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**DEMANDS OF OOTW ON GROUND FORCES:
IMPLICATIONS FOR RECRUITING AND TRAINING**

CORE COURSE V PAPER

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In the years since the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, increased participation in Operations Other Than War (OOTW) has been one of the defining characteristics of U S military life. U S troops have been deployed to Haiti, Cuba, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Somalia, Iraq, Guam, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Zaire in this relatively brief period -- always on missions well short of the "fight and win" that is their traditional primary function. For the purposes of this paper, OOTW will include missions other than conventional battlefield operations, focusing on disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, and peace enforcement. Such operations have placed unprecedented demands on both enlisted soldiers and officers in recent years.

It is no secret that for many members of the U S military, OOTW are an unwelcome distraction from their primary mission. It is not surprising that this new identity sits uneasily with many service members. Carl Builder and Theodore Karasik, discussing in 1995 the natural conflicts arising from participation in crises and lesser conflicts (CALCs), predicted "A tension in the purpose and identity of U S. military between warfighting and broad military service or between finite missions and open-ended tasking. CALCs would drive the armed services toward purposes associated with broad military service to the nation rather than toward 'fighting and winning the nation's wars'"¹ (Builder and Karasik define CALCs as international and nonroutine operations other than war, particularly those that could lead to combat operations. It is thus a subset, albeit the most prominent one, of OOTW.) The predominance of OOTW, then, threatens to alter the very identity so rightly cherished by members of the armed forces. This institutional discomfort with OOTW in turn led, at least initially, to a reluctance to tackle the planning necessary for operations short of full-scale conflict. In *The Masks of War*, Carl Builder had

¹ Builder and Karasik 1995

earlier noted that, “secondary (as opposed to dominant) images of war are the stepchildren in service planning, always finding some support from the fringe elements in the institution, always clamoring for more attention, but always treated as less attractive obligations by the institutional mainstream.”² As it has become clearer that OOTW will continue to be a large part of military life, at least for the foreseeable future, academic and professional journals have begun to tackle the challenges that characterize lesser conflicts. One of the most useful contributors to the fledgling inquiry has been Builder himself, who has concluded that CALCs present challenges to the *qualities* designed into U S forces, while major regional conflicts (MRCs) present *quantitative* problems relating to the size and sufficiency of the forces.³

While the literature on preparation for OOTW has grown appreciably thanks to the efforts of Builder and others, most of the available material deals with large-scale issues such as force structure (e g , the appropriate active/reserve mix) and the level at which training for OOTW should be done. It appears that there has been little methodical study of the skills needed by the *individual* soldier as he or she confronts the unique demands of OOTW. Col David Price takes a tentative stab at it in “Leadership: Some Thoughts on the Military Circa 2025”⁴, but confines himself to the language and cross-cultural skills that are the most obvious requirements for successful conduct of OOTW. This paper will seek to expand on Price’s list of the individual skills and attributes needed in the 21st century military.

OOTW: The Realm of the Junior NCO: OOTW places unprecedented demands on the judgment and restraint of enlisted soldiers and non-commissioned officers. This fact was recognized well in advance of the flood of low intensity operations that characterize today’s U S

² Builder 1989

³ Builder and Karasik 1995

⁴ Price 1996

military environment Michael Harbottle, writing in 1970 of his participation with British forces in UN peacekeeping in Cyprus, noted

There is no doubt in my mind that the success of a peace-keeping operation depends more than anything else on the vigilance and mental alertness of the most junior soldier and his young non-commissioned leader . It is at their level that most of the problems originate, and unless their reactions and palliatives are immediate, the deterioration in an otherwise peaceful situation could have far-reaching and serious results Their initiative and reflex actions must be spontaneous if a spontaneous incident is not to become a military and sometimes a political issue. However brilliant the senior commanders and staff may be, they are wholly dependent upon their most junior commanders⁵

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Lt Col Michael Dewar, describing the key role of the British junior non-commissioned officer in Northern Ireland, simply stated, "It is primarily his war . . ."6 As the nature of OOTW continues to demand that companies be broken up and dispersed to cover wide areas, the American experience mirrors that of the British In a volatile situation, whether in Mogadishu or Bosnia, a simple misstep by a young NCO in command of a checkpoint can quickly escalate into a major incident with significant political ramifications A senior USMC officer, speaking recently in a non-attribution environment at the National War College, said that in OOTW, "the individual soldier has strategic impact" This paper will thus focus on the challenges awaiting enlisted and non-commissioned personnel in the OOTW environment

More specifically, it will address the tasks confronting *ground forces* in OOTW Although the Air Force and Navy clearly have an important role in many lesser conflicts, it has historically been the Army and Marine Corps which have borne the major burden in these operations To the extent that naval and aviation forces do participate, moreover, their OOTW responsibilities are less radically different from the functions they would serve in a full-scale war⁷

⁵ Harbottle 1970

⁶ Dewar 1985

⁷ GAO/NSIAD-96-14 1995

How is OOTW Different? There are many areas in which OOTW places unique demands on ground forces. The most obvious examples occur when soldiers are required to fulfill functions totally at variance with their ordinary missions. A 1995 GAO report, for example, described the observation and reporting functions that had been assigned to a mechanized infantry unit in Bosnia -- a tasking having little if anything in common with its normal combat mission of breaching obstacles and providing firepower. The resulting degradation in gunnery and maneuver skills resulted in record low scores in the divisionwide Bradley qualification test the unit underwent after redeployment, and it took the unit three months of retraining to increase its readiness level to satisfactory.⁸ Because OOTW/warfighting differences such as this are most easily identified, and their results more easily quantified (e.g., in terms of retraining time required after redeployment), they receive most of the attention both in the mass media and academic press. There are other, more subtle ways in which OOTW places new demands on soldiers, however.

Adjusting from the “fight and win” doctrine of overwhelming force to more restricted Rules of Engagement (ROE) One study on Army operations in OOTW concluded, “Stress may be worse for troops in OOTW than in high-tempo combat operations because they may not have full recourse to the use of force and must exercise more restraint than their foes.”⁹ The higher threshold required for use of force in the chaotic, close-quarter environments of OOTW understandably increases the sense of vulnerability of the individual soldier whose combat training has instilled the instinct to react quickly and forcefully to a perceived threat. Even when nonlethal weapons are available to U.S. troops, their use may be severely constrained due to political

⁸ GAO/NSIAD-96-14 1995

⁹ Taw and Peters 1995

considerations. The senior Marine officer quoted above commented that only superior combat training instills in the soldier the self-confidence necessary to adjust to limited ROE. Another USMC officer who commanded troops in Mogadishu has offered the opinion that, ironically, only *less* restrictive ROE give the soldier on the ground the confidence to exercise the restraint necessary in OOTW. The relaxing of ROE's in politically sensitive situations is not a likely prospect, however, and this issue will not be soon resolved.

Dealing With NGO's. Another Kind of Culture Clash. While soldiers and non-commissioned officers deploy with an awareness that the country for which they are bound will have customs and mores different from their own, they may *not* be prepared for the gap which may separate them from Westerners (sometimes their own countrymen) already on the ground with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Legitimate NGO concerns that too-close association with the military could endanger their own personnel or imperil carefully forged ties to the local community sometimes combine with visceral anti-military attitudes to create an uncooperative environment. Failing to achieve a rapport with NGO's can negatively impact the military's mission, as was the case in Somalia, where “. . . antagonism complicated U S operations as American units were deprived of both a potentially lucrative source of information about the local population as well as cooperation in food distribution and other humanitarian efforts ”¹⁰

Even when military-NGO relationships are cordial, the non-hierarchical structure of nongovernmental organizations can be trying to soldiers accustomed to an established chain of command. U S troops are not alone in their frustration with this aspect of their OOTW mission. A Canadian “lessons learned” paper on Operation Deliverance in Somalia commented, “These agencies appeared to be highly disorganized and inefficient. Had it not been for the daily

¹⁰ Taw and Peters 1995

supervision and advice of Canadian liaison officers, relief supplies would not have reached people in need. Units deploying on similar operations should make every attempt to train liaison officers . . .”¹¹

Finally, the very presence of NGO’s changes the operating environment for military personnel, even under optimum conditions. An article in the September 1996 *Marine Corps Gazette*, referring to the presence of NGO’s and private volunteer organizations, counseled, “. . . the small unit leader may be surprised to learn that he does not ‘own’ his area of operations.”¹² Raised in a culture where autonomy and self-reliance are key, most Marines surely feel frustrated by the need to coordinate plans with civilians who may lack an appreciation or understanding of the military art.

A Clear Threat, but a Changing Enemy: OOTW present a unique set of dangers to the soldier on the ground. It will often be impossible to distinguish a potentially hostile force in a crowd of unarmed civilians at a checkpoint. Even more confusing is the fact that local forces with whom the military has forged a working relationship (sometimes a grudging one) may unexpectedly revert to an aggressive posture. A Canadian soldier interviewed about his unit’s experiences in Bosnia recalled that his unit had been taken hostage three times by Serb forces.

The Serbs surrounded us, saying that everybody had better give them their weapons or they would fire. Then they said that if we weren’t gone in two hours, they would drop mortars on our heads. We received orders to move into the hills. As soon as we did, the Serbs put mines around us and took us hostage. The commander came to me and said, “Sorry Mike, but we don’t like the way you’re treating us.” . . . The Serbs, Muslims and Croats play the same games. It’s a crazy country.¹³

¹¹ Service Paper on Canadian Airborne Regiment Battle Group Lessons learned from Operation Deliverance 1993

¹² Greenwood 1996

¹³ MacLean’s 6/12/95

Dealing With the Press In OOTW, even the smallest unit and lowest-ranking soldier is likely to have contact with journalists. Because OOTW taskings often call for the physical dispersal of small units, journalists have relatively easy access to younger and less experienced soldiers and leaders. While most members of the press corps recognize the value of a good working relationship with the military and seek to protect their own credibility by not exploiting unsophisticated interviewees, there will inevitably be some who are more concerned with publishing an attention-grabbing piece than with producing quality work. An unguarded comment by any soldier can have disastrous political results requiring damage control. An article on OOTW in *The Marine Corps Gazette* counsels that media relations should be, “coordinated down to the lowest level since that is often where the press goes for their stories”¹⁴. The quoted article includes suggested answers to leading questions such as, “Do you feel like a political pawn?” (Answer: “No, I feel like a Marine.”)

How to Guarantee That Our Military Will Be Able to Meet the OOTW Challenge? The foregoing is only a partial list of the nontraditional skills which OOTW demands of armed forces. It is true that the skills needed in combat often overlap with those required in OOTW -- but OOTW places an especially heavy premium on independent judgment, restraint, and the ability to deal with ambiguity and the unfamiliar.

The Army seems to have come the farthest in systematically preparing its troops for participation in OOTW. The Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) at Hohenfels, Germany is a center for OOTW training. A ten-day session for a tank or mechanized infantry battalion includes the mock creation of a Zone of Separation between two rival groups. Soldiers

¹⁴ Greenwood 1996

are trained to escort relief convoys, deal with media and establish civil-military working groups. Heavy emphasis is placed on development of junior leaders. In an effort to make the training as realistic as possible, units bound for Bosnia have found themselves confronted with a scenario in which three ethnic groups (and even more factions) vie for power. Taskforce commanders were forced to negotiate for even the most basic needs. Base engineers switched off utilities until the commanders could convince the "local authorities" to restore them. Civil unrest, evacuation of massive UN casualties, and other challenges round out the training. Closer to home, all three services participated with the Alaska National Guard in a peacekeeping exercise in 1994. Ground forces were required to create a demilitarized zone and implement a mass casualty evacuation. Red Cross and other NGO representatives participated in order to make the exercise closer to reality.¹⁵

Training is clearly effective in preparing troops for the challenges of OOTW. A subject for further study, however, is whether or not the traditional warfighter (although certainly capable of handling OOTW) is the individual *best* suited to handle the challenges of lesser conflicts. The reluctance with which many members of the military have embraced OOTW would seem to indicate that their own preferences would take them elsewhere. It is worthwhile to at least consider that an individual with different preferences and inherent aptitudes might be better prepared to cope with OOTW -- possibly with greater efficacy, and probably with less stress. Pursuing this thesis would involve considerable research into required skill sets and individual preferences (as measured, for example, by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator,) and is far beyond

¹⁵ Morocco 1994

the scope of this paper. Even if a full study were completed, moreover, its findings would probably *not* be used as a recruit-screening method at this time for the reasons discussed below

Army and Marine officers interviewed for this paper were unanimous in their belief that the military should *not* be recruiting specifically for OOTW, regardless of whether or not these operations will dominate the scene in coming years. One Marine Corps Colonel explained that the confidence necessary to conduct OOTW could only come from broad training across the entire spectrum of combat. Specialized troops designated for OOTW could never achieve that level of confidence, he continued. (A possible counterargument to this might be the example set by the Nordic countries, where separate units of volunteer reservists have been earmarked for UN service. Given the vast differences between the broader missions (and expectations) of U.S. and Nordic forces, however, any comparison between the two would necessarily be weak.) Another argument against the creation/recruiting of special OOTW forces was articulated by an Army Colonel who noted that the core mission of the military will always be to fight and win the nation's wars, and that specially recruited OOTW forces could not be relied upon to do warfighting in a worst-case scenario. He postulated that soldiers recruited specifically for OOTW might balk at being placed in combat situations due to moral or religious convictions or for a number of other reasons.

Yet another factor makes moot the possibility of recruiting specifically for OOTW skills at this point in time. As one Army officer in Enlisted Accessions commented, "We can't be too choosy - the buyer's market is in a downturn." Screening prospective recruits for aptitude/skills

most needed in OOTW would add another hurdle and make the already difficult job of filling enlistment quotas even more of a challenge

Revisiting the Issue: Are OOTW Skills Really That Different? There can be little doubt that makers and implementers of U.S. policy have learned a good deal about OOTW in recent years and that the effectiveness and sophistication of U.S. forces thrust into these difficult situations has increased considerably since the early 1990's. Thus, there is evidence to support the contention that whatever new skills are required can indeed be learned - at *all* levels of the chain of command. The ability to perform successfully in OOTW situations has a way of surfacing at the field level, even without elaborate screening procedures. The Army colonel who commanded troops in Somalia recalled that he quickly learned that soldiers who had grown up in rough urban environments were especially valuable in the streets of Mogadishu. The same survival skills and street smarts that had protected them in the ghettos of New York or Los Angeles gave them an edge in coping with the challenges of life in Somalia's capital. He recalled in particular a young NCO at a checkpoint who accurately warned that an individual claiming to be the head of one faction of fighters was in fact fronting for his boss until the situation was secure. The NCO picked out the real leader simply by looking at body language. He knew first-hand the dynamics of gang warfare, and successfully applied what he had learned in LA to a situation halfway around the world. Perhaps in placing too much emphasis on the distinctiveness of OOTW, we are indeed overlooking the inherent flexibility of the human organism.

Retention rates are often cited as another casualty of OOTW -- common wisdom has it that soldiers are failing to reenlist due to the heavy (and unwelcome) burdens that OOTW place on them. This is interpreted as another indicator that OOTW missions are radically different from traditional military operations. Recent Army studies conclude, however, that deployment on OOTW may in some instances have a *positive* impact on reenlistment. The 1st Armored Division in Europe had retention rates approximately 10% higher than the Army as a whole following deployment to Bosnia in FY 1996. The 10th Mountain Division, which was deployed repetitively during FY 1994 and FY 1995, also had overall reenlistment rates higher than that of the Army as a whole in those fiscal years. While by no means conclusive, these results do indicate that deployments on OOTW do not *necessarily* cause enough dissatisfaction to reduce reenlistment. To the extent that some reenlistment rates have fallen, it is likely that it is the PERSTEMPO itself, rather than the nature of the OOTW mission, that is driving people out of the service. Separating out the root cause of dissatisfaction in the ranks may well support the contention that OOTW missions and skills are not such a huge leap from conventional warfighting skills as long as the military continues to recruit quality soldiers capable of some degree of flexibility.

Conclusion: Military sociologists have begun to study the effects of OOTW on the armed forces, at least one has traveled to Bosnia to conduct field research. The Center for Naval Analysis has also begun its study of the impact of OOTW on the troops. One researcher there conceded that the field is in its infancy, and that much remains to be done. In view of certain realities facing today's military planners (the continuing vital importance of the "fight and win" mission and the challenge of recruiting quality personnel for that mission alone), it does not seem likely that our armed forces will be recruiting individuals targeted for OOTW in the foreseeable future. Nor

does it seem necessary to do so, given our improved OOTW performance of recent years -- a factor of better training and mission understanding and the inherent flexibility of quality personnel

None of these realities is necessarily permanent, however, and further research in the area of OOTW and its effects on personnel (and vice versa!) is warranted for more than academic reasons. If OOTW continue over the long run to dominate our military operations, and if certain regional threats are gradually neutralized through diplomatic, economic and other means, the nation may well increase the relative emphasis it places on operations other than war. Continuing research on this topic will help to alleviate stress on the individual soldier *now* and may lay the groundwork for the different kind of force that may yet be created for a different kind of world

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