

From the Editor

Controlling the Flow

Military operations on urban terrain (MOUT) are getting a lot of attention lately. The logistical and tactical operational demands of MOUT combat are challenging enough by themselves, but if we do not plan for population movements—read crowd control—the most carefully thought-out scenarios may never be executed the way we intend. Even worse, they may be executed in a way that favors our adversaries. The most proficient unit and the best tactical plan will come to naught if that unit cannot be supported logistically. Our axes of advance, routes to the objective, main supply routes, and planned drop zones and landing zones may all be choked with crowds of people—few or none of whom speak English—all trying to escape the impending clash of armies.

Such conditions were common in World War II and during the Korean War. Not everyone we encounter will be simply a refugee, however. An adversary with little regard for refugees or the conventions of war will push a dislodged population ahead of his maneuver forces, or insinuate his own personnel into the stream of refugees, either to spring a surprise attack or simply to gather intelligence on our activities. The likelihood of casualties among these pawns is high. For these and other reasons, the separation of the refugees from our ground forces must rank high among our planning considerations.

This does not necessarily mean that we must accept a scheme of maneuver that offers less likelihood of success; on the contrary, by timely planning and coordination we can influence the actions of the displaced civilians, long before they can wander into harm's way and thereby impede operations. And we must accomplish this *without assigning the mission to our maneuver units*; this would degrade combat power at a time when we will need it the most. This is the challenge—and one of the wartime missions—of our civil affairs units and staffs.

Remember, the civil affairs officer is not some guy who doesn't have a real job, but is instead a trained professional who can make the maneuver unit commander's job a whole lot easier. He has access to the linguists, host nation assets—including logistical support—and psychological operations (PSYOPS) units that are proven combat multipliers, and can support the scheme of maneuver in a number of ways.

First, he can help by co-opting host nation agencies into the effort. They are best able to deal with the needs, motivations, and concerns of the refugees. They will also have access to at least some relief supplies, will be able to identify facilities that offer shelter and medical care, and will share a common language with the population. A second source of assistance lies in the international aid organizations that are drawn to threatened regions. While they obviously cannot involve themselves in any way that would imply partiality, they can influence the movement of the refugees into previously coordinated areas that are remote from the likely battlegrounds, and provide support for the relocated civilians within their capabilities.

Host nation police and armed forces personnel can also be useful in identifying potential threats and others whose separation from the general flow would be advisable, and the civil affairs officer can establish contact with these agencies. We have recently seen in Third World countries that armed individuals infiltrating and accompanying refugees all the way to temporary resettlement camps can wreak havoc once they arrive. The refugees will soon identify—and attempt to distance themselves from—such individuals, and provisions must be made to isolate these potential threats early on.

Psychological operations units and indigenous linguists can also assist in alerting refugees as to what assistance is available, and the routes that will get them to it. Properly handled, a movement of some or all of the civilian population will reflect positively upon U.S. and Allied forces, and will yield a windfall of information on the enemy. Unit commanders can help themselves in this regard by identifying the foreign language skills of soldiers within their own units.

The mission of infantry units is—as it has always been—to close with and destroy or capture the enemy, and maneuver units cannot be diverted from such purposes without jeopardizing the mission. As we have seen, uncontrolled population movements can turn into a nightmare of slowed military operations and interrupted logistical support. With proper planning, however, commanders can anticipate and avoid these problems and bring the fight home to the enemy, on his turf, but on our terms. That's how we win wars, and that's why we win wars. Watch your lane.

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