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# Terrorist-Insurgent Thinking and Joint Special Operational Planning Doctrine and Procedures



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Terrorist-Insurgent Thinking

Paquette

Laure Paquette  
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**On the cover.** Screenshot from a video by German Islamists shows a group of them in a terrorist training camp in Pakistan on 3 October 2009. The one-hour-long video shows several alleged terrorists of German origin calling German Muslims to Holy War. Used with permission of Newscom.





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Doctrine and Procedures*

Laure Paquette

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# Foreword

**I**n this insightful essay contrasting terrorist-insurgent thinking and current U.S. Joint planning doctrine and practices, the author reminds the profession that war is between two or more belligerents and that as Clausewitz admonished us, the first and most important thing is to understand the kind of war that you are fighting. From this, all other things must flow. In order to understand the kind of war, it is essential to not only understand your adversary's purpose but to understand his thinking and how it differs from yours. Only through understanding his thinking can you grasp his likely objectives, the concepts and tactics he will use to obtain them, and effectively plan to counter his operations and defeat him.

This monograph examines the characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking and U.S. Joint planning doctrine and practices and concludes that the existing U.S. planning framework is inadequate for the terrorist-insurgent threat and challenges the reader to expand his own planning paradigm to more fully encompass the implications of terrorist-insurgent thinking in the design and planning of U.S. operations. Why this mismatch occurs and how the terrorist-insurgent operates outside our cognitive frame of reference (for fighting in theaters of war, theaters of operations, areas of operations) are two important questions addressed. Equally important is the question of what are the implications of this for our own doctrine and practices? Focusing on two of the most significant characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking — changing level of operations and broader range of tactics — the author answers these questions and identifies the obstacles that stand in the way of the necessary adjustments to our conventional paradigms. In the process she again validates Clausewitz by demonstrating that in war the enemy exerts as much influence on us as we do on him, and we must find a way to counter this influence in order to be successful.

Kenneth H. Poole, Ed.D., GS-14  
Director, JSOU Strategic Studies Department



## About the Author

**D**r. Laure Paquette is Professor of Political Science at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. She has conducted research and been invited to speak in over 25 countries, including the United States, Israel, France, Australia, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Dr. Paquette has held the NATO Fellowship, the Japan Foundation Fellowship, the Barton Fellowship of the Canadian International Institute for Peace and Security, and the Chiang Foundation



of Taiwan. She has lectured on strategy at the National Defense University of the People's Liberation Army in Beijing, the Korean Institute of Defense Analysis and the Korean Defense College in Seoul, and the National Institute of Defense Studies in Tokyo, among many others.

Specializing in strategy, Dr. Paquette has presented a general theory of strategy that focuses on the strategic thinking of the underdog—"the strategy of the weak." The weak don't like the strong, and the strong often find it difficult to understand this simple concept and its implications. Her training program includes a diagnostic exercise that can identify people who already think like the weak, the underdog, the insurgent, or develop this skill set in those who may need it—in war, or anywhere else.

Dr. Paquette has written 13 books—including *NATO After 2000*, *Strategy and Ethnic Conflict*, *Security for the Pacific Century*, *Bioterrorism and Medical and Health Services*, and the recently published *Counterinsurgency and the Armed Forces*—and provided input to the United States Air Force on counterinsurgency doctrine. She has served in Canada's Reserve Forces with the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa. Dr. Paquette's Web site is at [www.lakeheadu.ca/~polisci/index.html](http://www.lakeheadu.ca/~polisci/index.html), and she maintains a research blog at [www.paquetteresearch.blogspot.com](http://www.paquetteresearch.blogspot.com). She can be reached at [laure.paquette@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:laure.paquette@lakeheadu.ca).



# Terrorist-Insurgent Thinking and Joint Special Operational Planning Doctrine and Procedures

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## 1. Introduction

“I’m an advocate of learning to be an insurgent.”<sup>1</sup>

— Russell D. Howard, Brigadier General, U.S. Army (Ret.)

**T**he United States has been deeply committed to a “war on terror” since the World Trade Center towers attack on 11 September 2001 (9/11). Yet, despite extraordinary efforts, commitment of astounding resources, and the loss of many lives, the war goes on. Some argue that it is not really a war, but such an argument is spurious and more wishful thinking than factual. A conflict exists, whatever the definition may be. If law enforcement cannot deal with the level of organized violence, it is war whether you call it that or not. We are long past arguments over whether it is a “war.” The facts are clear to the reasonably minded. If a group of people or actors — political opportunists, even if disguised in religious quotes — declares war on you, then *war* exists. If you commit one of the world’s largest and most proficient militaries to combat, it is war.

It would be much more productive to debate what kind of war we are involved in and how we should fight it. Military power cannot alleviate the underlying social maladies that motivate many people to support terrorism and insurgency, but it can, in theory, create security conditions in which social remedies can be applied. Yet, even this result appears to have eluded the U.S. for too long. Despite the best efforts of a great military machine, terrorists and insurgents continue to retain a high level of strategic initiative — how is this possible? What is needed to help resolve this situation is a



new idea — or more properly stated, what is needed is an old idea renewed. Most military professionals recognize Sun Tzu’s “If you know both yourself and your enemy, you can win a hundred battles without a single loss,”<sup>2</sup> yet few have assessed what it implies for the war on terror. The existing U.S. planning framework fails to account for the uniqueness of the thinking of terror-

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*The existing U.S. planning framework fails to account for the uniqueness of terrorist-insurgent thinking...*

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ists and insurgents in the design and planning of U.S. operations. Why this mismatch occurs and how the terrorists and insurgents operate within the seams of our

cognitive frame of reference of fighting in theaters of war, theaters of operations, and areas of operations are half of a prolonged story of terrorist and insurgent warfare. The second half of this story and its conclusion will be written by how well it is possible to understand the characteristics of the way terrorists and insurgents think about warfare — here referred to as *terrorist-insurgent thinking* — and use that knowledge to change our approaches to strategy, planning, and tactics.

The paper that follows is organized in six parts. The first discusses the characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking. The second discusses in some detail the two characteristics that are the most important to operational planning and procedures. The third part discusses the implications for planning doctrine. The fourth part discusses the implications for planning procedures. The exploration will apply primarily to limited contingency operations or crisis response, or multipurpose operations influenced by fluid and changing situations.<sup>3</sup> The fifth part discusses the obstacles to the changes necessary. The sixth part discusses the implications for training. This is followed by a brief conclusion.

## 2. Characteristics of Terrorist-Insurgent Thinking

**I**n the nearly ten years following 9/11, the research and literature on the terrorist-insurgent has grown exponentially. The 21st century terrorist-insurgent phenomenon has been studied from the perspectives of numerous disciplines leading to various categorizations, models, and conclusions.

This wealth of information has informed U.S. military planning doctrine and procedures in multiple ways, but any changes have been U.S.-centric and based on countering terrorist-insurgent actions — not founded in knowing how these adversaries think. Consequently, the U.S. military response has been largely reactive, and those attempts that have tended to be proactive have been slightly off target. In explaining U.S. shortcomings some have suggested omnipresence or genius on the part of these global irreconcilables, and some have blamed chance. Few of the conjectures as to why this occurs are convincing, and many fail to even make the obvious observation that planning and operations do not adequately account for terrorist-insurgent thinking. Nonetheless these studies, when synthesized, begin to give us a good appreciation for the characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking and reveal that the terrorist-insurgent mindset — their way of thinking — naturally misaligns with U.S. cultural assumptions and doctrinal preferences. The terrorist-insurgent's success and longevity is, more likely than omnipresence or chance, a case of terrorists and insurgents following their natural mental precepts with audacity; it exploits the cognitive dissonance between our planning doctrine and procedures and the reality created by terrorists and insurgents on the ground. In other words, combating terrorist-insurgent success requires the U.S. to align its planning doctrine and procedures with the demands of the war it is fighting — the one the terrorist-insurgent has brought to the door step. All of this starts with understanding the characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking.

The research fits into four broad categories: game theory; empirical analyses, like historical or policy case studies; the study of particular issue, like martyr contracts or women suicide bombers; and the application of frameworks that were developed for other uses but are now being tried out on terrorism and counterterrorism.<sup>4</sup> In this last category, one finds social network analysis, collective action analysis, and some counterinsur-

gency techniques. Each makes a significant contribution, but fails to realign completely American thinking.

## Game Theory

Game theory is a branch of applied mathematics that attempts to capture behavior in strategic situations, in which an individual's success in making choices depends on the choices of others. To follow it requires at least college-level calculus. While initially developed to analyze competitions in which one individual does better at another's expense (zero sum games), it has expanded to include a wide range of situations, in particular war bargaining. However significant in the academic literature, this theory is of little interest for our purposes, since the number of users with enough (and fresh enough) mathematical background to transpose its contributions to their own problems is likely to be very small. Nor is it likely that Special Operations Forces (SOF) will have the time to learn enough calculus to use it in the field or before an operation.

## Empirical Analyses

This category includes a wide range of studies, and they have been very popular with academics in the U.S. In general, these studies are based on the analysis of experience and evidence. Usually, they test hypotheses and theories against observations in the real world. To become recognized, empirical studies must meet very specific criteria, which results in the exclusion of much that is considered true by practitioners.

Some studies lead to policy advice, like telling liberal democratic governments what to do and what not to do about internment without trial, coercive interrogative techniques, and the use of live ammunition during protests.<sup>5</sup> In general, governments are advised to stay the course for the long term, but they are rarely advised on how to maintain public support for that policy, for example. Empirical studies relevant to terrorism or insurgency occur by definition after the fact. They also tend to allow little in the way of generalizing learning from one situation to the next, which limits their usefulness.

Some studies suppose or conclude that U.S. allies in the war on terror behave like what we call here *weak-side strategists*.<sup>6</sup> That is to say, some allies might rush headlong into action, ignoring the consequences of domestic opinion failing to support government moves, as in a number of European liberal democracies one could name. Or allies might ignore the unintended

consequences of their own actions, such as the possibility of violent opposition to the government commitments or the provocation of internal terrorist and insurgents threats, such as may be a consideration in Saudi Arabia. These studies provide some support for the research presented here.

Other well-known themes in the scholarly literature are less supportive, principally the rational-choice theorists.<sup>7</sup> Rational choice theory provides no opportunity for the intuitive decision-making so crucial to the art of strategy, for example. Nor does rational-choice theory take into account non-rational beliefs of patriotism or non-rational acts of self-sacrifice, for example, observable among U.S. troops. Nor does it take into account political or religious extremism, which are observable in many parts of the world.

Finally there are areas of active research that are not directly relevant to the question of understanding and countering terrorist and insurgents, for example the literature that researches why liberal democracies are resistant to coercion as a means of constraining or provoking action by the government.<sup>8</sup>

### **Special Issue Studies**

In this category of research, there are a large number of detailed discussions of very specific, very circumscribed questions regarding insurgency or terrorism, and there is usually no pattern or overarching theme among them. One example is Alimi's study of collective action.<sup>9</sup> Another is the study of women as suicide bombers. An article by DeNardo looks at terrorism in a positive light now forgotten, with it being a bulwark against tyranny.<sup>10</sup> DeNardo nonetheless makes an interesting distinction between terrorism and insurgency, the fundamental difference being that terrorism emanates from the underground, where insurgency, with activities like looting or protesting, happens publicly. Kilcullen applies approaches to counterinsurgency to the global war on terror.<sup>11</sup> Also preceding the present work are articles that generalize from experiments with college students to military applications.<sup>12</sup> Although there are significant differences in the choice, the amount of information used, the decision strategy employed, and the effect of exogenous conditions on decision strategy and choice in international relations, those differences are quantitative rather than qualitative.

The most useful part of this collection of odds and ends lies in the discussion of the role of uncertainty, and the various levels of uncertainty, in counterterrorism. Considered here is "the small, secretive nature of terrorist

plots and the indeterminate nature of the target,” a circumstance to which a weak-side strategy would make a significant contribution.<sup>13</sup>

## Existing Frameworks

These studies include perspectives such as social network analysis or psychological theories, which were created to study phenomena other than terrorism or insurgency but have been brought to bear on it. For example, the social action perspective is a precedent for the present paper, to the extent that it applies an existing approach to terrorism. The expansion of thinking called for above certainly is in sympathy with Tilly and some of the military literature, who argue that an epistemological expansion is necessary.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, it is no great leap from the application of social network analysis, which has already been used in studies of crime, criminal intelligence, and criminal networks, to its application in counterterrorism.<sup>15</sup>

There are a number of such frameworks, grouped here by discipline for the sake of convenience. These disciplines include psychology, ethology, anthropology and other social sciences, cognitive theory, and the study of biological factors.

Psychology has considered the issues surrounding terrorism at considerable length. In this area of research, psychoanalysis is the most widely recognized theory that addresses the roots of all forms of violence. Freud viewed aggression more generally as an innate and instinctual human trait, which most should outgrow in the normal course of human development. Ethology, a different area of psychology, has been alternately defined as the scientific study of animal behavior, especially as it occurs in a natural environment and as the study of human ethos, and its formation. For ethologists, aggression arises from a very basic biological need — a *fighting instinct* that has had adaptive value as humans have evolved.

However, in non-psychological areas of research, such as anthropology and other social sciences, research has found significant differences both in the nature and level of aggression in different cultures. Here, experimental research has demonstrated that aggression can be environmentally manipulated; findings that argue against a universal human instinct. Another theory is that of frustration aggression. The basic premise is that aggression is always produced by frustration, and that frustration always produces aggression. However, research has shown that frustration does not inevitably lead to aggression. Social learning theory holds that behavior (e.g., aggression) is

learned not only through one's direct experience, but also through observation of how such contingencies occur in one's environment.

Cognitive theory holds that people interact with their environment based on how they perceive and interpret it. Perceptions of intent affect aggression. Moreover, there are internal and external factors that can affect one's perceptions of provocation or intent. Biological factors affecting aggression are also an important element in a comprehensive biopsychosocial understanding of behavior. Biological studies are rarely conducted on terrorists.

Researchers have also tried to apply statistical models to explain violence and to identify its predictors. This line of inquiry has yielded some positive findings on risk factors for violent behavior. Literally hundreds of studies in psychology, criminology, sociology, and other behavioral sciences have yielded significant risk factors for violence. Unfortunately, they are unlikely to be useful predictors. Although terrorism is a type of violence, risk factors tend to operate differently at different ages, in different groups, and for different — specific — types of violent behavior.<sup>16</sup>

## Military Literature

The military literature is striking for the compatibility found with the processes and ideas outlined in later sections of this paper. It also illustrates how important the formalization of these ideas actually is. In the military literature, there have been several new conceptual frameworks that try to help solve problems in operational art.<sup>17</sup> Most share some of the objectives and techniques outlined below. They also consider the issues of complexity, unpredictability, and lack of information. An excellent example of this is Yarger's review of strategic theory, including its premises.<sup>18</sup> He seeks to improve the concept of strategy by proposing some characteristics of weak-side strategy. Yarger also identifies common traps into which strategists fall.

The military literature also includes a wide range of fictional and actual case studies, such as E.D. Swinton's *Defense of Duffer's Drift*.<sup>19</sup> There are also proposals for applying operational design more systemically, but these explore specific questions rather than identifying the steps in a process. Dugan's monograph on strategic intuition, for example, explores the non-rational but nonetheless significant contribution made to planning and carrying out strategy that is made by what he and Johnston call strategic intuition, what Clausewitz called *coup d'oeil*, what Klein called analogical thinking, and what is called here and in extensive previous research the *core idea*.<sup>20</sup>

“Patton was a striking example of strategic intuition by applying examples from history through coup d’oeil.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, without a core idea, strategy is bound to fail. Finally, the U.S. Army has proposed a seven-step military decision-making model.<sup>22</sup>

Taylor and Horgan’s research examines the process of terrorist thinking.<sup>23</sup> They identify some problems, like the *bridging with assumption* in the absence of sound empirical knowledge. Terrorists share some of the characteristics of ordinary people. There is usually a context that facilitates the transition to terrorism: the act of terrorism brings the terrorist some benefit, if only in his own mind, and terrorism can operate at an individual and/or political level.

The profiling of terrorist and insurgent leaders is one of the richer veins of military literature. Taking the research discussed above into account, it is possible to develop a profile of a terrorist-insurgent leader that includes an impressive number of characteristics:

- a. Often educated to university level, often in subjects that have terrorist applications (science, business)
- b. Often organized planners, with some military training/experience
- c. Usually the brains behind operations or targeting and having the most detailed knowledge of the workings and intentions
- d. Often appear to be law-abiding, in order to remain under the radar
- e. Often charismatic, being able to convince and manipulate people, and being able to conceptualize and articulate an idea into a mission
- f. Truly convinced of the cause
- g. Possibly involved in personal risk-taking but usually keeps a certain distance to avoid capture and prosecution, and maintain plausible deniability<sup>24</sup>
- h. Always thinking about what the strong are about to do
- i. Holistic
- j. Playing a waiting game
- k. Creative
- l. Looking at the big picture
- m. Constantly scanning his environment for possible threats and for possible opportunities
- n. Specifically designing each action to suit his strategy

- o. Constantly forecasting for all events and all other actors, and investing in the development of even unlikely scenarios
- p. Going to assume s/he will lose any direct confrontation
- q. Engaging their own passions or passionate feelings
- r. Thinking like a weak-side strategist all the time, not just when there is a problem.

While all of these characteristics are significant, it is not practical to try to take all of them into account in operational planning doctrine and procedure. For these purposes, there are two characteristics that matter most. The next section discusses those two characteristics.





### 3. Levels of War and Tactics: On the Other Side of the Looking Glass

**T**he two main differences in the planning of operations by terrorists and insurgents, compared to the operational planning doctrine and procedures in the U.S. military are the following:

- a. First, when insurgents or terrorists discuss the level of the operation, they use more levels than the three used by the U.S. forces, and each of those levels is, so to speak, thinner.<sup>25</sup> The most important implication of this characteristic for planning is that terrorists and insurgents change levels of operation quickly and easily. The U.S. forces usually confine themselves to one level when planning.
- b. Second, the range of tactics used is broader. In many ways it is a disadvantage that insurgents and terrorists do not have the more specialized or technologically sophisticated tactics available to the U.S. forces. On the other hand, they change their tactics more quickly, and they use tactics that would not be allowed by the rules and laws of war. Rules and laws of war do not concern them. The range of tactics they will consider will therefore be broader.

There are a number of historical examples of these two characteristics in action. The Taliban's behavior after its military defeat in Afghanistan, for example, illustrates the change in level of operations. After its government fell, the Taliban changed its methods, and changed them again after the arrival of the NATO troops. In Pakistan, the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM or Army of Mohammed) is an Islamic extremist group formed in early 2000. It collected funds through donation requests in magazines and pamphlets. This understandably drew the attention of the government and forced withdrawal of funds from bank accounts in anticipation of asset seizures. (They invested them in legal businesses such as commodity trading, real estate, and production of consumer goods!)<sup>26</sup> In Sri Lanka, the Tamil Tigers eventually developed their own newspaper, press, and propaganda section, in addition to a political wing, a research and development wing, and an intelligence wing. Al Qaeda's Kalid Shaikh Mohommad introduced the *principle of losing and learning* doctrine: if an al Qaeda operation fails or suffers losses,

it is not considered a strategic loss if the group learns, improves, and vows not to repeat its mistake.<sup>27</sup>

An example of the broader range of tactics, most importantly tactics prohibited by the rules and laws of war, can also be found in the Taliban. The Taliban in Afghanistan were trading opium, at one point in 2005 moving their trade from Helmand to Nimroz when they realized that province was more weakly policed.<sup>28</sup> The Taliban's methods came to include assassinations, kidnappings, insurgency tactics, suicide bombings, and improvised explosive devices.<sup>29</sup> Among the occurrences for each of these are the following:

- a. Assassinations — the death of Vice-President Haji Abdul Qadir in July 2002; attempts on President Hamid Karzai in September 2002, on a vice-presidential candidate in 2004, and on the former governor of Badakhshan in October 2007
- b. Kidnappings — of groups of foreigners in both July 2007 and October 2007
- c. Insurgency tactics — the recruitment and training on the Pakistan border and the repeated ambush of soldiers
- d. Suicide bombings — there were sixty-four between January 2005 and August 2006
- e. Improvised explosive devices — against U.S. and NATO troops, and against Afghan military and civilian vehicles, with the number steadily increasing.<sup>30</sup>

The Taliban also quickly developed a symbiotic relationship with the opium traders, in order to finance these and other operations.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, the Taliban exploited Afghanistan's easily corruptible officials and the insecurity of the population.<sup>32</sup> They banned opium while in power, but quickly turned to it to finance their operations.<sup>33</sup>

There are also examples of broader tactics in other terrorist and insurgent movements. ETA (*Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna*), the Basque separatist group founded in 1959, finances its activities through kidnappings, robberies, and extortion. Its political tactics, so to speak, are limited to bombings and assassinations of Spanish Government officials. Similarly, the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) is a splinter faction that gained popular support in Algeria through its pledge to avoid civilian attacks inside Algeria — as opposed to the rest of the group who were willing to sacrifice civilians. Later, however, the GSPC did attack civilians.<sup>34</sup> Other observers have noted the

breadth of tactics: “Today’s international terrorist groups function not as tightly structured hierarchies, but rather as shadowy networks that, when necessary, strike ad hoc tactical alliances, bridging religious and ideological schisms.”<sup>35</sup>

We have seen that these characteristics are found in a number of hostile groups. The next section begins the exploration of the implications for operational planning doctrine.

It will be necessary to examine in another section the implications for operational planning procedures. Only then will it be possible to consider what obstacles exist to learning from terrorist-insurgent thinking.



## 4. Implications for Planning Doctrine

The previous section discussed the two characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking that are the most important to operational planning and procedures: their use of more levels of operation and their broader range of tactics. The present section discusses the implications for planning doctrine of these two characteristics, and does so by analyzing the major joint publication (JP) doctrinal and planning documents and the opportunities they present to more adequately account for terrorist-insurgent thinking. These JP documents are:

- a. JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*
- b. JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*
- c. JP 3-05, *Doctrine of Joint Special Operations*
- d. JP 5, *Joint Operation Planning*.

### JP 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States

JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* is, naturally, a document whose ideas are presented in broad strokes. Opportunities for analysis are similarly broad. The first great opportunity for taking into account terrorist-insurgent thinking arises from the emphasis on unity of action found in JP 1.

JP 1 recognizes the need for the maximum unity of action. Maximum unity of action, in turn, requires maximum interoperability of the various components of the forces.<sup>36</sup> This maximum interoperability of the components of the armed forces requires unity of command. In practice, however, hasn't unity of command also meant centralization of command? Has the improved technology of communication, sometimes reaching real-time for some components of the forces, meant not just better decision making, but also more centralized command? And if centralization is a tendency, what does this mean for counterinsurgency or counterterrorism planning? Can it become a disadvantage or even a danger if the terrorist or insurgent employs a diversity of tactics or changes level of operations?<sup>37</sup> There is evidence of constant efforts to counter the tendency to centralize command at the

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*Has the improved technology of communication . . . meant not just better decision making, but also more centralized command?*

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expense of effectiveness, for example, and these efforts are valuable. Their value is enhanced by the dangers presented by terrorist-insurgent thinking.

### **JP 3-0, Joint Operations**

In JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* there are more opportunities for special operations planning to integrate terrorist-insurgent thinking than in JP 1. In fact, JP 3-0 presents the special operator with four main opportunities to learn from terrorist-insurgent thinking. These arise from: the strategic estimates of the theater of action, the consideration of irregular war, cognitive dimension of the information environment, and the consideration of both desired and undesired effects of operations.

The first opportunity for integrating terrorist-insurgent thinking presented by JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* comes from the establishment of the strategic estimates of the theater of action. In most situations, the theater level of operations is the largest that terrorists or insurgents will use.<sup>38</sup> JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* outlines the procedures for threat assessment, in the course of which the insurgent or terrorist capacity for changing levels and employing more diverse tactics can be integrated by command at all levels. To be specific, it is possible to integrate these two characteristics at the following points in the process:

- a. When the commander establishes critical intelligence requirements
- b. When the protective function is being planned
- c. When operation art and design considers risk at the operational level
- d. When deciding to terminate an operation.<sup>39</sup>

The second major opportunity for learning from terrorist and insurgent thinking comes with the consideration of irregular war.<sup>40</sup> Irregular war includes various types of enemies and activities, but it is the category of warfare that specifically addresses terrorism and insurgency. When the characteristics of weaker opponents are discussed, there is an opportunity to include a consideration of the changes in level in operations and diversity of tactics. Those characteristics can also inform any discussion of enemies who do not engage directly and who use stealth in hit and run engagements.<sup>41</sup> Finally, irregular war requires the commander to be particularly aware and anticipate subtle shifts in political goals. Including the likelihood of changes in levels of operations and the diversity of tactics can help him/her anticipate the opponents.<sup>42</sup>

In the case of irregular war, the two characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking also mean that little massing of effects is possible, as mentioned in the previous discussion of JP 1, *Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the United States*.<sup>43</sup> Terrorists and insurgents avoid concentrating their assets or numbers, since an engagement then could result in too many losses for them to survive.<sup>44</sup> Combining this with frequent, patternless hit-and-run engagements, and adding to it changes in level of operations and diversity of tactics means that for each of the following ways to deal with terrorists and insurgents, changes in level of operations and more diverse tactics are even more important.<sup>45</sup> Restraint, in particular, is important in any operation countering terrorism or insurgency.

Of those on offer, the best ways to deal with terrorists and insurgents are:

- a. Maneuverability
- b. Economy of force
- c. Simplicity, restraint, and concern for legitimacy.

The third opportunity for integrating the fact that insurgents and terrorists change level and use a broader range of tactics comes in the discussion of the cognitive dimension of the information environment.<sup>46</sup> There are repeated references to the intuition and creativity of command in JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*. Intuition and creativity are always important characteristics of special operators. But as with so much of the previous discussion, they are going to be even more significant when dealing with an enemy that changes levels of operation and employs a diversity of tactics.<sup>47</sup>

There are, of course, difficulties in using intuition and creativity in practical decisions. However, certain types of decisions can integrate them more easily. We can illustrate this by taking the decision to end operations as an example: any commander or operator must always consider the right point at which to end counterinsurgency and counterterrorist operations. Terrorist and insurgents, however, profit more from short operations and therefore seek to end them, and to leave the area of conflict, as quickly as possible. In practice, then, this means that there is even more pressure than usual for U.S. forces to carry out engagements against an enemy that will disperse. The option of moving troops and equipment in and around the theater is limited by time constraints. A larger, more specialized or better equipped force may be at a disadvantage in some situations. Commanders, planners, and special operators would do well to consider that the conclusion



of operations may have as an undesired effect on the terrorist or insurgent, and whether this signifies in fact better operating conditions for them.<sup>48</sup>

Taking into account both desired and undesired effects of operations when planning is the fourth and last of the opportunities in JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*.<sup>49</sup> JP 3-0 states that the enemy has few, larger centers of gravity, whereas everything mentioned in this paper so far points to the fact that terrorists and insurgents are likely to have smaller and more numerous centers of gravity or a larger number of decisive points of interest.<sup>50</sup> To make matters more difficult, terrorists and insurgents may shift even more easily among these smaller and more numerous centers of gravity than would otherwise be the case. Taking this into account is a great opportunity to improve the effectiveness of joint operations planning and procedures.

Overall, then, diversity of tactics and changes in levels of operations can be identified as critical capabilities in counteroperations.<sup>51</sup> They are essential in determining decisive points, as mentioned previously, which in turn will make the lines of operation more effective.<sup>52</sup> Integrating the possibility of a greater range of tactics and rapid changes in levels of operations will improve planning and procedures at the following points:

- a. When considering the potential for leverage<sup>53</sup>
- b. In the phasing model, where operations are integrated and synchronized by planners, as proposed by JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*, considering that terrorist or insurgent actions are more likely to be cyclical, rather than linear<sup>54</sup>
- c. In establishing the measures of evaluation and measures of performance.<sup>55</sup>

### **JP 3-05, Doctrine for Joint Special Operations**

In JP 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations*, there are two opportunities to integrate terrorist and insurgent thinking. First, joint special operation planning requires the identification of the nodes of a system and the critical factors and decisive points.<sup>56</sup> The two differences in terrorist-insurgent thinking, change of levels and the diversity of tactics, have a role in identifying each of these. Second, the promotion of the indirect approach present in JP 3-05 is a support for integrating terrorist-insurgent thinking, since insurgents and terrorists use indirect approaches consistently and universally. The indirect approach has an impact throughout the planning process.<sup>57</sup>

## **JP 5-0, Joint Operation Planning**

There are sections of doctrine in JP 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* that assist forces in learning from terrorist-insurgent thinking. For example, given that “SO differ from conventional operations in degree of physical and political risk, operational techniques, mode of employment, independence from friendly support, and dependence on detailed operational intelligence and indigenous assets,”<sup>58</sup> planners ought to consider how the diversity of tactics and the change in operational levels affect their operations.

In addition, by definition, Special Operators will be more like insurgents than regular forces: they will consider or use a broader range of techniques, not only in themselves, but “inherently joint.” Although many special operations may be conducted as single-service operations, most are planned and executed as joint operations. Special operations routinely require joint support and coordination.<sup>59</sup> These are two significant advantages.

## **Doctrinal Publications Taken as a Whole**

Considering the major documents as a group in light of the differences in level and tactics of insurgents and terrorists, it also becomes clear that the huge bulk of the doctrine is about the armed forces, not about the enemy. This way of thinking is natural as far as procedures are concerned, and certainly common, among large and well-equipped regular forces. Armed forces personnel are naturally thinking about what their role and capacities are. But the challenges counterinsurgency and counterterrorism present also mean there is an opportunity to learn from the enemy, with immediate and obvious benefits. Terrorists and insurgents are obsessed with what the U.S. forces are going to do. A shift in emphasis towards what they may do, as opposed to what U.S. forces are capable of doing, may be beneficial. For maximum benefit, however, capacity for change of level and more diverse tactics should be integrated by command at all levels of operation.



## 5. Implications for Planning Procedures

**T**his section discusses in more detail the two characteristics, change in level and diversity of tactics, that are the most important to operational planning and procedures, and it discusses the implications for planning procedures. It does so by analyzing two major planning documents:

- a. JP 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*
- b. JP 3-05.1, *Joint Special Operations Task Force Operations*.

The remaining two sections of the paper will cover the implications for training, and then the obstacles to the changes necessary to make full use of this new information about terrorist and insurgent thinking.

### JP 5-0, Joint Operation Planning

The process outlined in JP 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* is commonly referred to as JOPP, Joint Operation Planning Process. Here, we will examine four of the characteristics of JOPP that give special operators a chance to learn from terrorist-insurgent thinking. We will then examine steps in the JOPP process in order to identify where these two characteristics can be integrated into the planning process. Then, we examine the specific capabilities of special versus regular forces, and discuss how this presents opportunities to learn from terrorist and insurgent thinking. Finally, we discuss the application of the principles of war.

JOPP has four characteristics that can facilitate integration of the thinking of terrorists and insurgents into the process. First, in JOPP, planners and commanders use an adaptive process.<sup>60</sup> At any point in their ongoing adaptation, it is possible to include information like the two characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking. The adaptive process also means that the more diverse tactics of terrorists and insurgents can be countered at any point in the process. Second, JOPP works as much as possible with the levels above and below the commander.<sup>61</sup> This means that JOPP is already changing levels, and should easily accommodate that characteristic of terrorist-insurgent thinking. Third, the increased flexibility of JOPP can be used to integrate the effects of terrorists or insurgents changing levels or using more diverse tactics.<sup>62</sup> There is a caveat, however: although there are assertions that “Joint Operation planning has the inherent flexibility to adjust to changing requirements for adaptive plans,” they are not presently likely

to be flexible enough to match the nimbleness of insurgents or terrorists.<sup>63</sup> Fourth and finally, JOPP is decentralized, so that it more closely resembles terrorist-insurgent thinking, but also so that the observations of novel tactics or changes of level can be more quickly taken into account.<sup>64</sup>

The steps of the Joint Operation Planning Process show where it is possible to integrate the diversity of tactics and the change in level of operations characteristic of terrorists and insurgents. These points are:

- a. Mission analysis, more specifically in the development of assumptions — i.e., statements thought to be true in the absence of facts<sup>65</sup>
- b. Analysis of the operational environment, more specifically in analyzing the higher command's intent and mission, and undesired effects<sup>66</sup>
- c. Development of mission termination criteria<sup>67</sup>
- d. Development of mission success criteria<sup>68</sup>
- e. Course of action analysis
- f. Determination of potential decisive points
- g. Risk assessments.<sup>69</sup>

In addition, there are two further opportunities to integrate the thinking of terrorists and insurgents. These are even more important than those just cited. The first of these is war gaming, the physical and mental equivalent of *gedankenexperimenten*, or thought experiments.<sup>70</sup> Integrating the characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking in war gaming means that training is available to all participants, with all the benefits that training confers for actual operations. The second of these opportunities is in the development of the centerpiece of the operational plan, the concept of operations (CONOPS). Again, if the central ideas of the operational plan include the two characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking, then they become integrated in the entirety of the operation.

Joint special operations have unique characteristics that offer the chance to profit from terrorist-insurgent thinking. Joint special operations occur when there are SOF drawn from more than one service. These are the types of operations that boggle the mind of the lay person — the possibility that in situations of high psychological and physical stress and situations of extreme danger and unpredictability, armed forces personnel of dramatically different services and organization cultures are expected to work together as seamlessly as possible, since lives are at stake.

Although it may seem obvious, it bears repeating that special operations warfare includes tempo, that is to say a “rapid execution of a mission allows SOF to mass combat power at the critical place and time, accomplish the mission, withdraw before the adversary can react, and then attack again.”<sup>71</sup> This means both that it is vital for special operators to integrate the way of thinking of terrorists and insurgents quickly and easily, since things are evolving quickly, and also that these same characteristics contribute to an increase in tempo.

The two characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking exacerbate the challenge facing SOF in carrying out their mission. To be specific, the challenge will be greater in the following situations:

- a. Influencing the will of foreign leadership and/or populations to create conditions favorable to U.S. strategic aims or objectives
- b. Action principally directed at high-value targets of strategic significance, that may be overt, clandestine, or covert
- c. Rehearsals of the mission
- d. Employment of sophisticated communication systems and means of insertion, support, and extraction
- e. Discriminating and precise use of force.<sup>72</sup>

The expectation that SOF should be “task-organized quickly and deployed rapidly to provide tailored responses to many different situations” presents a significant advantage in coping with changes in levels of operation and diversity of tactics.<sup>73</sup> The same can be said of a number of capabilities. These include the following:

- a. Surveying and assessing local situations and reporting these assessments rapidly
- b. Working closely with regional military and civilian authorities and populations
- c. Organizing people into working teams to help solve local problems.<sup>74</sup>

Similarly, the special operator’s core activities present certain points where the integration of terrorist-insurgent thinking needs more urgency.<sup>75</sup> Intelligence is likely to become dated even more quickly than is otherwise the case when SOF is engaged in direct action, special reconnaissance, and foreign internal defense operations. An argument can be made for other

SOF activities as well. When it comes to types of operations, these are, under the heading of direct action:

- a. Raids
- b. Ambushes
- c. Direct assaults
- d. Standoff attacks
- e. Terminal attack control operations
- f. Terminal guidance operations
- g. Recovery operations
- h. Precision destruction operations
- i. Anti-surface operations.

Under the heading of special reconnaissance, there are:

- a. Raids
- b. Ambushes
- c. Environmental reconnaissance
- d. Armed reconnaissance
- e. Post-strike reconnaissance
- f. Target assessment
- g. Threat assessment.<sup>76</sup>

Under the heading of foreign internal defense, there are:

- a. Counterterrorism
- b. Psychological operations
- c. Civil affairs operations
- d. Counterproliferation.<sup>77</sup>

When it comes to the principles of war, U.S. joint doctrine has nudged the historic objective, offensive, mass, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, surprise, and simplicity toward irregular warfare activity by adding “other principles” of restraint, perseverance, and legitimacy.<sup>78</sup>

Some of these principles make it easier to integrate the two characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking that we have been discussing. For example, special operations are called on more frequently to use much smaller measures for the concentration of mass, something that is appropriate for countering the thinking of terrorists and insurgents. A commander may simply assume that there will be no concentration of mass.<sup>79</sup> Another

example is the enhanced maneuverability of SOF. You do not need to be a special operator to realize this is an advantage in coping with an enemy that changes levels of operation or uses a broader range of tactics. The same can be said of surprise and simplicity.

On the other hand, a greater diversity of tactics and changes in the level of operations make it more difficult to actualize other principles of war and strategic concepts. For example, preemption is much more difficult with someone who changes tactics and levels of operations. Similarly, dislocation (as explained in B. H. Liddell Hart's *Strategy*) is possible, but not as significant as in other cases.

Finally, exploitation also takes on a new meaning, since terrorists and insurgents are not conventional enemies: the psychological operations are very important, but their aim is to separate the non-combatants from supporting the ideological movement of the insurgents and/or terrorists. Similarly, initiative is going to be a very important component of operations, to respond to the change of operational techniques and change of level.<sup>80</sup>

### **JP 3-05.1, Joint Special Operations Task Force Operations**

In this discussion of the publication JP 3-05.1, *Joint Special Operations Task Force Operations*, we shall consider the planning principles of special operations and the differences between special and regular operations. In the second half of this section, we will consider the process of planning of criticality, availability, recuperability, vulnerability, effect, and recognizability, known by the acronym CARVER.

The planning principles of special operations as presented in JP 3-05.1, *Joint Special Operations Task Force Operations* neither preclude nor exclude integrating the two characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking being studied here, the change in levels of operations and the diversity of tactics.<sup>81</sup> Implicit in these principles, however, is the fact that there are no second chances in this type of operations — they are by definition high-stakes, high-risk, and high-cost. This is a characteristic they share with terrorist or insurgent operations. They are also similar to terrorist or insurgent operations in that they can range in size, combat intensity, and purpose.<sup>82</sup> The real question, of course, is whether they can range in level within a single operation.

The fact that the planning of operations requires fused intelligence about both theater and national assets is a good sign, a hint of greater flexibility



in scope that is important in itself, but also the first detected in the review of doctrine and procedure executed so far.<sup>83</sup> This flexibility is more about the way in which operations are conceived than a purely geographical flexibility of location. It has the potential to reduce the surprise that could be experienced by forces fighting insurgents or terrorists.

Special operations differ from conventional operations in degree of physical or political risk, operational technique, use of special equipment, modes of employment, independence from friendly support, and dependence on detailed operation intelligence and indigenous assets.<sup>84</sup> SOF also perform two unique types of activities. First, they perform tasks that no other forces in the Department of Defense conduct. Second, they perform missions that are conducted by Department of Defense forces, but do so to a unique set of conditions and standards, normally using equipment and tactics, techniques, and procedures not utilized by conventional forces.<sup>85</sup> Once again, this moves them closer to being able to understand and integrate the greater diversity of tactics and the changes in levels of operation than the regular forces with which they are working.

Diversity of tactics and the change in level of operations are of particular relevant to the following capabilities of special operations:

- a. Special reconnaissance
- b. Direct action
- c. Unconventional warfare
- d. Foreign internal defense
- e. Counterterrorism.<sup>86</sup>

SOF also have particular capabilities, of which the following offer an opportunity to learn from terrorist and insurgent thinking. Those are:

- a. Capacity to work closely with local authorities and populations
- b. Capacity to assess local situations.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, there are some realities about special operations that are so well known as to have become truisms but bear mention here since they provide an opportunity to learn about greater diversity of tactics and changes in levels of operations. As a variation of the SOF Truths, the author's research suggests that:

- a. Quality is better than quantity.

- b. SOF cannot be mass-produced.
- c. SOF intelligence is often more detailed than most military intelligence.
- d. SOF intelligence is more perishable than most military intelligence.
- e. SOF intelligence is more broadly gauged than most military intelligence.
- f. SOF intelligence is more encompassing than most military intelligence.<sup>88</sup>

These characteristics are particularly true in the case of missions to combat terrorism, to insert SOF, or to extract SOF.

There are other points at which it is important for planners of joint special operations to take into account the thinking of terrorists or insurgents. To be specific, these are in discussing the:

- a. Nature of the target
- b. Adversary and friendly situations
- c. Environmental characteristics of the operational area.<sup>89</sup>

At the analysis, planning, and execution phases of a joint special operation, if the diversity of tactics and the change in levels of operation are taken into account, then we may expect the following impacts upon any assessment of the operational environment:

- a. The proportion of unplanned and/or unanticipated targets compared to planned/anticipated is likely to be much greater<sup>90</sup> because the tactics used by insurgents are more diverse than those used by SOF and because the ease of changing the level of operations means that insurgents or terrorists may increase the potential for surprise.
- b. In the contingency planning and targeting process, centers of gravity and decision points will be diffuse, rather than concentrated; similarly, as stated above, because the tactics used by insurgents are more diverse than those used by SOF, so that their decision points will be less concentrated than would otherwise be the case; and because the ease of changing the level of operations means that insurgents or terrorists are less likely to concentrate their assets.
- c. It is not certain that centers of gravity would even exist, as discussed above, or if they do that they would be greater in number and smaller in size.
- d. Time-sensitivity will be both generalized and extreme (i.e., the period when the target's accessibility is shorter than usual and the targeting process is compressed).

- e. The intelligence requirements will be unique.<sup>91</sup>

In contingency planning, the significant of change in level of operations and diversity of tactics is magnified for four reasons. First, the change in level of operations and the diversity of tactics can only increase uncertainty. Second, the change in level of operations and the diversity have a role in the feasibility assessment as well as the initial assessment. Third, they should figure in the target assessment as well as the prioritization of the information acquisition.<sup>92</sup> Fourth and finally, they also have a role in the target information package.<sup>93</sup>

The various consequences of changes in level of operation and a greater diversity of tactic combine to increase risk in joint special operations; however, special operators have an advantage over most of the conventional military force. For example, in crisis action, the change in level of operations and the diversity of tactics reduce the speed with which planning and targeting can occur. As a result, the chances of missing the target increase, or the operation may miss altogether.<sup>94</sup> The change in level of operations and the diversity of tactics have a role in the provision by special operations of input into the joint force commander's orders. When considering other facts or under the development of assumptions, in particular status-of-forces and available time, the commander may consider whether they are influenced by the change in level of operations and the diversity of tactics, or in the course of action analysis or war gaming.<sup>95</sup>

As a result, the analysis of the change in level of operations and the diversity of tactics needs to occur at every step of the intelligence gathering and analysis that underpins the planning of operations, and possibly emphasized at every step. They are more important for:

- a. Psychological operations (i.e., hostile sympathizers, hostile military forces for irregular warfare)
- b. Foreign internal defense (i.e., combating insurgents)
- c. Counterterrorism.<sup>96</sup>

## The CARVER Process

We can now consider the CARVER method of target analysis, described in Appendix F of JP 3-05.1, *Joint Special Operations Task Force Operations*. The steps of this method are: criticality, accessibility, recuperability, vulnerability, effect, and recognizability. The CARVER method focuses on the tactical level,

which is where the change in level of operations and the diversity of tactics can be observed and dealt with the most effectively. The CARVER method also focuses on the critical point — the point at which the components of a target should be disabled — again where the change in level and the diversity of tactics matter.<sup>97</sup> In CARVER, the analyst must tailor the criteria and rating scheme to suit the particular strategic, operational, or tactical situation, which means there is an opportunity to take into account the change in level of operations and the diversity of tactics.

In all, this occurs at three of the six selection factors of CARVER, that is to say:

- a. Assessment of effect
- b. Vulnerability
- c. Recognizability.

This is of greater significance where targets are human or associated with humans.

In order to decide whether a target should be attacked, the effects of such an attack need to be assessed. These effects may be military, political, economic, informational, or psychological, and collateral effects need to be taken into account. The change in level of operations and the diversity of tactics have a role in this particular assessment, since a change in levels can result in very different effects. The same is true of more diverse tactics being employed. Where humans are involved, the collateral effects are always significant, but when it comes to terrorism and/or insurgency, a small impact on human beings has, proportionately, a much greater importance. Terrorism, as we know, aims to kill a few but frighten many.

Change of level of operations and diversity of tactics can also affect the recognizability of targets. Targets must be identifiable under various weather, light, and seasonal conditions, without being confused with other targets or target components. Similarly, there must be a distinction between critical damage points and stress points in the targets from similar components in the surroundings. Quick changes in level of operations and greater diversity of tactics will make this more difficult unless they are expected by the special operator.

With appropriate training or augmentation, operators can recognize appropriate computer programs, communications circuits, or similar targets of information operations and missions. It is also important to take into

account the change in level of operations and the diversity of tactics in considering threats — again, more difficult unless the special operator is expecting them.<sup>98</sup>

The change in level of operations and the broader range of tactics are also important at several other points:

- a. At the feasibility assessment<sup>99</sup>
- b. At the development of assumptions for the initial assessment of the Threat/Target Situation<sup>100</sup>
- c. At the intelligence regarding limiting factors.<sup>101</sup>

The significance of terrorist-insurgent thinking in the development of assumptions has already been discussed in a previous section. In the case of CARVER, there are at least “limiting factors” like intelligence; where various uncertainties could at least be listed.<sup>102</sup> Just as in an operations order, there is a place for assumptions, and therefore for uncertainty in the description of enemy forces — CARVER even uses the word “likely” to describe these forces.<sup>103</sup>

Uncertainty is always a part of the process, and a diversity of tactics and changes in levels of operations make a significant contribution to it. All this can be countered if the special operators are expecting these two characteristics. Having examined the support and opportunities to learning from terrorists and insurgents in the previous three sections, we can now turn to the obstacles to this learning, present in joint special operations planning doctrine and procedures.

## 6. Obstacles to Change

**T**his paper began with a discussion of the characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking. The next section discussed in more detail the two characteristics that are the most important to operational planning and procedures. Then the implications for planning doctrine and for planning procedures were discussed. This section will discuss the obstacles to the changes necessary to take full advantage of the opportunity to learn terrorist-insurgent thinking.

This investigation has identified a number of obstacles to learning from terrorist-insurgent thinking in operations planning doctrine and procedures. These are: priorities; static planning, including the temptation of intellectual tidiness; the difficulty in measuring outcomes; and finally, *habitus*, established ways of thinking.

**Priorities.** The first obstacle to learning from terrorist-insurgent thinking as it has been presented here is that of priorities. Although the doctrine outlined in JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* applies to all the armed forces, in practice, special operators may have to assist the regular forces with whom they are cooperating in order to progress towards a more outside-the-box way of thinking, which is SOF's bread and butter. This is an additional burden to SOF who already have to be at peak operational capacity, a burden that commanders would do well to consider carefully — is it possible for special operators to know other services so well that they can operate smoothly and seamlessly with them? In addition, SOF may already be struggling to integrate some of the consequences of terrorist-insurgent thinking, characteristics that may be antithetical to the values that animate the entire organization, within a force structure that is not as quick to change at its enemies. The only reply, of course, is that understanding these characteristics may save lives.

**Static Planning.** The second obstacle could be called static planning. Despite frequent affirmations of the fluidity of the security environment, the fact is that the planning remains in practice static and not dynamic. The change in level of operations and the broader range of tactics have trouble being integrated because they present themselves as always changing and are therefore not convenient in the planning phase. To the protestation that planners realize they are working in a dynamic environment, it is possible

to reply that the changes in level of operations and the broader range of tactics represent the most rapid and least expected of all the changes they are used to seeing. There is little to be done about the speed with which terrorists and insurgents change their level of operations or their methods, but it is possible to train special operators to at least expect them. On the other hand, it is a well-known truism that the plan does not survive first contact with the enemy. It is possible that changes to plans in ongoing operations provide the necessary flexibility, but there will always be limits imposed by essential coordination of action of a sophisticated armed force dedicated to limiting casualties of all kinds.

JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, reflects an important barrier to the flexibility of scope and range of tactics in the very nature of the armed force, large, specialized, with routine, regular decision-making; and with its governance by a liberal democracy with a free media. Liberal democracies, although acknowledged as being the best political system available, also brings with it a slow and unwieldy decision-making process that results not in the optimal outcome but with the outcome agreeable to the greatest number. While this political scientist is not proposing abandoning liberal democracy as a political system, or to argue that ‘Mussolini made the trains run on time,’ it is important to recognize some of its inherent limitations.

How then does a planner do his or her job? The greatest temptation in planning is undeniably the desire for intellectual tidiness, for being able to slot neatly means and ends. “Joint operational planning uses measurable desired

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*The biggest trap, however, is in thinking that everyone else in the theater of operations thinks like the planners do.*

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effect to relate higher-level objectives and effects to component mission and tasks.”<sup>104</sup> The biggest trap, however, is in thinking that everyone else in the theater of operations thinks like the planners do. Legitimacy of government

is a good example. The reading of JP 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations* points to one of the mistakes commonly made with respect to legitimacy: it is tempting and easy to assume that the government of a foreign country usually enjoys legitimacy in the eyes of the population. In post-colonial or post-authoritarian states, or in states with ethnic dissent, that is not always the case. And there is always the possibility that the population is suspicious

of its government on a particular issue, such as the handling of the economy, although overall the population trusts the government.

**Measuring Outcomes.** The third obstacle could be called the impossibility of measured outcomes. The problem here is that the desired effects are not necessarily measurable, especially not in a fast-moving situation. The commander, in his process of continuous assessment, can take special note of the possibility of the change in levels and range of tactics. The question, then, becomes how nimble that continuous assessment can be.<sup>105</sup> In addition, the change in level of operations and the broader range of tactics have a place in operation art and operation design,<sup>106</sup> especially since operational design is intrinsic to Joint Operation Planning Process (JOPP).<sup>107</sup> That also means that the two points of interest here, of broader tactics and greater level of action, are intrinsic to JOPP.

**Habitus.** The fourth obstacle is habitus. Habitus is the system of durable, transferable dispositions produced by the conditioning associated with a particular class of conditions of existence.<sup>108</sup> Military personnel of all levels are likely to have a strong habitus. Indeed, the entire system of military training is designed to instill the ability to function under conditions of stress unknown to the civilian — reflex action under the threat or actuality of death or grievous harm to oneself or people one has worked with on a ongoing basis. But habitus could, like the tacit dimension postulated by psychologists, be one of the forces that strategy can tap. Habitus can be founded in intuition, and intuition is important to underdog strategic thinking.<sup>109</sup> But if habitus is neither conscious nor explicit, it is not possible to implement what is useful and set aside what is restrictive. The way out is through the use of thin-slicing, or the ability of the unconscious to find patterns in situations and behaviour based on very narrow slices of experience.<sup>110</sup> Habitus is distinct from intuition — which is essential to the art of strategy, a positive capacity to structure personal knowledge in such manner that it is possible to master and apply developed knowledge but remain open to generating new knowledge.<sup>111</sup>

Until this obstacle is resolved, there can be no question that the integration of the change in level of operation and the greater diversity of tactics poses a serious challenge to the usual thinking of military commanders. If they have managed to retain their creativity and nimbleness of mind to



a greater extent than their peers, they are confronted with a system that is complex and not easy to shift. To incorporate the possibility of rapid change of level of operations and use of a broader range of tactics into planning and verification during execution is critical, but it is not enough.<sup>112</sup> Operational art needs to apply and should apply to rank and trade levels other than those who develop strategies or plan campaigns and major operations. It could take the form of a small change to the day-to-day thinking that incorporates the change in level of operations and the broader range of tactics.<sup>113</sup>

Could such a small change make a difference? One example is provided by the introduction of the idea of centers of gravity.<sup>114</sup> “Center of gravity is the set of characteristics, capabilities and sources of power from which a system derives its moral or physical strength, freedom of action, and will to act.”<sup>115</sup> But for a terrorist or an insurgent, it will be diffuse and not concentrated, so you need to learn to identify the nodes differently. But all center of gravity nodes are by definition areas that are decisive.

The concept of depth in operations is not useful in planning insurgent or terrorist counter-operations, since their forces are diffuse rather than concentrated.<sup>116</sup> Counter-operations lack leverage since there are few, if any, decisive points, and they can be difficult to identify. The doctrine of the U.S. forces hints at difficulties in coping with the differences between a conventional enemy and a terrorist or insurgent enemy. For example, “in actual circumstances there may be no precise distinctions where a particular state ends and another begins.”<sup>117</sup> Be it a state of war or a state of military operations other than war, the lack of discrete circumstances is a difficulty for a planning process that is discrete between war and military operations other than war.

## 7. Implications for Training

This paper began with a discussion of the characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking. The following section discussed in more detail the characteristics that are the most important to operational planning and procedures. The previous sections discussed the implications for planning doctrine and procedures. Then obstacles to the change were discussed. This section covers the implications for training.

As stated in the introduction, the aim of this paper is to investigate whether the doctrine governing joint special operations allows for two particular new ideas, and if so, where. The conclusion is very clear: while the support given to the introduction of these new ideas is limited, the obstacles are comparatively easily overcome, and both the doctrine and procedures of operations planning are rich in opportunities to more adequately account for terrorist-insurgent thinking, although most of the opportunities are at the operational level.

Russ Howard has advocated graduate studies for junior officers in SOF, given the complex security environment.<sup>118</sup> Brigadier General (Ret.) Howard's advice is excellent, but it may not be enough. This graduate training should, among other things, include *analogous reasoning*, which is described below, to its curriculum so students may have a fighting chance of being able to cope with the change in level of operations and the diversity of tactics.

How do we transfer some of the characteristics of insurgent thinking to SOF? All of the differences in the way terrorists and insurgents think are summed up by the *core idea*, which was introduced in section 1. The core idea forces the use of more than the rational way most of us are taught in school. It calls on experience, judgment, intuition and everything else that has been learned in the past.

We can also start by encouraging analogous thinking. There has been an increase in the use of analogous thinking in recent years, among scientists with some surprising collaborators. For example, "In one of the more unlikely collaborations of modern medicine, Britain's largest children's hospital has revamped its patient hand-off techniques by copying the choreographed pit stops of Italy's Formula One Ferrari racing team. The hospital project has been in place for two years and has already helped reduce the number of mishaps."<sup>119</sup> Physicians in the U.S. have also sought out unusual collaborators: "A growing number of health care providers are trying to learn from

aviation accidents and, more specifically, from what the airlines have done to prevent them. In the last five years, several major hospitals have hired professional pilots to train their critical-care staff members on how to apply aviation safety principles to their work ... it is well established that, like airplane crashes, the majority of adverse events in health care are the result of human error, particularly failures in communication, leadership and decision-making.”<sup>120</sup> There is also structurally analogous thinking in other areas of science. For example, “In a trial for a company with a high speed robotic assembly line, it took the algorithm for the waggle dance of bees identifying nectar location (developed by Cardiff University’s Manufacturing Engineering Centre) just a few days to identify the most efficient way to run the machines, much faster than a more conventional program.”<sup>121</sup> But there have been structurally analogous thinking in the military sphere, going back to the Duke of Wellington’s ‘A mosquito attack, not a cannon attack,’ Churchill’s “We shall attack the underbelly of Europe,” and Patton’s flashes of insight.<sup>122</sup> The study of emergency responders using intuitive methods of decision-making, including military people, is also established.<sup>123</sup>

It is possible to prepare operators by the use of thin-slicing, or the ability of the unconscious to find patterns in situations and behaviour based on very narrow slices of experience.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, this author has developed extensive training methods in this area.<sup>125</sup> As a first step, however, it would be enough for planners, commanders or operators to ask themselves, at each of the points identified in sections 4 and 5, two simple questions. First, what difference would it make if the enemy subdivided the levels of operation into several sub-levels, and then in the course of action suddenly expanded or contracted the level of their operations? Second, what difference would it make to the course of action if the enemy suddenly used different tactics than expected, tactics that our side would not use for humanitarian, legal, or ethical reasons?

It is obvious from considering the syllabus of major planning courses that it would be a small matter to add material on the characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking to the curriculum. The problem would be of time- and content- management: those courses are already very compressed. The alternative could simply be to distribute this paper widely, so that special operators may at least be alerted to the possibilities of being blind-sided by known and common ways of thinking of terrorists and insurgents.

## 8. Conclusion

**T**he results of the present investigation support looking further into the other characteristics of terrorist-insurgent thinking. These characteristics include the following:

- a. The terrorist or insurgent is always thinking about what the strong are about to do.
- b. The terrorist or insurgent is holistic.
- c. The terrorist or insurgent plays a waiting game.
- d. The terrorist or insurgent is creative.
- e. The terrorist or insurgent sees the big picture.
- f. The terrorist or insurgent is constantly scanning his environment for possible threats and for possible opportunities.
- g. The terrorist or insurgent specifically designs each action to suit his strategy.
- h. The terrorist or insurgent is constantly forecasting for all events and all other actors, and invests in the development of even unlikely scenarios.
- i. The terrorist or insurgent assumes s/he will lose any direct confrontation.
- j. The terrorist or insurgent's passions or passionate feelings are engaged.
- k. Thinking like a terrorist or insurgent is not just for when there is a problem.

It is the hope of this author that asking questions about terrorist-insurgent thinking might actually prevent death, injury, or some other cost of war that might otherwise have occurred. ↑



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