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## The “Tactical” Leaders of Tomorrow

Tyler J. Sweatt

The Army must relook how it trains junior leaders for tactical decision making in combat by first redefining what tactical decision making entails. No longer are junior leaders solely responsible for executing battle drills and maneuvering squads and fire teams. We must stop training them to this limited scope. Junior leaders must not only understand, but also display competency at fusing traditional tactical decision making, troop leading procedures, American foreign policy, and the culture of the region in their area of operations. This is no small task and as such requires a significant amount of attention in the training and development programs currently in place today. This must start at the commissioning source and continue throughout the career path of today’s Army officer.

Counterinsurgency (COIN) is defined in Joint Publication 3-24: *Counterinsurgency Operations* as “comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances.” The tactical level of war as defined by FM 3-90: *Tactics* is “the level of war at which battles and engagements are planned and executed to accomplish military objectives assigned to tactical units or task forces. Activities at this level focus on the ordered arrangement and maneuver of combat elements in relation to each other and to the enemy to achieve combat operations.” As defined in the more recent FM 3-0 *Operations*, tactics is defined as “the employment and ordered arrangement of forces in relation to each other. Through tactics, commanders use combat power to accomplish missions. The tactical-level commander uses combat power in battles, engagements, and small unit actions. A battle consists of a set of related engagements that lasts longer and involves larger forces than the engagement. Battles can affect the course of a campaign or major operation. An engagement is a tactical conflict, usually between opposing, lower echelons maneuver forces. Engagements are typically conducted at brigade level and below. They are usually short, executed in terms of minutes, hours, or days.”

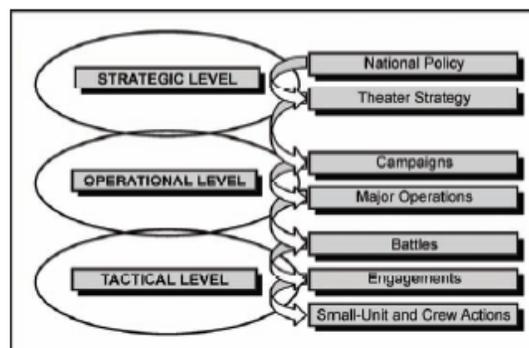


Figure 6-1. Levels of war

Source: FM 3-0: *Operations*

There are a number of critical factors which are not addressed anywhere in the above definitions concerning tactics, especially those required for successful execution of COIN policy in today's operating environment. Tactical leaders are no longer solely executing maneuver independent of strategic policy. Junior leaders must be able to critically apply their working knowledge of strategic objectives, operational goals, cultural and tribal environments, and host nation policies.

By limiting the scope of tactics and the tactical level of war to simple maneuver and use of force, the Army fails to fully employ its greatest asset, the junior leader. The junior leader is the ambassador of US foreign policy and current military policy to the most important target audience, the host nation population. While the responsibility to convey military policy to domestic sources still lies with politicians and strategic level military officials, the daunting task of delivering and explaining that policy to those whose nation we are providing support to, exists solely at the tactical level of warfare. The current gap between national policy and theater strategy no longer exists, and we must address this in our education of tactics to junior leaders, at the commissioning source as well as the Basic Officer Leader Course.

This is not a statement advocating a complete paradigm shift towards COIN, but rather an expansion of the expectations of tactical leaders, and subsequently the training afforded to them. By expanding the scope of tactical warfare, and tactics as a whole, one is able to more clearly articulate and capture the expectations and requirements which will be levied on future junior leaders. Regardless of whether the United States Army is engaged in COIN or conventional conflict in the future, junior leaders are now expected to deliver more than simple maneuver and battle drills. By not including things such as civil affairs and information operations within the discussions of tactics and tactical level of warfare, one assumes incorrectly that these types of operations are reserved for the operational level of warfare, and thus, only operational commanders play a role in their planning and execution. This is not the case. Today's junior leader should be, as Dr. David Kilcullen puts it "practicing armed civil affairs," in order to establish legitimacy with both the government and local population. Aspects of this will surely include maneuvering squads in engagements or battles, but this should be taught as tactics in their purest form, as day to day operations within the tactical level of warfare and contemporary operating environment.

Strategic initiatives and tactical orders must be fused within junior leaders as they now implement and represent US foreign policy strategy almost in real time given current media capabilities. The training programs must change in order to prepare future junior leaders to deal with the current tactical environment. Short term, the goal must be to produce young leaders who can adapt to the COIN environment, and who are familiar enough with COIN theory and history to understand implications of decisions they make within the tactical level of warfare. They must grasp Mao's old adage that "The guerilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea," and see the value and converse of that statement in their daily operations. They must understand culture and policy issues, both at home and abroad, and they must possess the ability to craft plans and operations within the constraints of the above, while still executing traditional tactical missions. Long term, the goal is to produce scholar-soldiers, capable of fluctuating between conventional and unconventional strategy, tactics, and operating environments in real time. This should be accomplished through overhauling the academic programs within the military and raising the bar for promotions and accountability among

leaders. This must start at the commissioning source. The only way to incorporate all of these skills is to redefine tactics, the tactical level of warfare, and readjust the training to encompass as much.

The Army must provide its junior leaders with the tools to be successful. Junior leaders must understand US domestic and foreign policy, they must understand the national policies of the region of the world they are serving in, as well as the culture. They must be media savvy, articulate, and they must retain the ability to deliver precision violence onto the enemies of the United States. The goal must be to produce soldier-statesmen, who can maneuver soldiers under fire, reinforce host nation government and US policy in meetings with local tribesmen, deliver articulate statements to the press, and do all of this nearly simultaneously and while exhibiting restraint and respecting the cultural sensitivities of the host nation. This is no easy task, and there is no single solution, or single document to read which will complete the dynamic overhaul which is required, but change must be made.

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