



French commandos during a maritime interdiction mission in the Red Sea.

U.S. Navy (Milton R. Savage)

# Preparing Future Coalition Commanders

By TERRY J. PUDAS

**T**his Nation has fought every conflict since World War II either unilaterally or as a member of an ad hoc coalition. No military action has been conducted as the combined effort of a standing alliance in which the United States was a member. Even though the United Nations played a major role in

both the Korean and Persian Gulf Wars, the forces that fought in those conflicts operated as ad hoc coalitions under U.N. authorization. There have been many other operations carried out by the United States as part of an ad hoc organization. Even the war on drugs has been prosecuted by a coalition. When America has been involved in multinational operations it has been as a member of ad hoc coalitions. What follows are some considerations intended to help coalition commanders of the future plan and execute operations in support of such coalitions.

This article is adapted from a distinguished individual entry in the 1993 CJCS Essay Competition which the author completed while attending the Naval War College.

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### Planning Coalition Warfare

Ad hoc coalitions are unique in that they are based on temporary agreements and normally are less formal than standing alliances. The psychological and sociological problems generated by differences among coalition partners in culture, customs, religion, and standards of living require a unique mental approach to planning military operations.<sup>1</sup> The experience of combined operations reveals that integrating multinational forces is complex and requires a great deal of understanding and skill on the part of commanders. An awareness of the unique aspects of coalition warfare can enable commanders to plan intelligently and avoid problems which arise through insensitivity and ignorance.<sup>2</sup> Creating this

unity of effort cannot be realized unless commanders understand allied political and military objectives

awareness among command and staff personnel is essential to preparing for coalition operations. The mission of commanders is to plan and direct the combat power of coalition members to ac-

complish common objectives. Key planning considerations for combined operations must include proposed command relationships, interoperability, logistical support, and the risk to U.S. Armed Forces.

The most important element in preparing for combined operations is developing sound and effective coalition command relationships. One report on the Gulf War noted that relationships "met with difficulties, were complex, but workable."<sup>3</sup> When unity of command is not achievable, then unity of effort and an agreed upon strategy must be achieved through the coordination and cooperative efforts of allied commanders. Operational commanders can prepare for this eventuality by understanding the various factors which influence a coalition's ability to coordinate forces and achieve unity of effort. Unity of effort cannot be realized unless commanders understand allied political and military

objectives and reach agreement on their common interests and objectives. Dealing with allies must be accomplished with patience and respect. Commanders must establish and maintain trust among coalition forces. Both coordination and cooperation are key ingredients to successful coalition command. Harnessing the personalities of allied military leaders and coping with problems associated with interpersonal relations can be among the greatest challenges.<sup>4</sup>

Effective use of coalition combat strength is achieved when operational planning is carried out by a combined staff which includes equitable representation from each coalition nation. This coordinated planning is essential to ensuring unity of effort. In Operation Desert Storm this was done through a Coalition Coordination Communications and Integration Center (C<sup>3</sup>IC). Even though planning must always be coordinated, overall planning responsibility for specific operations should be vested in commanders responsible for execution. The responsibility for planning and execution must not be separated.<sup>5</sup>

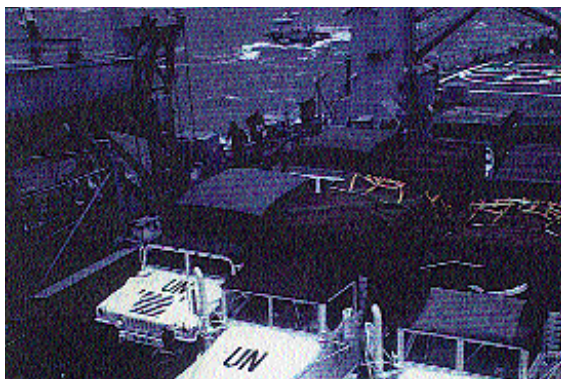
Several general considerations should guide coalition planning. A combined plan should reflect an appreciation of the unique capabilities of each national contingent in assigning missions. Multinational forces should optimize their strengths and avoid duplication or degradation of unique capabilities. Likewise, planning must compensate for comparative vulnerabilities among coalition partners. Forces are normally more effective if employed under military commanders from their respective nations. Other considerations which affect planning and mission assignment of forces are common doctrine, logistic sustainment capabilities, and systems interoperability. One principle of war with significant applicability in planning coalition operations is simplicity. It is essential that the plan be capable of being understood and executed by all combat forces in a coalition.

Another important consideration in coalition planning is interoperability. Military success in coalition warfare depends on the ability of American commanders to harmonize the capabilities, doctrines, and logistics of forces from varied cultures. In an ad hoc coalition such as Desert Storm where nearly forty different nations contributed to

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U.N. vehicles aboard  
*USS Harlan County* en  
route to Haiti.



Fleet Imaging Command Atlantic (Alexander C. Hicks, Jr.)



Joint Combat Camera Center (Scott Stewart)

F-16 fighters flying  
over South Korea  
during Team Spirit '93.

in many instances the  
common political objec-  
tives that bind members  
together become the  
center of gravity

the effort, this was a monumental task. There are, however, some general principles and planning factors which can contribute to overcoming interoperability problems. Unity of effort requires coordinating air defense, intelligence, electronic warfare, and operational timing. A communications network and interoperable connectivity also are key ingredients in effectively coordinating the capabilities of multinational forces.

Liaison officers provide one of the most effective ways of coordinating coalition efforts as the Gulf War confirmed. Nearly all our partners had American liaison officers drawn from Special Operations Forces with them. The officers were language qualified and served as communication links to coordinate with the military forces of diverse nations.

In ad hoc coalitions, interoperability problems are usually managed but rarely solved. One method of minimizing problems which usually proves effective is to allocate discrete geographical or functional areas of responsibility to national forces. This preserves unique capabilities and prevents diluting combat strength which may occur if attempts are made to combine incompatible forces. It also helps to minimize blue-on-blue fratricide or friendly fire incidents.

Gathering and disseminating intelligence can have a major impact on successful coalitions. Planning and preparations must provide timely military intelligence to all partners.<sup>6</sup> The degree of dissemination will undoubtedly vary depending on the individual member. In ad hoc coalitions the United States may be operating with partners with whom there is a reluctance to share intelligence, especially when it might reveal sensitive sources or collection methods. In Desert Storm there was no preplanned system or mechanism to govern the release of essential military intelligence to other than our traditional allies.

Logistics affects success in every military operation. Logistical support and sustainment needs of multinational forces vary significantly and are influenced by tactical doctrine or individual dietary requirements. Coalition experience confirms the desirability of making logistical support a national responsibility. The combined staff must, however, ensure the coordination of host nation support including transportation networks and major facilities such as ports and airfields.

American coalition commanders must always consider the risks to U.S. forces involved in combined operations. Assessments must concentrate on the reliability of other coalition forces, as well as on combat strength and capabilities. Rules of engagement (ROE) also figure in planning coalition operations. U.S. forces are governed by specific ROE during peacetime and the Law of Armed Conflict in war. Different rules within a coalition—particularly in operations short of war—can provoke responses that put the forces of certain members at risk. Coordination must ensure that ROE are consistent in a coalition. In the Gulf War, coordination among commanders and liaison teams ensured the effectiveness and consistency of such rules.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, the vulnerability of a coalition's center of gravity must be evaluated. In many instances common political objectives that bind members become the center of gravity. Plans must minimize risk by including appropriate defensive measures, even when the measures do not directly defend a coalition partner. This situation existed in the Gulf War when exhaustive efforts were made to protect Israel against Scud missile attacks. Had Israel retaliated against Iraq the





U.S. Navy (April-Hatton)

Coalition ships at Mina Salman during Operation Southern Watch.

cohesion of the coalition and willingness of some members to contribute militarily may have been jeopardized. This potential breakup might have resulted in an increased risk to U.S. forces.

The next coalition war or the members of the alliance cannot be predicted. There are steps, however, that the Armed Forces can undertake to prepare and enhance capabilities for coalition operations. Education in coalition warfighting for senior officers is a prerequisite. Increased study emphasizing planning considerations and execution decisions for ad hoc combined operations must be a central part of all war college curricula.

Preparation for coalition efforts must be focused on the most probable planning scenarios for future conflicts such as hypothetical Pentagon planning scenarios.<sup>8</sup> It is essential in planning for future regional contingencies that all ramifications of coalition operations are considered. The United States should increase the number of multinational training exercises in each theater with potential coalition partners. Combined exercises, regardless of their size, are productive because they create a spirit of cooperation and enhance awareness of interoperability.<sup>9</sup> Additional language training for liaison officers can provide significant advantages in combined operations. Planning scenarios can

focus the language training on specific regions and countries most likely to be future coalition allies. Sales of U.S. equipment to potential coalition partners and training foreign military personnel are also ways of enhancing interoperability for coalitions. Security assistance for critical infrastructure as well as International Military Education and Training can be particularly helpful.

Ad hoc coalitions will continue to be unique in terms of their membership and the obstacles encountered in attempting to achieve unity of effort. The planning considerations discussed above are intended to heighten awareness of potential difficulties and provide a framework for thinking about coalition operations. The success of commanders of ad hoc coalitions will depend upon their ability to correctly apply coalition warfare planning considerations.

#### Executing Coalition Warfare

Understanding the complexities of coalitions and successfully executing coalition warfare requires a unique combination of political and military prowess. As Clausewitz noted: "Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult."<sup>10</sup> His observation is especially relevant in the case of ad hoc coalitions.

The key element in successfully executing coalition warfare is the ability of commanders to achieve unity of effort among their forces. In ad hoc coalitions like Desert Storm this will normally be accomplished through cooperation rather than by appointing supreme coalition commanders. The prerequisite for unity of effort is unity of purpose which involves reaching a consensus on military objectives and coalition strategy. War-fighting commanders must be assured that there is a consensus prior to committing military forces to combined operations.

Both the planning and the execution phases should be accomplished as a coordinated effort. Combined staffs are an ideal means of ensuring that multinational forces are utilized in compliance with national political and military restrictions. In execution, multidimensional battlefields require special consideration when fighting coalition wars which involve land, naval, and air forces from a wide variety of coalition partners. Many of the concepts discussed here as planning factors were actually applied in executing the

the assignment of forces and missions in ad hoc coalitions must reflect the unique capabilities of each partner

Persian Gulf War. Unity of effort was achieved by establishing a multinational coordination center. Continuous liaison and collaboration by all partners through the C<sup>3</sup>IC provided a mechanism to achieve unity of effort. Coalition forces were assigned missions consistent with political restrictions, military requirements, and force capabilities.<sup>11</sup>

Politically and militarily it is important that the United States and its allies fight side by side against a common enemy. This is particularly desirable from the perspective of national prestige. In the Gulf it was important to ensure that each coalition member was provided an opportunity to contribute to the effort. The assignment of forces and missions in ad hoc coalitions must reflect the unique capabilities of each partner and create organizations whose combat potential is not degraded by a lack of interoperability. As previously mentioned, the options which best satisfy requirements may be functionally or geographically oriented. Specifically, options should include assigning:

- ▼ a national single service or joint force to a specific area of responsibility
- ▼ a national single service or joint force to a specific function
- ▼ a combined single service force to a specific area of responsibility
- ▼ a combined joint force to a specific area of responsibility.<sup>12</sup>

Each option was utilized in Operation Desert Storm. Specific geographical areas of responsibility were assigned to both ground and naval units operating in the Gulf. Other units were assigned functions consistent with their capabilities, such as anti-mine warfare or air defense missions. The air war combined single service forces which were responsible for a specific functional area of the overall campaign. The Arab coalition functioned as a combined joint force with a geographical area of responsibility. Each option has utility by providing a mechanism for matching ends and means in coalition wars.

The responsibility for logistical support in ad hoc coalitions is best retained by each nation. Key transport facilities and host nation support (such as water and petroleum, oil, and lubricants) should be coordinated by a multinational combined staff. Policies relating to medical treatment and evacuation of casualties are also best left to individual national forces.



British explosive ordnance unit providing security in Kuwait Harbor.

Joint Combat Camera Center

Enemy prisoners of war will undoubtedly always be a sensitive issue and the United States will bear responsibility for their welfare since we traditionally contribute more to coalitions in terms of political power and military strength. Regardless of the arrangements, the Armed Forces must retain sufficient oversight and control to ensure appropriate treatment of prisoners and compliance with international conventions and also should ensure compliance with the provisions and intent of the International Law of Armed Conflict by all coalition partners.

Another major consideration for American commanders is the risk to U.S. Armed Forces. This means balancing the sometimes sensitive subject of burden sharing with consideration of risks which could result from the desertion of coalition partners or the failure to achieve unity of effort. In Desert Storm there were partners who saw their roles strictly in terms of defending Saudi Arabia or liberating Kuwait and others who committed forces in Iraq to neutralize enemy military power. As history has borne out, the closer a coalition is to victory, the more individual partners diverge from common objectives to pursue their own aims. This phenomenon in the war-termination phase introduces an increased element of risk to U.S. forces. Commanders must be aware of this issue and execute in a manner that enables risk-reducing alternatives or unilateral options to protect both our interests and forces.



Coalition forces conducting daily situation evaluations during Desert Storm.

U.S. Air Force

the closer a coalition is to victory, the more individual partners diverge from common objectives to pursue their own aims

British frigate *HMS Penelope* leading ships of NATO On-Call Force Mediterranean.

Royal Navy (Ian Arthur)

### Principles for Coalition Commanders

Historical evidence and the lessons of Desert Storm reveal four enduring principles which commanders must consider in planning and conducting coalition operations:

▼ *Unity of purpose* is the political glue that binds coalition members together. Operational commanders must understand ultimate political objectives and create military conditions which will achieve strategic goals in theater.

▼ *Unity of effort* is necessary to achieve success in combined and coalition operations. If unity of command is not possible, then cooperation and coordination are the keys to unity of effort. Coordinated planning staffs and assignment of liaison officers significantly enhance the process.

▼ *Interoperability* is best managed by appropriate force assignments and the retention of responsibility for logistical support by individual nations. Intelligence sharing, the treatment of prisoners, and rules of engagement are best han-

dled by cooperative planning and coordination. Although interoperability is often the major obstacle to achieving unity of effort, there are measures which can be undertaken to minimize problems. Language training for liaison officers, targeted military sales and security assistance, and combined exercises can promote interoperability with potential coalition partners.

▼ *Minimizing and preventing risks to personnel* in combined operations with nontraditional allies and without formal treaties may lead to situations in which changing political events influence the military contribution of each partner. This may mean increased risk to American forces. Also, diverging national aims in the war-termination phase—or a vulnerability to the coalition's center of gravity—may be sources of risk for U.S. forces.





U.S. peacekeepers training for Operation Able Sentry in Macedonia.

Joint Combat Camera Center (Efrain Gonzalez)



Coalition commanders discussing cease-fire terms with Iraqis on March 3, 1991.

U.S. Army (Jose D. Trejo)

While coalition warfare is being touted as a silver bullet for the future of the Armed Forces, its utility may be questionable in operations where unique national interests are at stake. Political and military benefits derived from coalition operations will vary across the entire conflict spectrum. In scenarios when the United States is able to conduct unilateral operations the potential advantages of coalitions must be weighed against the disadvantages. In more fragile and less enduring ad hoc relationships the urgency to act may influence operational timing. More importantly, in order to achieve consensus on unity of purpose, the United States may be restricted from pursu-

ing its own national objectives. Notwithstanding such shortcomings, coalitions are here to stay. Commanders and their staffs must prepare for the eventualities of future ad hoc coalitions. Success in achieving national objectives with minimum risk to American lives may depend less on warfighting skills and more on understanding the complexities of coalitions

JFQ

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Armed Forces Staff College, *The Joint Staff Officers Guide 1991*, AFSC Pub 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), p. 2-43.

<sup>2</sup> John Hixson and Benjamin Franklin Cooling, *Combined Operations in Peace and War* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army Military History Institute, 1982), p. ii.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: An Interim Report* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), p. 20-4.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob L. Deavers, "Major Problems Confronting a Theater Commander in Combined Operations," *Military Review*, vol. 27, no. 10 (October 1947), p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Army War College, *Warfighting: Its Planning and Conduct*, vol. 1 (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, 1988), p. I-86.

<sup>6</sup> Department of the Army, *Operations*, FM 100-5 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1986), p. 166.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War*, p. 16-1.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick E. Tyler, "7 Hypothetical Conflicts Foreseen by the Pentagon," *The New York Times*, February 17, 1992, p. A7.

<sup>9</sup> Hixson and Cooling, *Combined Operations*, p. 363.

<sup>10</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 119.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War*, p. 20-2.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Army War College, *Warfighting: Its Planning and Conduct*, p. I-85.