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ABSTRACT

Due to the dominant political nature of coalitions, the author contends that doctrinal unity of command is rarely attained in coalition operations. Consequently, operational level commanders must focus on achieving unity of effort or purpose. The paper reviews relevant definitions and examines the dominant role of politics in determining the mission or mandate, the force contribution, and the imposed constraints and restraints in the form of restrictive command authorities. Having recognised the overriding impact of politics, the author proposes three strategies to optimise unity of effort within a coalition force: innovative command structures; thorough coordination and consensus building; and leader development and education.
“Overall the nations did not achieve “unity of command,” but they were able to achieve a “unity of purpose” which, coupled with overwhelming operational superiority, led to ultimate victory.”

Op Desert Storm Gulf War

Colonel J. McCausland, Dean of Academics, US Army War College

INTRODUCTION

For the past decade the Canadian Forces have participated in a wide variety of missions ranging from humanitarian intervention in Somalia through to relatively high intensity operations in the Persian Gulf and Kosovo. With the exception of the NATO led Kosovo mission, they were conducted within a joint coalition framework. Coalition operations are becoming more prevalent, and it is recognized that the Canadian Forces will increasingly operate as part of a multinational coalition of like-minded states. Due to the aggregation of capabilities, the enhanced domestic and international legitimacy through a shared cause, and the opportunity to enhance a nation’s international image, countries, in particular middle powers like Canada, are able to leverage considerable world influence through these types of operations. However successful coalition operations are not easy. Their ad hoc, transitory and political nature present many military challenges of which the most vexing is command and control.

Traditionally, when designing an efficient command structure, one adheres to several fundamentals and principles of which the most important is unity of command. “Unity of command means a single commander will be authorized to plan and direct operations...will be held responsible for an operation’s success or failure...has the authority to direct and control the personnel and materiel committed to the task.” However can doctrinal unity of command be
achieved in coalitions that are dominated by politics? This paper will argue that due to political factors the coalition commander will seldom receive the requisite authority to direct all of the forces employed in pursuit of a common objective or goal. Without the appropriate command authority the principle of unity of command is not attainable. Consequently, the requirement for unity of effort towards common multinational objectives becomes the essential key to an effective command structure and a successful coalition mission. This paper will examine the differences between coalitions and alliances, discuss the political factors and their impact, and offer alternative strategies to achieve unity of effort when the principle of unity of command cannot be attained.

COALITIONS AND ALLIANCES

The principle of unity of command is applicable to modern joint national armed forces, as their roles and command authorities are clearly articulated in various government White Papers, policy documents and publications. For example the Canadian Forces (CF) exist, “to defend Canada and Canadian interests and values, while contributing to international peace and security.” The Constitution Act 1982 establishes the Governor-General as the CF Commander-in-Chief, while the National Defence Act provides for the CF’s overall management and organization. CF doctrine provides the fundamental principles by which all CF operations are conducted to include command and control. But what is the impact on unity of command when nations decide to form coalitions in response to a common concern?

To answer the question, we must begin by understanding the differences between multinational alliances and coalitions. An alliance is the result of a formal agreement between
two or more sovereign nations for the accomplishment of broad, long-term objectives. Long standing alliances such as NORAD, ABCA and NATO have rationalized their capabilities, standardized their processes and improved interoperability to enhance cohesion, combat power and overall effectiveness. Many sources of friction such as culture, language, religion, class and gender, work ethic, traditions, discipline, doctrine, training and equipment have been addressed. Levels of trust and mutual confidence are well established at the most senior levels within the member governments and militaries; but more importantly, the overall mandate, goals and objectives of the alliance have been established and agreed to.

Conversely, a coalition, which is an ad hoc agreement between two or more sovereign nations for a common action, is usually short term and formed on short notice. “Coalitions may be drawn out of traditional alliances; represent the response of a standing public organization; or be formed as a military response by a group of concerned countries” as was the case in Somalia and East Timor. They are usually formed under the auspices of the United Nations or a major regional organization to serve interests of collective security or to deal with a significant disturbance to world order.

Because of a coalition’s short term, ad hoc nature, they are less formal than standing alliances being normally based on temporary agreements. Unless the partners have worked together as a member of an alliance, they will experience problems associated with different ethos, culture, religion, language, doctrine, training and equipment to name a few. More importantly, however, as Alan Ryan writes in his monograph on “new age” coalitions it is the political concerns that present the most problems. “The speed of coalition deployments militates
against the early expression of explicit national and coalition objectives...it is necessary to create shared appreciations of national and collective interest. The experience of all recent coalition operations has been that the more complex the combination of countries, the more essential this level of understanding." Thus, the coalition is politically more demanding than an alliance.

POLITICAL FACTORS

What then are the political factors that have such an impact on the coalition? In a recent lecture on the operational level of war, a former US Army operational level commander identified several practical high, medium, and low level considerations that operational commanders must address in the planning and execution of their missions. Of these, the high level considerations, which include missions, national capabilities and limitations, restraints and constraints, organization, and personalities, are the ones most easily influenced by political factors. It is within this framework that the political dimension will be explored.

Missions

To be successful operationally, a clear understanding of the national and military strategic goals and objectives is required. General Devers, Commander of the 6th Army Group during World War II stated that one of his principle problems was the conflicting political, economic, and military objectives of each of the allied powers. His comment is just as appropriate today as countries possess many political reasons for joining coalitions. A nation’s interest and motivation will in turn determine its political, economic, and military goals and objectives.
According to Dr David Edelstein, a postdoctoral research fellow at Harvard, nations join a coalition for the following reasons. First, they join or form a coalition to aggregate capability in that they may not have the resources to conduct the mission alone. Through sharing arrangements coalitions can acquire forward basing, secure overflight rights, expand military capabilities, share costs etc. Second, partners can join coalitions in an attempt to limit, restrain or influence the power of other partners. In Kosovo during the conduct of Operation Allied Force and the subsequent peacekeeping effort, Operation Joint Guardian, the inclusion of Russian troops influenced the political process and provided balance to an overwhelming Western coalition presence. Third, countries initiating action seek partners to enhance legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. The most successful example of this in the past decade was the US ability to form a coalition of 37 nations to prosecute the Gulf war ensuring legitimacy in the eyes of the Arab and Western states, an essential key to success. Finally nations join coalitions to realize broader foreign policy objectives. These objectives can be explicit or implicit to enhance world standing and cooperation amongst nations, and to establish markers for future coalitions or dealings among nations.\(^{11}\) Canada’s contribution to Op Desert Storm and to the Kosovo operation clearly enhanced its standing with fellow NATO states.

It is apparent from the discussion above that countries join coalitions for different reasons though the catalyst for forming the coalition is quite often the same. The national interest will affect the partner’s goals, objectives, and perceptions of the operation and influence its participation and involvement as the mission progresses. Therefore it is evident that, “a clear understanding of mutual objectives, strategies and responses needs to be established prior to the deployment of troops.”\(^ {12}\)
National Capabilities and Limitations

Once the objectives and goals are set or at least start to gel, nations through their strategic military staffs will allocate the forces and resources to the coalition along with the approved command authorities. The national interest will determine the contribution and it may not necessarily meet the needs of the coalition. An example is the recent INTERFET mission in East Timor where the requirement was for security troops to conduct UN Chapter 7 tasks. Several nations deployed troops specifically resourced to conduct humanitarian missions. This led to certain nations burdening an undue share of the more dangerous security tasks.\(^{13}\) The latter creates friction, as certain coalition partners burden the greater risk while others appear to go along for the ride without exposing their troops to danger. Further, coalition partners are not all equally capable in terms of military equipment, organization, doctrine, leader development and training thereby placing limits on what a partner can contribute. However the contribution no matter how small is provided for several politically motivated reasons and it cannot be ignored. To reject or not employ a nation’s assets could lead to political problems and open a potential seam of discontent that if left to crack could lead to disharmony.

Constraints and Restraints

The forces allocated to a coalition will have constraints and restraints placed upon them. Durell-Young argues that, “because military forces are a \textit{sin qua non} of a state’s most basic manifestation of sovereignty, it is not surprising that they are not lightly delegated to foreign commanders”.\(^{14}\) The military organizations of troop contributing nations may be reluctant or
prohibited from operating under command of the appointed coalition force commander. Yates, a
US Army officer with extensive experience in Saudi Arabia, reinforces this point by opining that,
“especially in regions where “colonisation” and “imperialism” carry deep emotional messages, it
is unlikely that subordination of a national symbol of independence, especially to a Western
power, will willingly occur.”15 The US/Arab experiences in the Persian Gulf illuminates this
particular problem.

Nations have a tendency to relinquish the least amount of authority to retain as much
control as possible over their forces. Once the command authority has been provided nations
tend not to increase it as the situation changes. A survey of Central region NATO armies
concluded that there was no instance where command authorities were changed during the
conduct of a peace support mission16.

The two command authorities that impact most on a coalition are the generally accepted
NATO terms: OPCOM and OPCON. There are two other authorities, TACOM and TACON,
which provide the least authority to a commander and therefore will not be discussed further.
The definitions according to NATO publication AAP-6 are as follows:

OPERATIONAL COMMAND (OPCOM)

The authority granted to a commander to assign missions or tasks to subordinate
commanders, to deploy units, to reassign forces, and to retain or delegate operational
and/or tactical control as may be deemed necessary. It does not of itself include
responsibility for administration or logistics. May also be used to denote the forces assigned to a commander.

OPERATIONAL CONTROL (OPCON)

The authority delegated to a commander to direct forces assigned so that the commander may accomplish specific missions or tasks which are usually limited by function, time, or location; to deploy units concerned, and to retain or assign tactical control to those units. It does not include authority to assign separate employment of components of the units concerned. Neither does it, of itself, include administration or logistical control.

“The principle distinguishing factor between these two levels of command authority is that OPCOM allows a commander to assign and reassign missions of subordinate forces, as well as task organize subordinate assigned forces, in addition to those authorities found in OPCON.”17

It should be noted that according to US doctrine, short of full combat operations, to meet an attack on NATO territory, US Forces would not normally fall under OPCOM of foreign commanders. Regarding OPCON the US further expands the definition to state that OPCON does not include the authority to reassign forces or employ a formation, or any part of it, other than on the assigned task, or to disrupt its basic organization so that it cannot be given a new task or redeployed elsewhere.18 Canadian doctrine does not refer to formations but it does say that if commanders have forces assigned for a continuing mission where they would need freedom to employ them with little or no constraint OPCOM should be given.19
Common practice is for units to be deployed OPCON. The latter places several constraints on the commander, as he/she cannot delegate OPCON without approval from national authorities and task organization cannot take place. Consequently without OPCOM, unity of command by definition cannot be achieved as commanders do not have the authority to direct and control the personnel and materiel committed to the task.

Organization

Almost all coalition operations involve non-military agencies such as non-governmental organizations, other government departments, the media, and private volunteer organizations. Each arrives with his or her set of political issues, which will impact on a coalition’s success or failure. These organizations aside from governmental ones are characterized by extreme independence and eschew the appearance of formal relationships with military forces. General Romeo Dallaire, former Force Commander UNIMIR, found that, “the NGOs resisted cooperation with the UN leadership in Central Africa, often claiming to have had enough experience operating in dangerous environments as not to need the help, protection, and coordination of the UN mission and its troops.” The latter resulted in a severely limited, reactive and haphazard relief effort. Though not part of a formal coalition organization and structure their political agenda and actions are an integral component of any coalition campaign plan and must be catered for in the command structure.

Personalities
The personality of the various coalition leaders is another high level consideration. Devers said one of his principle problems of allied command was; “the personalities of the senior commanders of each of the armed services of the allied powers under command, their capabilities, personal and professional habits, and their ambitions”. As this consideration is important to achieving unity of effort, its discussion will be saved until later.

In summary, the review of the political factors affecting a coalition reveals that a nation’s interest will in turn affect the overall goals and objectives it signs up to, the force package that it sends to theatre, the command authority it agrees to and the type of restraints and constraints it places on its forces. These in turn will have a significant impact on the practical high level considerations for operational level missions and on the attainment of unity of command. Captain Terry Pudas, USN, concluded that it is the political context that determines a coalition’s success or failure. Indeed the political unity of purpose becomes a coalition’s centre of gravity. The political dimension is a fact of life and operational commanders must adapt to meet the explicit and implicit operational challenges posed by it. Before moving on to a discussion on how to accommodate the political imperatives, it is worthwhile examining an opposite viewpoint.

An Opposite View

Some military writers such as Anthony Rice disagree with making military command and control accommodations to satisfy political imperatives. Rice writes that the US Armed Forces have made a serious error in identifying unity of effort as a key consideration for multinational
operations over the US principle of war: unity of command. He argues that the First World War Western Allies’ Beauvais Agreement (excerpted below) on 3 April 1918 supports the need for unity of command as the paramount C2 principle.

“General Foch is charged by the British, French and American governments with the coordination of the action of the Allied Armies on the Western Front; to this end there is conferred on him all the powers necessary for its effective realization. To the same end, the British, French and American governments confide in General Foch the strategic direction of military operations. The Commanders-in-Chief of the British, French and American Armies will exercise to the fullest extent tactical direction of their armies. Each Commander-in-Chief will have the right to appeal to his government, if in his opinion his army is placed in danger by the instructions received from General Foch.”

He goes on to say that in World War 2, “unity of command in the Anglo-American alliance had a particular meaning, distinct from the natural authority implicit in the term command.” He uses the following quote to support his statement; “It implies special arrangements to bring together under a single commander elements ordinarily controlled by separate sources of authority, each sovereign within its own sphere. Invariably the powers of the joint commander have been closely hedged about by restrictions designed to preserve the direct chain of command from the central authority of the service or nation to its own commanders in the field.”
Rice’s arguments in fact call for the supremacy of unity of effort as the guiding principle for coalition commanders. In each of his sighted cases the overall commander held mainly a coordinating function. It should be noted that these were world crisis situations and included alliances that had worked together for a considerable length of time. They were not ad hoc coalitions formed on short notice and therefore the circumstances are not the same as modern day coalitions.

An example of a short-term ad hoc coalition that followed the unity of command principle was the ill-fated Anglo-French Suez expedition in 1956. General Andre Beaufre based on his experiences as part of the Suez operation in 1956 writes that subordination of the French command to the British using an integrated command system based on the NATO model did not work. He could not act on national direction and he was infuriated when the British command gave direct orders to French units. “My experience at Suez proves to me that it (the subordinated/integrated command model) is not a feasible one, if there are likely to be difficulties of a political nature.”26 It is interesting to note during the Gulf War that the French Forces operated independently under French national command and control, but co-ordinated with the Saudis and CENTCOM. They eventually conducted operations in the US XVIII Airborne Corps’ area of operations but under TACON, the lowest command authority.

One must agree with Rice that in all but exceptional parallel command cases an overall force commander will be selected. The point is that the particular commander will have severe restrictions placed on him or her. As noted previously, the US has no intention of deploying forces OPCOM unless there is a severe crisis to world peace as was the case in both World Wars.
However for mid-level conflict and peace support operations where national interest, perception, and domestic politics play a dominant role, nations will provide OPCON at best. With these constraints a commander is restricted in his or her ability to direct and control the personnel and material committed to the task. This being the case, unity of effort gained through cooperation and mutual confidence between the coalition partners and the force commander is essential. General Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, said it best in a letter to Admiral Mountbatten prior to the latter’s assumption of Southeast Asia Command.

“The written basis for allied unity of command is found in directives issued by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The true basis lies in the earnest cooperation of the senior officers assigned to an allied theatre. Since cooperation, in turn implies such things as selflessness, devotion to a common cause, generosity in attitude, and mutual confidence, it is easy to see that actual unity in allied command depends directly upon the individuals in the field. This is true if for not other reason than no commander of an allied force can be given complete administrative and disciplinary powers over the whole command. It will therefore never be possible to say the problem of establishing unity in an allied command is ever completely solved. This problem involves the human equation and must be met day by day. Patience, tolerance, frankness, absolute honesty, in all dealings, particularly with all persons of the opposite nationality, and firmness are absolutely essential.”

ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

What happens when these various national political goals come into conflict or change as a result of changing circumstances? Friction is created as national agendas start to influence the
actual military operations on the ground. In the extreme the taking of casualties in areas where there is limited vital interest can lead to coalition breakdown as was the case in UNOSOM II when the US withdrew its contingent and in UNAMIR when Belgium withdrew following the massacre of their ten paratroopers. In both cases the national interest changed. It is difficult to say whether the operational commander could have prevented the dissolution of the coalition. However knowing and understanding each member nation’s motivation for joining the coalition may have anticipated such events. Maintaining unity of purpose and effort throughout the operation is paramount to maintaining cohesion. The operational level commander, “should strive to understand each nation’s goals and how these goals can affect conflict termination and the desired end state.”

Given the primacy of political considerations in coalition operations what can be done to ensure unity of effort? To ensure support for the coalition objectives commanders should focus on reducing political friction to the greatest extent possible. This can be accomplished by the creation of command structures that satisfy national constraints, by thorough co-ordination and consensus building leading to appropriate employment of forces, and by developing mutual confidence and cooperation within the coalition’s senior commanders and staff.

**Command Structures**

There are two basic command structures open to a coalition commander. “The usual options are lead nation command, where the main contributor of forces conducts the campaign, or parallel command, where command responsibilities are shared.” As both are discussed in US multinational doctrine the reader is requested to read the appropriate manual for a detailed
description. A recent example of lead nation command was the Australian led International Force East Timor (INTERFET) which acted under the auspices of the UN. The Gulf War coalition accepted a parallel command solution, which acknowledged the political, religious, and social imperatives of Saudi Arabia and the Arab States and the military imperatives of Britain and the US. HRH General Khaled Bin Sultan, the Saudi Commander, Joint Forces Command, commanded 25 of the 37 contingents in Saudi Arabia. Khaled recognized that ultimately General Schwarzkopf was responsible for the military planning and execution. He in turn ensured that Saudi Arabia as host nation remained sovereign and that the culture was not impacted upon by the large influx of western forces personnel.\textsuperscript{30} The adopted command structure led to a successful coalition mission by recognizing the political concerns of the partner nations.

**Coordination and Cooperation**

The key to the Gulf War command structure was the establishment of a highly effective coalition coordination, communications, and integration centre (C3IC). “It is important to note that the C3IC did not command any units. C3IC advised the two separate commanders and their staffs, and it transmitted orders of one national command to the other. C3IC integrated the efforts of both partners into a unity of effort, not a unity of command.”\textsuperscript{31} By coordinating issues on deployment, courses of action, rules of engagement, communications, procedures, doctrine, and capabilities, tasks can be ultimately assigned that take into account national sensitivities such as pride, honour and prestige. It may lead to the allocation, “of discrete geographical or territorial areas of responsibility to national forces.”\textsuperscript{32} General Andre Beaufre, Commander French Expeditionary force to the Suez 1956, writes, “it was clear that the political aspect justified the
allocation of distinct military objectives...since logistics remained national, it was essential that the forces be used as far as possible in homogeneous national groups.” The latter significantly reduces friction at the tactical level.

To further enhance coordination and cooperation, many writers and doctrine publications argue for the formation of coalition liaison and support teams, civil-military coordination centres, and for the extensive use of Montgomery’s “directed telescopes” ie liaison officers well versed in the culture, language, etc of participating forces. Scales argues for the formation of “geostrategic scouts” who are officers that have the requisite language, cultural, historical and regional geopolitical knowledge to assist coalition commanders when they move into certain regions of the world. Through these mechanisms unity of effort at the operational and tactical level can be achieved by confirming that the commanders intent is properly developed, communicated and carried out.

Leadership

In the final analysis it is leadership that will ensure unity of effort. Bowman writes that: “Coalition politics override coalition military logic - a factor coalition leaders must clearly understand. Coalition leadership must be persuasive, not coercive, and sensitive to national needs. Future coalitions will require new Eisenhowers, Schwarzkopfs, or Khalids. National forces, especially in potential lead nations, must consider how to develop such leadership traits in future military leaders.” Mutual confidence as stated by General Eisenhower is the “one basic thing that will make allied commands work”. US doctrine advocates that rapport, respect,
knowledge, patience and the appropriate mission for participating nations all contributes to the notion of mutual confidence. The latter reduce political friction through understanding of each member’s national goals and objectives, respect for differing cultures, religions, values etc, understanding of members capabilities and limitations, and equitable tasks in terms of burden and risk sharing.\textsuperscript{36} Finally the willingness to reach a consensus is vital to ensuring the political aspirations of nations are satisfied. A balance between what is acceptable both militarily and politically must be achieved. “The glue that binds the multinational force is agreement, however tenuous, on common goals and objectives.”\textsuperscript{37} Canadian doctrine publications and professional military education institution’s curricula must provide the fundamental leadership principles and guidance necessary to ensure that the CF’s leadership understands the unique challenges posed by coalition operations.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, multinational coalitions will become more prevalent in the future as nations seek alternate methods of resolving conflict. Future coalition commanders will be faced with a myriad of challenges of which the most demanding will be the establishment of an effective command and control structure. Leaders must recognize that national interest will govern the setting of coalition goals and objectives, place constraints on the coalition force, and determine a nation’s contribution in terms of organization, capability and command authority. Via innovative command structures and thorough coordination and cooperation, the overriding nature of political interests in coalition operations can be mitigated. The focus must be toward achieving unity of effort. To do so operational level commanders must develop mutual confidence amongst the military leadership of the coalition partners to ensure a balance is struck
between competing political and military interests. Doctrine publications and professional military education curricula must reflect the political realities of coalition operations to ensure future leaders can meet the challenges of coalition command. For in the end, “it is not worth having a political coalition that cannot fight, or an effective fighting force that does not work for the member states of the coalition.”

NOTES

3 Dr David Edelstein, Presentation to AMSC 3, Canadian Forces College, September 2000.
5 CF Operations p 1-1.
6 CF Operations p GL-E-1.
7 Ibid, p GL-E-3.
8 Alan Ryan, From Desert Storm to East Timor: Australia, the Asia-Pacific and the “new-age” Coalition Operations, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Australia, 2000, p 17.
9 Ibid, p 98.
11 David Edelstein.
12 Ryan, From Desert Storm..., p 41.
13 LCol C.R. Lacroix, J3 International 1, Joint Staff, NDHQ, Ottawa, former Senior Planner J-5, INTERFET HQ, personal interview, 1 October 2000.
16 Durell-Young, “Command in Coalition... p 32.
19 CF Operations p 2-2.
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