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EXERCISE/EXERCICE NEW HORIZONS

AN OPERATIONAL LEVEL ANALYSIS OF THE KOREAN WAR

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There are five basic questions which must be asked about any war; What is the situation surrounding the war? What is the object of the war? How to conduct the war? How to support the war? How to control the war?¹ These five questions constitute a relatively simple, yet comprehensive, framework for studying, planning, and conducting war; when asked in the past tense they provide an analysis of past wars, when asked in the future tense they will provide a guide to preparing for war, and when asked in the present tense they can guide the actual conduct of war, and set forth, simply stated in terms of ends, ways and means, the ends or the missions to be accomplished, the ways or concepts of how to achieve those end, and the means or what will be required to achieve the desired ends. These terms are fundamental to the design and conduct of war and planning tools for war design.

War, whether one is studying it, planning it, or conducting it, can be viewed from three different perspectives, each of which can provide a significantly different picture to the viewer. The five-question framework applies to each of the three perspectives of strategy, operational art and tactics. Concentrating on one perspective of war at the expense of the other two will produce an oversimplified and distorted view. Just as a three-legged stool provides a solid seat when all three legs are even, understanding these three perspectives, their basic differences, and how they interact will provide a firm foundation for explaining the complexities and chaos of modern war. If, however, one of the legs of this theoretical stool is shortened, the seat becomes more precarious. So too will a nation's success in war, unless the study of war includes all three perspectives.²

¹ Clayton R. Newell, *The Framework of Operational Warfare* (Routledge, 1991), p.9

² Clayton R. Newell, *The Framework of Operational Warfare*, Opcit., p.20

On 25 June 1950 the Korean War broke out, just five years after the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule. The war lasted for three years and a month before the two sides agreed to the cessation of hostilities on 27 July 1953 and the uneasy truce survives to this day. The Korean War unfolded in the broader context of the Cold War under the US-USSR bipolar system. Triggered by North Korea's southward invasion, the war initially was an intra-national conflict between South and North Korea. As the world's two ideologically opposed camps intervened, however, it developed into a full-blown international war involving troops from twenty different nations. Only in a geographical sense was its scope limited to the Korean Peninsula. During the war, the Korean people suffered horrors and tragedies unprecedented in Korea's five-thousand-year history. However, the Korean War has replaced the 38th Parallel with what amounts to a cease-fire line, and has failed to provide the Korean people with permanent relief from another fratricidal war.

Although the Korean War has recently been termed "The Forgotten War" or "The Unknown War", an outpouring of books, articles and film about the war have been published. Most of them have not broken from the realm of battle or combat histories and political issues nor have they provided a link between national and military strategy and tactics. In spite of that, during the war, commanders faced a number of significant challenges such as political constraints, coalition warfare, long air and sea lines of communication to a distant theater of operations, limited infrastructure, the exploitation of joint warfare and the synchronization of forces faced by those commanders charged with the successful prosecution of the war.

The focus of this paper is to show that the UN forces under MacArthur actually employed the idea of operational design to a superior manner than their North Korean opponents, even though operational level design did not exist in military thinking of the day. In addition, this paper will help to understand the design and conduct of campaigns, build up the coup d'oeil of war as viewed by an operational commander, and develop the doctrine of operational art which has been recently introduced to my country – Korea.

To accomplish this, this paper will discuss the characteristics of the operational perspective of war prior to the explanation of the operational concepts in campaign design. Then, a chronological overview of the Korean War will be provided, and finally the operational level analysis of the Korean War through modern day operational concepts will be demonstrated as they apply to the five basic questions about any war in the operational perspective.

Characteristics of the Operational Perspective of War

The conduct of war from the operational perspective has perhaps the most impact on the ultimate success of using military force. It is this perspective which links the national goals set by the strategic perspective with the tactical military forces which actually use force to attain the desired order. Although there are no set rules, there are three basic characteristics which make the operational perspective of war the essential link between the strategic and tactical perspective.

First, the planning and conduct of war from the operational perspective has strategic aims which link it to the strategic perspective of war.³ Operational commanders establish

³ Clayton R. Newell, *The Framework of Operational Warfare*, Opcit., p.79

the tactical objectives to be attained by the tactical forces, which links the operational perspective to the tactical perspective of war.

Second, the operational perspective encompasses the air, land, and sea armed forces which comprise a nation's military forces.⁴ The strategic perspective of war coordinates all elements of national power, while the operational perspective of war focuses on integrating and coordinating the activities of disparate tactical forces toward a single military objective. The tactical perspective of war focuses on the activities of only one of the three services of the armed forces: air, land, or sea.

Third, maneuver, in the broadest sense of the term, is the essence of conducting war from the operational perspective.⁵ The operational commander designs a campaign to attain the strategic goals, so that when the tactical forces fight their battles, they will pit their strength against their opponent's weakness, rather than pitting strength against strength. This maneuver of friendly strength against enemy weakness is designed to produce a successful outcome without squandering the precious means of lives and national treasure.

Therefore, the Korean War in this paper will be viewed from a different perspective contrary to the other two – strategic and tactical perspectives.

Operational Concepts in Campaign Design

If these are the five questions that must be addressed in the operational appreciation, there are certain concepts that will play a central part in the formulation of answers to those questions and thus in the formulation of the operational plan, because these operational concepts are fundamental to the design and conduct of campaigns and

⁴ Ibid., p.79

⁵ Ibid., p.79

planning tools for campaign designs. Then, an explanation of each of these operational concepts will be stated.

End State

The Canadian Forces Operations Manual describes the “end state” as “the political and/or military situation to be attained at the end of an operation, which indicates that the objective has been achieved.”⁶ A purely military and land-centric explanation of the end state is offered by Col. Thomas E. Brown of the US Army: “The end state is how the commander visualizes the battlefield will look after mission accomplishment.”⁷ In any operation it is critical that a commander communicate to his subordinates and staff what it is he is trying to achieve, and what that achievement will actually look like.

Center of Gravity

The keystone operations manual of the US Army defines the “center of gravity” as “that characteristics, capabilities, or localities from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength or will to fight.”⁸ This definition is perhaps a bit too ambiguous and all-encompassing. In non-specific lexicon, an enemy’s center of gravity is also described in the CF Operations publication as that the aspect of the enemy’s total capability, which, if attacked and eliminated or neutralized, will lead either to his inevitable defeat or his wish to sue for peace through negotiations.⁹

If an enemy has a center of gravity that can be attacked or neutralized, then so must the friendly forces that are prosecuting the operational campaign. The protection of the friendly center of gravity, therefore, becomes a key activity of any commander. If

⁶ DND, B-GJ-005-300/FP-000 *Canadian Forces Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2003), p.3-1

⁷ Thomas E. Brown *Commander’s Guidance – Military Review* (US Army College, April 1994), p.2-7

⁸ US, FM 3-0 *Opera2 1088 93001 .9.873001 Tmri*

destruction of the enemy's center of gravity leads inevitably to his eventual downfall, so must destruction of the friendly center of gravity lead to the downfall of the friendly forces.

Therefore, military planning staffs spend considerable time and effort to identify correctly the enemy's as well as their own, center of gravity in any operation. In most military operations the desired end state of a campaign and the center of gravity of a force are closely linked. Only once the center of gravity of this force has been successfully neutralized or destroyed has a desirable end state been achieved.

Decisive Point

A foe's center of gravity is often described in rather subjective, broad terms such as the enemy's will to fight or his cohesion as a military body. Such depictions of center of gravity, are difficult to attack directly. Often a center of gravity can only be threatened by attacking several elements that constitute, in the whole, the center of gravity. Each of these elements is key to an enemy's operation but is not so overwhelmingly important that its loss or compromise will lead automatically to the defeat of the enemy. These elements are called "decisive points" and can be events, activities, capabilities, pieces of ground, or many other entities and concepts, depending on the nature of the center of gravity being attacked.

For example, during the Gulf War it was determined early on, that achieving mastery of the air would be required before Iraq could be attacked on the ground; thus air superiority became a decisive point. A high ranking British officer, General Sir Peter de La Billiere stated, "this air effort was undoubtedly a major contributing factor in the

overall allied success.”¹⁰ Decisive points, then, are a major component of any campaign and by attacking decisive points, which protect the center of gravity, a foe can move on to victory. The CF Operations Manual states “a point from which a hostile or friendly center of gravity can be threatened may exist in time, space or in the information environment.”¹¹

Lines of Operation

It is rare in an operational campaign that the center of gravity is protected by only one decisive point. The more complicated the operation, the more likely that the center of gravity is surrounded by several decisive points. Many of these decisive points will be inextricably linked such that the precondition of launching an attack on one decisive point is the successful destruction of one or more previous decisive points. The way that a commander chooses to attack a center of gravity through elimination or attainment of successive decisive points is called a “line of operation”. A center of gravity may be protected by a number of lines of operation each consisting of numerous decisive points. It may be possible to approach or attack the center of gravity by a number of different lines of operation. Commanders may seek the most efficient or most effective route. The combination of these lines of operation and the manner in which they are prosecuted defines the commander’s campaign plan and is the essence of operational art. The CF Operations Manual describes that the relationship between decisive points, and notes that a critical path to the center of gravity and events are to be tackled in a logical progression.¹²

¹⁰ Gen Sir Peter de la Billiere Address to Royal United Services Institute. Extract from RUSI Journal Winter 1991

¹¹ DND, B-GJ-005-300/FP-000 *Canadian Forces Operations*, Opcit., p.3-1

¹² *Ibid.*, p.3-1

Sequencing

The process by which the attack of various decisive points is orchestrated is called “sequencing”. An operational commander will select a center of gravity, determine that it is protected by a number of decisive points and decide to attack these is a logical sequence. These sequenced sets of activities are collectively referred to as lines of operation. The CF Operations Manual states that the arrangement of events within a campaign must be in an order that is most likely to achieve the desired end state.¹³

Culmination

Culmination occurs when a force is incapable of increasing its rate of activity; it may only sustain its current rate. It is said that a military commander prosecuting a campaign has reached his culminating point when he is only just able to maintain his tempo, he can not plan and conduct new offensives and he is only able to hold in his present defensive posture. Operational art is focused on ensuring that an enemy reaches his culminating point before friendly forces do. Napoleon’s advance into Russia was brought to a standstill when his logistic ability was outstripped by the needs of his forces; he had reached a culminating point and the outcome of the campaign was no longer in doubt.

The CF Operations Manual states that culmination occurs when the current situation can just be maintained but not developed to any greater advantage.¹⁴

Maneuver

¹³ DND, B-GJ-005-300/FP-000 *Canadian Forces Operations*, Opcit., p.3-1

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.3-1

Maneuver is applied against decisive points or against a center of gravity directly. The success of maneuver is predicated on accomplishing this as decisively and as quickly as possible and the object is either to destroy the opponent's physical means to resist or to destroy his capability to resist. Therefore, maneuver is linked to the concepts of direct and indirect approaches, to tempo and to sequencing. Thus within one campaign, there will be a variety of maneuver approaches employed. Operational maneuver seeks a decisive impact on the conduct of a campaign; scale alone does not make a maneuver operational, rather the significance of maneuver is derived from its basic purpose of creating operational advantage. The CF Operations Manual states that operational maneuver can be described as seeking to gain a position of advantage in respect to the opponent from which force can be applied or threatened.¹⁵

Tempo

In operations, the ability to act faster than one's enemy provides a force with a distinct advantage. The enemy is always trying to react to your activities and not vice versa. The rate at which one force can commit successive, independent acts is called the "tempo". In most campaigns, the ability to maintain a faster tempo than the enemy can lead to a decisive advantage. Therefore, tempo does not imply an ever-increasing speed of operations but rather a competing pace of operational change. Commanders must be aware of the danger of establishing a pace that his force can not maintain. Thus tempo is directly related to sequencing and to culmination. The CF Operations Manual states that tempo is the rate or rhythm of activity relative to the opposition.¹⁶

¹⁵ DND, B-GJ-005-300/FP-000 *Canadian Forces Operations*, Opcit., p.3-1

¹⁶ Ibid., p.3-1

Operational Pause

An operational pause will be planned so that initiative is not unnecessarily forfeited to the opponent. Therefore, operational pause must be sequenced to avoid ceding the initiative to the adversary. While some subordinate forces are required to replenish or reconstitute, others will maintain tempo along another line of operation. Flexibility and a sound campaign plan that ensures an operational reserve and logical constraints will allow operational pausing without sacrificing initiative. The CF Operations Manual states that in order to regenerate fighting power before reaching a culminating point, a commander may find it necessary to plan an operational pause.¹⁷

Joint and Combined Synergy

The conduct of a successful campaign requires the integration of many disparate efforts. Effective action in any single war-fighting function is rarely decisive in and of itself. We obtain maximum impact when we harmonize all war-fighting functions to accomplish the desired strategic objective in the shortest time possible and with minimal casualties. Synergy results when the elements of the joint and combined forces are so effectively employed that their sum total is greater than their individual contributions. Therefore, operations are integrated and synchronized in a manner that applies force from different dimensions to shock, disrupt, and defeat opponents. The CF Operational Planning Process states that establishing unity of effort across components is fundamental to joint and combined operations and constitutes the first step in ensuring a truly joint and combined approach.¹⁸

¹⁷ DND, B-GJ-005-300/FP-000 *Canadian Forces Operations*, Opcit., p.3-2

¹⁸ DND, B-GJ-005-500/FP-000 *CF Operational Planning Process* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2002), p.2-8

Freedom of Action

To allow freedom of action for subordinates, the operational commander must first obtain maximum freedom of action for himself from the strategic authority.¹⁹ Also, sufficient logistic and personnel resources, reasonable and clear limitations, and good operational security contribute to freedom of action at the operational level.

Once the degree of freedom of action has been obtained at the operational level, the commander must decide how much freedom of action that subordinates can be allowed at various stages of the operation. In doing so, the commander must find the correct balance between centralization and decentralization.

Command

Command decisions start and stop action, set objectives, direction, priorities and parameters of the campaign endeavor.²⁰ This function includes the setting of the decision-action cycle and its attendant planning process. It establishes the command support system, specifies the organization of command and command relationships and establishes the battle-space framework for continued operations. Parallel with and complementary to the command process is the exercise of control. Coordination and integration activities such as information operations, air defense, communication and information systems management, special operations and reconnaissance are vital command and control responsibilities within joint and combined forces.

Therefore, the commander must identify subordinate commanders, establish command relationships and devise a command and control organization. In all cases, the campaign

¹⁹ DND, B-GL-300-001/FP-000 *Conduct of Land Operations-Operational Level Doctrine for The Canadian Army* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1998), p.69

²⁰ DND, B-GL-300-001/FP-000 *Conduct of Land Operations-Operational Level Doctrine for The Canadian Army*, Opcit., p.2-9

commander must balance the need for centralized direction with decentralized execution.²¹

Summary of Operational Concepts in Campaign Design

These operational concepts were all present during the Korean War. The ability of various leaders of the campaign to recognize the importance of these operational concepts and then plan and launch a campaign which successfully attained each sequential element can be seen to be one of the key elements of success in the Korean War.

Before analyzing the Korean War at the operational level using these concepts, it is important to understand the Korean War in a proper historical context.

Overview of the Korean War²²

The Korean War lasted for three years and a month and two days from the time that North Korean Army invaded South Korea with a sudden attack on June 25, 1950 until the creation of a cease-fire line on 27 July 1953. During the Korean War the two sides crossed the 38th Parallel three times and advanced and retreated to the south- the Naktong River- and to the north-the Yalu River. The theater of the war reached eighty per cent of the Korea peninsula.

Although it is difficult to divide the Korean War through events, the war can be divided into four phases: Invasion of South Korea by North Korean Forces (June 25 – Sept 15, 1950), Counter Offensive and the march north of the UN forces (Sept 15 – Oct 25, 1950), Intervention of Communist China and re-counter offensive of the UN forces (Oct 25, 1950 – July 10, 1951), and Return to the pre-war line and stalemate (July 10, 1951 – July 27, 1953).²³

²¹ Ibid., p.2-9

²² James F. Schnabel, *Policy and Direction: The First Year* (Center of Military History, US Army, 1992)

This paper will cover the first year of the Korean War - between on 25 June 1950 and on 25 Oct 1950 - because with the entry of China into the conflict, its character was to rapidly change from a war of maneuver to one of static engagements. Whereas the potential for a military solution faded, the impetus for a political settlement to the conflict rose. However, this does not mean that the remainder of the war is not worthy of study, for indeed it contains many valuable lessons about the conduct of war and about the termination and the resolution of conflict.

The Road to War

Korea is a peninsula that shares a common border with Manchuria along the Yalu and Tumen Rivers and touches Russia at the mouth of the Tumen. From the northern bend of the Tumen River to the southern tip of the peninsula, Korea extends some one thousand kilometers. Its width varies from one hundred sixty kilometers at the waist to about three hundred fifty kilometers at the broadest point. The dominant feature of the topography is the mountainous Taebaek chain covering northeastern Korea and running south along the eastern coast. The mountain slopes dip sharply in the east, but are gentler in the west. Rivers to note include the Taedong, Han and Naktong. Roads, railroads and the communications network followed the valleys and mountain passes in this broken terrain. Winters are cold and the bulk of rainfall occurs between the months of April and October.

Essentially a Japanese colony from 1905, Korea was divided at the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945 along the 38th Parallel into separate Soviet and American operational zones. This line of division was arbitrary and was designed to stall any Soviet attempt to occupy the entire peninsula. It cut across lines of communication and separated the primarily agricultural south from the more industrialized north. The north had a

²³ Sangbong Oh, *The Korean War* (ROK Army College, 2003)

population of about nine million in an area of eighty thousand square kilometers, while the south contained almost double the population in less space (sixteen million people in some seventy thousand square kilometers).

As tensions grew between the United States and the Soviet Union soon after the War, Korea suddenly became a focus of the developing rivalry between the emerging superpowers. In 1948, the United Nations general assembly approved in principle a US resolution calling for general elections to be held which would be followed by the withdrawal of foreign troops after a legal government was formed. The Soviet Union made it clear that it would neither tolerate UN observers in the North Korean zone, nor would it consent to a general election there.

Nevertheless, the vote was held in May 1948 in South Korea. A constitution was drawn up and a new president was selected to lead the nation in August of that year. The communist leadership in North Korea reacted by proclaiming the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and announcing that the communist regime had jurisdiction over all Korea. The Soviet Union immediately recognized the government in the north and began to withdraw its troops from the region. The US was willing to match the Soviet withdrawal, but did so more slowly, while leaving behind a small military advisor group.

The political climate continued to deteriorate and clashes of increasing intensity broke out along the 38th Parallel during 1950. A new round of elections held in South Korea in May of that year prompted North Korea's demands that new elections be held to establish a legislative body for all Korea, however South Korea refused.

Invasion of South Korea by the North Korean Forces (June 25 – Sept 15, 1950)

On 25 June 1950 North Korea's well-prepared army invaded South Korea using a sudden attack with the aim of uniting the country under its rule. So quick and effective was the North Korean offensive that after only three days of fighting Communist troops had only a few miles to go to capture the capital, Seoul. Then the North Korean command directed its principal drive southeastward, thus continuing to use the railroad as a line of operations and communications. To occupy the whole country quickly, North Korean army troops also moved down each coast. The United States promptly resisted and quickly intervened with air raids and sent a division of troops from their occupation duties in Japan into South Korea through the port of Pusan. This division then moved forward to help the South Korean army defend against the invaders' main effort along the railroad from Seoul to Pusan.

By the end of July, the North Korean coastal and central lines of operations were converging on the port of Pusan. The North Korean forces had pushed the UN units into a rectangular perimeter only one hundred miles along which the US and South Korean troops defended stubbornly. The North Koreans then devoted August and early September to a series of attacks against this position, held by the US Eighth Army, and South Korean and other UN troops. The northern forces' use of successive attacks enabled the Eighth Army commander to exploit his interior lines of operation by moving reserves quickly from point to point to counter each drive. Meanwhile, the UN air power struck at the enemy's logistics with such effect that it had disabled most trucks, and the trains ran only at night.

Counter Offensive and the March North of the UN forces (Sept 15 – Oct 25, 1950)

By this time the UN commander, General Douglas MacArthur, had accumulated a sufficient reserve force in Japan and was able to execute an amphibious turning movement by landing at Inchon, the port near Seoul. This movement would then put the landing force directly on the lines of communications of the North Korean forces assailing the Pusan perimeter. Preparatory to striking such an obvious objective, the UN command sought to distract the enemy with air and sea threats against the coast at five different locations. So, when the army and marine troops of Tenth Corps landed on 15 September 1950, they found the bulk of the North Korean army still besetting the Pusan position. The difficult landing worked well, with the Tenth Corps soon cutting the railroad, gaining the airport, and then capturing Seoul.

With the main route of retreat thus closed, the North Koreans, deprived of their fuel supplies, had to leave behind most of their motorized equipment, including tanks and artillery. Because an immediate offensive by the UN forces in the Pusan position further complicated its withdrawal, the once so-formidable North Korean army retreated by dispersing. Many found their way to the north by crossing the one hundred miles of border between Seoul and the east coast. Others took refuge in the mountains in the south. Thus the victorious turning movement regained South Korea but brought no big bag of prisoners and left a legacy of northern troops in southern mountains from which they harried the country with their raids. This threat occupied the US Ninth Corps in October 1950.

The UN soldiers wanted to pursue the beaten foe into North Korea to destroy those feeble remnants that had escaped northward, thus completing the victory of the combat strategy of the turning movement. Because this action would unite Korea under South

Korean leaders' rule, South Korean political leaders also favored it. For this very reason, the invasion of a *de facto* independent country, had considerable political significance. Nevertheless, the UN sanctioned it, and the UN forces pushed north; ahead lay a hostile country and the Yalu River, which divided North Korea from China.

Accordingly, the UN forces planned an offensive with the Eighth Army advancing directly north and the Tenth Corps making another landing, this time on the east coast. Meanwhile, South Korean troops pushed north at the beginning of October, advancing fifteen miles per day in spite of some determined opposition. But late in October they encountered Chinese troops in considerable strength near the Yalu River.

Operational Level Analysis of the Korean War

Now I will achieve the focus of this paper by studying the conduct of operations through the lens of current operational concepts to show that the UN forces had a superior operational design to the North Korean forces. While this may distort some of the events described as I try to place them in the context of today's doctrinal concepts and terminology, the enduring aspects of operational art will allow me to draw a number of lessons and deductions.

End State

Although never described using this term, the desired end state for this campaign can be estimated by the operational objectives. The campaign of 1950 demonstrated this clearly, in that major battles and actions were focused on achieving the directed end state, and the linkage between the political and military objectives.

From the North Korean perspective, the end state was the unification of the Korean peninsula under the communist regime.²⁴ The North's basic strategy remained to be: occupation of Seoul within 3 days, overthrow of the ROK government by popular revolts, seizure of all of Korea before the deployment of US troops, and establishment of a unified people's government by the fifth anniversary of Korea's liberation. However, the objective was not achieved by September 1950.

From the United Nations perspective, from early in the campaign the end state was obvious - the clearance of North Korean forces from South Korea.²⁵ The guidance to UN Command Far East Command, then commanded by General Douglas MacArthur, was to drive forward to the 38th parallel, thus clearing the Republic of Korea of invasion forces. UN forces achieved the objective by October 1950. Later, as the political imperatives changed, the end state became the destruction of the North and a post-conflict landscape that would lead to the re-unification of Korea under Seoul's leadership.²⁶ The UN resolution on 7 October 1950 required that all necessary steps be taken to ensure conditions of stability throughout Korea. The second objective was achieved, temporarily at least, by November 1950.

Center of Gravity

In the opening stages of the Korean War, both sides readily identified their opponent's operational center of gravity and focused their military action accordingly.

The North Korean Command saw Seoul as South Korea's operational center of gravity in the beginning.²⁷ Without Seoul, the people would grow discontented with the

²⁴ Allan R. Millett, *The Korean War-Volume I*(University of Nebraska Press, 2001), p.42, pp.102-120

²⁵ James F. Schnabel, *Policy and Direction: The First Year*, Opcit.,pp.77-79

²⁶ *Obid.*, p.183

²⁷ Allan R. Millett, *The Korean War-Volume I*, Opcit.,pp.113-115

Syngman Rhee government and would rise up and overthrow the South Korean regime. Later in the conflict the North Korean Command saw the port of Pusan as the US and UN's operational center of gravity.²⁸ Without Pusan, the UN forces could not sustain ground operations in the Korean peninsula, air action would also have been severely limited, and the South Korean forces would be unable to withstand the onslaught without the support of the UN and additional combat forces. The drive by the North Korean forces to Pusan, at considerable risk, demonstrates this focus. This changed center of gravity was due to the non-existence of popular revolts, strong resistance by South Korean forces, and rapid deployment of the US troops.

For the US and UN's part, MacArthur recognized from the beginning that the operational center of gravity for North Korean was their ability to sustain their operations over stretched lines of communication.²⁹ If the US and UN forces disrupted or cut these lines then the North Korean forces would need to fall back on their supply bases. Once they gained room to maneuver, UN forces would be able to outfight the North Korean forces. Later in the campaign as his strategic direction changed, MacArthur focused on the North Korean army itself as the operational center of gravity; its destruction would allow the UN to occupy North Korea and eliminate any major armed resistance to the planned re-unification.³⁰

Decisive Points and Lines of Operation

The Inchon landing by the Tenth Corps and the North Korea forces thrust to Pusan offer interesting contrasts in following lines of operation. The effect gained by the maneuver through Inchon was profound. It struck directly at the enemy operational center

²⁸ Obid., pp.115-120

²⁹ Obid., pp.591-594

³⁰ Obid., pp.738-750

of gravity, dislocating him to the point where he had no choice but to withdraw and, but for the intervention of the Chinese forces, would have led to his inevitable defeat. MacArthur was single-minded in this and refused pressure to be distracted from this line of operation, neither by delaying its execution nor by selecting an objective other than Inchon.

For the North Korean forces, the effectiveness of their line of operation to Pusan was reduced by an attempt to reduce logistical risk. The effort and the rate of advance of the North Korean forces thrust to Pusan was diluted by actions to secure ports from Kunsan to Yosu which would be used to supply the enveloping force. The result was to give time for the UN forces to interpose sufficient strength to stop the North Korean Sixth Division and supporting formations. The ports were not decisive points in that they added nothing to the weakening of the UN center of gravity and added little protection to the North Korean operational center of gravity. The cost, however, was in time - time that could not be recovered.

Sequencing

The North Korean failure to defeat the UN forces in Pusan can be directly related to the concept of sequencing. Simply put, sequencing is the arrangement of events within a campaign in the order most likely to achieve the elimination of the enemy center of gravity. The North Koreans should have defeated the UN forces before attempting to secure additional ports. However, the North Korean Sixth Division did not advance toward Pusan, but maneuvered toward the southwestern region. This prevented the North Korean from allocating resources effectively over time and reached a culminating point.

The application of UN air and naval power on the North Korean lines of communication, even before the situation had stabilized around Pusan, is an example of military action being mounted to meet the longer term operational level requirement rather than immediate tactical needs. While the disruption of the lines of communication probably resulted in limited discernible effect on the close battle, its effects were crucial when UN forces moved to regain the initiative through the operational maneuver based on Inchon.

This mastery of sequencing by MacArthur is again seen in the readiness with which he changed the chronology of events when entering North Korea, including the timing and use of his airborne forces. The longer term view of the impact of events is yet another characteristic that distinguishes the operational level commander as campaign planner from the tactical level commander as battle captain.

Maneuver

The actions by the Tenth Corps at Inchon and the North Korean Sixth Division in the Pusan perimeter were different to be highlighted relates to the concept of maneuver as executed by each side.

While the goal of maneuver – to incapacitate the North Korean forces through the disruption of lines of communication, by the turning movement – was achieved by the UN forces at Inchon, the decisive engagement of the North Korean Sixth Division into a battle of attrition in its drive towards Pusan foiled the chance of exploiting operational maneuver to their advantage. Maneuver involves battle at the time and choosing of the commander. MacArthur fought at Inchon, at the time and place which suited him and

which had the most telling effect on the enemy. The failure of the North Koreans in their drive for Pusan is largely attributable to their not exploiting their lines of operation.

Tempo

The North Korean invasion, and especially their rapid crossing of rivers immediately upon reaching them and without waiting for heavier support, did not allow the Republic of Korea and US forces to react effectively. One obvious result of this pressure is seen by the cancellation of plans prepared by MacArthur's staff for an amphibious landing in early July.

The North Koreans passed the amphibious landing sites well before any operation could be mounted. The initiative gained by superior tempo passed from the North Koreans as they closed in on the Pusan perimeter and as they began to suffer from the relentless attacks on their lines of communication. MacArthur's air and naval operations, along with the use of reserves in the Pusan perimeter saw the superior tempo pass to the UN forces. Of course, the Inchon landing and supporting breakout made the advantage complete. MacArthur overwhelmed the enemy by synchronized, simultaneous tactical activity that he applied without respite.

Operational Pause and Culmination

MacArthur imposed a short operational pause at the end of September to allow his force to prepare for the actions to follow in North Korea. He was confident that while the pause would allow his forces to be better prepared for what was likely to be fierce fighting, the enemy was in no state to gain any notable advantage from the pause.

The North Koreans, however, were exhausted by August and had reached a culminating point. The North Koreans were able to contain the UN forces while they

were on the defensive, but they could not penetrate the Pusan perimeter and when the break out began, they could hold for only a short time and then faced destruction. What needs to be noted is that forces that have reached a culminating point find it almost impossible to recover while still engaged in combat. The North Korean forces were not given the opportunity to recover.

Joint and Combined Synergy

The actions in Korea involved all services and forces from several nations even though the ground forces of most of the contributing nations had yet to arrive in any significant numbers during the period under consideration.

In the early stages, once air superiority was achieved, US and Australian P-51 Mustangs were the only aircraft capable of operating from the rough strips to provide close air support, while B-29 Super Fortresses were employed on longer range missions in support of ground forces. The newer jet fighters lacked bomb racks and had limited endurance over the battlefield. Air power was in fact decisive during the first few months. The interdiction campaign and the close air support provided by the air forces and naval aviation helped disrupt enemy movement and gained precious time for the UN forces. Not surprisingly, the rate of tactical support increased significantly during the battle of the Pusan perimeter. For example, on 2 September 1950, the US Second and Twenty-fifth Divisions received three hundred close support sorties.

During August, the Far East Air Force, by then under the operational control of MacArthur, began the strategic bombing of North Korean industrial targets. However, as an indication of things to come in a later Asian war, this bombing effort had limited military effectiveness due to the establishment of supply sanctuaries in Manchuria and

the Soviet Union. Further, the North Koreans made a determined and somewhat successful effort to exploit the propaganda value of the effects of collateral damage to civilians. The interdiction of North Korean lines of communication also realized only limited success due mainly to the lack of ground action to capitalize on any one advantage, and the lack of precision weapons to pinpoint targets of high military value. However, the interdiction campaign mounted in conjunction with the Inchon landing had a devastating effect on the North Koreans who were unable to repair their lines of communication and in the subsequent rout were badly mauled by air power if caught moving by day. Thus it is fair to say that the retreat of the North Korean forces after Inchon was the direct result of the combined effects of ground and air action. Subsequently, in the UN forces advance to the Yalu, the ground forces were heavily dependent on air re-supply, and complemented their push with the coordinated use of airborne forces.

The action at Inchon and the landings at Wonsan and Iwon, were of course only possible through the participation of naval forces. Apart from the amphibious landings and the substantial contribution of naval aviation to the air campaign, the naval forces maintained a successful blockade of North Korea, provided naval gunfire support and used minesweepers to open points of entry denied by enemy minefields.

Freedom of Action

Like a chess game, without freedom of action, there can be no maneuver. In the opening phase of the campaign, the North Korean forces enjoyed freedom of action and demonstrated skillful maneuver. The Republic of Korea and United States ground forces

within the peninsula were fully committed, as discussed above and were simply fighting for survival. They did not enjoy freedom of action.

This changed as the Pusan perimeter hardened and was reinforced, and as the North Korean elements became fully committed. Nevertheless, throughout the bleak early stages of the war, MacArthur searched for ways to exercise some initiative to ensure that he retained some measure of freedom of action. His aggressive use of air and naval power gave him this opportunity and proved to be critical as events transpired. Later, as he was reinforced, he gained the combat power that could be deployed to exploit enemy weaknesses. The commitment of the US marine elements to the Pusan perimeter to stabilize the situation rather than holding them in reserve for the Inchon landing, demonstrates that the ability to exploit freedom of action may well vary during a campaign. However, the opportunity to find operational flexibility must always be sought by a commander.

Consequently both the UN forces and the North Korean forces were better at exploiting freedom of action.

Command

It is difficult to identify where command at the operational level was exercised by the North Korean forces, but it would appear that strategic level direction and operational level planning remained intertwined and that North Korean General Chai Ung Jun was limited in the latitude or freedom of action that he could exercise in the drive South.

In the case of the UN forces, it is more obvious where operational command was exercised. General MacArthur was clearly operating at the operational level. The unity of General MacArthur's command was considerable. At the outbreak of hostilities, he was

the commander-in-chief of the Far East, responsible primarily for the occupation of Japan and the protection of Taiwan. The UN resolution of 7 July 1950 included a recommendation for the creation of a unified command in Korea and requested the US to name the commander. On 8 July 1950, MacArthur was designated commanding general of the military forces and 14 July 1950, Republic of Korea President Syngman Rhee placed his nation's forces under MacArthur's command. Later in August, as commander-in-chief of the UN Command, MacArthur assumed command of the Far East Air Forces and the US Naval Forces Far East that had been officially transferred as part of the UN Command. This served as a precedent for subsequent attachment of other UN naval and air forces to the command. Armed with such sweeping authority, MacArthur was able to plan the use of his forces, including their allocation to subordinate commanders, with supreme confidence and achieve unity of effort and action of alliances.

Therefore, his command was the one that received strategic direction, at times from both the military and political strategic levels. These instructions included the strategic aims sought, although strategic end state at times were perhaps not so clear.

The historical record of warfare generally presents an orderly picture of war since, to make any sense at all of what happened in past wars, historians must necessarily record war's chaos in an orderly fashion. However, the orderly record of war tends to ignore or downplay the impact of chaos and confusion which invariably accompanies the conduct of war. Relying solely on a historical record which portrays battles, campaigns, and wars as a series of neat red and blue lines and boxes on a map which in many cases may not

have even existed at the time of the conflict is not enough to understand war. Understanding war means understanding its inherent chaos.

In this aspect, the Korean War is worth studying. Although the Korean War has become “The Forgotten War”, “The Unknown War”, or “The War before Vietnam”, ten thousand books and countless articles have been written since the war and many experts have actively studied the War. However, most publications have limited their scope to the discussions of battles – the tactical perspective, or national policy – the strategic perspective, and have not necessarily addressed the chaos associated with war. In addition, North Korea has never changed its military policy and strategy – the communization of the entire Korean peninsula. Since the Korean War, North Korea has thoroughly prepared and improved its military to be ready for another war based on the lessons learned from the Korean War.³¹

I have analyzed the Korean War through the lens of operational perspective to in order to understand war. Success in war depends simply on balancing the ends, ways, and means of war related to the five questions about any war from each of the three perspectives of war because war is inherently chaotic. The operational perspective of war is the essential link between the strategic and tactical perspectives. The strategic perspective provides the widest view, and includes all the elements of national power at the highest level of planning and conducting war, while at the lowest levels of execution the tactical perspective provides the narrowest view of war as it concentrates of the direct application of military power. Between the narrow tactical perspective and the broad strategic perspective lies the operational perspective. Viewing war from the operational perspective must take broad direction from the national political and military leadership

³¹ Republic of Korea, *Defense White Paper* (The Ministry of National Defense, 2000), p.47

with its strategic perspective of war and translate that broad direction into the specific military action to be taken by commanders with a tactical perspective of war. Each view must complement the other two. Having identified the operational level of war, it is now appropriate to examine what functions are performed at that level. It is usually at this level that strategic goals will be translated into military action; this activity is generally known as campaign planning. For campaign planning, there are several operational concepts that are fundamental to the design and conduct of campaigns. These concepts are also planning tools for campaign design.

This paper has discussed, using an operational level analysis of the Korean War employing operational concepts in campaign design, that UN forces excelled at the concepts of operational art and campaign planning even before such concepts were accepted doctrine.

This view of the operational level of war and of campaign planning can do no more than highlight some of the more important tasks and considerations that are associated with command at this level. It should be regarded as no more than a basic primer, a prelude to further and deeper study. And further study is indeed required for it will have been clear from what has gone before that the operational commander has no easy task. Having interpreted what is required of him by national strategic objectives, he must devise a sequence of operations that will lead him to the achievement of those objectives. His decisions in this planning phase will be greatly influenced by his perceptions of enemy intentions and capabilities and by the extent to which his own side's military strategy is able to support him in terms of resources. And once the fighting has started the operational commander will have to decide where and when to deploy his campaign

winning assets and reserves and where and when he should bank his gains and prepare for the enemy's counter move. If he makes the right decisions, then he will be able to claim that he is a true exponent of the operational art.

During peacetime, education in operational art and campaign planning must rely heavily upon the historical study of past conflicts. Consideration of campaigns and the actions of senior military commanders in them contribute to a better understanding of the operational level of war and provide a firm basis for formulation of operational doctrine. Fortunately, since the introduction of operational art to my country – South Korea – in 2000, many officers have studied and developed the doctrine of operational art. As one of these officers, I hope that this paper has helped me gain a greater understanding of the development of the operational doctrine as it applies to the art of war.

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