

Trouble *with* Doctrine?

By DAVID H. GURNEY

It will do what good doctrine ought to do, which is to stimulate thought. It's not a template. I don't think it's going to be a rigid set of prescriptions. But what it will do, I think, will be to stimulate thought and to be the basis of ever-developing practice in this field.

—Department of State Counselor Eliot Cohen
Signing Ceremony for the U.S. Government
Interagency Counterinsurgency Guide
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JFQ readers are accustomed to seeing one or more essays on various aspects of joint thought, usually challenging or expanding extant doctrine. In this issue, we present opposing views of *systemic operational design*, which—unlike effects-based operations, explored in previous editions of *JFQ*—is targeted primarily at commanders and their key subordinates and less toward staffs in their supporting and secondary roles. *JFQ* sponsors these debates in hopes of contributing materially to the refinement of ideas necessary to keep the institutional wisdom that is joint doctrine right and relevant.

It is fashionable for those advocating various aspects of joint thought to opine that joint doctrine is somehow faulty, and to conclude that because of its often unspecified deficiencies, military strategists, operational planners, and commanders fail to see the “big picture.” Such a perception was recently given voice by retired Brigadier General Huba Wass de Czege when he asserted in the January-February edition of *Military Review* that “current doctrine needs to provide more wisdom about how to help the command think critically and creatively as a team.” But is the problem really with doctrine? Or could the problem be elsewhere, such as doctrinal familiarity or policy? Joint doctrine presents fundamental principles that guide the employment of forces, and commanders must exercise judgment in selecting courses of action appropriate to the unique circumstances prevailing at the time of decision. “Policy” is more fundamentally about specified choices and it is directive, whereas “doctrine” is authoritative advice. This difference is important because policy restraints and constraints are among the unique circumstances providing context to decisions.

In the Winter 2009 issue of *World Affairs Journal*, H.R. McMaster asserts that in both Vietnam and Iraq, it was not doctrine but rather policy that was responsible for the conceit “that the United States had discovered the secret of using violence with minimal uncertainty and a high degree of efficiency: the mere demonstration of American military prowess, policymakers argued at the outset of both conflicts, would be sufficient to alter the behavior of the enemy.” Senior military leaders provide recommendations on feasible military options, resources required, and anticipated consequences of military action, as well as the military requirements for conflict termination. The interaction between senior military leaders and policymakers is largely confidential, and therefore some elements of strategy are difficult to trace. After reading the arguments of Colonel Richard Swain and Professor Milan Vego that follow, the questions for *JFQ* readers to ponder are: Do we indeed have defective or deficient doctrine? Are military professionals insufficiently familiar with extant joint doctrine? Or are the issues elsewhere, specifically in the policies imposed? **JFQ**

Effects-based Thinking in Joint Doctrine

By JOINT STAFF J7 JOINT DOCTRINE
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Much discussion in *Joint Force Quarterly* and other media has occurred lately regarding what can broadly be called “effects-based ideas.” To bring clarity to this debate, it is worthwhile to consider exactly what published U.S. joint doctrine says—and does not say—on this topic.

For the record, one does not find the terms (or their related acronyms) *effects-based operations* (EBO) or *effects-based approaches to operations* (EBAO) anywhere in the 77-volume U.S. joint doctrine hierarchy. Furthermore, one does not find the terms (or acronyms) *operational net assessment* (ONA) or *system-of-systems analysis* (SoSA). What one does find is the inclusion of the term *effects* as an element of operational design—one of 17 such elements provided as “tools to help commanders and their staffs visualize the campaign or operation and shape the [concept of operations]” (see Joint Publication [JP] 3–0, *Joint Operations*, IV–5).

Current joint doctrine promotes a “Systems Perspective of the Operational Environment” (see JP 3–0, chapters II and IV). This perspective—or better understanding—“supports operational design by enhancing elements such as centers of gravity, lines of operations, and decisive points. This allows commanders and their staffs to consider a broader set of options to focus limited resources, create desired effects, avoid undesired effects, and achieve objectives.”

Not surprisingly, JP 5–0, *Joint Operation Planning*, takes the above into account as it details its subject matter. It would have been incomplete and inconsistent with JP 3–0 if it did not—something the joint doctrine community finds unacceptable.

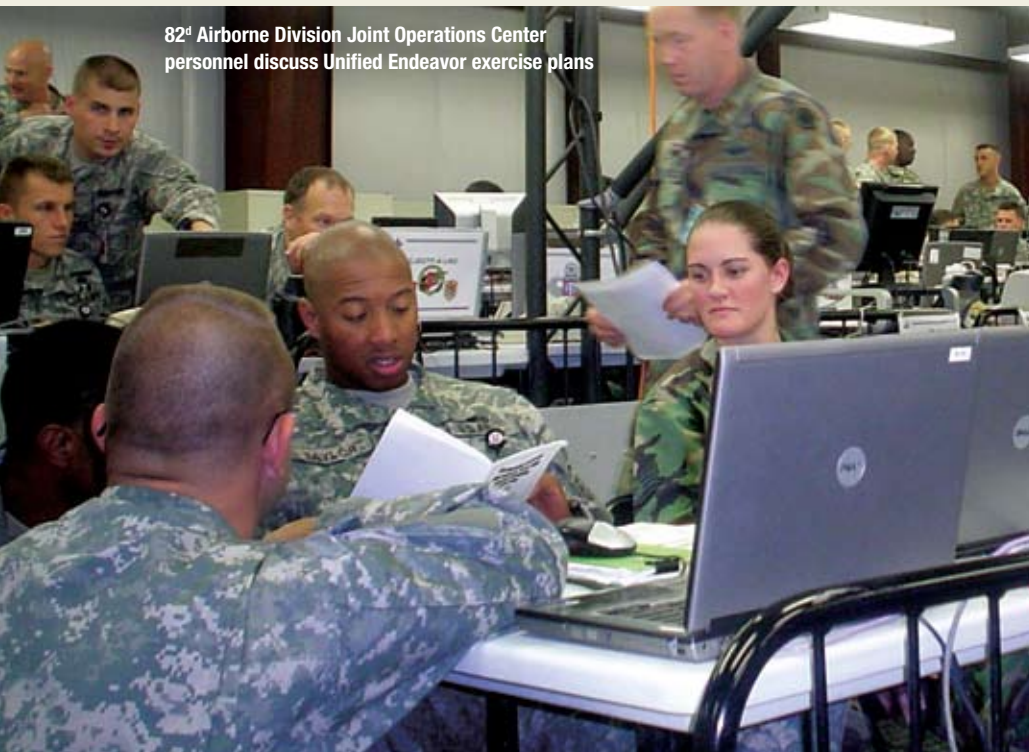
The “systems perspective” and the inclusion of “effects” as an element of operational design in both JP 3–0 and JP 5–0 should not be construed as U.S. joint doctrine blanket acceptance of EBO/EBAO in the fullness of

those ideas. Even considering that there is no definitive treatise on what constitutes EBO/EBAO, a nonpartisan analysis of the center mass of EBO/EBAO thinking would show that the bulk of the construct was *not* incorporated into joint doctrine. Authors on both sides of the discussion would do well to note the above and focus their arguments accordingly.

Two things pertain to the future of this discussion. First, it would benefit from homing in on the two topics included in current joint doctrine as recounted above. The question is not one of EBO/EBAO; instead, it goes directly to the relative efficacy of including “effects” as an element of operational design. A sample line of inquiry might consider if the construct of “effects”—in the context of articulating conditions to be established (or avoided)—helps or hinders clarification of the relationship of objectives and tasks in achieving an end. There are other such questions to be raised and analyzed. Regarding a “systems perspective,” this too would benefit from a careful parsing. Does the inclusion of this perspective suggest a universal truth that aids planning and assessment, or does the argument centered on key differences in system theory (related to closed, linear systems versus open, nonlinear systems) undercut the utility and practical applicability of the perspective?

Second, interested parties should note that both JP 3–0 and JP 5–0 are in formal assessment with a mind toward beginning revision in 2009. Joint doctrine purports to be recorded wisdom about our fundamental business in the Armed Forces, and wisdom is gained over time as ideas gain or lose stature on their own merits, clarity, and effectiveness. Arguments regarding “effects-based ideas” scoped with this in mind would provide good service to the shared goal of having joint doctrine that is both right and relevant. **JFQ**

82nd Airborne Division Joint Operations Center personnel discuss Unified Endeavor exercise plans



U.S. Navy (Chris Helfrauer)