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**THE APPLICATION OF OPERATIONAL DESIGN AT THE TACTICAL LEVEL
OF WAR: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

by

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Major, U.S. Army

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

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

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Abstract

Operational Art and Operational Design must be understood and applied at both the operational and tactical levels of war during counterinsurgency operations. While doctrine prescribes the tactical commander must understand operational art, it also retains its application within the purview of the operational level commander. Additionally, while current and evolving counterinsurgency doctrine reinforce the need for a specific view of operational design when applied specifically to a counterinsurgency campaign, it still retains that campaign planning and design exist at the operational level and above. This paper will assert the need for tactical level commanders' sound application of operational design when planning for protracted counterinsurgency operations within the context of a higher strategic and operational campaign plan. While doctrine states that there is only one campaign plan, current operations clearly show the need for tactical commanders to think with a campaign plan mindset when approaching their tactical planning. In conclusion, it will provide "a way" for tactical commanders to think about and apply the elements of operational design to better focus their efforts upon assumption of an area of responsibility within a COIN environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Although most military scholars would agree that there is no defined boundary between the three accepted levels of war, many attempts have been made to codify certain principles and practices as being unique to a specific level of warfare. The concept of operational art is relatively new, given the volume of military theory derived from thousands of years of history.¹ Despite the consensus that there is no finite boundary between the operational and tactical level, it is generally codified in U.S. doctrine that battalion and brigade level maneuver units operate at the tactical level of war.² The scope of battalion and brigade level actions includes engagements at the low end of the spectrum and participation in major operations at the high end. In the current environment, the U.S. undoubtedly would employ a joint task force commander to serve at the operational level and provide the necessary link between strategy and tactics. However, despite the necessity for the joint force commander to apply operational art and craft a military campaign plan through the use of operational design, it is also absolutely imperative for brigade and battalion (BN) commanders to apply select aspects of operational design when planning and executing operations in a counterinsurgency environment.

While this paper does not dispute the construct of a single campaign plan for a theater of operations, it shows the merits of certain components of operational design at the tactical level within the context of the campaign plan. Current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan show all too clearly the requirement for tactical level commanders to think at a higher level

¹ Milan N. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2007), I-16 – I-18.

² U.S. Army, *Operations*, Field Manual (FM) 3-0 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, 27 February 2008), 6-3 – 6-4.

and view their operating environment holistically.³ They cannot simply take their ‘piece of the pie’ from their higher headquarters and execute short term planning along several ‘logical lines of operation’ (LLOs) without consideration of an achievable operational objective within their area.⁴ While these ideas may seem common sense, our doctrine does not adequately support a link between operations and tactics. Tactical manuals describe tactical constructs for specific actions against a particular enemy force. Operational manuals describe operational art and design, but fail to provide adequate guidance for their application and usefulness at the lower echelons of the chain of command.

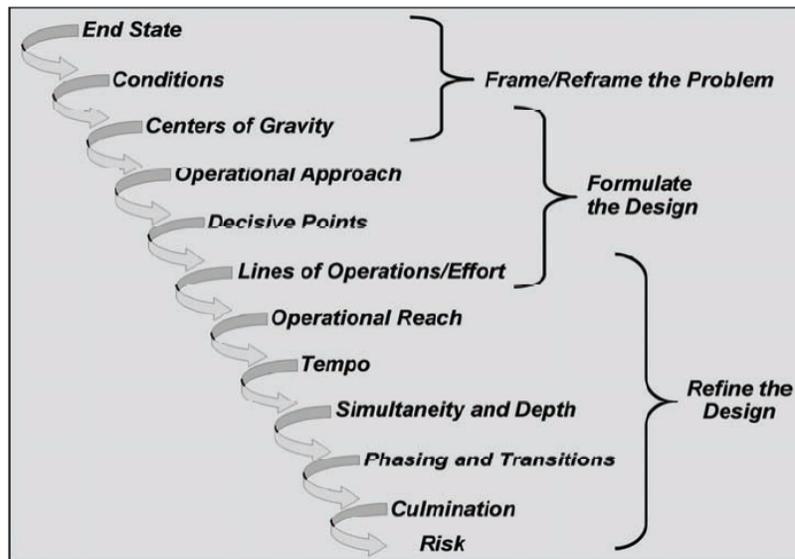


Figure 1: Linking the Elements of Operational Design⁵

³ The author’s most recent duty assignment brought him into daily contact with 15-20 Army Infantry and other maneuver junior officers who had recent, relevant combat experience in Afghanistan and Iraq. His position as an operations and tactics instructor allowed regular discourse regarding tactics, planning and counterinsurgency. Many of the author’s personal views were gleaned through these discussions, and every effort is made to document actual sources. Otherwise, summary is made on the basis of routine discussion over a 3 year period.

⁴ U.S. Army, *Counterinsurgency*, Field Manual (FM) 3-24 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, 15 December 2006), 5-3 – 5-7. The term **logical lines of operation** is used in FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, to delineate the difference between lines of effort across non-traditional operations in COIN, such as economics, governance, security force development, etc., when compared with the term **physical lines of operation**, which refers to the traditional term **lines of operation** as described in joint doctrine. Since publication of FM 3-24, the Army has replaced the term logical lines of operation with the term **lines of effort** and eliminated the physical modifier from the commonly understood lines of operation term. For consistency with joint doctrine, the author will use LLOs in this paper.

⁵ FM 3-0, 6-7.

The Army and Marine Corps' new counterinsurgency (COIN) manual broadly describes the nature of the theater campaign design, and it provides logical lines of operation as a way for viewing military actions along the different ends of the spectrum of counterinsurgency.⁶

What is needed is a discussion of how tactical commanders can apply operational design to translate the operational campaign plan from their theater headquarters into a tactical design which validates, refutes or varies the now traditionally accepted LLOs as promulgated in doctrine.

NATURE OF THE CURRENT OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

The United States has been engaged in protracted counterinsurgency operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan for the better part of the last seven years. The events of September 11th, 2001 triggered America's entry into a new age of warfare, one not dominated by traditional nation-state actors. During this time, the military component of the U.S. Department of Defense has taken advantage of the opportunity to transform 'under fire,' rather than wait for a lull in the action to pause, take stock of lessons learned, and transform afterward. This currently ongoing transformation under fire has created a new paradigm regarding land warfare, specifically counterinsurgency doctrine. The Army and Marine Corps entered operations immediately after 9-11 with outdated counterinsurgency doctrine.⁷ The US military had not participated in COIN environments since Vietnam and was built and trained for the high-intensity maneuver warfare we expected to fight as part of the Cold War. We nonetheless undertook the campaign into which we were thrust, and learned how to operate through trial and error. In December 2006, the Army and Marine Corps jointly

⁶ FM 3-24, 5-3 – 5-7.

⁷ FM 90-8, *Counter Guerrilla Operations* is the Army's manual focused at the tactical level for fighting in guerrilla warfare. It addresses how to defeat the guerrilla fighter, but does not address the broader aspects of the nature of the environment. Although it is still currently in the doctrine inventory, many of its concepts have been overwritten by FM 3-24. FM 90-8 is to be replaced with FM 3-24.2, *Infantry Counterinsurgency Tactics*.

published *FM 3-24/MCWP3-33.5 Counterinsurgency*, based primarily on the collective experience of both services in the current theaters.

In addition to promulgating new doctrine as part of its transformation, the Army has shifted its primary tactical warfighting organization from the Division to the Brigade Combat Team (BCT).⁸ This change has permanently assigned units of combined arms (infantry, armor, artillery) and provided functional support (intelligence, protection, sustainment, command & control) to the brigade commander. This paradigm shift, when laid upon the map of the current operating environment, has placed brigade commanders in a position to have to think and build their long term operations with the operational and strategic end in mind from the outset. No longer can tactical units focus solely on executing tactical mission tasks along physical lines of operation that are generally linear. While U.S. ground forces must undoubtedly be able to execute high intensity linear operations, as evidenced by the attack into Fallujah in 2004, they must also prepare for much longer duration, multidimensional problems, specifically involving less traditional, but recently elevated stability operations.⁹

Brigades executing stability operations will generally have a certain portion of the other instruments of national power (diplomatic, informational and economic) at their immediate disposal. Commanders can expect continuous operations in a single environment in increasing duration, generally up to a twelve month tour. During that timeframe, the usual fog and friction of war will exist, but unlike in linear operations, the center of gravity concept may take on a different form. The ‘enemy,’ while generally used in the collective sense,

⁸ FM 3-0, C-1 – C-8. While the official doctrine for modular organizations is the new 3-0, then Chief of Staff of the Army, General Peter J. Schoomaker approved the concept and design of modular brigades in 2005. Various powerpoint briefings have described the transformation guidance prior to the official doctrinal change.

⁹ FM 3-0 elevates stability operations to the same level as offense and defense operations as core competencies of the Army.

refers to a singular opponent, whether uniformed or not. In Iraq, the U.S. broadly categorizes the enemy into four different groups. They are Sunni Extremists, Sunni Rejectionists, Shia Extremists, and Shia Militia.¹⁰ Since these enemies have different motivations and bases of support, each will have its own center of gravity. The particular enemy one brigade faces early on in its tour may not be the same four to six months down the road. Additionally, the population dynamics from one BCT's area of operations (AO) to another can be vastly different. Stability operations at the tactical level, while in the last fifteen years have proven the norm rather than the exception are counterculture to ground forces propensity for short duration, high intensity offensive operations directed at clearly defined objectives. The dynamics of culmination and operational reach are more relevant now as tactical units assume areas of operation which in the past would be allocated to division size units.

WHY THE NEED FOR TACTICAL DESIGN

Operational COIN doctrine offers the much needed theoretical underpinnings for successful execution of COIN operations. While it is nested with Army and Joint operations doctrine, it lacks a tactical level counterpart to guide tactical commanders' actions. Although the Army is currently in the process of writing a COIN tactics manual, it may well lack the linkage between the two levels of war as do its baseline 'conventional' manuals, FM 3-0 *Operations*, and FM 3-90 *Tactics*.¹¹ FM 3-0 and FM 3-24 together propose that within the context of a campaign, tactical level commanders execute battles and engagements, which lead to achievement of a series of decisive points and ultimately to an objective. They

¹⁰ Joseph Anderson, "Multi-National Corps Iraq: December 2006 – February 2008: Observations and Insights from the Chief of Staff," Powerpoint, 26 March 2008, Newport, RI: Naval War College: Lecture of Opportunity.

¹¹ Jason Enyart, then chief of Doctrine, US Army Infantry School, personal discussion with author, circa December 2007 and again in February 2008. Jason Enyart first used the term 'tactical design' in discussion with the author in February 2008 when identifying a gap in Army doctrine between the tactical and operational levels of war with regard to counterinsurgency.

participate in, but do not plan or command major operations. Nor do tactical commanders focus on attacking the center of gravity, unless participating in a major operation. They may attack decisive points determined by the operational level command which are focused on critical vulnerabilities or critical requirements.¹² Tactical commanders operate along the LLOs as determined by the operational command. While the aforementioned points are written in the absolute, it is clear that doctrine is not intended to be that way. While authoritative, it requires judgment in its application. It should, however, be complete and link the major components and factors of military operations. The operational level of war is linked to the tactical level through operational design, battle command, mission type orders and the operations process (plan, prepare, execute and assess.) Tactics govern the offensive and defensive actions at the tactical level, as do stability tasks.¹³ Doctrine exists for the preceding concepts, but it does not exist for tactical design.

Tactical commanders cannot alone use the military decision making process (MDMP), operations process and tactical task knowledge and proficiency to be successful in COIN. MDMP, despite the Army's recent emphasis on mission style orders and commander centric planning, is a very structured, linear process which focuses on achievement of decisive points and objectives.¹⁴ While the MDMP will be used in crafting the operations order and subsequent fragmentary order, the tactical design portion is primarily within the purview of the commander, and must occur early on, beginning with mission analysis.

Tactics exist to provide solutions to enemy problems in the short-term. Stability tasks also

¹² Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, VII-26.

¹³ U.S. Army, *Tactics*, Field Manual (FM) 3-90 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, 4 July 2001), 1-1 – 1-3.

¹⁴ John D. Waghelstein and Donald Chisholm. *Analyzing Insurgency*, Naval War College Paper #3099. (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, February 2006), 1-2.

achieve short term objectives. The onus is on the brigade or battalion commander to design, and continually refine his vision for success over the course of the deployment.

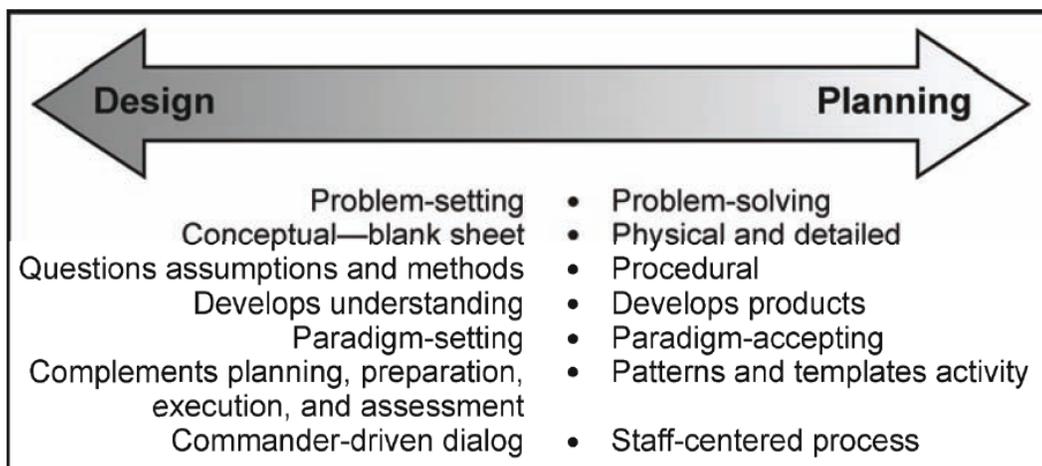


Figure 2: Design and Planning Continuum ¹⁵

Additionally, recent Army planning doctrine acknowledges tactical units applying operational design in recent years. “Operational and tactical-level planning are not limited to particular echelons. Major Army Command headquarters may engage in tactical planning, and echelons normally associated with tactical missions increasingly find themselves undertaking operational-level design.”¹⁶

COIN operations are akin to a marathon as opposed to a sprint. If tactical commanders solely use MDMP, targeting, the operations process and tactics, they may be successful in the short term along one or several LLO. Adept execution of those processes is important to streamlining planning of tactical missions. However, commanders must employ creative military art to look at operations over the long term and not just from one objective to the next. While doctrinally a brigade combat team would not plan and execute its own major operation, over the course of a 12-15 month deployment, its continuous presence and

¹⁵ FM 3-24, 4-2.

¹⁶ U.S. Army, *Army Planning and Orders Production*, Field Manual (FM) 5-0 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, 20 January 2005), 1-8.

tactical actions toward a joint force commander's operational end state constitutes a major operation. Additionally, the imperative to learn and adapt as put forth in both FM 3-24 and the USMC *Tentative Manual for Countering Irregular Threats* fits well within the construct of refining the design during execution.¹⁷ In COIN, this is best done from the bottom up approach. Unlike a conventional operation, where the enemy fights generally within an accepted doctrinal template, counterinsurgency demands constant bottom up refinement of the intelligence picture to feed the higher headquarters assessment.¹⁸ Embracing this, the tactical commander must not wait for the collective assessment at the operational level before he at least mentally refines his tactical design. Given the premium placed on mission command and commander's intent concepts, the tactical commander should take the initiative to re-design, if necessary, as long as he remains within the umbrella of the operational commander's guidance. This will allow for maximum subordinate initiative and lead toward the tactical echelon forces being able to get within the enemy's decision cycle.

While the campaign should have a single operational theme and approved lines of operation, the tactical commander must understand where his area of operations sits along each of the operational level lines. He must continually assess progress and take action when and where needed to continue progress along the lines he determines most critical in both the short and long term in his AO. One BCT may surge along the 'restore essential services' line while the adjacent unit might focus heavily on 'establish governance.' Depending on the level of success along each line, one commander may spend several weeks or months surging along a particular line. The loose nature of the LLO construct enables the tactical

¹⁷ U.S Marine Corps, *Tentative Manual for Countering Irregular Threats: An Updated Approach to Counterinsurgency Operations*, (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 7 June 2006), 17-18.

¹⁸ FM 3-24, 3-25.

commander to remain within the operational intent but focus efforts as he sees fit. Additionally, the measures of effectiveness determined by the operational level command will provide an assessment mechanism for the higher commander to use should he need to redirect a subordinate commander along a different line than the tactical commander believes is primary. As long as there is a good reporting and accountability mechanism, such as objective measures of performance and effectiveness, the operational commander can ensure the campaign moves forward according to his operational design. Another major reason tactical commanders must design operations in their AO is the fact that the unit will eventually rotate out and turn the AO over to another unit. Relief in Place (RIP), as a tactical task, is generally considered one of the most dangerous times on the battlefield.¹⁹

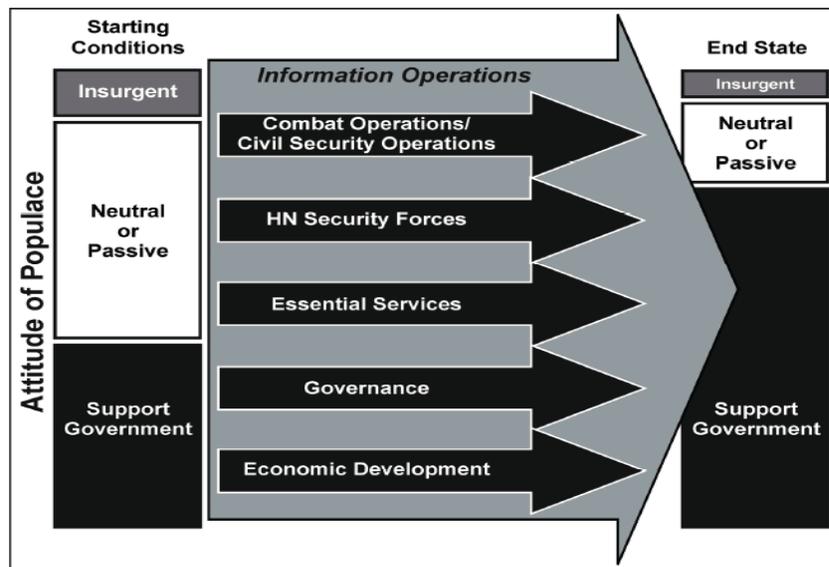


Figure 3: Example Logical Lines of Operation in a Counterinsurgency²⁰

Ideally, a tactical success in one AO could lead to the unit not being replaced, should the local area achieve stability during one's tour. However, given the protracted nature of counterinsurgency and current operating experience, it is likely that a unit will be replaced

¹⁹ FM 3-90, 15-3.

²⁰ FM 3-24, 5-3.

one for one, or even better, a smaller unit will assume responsibility from a larger one. The latter presupposes advanced progress along each of the LLOs, enough that the AO may become an economy of force effort. Regardless, the tactical commander must envision the endstate for his unit's tour, and clearly define and refine what he expects to achieve. By placing a high mark on the wall for his unit to shoot for, he will help keep focus, reduce complacency, and maintain forward momentum until the end.

Considering the dangers of the RIP, it is critical that the outgoing unit handover the AO with momentum that can be maintained, at least in the short term, by the local government and security forces, as the new unit transitions to the AO. The outgoing unit's failure to achieve a quantifiable objective close to the end of the rotation could hurt the incoming unit as they search for something on which to build a foundation for continued progress. Developing a vision for resolution also gives the incoming commander an understanding of the outgoing commander's thought process, rationale, and vision of success in the AO. Depending on the level of success, the incoming commander may be able to achieve complete success within months of arrival, and transition the AO to local control well prior to the end of his tour.

TACTICAL DESIGN DESCRIBED

The diagram below depicts a technique for commanders to use when assuming responsibility for an AO in a COIN or stability environment. While it contains aspects of operational design, it takes into account that certain aspects of operational design do not apply in this context. It also assumes the command will relieve an outgoing unit; however the construct could still apply if the commander is the first one to assume responsibility in that area. The questions the commander asks are along the lines of operational design in the

sense that they frame the problem rather than solve it. The major product at the end of the initial 30-day assessment is a BCT or BN operations order that lays out the tactical design for the unit for the long-term operations in the AO. Specific tactical missions such as raids, cordon & searches, training of host-nation security forces, etc., would all be planned using MDMP. This is not to say, however, that the initial order which frames the design is static. (figure 1) Through the operations process, the command will continually refine the assessment, and the commander should ask himself the design elements questions as often as necessary to optimally apply his combat potential.

Tactical Design for COIN Commander Questions / Milestones				
Receive Mission / AO	Begin RIP with outgoing unit	Complete RIP / Assume AO	First 30 Day Assessment	Issue Guidance / CONOPS
Analyze Mission, Intent, Concept of 1 & 2 levels up	Physically recon AO	Complete Intel Prep of the Operational Environment (IPOE)	Is initial approach working?	Refine current IPOE
Determine outgoing CDR (counterpart) M/I/C and vision of resolution	Begin to gauge progress along LLOs	Determine (T) Decisive Points	Have we achieved decisive points along any / all LLOs?	Provide / brief CDR's visualization, to include: - Tour endstate - AO specific COG - Intermediate OBJs - Approach - Tempo - Priority of effort - Risk
Receive assessment of progress along LLOs	Receive guidance from on ground higher HQ CDR (could be tactical or operational level)	Validate OBJs	Can I extend reach further (if necessary, to reach areas of little or no coverage)?	Issue OPORD: - Troop to Task guidance (based on assessment) - Concept of Operations - Application of other available instruments of national power - Tactical IO themes
Determine assets available from other instruments of national power	Assess friendly COG of outgoing unit based on mission set, factors	Craft Enemy and/or Civilian Center of Gravity	Where are we along each LLO?	- Tactical IO themes
Determine outgoing unit force structure and troop to task ratio	Ensure unit assumes tasks of outgoing unit seamlessly for entire RIP process	Determine INITIAL approach (direct/indirect)	What is the main effort for the next 30-60 days?	<i>Ensure all above are nested within Operational Commander's Intent</i>
Determine outgoing CDR assessment of COG	Determine incoming CDR assessment of COG	Prioritize actions along LLOs	Has initial tempo proven bearable, can it be sustained?	
	Assess outgoing unit tempo, reach and culmination	Set Tempo	What situation will cause tactical culmination?	
		Confirm extent of reach capacity (factor of space/force)	Is Op level COG valid? What about critical factors?	

Figure 4: Tactical Design Considerations for the Commander in a Counterinsurgency Environment

In the Receive the Mission portion of the Tactical Design, the commander and staff mentally prepare themselves and the unit for the nature of their pending operating

environment. This includes gleaning mission essential tasks from the higher headquarters standing orders and the operational campaign plan. Should the unit receive a change of mission or AO prior to arrival in theater, this step is not wasted, as the mental exercise and analysis will likely transfer in great deal to the new area. The commander should also make every effort to understand his outgoing counterpart's intent and concept of operations, to gain further background understanding of how and why the outgoing unit has operated. He should find out how much progress the outgoing unit has made along each of the LLOs and which is the primary effort as transition approaches. Whether the AO has a center of gravity (COG) all its own, or just contains critical requirements or vulnerabilities of the operational center of gravity, the commander should inquire as to the outgoing commander's view of the COG and his approach (direct or indirect).

Upon beginning the RIP, the incoming unit can begin to gauge the previous unit's progress along the operational LLOs. This objective assessment may or not be completely accurate, as it may not be informed by a complete understanding of the initial state of affairs when the previous unit assumed responsibility. For instance, by one's standards, there may only be a modicum of success, but it could be exceptional when compared relative to the start point. The new unit commander should strive to avoid personal bias, comparison to other AOs, and comparison of success against his, or his subordinates' past experiences. However, if the new commander assuming the AO will work for an already established higher headquarters it is necessary to get the higher commander's perspective on the progress made up to that point. There may be a different perception from the two points of view. Also, the benefits of face to face interaction and receipt of mission outweigh just reading the written order. During the RIP, the new commander should begin his assessment of the COG

in the AO. He will take into account the strategic and operational COG as well as placing heavy emphasis on the civilian considerations in the area. Since the population plays a large role in the success or failure of an insurgency, first hand knowledge of the populace's beliefs, norms and attitudes is critical in determining the enemy's level of support and / or sanctuary.

In the Complete the RIP / Assume the AO element of tactical design, the commander completes the initial Intelligence Preparation of the Operating Environment (IPOE), and determines the Enemy COG, strengths and weaknesses, which will then become the basis for his initial tactical approach. Based on his assessment of his unit's capabilities, the decisive points and objectives, he will set an initial tempo. He should include a thorough understanding of the tempo and troop-to-task ratio of the outgoing unit when building his guidance, as it is critical to maintain the right tempo through the transition. The commander must determine the extent of his operational reach. If he is assuming the AO from a larger unit, he might not have the right force mix to accomplish tasks over the same distance as his predecessor. If he has fewer vehicles his reach might also be reduced. This can affect where he bases troops in the AO. A shorter reach might necessitate a greater number of bases or outposts deployed within the AO. The commander must balance the importance of force presence among the populace with the sustainment capability. If the logistics units within the BCT or BN can adequately support multiple forward bases, the unit should put forces as far forward in the AO as possible in order to maximize tactical effectiveness.

Once the RIP is complete, the AO is now fully the responsibility of the new commander, and he may elect to change troop to task distribution with reduced risk. During the first 30 days the command must balance the need to maintain tempo with the requirement to critically analyze the effectiveness of the tempo and the ability to sustain it over the long

haul. Regarding tactical culmination, the commander will, along with his S2, determine the most dangerous enemy situation which could cause tactical culmination. If culmination is reached, the command would either have to reduce execution of other mission tasks in order to surge against the threat, or ask for reinforcements from the higher headquarters. While there are innumerable ways the unit could tactically culminate resulting from enemy contact, the potential also exists for culmination due to exhaustion. While it is unlikely this scenario would occur during the first 30 days, it is nonetheless important for the commander to mentally consider when and why it could occur. Given the previous analogy of the marathon compared to the sprint, the unit's tempo should not lead to early exhaustion.

Early success can serve as a springboard for later success. It can also validate the new unit's capability in the eyes of the population. The population may initially be skeptical of the new unit, as their methods, personalities and proclivities may be substantially different than the unit with which they are used to dealing. The commander should seek to accomplish at least one, if not more of the decisive points along the LLOs he received from his higher headquarters and the outgoing unit. Directing effort towards a DP from the outset will also smooth the transition by preventing unfocused efforts across the unit's AO. Along with tempo and culmination, the idea of direct or indirect approach must be examined for effectiveness. An overly direct approach to the enemy could lead to early culmination if it is unlikely to defeat the enemy in the short term. An indirect approach might allow the command to focus along non-lethal LLOs and attack enemy sources of support within the population, before mounting offensive operations. The commander must assess the effects of the approach on both the enemy and the population.

By the end of the first 30 days assessment, the commander should issue his short and long term guidance in the form of an updated commander's intent and an operations order. His intent, informed by the experience of the previous unit, as well as his own unit's operations should lay out his vision for success over the duration of the unit's tour. He should communicate his vision of the enemy COG, specifically in relation to his AO, and outline a general approach to attacking it. He will set the tempo, determine the priority of effort and focus the unit toward decisive points or minor tactical objectives. He will outline the unit's basing strategy in order to maximize reach to the fullest extent within the AO. He should describe his view of what would cause culmination, and how the unit will avoid it. He will also articulate his view of risk and his expectations of subordinates to accept prudent risk in executing missions. While the unit would generally know the commander's attitude toward risk, the commander still has the responsibility to explain what conditions he believes pose the greatest risk to mission accomplishment.

While the commander's intent is doctrinally part of the operations order, the preceding paragraph describes the intent more holistically in terms of his tactical design for his portion of the campaign. Subordinates must understand the difference between the tactical design and the more narrow intent for a specific mission or task. The mechanics of the current troop-to-task execution will be included in this initial operations order (OPORD), as will the updated IPOE, but tasks in this order will change at a more rapid pace than the design itself. All too often, tactical units get caught up in the day to day execution of the steady state tasks that they miss out on the bigger picture. Tactical units should not just issue a fragmentary order off the outgoing unit's current OPORD upon assumption of the AO. They must holistically assess the effectiveness and validity of the previous unit's task set.

The commander must articulate his vision as it applies to his unit over the course of the campaign. Done too early, it will be uninformed by assessment. Done too late, it will be of little use, as it may be harder to reverse subordinate commanders' actions. At the 30 day mark into the operation, the command will have had adequate time on the ground to assess the population dynamics and the enemy. The commander will understand the other instruments of national power at his disposal, the guidance from his higher headquarters, and the effects of adjacent areas of interest on his AO.

Finally, while this model only shows milestones leading to the issuance of an initial tactical design, it is imperative that the commander conduct continuous assessment and refine his design as necessary throughout the course of operations. Above all, his actions must remain nested within the commander's intent and concept of two levels higher in order to ensure unity of purpose and effective resolution of the campaign.

CONCLUSIONS

Tactical units executing long term COIN operations operate under a different paradigm than those executing tactical tasks within a high-intensity offensive campaign. Tactical commanders must apply military art in the design and planning of their operations, while still operating within the context of the operational campaign plan. Operational and tactical doctrine do not effectively link the two levels of war through nesting of planning and thought processes. While MDMP is the Army's standard planning process at both the operational and tactical level, it is intentionally vague when describing what a commander's concept of operations must look like.²¹ Tactical design, as a term in the vernacular, might be new, but its components are drawn directly from the elements of operational design. Commanders at the BN and BCT level are graduates of Command & Staff Colleges and War

²¹ FM 5-0, G-23.

Colleges, respectively, so they understand the elements of operational design. American military institutions, both educational and doctrinal, should not imply that operational design elements only occur at the operational level of war.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Commanders at the tactical level do an excellent job of planning and executing operations in spite of a lack of clear doctrinal linkage between operational design and planning. The U.S. Army should adopt the aforementioned model, or at least include discussion of the differing nature of planning and design at the operational and tactical levels of war within its upcoming *Tactics* and *Infantry Counterinsurgency Tactics* manuals. Because the above model is the author's own, it should not be construed as the 'approved solution' or doctrinally correct in all situations. It is one of many thought processes which tactical commanders could use when linking operational design and tactical mission planning. Due to the increased pressure and responsibilities brigade and battalion commanders have in the current environment, it is important that the Army and Marine Corps include the concept of commander-centric tactical design within their warfighting doctrine. Inclusion will also provide the staffs of those tactical units a broader understanding of the linkage between operational and tactical thought.

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