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# Campaigns: The Essence of Operational Warfare

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**O**n 6 June 1944, American and British forces stormed across the Normandy beaches to begin Operation Overlord, the far-reaching campaign for the liberation of Europe. The unqualified success of that bold venture, which led to the defeat of Nazi Germany, stressed the importance of a well-designed and well-executed campaign as an adjunct to operational warfare. Yet, shortly after the Second World War, this notion of warfare with its associated campaigns largely disappeared from contemporary military thinking. More recently, however, a resurgent interest in operational warfare as an essential step in achieving overall victory in war has evolved among military leaders. Unfortunately, somewhat less attention has been placed on its indivisible component—the campaign.

In order to better convey the notion of campaigning, this essay delves into a series of campaign fundamentals from four points of view. First, numerous campaigns of the Second World War, in Europe, the Pacific, and Africa, illustrate the elements of war that must be amalgamated to produce victory. Although Overlord was but one of these memorable campaigns, a brief review of its salient points provides a useful historical perspective of a campaign. Second, a precise definition of operational warfare and its companion, the campaign, serves to simplify many of the complexities inherent in these terms. Third, a comparison of campaign planning with other planning functions further delineates the unique wartime role of the campaign. Finally, by examining some of the campaign's major components—the mission, the concept of operations, and the

logistics concept—we will see these disparate components quickly coalesce under the unifying rubric of the campaign.

### *Operation Overlord*

Strategic guidance from civilian and military policymakers as a prerequisite to the formulation of campaigns was just as important in years past as today. On 12 February 1944, in fact, the Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff initiated Overlord by providing strategic guidance in the form of a directive to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force. In a one-page document that granted wide latitude in the exercise of command, the Chiefs outlined the Allies' strategic war aim and specified general mission guidance for the Supreme Commander: "Enter the continent of Europe, and . . . undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces."<sup>1</sup>

With the Combined Chiefs' directive as guidance for what was to be the most extensive military adventure in history, General Eisenhower planned and conducted the campaign to recapture Western Europe. In order to achieve ultimate victory, he focused all his efforts on a single guiding principle—the destruction of the enemy's forces.<sup>2</sup> Control of geographic areas was important only in relation to their use for the enemy's conduct of operations or as friendly supply and communications centers. Two such areas of special interest were the Ruhr as the principal center for the munitions industry in the heart of western Germany, and the Saar as the second most important industrial region.

Throughout the campaign, but especially during its opening phases, extensive deception measures were incorporated into the concept of operations. As a consequence, the defending German forces were unable to determine the exact timing, scope, and location of the initial Allied amphibious assault and the subsequent operations across Europe—factors that contributed to their defeat.

Finally, Eisenhower divided the campaign into seven phases, each consisting of a number of major sequential and simultaneous operations that ultimately resulted in the destruction of the German armed forces and the achievement of his strategic aim. The first phase involved the amphibious assault on the Normandy beaches by British and American forces.

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Next came the establishment of a lodgment on the Continent, the buildup of a logistics base, and the subsequent breakout from German encirclement. The third phase saw the Allies pursue the German army across France to the Rhine River. Here, Eisenhower's armies paused to establish another logistics base along the western border of Germany, while continuing to apply offensive pressure on the enemy. Upon completion of this fourth phase, the allied armies commenced upon the next, which led to the destruction of German forces west of the Rhine. Penultimately, they launched the massive attack into the Ruhr. During the final phase, remaining enemy forces were destroyed throughout Germany.<sup>3</sup> As history would later record, Operation Overlord progressed substantially through the phases and along the pattern as originally conceived.

### *The Campaign as Operational Art*

With Overlord as a classic example of the campaign, we are now better positioned to understand its relationship to operational warfare. The 1982 edition of FM 100-5, *Operations*, defines the operational level of war as that level where available military resources are employed to attain strategic goals within a theater of war. Here, the operational level is closely associated with the theory of larger-unit formations and the planning and conduct of campaigns.<sup>4</sup> In the 1986 edition of the same field manual, the term "operational art" replaces "operational level," but the definition remains essentially the same. In this latest version, operational art still focuses on the attainment of strategic objectives through the design and conduct of campaigns. Gone, however, is the explicit connection with large formations—an apparent recognition that relatively small forces, such as those involved in the Grenada operation, can fight at the operational level. Furthermore, the new edition added the theater of operations to the theater of war as a potential stage for operational warfare.<sup>5</sup> Even the Soviets refer to operational art as focusing on strategic objectives, but, like the 1982 edition of FM 100-5, they tie campaigns to the maneuver of large military formations. In any event, the operational level of war and operational art are interchangeable terms used to describe warfare that achieves strategic aims.

Clearly, then, the campaign is an integral part of operational warfare. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have defined the campaign as "a series of military operations aimed to accomplish a common objective, normally within a given time and space."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the 1986 version of FM 100-5 describes the campaign as "a series of joint actions designed to attain a strategic objective in a theater of war."<sup>7</sup> From these two complementary definitions, it follows that the campaign can be expressed as a series of either simultaneous or sequential operations, within a given time and space, designed to attain a strategic aim. Because of the complexity of forces



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**General Eisenhower was given wide latitude in the exercise of command. His mission was “Enter the continent of Europe, and . . . undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces.”**

required for modern warfare, the campaign normally will be a joint or combined effort. Independent single-service campaigns, however, may still exist to support a theater campaign. For example, an independent strategic air campaign could be conducted against the Soviet Union, while a combined theater campaign might be fought simultaneously in Europe’s central region.

The theater of war or theater of operations provides the setting in which the campaign normally occurs. The theater of war is the total area of military operations under the responsibility of a joint or combined commander-in-chief. For example, the European theater of war extends from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Ural Mountains in the east, and from the northern cape of Scandinavia to the Mediterranean in the south—all under the responsibility of the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe. Other US theaters of war include the Pacific Command, Atlantic Command, Central Command (Southwest Asia), and Southern Command (South and Central America).

Just as the campaign is associated with a theater of war, it also finds expression on the smaller stages comprising theaters of operations, which are subdivisions of some theaters of war. In Europe, the theater of war is divided into the three theaters of operations consisting of the Northern, Central, and Southern European regions—each with its own independent but coordinated plans for campaigns against Warsaw Pact

forces. In the Pacific theater of war, the Korean Peninsula, the Indian Ocean, and the eastern edge of the Soviet Union form separate theaters of operations. Likewise, either Central or South America could be organized into individual theaters within the larger theater of the Southern Command. Campaigns in theaters of operations, though generally lacking the spatial amplitude associated with those traversing an entire theater of war, do serve to achieve strategic aims and thus qualify as instances of operational art.

### *Campaign Planning*

In the conduct of the individual battles and larger military operations that collectively comprise campaigns, planning assures that superior combat force is channeled against enemy vulnerabilities. That is to say, during offensive operations the campaign is designed to disrupt enemy plans, capabilities, and freedom of action. During defensive situations, the campaign aims to disrupt the enemy's timetable but at the same time retains friendly freedom of action and avoids decisive engagement until an opportune time. Moreover, based upon planning well into the future, the campaign permits both the scheduling of proper forces as well as the procurement and use of necessary resources. This scheduling process prevents the premature exhaustion of scarce resources prior to the engagement with the enemy.

When we speak of "campaign planning," we normally have in mind such planning as applied to the employment of forces in actual combat, or what is called *prosecution planning*. It is important to realize, however, that a prosecution plan is only one of the four types of operational plans, which collectively accommodate planning at the various levels of command and cover the entire spectrum from peace to war and back to peace again.<sup>8</sup> This planning cycle is particularly useful in relating campaign planning to operational warfare.

The first category, *current operations planning*, aims at deterring potential enemies from aggression and at ensuring a high state of readiness among military forces. Normally associated with peacetime, day-to-day functions, it allows for the development of broad, strategically oriented guidance and direction for the unified and specified commands, which have broad continuing missions. At lower organizational levels, this type of planning leads to the development and enforcement of training and readiness standards, the conduct of routine peacetime patrols, and the accomplishment of joint and combined operational exercises.

The second category, *contingency planning*, relates to peacetime preparations for dealing with potential crises or military requirements within a theater commander's area of responsibility. This category is most closely associated with the development of operation and concept plans under the deliberate planning process of the Joint Operations Planning

System or JOPS. These products of contingency planning are the many numbered war plans, often called deployment plans, that theater commanders produce in response to foreseeable or potential military eventualities.

The third category, *execution planning*, pertains to the actual commitment of forces when conflict is imminent. In other words, this planning occurs during the transition from peace to war. Once again, JOPS provides the framework for a process that ultimately leads to executable operation orders. In this respect, execution planning facilitates the initial deployment of forces and equipment to a theater of war, and supports the employment of those forces in a manner consistent with the overall concept for fighting the war.

The fourth and final category of planning, which we glanced at earlier, is *prosecution planning*. It pertains to plans that actually employ forces in combat in order to achieve strategic aims. By completing the cycle from peace to war and back to peace again, prosecution planning ultimately provides for a favorable resolution of the war. At the highest national levels, this planning results in strategic guidance from which theater commanders derive their mission. Armed with such guidance, these operational commanders then design a campaign plan as the basis for operational warfare. Obviously, though the campaign plan is a wartime instrument, it can be developed in part before commencement of hostilities in cases when timing permits or the actual contingency is anticipated.

### *Mission and Concepts*

As exemplified in Operation Overlord, there are a number of fundamental considerations essential to the design and conduct of any well-conceived campaign. Some of the more important of these can be explored by looking at three different aspects of the campaign—the mission, the concept of operations, and the concept of logistical support.

With respect to the campaign's mission, there are several important considerations. To begin, all of the military operations embraced by the campaign must focus on the attainment of an identifiable strategic aim. For this reason, it is essential to recognize clearly the objective for which the campaign will be fought. The campaign plan then translates the strategic guidance into a mission from which subordinates develop military tasks—all of which also contribute to the accomplishment of the singular strategic aim.

Understandably, the development of such a strategically oriented mission requires an appreciation of the supporting, and sometimes distracting, influence of campaigns being fought in adjacent theaters. During a global war, for example, campaigns in the Atlantic and Southwest Asian theaters would be inextricably linked to a European campaign.

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Likewise, planning for military campaigns must include an appreciation of the constraints and imperatives imposed on the mission by national policy. Hence, the *political* imperative to conduct a forward defense of Western European territory along the inner-German border overrides the possibility of any alternative and arguably superior *military* options. Finally, the mission must be developed so that all efforts concentrate on determining and destroying the enemy's center of gravity. A center of gravity is, as Clausewitz explained, "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends . . . the point against which all our energies should be directed." For example, it might be the armed forces of the enemy, his capital, his essential lines of communication or logistics bases, or even the political cohesiveness of his alliances. Eisenhower, as we have seen, focused all the strength of the Allied combined armies on the Nazi center of gravity, i.e. the German armed forces, during his campaign across Europe. Moreover, the same careful consideration must be given to the identification and protection of friendly centers of gravity as well, for their loss would lead to certain defeat at the hands of the enemy.

Another important aspect of campaign planning is the concept of operations. The concept must of course be compatible with previously developed plans for mobilization, deployment, employment, or sustainment. If a conflict exists between the campaign plan and these other plans, adjustments must be made either to the campaign plan itself or to the other supporting plans.

The operational concept must provide for the massing of sufficient combat power at decisive points on the battlefield to assure the victory that will lead to the attainment of the strategic aims. This concentration of force includes the establishment of lines of operation as primary axes of advance, the development of contingency options, known also as branches and sequels, to account for changing circumstances, and the incorporation of such environmental factors as climate and geography. Furthermore, it requires strong operational reserves and forces with special capabilities, such as airborne or amphibious, in order to help achieve the decisive operational victories.

The operational concept must also reflect a grasp of the culminating point—the point in time or space where the momentum of the attack can no longer be maintained. Clausewitz pointed out the risks of



strategic attacks made without a proper appreciation of the culminating point: “Most attacks only lead up to the point where their remaining strength is just enough to maintain a defense and wait for peace. Beyond that point the scale turns and the reaction follows with a force that is usually much stronger than that of the original attack.”<sup>10</sup> Continued offensive operations beyond the culminating point risk overextension, counterattack, and defeat. In the attack, therefore, the objective is to achieve decisive victories before reaching the culminating point; in the defense, the enemy’s culminating point must be exploited as a springboard to seize the offensive.

The concept of operations for a campaign is normally divided into phases, which outline the commander’s vision of the campaign’s intended progress. This phasing occurs under a variety of circumstances. For example, a change in the type of operation (e.g. a shift from defensive to offensive operations) or a change in the tempo of operations (e.g. a pause to regroup prior to continuing offensive operations) provides an appropriate juncture for a phase. Similarly, a change in force structure, such as the introduction of fresh reserves or the reallocation of critical resources to lend weight to specific operations, might also result in a separate phase. Then too, phasing serves to accommodate the uncertainty associated with the scheduling and concept of intermediate operations of a campaign. As illustrated in Overlord, every phase of a well-constructed campaign is crucial to the overall success of the campaign.



**Operation Overlord provides a classic example of campaign planning.**

Deception—the deliberate attempt to manipulate the enemy's perception of the battlefield—is also an inseparable part of the concept of operations. Designed to achieve surprise, deception is most successful when it reinforces the enemy's predisposed tendencies in analyzing friendly intentions. To be effective, deception must occur over extended periods of time, and at the same time be fully embraced by all of the forces that are a part of the campaign.

Certainly the Allied deception concerning the intended sites for their amphibious assaults during the Normandy invasion fully incorporated such principles, and contributed immeasurably to the overall success of the campaign.

In turning from the operational concept to the logistical concept of the campaign, we encounter still another group of pertinent considerations. One such is the requirement to forecast the resources that will be necessary to pursue the campaign through to a successful conclusion. This anticipated demand for future resources serves to alert higher authorities, i.e. the national leadership or the combined and joint staffs, of the current and future national preparations that will be necessary to win the war.

Another consideration is the degree of authority a theater commander exercises over the various logistics functions within his command. Although logistics functions are generally a national or service responsibility, the theater commander retains the authority to coordinate and establish priorities for the logistical support of his forces in order to ensure their effectiveness in combat. The theater commander establishes a theater-wide logistics base that provides for the needs of his varied forces. This effort includes such far-ranging matters as arrangements for host-nation support, the location and use of prepositioned, war-reserve stocks, and the establishment of major lines of communication—specifically the airports, seaports, petroleum depots, and main supply routes. All types of supply are important, but petroleum products and ammunition deserve special attention because of their critical importance on the battlefield. Medical treatment and evacuation policies require close scrutiny, not only for the psychological impact on sick and wounded troops, but for the equally imposing impact on hospital requirements, force structure, and replacement policy.

### *The Final Product*

The campaign plan itself will be the key product of the planning process that ties together all of the foregoing factors that bear on operational preparations. Through the campaign plan, the theater commander conveys his personal vision for fighting and winning the campaign not only to his subordinates—the fighting components—but also to his superiors. Moreover, it highlights the strategic aim for which the campaign

is fought, again to lower and higher headquarters alike, so that all have a clear understanding of the simultaneous and sequential operations that are intended to achieve that strategic aim. In addition, the campaign plan serves as the commander's tool for directing the complex operations that occur throughout the theater. In this respect, it assists the commander in monitoring and adjusting operations or phases, in establishing major milestones en route to attaining the strategic aim, and in placing continuing emphasis on the ultimate war objective.

Under the broad principles of contingency planning and execution planning that we examined previously, several US theater commanders have developed campaign plans in varying degrees of completeness and under a variety of names. In the Pacific, the CINC expounds his campaign plan both in his warfighting strategy (formerly called a campaign plan) and in war plans prepared pursuant to the JOPS. The CINC of the Combined Forces Command in Korea also sets forth his campaign for the defense of the peninsula in a JOPS-associated war plan. On the other side of the world, the CINC, US Central Command, has drawn up a series of plans that to some degree fulfill the requirements of the campaign plan. But in all theaters, whenever hostilities commence, expert prosecution planning in the form of complete—and enlightened—campaign plans will be essential. Only thus can we wage war on the operational level successfully. And only thus can we achieve our strategic aims.

#### NOTES

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