Battle doctrine that was developed to counter this greatly affected NATO's political leaders. Their major political concerns were the international border of Germany and the concept of forward defense.⁹

The German position regarding the international border was quite clear:

A concept (defense in depth), under which only part of our population, namely, that in the more westerly regions, is defended, while the border area is relinquished right from the beginning and its population are expected to bear the brunt of the war, even to endure occupation by the aggressor, is contradictory to reason, to the responsibility of the State, and to national German interests. The advocates of defense in area sadly neglect to consider the consequences of a conventional war and military occupation.¹⁰

Defense in depth could only have been accomplished if the German politicians changed their policy of conceding no territory. Retention of the border restrictions would have hindered any effort to extend the battlefield and use maneuver to defeat the Soviets when they exposed their flanks.

A mobile defense in depth orients on the destruction of the enemy force by employing a combination of maneuver, offense, and defense to defeat the attack. The minimum force possible is committed to the forward defense, while the maximum combat power is in reserve to strike the enemy at the most vulnerable time and place.¹¹ Using only forward defense, Soviet forces would have closed into the tactical battle comprising operational maneuver. General Glenn Otis, Commander-in-Chief of United States Army in Europe in 1987, recognized the paralysis of AirLand Battle doctrine given NATO's political reality. He stated, "There is no thought to applying those parts of AirLand Battle doctrine that are at odds with NATO guidelines."¹²

This demonstrates the conflict between the United States' desire to fight using operational maneuver and the limitations placed on operational commanders by Germany's and NATO's political restrictions. Public support would diminish if we advocated applying our doctrine in NATO. The idea of rejecting forward defense for a more mobile area defense was politically unacceptable to most Europeans. Only if the

public believed that the military strategy had a reasonable chance of success would the Alliance continue to enjoy political support. The purpose of the Alliance was, after all, to create an atmosphere of security.¹³ Therefore, forward defense was the price to pay to reassure the NATO members that the United States was making every effort to ensure that the Federal Republic of Germany remained within the Alliance.¹⁴

The question remained, when the shooting war started, would political restrictions and realities restrict operational maneuver. If war came, would we use the doctrine that officers were learning at the command and staff colleges and applying on training exercises? After all, FM 100-5's main emphasis was to fight and win against the greater numbers of the Soviet Union. Fortunately, we never had to answer those questions against our greatest threat. We did answer it against a lesser threat during the Gulf War.

DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM

The NATO political constraints on maneuver represented an unresolved example. The Gulf War provides an actual demonstration of the consequences of coalition political constraints on operational maneuver. Virtually the entire world agreed that what Saddam Hussein did by invading Kuwait was wrong. The coalition clearly held the moral high ground. The coalition won the campaign because they had a better

operational concept for defeating Hussein. General Schwarzkopf's plan was to fight a combined arms campaign dominated by maneuver. The Iraqi plans were to dig-in, stick it out, and hopefully cause enough casualties so the United States would decide that the war was not worth the cost.¹⁵

The Gulf War presented unique challenges to General Schwarzkopf in developing coalition command relationships and strategy, in both the defensive and offensive phases of the war. There was a tremendous diversity of forces, doctrine, customs, and equipment that each nation and service brought to the war. Political considerations caused by national pride, service desires, and public perceptions, complicated the development of Schwarzkopf's plans.

Coalition political concerns surfaced during the first weeks of the Gulf War. Like Germany and NATO, the Saudis expressed concerns about the United States' defensive plans. King Fahd invited foreign troops into his country to protect his kingdom and citizens; therefore, he wanted the entire border defended. Prince Khalid, leader of the Arab forces, placed his forces along the Kuwaiti border using the doctrine of forward defense to meet his government's intent. The Arab plan called for linear static positions far forward to defend every inch of Saudi Arabia. The American plan stressed maneuver warfare. They wanted to defend in depth and use air power to delay and reduce the attacking Iraqi army. The

initial defense centered on the critical Gulf coast ports and airfields of Al-Jubayl and Dhahran.

The American plan later expanded to block the two critical high speed avenues of approach along the Gulf coast. The planners advocated allowing the Iraqis to overextend their forces and then use maneuver warfare to destroy them. The planners recommended the Saudis execute a mobile covering force battle in which they would engage the Iraqis at long range and fall back behind American forces before becoming decisively engaged. The Saudis continued to express concern with this idea. Khalid insisted that American forces join his in protecting the border and block the western attack route to Riyadh.¹⁶

To satisfy the Saudi government Schwarzkopf shifted elements of the 82nd Airborne to Riyadh to defend the city and protect it against terrorist attacks.¹⁷ Militarily this was a poor decision; politically it was a necessary one. In the early defensive phase of the war, Schwarzkopf needed every ounce of combat power he had just to protect the vital Gulf coast. The US military commanders hoped the Iraqis would attack using the avenue to Riyadh. It was 400 miles long through slow-go terrain. Air power could easily batter them while coalition ground forces maneuvered to contain the enemy penetration.¹⁸

The political necessity to shift forces to Riyadh did not change Schwarzkopf's plan, but it reduced his relative combat power and flexibility. Operational maneuver was specifically designed to help offset the advantage the enemy had in combat power. The linear defense advocated by the Saudis would restrict depth and maneuver, therefore, reducing the operational potential of Schwarzkopf's forces.

Political realities would continue to restrict the operational commander. General Khalid stated that Schwarzkopf never fully grasped the Saudi overriding concern to do nothing during the war that might compromise their postwar future.¹⁹ American forces were in Saudi Arabia at the request of their government; we could not ignore the Saudi desires. Shifting forces to Riyadh reduced their anxiety over the American plan. A key lesson is that the military must better articulate to the politicians the operational conditions necessary to defeat the enemy or recognize that there may often be political requirements that prevent optimum military actions.

Decisions made strictly for political reasons can also have a positive, although unintended, impact on operational maneuver. The use of British forces during the war provides a good example. In October, the coalition decided to deploy additional forces to the Gulf to permit offensive operations.

General Schwarzkopf's scheme of maneuver called for the armor heavy VII Corps to make the main attack coming as a

"left-hook" against Iraq's right flank. XVIII Airborne Corps would secure the western flank of the main attack and block any Iraqi withdrawal through the Euphrates valley. The maneuver would avoid the Iraqi fixed defenses and attack Iraq's operational center of gravity -- the Republican Guard. The Arab coalition forces and United States Marine forces reinforced by the British 1st Armored Division would make the supporting attacks into Kuwait.²⁰ An amphibious feint supported the plan. Rapid maneuver, overwhelming combat power, and deception were critical to the coalition's success.

The domestic politics of the NATO members required Schwarzkopf to change his task organization and include the British and French in the main effort against the Republican Guard forces. The British wanted to participate in the main flanking attack, not a secondary attack. General De la Billiere, the British land commander, pressed the issue. His desire to move was for both military and political reasons.

Billiere strongly believed that the British were making, in their terms, a very large commitment against Saddam. He wanted a chance to show what British armor could do in the desert. The American Army's doctrine and style were familiar to the British because of their working relationships in NATO. This became a high priority with London, and while Schwarzkopf wanted to support the Marines desire for more armor, he felt he had little choice but to accept the British request.²¹

From an operational maneuver perspective this was also the correct decision to make. The unintended effect was to raise the anticipated force ratios in the main attack from slightly over 2:1 to a more appropriate 3:1. This would significantly enhance the main attack's probability of success. Simultaneously, it reduced the force ratios in the Marine supporting attack from 4:1 to 2:1.²² From an analytical point of view this is a satisfactory force ratio for a supporting attack.

Schwarzkopf was totally against the British and French proposals, but his duties were as much political as they were military. The operational center of gravity for the United States was the coalition. A major part of his duties was keeping that coalition together. If the political environment Schwarzkopf operated in caused him to modify his plan, it was an acceptable cost. The decision strengthened the maneuver element and supported the unity of effort of the coalition by quelling the domestic political pressures in Britain and France.²³ Just as important, it ensured an international force entered Iraqi territory, not just an American one.

The United States, British, and French forces operated under their national rules of engagement, but they could attack into Iraq as necessary. The politics of the Arab members of the coalition was a concern. The Egyptians, Syrian, and troops from other Muslim countries would not serve

under American command. Also, most of the Arab coalition forces wanted to limit their participation to the defense of Saudi Arabia and the liberation of Kuwait; they did not want to attack into Iraq. They had no wish to see Iraq devastated. Iraq was a brother country whose regional role the Saudis valued as a counterweight to Iran and Israel.²⁴ Therefore, Arab forces received mission's compatible with their country's national aim and rules of engagement.

These national political restrictions could have seriously affected Schwarzkopf's freedom to maneuver forces to best accomplish the mission. In fact, it would have given Saddam exactly what he wanted and expected. He did not conceive that there might be a ground attack from the West, deep into Iraqi territory, as opposed to a frontal assault from the Kuwaiti-Saudi border and an amphibious assault on Kuwait City. Fortunately, in this war, these political restrictions did not affect the operational scheme of maneuver. The combined American and British forces had the minimum relative force ratio necessary for the deep attack into Iraq. It was this maneuver strategy that delivered the final blow to the Iraqis. Through the artful application of maneuver the coalition maximized their strengths and minimized Iraq's.

Throughout the Gulf War, the campaign plan changed to ensure that military action properly supported the coalition

political objectives.²⁵ The political constraints on President Bush to halt VII Corps' maneuver in Iraq, sooner rather than later, came from domestic and international constituencies that were both political and popular. One of the basic objectives of the war, evicting Iraq's troops from Kuwait, was accomplished. This left no clear path for the coalition to follow. The Arabs warned of the dangers that a fragmented Iraq would produce and urged restraint.

This war demonstrated that military objectives and political objectives do not always coincide. The military objective of the coalition's deep maneuver attack was to envelop the Republican Guard forces and destroy them. By the end of the war, coalition forces were merely slaughtering Iraqis for no pressing military purpose.²⁶ The coalition had not decided the strategy for the transition from war to peace upon retaking Kuwait; however, the maneuver against the Republican Guard forces was halted. As the conflict ended, political considerations took priority over military strategy, and this affected the outcome of the war.

CONCLUSION

War is a political act stemming from political causes fought by the military for political objectives. Our National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement has demonstrated beyond a doubt that the United States military is

politically dependent on allies. The reduction in military forces means that it is unlikely we will perform major military contingency operation without the assistance from other nations. Therefore, political restrictions imposed by allies or coalition members will greatly affect the operational commander's scheme of maneuver.

The expected contributions of allies are important to the operational plan. Operational commanders must learn to take into account other nations' capabilities, intentions, circumstances, and vulnerabilities. The interests and objectives of coalition partners must be fully considered by the operational commander during the planning and execution of military operations. These evaluations are critical to the choice between a go-it-alone versus a coalition strategy.²⁷

Failure of coalition members to agree on doctrine may result in the acceptance of a flawed plan to achieve political support. Maneuver warfare is especially hard to explain, coordinate, and execute with coalition forces. Allied or coalition governments must understand operational maneuver before hostilities begin. Failure to do so may greatly restrict our ability to fight and win with the minimum cost to soldier and civilian lives. Attrition warfare can only be avoided through the effective employment of operational maneuver.

International coalition strategy and training are as critical as high technology weapons. No military can fight effectively without a good strategy. The United States has demonstrated the ability to fight and win wars based on its doctrine. Our current doctrine recognizes that our adversary may have numerical superiority at the start of a conflict. Operational maneuver offsets this disadvantage. Combined planning and training with our allies during peacetime are more important than ever. Exercises contribute to both personal relationships and interoperability within allied forces.

As our experience in NATO and the Gulf War demonstrated, we will not fight future wars without regarding the views of our coalition partners. Winning or losing may depend upon our understanding of the impacts political restraints have on operational maneuver.

Notes

- ¹ Robert Leonard, *The Art of Maneuver*, (Presido Press, 1991), 157.
- ² William Clinton, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, (The White House, Feb 1996), 14.
- ³ White Paper, *The Security of the Federal Republic of Germany*, (Federal Minister of Defense, 1983), 158.
- ⁴ Department of the Army, *Field Manual 100-5: Operations*, Washington: 1993, 1-3.
- ⁵ *FM 100-5, Operations*, 2-10.
- ⁶ United States Naval War College, *Elements of Operational Warfare*, (Joint Military Operations Department, 1996), 13.
- ⁷ *FM 100-5, Operations*, 9-0.
- ⁸ Joseph Schroedel, *The Art and Science of Operational Maneuver*, (Defense Technical Information Center, 1988), 17.
- ⁷ William H. Janes, *Operational Art in NATO*, (School of Advanced Military Studies, 1988), 20.
- ¹⁰ White Paper, 159.
- ¹¹ *FM 100-5, Operations*, 9-2.
- ¹² Charles D. Odorizzi and Benjamin F. Schemer, "AFJ Interview with General Glenn K. Otis, Commander-in-Chief of The US Army in Europe," *Armed Forces Journal International*, January 1987, 48.
- ¹³ Lawrence W. Martin, *NATO and the Defense of the West*, (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1985), 41.
- ¹⁴ Keith A. Dunn, *In Defense of NATO: The Alliance's Enduring Value*, (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1990), 83.
- ¹⁵ James Blackwell, *Thunder in the Desert: The Strategy and Tactics of the Persian Gulf War*, (New York: Bantam, 1991), 222.
- ¹⁶ Robert H. Scales, *Certain Victory: The U.S. Army in the Gulf War*, (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Staff, United States Army, 1993), 94.
- ¹⁷ Micheal R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The General's War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf*, (New York: Little, Brown and Co, 1995), 74.
- ¹⁸ Gordon, 73.
- ¹⁹ Khalid bin Sultan, *Desert Warrior*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 208.
- ²⁰ Scales, 129.

²¹ Peter de la Billiere, *Storm Command: A Personal Account of the Gulf War*, (London: Motivate Publishing, 1992), 89.

²² Douglas W. Craft, *An Operational Analysis of the Persian Gulf War*, (Institute for Strategic Studies, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 1992), 28.

²³ Craft, 29.

²⁴ bin Sultan, 218.

²⁵ Craft, 44.

²⁶ Center for Strategic and International Studies, *The Gulf War: Military Lessons Learned*, (Washington D.C., 1991), 46.

²⁷ Richmond M. Lloyd, "Strategy and Force Planning Framework," *Strategy and Force Planning*, (Newport RI: Naval War College Press, 1995), 10.

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