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Campaign Planning: Getting It Straight

WILLIAM W. MENDEL and FLOYD T. BANKS

Incredibly, there exists today no properly sanctioned doctrine for campaign planning in either the joint or combined arenas. Further, within these two planning communities, there is no consensus on the terminology of planning discourse. In this article our purpose is to get planners singing from the same sheet of music.

With the recognition that something called a campaign plan is important, several questions come to mind. Exactly what are campaigns and campaign plans? What is contained in them? What is a campaign plan designed to do and how do you recognize one when you see it? The answers to these questions are only partially available in current official publications, although there has been no shortage of opinions expressed among planners, instructors, and operators.

Among the stabs at definition of a campaign are the following:

FM 100-1, *The Army*—A campaign is a series of joint actions designed to attain a strategic objective in a theater of war. . . . [T]heater commanders and their chief subordinates usually plan and direct campaigns.¹

FM 100-5, *Operations*—A campaign is a series of joint actions designed to attain a strategic objective in a theater of war. Simultaneous campaigns may take place when the theater of war contains more than one theater of operations. Sequential campaigns in a single theater occur when a large force changes or secures its original goal or when the conditions of the conflict change. An offensive campaign may follow a successful defensive campaign, for example, as it did in Korea in 1950. Or a new offensive campaign may have to be undertaken if strategic goals change or are not secured in the initial campaign.²

Clearly a campaign is characterized by its broad scope, joint activity and linkage to a series of operations designed to achieve strategic objectives. A new Army manual, FM 100-6, *Large Unit Operations*, now being staffed, will provide further information about campaigns and campaign plans. Yet, doctrine proffered by Army manuals is not binding on the other services or on the forces of allies.

Only one current joint publication provides a definition of a campaign plan:

Joint Chiefs of Staff Publication 1, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (1986)—A plan for a series of related military operations aimed to accomplish a common objective, normally within a given time and space.³

As can be seen, this definition is so general that it could apply to almost any plan; it provides little insight into what a campaign plan is or what it is designed to do. Before we flesh out a complete definition of the campaign and campaign plan, let us first consider an essential prerequisite—planning guidance.

The assertion that campaign planning has become a lost art is confirmed when one reviews current campaign planning doctrine and procedures. The problem is that campaign plans are not an integral part of the joint planning process. There is no document approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff as doctrine for theater warfighting, campaigning, or campaign planning. Similarly, there are no such documents in the combined theaters that contain major US forward-deployed forces—Europe and Korea. This lack of comprehensive doctrine is the basic factor contributing to the ambiguity surrounding what a campaign plan is, who should prepare it, what it should address, and what the process is for developing it. In the United States, the Joint Operations Planning System, or JOPS (and the Joint Operations Planning and Execution System under development), is the DOD-directed, JCS-specified system for joint planning in the areas of mobilization, deployment, employment, and sustainment. JOPS establishes the systems to be used in both deliberate and time-sensitive planning for joint operations. It does not, however, specifically address campaign planning, and there is no formal relationship between JOPS and campaign planning.

Recognition of these realities is a first step toward providing insight about campaign planning. Though work to address many of these problems is going on at the US Army War College, the National Defense University,

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the US Army Command and General Staff College, and the Advanced Amphibious Study Group, there remains a lack of doctrine on campaign planning. The thoughts that follow may help planners in the near term and provide a foundation for writers of future joint and combined campaign planning doctrine.

Defining the Campaign and the Campaign Plan

A campaign is the military activity in which the commander of a theater of war or theater of operations coordinates, employs, and sustains available resources in a series of joint actions across a regional expanse of air, land, and sea in order to achieve strategic objectives. It is a phased series of major operations along the intended line (or lines) of operation to bring about decisive results from battles. The effect of these phased joint operations creates the operational advantage, or leverage, that makes the enemy's position untenable. A key characteristic of a campaign is the commander's calculated synchronization of land, sea, and air effort to attain his strategic objective.

Campaigns are conducted throughout a theater of war: the total land, sea, and air space that may become involved in military operations. In large theaters of war where campaigns may be conducted along more than one line of operation, theaters of operations can be established to conduct operations along each separate line of action. The theater of war campaign synthesizes deployment, employment, sustainment, and theater of operations supporting campaigns into a coherent whole. Theater of war campaigns seek to attain national and/or alliance strategic objectives; theater of operations campaigns seek to achieve theater strategic objectives.

But what is a campaign plan? Contrary to common belief, a campaign plan isn't a document that springs into existence only after a war begins; rather, it continues through time as the operational extension of the commander-in-chief's theater strategy for peace and crisis, as well as war. A campaign plan translates strategic guidance into operational direction for subordinates. It provides broad concepts for operations and sustainment to achieve strategic objectives in a theater of war or theater of operations. It provides an orderly schedule of strategic military decisions that embody the commander's intent. The campaign plan is the commander's vision of how he will prosecute his portion of the war effort from the preparation phase through a sequence of military operations to a well-defined conclusion that attains the strategic objective. The campaign plan clearly defines the initial phase(s) of the campaign and unambiguously establishes what spells success at the end of the campaign; however, in recognition of how war's "fog and friction" can affect planning and operations, the mid-phases of the campaign plan may necessarily show less definition. Campaign plans therefore are

supplemented with options (contingency or outline plans) for shifting lines of operation and accepting or declining battle in order to provide flexibility in dealing with the changing situation. Other contingency plans (called “sequels” in FM 100-5) address options to be taken that will exploit success or minimize losses depending upon the outcomes of battles.

A campaign plan orients on the enemy’s center of gravity in order to make his position in the theater disadvantageous, rob him of the initiative or his will to continue the fight, and defeat him. At the strategic level of war, the theater of war commander may often see the enemy center of gravity in complex and abstract forms, such as alliance solidarity or national will. At the operational level of war, the theater of operations commander is likely to focus upon a concrete center of gravity—main enemy forces. The notion of center of gravity is less important for the simple or complex manner in which it describes the enemy’s main strength than in the way it enjoins decisive thinking at the strategic and operational levels of war.

The campaign plan synchronizes land, sea, and air effort against the enemy center of gravity. It does this principally by establishing command relationships concerning the joint or combined commander and his land, sea, and air component commanders and the commanders of other assigned commands. It also synchronizes by describing the joint concept of operations and by assigning tasks. The campaign plan composes the forces assigned to the joint or combined commander. The plan’s concept for sustainment includes direction for procuring national resources from the sustaining base, establishing a forward base of operations, opening and maintaining lines of communication, providing intermediate bases of operations to support phasing, and establishing priorities for services and support by phase throughout the campaign. The sustainment part of the campaign plan is equal in importance to the concept of operations. The following tenets summarize what a campaign plan is and does.

Seven Tenets: A Campaign Plan . . .

- Provides broad concepts of operations and sustainment to achieve strategic military objectives in a theater of war or theater of operations; serves as the basis for all other planning and clearly defines what constitutes success.
- Provides an orderly schedule of strategic military decisions; displays the commander’s vision and intent.
- Orients on the enemy’s center of gravity.
- Phases a series of related major operations.
- Composes subordinate forces and designates command relationships.
- Provides operational direction and tasks to subordinates.
- Synchronizes air, land, and sea efforts into a cohesive and synergistic whole; is joint in nature.

While the format for a campaign plan is secondary in importance to its content, the format itself can be very useful to guide the planner in accommodating the tenets of a campaign plan. In existing campaign plan formats there appear to be some good choices. The basic plan format of the Joint Operational Planning System is adequate for the experienced planner who understands the need to infuse the tenets of a campaign plan into this format. Although no longer in joint publications, the campaign plan format found in Appendix C of the 1974 JCS Publication 2, *Unified Action Armed Forces*, provides greater assistance in ensuring the tenets are incorporated. Unfortunately, the campaign plan format is not contained in the 1986 JCS Publication 2 which superseded the 1974 edition. The plan format in the 1974 edition will reappear with some modification in a future JCS publication to be produced under the aegis of the OJCS Joint Doctrine Master Plan. In the meantime, most useful is an update of the JCS Publication 2 campaign plan format which was developed at the US Army War College. This format provides refinements that are closely aligned with current doctrine, including the concept of the center of gravity and the concept of deception as an integral part of operations.

The five-paragraph format, which is characteristic of these examples, accommodates the tenets of a campaign plan and is a universally understood instrument within US, NATO, and Republic of Korea military establishments. The format allows for a relatively brief plan which provides an overarching concept for the campaign. Based on such a conceptual plan, individual component and assigned major headquarters develop their own detailed implementing operation plans and orders.

Who Should Prepare Campaign Plans?

The theater of war CINC has an obligation to his subordinate commanders to translate broad strategic guidance into the operational direction that is required to coordinate military effort within his theater. The CINC must transform strategic military concepts into incisive instructions that are useful at the next lower echelon: who, when, where, why, how. He does this in his campaign plan, which provides necessary information such as specified and implied missions, identity of the enemy center of gravity, overarching concept with phasing and contingency concepts, command relationships, task organization by phases, and logistical concepts for sustainment. This information presents a complete picture of the CINC's vision for the theater from the beginning of a campaign through various phases to the achievement of the strategic objective. When the theater of war commander has land, sea, and air components under his direct command, his campaign plan may include considerable detail in order to synchronize Phase I of the campaign. In this case, the campaign plan loses its briefness and takes on the

appearance of a large operation plan. This is especially true when the CINC serves as his own land component commander and must provide detailed instructions to his ground elements.

When the theater of war commander does not directly command warfighting components, as when he divides the entire theater of war into subordinate theaters of operations, he still needs a campaign plan. This theater of war plan may be briefer than the theater of operations plans because the theater of operations commanders provide the detailed employment specifics for their components in subordinate campaign plans. Yet the theater of war commander uses his own campaign plan to provide for the phased apportionment of resources in accordance with his concept (e.g. air squadrons, engineer support, supplies). The theater of war campaign plan synchronizes the several theaters of operations warfighting efforts. Further, the theater of war commander may not apportion all forces, but rather retain control of some forces and resources. He withholds strategic reserve forces for later employment or assignment. He directs theater-wide deep reconnaissance and interdiction efforts; he employs Special Operations Forces through a sub-unified Special Operations Command or Combined Unconventional Task Force; he employs units for deception operations; he employs strategic psychological operations units and guides the tactical psychological operations effort. All these things must be done in accordance with a plan—a campaign plan—if they are to provide the advantage of coordinated effort on the battlefield.

The theater of operations commanders key on the campaign plan of their theater of war commander and ensure that their concepts for operations, phasing, and logistics are supportive of the higher campaign plan's concept, phasing, and priorities. Normally theater of operations campaign plans are prepared concurrently with or subsequent to the theater of war campaign plan.

Other joint force commanders may prepare campaign plans. For example, the theater Special Operations Command, as a subordinate unified command of the theater of war CINC, may develop a campaign plan if assigned a broad continuing mission that includes a strategic objective. Also, a combined special operations command may develop a campaign plan.

A Joint Task Force is normally established to achieve specific, limited objectives. When the JTF mission is of sufficient scope as to require the phasing of major operations to achieve a strategic objective, the JTF develops a campaign plan.

The joint command components with employment (warfighting) roles develop operation plans to direct major operations in support of the theater of war or theater of operations campaign plan. Components with sustainment (supply, services) roles prepare plans for support. The campaign

plan is essential to compel the coordinated effort of the component commands to jointly achieve strategic objectives.

Campaign Planning: For Theater Contingencies and Prosecuting War

Within the outline of the commander-in-chief's theater strategy for peace, crisis, and war, the campaign plan is developed to achieve strategic objectives that counter a strategic threat. It is developed in peacetime to protect national interests which are assumed to be threatened by a possible occurrence, or contingency. In this sense, all plans (as opposed to operation orders) are "contingency" plans. The campaign plan, however, has aspects (described above under the tenets of a campaign plan) that set it apart from other plans, and it is unique to the theater of war, theater of operations, and joint forces with strategic objectives. Campaign planning is much more difficult in peacetime than in war because the commander must make more planning assumptions (warning time, enemy intentions, location of the strategic threat) than would be required in war. The campaign plan developed in peacetime may require numerous options for changing orientation, disposition, and direction and for changing to new phases of defensive or offensive operations—attack, exploitation, pursuit, defense, retrograde. Indeed, within large unified commands during peacetime, several campaign plans may need to be developed to protect US interests in anticipation of possible theaters of operations. Then, when war unfolds, the campaign plan becomes effective for execution, and operation orders will accordingly be issued to begin the first phase of the campaign.

Some planners contend that campaign planning is not appropriate, or not possible, in peacetime. For example, typical theater planning under the Joint Operations Planning System has seen concentrated effort on developing deployment and sustainment concepts within a "theater plan," and then supplementing this base plan with various "contingency" plans for possible occurrences throughout the theater. This approach, however, has not provided the CINC's overarching vision and intent for coordinated theater operations and sustainment to achieve strategic objectives. At best, it has provided guidance only for what may be the first phase of a campaign.

Other planners prefer "prosecution planning" as the appropriate planning activity for campaign planning.⁴ Prosecution planning, aimed toward the actual employment of forces in combat, follows what in the Joint Operations Planning System is referred to as "execution planning" (covering the transition from peace to war, as conflict becomes imminent). But in reality campaign planning is a continuing deliberate planning process, while execution planning and prosecution planning are forms of operation-order development. The "planning" involved in execution and prosecution is akin

In reality campaign planning is a continuing deliberate planning process, while execution planning and prosecution planning are forms of operation-order development.

to coordination for impending and ongoing operations, respectively; it is likely to develop the operation order for a major operation or the first phase of a campaign. The notion of waiting until contact with the enemy is imminent before writing the campaign plan suggests a loss of valuable planning time. Of course, campaign planning is done during wartime also, and, as war within the theater continues, new requirements for campaign plans may develop. These plans would be written for future campaigns.

Several peacetime factors tend to militate against combined campaign planning within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's integrated military structure. First, campaign plans are thought to be inappropriate because NATO is a defensive alliance with a primary aim to deter war. NATO planners have been constrained by the inability, or unwillingness, of politicians to differentiate between offensive operations within the context of a strategic defense and a strategy of aggression. Mutual defense is the glue that holds together the alliance, and it has been feared that offensive planning could break the bond. Second, the strategy of Flexible Response includes a nuclear aspect which is difficult to conceptualize. In crossing the nuclear threshold, it becomes problematic whether the commander's vision and intent can be sufficiently reliable and predictive to provide an orderly basis for military decisions. Third, with its emphasis on deterrence as opposed to warfighting, the strategic concept of forward defense as far east as possible has carried with it the heavy baggage of inhibition against any type of cross-border operations. Finally, there are differing national views on the nature and capabilities of the threat, enemy intentions, and his anticipated attack options (e.g. no notice, partially reinforced or fully reinforced attack against NATO). The timeliness of the decision to begin moving forces (a mere 48 hours is important) can make a significant difference in NATO's ability to execute a cohesive defense. Thus NATO planners tend to focus their efforts as much on the transition from peace to war as on the prosecution of the war itself.⁵ As a result of all the foregoing considerations, the concept of a campaign plan is not embodied in NATO's peacetime planning procedures. The result of this lack of campaign planning in peacetime is that there is little operational guidance concerning how SACEUR will fight after the first phase (general defense) of war.

Whatever the political constraints and the inherent difficulty in developing planning assumptions, peacetime campaign planning is important for the continuous multiservice and multinational coordination, formal agreements, understanding, and trust that the process engenders. Viewed thus, the campaign planning process becomes as important as the plans produced. Should war come, a preexisting campaign plan would provide the basis for the operation orders that initiate the campaign, and the command would have enjoyed the benefit of peacetime deliberate planning for theater exigencies.

What About Air, Land, Interdiction and Other Specialized Campaigns?

Imprecise terms are found in doctrinal literature, periodicals, and plans which confuse the issue of campaign planning responsibilities. The colloquial use of the word "campaign" has led to such terms as the "land campaign," the "land-air campaign" of a ground component, the "interdiction campaign," the "Joint Suppression of Enemy Air Defense (J-SEAD) campaign," and on and on. These expressions may have some utility, of course, because they describe the dominant characteristic of an activity or major operation that supports an overall campaign. But we believe these terms lead to confusion as to who should conduct campaigns and write campaign plans. For example, the Commander, Central Army Group (a land component of Allied Forces Central Europe), uses the term "land-air campaign" to describe the conceptual "jointness" inherent in the group's operations, which include follow-on forces attack methodology. Yet, the Commander, Central Army Group, should not (and does not) write a campaign plan because he has neither the authority to compel land-air synchronization nor the scope of mission to achieve strategic objectives. The term "campaign" is also misused when discussing air operations. This can be traced, in part, to the colloquial use of the term in official publications. For example, JCS Publication 26, *Joint Doctrine for Theater Counterair Operations*, uses the term "counterair campaign."⁶ Yet counterair operations do not achieve strategic objectives: "The objective of counterair operations is to gain control of the air environment and protect the force."⁷

While the counterair operation contributes toward achieving the theater commander's objective by affording freedom of action to all forces of the command, the counterair effort is merely a part of the overall effort and does not constitute a campaign. The term "campaign" is also misused in Publication 26 in its discussion of the Joint Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (J-SEAD):

SEAD objectives are specified by the joint forces commander, who will consider the unique capabilities of each component to contribute to the counterair campaign. Initial campaign objectives will be to protect friendly airborne

standoff systems, disrupt the cohesion of enemy air defense, and assist in attaining tactical flexibility for friendly aircraft in the medium- and high-altitude regimes.⁸

The objective of J-SEAD is to protect friendly aircraft and not to achieve a strategic objective.

The Army and Air Force biservice pamphlet *General Operating Procedures for Joint Attack of the Second Echelon (J-SAK)* refers to the “interdiction campaign.” Yet, it clearly defines the effort in terms of tactical and operational objectives:

The objectives of joint attack of second echelon targets is to divert, disrupt, delay, and destroy the enemy’s capability for continuous operations by altering the momentum of his effort. Success in this objective will provide time and space for commanders to fight the battle at the forward line of own troops (FLOT), prepare to continue the fight, and take advantage of opportunities for offensive actions.⁹

Though it is an important part of the joint effort, the “interdiction campaign” is thus not a campaign at all because by itself it cannot achieve the strategic objective.

The land components (Northern Army Group and Central Army Group) and the air component (Allied Air Force Central Europe) write operation orders for the conduct of operations in support of the Allied Forces Central Europe campaign plan. Using the air component commander’s role as an example, we can visualize a hypothetical illustration of Allied Air Force Central Europe support to a possible Allied Force Central Europe campaign. Close air support for Commander, Northern Army Group, and Commander, Central Army Group, would be provided through the Allied Tactical Air Forces. The deeper battle is supported by general support attack missions consisting of battlefield air interdiction and air interdiction. These two interdictory efforts are not a campaign because they do not achieve a strategic objective, are not a joint effort, and do not comprise a phase of a war. The interdictory efforts are focused upon portions of Commander-in-Chief Central Europe’s area of operations and would directly support a phase of his campaign plan.

In essence, commanders with strategic objectives and the authority to compel synchronization of air, sea, and land effort at the operational level of war should write campaign plans. These are typically theater of war commanders with employment (warfighting) missions (e.g. NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, US Commander-in-Chief Central Command, US Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command, and Republic of Korea-US Commander-in-Chief Combined Forces Command). Theater of operations commanders should write supporting campaign plans (e.g. NATO Commander-in-Chief Allied Forces Northern Europe, Commander-in-Chief

Allied Forces Central Europe, and Commander-in-Chief Allied Forces Southern Europe).

Summing Up

In the aggregate, the foregoing views represent an argument for the promulgation of joint and combined doctrine to guide the application of operational art—the employment of forces to attain strategic goals through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations in theaters of war and operations.

While the US Army Command and General Staff College is developing doctrine concerning the Army role in campaign planning, the responsibility for promulgation of joint and combined doctrine for the strategic and operational levels of war resides within other domains. Until guidance concerning the process of campaign planning and who should write campaign plans is institutionalized in joint and combined doctrine, the issues will remain the object of debate and the source of much confusion. Our joint and combined staffs are manned by skilled planners who are fluent in the language of operational art. This reflects well upon the instruction at the various service schools and upon the officer corps. In the main, headquarters that should do campaign planning are working at it. Where exceptions are found, as in NATO, officers are responding to the guidance of the political leadership. The skills and knowledge necessary to fight successfully as a joint or combined team are extant; what is needed now is the authoritative guidance to unify the actions of our forces at the strategic and operational levels of war.

NOTES

This article is based upon the authors' study, *Campaign Planning*, published by the Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 4 January 1988, Chapters 2 and 6.

1. US Department of the Army, *The Army*, Field Manual 100-1 (Washington: GPO, 1986), pp. 13-14.

2. US Department of the Army, *Operations*, Field Manual 100-5 (Washington: GPO, 1986), p. 10.

3. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, JCS Publication 1 (Washington: GPO, 1986), p. 60.

4. US Department of the Navy, US Marine Corps, *Planner's Reference Manual, Vol. 1, (Draft)*, August 1983, pp. 3-5-1 through 3-5-3.

5. Message, 231911ZNOV87, Unclassified, US Delegate Military Committee (NATO), Brussels, Belgium. This message provided follow-up information to author interviews conducted in December 1986 with Colonel Gene H. Rafanelli, US Army, Strategic/Land Forces Planner, US Delegation to the NATO Military Committee.

6. US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Doctrine for Theater Counterair Operations (from Overseas Land Area)*, JCS Publication 26 (Washington: GPO, 1986), pp. III-5, III-6.

7. *Ibid.*, p. III-1.

8. *Ibid.*, p. VI-1.

9. US Readiness Command, US Army Training and Doctrine Command, and US Air Forces Tactical Air Command, *General Operating Procedures for Joint Attack of the Second Echelon (J-SAK)*, 28 November 1984, p. 1-1.