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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, RI**

WAR TERMINATION: WE CAN PLAN BETTER.

By

**Mark S. Gilbert
LCDR USN**

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.

Signature: _____

14 February 2005

**Capt. S.D. Kornatz, USN
Faculty Advisor**

Abstract

War termination presents a complex challenge to the combatant commander and his operational planners. The combatant commander is responsible for establishing the conditions for a better peace through war termination by translating military success into political victory. The strategies for war termination that are most likely to produce a better, more stable or enduring peace are characterized by clearly stated objectives, significant planning, negotiation leverage and a reliable means to enforce the peace. Such was the case in World War II when the allies clearly articulated their objective of unconditional surrender in both the European Theater and the Pacific Theater. The objective of unconditional surrender was supported by considerable planning that took into account the necessary leverage and means to enforce the peace.

Without significant planning or consideration for the war termination phase it becomes difficult for the combatant commander to determine how far to go militarily to achieve political objectives. Consequently, the combatant commander increases the risk of going beyond the culminating point of victory or stopping short of that point resulting in the loss of valuable leverage for negotiations. The lack of leverage will reduce what the national leadership is able to demand politically in peace negotiations leading to a peace that is less enforceable. To best establish conditions of leverage and enforceability in operational plans, the planning staff must develop war termination criteria. The Korean War provides an excellent example of the problems of war termination when leverage and enforceability are lost due to a lack of war termination criteria.

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Introduction

War plans cover every aspect of war and weave them all into a single operation that must have a single, ultimate objective in which all particular aims are reconciled. No one starts a war-or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so, without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it.

Carl von Clausewitz, On War

The first instance of war termination in American history provides an example of leverage that remains relevant today. At the end of fighting during the American Revolution, George Washington recognized the importance of maintaining the Continental Army until peace negotiations were complete and favorable to American interests. He wrote to James McHenry:

There is nothing which will so soon produce a speedy and honorable peace as a state of preparation for war, and we must either do this or lay our account for a patched up, inglorious peace after all the toil, blood, and treasure we have spent.¹

Washington's foresight and vigilance, primarily his decision to maintain military pressure on the British by concentrating his forces against them in New York, combined with the negotiating skill of American diplomats enabled the colonists to gain their independence along with generous territorial concessions.² Had Washington not maintained the leverage of military pressure on the British it is unlikely American diplomats would have achieved as much towards American interests as they did.

War termination presents a complex challenge to the combatant commander and his operational planners. As B.H. Liddell Hart reminds us, "the objective in war is a better state of peace – even if only from your point of view. Hence it is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace you desire."³ The combatant commander is responsible for establishing the conditions for a better peace through war termination by translating military success into political victory. The strategies for war termination that are most

likely to produce a better, more stable or enduring peace are characterized by clearly stated objectives, significant planning, negotiation leverage and a reliable means to enforce the peace. Such was the case in World War II when the allies clearly articulated their objective of unconditional surrender in both the European Theater and the Pacific Theater. The objective of unconditional surrender was supported by considerable planning that took into account the necessary leverage and means to enforce the peace.

Without significant planning or consideration for the war termination phase it becomes difficult for the combatant commander to determine how far to go militarily to achieve political objectives. Consequently, the combatant commander increases the risk of going beyond the culminating point of victory or stopping short of that point resulting in the loss of valuable leverage for negotiations. The lack of leverage will reduce what the national leadership is able to demand politically in peace negotiations leading to a peace that is less enforceable. To best establish conditions of leverage and enforceability in operational plans, the planning staff must develop war termination criteria.

War Termination Criteria

Joint doctrine is filled with generalities and lacks specific guidance when it comes to war termination criteria. For example, Joint Publication 5-00.1 (Joint Doctrine for Campaign Planning) stresses the importance for the combatant commander to clearly understand termination criteria for the campaign but fails to provide specific examples of such criteria. Joint Publication 5-00.2 (Joint Task Force Planning Guidance and Procedures) contains a checklist for termination planning but it fails to address

termination criteria. Joint Publication 3-0 (Doctrine for Joint Operations) also highlights the importance of war termination criteria with the following passage:

Properly conceived termination criteria are key to ensuring that victories achieved with military forces endure. To facilitate development of effective termination criteria, U.S. forces must be dominant in the final stages of an armed conflict by achieving the leverage sufficient to impose a lasting solution.⁴

This passage has some value in that it relates leverage and enforceability (impose a lasting solution) to termination criteria but fails to delineate properly conceived termination criteria.

Properly conceived war termination criteria should link strategic objectives to operational objectives and serve as the basis for a dialogue between military planners and political leadership. From the combatant commander's perspective, properly conceived war termination criteria should focus on the leverage required for negotiations and long term enforceability to achieve a better peace. The Korean War provides an excellent example of the problems of war termination when leverage and enforceability are lost due to a lack of war termination criteria. War termination responsibility overlaps the strategic level of war and the operational level of war; therefore it is necessary to examine both levels when evaluating the war termination phase.

Korean War: the Strategic Level of War

The Truman administration's policies during the Korean War were grounded in the overarching strategic objective of containment and to a lesser extent the Truman Doctrine.⁵ Prior to the surprise attack of June 25, 1950 by the Soviet and Communist

Chinese backed North Korean forces, Truman and his advisors discounted the defense of South Korea based on military strategic grounds.⁶ However, after the aggression occurred, they unanimously agreed intervention was unavoidable due to broader political considerations. The motive for such a reversal was the fear, that if unchecked, the aggression would be the first in a series of aggressions that would threaten international security and transgress into another world war. This conclusion was based on an analysis of the events leading up to World War II and it reflected the common hypothesis that World War II resulted when the democracies of the world failed to check the aggression of the totalitarian regimes of the 1930's.⁷ Now, if the Communists were allowed to initiate aggression unchecked, they would be confident and undeterred on their path to world domination. Eventually, the democracies of the world would be forced into a total war with the Soviet Union the same way they had been forced into a total war with the Axis powers in World War II.⁸

Truman was intensely concerned with the risk of neglecting the defense of Western Europe by over-committing American resources to Korea since he believed the Kremlin's aim was to distract the United States from its responsibilities there to gain more freedom to maneuver politically and possibly militarily.⁹ Additionally, the prevailing view in the Truman administration was that the Soviet Union, Communist China, or both would send forces into Korea to prevent the United Nations (UN) troops from reaching the northernmost parts of the Korean peninsula. The administration as well as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies held the position that a direct U.S.-Soviet confrontation would increase the risk of expanding the war beyond the peninsula and could possibly lead to another world war.¹⁰

A direct clash between U.S. and Communist Chinese forces was less likely to result in a general war since they did not possess the capability to attack the United States or its NATO allies directly. However, Communist Chinese intervention was undesirable since it would prolong the conflict, require substantial American resources for a significant amount of time, and increase the possibility of the conflict spreading beyond the Korean peninsula. If the conflict were to spread into China, Soviet intervention was viewed as imminent in light of the Sino-Soviet alliance.

Over-commitment in Korea would detract from the capability of the United States to defend Western Europe which was seen by the administration and NATO as the primary theater in the Cold War.¹¹ With these considerations, the administration approached the possibility of operations above the thirty-eighth parallel with caution.

Although the UN resolution of 27 June 1950 did not restrict military operations north of the thirty-eighth parallel, President Truman directed the National Security Council to consider the consequences of such action. The resulting report to the president, NSC 81, concluded that “the UN forces have a legal basis for conducting operations north of the thirty-eighth parallel to compel the withdrawal of the North Korean Forces behind this line or to defeat these forces.”¹² Additionally, the report favored pressing the current UN action to achieve unification of Korea so long as it did not involve a substantial risk of general war and garnered the support of the UN. To avoid the risk of general war, the report stipulated several policy recommendations to the president which he adopted.

The restrictions imposed were as follows:

1) “provided at the time of such operation there has been no entry into North Korea by major Soviet or Chinese Communist Forces, no announcement of intended entry, nor a threat to counter our operations militarily in North Korea;”

2) “under no circumstances, however, will your forces cross the Manchuria or USSR borders of Korea;”

3) “as a matter of policy, no non-Korean Ground Forces will be used in the northeast provinces bordering the Soviet Union or in the area along the Manchurian border;”

4) “support of your operations north or south of the thirty-eighth parallel will not include air or naval action against Manchuria or against Soviet territory.”¹³

Additionally, MacArthur was directed on specific actions to be taken if he encountered the open or covert and the small or major employment of Soviet or Communist Chinese forces.¹⁴

By placing these military restrictions on MacArthur, Truman clearly intended to limit hostilities to the Korean peninsula and to avoid Communist Chinese and Soviet intervention reducing the risk of a general war. However, what did he intend for MacArthur to achieve? Specific war termination criteria were never discussed which would have led not only to a critical review of MacArthur’s plans for war termination, but more importantly, a clear definition of what could and could not be accomplished militarily under the given restrictions.

As a consequence of the complex political environment, the Truman administration vacillated between restoring the *status quo ante bellum* and Korean reunification without consideration for an outcome somewhere in the middle. The lack of clearly defined war

termination criteria translated to the operational level of war. As a result, the United States did not take advantage of its successful offensive in the spring of 1951 and failed to maintain leverage for armistice negotiations which contributed to current peace enforcement duties that have lasted for over fifty years.

Korean War: the Operational Level of War

The North Korean offensive, initiated in the predawn hours of June 25, 1950, achieved complete tactical surprise. Out numbered and out gunned, the South Korean Army along with their American advisors was eventually driven south to the Pusan perimeter by the advancing North Korean Army. On September 15, 1950, General Douglas MacArthur's bold amphibious landing at Inchon gave the UN forces under his command a distinct operational advantage and prompted an upward revision of U.S. strategic objectives which included the reunification of the Korean peninsula under the South Korean government.¹⁵ In November 1950, MacArthur's pursuit of the revised political objectives was met with massive Chinese intervention and incited him to declare "we face an entirely new war."¹⁶ President Truman would later relieve General MacArthur for insubordination stemming from the General's public criticism of Truman's policies. He was replaced by General Matthew Ridgway. The combined Chinese and North Korean offensive pushed UN forces below the 38th parallel but had lost momentum and stalled by mid-February of 1951.¹⁷ General Ridgway seized this opportunity to launch an offensive.

During the offensive in the spring of 1951, the United States led UN forces exacted a staggering defeat on North Korean and Chinese forces. The North Korean and Chinese forces were overextended and virtually collapsed during the offensive. The Eighth Army Commander, General James Van Fleet, would later recall that “in June 1951 we had the Chinese whipped. They were definitely gone. They were in awful shape. During the last week in May we captured more than 10,000 prisoners.”¹⁸ The UN forces regained territory up to and above the thirty-eighth parallel in some areas before the UN Forces Commander; General Ridgway halted the advance. The North Korean and Communist Chinese forces were in no condition to establish an effective defensive perimeter to stop the advancing UN troops. Communist Chinese and North Korean leaders realized their dangerous position and indicated a willingness to commence armistice negotiations.¹⁹

General Ridgway’s operational decision to halt the offensive allowed the North Korean and Communist Chinese forces time to regroup, reinforce and resupply. The tactical advantage had been given back to the North Korean and Communist Chinese forces. They would translate the tactical advantage afforded them into a strategic advantage while they delayed peace talks and tested the political will of the United States. The break in fighting allowed the North Korean and Communist Chinese forces to entrench in the rugged Korean terrain. At this point, a renewed UN offensive would be too costly. In August and September of 1951, operations to straighten the combat line resulted in 60,000 UN casualties of which 20,000 were U.S. casualties.²⁰ During the ensuing two-year stalemate, hostilities continued and resulted in 12,000 additional U.S. casualties while negotiations addressed issues that were mainly secondary to the strategic objectives of each side.²¹ By halting the offensive without reaching any formal ceasefire

agreement, General Ridgway had removed all incentive for the North Korean and Communist Chinese leadership to conclude an armistice in a timely manner. They would now use armistice negotiations to accomplish what they could not achieve on the battlefield.

Had the American led UN forces maintained battlefield pressure on the defeated North Korean and Communist Chinese forces while negotiating, the war would have terminated with a quick armistice and an enforceable peace. Clearly defined war termination criteria would have prevented the premature halt to the offensive and subsequent loss of negotiation leverage. By clearly defining war termination criteria during planning at the operational level, operational planners can expose the specific military conditions required to achieve an enforceable peace. Additionally, war termination criteria will allow civilian leaders to assess whether or not the military conditions will accomplish their political objectives by critically examining the assumptions that support the operational plan.²² This underscores the importance of a dialogue between the military and civilian leadership to ensure that military success is translated into political victory.

War Termination

The historical record does not indicate that restoration of the 38th parallel had become the principal strategic objective in the spring of 1951 nor does it reflect any effort by operational planners to define specific military conditions to achieve this objective.²³ General Ridgway's operational decision to halt the 1951 spring offensive was based on the following rationale:

- Continuing the offensive would be too costly.
- Continuing the offensive could motivate the Chinese to increase the amount of men and resources they were providing to the Korean theater.
- A second drive towards the Yalu would have served to shorten the Communist Chinese and North Korean lines of communication while lengthening the UN lines of communication.
- A second drive towards the Yalu would only result in the acquisition of more real estate of no significant value.²⁴

Had his staff conducted war termination planning, General Ridgway would have developed a different opinion of the costs of continuing the offensive, the likelihood of further Chinese intervention, the relative advantages of the lines of communication and the value of the “real estate” north of the truce line. U.S. Department of Defense records indicate that 33,686 Americans were killed in combat during the Korean War.²⁵ Thirty-six percent of those killed occurred after the spring 1951 offensive had been halted and negotiations dragged on.²⁶ At this point, the objective of the Truman administration was to bring the war to an early end; however, the premature halt of the spring 1951 offensive achieved the opposite and substantially increased the cost of the war. That cost does not reflect the financial commitment for fifty-two years of continuous U.S. troop presence where roughly 34,000 U.S. troops are deployed to the Korean peninsula today to enforce the 1953 armistice.²⁷ The cost of continuing the spring 1951 offensive against the badly beaten Communist Chinese and North Korean forces would have been far less expensive in lives and dollars.

Despite their initial success, by mid-June 1951, the Communist Chinese forces were near destruction and their primary concern was to prevent their annihilation. The Communist Chinese had sent their two best field armies which were beaten badly and on

the verge of destruction. The spring 1951 offensive was so successful that Communist Chinese leaders were not encouraged to send reinforcements or increase logistical support to shore up the Korean theater. In a letter written to Stalin in July 1951, Mao confirmed the Communist Chinese view that “. . . If we continue fighting for 6-8 months, we might be able to chase the adversary out of South Korea, but the price will be too high, we’ll face a crisis . . . if the war . . . resumes again, we’ll have to continue a long war trying to achieve the unachievable.”²⁸ Due to the near destruction of China’s two best field armies, increasing financial burdens, the recent conclusion of the civil war and other political considerations, China was eager for peace at the height of the UN spring 1951 offensive. China did not have the means or the intent to dedicate more resources to the North Korean theater.²⁹

The continued northward advance of the UN forces in the spring of 1951 would have served to lengthen their lines of communication and consequently shorten the Communist Chinese and North Korean line of communication. However, UN naval and air superiority combined with the successful ground offensive would have made it possible to seize ports on either coast to facilitate the resupply of UN ground forces as the advance pushed further north.³⁰ This would have remedied any advantage the Communist Chinese and North Korean forces could have hoped to gain with relatively shorter lines of communication.

The “real estate” between the Yalu and the truce line was more valuable than General Ridgway had thought. The primary reason for continuing the offensive would have been to maintain battlefield pressure on the Communist Chinese and North Korean forces during negotiations. Additionally, reducing the size of North Korea, geographically and

by population, would serve to diminish future North Korean capacity to wage war while increasing the size of South Korea and its future capacity to defend itself. With the threat of North Korea emerging from the war as a much smaller country, the United States could have punished communist aggression or used the territory as a means to achieve a more enforceable peace. The enemy must be placed in a position to fear failed negotiations and the operational decision to halt the spring 1951 offensive removed all fear from the Communist Chinese and North Korean leadership.

The success of the spring 1951 offensive provided the perfect opportunity to reassess the strategic objective and the supporting war termination criteria. The UN Commander, General Ridgway, was in the best position to initiate a dialogue with the Truman administration but failed to do so. The premature halt of the offensive made possible by the lack of a war termination strategy at the operational level caused the UN forces to lose all negotiation leverage resulting in a military stalemate, protracted peace talks and many more unnecessary U.S. and UN casualties.

Recommendations

Establish a distinct war termination phase in the campaign and joint task force planning process. The war termination phase should rest between the decisive operations phase and the transition phase. Since it contains aspects of both phases, it should naturally be viewed as overlapping the two phases. “Phases are a logical way of chronologically organizing the diverse, extended, and dispersed activities involved in the

campaign . . . Each phase should represent a natural subdivision of the campaign's objectives."³¹

War termination should be defined as the military and political process of ending hostilities to facilitate the transition to civil control and rule of law. The primary military component of the process is to achieve and maintain leverage for negotiations. The political component of the process is the negotiations to achieve the enforceability of an enduring peace. They should complement each other. Creating a distinct war termination phase will allow planning to focus on the military conditions and the requirements in terms of resources, forces, time, space and purpose to achieve a political victory. This planning should answer what to accomplish militarily after the enemies operational center of gravity has been destroyed or neutralized to gain necessary leverage. All instruments of national power should be considered throughout the planning. The war termination phase should end with a formal peace agreement or the establishment of an interim government in the case of regime change.

Establish a war termination planning cell that focuses on the specific military conditions that are required to create leverage and enforceability. These conditions will be defined as war termination criteria that if met will satisfy the ultimate strategic objective of a better peace. The war termination planning cell should have some interagency representation; however the primary interagency effort should be aimed at the transition phase. The planning cell should define the operational conditions to be achieved during the war termination phase in clear, unambiguous detail. The absence of clear, detailed war termination criteria may produce unintended consequences such as

General Ridgway's premature halt of the 1951 spring offensive which protracted the war counter to the Truman administration's strategic objectives.

The planning cell should strive to exploit the tempo of operations in the war termination phase. Experience from the Korean War suggests that aggressive exploitation of the enemy's culminating point will most likely attain the required leverage to realize the desired strategic objectives at a lower cost. By viewing war termination as a distinct phase of an operation that overlaps decisive operations and transition, the war termination planning cell should identify operational objectives beyond the enemies operational center of gravity that help to establish leverage and enforceability. These objectives can be achieved in other phases of the campaign or operation, but their significance will be realized in the form of negotiation leverage in the war termination phase.

War termination criteria should be developed by the combatant commander and his planning staff based on what can be accomplished militarily to support given political objectives. Joint doctrine provides a single instance of specific guidance with respect to war termination criteria: "If the NCA do not adequately articulate the termination criteria, the Combatant Commander should request further guidance or clarification, as appropriate."³² Perhaps the best way to ensure the President or the Secretary of Defense adequately articulate war termination criteria is for the combatant commander to develop such criteria for submission. War termination criteria developed by the combatant commander will clearly describe the military conditions that are achievable in support of political objectives. The President or Secretary of Defense will approve the war termination criteria.

By proposing war termination criteria the combatant commander initiates a dialogue with political leadership that guarantees war termination will be considered at the outset along with the military means to achieve it. Additionally, the combatant commander should initiate a reassessment of the war termination criteria when changes on the battlefield dictate. The reassessment should initiate a dialogue with political leadership to consider what is achievable and what is acceptable based on the military effort required. Any adjustment to the war termination criteria will be approved by the President or Secretary of Defense.

Conclusion

To best establish conditions of leverage and enforceability in operational plans, the planning staff must develop war termination criteria. Current joint doctrine calls for the NCA to articulate war termination criteria; however, the combatant commander is better positioned to formulate war termination criteria. By formulating and proposing war termination criteria, the combatant commander initiates a dialogue with political leadership that guarantees war termination will be considered at the outset along with the military means to achieve it. Additionally, the combatant commander is best suited to initiate a reassessment of the war termination criteria when changes on the battlefield dictate.

From the combatant commander's perspective, properly conceived war termination criteria should focus on the leverage required for negotiations and long term enforceability to achieve a better peace. Without significant planning or consideration

for the war termination phase it becomes difficult for the combatant commander to determine how far to go militarily to achieve political objectives. Consequently, the combatant commander increases the risk of going beyond the culminating point of victory or stopping short of that point resulting in the loss of valuable leverage for negotiations.

NOTES

¹ Gary L. Gregg and Matthew Spalding, ed., Patriot Sage: George Washington and the American Political Tradition (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1999), 93.

² Ibid., 93.

³ B.H. Liddell Hart, Strategy (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1991), 353.

⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Operation, Joint Publication 3-0 (Washington, DC: 10 September 2001), I-10.

⁵ During an address before a joint session of Congress President Truman proclaimed “I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.” This became known as the Truman Doctrine.

⁶ Robert Osgood, Limited War: The Challenge to American Strategy (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 163.

⁷ Ibid., 165.

⁸ Ibid., 165.

⁹ Bernard Brodie, War and Politics (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 63.

¹⁰ Osgood, 169.

¹¹ Osgood, 170.

¹² James F. Schnabel, Policy and Direction: The First Year (Washington, DC: Center of Military History 1992), 182.

¹³ Schnabel, 182.

¹⁴ Ibid., 182.

¹⁵ Brodie, 70.

¹⁶ William Stueck, Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2002), 93.

¹⁷ Ibid., 129.

¹⁸ Brodie, 92.

¹⁹ Ibid., 94-95.

²⁰ Callum A. MacDonald, Korea: the War before Vietnam (New York, NY: The Free Press), 116.

²¹ James W. Reed, “Should Deterrence Fail: War Termination in Campaign Planning,” Parameters, Vol. XXIII No. 2 (Summer 1993): 50.

²² Ibid., 50.

²³ Ibid., 51.

²⁴ Brodie, 94.

²⁵ “An Overview of the U.S. Army in the Korean War, 1950-1953,” United States of America Korean War Commemoration, 24 October 3003, <<http://korea50.mil/history/factsheets/army.shtml>> [5 February 2005].

²⁶ Brodie, 95.

²⁷ Jim Garamone, “In Korea, Think Capabilities, Not Numbers, General Says,” American Forces Information Service, 24 September 2004.

²⁸ Dr. Natalia Bajanova, "Assessing the Conclusion and Outcome of the Korean War", Paper presented to the Korean Society Conference (Georgetown University, Washington, DC: 24 July 1995), 5.

²⁹ Brodie, 96.

³⁰ Brodie, 94.

³¹ Joint Publication 5-00.1, II-16, II-17

³² *Ibid.*, 5-00.1, II-4.

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