Mission Analysis
In Stability and Support Operations

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In many of today's operations, units find it hard to define the mission. For the 10th Mountain Division in Operation *Restore Hope* in Somalia, mission analysis was made difficult by a lack of focus, definition, and end state from the higher headquarters.

It is easy to understand the division's situation, but some of the mystery of mission analysis in such operations is dispelled when we remember that the process we use is the same one we use in war. Nonetheless, for some reason, leaders do not use clearly defined tasks, do not link the main effort to the unit's purpose, and do not link the supporting efforts to the main effort.

The first point that needs attention is the difference between an operation and a task. Although this is certainly not new ground for any recent graduate of the Infantry Officer Advanced Course, it is an important point that seems to be lost in the fog of operations. Field Manual (FM) 7-20, *The Infantry Battalion*, defines an *operation* as "a group of similar missions." Familiar examples include *offensive*, *defensive*, and *retrograde*. In today's environment, an example of an operation would be peace

enforcement, and it is on such an operation that this article will focus.

It is the *task*, however, not the operation, that must go into the mission statement, and a task is something very different from an operation. FM 7-20 defines a *task* as follows: "a clearly defined and measurable activity accomplished by individuals and units. It is a specific activity that contributes to the accomplishment of the mission." Examples of tasks are *clear*, *destroy*, *secure*, and *breach*. A more complete list is in FM 7-20 (page 2-11), but no list is exhaustive. Additional tasks, generated by mission analysis, are perfectly valid so long as they meet the definition cited. But don't be too quick to discount the familiar tasks, even in stability and support operations.

Most of the definitions of these tasks are general enough that they still make sense, given restrictive rules of engagement (ROEs). *Clear*, for example, means "to destroy or force the withdrawal of all enemy forces and reduce obstacles that may interfere with subsequent operations." Isn't that exactly what you are trying to do in a peace enforcement operation when you establish a buffer zone, even if your primary way to "force the withdrawal" is through negotiation? Likewise, *interdict* means "to prevent or hinder by any means enemy use of any area or route." This may be an appropriate task for a checkpoint operation. Again, the "by any means" would be clearly spelled out in the ROEs.

Instead, however, even squad leaders are using "conduct peace enforcement operations" or "enforce the UN mandate" in their mission statements where the task should be. Interestingly, the rotational units at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) have been through a similar learning experience with the *search and attack*, which is an operation, not a task. Depending on whether they are part of the *find, fix,* or *finish* force, squads, platoons, and companies may perform such tasks as *recon, block*, or *destroy*. But to have "conduct search and attack" as a task is as general—and hence as meaningless—as "conduct peace enforcement operations."

The second familiar concept is that of the main effort. FM 7-20 says it is the battalion commander who links the purpose of the main effort directly to the purpose of the battalion. Often, the main effort's purpose will be the same as that of the unit. If you understand the concept of a *main* effort, it is not too difficult to understand the idea of a *supporting* effort. FM 7-20 very logically requires that the supporting effort's purpose be clearly linked to the main effort's assigned purpose.

General William DePuy describes this relationship as *cascading* and *nested concepts*. He writes:

Cascading concepts carry the top commander's intentions to the lowest levels, and the nesting of those concepts traces the critical path of concentration and priorities. . . . The concepts are nested like mixing bowls in a kitchen. Each must fit within the confines of the larger and accommodate the smaller and so on down. ("Concepts of Operation: The Heart of Command, The Tool of Doctrine," *Army*, August 1988, pages 26-40.)

These relationships are too often ignored in a stability and support situation. The purpose of all three battalions in a brigade task force should not be the same. One should be the main effort and the others supporting efforts, and the purposes should reflect this. Likewise, a company that has three separate unrelated checkpoints to operate is not following the process of nested concepts either. This is especially true when, under the guise of "decentralization," these checkpoints are so widely dispersed that they are completely beyond mutual support.

Decentralization is a critical element of all Army operations, but it is also a slippery slope. I think our concept of decentralization, particularly in stability and support operations, has gone well beyond the bounds of both practicality and doctrine. Our manuals address decentralization in terms of decision making. FM 100-5, *Operations*, says, "In battle, initiative requires the decentralization of decision authority to the lowest practical level." FM 7-20 says "decentralization provides latitude to subordinates to make decisions rapidly within the framework of the commander's concept and intent." Thus, what decentralization *is* a way of streamlining decision making at lower levels. What it is *not* is squads running around the battlefield without a coordinated purpose, without the ability to mass and concentrate, without adequate sustainability, and without mutual support. FM 100-5 cautions us that this kind of decentralization may result in the loss of synchronization, and I believe that we have reached that point in many recent situations.

Nonetheless, few discussions of stability and support operations exclude the topic of decentralization. Interestingly, however, FM 100-5 does not address the subject in its discussion of the principles of "operations other than war." What it does emphasize, how-

1st Marines Civil Disturbance Missions

MSN #	MISSION DESCRIPTION	MISSION LOCATION	PERS. REQ.	AO STATS.	REMARKS
1-1	Town Center	Alameda & Compton Blvd.	Co.	AO-1	Zero presence visibility. Company assembly area.
1-2	Fashion Center	Long Beach Blvd. & Orchard	None	AO-1	Position covered by hourly mobile patrol x 24 hours
1-5	Carson Mall	Avelon & Del Amo Blvd.	1 PLT	AO-1	Zero presence visibility. Company assembly co-located area at LASD-Carson HQ nearby.
1-9	Pac. Bell sites x 2 Social Gas Sites x 1	608 E. Compton Blvd. 921 E. Compton Blvd. 700 N. Long Beach Blvd.	MP PLT(-)	AO-1	3 positions covered by hourly mobile patrol x 24 hours.

Note: Hourly, one mobile patrol manned by MP PLT(-) covers MSN 1-2 and 1-0 sites. These patrols are escorted by Compton Police Dept. cruiser.

ever, is objective, and cautions us that "each separate operation must be integrated with every other to contribute to the ultimate strategic aim." We have accomplished this traditionally by linking the main effort's purpose to the unit's purpose and the supporting efforts' purposes to the main effort. We should not change this practice for stability and support operations, even if that requires additional troops, a smaller area, and fewer tasks.

Consider, for example, a peace enforcement scenario in which the U.N. mandate requires a task force to separate belligerents, protect civilians, assist prisoners of war and interned noncombatants, conduct mine awareness training, and assist nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). That is a pretty tall order, and surely not all of it belongs in the mission statement. In fact, the initial draft of FM 100-15, *Larger Unit Operations*, states:

The corps commander must guard against a tendency to expand the stated mission in an effort to accomplish more than is appropriate for the military. The commander and staff should not expand their mission, unless the accomplishment of additional tasks is critical to accomplishing the primary mission.

If this is important at corps level with all the available resources, it is much more important at the lower tactical levels. What belongs in the mission statement is the mission essential task and the purpose.

Of all a unit's responsibilities, some are more important than others. FM 7-10, *The Infantry Rifle Company*, says that "a failure to accomplish a mission essential task results in the company's failure to accomplish its primary purpose for the operation." Because the final phase of a peace enforcement operation is relief by a peacekeeping force, let's assume the purpose of this mission is "to establish conditions that allow for the introduction of UN peacekeeping forces." It is the mission essential task that will achieve this purpose, and that task is to separate belligerents. Although other tasks are important, too, they don't belong in the mission statement. FM 7-20 says that those tasks not deemed mission essential can appear elsewhere in the operations order. The whole idea is to maintain focus.

Now the drill is to translate "separate belligerents" into the common military vocabulary. Some commanders may be comfortable with the term as it is, and if it's clearly defined in their units, their subordinates should have no problem. I would suggest, however, that it can be improved. Separating belligerents probably entails establishing a buffer zone, a task that is both force oriented and terrain oriented. Therefore, *clear* would be better. Thus, the mission statement would be "1st Battalion clears Buffer Zone Alpha NLT 25 Feb XX in order to establish conditions that allow for the introduction of UN peacekeeping forces."

Now, within the battalion, one company will be the main effort. Because the main effort's purpose should be linked to the unit's overall purpose, the purpose in the main effort's mission statement will probably be almost identical to that of the battalion. The main effort's task, then, must be something that facilitates this purpose. For example, the main effort might be required to clear the buffer zone itself if this area is small or, more likely, to clear that part of the buffer zone that contains the decisive point. The decisive point could be a belligerent force templated or known to be in a certain location, a population or resource center that must be controlled, or anything else that gives the friendly force a key advantage.

For the sake of argument, let's imagine that within Buffer Zone Alpha there is a village called K-town that is the belligerents' stronghold and their source of manpower, supply, and command and control. If the belligerents do not control K-town, they cannot conduct organized and sustained operations in the buffer zone. If all this is true, K-town is a potential decisive point and a good objective for the main effort. Thus, the main effort's mission statement might be "Company A clears K-town NLT 23 Feb XX in order to eliminate the belligerents' ability to conduct organized and sustained operations in Buffer Zone Alpha." The company may accomplish this task by means of a cordon and search, which is an operation. If the commander wants to include this in his mission statement for clarity, he can, but he still must have the task. This style of mission statement would be, "Company A conducts a cordon and search to clear K-town NLT 23 Feb XX in order to eliminate the belligerents' ability to conduct organized and sustained operations in Buffer Zone Alpha."

The purpose of the supporting efforts must be linked to the main effort. Say that area of operations (AO) A1 is close enough to K-town that belligerent forces there could interfere with the main effort's operation. The purpose of the supporting effort in AO A1 would then be to prevent this interference. The task that facilitates this might be *clear, block, interdict,* or something else. Let's stick with *clear*. The supporting effort's mission statement then might be "Company B clears AO A1 NLT 22 Feb XX in order to prevent interference with the main effort in K-town."

Within AO A1 there is some decisive point; let's say it is Checkpoint Romeo, which is on the main road leading to K-town. This road has been the primary means of belligerent traffic to and from the town. Thus, the commander of Company B assigns the main effort at Checkpoint Romeo to a platoon (plus). Its mission statement might be "1st platoon (+) establishes Checkpoint Romeo NLT 211500 Feb XX to block belligerent traffic in order to prevent interference with the battalion main effort in K-town." The company commander wants to support his main effort at Checkpoint Romeo by securing its flanks. To do so, he divides AO A1 into halves and assigns responsibilities for each. Thus, the mission statements for the supporting efforts might be "2d Platoon (-) clears AO East NLT 210900 Feb XX in order to prevent interference with the company main effort at Checkpoint Romeo" and "3d Platoon clears AO West NLT 210900 Feb XX in order to prevent interference with the company main effort at Checkpoint Romeo."

Unfortunately, these clean mission

statements do not make all the other tasks go away, but they don't do this in combat situations either. Even more unfortunately, more tasks will probably follow. The 10th Mountain Division noted in Somalia that mission creep is an inevitable part of any operation. The Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force discovered the same phenomenon during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The technique the task force used to capture mission creep was the mission matrix shown here.

This matrix enhances battle command by providing in a single picture the tasks and resources that currently affect the unit. It is preferable to a stack of fragmentary orders in an accordion file, because it shows the total impact and helps alert the commander that he is reaching his culminating point. If the commander's mission analysis indicates a platoon is needed to operate a particular checkpoint, he should not reduce this force to a squad simply for the sake of accepting another task. If he does so, he is, by definition, saying he does not have the force required to operate the checkpoint.

The mission matrix tells the commander where his resources (both personnel and equipment) are and helps keep him from spreading himself too thin. All tasks, even such requirements as liaison, should be included on the matrix.

The mission matrix can be used as a graphic aid to depict a unit's status to higher headquarters. The 10th Mountain AAR on *Restore Hope* says that "commanders must drive mission statements, task organizations, and end states from the bottom up....This driving from the bottom will either get ideas approved or force higher headquarters to give more detailed guidance on what they expect to be accomplished."

To go back to our example, I believe this bottom up analysis will convince higher headquarters that the unit cannot *specifically* separate belligerents, protect civilians, assist POWs and interned non-combatants, conduct mine awareness training, and assist NGOs, all at the same time. Obviously, there is the concomitant relationship by which clearing an AO of belligerents to some degree assists NGOs by making it safer for them to operate in that AO. But having Company A separate belligerents, Company B assist NGOs, Company C conduct refugee operations, the engineer platoon conduct mine awareness training, the antitank platoon man a checkpoint, and so on, is not in keeping with the traditional process of nested concepts that has served us so well.

The answer, I think, is to prioritize tasks, do the most important task first (focusing on the decisive point), and shift to secondary tasks (which may also mean shifting the main effort) upon completion of higher priority tasks. Simultaneity, versatility, and decentralization are all good ideas, but so are concentration, synchronization, focus, and mass. I think we may have gone a little overboard with the former set of values at the expense of the latter.

Surely there will be cases when unrelated tasks must be done simultaneously. Many times, a battalion size noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO) can't wait until the brigade size buffer zone is established. Economy of force is still a very valid principle. But we should not allow ourselves to deviate from everything we've done to this point concerning task and purpose, the main effort, supporting efforts, objective, the decisive point, nested concepts, and the like just to try to accommodate stability and support operations. The Army has certain capabilities and limitations. We have a big role in such operations, but we must fulfill this role within these capabilities and limitations. We cannot do everything at once.

Perhaps my view is short-sighted, and the current situation requires that the best way to serve our country is, in fact, to do everything at once. If this is the case, our current mission analysis process, as described in our 7-series manuals, is inappropriate and must be reviewed in light of the way we do stability and support. To make this change, I believe, would be a tremendous mistake. But teaching one thing and doing another is not the right answer either. Our doctrine must change along with the complexity and the diversity of the missions we are expected to execute.

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