CHAPTER 5

COMBINED OPERATIONS

Combined operations involve the military forces of two or more nations acting together in common purpose. If the relationship is longstanding and formalized by mutual political, diplomatic, and military agreements, it is referred to as an alliance. If the relationship is short term, ad hoc, and less formal, it is referred to as a coalition.

From the American victory at Yorktown in 1781 and throughout the US Army's history, combined operations have remained central to its experience. Combined operations occur both in war and in operations other than war. World War II, the Korean War, and the 1991 Persian Gulf conflict are examples of combined warfare.

The US will often pursue its objectives through coalitions and alliances. In Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, more than 800,000 military personnel from 36 nations combined their will, forces, and resources to oppose the Iraqi military. These operations, like many before them, demonstrated the advantage of successful combined warfare over the unilateral efforts of a single nation. The coalition increased the size of the overall force, shared the cost of waging the war among the nations, and enhanced the legitimacy of the strategic aims.

Nations usually form coalitions for focused, short-term purposes. Ad hoc methods are often required to deal with potential coalition issues. Occasionally, coalitions mature into more formal alliance relationships.

Alliances afford the participant nations the time to establish formal, standard agreements for broad, long-term objectives. Alliance nations strive to field compatible military systems, structure common procedures, and develop contingency plans to meet potential threats in a fully integrated manner. As these nations plan and train together, they become more comfortable with one another, earning mutual respect and trust. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Combined Forces Command in Korea are examples of such alliances.

CONSIDERATIONS

Regardless of their structure, successful alliances and coalitions exhibit similar traits. Commanders should understand the difficulties in forming a strong combined force and consider the following factors when preparing for combined operations.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

No two nations share exactly the same reasons for entering into a coalition or alliance. Furthermore, each nation's motivation tends to change during the life of the union. National goals can be harmonized with an agreed-upon strategy, but often the words used in expressing goals and objectives intentionally gloss over differences. Even in the best of circumstances, nations act according to their own national interests. Differing goals, often unstated, cause each nation to measure progress differently. Thus, participating nations in the coalition must agree to clearly defined and mutually attainable objectives.

Successful coalitions and alliances build upon common purpose in combined operations. By emphasizing commonalities, coalitions can reduce friction and hold
themselves together for the duration of operations. Maintaining cohesion and unity of effort requires understanding and adjustment to the perceptions of all allied nations, allowing them to do those tasks they feel politically and militarily comfortable doing. Maintaining such cohesion among a coalition is an important factor for US Army forces to consider in both planning and conducting operations.

MILITARY DOCTRINE AND TRAINING
All nations have different vital interests and military capabilities. Thus, their strategic aims and military doctrines vary. The armed forces of one nation may possess a doctrine with a full treatment of strategic, operational, and tactical issues. Other nations may possess a doctrine for forces of brigade-size or smaller. US Army doctrine endeavors to be compatible with joint and combined operations requirements.

Other nations’ doctrines may focus on a single service. Some doctrines emphasize offensive operations; others defensive. Some nations prepare for highly mobile, mechanized operations; others concern themselves with insurgent or other forms of warfare. US Army doctrine stresses rapid, agile operations emphasizing ingenuity and improvisation within the guidelines provided by the commander’s intent. Others discard this approach as too risky. Training, equipment, and technologies vary. Commanders carefully consider which national units are best suited for particular missions. In combined operations, as in unilateral operations, US Army commanders employ units according to their capabilities or advise the senior allied commander of the need to do likewise with US units.

EQUIPMENT
Commanders consider equipment capabilities when employing allied units. Among nations, equipment will vary in modernization levels, maintenance standards, mobility, and degree of interoperability. Commanders of combined units may face a large technological disparity between units, resulting in a mixture of systems. They can exploit interoperability by placing like units with similar capabilities adjacent to, or reinforcing, one another. Nonetheless, they will usually have to overcome some measure of incompatibility. Selected coalition units may have some systems similar to that of the enemy, making measures to preclude fratricide vital. Operational planners should expect difficulties such as incompatible communications and differences in the cross-country mobility of vehicles. Commanders must understand the actual capabilities of allied or coalition partners.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES
Each partner in combined operations possesses a unique cultural identity, the result of language, values, religious systems, and economic and social outlooks. Nations with similar cultures are more likely to have similar aspirations. Further, their armed forces will face fewer obstacles to interoperability in a combined force structure. Nations with divergent cultural outlooks have to overcome greater obstacles in a coalition or alliance.

Armies reflect the national cultures that influence the way they operate. Sources of national pride and cultural sensitivities will vary widely, yet the combined force commander must accommodate them. Differences in work ethic, standards of living, religion, and discipline affect the way nations approach war. Commanders cannot ignore these differences because they represent potential major problems. Even seemingly minor differences, such as dietary restrictions or officer/soldier relationships, can have great impact. Commanders may have to accommodate religious holidays, prayer calls, and other unique cultural traditions that are important to allies.

LANGUAGE
Language barriers represent a significant challenge. Because Americans are used to English-speaking counterparts, they generally do not understand the difficulties faced by non-English-speaking allies. Specifying the official coalition language may be a sensitive issue. One should not assume the language will automatically be English. After a language is selected, all written documents must be translated for tactical execution by units of different nations. The effort detracts from planning time and has the potential for mistakes or misunderstanding. Few linguists have both the technical expertise and depth of understanding to cross both language and doctrinal boundaries and be fully understood. Loss of meaning in translation can be high. The problems that can arise due to miscommunication are potentially disastrous. A possible solution is a significant resource commitment to dedicated liaison and linguist teams.

TEAMWORK AND TRUST
Nations build coalitions and alliances on mutual trust, understanding, and reliance which bind the
combined force together. Teamwork and trust are
essential. Shared hardships; missions that are
reasonably achievable in accordance with capabilities;
access to reserves and reinforcements, to include CAS
and air interdiction; and frequent face-to-face
command and soldier exchanges build trust and a
shared sense of mission.

Common purpose not only requires well-articulated
goals shared by all members of the coalition or alli-
ance, it demands the efforts of leaders capable of in-
spiring, motivating, and directing multicultural forces
in execution. The force of personality in combined op-
erations is often key to multinational cooperation di-
rectly influencing the strength of the coalition or
alliance. If all participating nations understand clearly
stated objectives and have trust and confidence in their
leaders, the combined forces should succeed. Building
a team and establishing trust before, during, and after
the battle and campaign are vital to success.

PLANNING AND CONDUCT

The US Army has extensive experience in planning
and conducting combined operations. Its participation
in peace, conflict, and war over the past 200 years has
provided insights into how to synchronize combat
power and achieve unity of effort in cooperation with
allies. These insights are summarized below and dis-
cussed in greater detail in FM 100-8.

COMMAND

Successful combined operations center on achieving
unity of effort. Each participating nation must agree to
provide the commander of the alliance or coalition
sufficient authority to achieve this. In turn, the
commander and his staff use this authority to unify the
efforts of the combined force toward common
objectives. This authority, however, is seldom
absolute. Consensus will be important to the overall
commander.

National contingents normally retain command of
their own forces, relinquishing only operational com-
mand or OPCON to the alliance or coalition military
leadership, even though staffs might be combined. The
1st (UK) Armored Division under TACON of the VII
(US) Corps in Operation Desert Storm is an example
wherein British staff members were totally integrated
into the VII Corps staff. The combined force com-
mander may not be a US Army officer. He could be a
senior US officer from another service or a commander
from another nation. Army commanders fight at the
direction of the allied or coalition commander, retaining
all of the command authority and responsibility inher-
ent in the command relationships (OPCON,
TACON, attached, direct support) of the forces they
have been provided. Missions should be perceived as
appropriate and achievable for the forces to which they
are given and equitable in terms of burden and risk-
sharing.

The factors mentioned earlier in this chapter in-
fluence the C2 structure of the combined force. If
the nations are very similar in culture, doctrine, train-
ing, and equipment, or if extensive cooperative experi-
ence exists, a combined headquarters may be effective.
This direct approach requires each armed force to re-
ceive, understand, plan, and implement missions at the
same level as the other nations. However, in planning
combined operations, commanders have to accommo-
date differences in planning capabilities. Some armies
have large staffs and the technical means to support
planning. Others have austere staff structures and do
not possess the means to process, reproduce, or rapidly
disseminate many contingency plans. Moreover, deci-
sion authority of staffs and subordinate commanders
varies between armies. The sophistication and nature
of missions assigned to each nation may vary to ac-
commodate differences between nations, but the com-
bined staff should provide guidance directly to each
nation’s forces.

A coalition of dissimilar nations may require an in-
direct approach to achieving unity of effort. The the-
erator commander may use a primary staff for planning
and an auxiliary staff to absorb, translate, and relay
straightforward, executable instructions to members of
the coalition. USCENTCOM used such an approach in
the 1991 Persian Gulf War as the coalition coordi-
nation, communications, and integration center (CIC)
was formed to coordinate the efforts between Islamic
and non-Islamic command structures.

MANEUVER

To best achieve strategic and operational aims, plans
should reflect the special capabilities of each na-
tional contingent in the assignment of missions. Mo-
tility, intelligence collection assets, size and
sustainability of formations, air defenses, capabilities
for long-range fires, SOF, training for operations in
special environments, and preparation for operations
involving nuclear and chemical weapons are among the
significant factors at this level.
To overcome differences in doctrine, training, or equipment, leaders may assign selected functions to the forces of a smaller group of allied or coalition partners. For example, the combined commander may assign home defense or police forces missions such as rear area security. The commander may also entrust one member of the combined force with air defense, coastal defense, or some special operation, based on that force's special capabilities. In fact, some coalition partners might not provide army, air force, or naval forces at all, but contribute through alternative means such as the political power provided by their membership in the coalition.

Tactical cooperation requires more precision since it deals with immediate combat actions. Among the disparities that adjacent and supporting commanders must reconcile are dissimilar TACON measures, differences in tactical methods and operating procedures, differences in using other service capabilities such as CAS, varying organizations and capabilities of units, and differences in equipment.

Liaison, equipment exchanges, and training can offset some of these problems. Combining staffs, rather than just exchanging liaison parties, is another option. The commander of a combined force plans and conducts operations in ways that exploit complementary strengths and minimize coordination problems. When the combined force commander assigns one nation's forces to another nation for an extended period, these forces should establish habitual relationships between units in order to help foster cohesion and understanding. Detailed planning with emphasis on rehearsals and careful wargaming should precede operations in which units are working together for the first time. Back-briefs become especially important for understanding. Tactical plans should address unit recognition, people and equipment, fire control measures, air support arrangements, communications, signals, liaison, and movement control. The commander's intent and the concept of the operation should also receive special attention to avoid confusion that might occur because of differences in doctrine and terminology.

FIRES

The focus of fire support at the operational and tactical levels is on the synchronization of the full range of fires provided by all friendly forces. The integration of artillery, armed aircraft, non-line-of-sight fires, naval gunfire, close air support, interdiction, and electronic countermeasures requires the development, full understanding, and rigid adherence to a common set of fire control measures. In an alliance these measures may be routine. However, in a coalition ad hoc procedures may have to be developed. Commanders give this early and continuous emphasis to ensure timely, effective fires and to minimize fratricide.

INTELLIGENCE

The collection, production, and dissemination of intelligence are major challenges. Allied and coalition partners normally operate separate intelligence systems in support of their own policy and military forces. These national systems may vary widely in sophistication and focus. Most allies cannot approach the range of US capabilities to collect and process intelligence. Nonetheless, each nation can contribute human intelligence (HUMINT). Commanders of combined units should rapidly establish a system that takes advantage of each nation's contributions and provides all units an accurate intelligence picture.

For operational and tactical purposes, commanders arrange for the rapid dissemination of military intelligence and the use of available intelligence assets by all partners. This arrangement usually requires the formation of a combined intelligence staff at theater level. It also necessitates establishing an intelligence network with dedicated communications and liaison officers to link various headquarters. Few nations will have the technical means to link with US systems. The provision of the appropriate interfaces will be an early and major concern.

LOGISTICS

Combined logistics present a major challenge. Problems include differences in logistics doctrine, stockage levels, logistics mobility, interoperability, and infrastructure and national resource limitations. Nonetheless, allied and coalition commanders have to coordinate the use of facilities such as highways, rail lines, ports, and airfields in such a way as to ensure mission accomplishment. The concept that logistics is primarily a national responsibility cannot supplant detailed logistics planning within a theater of operations. For these reasons, combined commanders should form a combined logistics staff section as early as possible.

Movement control, operation of ports and airfields, theater logistical communications, and specific supply functions are significant matters often coordinated
above the level of national contingents. To assure coordination and prevent duplication, commanders of combined forces establish clear responsibilities for such functions. Lower level commanders and staff officers responsible for operating in the theater resolve the problems of liaison, language, and equipment compatibility that are inherent in these multinational logistical operations.

Transportation, construction services, medical support, and some classes of supply may be available from the host nation. US forces may rely upon host nation support to supplement or substitute for US services, supplies, and facilities. Central allied or coalition agencies may obtain and provide water, food, and construction materials to be shared between national contingents. Civil affairs officers can assist commanders in identifying and coordinating requirements for local resources, facilities, and support.

The US often supplies allied and coalition forces with materiel and receives combat support or combat service support in exchange. This can lead to significant economies of force and effort. US forces seek such support agreements early in a combined operation.

When allies or coalition partners use similar equipment, they plan for resupply, maintenance, or other support operations across national lines. This occurs routinely, whenever feasible, and always in the case of tactical emergency. Members of an alliance or coalition can use such common items as petroleum, oils, and lubricants (POL), medical supplies, barrier materials, mines, and some tools and vehicles. The combined force commander, at appropriate times, allows combined forces to obtain and distribute these items through a single, combined supply agency to facilitate simple operations and economy of effort.

**LIAISON AND COMBINED STAFFS**

During combined operations, US units establish liaison early with forces of each nation and the next higher headquarters. Where appropriate, coalition commanders might choose to combine staffs of two or more nations to better coordinate the complementary capabilities. This fosters the understanding of missions and tactics, facilitates transfer of vital information, and enhances mutual trust and confidence.

Combined forces that employ units or equipment with which they are unfamiliar exchange liaison personnel such as aviation staff officers, fire support officers, engineers, or intelligence specialists. Whenever possible, such liaison or coalition staff personnel should be familiar with the staff and operational organizations, doctrine, and procedures of the force with which they will work. They should either speak the language of that force or be accompanied by interpreters. Also, civil affairs staff officers can assist in the control of operations that require the cooperation of host nation civilian authorities.

The Army provides specialized training (for example, language) to liaison officers. Coalitions and alliances should pursue standardized procedures, equipment, and doctrine as time and national capabilities permit. The use of mobile training teams, the development of standardization agreements (STANAGs), and the exposure and ultimate integration of staffs promote standardization and enhance the ability of forces from many nations to fight alongside one another. STANAGs already in existence may also be used to form the basis for detailed coalition agreements and procedures.