

**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

**INFLUENCE TAKES PRIMACY:
A New Approach to Military Thinking**

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Maritime Advanced Warfighting School.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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14. ABSTRACT Traditional military thinking has left US Forces with the notion that the best way to achieve military strategic objectives in war is through force based attritional warfare. Military capabilities are aimed at destroying the strong arm of the opposing force but this method does not definitively solve the problem. There is a cognitive decision-making force behind the opposing military that provides purpose, direction and motivation to conduct operations. Influencing the cognitive decision-making force through synchronized actions on the battlefield can shape and change enemy behavior to enable the achievement of US military strategic objectives. Creating an influence LOE as the primary supported effort in an operation allows for the synchronization necessary to shape enemy behavior. Whether its fighter planes, naval cruisers, or light infantry every entity in the US arsenal is a messaging platform and should be employed as such.					
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Introduction

War is a uniquely human endeavor. Only humans have formulated intricate plans to wage war with global consequences. Despite this uniquely human undertaking, people often view warfare as the animalistic battle between machines: tanks charging through a berm to destroy an enemy bunker, naval gunships firing endless barrages of surface fires, or aircraft conducting bombing runs. While war is a primal event, this view is only a surface-level understanding. Warfare takes place in the human mind. The true intention of every action on the battlefield is to send a message to an opposing actor. And because humans are not a hive-mind, the opposing decisionmaker will view and process the battlefield differently at an individual level. The intent is, of course, for the opposition to receive the message that opposing is no longer the best option.

So, the question arises, are US forces correctly synchronizing their actions so that the message received by the opposition leads them to cease fighting or competing? Much of US military history has shown that US forces often leverage combat power as the supported effort believing that imposing a physical cost is the only means for defeating an enemy. While kinetic operations have their place in a conflict, this paper will argue that kinetic operations are only a piece of a larger puzzle. There is a connection to this larger puzzle in grey zone conflicts that fall short of kinetic fighting and instead focus on influence and coercion. Regardless of the type or level of conflict, *influence operations should be the primary supported effort in every major operation or campaign to achieve military strategic objectives*. This paper will deconstruct the theory that influence operations should be the main effort by arguing several vital points. To start, this paper will argue that will is the cognitive force that drives an enemy's decision-making. A proceeding argument proves why it is essential for a military force to target an

enemy's will to achieve military strategic objectives. Targeting an enemy's will can be difficult to conceive, but strategic communications provide a foundation for influencing enemy will. By adapting strategic communications to the operational level, commanders can achieve their military strategic objectives. This paper will begin with a case study from Vietnam that exemplifies why new military thinking is needed. Before diving in this paper will start by defining influence as it is used in this paper.

Background

One of the most common terms used in this paper is "influence." In this paper, influence refers to an actor's ability to change or maintain an adjacent or opposing actors' behavior. The following are examples to clarify what it means to influence various actors: a successful salesperson can persuade and convince customers to purchase their product- an example of influencing an opposing actor. Next, consider a staff planner; their ability to persuade peers (adjacent actors) to provide support or assistance would be an example of influencing an adjacent actor. A final example demonstrates the meaning of influencing an actor to maintain a behavior. Imagine a scenario where a sports team wants to retain their best team member who considers leaving the team. The team's management might take certain actions such as giving awards or higher pay to persuade their top player to stay on the team. These examples are reflected at the national level, as well. Consider the United States' ability to convince other partners to join them in theaters of conflict. The US must take specific actions such as foreign aid, high-level meetings, and political level agreements to solidify an alliance. These examples provide simple scenarios to foster understanding of the term influence in this paper.

This paper will focus on influence in the military as a collection of actions to cause the desired enemy behavior. This paper will not focus on the specifics of information operations (IO) or how to conduct information operations to influence an actor. The reason for this is two-fold: this paper, itself, intends to send a message that every unit of action at a commander's disposal has a role and responsibility in influence. If this paper focused on IO, it would perpetuate the notion that the IO staff is the sole proprietor of influence operations. Additionally, this paper aims to argue that commanders and staff should prioritize influence operations in the planning process at the operational level. Retaining attention at the operational level precludes the need to discuss tactical level operations. This paper is also not arguing against the use of kinetic operations. In influence planning, IO and kinetic operations are equal partners capable of influencing an actor.

The Detriment of Traditional Thinking in Warfare- Vietnam

The United States has had a history of incorrectly identifying the basis for the opposition's will in war. Consider the American war in Vietnam as an example. Colonel Harry Summers served as a US Army operations officer during the Vietnam War. After the conflict, Summers returned to Vietnam as part of a team tasked with recovering US Service member's remains. While there, Summers met his counterpart, Colonel Tu of the North Vietnamese. The two had a famous exchange where Summers said, "You know, you never beat us on the battlefield," Tu responded by saying, "That may be so, but it is also irrelevant."¹ Tu was alluding to the driving force, the will, behind the North Vietnamese actions that remained undefeated.

¹ Peter B. Lane, Ronald E. Marcello, *Warriors and Scholars: A Modern War Reader* (Denton: U. North Texas Press, 2005), 193-194

President Kennedy had to ask the question about the American War in Vietnam, "How can we tell if we are winning?"² It was a difficult question, but his advisors' believed that US forces should measure success by the quantity of enemy combatants killed. Attrition became the chosen measure of effectiveness used by US forces during Vietnam. The discussion even remains today; certainly, if you degrade the number of enemy combatants, there will eventually not be enough combatants to continue fighting, right? But America left Vietnam without achieving its primary strategic objective to unify Vietnam under a stable democracy. Why was the United States incapable of achieving their objective despite the cost imposed on the North Vietnamese? One reason is that the United States underestimated their opposition, a practice that continues in current wars.

The US did not underestimate North Vietnam's military capability, number of fighters, or populace support level. The US had underestimated the enemy's will to devote everything they had to achieving victory.³ The United States continues to demonstrate that it does not correctly identify the opposition's will in a conflict. General Stanley McChrystal sheds some light on the differences between traditional thinking and the method of thinking proposed in this paper:

Let us say that there are 10 [insurgents] in a certain area. Following a military operation, two are killed. How many insurgents are left? Traditional mathematics would say that eight would be left... There are more likely to be as many as 20, because each one you killed has a brother, father, son and

² George Herring, "America and Vietnam: The Unending War," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no.5 (Winter 1991): 113, accessed 24 February 2021, JSTOR.

³ *Ibid*, 114.

friends, who do not necessarily think that they were killed because they were doing something wrong.⁴

General McChrystal's thoughts exemplify that traditional military thinking does not necessarily lead to achieving the desired outcome. There is a non-tangible driving force behind the enemy that remains untouched and, in some cases, enables the enemy to grow.

If achieving kinetic effects or measuring progress with observable results based on kinetic operations isn't the solution, then what is? Revisiting Clausewitz's principles for victory, bending enemy will, and their decision-making is likely the answer. Achieving victory means that the victor successfully compelled the enemy to act in their will.⁵ Based on these Clausewitzian principles, an actor does not achieve victory until they have driven the enemy's will to support their own. Most often, planners determine the enemy's center of gravity by answering the question: "where does the enemy place most of their effort?" The real question to answer is, "what drives, motivates, or compels the enemy?" Answering this question gives a basis of understanding for how to truly defeat the enemy.

In Vietnam, the US's actions indicated that they identified the North Vietnamese fighting force as the opposition's center of gravity. The US had inflicted significant losses on the North Vietnamese fighters, but still, the US left Vietnam without achieving victory. Had the US been able to identify the source of the North Vietnamese will to fight and aimed to degrade their decision-making, potentially, there may have been a different outcome. The remainder of this paper will make arguments to support a new way of military thinking. The primary supported line of effort in every operation must influence enemy will.

⁴ Thrall, Trevor and Goepner, Erik "Counterinsurgency Math Revisited." *CATO Institute*, 2 January 2018. Accessed 2 April 2021. <https://www.cato.org/blog/counterinsurgency-math-revisited>

⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 75

An Argument for the Importance of Will

In war, motivation is a significant factor for achieving objectives and victory.

Clausewitz describes that victory in warfare is the ability to "compel your enemy to do your will."⁶ This statement from Clausewitz ultimately suggests that influencing the enemy's will to support one's own should always be the primary objective. Will is commonly understood to be one's ability to control one's decision-making.⁷ At the tactical level, will is thought of as a soldier's drive to continue fighting or complete a difficult physical challenge. But at the operational level of war, consider an actor's ability to control its decision-making towards achieving its objectives. US forces need to understand the source of will by using two other principles from Clausewitz: the value of the object and the accepted level of effort⁸. In other terms, how much does the actor feel the object of the conflict is worth, and how many resources are they willing to commit to gaining or retaining said object?

The will of an actor will vary from conflict to conflict. The will of an adversary will even differ from object to object within a conflict. But to better explain the concept, here is a simple hypothetical: A nation defending their homeland and way of life from an invading power will have a greater value of their homeland and be willing to commit a greater level of effort. The invading power might be interested in the land they are invading, but their interest likely would not match that of the defending actor. So, how then does an actor influence the will of an opposing actor? Going back to an earlier explanation, controlling one's will is essentially the

⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), (Value of the Object)

⁷ George Lowenstein, "Willpower: A Decision-Theorists Perspective," *Law and Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (January 2000): 51-52, accessed 10 March 2021, JSTOR.

⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 92.

ability to control one's decision-making. Using the connection between will and decision-making, consider a rephrasing of Clausewitz's definition for victory: The ability to bend an adversary's decision-making to support achieving one's objectives is the path to victory. Even still, how does one influence an adversary's decision-making? It is paramount to understand that successful operationalization of influence at all levels of war is strongly related to their experiences that drive their perceptions.

The Argument for Shaping Will

Will is a concept of the human mind that can't be touched or manipulated in physical space. But the human mind and will are malleable in cognitive space. Will is fluid, adaptable, and emotional and changes based on internal and external stimuli.⁹ This statement means that human thoughts and decisions result from one's combined experiences. So too, the military can apply this to warfare. The experiences of an army, military, or national power influences the decisions they make on the battlefield and in national policy. These decisions are emotional responses based on experienced stimuli. If experiences formulate the will and cognitive processes of the human mind, then possibly, an actor can provide the opposing decisionmaker with the necessary experiences to mold their thought process. There are such events that show how an individual's relatively minor actions can significantly impact armies from multiple nations.

The Mediterranean campaign in WWII is a fitting example of how a person of influence can impact a theater of war. After a successful invasion and conquest of Sicily, Italian forces showed little will to resist Allied forces. A hasty armistice between Allied and Italian forces

⁹ George Lowenstein, "Willpower: A Decision-Theorists Perspective," *Law and Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (January 2000): 57, accessed 10 March 2021, JSTOR.

complicated operations in Sicily and after. Eisenhower announced the new armistice without a pre-emptive message to his forces or considering what would follow. Additionally, Pietro Badoglio, prime minister of Italy, announced the armistice to the Italian public.¹⁰ However, Badoglio gave no guidance to his troops. The armistice's hasty nature without supporting guidance was felt when the Allies moved onto the Italian Peninsula and beyond. Both Italian and Allied will and decision processes had taken a hit with this event. Italian forces had no guidance and felt no will to resist the German invaders. Allied troops became wary; the Italians that were supposed to provide exterior security for airborne landings would no longer be present.¹¹ The events leading up to the Allied invasion of Salerno show that words alone, from Eisenhower and Badoglio, could significantly impact two different militaries.

At the foundation, the announcement's timing gave the words their power. Had the Italians announced the armistice along with troop guidance, the impact would likely have been significantly different. This case study shows the impact words can have and the importance of sequencing and timing of messages and actions to have the intended effect. All activities and words together create a message; this may be the message the sender intends or otherwise. But, synchronization of the actions and words can create the desired message to achieve strategic objectives. Strategic communications provide a starting point to adapt to operational use.

The Importance of Strategic Communications

Human experiences inform their future decision-making, and by extension, influence their will. Is it possible to use this concept purposefully to mold the decision-making of an

¹⁰ Douglas Porch, *The Patch to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 467.

¹¹ Ibid, 467-470.

adversary? The answer to this, in part, comes in the form of strategic communications. Strategic communications (SC) are, in essence, the cohesion of actions under a desired message. In SC, the messenger first determines the behavior they want from the receiver. After selecting the desired behavior, analysis determines the messages that the opposing force must receive to instigate the desired behavior. Lastly, actions are determined that support the desired message. An actor will broadly execute SC through public speeches, conspicuous strategic level meetings, or policymaking. One study has even shown that the simple existence of certain military tools can influence decisionmakers.¹²

The intent behind SC is "convincing others to think and act in ways compatible with [US] objectives, whether this means causing others to adopt a specific course of action or simply understand [the US] better and accept [the US] more."¹³ The intended audience of SC can vary wildly. Friendly, enemy, and neutral actors alike could all be possible audiences of strategic communications. The concept of SC leverages the earlier points on decision-making. Synchronizing events such as speeches, public policymaking, and strategic level meetings send a message to the desired audience. There are important considerations for strategic communications to be successful.

Because strategic communications are, in essence, the transfer of thoughts from one actor to the next, there are many risks and aspects to consider. One of the most critical aspects of messaging is ensuring that the receiver interprets the message as intended. Because the US military conducts operations exclusively outside of US borders, there is an essential need to have a cultural understanding of the operating environment. Even communication across

¹² Benjamin Fordham, "A Very Sharp Sword: The Influence of Military Capabilities on American Decisions to Use Force," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 5 (October 2004): 51, accessed 27 February 2021, JSTOR.

¹³ Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Strategic Communication Joint Integration Concept* (Washington, DC: CJCS, 20 November 2014), ii.

cultural sub-groups in the US can be challenging.¹⁴ Communication between cultures geographically separated from the US is an even more significant challenge. With the explosion of information technology and the ability to communicate, it has become more critical than ever to accurately project the intended message within the target's cultural context. Any lag in messaging leaves room for adversarial counter-messaging or misinterpretation of the intended message.

To provide clarity for SC consider the example: Nation A and Nation B have entered a newly formed alliance. The environment may dictate that the stronger Nation A should show immediate dedication to the new alliance. Nation A immediately began to donate troops and equipment, provide additional funding, and sent several liaison officers to foster coordination. Each action that Nation A took sends a message to Nation B. Alternatively, imagine if Nation B decided to have a presidential-level meeting with Nation A's adversary. This action sent a clear message to Nation A that Nation B did not value the alliance. Both nations took actions that the receiver interpreted as a message. These actions would lead to an impact and a response. This scenario is a simple demonstration of political-level messaging. But it holds true that actions can and do send messages at the operational level and lower.

Military Thinking Must Adapt: Operational Communications

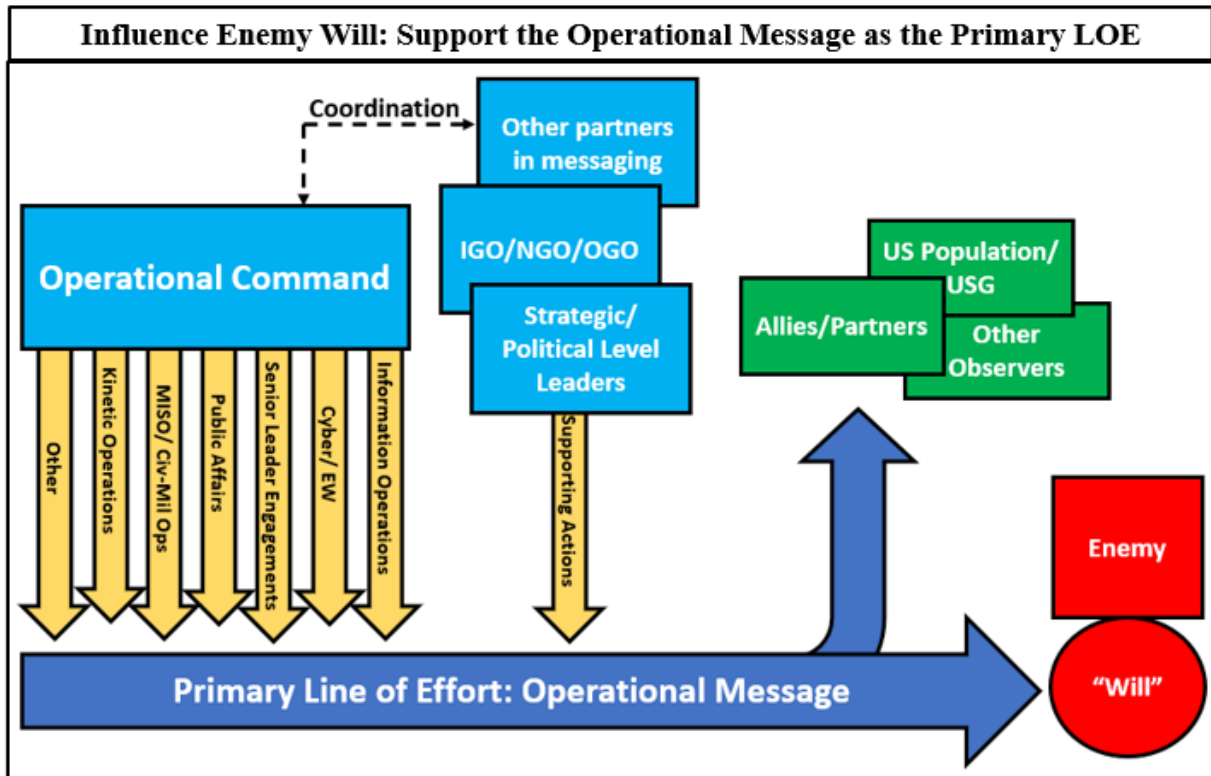
Modern military thinking continues to overvalue kinetic operations for the main effort in operations. Kinetic operations certainly play a role in warfare, but they must synchronize with adjacent tools to influence the enemy's decision-making. Extracting principles of strategic communications informs the creation of an operational communications process. The focus of

¹⁴ Edward A. Suchman, and Lois Alksne, "Communications across Cultural Barriers," *The American Catholic Sociological Review* 22, no. 4 (1961): 306-309, accessed 26 March 2021, JSTOR.

operational communications is to effectively send a message to opposing actors between the tactical and strategic levels of war. Synchronizing the actions within an operational headquarters can achieve the same effect as strategic communications but adapted for the operational level.

Military commanders have the unfortunate tendency to assume complete responsibility for messaging, especially in armed combat. However, opposing actors do not have a limited periphery, meaning they will receive their messages from other sources than only the military. Because of this, an actor should not unilaterally conduct operational messaging. It is essential to include additional organizations that have equities or influences in the conflict as well. Other Government Organizations (OGO), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Intergovernmental Organizations (IGO), adjacent service components, and even strategic level figures have a role in supporting an operational message. Each action in the tactical and operational environment would have a piece of the messaging puzzle. There is an enumerable amount of historical examples where a particular tactical action sends a specific message. The movement of an armored brigade to the border will signal an intent to attack. Maneuvering an aircraft carrier near an opposing actor's coast is a show of force and attempts to make the opposition feel vulnerable or exposed. Operational messaging aligns all such activities (coordinated military and interagency) under a supported operational level message- [Fig. 1].

Recent operations in Somalia provide an excellent case study that exemplifies that all operations must support an operational message through an influence line of effort.



[Fig. 1] The Operational HQ creates an operational message and directs all actions in an operation to support the operational message. The operational HQ should also coordinate with outside organizations to contribute towards the message. The operational message is received by the enemy with the intention of influencing enemy will. The operational HQ must also consider other audiences that will receive the message and attempt to mitigate any possible risks to the message.

Operation OCTAVE QUARTZ: Operational Messaging as the Main Effort

Is it possible to conduct operations to support an operational message? A recent case in Somalia depicted just this. Leading up to November 2020, US Special Operations Forces (USSOF) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) were conducting operations in Somalia to bolster a Somali partner force, called the Danab. After the death of a CIA officer working alongside USSOF in Somalia, President Trump ordered all US personnel to withdraw from

Somalia.¹⁵ Trump's announcement initiated new political level objectives, which caused General Townsend, the AFRICOM commander, to initiate a crisis response plan. From this, Operation OCTAVE QUARTZ (OOQ) was born.

The importance of supporting an operational message became clear from the start of the operation. The Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAFRICA) commander, Major General Dagvin Anderson (USAF), would command the newly formed Special Operations Joint Task Force-Somalia (SOJTF-SOM), which would be responsible for the execution of OOQ.¹⁶ MajGen Anderson recognized the risks involved and identified in his commander's intent that influencing the enemy through cohesive messaging would be the main effort. Messaging needed to be synchronized in space and time to achieve the effects necessary for a successful withdrawal.¹⁷ "The whole idea was to get inside Al-Shabaab's decision cycle...to let them know they had no room to move," says LTC Micah Baker (USA), Director of the Commander's Action Group at SOCAFRICA and SOJTF-SOM.¹⁸ SOJTF-SOM created the primary supported message: *The United States is not running away from the problem; the US is not abandoning their Somalian partners. The US can reach out and touch Al-Shabaab from any place or time of their choosing.*¹⁹ From this point forward, all tactical actions executed in or near Somalia supported the operational message.

The embarked 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) and the USS *Hershel "Woody" Williams* loomed over local fishing vessels and dominated Somalia's horizon. US Marine F-35Bs flew sorties visible over Somalian territory. US Air Force C-130s landed troops at the

¹⁵ Jim Sciutto "CIA officer killed in combat in Somalia." *CNN*, 25 November 2020, accessed 26 March 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/25/politics/cia-officer-killed-somalia/index.html>

¹⁶ LTC Micah I. Baker. (U.S. Special Operations Command Africa, Kelley Barracks, Stuttgart Germany), interview by the author, 25 March 2021.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Somalia national airport to reinforce its barriers. SEAL platoons conducted beach raids in plain sight. Drones conducted strikes on known aS propaganda factories for a two-fold effect.²⁰

To an average consumer, it appeared the US was preparing for a large counterattack should aS attempt to maneuver. The real impact came from using each unit of action as a messaging platform. SOTJTF-SOM Public Affairs Office released photos and articles to publish throughout the journalism world.²¹ Each image and caption reiterated the same operational message. Military Information Support Operations (MISO) pushed information, photos, and news through all the locally consumed methods: radio, internet, newspaper, social media, and others all showed the Somali public the capabilities of the Danab to protect them and the horrors of aS activity. General Townsend supported the message through public statements: "To be clear, the US is not withdrawing or disengaging from East Africa. We remain committed to helping our African partners build a more secure future. We also remain capable of striking Al-Shabaab at any time and place of our choosing-they should not test us."²² The operation's success was because of the deliberate planning to synchronize actions in time and space to elicit the desired enemy response.

All the activities together supported the same message. In plain view, aS could see the fighter aircraft that could engage them at any moment. The vessels off the coast could launch a beach landing of a thousand marines whenever they wanted. Somali radios played the message, so when they didn't see US forces, they heard about US forces' presence. Al-Shabab was not safe, and the Danab partner force also noticed that the US could still reach out and provide

²⁰ It was immensely important to degrade aS ability to conduct messaging. Targeting their known propaganda facilities degraded their ability to counter US messages. Images of the drone strikes were distributed along with other news media supporting the operational message that aS had no safe haven.

²¹ A diverse array of journalists published articles about the activity ensuring the message's widest possible distribution. [FIG 2 in Appendix -pg 21]

²² John Friberg. "U.S. Withdrawal from Somalia." SOF News (2021). <https://sof.news/africa/u-s-withdrawal-from-somalia/>

support even if US Special operators were not on the ground. All the while, SOJTF-SOM employed tools to measure the operational message's high level of effectiveness on the aS decision-making. The effect on foreign competitors was possibly more significant. The largest consumer of open-source news about OOQ was from China, showing that the intended third-party nations were receiving the message.²³ By the conclusion of OOQ, the US successfully withdrew its forces from Somalia on the desired timeline.

The maneuver of giant warships, fighter plane fly-overs, and beach landings are not novel concepts for conducting a show of force. Using MISO to create content for messaging over radio, newspapers, and leaflets is not new. News releases through public affairs channels are certainly not out of the ordinary. The US achieved success in OOQ because each activity was meticulously planned and synchronized in time and space to support an operational message and achieve their primary objective.

Counterargument

Some would argue that focusing all efforts to affect the enemy will, and decision-making is too complex for military operations. After all, conducting tactical action for the sake of chipping away at the number of enemy combatants is a much easier concept to consider. The idea of targeting enemy will can be nebulous, and it is undoubtedly more complicated than our traditional thoughts surrounding victory in warfare.

Measuring success is one of the significant difficulties when targeting enemy will. The enemy will or decision-making is not necessarily measurable in the same way that commanders

²³ Competition with China is politically directed at this time. Displaying the US' ability to reach Africa, especially areas proximate to Djibouti, where China has a military installation, supports US political objectives to compete with China.

measure effectiveness against combat power. It is nearly impossible to understand if an actor's actions towards an enemy's will are achieving the intended outcome. Imagine a business that creates advertisements in the newspaper and on social media to draw in new customers. When new customers come to the store, the only way of knowing whether it was the newspaper or social media that brought them in is to ask. Knowing which advertisement solicited the desired action would help the business to allocate their advertising funds better. In warfare, it is not always possible to ask the enemy which friendly force actions had the most significant influence on enemy decision-making. This example parallels the difficulty of targeting enemy will and subsequently attempting to measure any form of success.

Others would also say that prioritizing messaging in a large-scale war does not immediately address threats. For example, a division commander rapidly losing forces from artillery on a nearby hillside will take action to defend his troops regardless of the messaging impact. One could argue that the preservation of force and firepower should be the primary concern in every operation.

Both arguments certainly have their merits, but the need to affect the enemy's will to achieve military strategic objectives still stands true. To the first point, on the inability to measure effects, modern technology and a cultural shift in understanding the environment can quell any concerns. The effectiveness of actions is easily observable through modern tools, many of which are classified. In short, there are technologies available that enable a military staff to understand exactly how an adversary consumes and processes events on the battlefield. The cultural shift comes in at the command level. Commanders appreciate numbers: Five enemy brigades have been destroyed, three ports have been seized, or enemy forces have been eroded by fifty percent over the last four months. But commanders must become comfortable

with less quantifiable effectiveness reports. Human and signal intelligence reports, troop movements, and populace sentiment measures are just some examples of information that one could collate to create indications of a message's effectiveness.

The second point, that force and combat power preservation should be the primary concern in large-scale warfare, is also a compelling argument but still does not stand against the need to target enemy will. Yes, in open conflict at the tactical level, it will be necessary to preserve combat power through defensive and offensive means. However, actions beyond the preservation of force must be fully synchronized under a message to achieve military strategic objectives. Relegating forces to traditional combat for the sake of combat power preservation and attritional warfare will only enable the style of warfare that has caused the US to be in the Middle East for over twenty years. Earlier evidence still stands as the most compelling; one can best achieve military strategic objectives through affecting enemy will and decision-making.

Conclusion

War is a human endeavor, a social problem, and we have modest expectations that technology is going to solve a problem as complex as warfare.

-General James Mattis²⁴

War is human nature and thus fought through decisions informed by the decisionmaker's collective experiences. Experiences continue to enable humans to learn, adapt and make new decisions. Careful analysis of an enemy's decision-making will lead to a proper understanding of the source of enemy will. The understanding of the enemy's will leads to a sense of what the

²⁴ Vago Muradin, "General James Mattis Q & A," *Defense News*, 24 May 2010, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/gen-james-mattis-qa>

enemy must experience to change their decision-making. With this understanding, commanders can create the operational message and laser-focus coordinated military and interagency capabilities. Gleaning lessons from OOO, US forces can achieve the greatest effect through synchronized actions. Thus, it warrants the creation of a primary influence LOE to unite all actions. This concept is an uncommon and complex way of conducting war and will take a sizeable cultural shift within the armed forces.

Every soldier, sailor, airman, guardian, and marine will need to shift their understanding of the method for conducting warfare. More importantly, leaders at the tactical, operational, and strategic level must wholly consume the knowledge that every action or inaction has an associated message; action or inaction must align with the desired effect on enemy will. Every person and machine in the US arsenal is a messaging platform that should be aimed to influence enemy will. Leaders must place significant value on synchronizing each platform, lethal and non-lethal alike, with the purpose of changing enemy decision-making.

Many military commanders throughout history have admitted that warfare is a battle of wills. Despite acknowledging the importance of will in warfare, commanders continue to act as if the only means for victory is to degrade enemy combat power. The military must stop aiming to defeat the sword and instead seek to defeat whatever is wielding it. Whether its fighter planes, naval cruisers, or light infantry every entity in the US arsenal is a messaging platform and should be employed as such.

Recommendations

The task of influencing the enemy's decision cycle is the best way to achieve military strategic objectives. The means for affecting enemy decision-making is activity synchronized

from the strategic to the tactical level. Ideally, identifying the source and definition of the opposition's will should be fully integrated into the mission analysis portion of the various military planning models. Until then, there are steps that commanders can take to incorporate operational messaging.

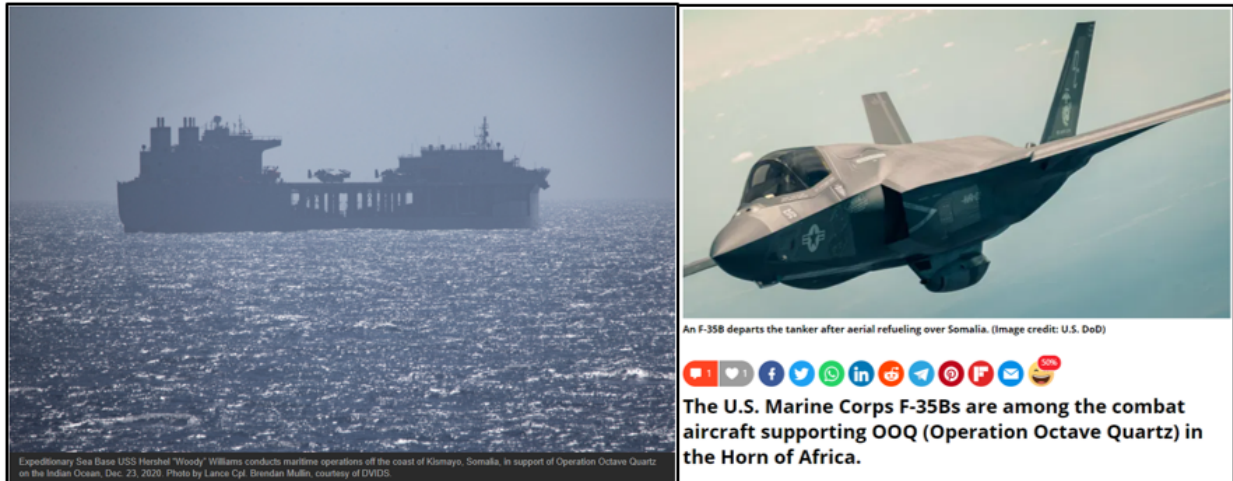
- 1) The DoD must task STRATCOM to develop a process to implement at the component command level to enable staff to analyze, assess, and define enemy will and subsequently create an operational message.
- 2) Commanders must frame their minds to understand the importance of targeting enemy will and decision-making. The commander's intent must prioritize the supported operational message.
- 3) Create an Operational Message Cell (OMC) at the operational level to analyze and define drivers of enemy decision-making. The OMC develops the supported operational message, which will become the primary supported LOE. The OMC will assess risks which includes unintended audiences or undesired actor responses. The OMC is also responsible for determining risk mitigation and pre-planned messaging responses.
- 4) The OMC should review each subordinate concept of operation (CONOP) under an Operational Plan. The OMC will recommend approval or disapproval based on the CONOP's support or risk to the operational message.

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Appendix

Images



[Fig. 2] A diverse array of news sites ran stories on Operation Octave Quartz. The synchronization of press releases with activity on the ground enabled a wide distribution to all the intended audiences of information pertaining to OOQ. Depicted on the left is an article from the veteran owned coffee company, Black Rifle Coffee²⁵. On the right is an article written about F-35B support to OOQ on an aviation enthusiast website.²⁶

²⁵ Nolan Peterson, "As US Forces withdraw from Somalia, the Navy and Marines park some Serious Firepower Offshore." Coffee or Die, 29 December 2020, accessed 26 March 2021, <https://coffeeordie.com/withdrawal-somalia/>

²⁶ David Cenciotti, "F-35Bs Armed with Gun Pod Continue Supporting Operation Octave Quartz with Armed Aerial Patrols Over Somalia" The Aviationist, 13 January 2021, accessed 27 March 2021, <https://theaviationist.com/2021/01/13/f-35bs-armed-with-gun-pod-continue-supporting-operation-octave-quartz-with-armed-aerial-patrols-over-somalia/>

Interview of LTC Micah I. Baker

The following is a transcript from the interview of Lieutenant Colonel Micah Baker (USA), Director of the Commander's Action Group at Special Operations Command Africa. The interview took place over a Facebook video call on 25 March 2021. Contact for LTC Baker: micah.baker@socom.mil

Author (A): Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. I'm writing an Operational Research Paper at the Naval War College and I'm hoping you can provide some insight that can shed some light on my topic. I'm looking at the importance of messaging and the ability of US forces to affect enemy's will to oppose. I believe that there is a way to model strategic communications for the operational level but it takes an adaptation to the current IO planning model at the operational level.

LTC Micah Baker (MB): Ok, sounds interesting. I worked in the SOCAFRICA J39 before I was the CAG director here, so I have some insight on the process.

A: How long have you been working with SOCAFRICA?

MB: I've been involved both directly and indirectly with SOCAFRICA for the past ten years. I've deployed in support of SOCAFRICA's named operations several times. I've worked with SOCAFRICA as a battalion XO and later brigade XO for the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade which provides Special Operations Civil Affairs forces to AFRICOM. Right now I'm the director of the Commander's Action Group here at SOCAFRICA.

A: So, it would be fair to say that you're familiar with the staff processes at SOCAFRICA. How would you say that SOCAFRICA prioritizes information operations in the staff process?

MB: That has changed a lot over the last 10 years. Before, non-lethal assets were only used to support the operation or as a means to get information to the kinetic actors to conduct operations; Humanitarian Assistance, MISO led radio stations, things like that. It was never a priority. In the staffing process for CONOPs, the IO branch would get a look at the CONOPs and usually ask what the IO concept of support was but would get no response and would often get vetoed by the J3.

3-4 years later people realized that it was where the real battle was taking place. They would start to say 'Let's use this stuff to increase trust in the partner and government to try and gain momentum.'

A: Did you see that trend continue after that into today or did it fluctuate?

MB: It was completely dependent on the commander at the time. The commanders that always seemed to do better found [IO] to be a priority. Truthfully, the subordinate commanders that really lived by that, were the ones that did the best. They knew that what they had [units of action] could send a message not just achieve kinetic effects.

Also, they knew it was important to attack the [VEO] messaging. They'd say 'we have to go back through the narrative and start competing in this [information] space.' They would show 'this is what happens to your kids when they get kidnapped by militants, [VEOs] are burning down churches and schools.' [VEOs] were trying to do the same thing to us. It became a battle for influence over who is the legitimate authority.

Now fast forward to a recent case, I think you'll be interested in. Very recently we had Operation OCTAVE QUARTZ.

A: I've read a little about it in the news, that was the operation to evacuate forces from Somalia, correct?

MB: So, fast forward to today, operation OCTAVE QUARTZ was for us to reposition out of Somalia. [MajGen] Anderson commanded the JTF under a super short timeline with a very minimum footprint. It was still a combat zone with ongoing active kinetic operations. The risk was high and we had to do everything we could to prevent a catastrophic event, one large event would have derailed the entire timeline. So, the information piece became the main effort.

A: That's really interesting. So, what did it look like to have the information piece as the main effort?

MB: Well, we had to have a message to support. It became, 'we are not running, we are doing this on our terms, and it doesn't matter where we sit physically, we can reach out and touch you anywhere we want, whenever we want, you will never know what's over the horizon.' We needed to say, 'We're still coming in we're still training and we're still able to reach out and touch aS'.

A: So, where did the message come from? Who decided the main effort would be messaging?

MB: Some of the staff was hesitant but it came directly from the commander. It was very clearly stated in his commander's intent. His intent was very directive on what would be the priority.

A: I know Al-Shabaab has been active with messaging as well, how did you see aS reacting to this?

MB: We actively went after aS' ability to do the same thing in the information environment. There are images of drone strikes on aS propaganda facilities, we could send those images out and put on display how we can get to them all the while denying them the ability to do any sort of messaging.

And, Another big win on beating aS to the info space: we took away their ability to complain on the world stage about civilian casualties in drone strikes. We got the videos out first and clearly showed that there was no collateral damage. That really pissed them off because it took away a sympathetic audience.

A: You mentioned that strikes were still being done. So what exactly was being done to support the message?

MB: The strike wasn't the main thing, it was the message. It was all layered together. And everyone was involved, Marines were all in doing all kinds of stuff to support the message. The ARG MEU, SEAL platoons, two companies of Marines, F35s refueling over Somalia all with the intent of supporting the message. The whole idea was to get inside Al-Shabaab's decision cycle. All of the activity was being coordinated and synchronized in time to support the message. We needed to let them know they had no room to move. And a lot of other audiences received that message too. It influenced numerous actors' decision-making cycles simultaneously. Our government, foreign governments, Al-Shabaab. We sent everything out to the media, you could see it all over the news, the radios. We needed the message to get out.

A: That sounds great but how do you know it was working and not something else? Did you have a way to tell that it was having an effect on the target?

MB: Yes, we can tell for a fact that it was working. We had different technologies that could tell us how we changed their decision-making... We changed their decision calculus. It went from an active, "we want to do something for a win against the US," to over time, 30-45 days, "lets hold what we've got because we're losing." There was feedback that clearly indicated that they changed their decision making process and allowed us to achieve our objectives faster.

A: You're saying that's what Al-Shabaab was doing? They shifted from offensive to defensive?

MB: Exactly. And that was the thing that let everything else be hugely successful. Influencing their decision cycle got us to where we got it and allowed us to still get our job done.

A: You mean the withdrawal from Somalia?

MB: Retrograding was the strategic level objective directed from the political level. At the operational level the primary objective was to message.

A: So, you mentioned that other governments also got the message, any particulars about that?

MB: The number one nation consuming the news during the operations was China-[they have] significant interests in the region for geopolitical reasons. Turkey also has significant interests in the security assistance sector, they have a vested interest where they shake out. That allows them more space to move in and their market share goes up.

A: How did the US leadership react? Did they see it as a success too?

MB: Definitely, we achieved our objectives in a highly contested area without any losses and we did it all on time. All the one- and two-star commanders saw the value in this format. The JFACC, MEU and other commanders all saw the value in doing it this way. General Townsend [AFRICOM Commander] even came to us and said, "You guys made this look too easy." One of the three stars even said, "someone should do a war college case study on this."

A: Maybe that can be my next project.

MB: It would be a good one for you to do for Senior Service College.

A: I really appreciate your time, sir. This was great and actually fits very well with the model I think should be replicated in other commands. I wasn't expecting a case study that would fit so well with my thesis. I really appreciate your time.

MB: Anytime, I hope its helpful.

//End of Interview//