

World War IV: The Operational Level of War

As America's Strategy in this first phase of WW IV should be Defense, contain Muslims in the Islamic world until Islamist ideas die, so should America's Operational Level of War be very much the Offense. So, it has been. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) invaded Afghanistan, defeated the Taliban, set up an election and polices the frontier, like the U.S. Cavalry in our West or the Roman Legions on the borders of civilization. Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) invaded Iraq, defeated Saddam Hussein, set up an election and tries to impose peace among warring factions. Our Iraqis have the upper hand, but it isn't a done deal. Our Operational art of war may determine the outcome.

The Operational level of war is above Tactics, usually viewed as Corps to numbered Army size of several Divisions, and below Strategy. "Campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted, and sustained to accomplish strategic objectives within theaters or other operational areas." (DoD definition). Wars are won by winning at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. The U.S. was superb, tactically, and terrible, operationally, in the Vietnam War. The Principles of War (Mass, Objective, Offensive, Surprise, Economy of Force, Maneuver, Unity of Command, Security and Simplicity) are very important. The Operational Level tends to be as much the Art of War as the Science of War.

So far, OEF triumphed in Afghanistan and now holds the frontier. OIF won Iraq's first phase, but stumbled where "these activities imply a broader dimension of time or space than do tactics; they ensure the logistic and administrative support of tactical forces, and provide the means by which tactical successes are exploited to achieve strategic objectives" (DoD definition). Secretary Rumsfeld browbeat the Regional Component Commander, GEN (RET) Tommy Franks, despite his denials, into submission and the omission of 'mass'. Not enough troops, and not deploying the 4th Infantry Division sooner, left the lines of communication to Baghdad insecure. Throughout 2003-04 the insurgents grew in a near vacuum. The U.S. should learn from Operational mistakes.

Operational Offensive in a Strategic Defense means the ability to go anywhere in the world and utterly defeat any armed forces there. It means going at the place and time of America choosing to attack – with impunity. Not arrogance which causes casualties, but impunity. Every enemy of the U.S. should go to sleep at night knowing that if the Americans know where he is, they can come any day to kill and destroy anything and everything he cares about. Furthermore, the Americans can leave as quickly as they came and there is nothing the enemy can do to stop it.

If the U.S. maintains and enhances this Operational capability, it will have to engage it less often. Few enemies want to die for nothing. The exception to the rule for the U.S. is when enemies present a clear and present danger across a country. When a raid or punitive expedition won't end the threat, the invasion and destruction of the enemy threat must be followed by an occupation. This should not happen very often in long decades of WW IV to come. But, we must have the forces, that means an active Army of 600k to

800k and all the Allies we can get, when needed.

Since, WW IV is a war of competing ideas, every military operation should turn more Muslims away from Islamist ideas. Sometimes, like OIF, that might not be possible in the short term. Someday, depending on how Islam evolves, it may be totally impossible – or not. We'll have to see how the war changes. Regardless, Operations must support the strategy.

Good operations require better intelligence and understanding of the enemy. Human Intelligence (HUMINT) needs to be expanded for years and years. It's very imperfect and very necessary to fight a culture which is so far behind as to be barbaric compared to the West. Know your enemy.

Which is why I encouraged my classmate, MG 'Rick' Olson, to take Asprey's *War in the Shadows* (both volumes) with him as commander of ground troops in Afghanistan. There is a lot to learn from the French tactical/operational total victory but strategic defeat in Algeria (1954-62). Also, the nature of operations during U.S. Indian Wars (1608-1892) shows how a war between cultures shifts with each tribe. The Operational Level of War for WW IV will change through the dynamic that war is – as a test of human wills. The trick is to modify first and better.

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