Environmental Considerations as part of the MDMP

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It is NOT just about endangered species, cleaning up spills or being in compliance! Current operations and simulations confirm that environmental considerations include many areas that may be low on the commander's (and staff's) priority list, but still need to be considered as part of the military decision-making process (MDMP).

Consider the following scenario: U.S. deployed forces are about to conduct a deliberate river crossing operation against a smart, determined but outnumbered enemy. Multiple crossing sites are planned. One Brigade Combat Team (BCT) will cross at a point in the river parallel to an underground petroleum pipeline. Not far away is an underground natural gas pipeline. Both have exposed standpipes and valves on both sides of the river. The terrain is complex with a mix of small built up urban areas and rolling agricultural fields. Another BCT has a forward base established less than a kilometer away from a commercial phosphorus plant. A municipal power plant in the area of operations (AO) was destroyed by U.S. forces because the enemy was using it for hiding an anti-aircraft battery. It is harvest season and the farmers are trying to get their crops in before the rainy season starts. The U.S. mission is to destroy enemy forces, shore up the fledgling elected government, train their armed forces, and stay on to conduct support operations along with nation building. Winning the hearts and minds of the local population is an important implied task. Another key implied task is to conduct the mission with minimal casualties, both U.S. and civilian.

This was the scenario facing the Maneuver Support Center (MANSCEN - Engineer-MP-Chemical Schools) Captains Career Course Warfighter III culminating exercise sponsored by the MANSCEN Battle Lab. What are the environmental considerations?

1) Environmental considerations should be clearly identified during the MDMP and the Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB). A thorough terrain analysis to include identification of the existing infrastructure would reveal that choosing a river crossing site adjacent to these pipelines is NOT a good choice. These pipelines could be blown either on purpose or by accidental artillery/mortar fires and create a significant blast, illuminate the crossing sites, spill burning petroleum product in the river and put the crossing at risk. Destruction of these pipelines would also have a significant adverse impact on the civilian population.

2) Selecting a forward operating base so close to a commercial phosphorus plant is NOT a good idea in the interest of force health protection. The fumes from this plant could make Soldiers sick. If the plant were deliberately blown by the enemy, there could be significant loss of life (military and civilian) from toxic fumes carried downwind. The destruction of this plant would also adversely impact the farming community.

3) Loss of the power plant may or may not affect combat operations much, but in the aftermath of its destruction, a lot of time, money and effort will be required to make it operational again. If destruction of the power plant is not absolutely necessary, it should not be targeted. The negative impacts of destroying the power plant should be weighed before the final decision is made to destroy it. There may be alternatives to reducing the enemy fire coming from the facility that do not require the plant's destruction.

4) Since this is an agricultural area, there will be many feed stores in the area with agrochemicals present. These are easily made into explosive devices that a determined and desperate enemy would employ. It would be an important priority in the offensive operation to secure them, both to deny use by the enemy and to protect them for future use by the agricultural community once combat ends.

5) The farmlands, vineyards, orchards, etc., should be avoided to the extent it is militarily possible. Any follow on stability operations will be made simpler if the civilian population still has a means to make a living and stay employed. It may be necessary as part of combat operations to destroy some of the agriculture in the area, but the consequences will have to be addressed in the aftermath by the government and also by the U.S.

Other environmental considerations associated with military operations that can impact the operation include: dust suppression, insect infestations and vermin, infectious waste disposal, hazardous waste disposal and protection/preservation of historic, religious, and cultural sites.

For more information on environmental considerations during military operations, visit the U.S. Army Engineer School's Directorate of Environmental Integration Web site at www.wood.army.mil/dei.

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