

THE MARRIAGE OF SCIENCE AND ART: UTILIZING DOCTRINE TO CONDUCT UNCONVENTIONAL OPERATIONS

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The sky is piercing blue and the hot Mojave sun beats down the sweating necks of Comanche Soldiers. Lying in the prone in squad-sized elements across a 500-meter stretch of open desert, they wait in a whirlwind of fine gritty sand for the UH-60s to exfiltrate from helicopter landing zone (HLZ) Cardinal. This was the beginning of the movement phase for an operation that Comanche Company, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, had never previously executed — one that was planned in its entirety within two days. The company was tasked to secure an American consulate within the town of Razish in order to conduct a noncombatant evacuation (NEO) as part of National Training Center (NTC) Rotation 15-08.5 at Fort Irwin, Calif.

The NEO mission was essential to 3-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team's (SBCT's) tactical operations to establish the foundation for the upcoming hybrid battle with the insurgent Bilsuvar Freedom Brigade (BFB) and the invading conventional Donovanian Forces. However, the short planning timeline and the fact that the NEO mission was not a METL (mission essential task list) task for a regular infantry company presented Comanche Company with numerous challenges. The question was inevitably asked, "How do conventional Infantrymen conduct an unconventional mission that doesn't fall under their unit's METL?" The rapid planning process and effective execution of the NEO mission can be chiefly attributed to how the operation was approached and handled — the company commander and platoon leaders recognized that the tasks of a NEO mission were not different to that of a raid mission, a METL task that is not foreign to Comanche Company.

According to Joint Publication (JP) 3-68, *Noncombatant Evacuation Operations*, a NEO mission is "conducted to assist the Department of State (DoS) in evacuating U.S. citizens, Department of Defense (DoD) civilian personnel, and designated host nation (HN) and third country nationals (TCNs) whose lives are in danger from locations in a foreign nation to an appropriate safe haven." The NEO mission was conducted in cooperation with representatives of the DoS in order to secure the American consulate located within Razish, and to evacuate American citizens (AMCITs) located within the greater Erdabil Province. The secondary objective of the NEO mission was to build and maintain trust amongst the local Lezgin population that, at the time, was not sympathetic toward the BFB/Donovian Forces nor U.S coalition forces. In order to initiate the planning process, Comanche Company assigned 1st Platoon with the processing of AMCITS, 2nd Platoon with securing the evacuation control point as well as the AMCIT evacuation route to the HLZ, and 3rd Platoon with security of the American consulate. However, early in the planning process, Comanche Company leaders realized the military-political obstacles that were inherent to the NEO mission and acknowledged that the mission was going to be a delicate operation, especially for 3rd Platoon and its security elements. During a NEO, the DoD works in support of the U.S ambassador whose primary concern is to maintain control over the regional geopolitical landscape.¹ In order to comply with the DoS's objectives, Comanche Company needed to

Traveling in UH-60 Black Hawks, Comanche Company Soldiers infiltrate 300 meters northeast of Razish at the start of the NEO mission.

Photos courtesy of author

minimize its military footprint “to maintain a semblance of diplomatic normalcy” within a politically sensitive environment.

Regardless of the limitations that were imposed on the planning and execution of the NEO, the company utilized principles of unified land operations (ULO) in order to create a lethal and adaptive plan that fit both the military and political objectives of the DoS. Though a discussion regarding ULO doctrine merits an article of its own, in essence it “describes the Army’s approach to generating and applying combat power in campaigns and operations.”² Pertinent to the NEO mission, ULO doctrine recognizes that “Army forces do not operate independently but as a part of a larger joint, interagency, and frequently multinational effort;” it is the responsibility of Army leaders to integrate Army operations within this larger effort.³ In order to achieve this level of required integration in an operation that is novel to a regular infantry company, Comanche leaders had to creatively understand, visualize, and describe an unfamiliar problem in order to exercise the military decision-making process (MDMP) and execute troop leading procedures (TLPs). Army leaders repeatedly state and understand that planning is both an art and science.⁴ The company commander and platoon leaders realized that by linking the similarities between the NEO mission and a raid — a common infantry task — the “science” aspect was established as the foundation for further planning. Though the principles of a raid dictated the conditions and key tasks necessary for the NEO, the “art” portion remained for Comanche leaders to adapt the principles of the raid to the NEO mission. Subsequently, certain key characteristics of a raid were deemed applicable to the NEO mission: rapid seizure of a specific objective, achievement of violence through a concentration of firepower and an aggressive posture, collection of priority intelligence requirements (PIR), capture/kill enemy forces, and planned withdrawal.

Comanche Company achieved the rapid seizure of the objective (the American consulate within Razish) through the use of UH-60 Black Hawks and CH-47 Chinooks in order to quickly infiltrate a company-sized element into the town from a direction of travel that was unseen from the enemy’s perspective. At the time of the operation, the main American coalition force was located approximately 20 kilometers to the west of Razish. To ensure swift movement, the company utilized air assault assets to infiltrate an HLZ that was located 300 meters northeast of Razish. The close proximity of the HLZ to the town ensured a quick dismounted maneuver across the open desert terrain that inherently provided security for Comanche Soldiers by minimizing the time of friendly exposure to potential enemy fire. This approach provided a friendly

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avenue of approach that was both unpredictable to enemy situational templates (SITEMPs) and provided rapid access to the American consulate. Swift maneuver and surprise allowed 3rd Platoon to quickly gain security of the consulate and ultimately preserve the operational momentum for AMCIT evacuation.

Similar to a raid, the hasty security element emplacement allowed the continuation of tactical operations and freedom of maneuver for Comanche Company, DoS personnel, and

AMCITS not only within the consulate but throughout Razish. Though the political, cultural, and societal landscape of Razish severely limited the use of lethal force and aggressive posture, the company was able to emplace key weapon systems at strong points throughout the consulate as well as escalate our security posture in response to the situation at hand. The American consulate is a modest-sized compound measuring approximately 100 meters in length and width. This compound is distinguishable by a vehicle traversable main gate located on the west side, a small foot-traffic gate on the east side, and six three-story guard towers that dominate the corners of the compound as well as the flanks of the main gate. Heavy weapon systems, which include the M240 and AT-4s, were placed on the guard towers and were able to achieve interlocking sectors of fire from mutually supported battle positions (BPs). The towers provided superb cover, concealment, and fields of fire. More importantly to the NEO mission, the covered towers reduced the visual signature of the M240s and AT-4s, which minimized the appearance of American aggression and presented a more palatable security arrangement to the non-hostile protestors. Though the mutually supporting BPs provided security, both near and far, they also served as observation posts (OPs) that provided critical regular reports on the developing situation outside of the consulate walls, providing forewarning to security elements at the main gate.

As AMCITs entered the compound after the establishment of security and evacuation operations continued uninterrupted within the consulate, the Comanche security elements were dealing with a much more amorphous situation at the gate. A large protesting crowd of Lezgins gathered at the front gate of the consulate demanding security and travel visas to the United States. It would have been a simple mission to merely lock down the gate and deny access to all personnel, but it was essential to keep this gate open in order to allow AMCITS to enter the consulate so that they may be processed for movement to HLZ Cardinal for evacuation. Due to the close proximity with the protestors and our inevitable interactions with local Lezgins, enablers such as Civil Affairs (CA) and



A Comanche Soldier addresses the protesting Lezgins as he tries to identify American citizens who are seeking admittance to the consulate for evacuation.

Military Information Support Operations (MISO) were attached to Comanche to facilitate the pacification of the protesting Lezgins. Measures were taken in an attempt to quell the crowd such as broadcasting Arabic messages for civilians to stay in their homes for their safety and English messages for AMCITS to come to the consulate for evacuation. Concertina wire was also used to physically restrict the gate, but it appeared that all these measures had little effect and may even have exacerbated the situation.

Counterintuitively, the most effective technique was not to shun the protestors but to embrace and engage the crowd. Gate guards identified people who appeared to be the key organizers of the protest and engaged them in dialogue, with the help of skilled CA personnel and DoS translators, in order to understand the demands and the circumstances of the protest. This method closely-imitated tactical questioning (TQ) which yielded valuable information that met the PIR for battalion and brigade-level leadership. Through casual dialogue, Lezgin protest leaders yielded information such as recent BFB activity, BFB base of operations, and location of BFB-held territories. Through the gate guards' engagement with the protest leaders, Comanche Company was able to conduct intelligence gathering as well as disrupt the protests by essentially detaching key civilian leaders from the protesting mass. Because protest leaders were being occupied by the Comanche security elements, there was no organizing force that was capable of inciting Lezgin protestors to rush the gate or chant slogans in unison. This disintegration of

organization provided a more manageable security situation at the gate for 3rd Platoon's gate guards.

Likewise, the engagement with the protesting civilians allowed Comanche gate guards to identify suspicious personnel embedded within the protest who were subsequently pulled from the crowd for TQ. These potential militants were either released or sent to a guarded enemy prisoner of war (EPW) collection point within the consulate according to their responses. Additionally, 3rd Platoon security elements encountered those who appeared to be part of the local police force conducting extrajudicial executions of innocent civilians in the proximity of the consulate. Though the platoon leader and the gate guards were successful in securing the first civilian from execution through direct and deliberate confrontation with the vigilante police force, the vigilantes appeared a second time and

were successful in publicly executing an innocent Lezgin. We later discovered, through our engagement with the Erdabil Province police chief, that this group of vigilante policemen were in fact BFB who had earlier ambushed and killed local policemen. Each brazen attempt was characterized by the yelling of "Kafir!" (which translates to unbeliever or heretic) and a careless waving and pointing of their weapons at civilians in an obvious attempt to draw our attention and efforts away from the consulate and into the town.

Plumes of flames from improvised explosive devices (IEDs), indiscernible explosions in the distance, and erratic sniper fire were regularly reported by the gun teams in the towers of the consulate in addition to roving unmarked civilian vehicles and suspicious movement in the windows of multiple-story buildings. All of these distractors, in



Gate guards from 3rd Platoon react as an IED is triggered by BFB forces in the town of Razish.

conjunction with the extrajudicial killings, served to draw Comanche Company into the town center of Razish and divert our attention from the main objective. Through the chaos, the company's focus on the evacuation of the consulate and the company's pre-planned withdrawal provided direction and an end-state for Comanche Soldiers. Had the company become decisively engaged outside of the consulate, the combat power protecting the compound would have been overextended and thus debilitated the security around the consulate. Without a timely Comanche Company withdrawal, 3-2 SBCT would have been coerced to become prematurely engaged with enemy forces forward of any friendly lines of support.

The NEO mission yielded a successful evacuation of the consulate along with actionable intelligence for future operations in vicinity of Razish. As a by-product of the effective execution of the NEO mission, U.S. coalition forces created positive relations with the Lezgins which permitted the establishment of the Home Guard, a local pro-American Lezgin guerilla force that assisted in combating BFB forces through the NTC rotation. Though Comanche Company was not trained in conducting a NEO, and no Army NEO publication currently exists, the principles of a raid were utilized to conduct planning and execution. Comanche Company was able to rapidly conduct adaptive planning and troop leading procedures, coordinate an air assault to swiftly secure a point target, establish security, secure friendly forces, fulfill higher headquarter PIRs, and rapidly disengage from the objective through a pre-planned withdrawal.

In summary, a regular infantry company is capable of conducting any operation under the condition that the mission is analyzed in terms that are familiar to an infantry company's METL and ULO doctrine. Characteristics of an offense (surprise, concentration, audacity, and tempo) and of a defense (preparation, disruption, concentration, flexibility, and security) are principles that should not be relegated to simple battle drills but can be applied to any conventional or unconventional military operation. The U.S. Army has already established the science of military



Before bringing him in for tactical questioning, a Comanche Soldier searches a possible militant who was loitering outside the consulate.

operations through doctrine and publications, but it falls upon the disciplined initiative of adaptive and mentally agile Army leaders to creatively tailor doctrine to all lethal and non-lethal military operations through MDMP and TLPs. Army leaders can only hope to understand the full spectrum of military operations and the inexorable fog of war through the marriage of the unfaltering "science" and unpredictable "art" — doctrine and palpable execution. The application of these principles and those of the subtasks of an offense (i.e., raid) and/or defense (i.e., area defense) through the military decision-making process and troop leading procedures ensured victory for Comanche Company in Razish and will continue to do so for any U.S. infantry company regardless of operational requirements and objectives.

Notes

¹ JP 3-68, *Noncombatant Evacuation Operations*, 18 November 2015.

² ADP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, October 2011, 7.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

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Comanche Soldiers lower the flag outside the U.S. consulate in Razish, signifying that the consulate had been evacuated.