

The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Volume 14 | Number 1

Article 31

7-4-1984

CAMPAIGN PLANNING

William R. Williamson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters>

Recommended Citation

William R. Williamson, "CAMPAIGN PLANNING," *Parameters* 14, no. 1 (1984), doi:10.55540/0031-1723.1370.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters by an authorized editor of USAWC Press.

CAMPAIGN PLANNING

by

WILLIAM R. WILLIAMSON

Since the advent of the efforts to revise the 1 July 1976 edition of FM 100-5 (*Operations*), increasingly greater attention has been focused on the importance of a campaign plan in conducting large-unit operations. This was an important change because during the last three decades, the concept of a campaign plan as a critical element in theater operations had significantly diminished. During these decades, the use of this term and the product it denotes were relegated almost totally to the joint arena.

Campaign planning was found to have great utility during previous wars up to and including World War II. The result of this planning, the campaign plan, was a crucial document in which the theater commander could communicate his view of how military resources would be employed over a period of weeks or months to accomplish theater objectives. The recognition of its cruciality and the increasing focus on the operational level of war brought about by the revision of FM 100-5 necessitates a better comprehension of the campaign plan, how it fits in our hierarchy of plans, and what purposes it may serve.

At the outset, it is important to recognize that there is a variety of definitions for a campaign plan. This variation and the brevity of these different definitions contribute to the ambiguity surrounding the term, as seen in these extracts from principal source documents:

- JCS Pub 1: "A plan for a series of related military operations aimed to accomplish a common objective, normally within a given time and space."¹

- FM 100-5: "Sustained operations designed to defeat an enemy force in a

specified space and time with simultaneous and sequential battles."²

- JCS Pub 2: "A device used by major commands to express the commander's decision in terms of specific operations projected as far into the future as practicable Its purpose is to express an orderly schedule of the strategic decisions made by the commander to allow sufficient time to procure and provide the means to secure desired or assigned objectives."³

TIERS OF PLANNING

First, let us consider where the campaign plan fits in the planning process. The ultimate source of military plans can be traced to national-level decisions made within the National Security Council process. From these decisions come not only a national military strategy but also additional guidance on priorities, forces, timing, and other planning assumptions. These decisions are amplified by the Secretary of Defense. The Joint Chiefs of Staff further develop these decisions in the operational planning realm through the use of the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP). The JSCP, which is revised biennially and updated in the off-year, provides guidance to the unified and specified commanders (CINCs) for the development of Operation Plans (OPLANS) and Concept Plans (CONPLANS) to be used in the event of possible employment of military power to protect US interests and attain strategic objectives.

As each CINC responds to the guidance and taskings in the JSCP, he must decide early how operations will be conducted within his command or, in the case of a unified commander, within his theater. Assisted by

the strategic guidance and his view of how the war will be conducted within his theater, the commander develops an operational concept. This operational concept not only becomes the basis for the development of the Operation Plans tasked by the JSCP, but also leads to the development of a campaign plan for the theater.

The JSCP-derived Operation Plans serve the principal purpose of focusing the efforts of a number of unified and specified commanders to insure that military resources arrive in the theater at the time and place which will best support the theater commander's operational concept. In many ways, then, these Operation Plans become predominantly deployment plans. Their principal focus is on the strategic mobility problem and less on the problem of effectively employing military resources once they have arrived within the theater. This differentiation is useful and practical since deployment requires careful coordination between several unified and specified commanders whereas employment usually falls within the total purview of the theater commander.

For employment planning, the CINC translates his operational concept into a more elaborate statement of how operations will be conducted within the theater once the military resources have arrived. This statement is the campaign plan. It should describe the general conduct of operations within the theater over the period of time required to achieve the theater objectives. However, it will only include those operations which the theater commander is able to effectively visualize. Thus in the case of a major conflict the campaign plan may not describe the full period of time required to win the war, but rather only those operations conducted to achieve intermediate theater objectives. The winning of the war may require a sequence of campaign plans which are successively prepared as critical aspects come into better focus. In some cases where the theater is geographically large, several campaign plans may be prepared and executed not only sequentially, but also in parallel. This is

especially true where the theater commander has chosen to use several lines of action.

The possibility of several separate lines of action leads to the distinction between a theater of war and theaters of operations. The theater of war is the total land, sea, and air space that is or may become involved directly in the military operations. In the case of large areas, a theater of war may be divided into theaters of operations. The theater of operations is that portion of a theater of war necessary for military operations to achieve an assigned mission and for the support incident to these operations.⁴ The theater of operations may well include not only land but also sea and air space. An illustration in today's context would be the Allied Command Europe. Because of its size and diversity, this theater of war is divided into separate theaters of operations: Allied Forces Northern Europe, Allied Forces Central Europe, and Allied Forces Southern Europe. Not only would the Allied Command Europe prepare a campaign plan, but each of the three commanders of the theaters of operations would prepare one. These three subordinate plans would be thoroughly coordinated and submitted to the theater commander. Then, should war come, they would be synchronized and ready for execution in parallel.

Better clarification of these points may be found in historical examples. Operations conducted in the Pacific during World War II

Colonel William R. Williamson is currently Director of Force and Theater Planning in the Department of Military Strategy, Planning, and Operations at the US Army War College. He is a graduate of the US Military Academy, received an M.S. from the University of Illinois, and is a 1980 graduate of the US Army War College. He has served as an Assistant Professor at the US Military Academy, commanded a mechanized infantry battalion in the 9th Infantry Division, and served as a staff officer with responsibilities in Army mid-range strategy formulation and force planning in the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans, Department of the Army.



were essentially along two separate lines of action. General MacArthur developed a campaign plan for his island-hopping operations leading to the Philippines, and Admiral Nimitz developed a separate but parallel campaign plan for his deep-water approach to Japan. Both converged into a subsequent campaign plan that was developed for the seizure and occupation of the Japanese home islands. Allied operations in the Mediterranean should also provide an excellent example of a campaign plan, but they do not. Instead of being guided by a comprehensive longer-term view, planning was conducted operation by operation, with each successive operational stage dictated by political and military developments as they arose.

How then do the Operation Plans that result from the Joint Operations Planning System connect with the operation orders and operation plans developed by the subordinate headquarters within the theater? The link between these two dimensions of planning is the campaign plan. The theater commander's campaign plan not only provides his comprehensive vision of how operations will be conducted within the theater, but it also insures that there is proper synchronization and unity of effort among the various subordinate commands within the theater. With this vision, subordinate commanders begin their planning. Subordinate commanders will not normally prepare orders and plans to cover the entire time span of the theater commander's campaign plan. Rather, they plan in detail and develop orders for those initial actions for which the requisite information is available and which they may be called upon to execute early. For operations that will occur later in the campaign, they develop plans or outline plans. Service component headquarters within the theater, and possibly even the next subordinate headquarters below the component headquarters when the theater is especially well developed, may also find it useful to develop their own campaign plans in order to provide the commander's comprehensive view of the orchestration of operations within his command. As a minimum, though, the

theater commander would develop a campaign plan to guide actions within the theater.

SCOPE

With the position of a campaign plan relative to other types of plans and orders established, it is appropriate to address the thrust and contents of the campaign plan. As mentioned before, a campaign plan prescribes the sequential operations to be conducted within a theater in order to achieve assigned theater objectives. The best description of a campaign plan appears to be that contained in chapter 5 of the 29 July 1983 draft FM 100-15 (*Corps Operations*). The next several paragraphs paraphrase and enlarge upon several sections of that chapter.

In designing his plan the theater commander should visualize the campaign from its beginning to its end. He should base his plan on a specific means of defeating his enemy—making the enemy's position in the theater untenable by destroying his logistic support, defeating his allies, separating his forces, occupying decisive terrain, carrying the war to his homeland, or destroying his fighting forces. The plan must necessarily be flexible and provide latitude for considerable adjustment during its execution, but its aim must be clear. The plan should also be conceptually simple and designed to threaten several areas or forces at once. By presenting the enemy with multiple threats, the commander preserves the initiative, avoids being predictable, and retains the freedom of action necessary to strike at weaknesses as they are identified.

Sun Tzu observed that "a victorious army wins its victories before seeking battle." The campaign plan anticipates battles and disposes forces in ways that create the operational advantages of relative positioning, which influences killing power and speed of action before battle is joined. The anticipated battles will rarely take place exactly as foreseen and may even be avoided if their terms are not acceptable, but the operational dispositions should always facilitate rapid, advantageous commitment of forces to battle.⁵

In visualizing the course of his campaign, the theater commander should see beyond the immediate battles. He should consider the enemy's likely direction of withdrawal and the future courses of action open to both forces. He should make tentative plans for the employment of his forces after each series of battles to advance his operational plan as far as possible. Possible local reverses or tactical failures must also be taken into account; their occurrence should not unduly influence the campaign plan.⁶

Campaign planning should aim at the most rapid and least expensive defeat of the enemy. The enemy should be attacked throughout the theater with every means available to weaken him before, during, and after battle. Deception, psychological warfare, airborne and amphibious operations, coordinated naval and air interdiction campaigns, and special operations should all be used to augment the ground campaign.⁷

Successful battles must be parlayed into operational gain whenever possible. The campaign plan must anticipate the necessity for fresh forces to be positioned in order to exploit success and to prevent the enemy from reorganizing and conducting subsequent phases of his operation. Timely commitment of reserve forces to exploit battlefield success may decide the campaign. Critical elements in the art of campaign planning are the commander's ability to anticipate and his sense of timing.

KEY ASPECTS

Beyond this overview, there are specific aspects that should be addressed in the campaign plan in order to insure full understanding and transmit the theater commander's intent. Each of these aspects demands some elaboration.

Assumptions. As with all plans, assumptions are also key to the campaign plan. Assumptions are used by the planner to shape the unknown. In the case of a campaign plan, they may well be developed to address the most likely enemy action, the amount of participation by allied forces, the use of nuclear and chemical weapons, etc.

There is sometimes a tendency to develop assumptions that depict "worst case" situations in an attempt to "safe-side" planning. This is an erroneous approach. Worst-case assumptions often are wasteful of resources and reduce the opportunity to exploit momentary advantages or enemy weaknesses. In the opposite sense, there is sometimes a tendency to adopt facilitating assumptions which assume-away problems. This approach is equally incorrect. In each case assumptions should be developed to depict what the commander's best estimate of reality will be at the time of execution.

Theater Objectives. Theater objectives should be carefully described in the campaign plan so that subordinate commanders will fully understand them. These objectives will then guide the decentralized planning and operations of subordinates, thereby increasing the likelihood that their separate activities will be synchronized as parts of the entire theater effort. Clear statement of the theater objectives also provides overarching guidance for subordinate commanders when immediate actions are required in the absence of specific guidance. Such decentralization converts initiative into agility, allowing rapid reaction to capitalize on fleeting opportunities.

Missions. Missions should be stated in the campaign plan in broad terms, should be general in nature, should cover a considerable period of time, and should leave the details to subordinate commanders. This technique provides maximum flexibility and freedom of action. The assignment of specific terrain objectives should be avoided so as not to inhibit the actions of subordinate commanders. If necessary, general traces using cities and major terrain features may be assigned as objectives.

Phasing. Since the campaign plan presents a longer-term view of operations, it should envision a series of sequential operations. Each of these operations constitutes a potential phase (and sometimes more than one) of the campaign plan. Identified phases provide sequential segments within the campaign plan which allow the focusing of effort. The early phases, because

they are more proximate, contain the greater amount of specific guidance and detail. Phases should be established by identifying transition points between different kinds of operations or by identifying changes in tempo within a particular operation.

Maneuver. The critical problem of the campaign plan is to distribute the available forces where they will do the most good. By assessing enemy capabilities and weaknesses, the theater commander disposes the minimal essential forces in those areas where he does not wish to conduct major operations, thus allowing the concentration of his limited resources in carefully chosen areas where the enemy is least prepared and most exposed. In so doing, head-on encounters are avoided and attacks on flanks and rear areas are maximized. The campaign plan should task-organize forces for each phase of the plan.

Fire Support. Fire support includes the whole range of land, air, and naval capabilities—conventional, chemical, and nuclear. Apportionment of and priorities for these resources should be made in the campaign plan—again, as in maneuver, for each phase. Fire support and maneuver are integral parts of the campaign. The coordinated use of both should characterize every phase of the campaign. Fire support should create opportunities for maneuver, and maneuver should expose enemy forces to the concentration of fires.

Control Measures. For each phase, the campaign plan should specify zones of action for subordinate commanders and, where appropriate, axes of advance. When establishing these control measures, careful attention should be given to the terrain, capabilities and limitations of friendly units, the capabilities of the enemy, and the availability of major lines of communication. These demarcations cannot become inviolate, but rather must be adjustable through adjudication as operations and planning are conducted.

Reserves. Major influence on the campaign is attainable through the careful husbanding and employment of reserves. These reserves may be forces or chemical and

nuclear weapons. They may be assets available at the outset of the campaign, or they may arrive during the campaign. The campaign plan must capitalize on every opportunity that can be anticipated or created to withhold important combat resources in anticipation of delivering a decisive blow to the enemy. By necessity, this will require some portions of the theater to be in an economy-of-force role so that adequate reserves may be created and disposed in anticipation of their commitment. Once again, reserves should be identified for each phase and their anticipated use delineated.

Logistics. Logistics may well regulate the pace of the operations described in the campaign plan. One of the primary considerations at theater level will be the management of logistics. The campaign plan must allot time for logistical buildup prior to the initiation of major operations. It must also designate priorities among subordinate units and provide for the establishment, development, and protection of lines of communication within the theater. Without adequate lines of communication, an aggressive campaign is not possible.

Deception. Given the amounts of military resources involved in a campaign, deception is a necessity in order to conceal the true intentions, capabilities, objectives, and locations of vulnerabilities within the theater. The campaign plan should direct the use of every available resource within the theater in order to project a plausible deception that conceals upcoming operations from the enemy. This will necessarily involve the use of some combat forces to make it convincing. Combat support units and reserve units are well-suited to accomplish deception measures.

Format. The format for a campaign plan may be found in Appendix C of JCS Pub 2, *Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF)*.

CONCLUSION

Campaign planning has become somewhat of a lost skill since the end of World War II. In recent years, however, increasing

emphasis has been placed on the importance of campaign planning in the conduct of large-unit operations. Of the definitions offered at the outset, the most useful is that provided in JCS Pub 2:

A device used by major commands to express the commander's decision in terms of specific operations projected as far into the future as practicable Its purpose is to express an orderly schedule of the strategic decisions made by the commander to allow sufficient time to procure and provide the means to secure desired or assigned objectives.⁸

However, as with all definitions, this is only a point from which to begin to understand the subject.

I have attempted in this brief article to go beyond the basic definitions in order to promote greater understanding and application of the campaign plan. Its role as a bridge between the Operation Plans derivative of the Joint Operations Planning System and the operation orders and operation plans developed by subordinate units within a theater of war is crucial. Not only does the campaign plan serve as such a bridge, but it

also enables the theater commander to communicate his strategic decisions, priorities, and view of the sequential and simultaneous operations necessary for the theater objectives to be attained. The utility of the campaign plan in allowing the entire force to understand thoroughly the commander's intent is clearly evident. It is through this understanding that subordinate commanders can maximize the basic tenets of FM 100-5: initiative, depth, agility, and synchronization.

NOTES

1. US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, JCS Pub 1 (Washington: GPO, 1 June 1979), p. 58.
2. US Department of the Army, *Operations*, Field Manual 100-5 (Washington: GPO, 20 August 1982), p. 2-3.
3. US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF)*, JCS Pub 2, with Change 2 (Washington: GPO, 1 December 1975), p. 72.
4. US Department of the Army, *Larger Unit Operations*, Field Manual 100-15 (Test) (Washington: GPO, 15 March 1974), p. 2-1.
5. US Department of the Army, *Corps Operations*, Field Manual 100-15 (Draft) (Washington: GPO, 29 July 1983), p. 5-7.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 5-8.
8. JCS Pub 2, p. 72.

