

Visualizing Transition from the “Bottom Up” Observations from Joint Urban Warrior 2008

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Joint Urban Warrior 2008 (JUW 08) was a United States Marine Corps (USMC) and United States Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM) cosponsored seminar wargame that was designed to objectively observe and capture operational insights during a forces drawdown from an Irregular Warfare operation/environment.¹ Participants were presented with an “OIF-like” scenario and asked to drawdown current US and Coalition forces to an “advisory organization” in two years. Using the JUW 08 scenario, participants created many visualization tools to help them describe what a two-year drawdown of forces/*event-driven transition* would look like from their viewpoint. This paper discusses a doctrine-based visualization tool developed during JUW 08 that both military and non-military participants found to be especially useful. This particular model was successful because it allowed participants to look at transition from the viewpoint of a tactical commander, or from the “Bottom Up.”²

Insights from using the “Bottom up” Approach Visualization Tool

The primary observation from using the “bottom up” approach was that *functions* were being transitioned to host nation or non-governmental organizations. From this key insight, participants developed several other insights. First, it was established that it is the timing of when functions are to be transitioned that should determine the future form (organization) of US forces; not the other way around. Second, an event-driven transition in an uncertain environment will require commanders to retain specific functions and capabilities to mitigate risks. And, third, by listing a function as transitioned on a chart doesn’t necessarily indicate a completed action. In many instances some form of “overwatch” will be needed until a “good enough” point is reached by the organization to which the function is transitioned.

¹ Joint Urban Warrior 2008 was held from 7-11 April 2008 in Potomac, Maryland.

² The “Bottom up” model discussed in this paper was created by participants in the JUW 08 “Experimental” Blue Cell which included a mix of officers and representatives from the USMC, USAF, USA, SOCOM, the Department of State, multi-national forces, and several academic institutions. Looking at the problem from the “Bottom up” was part of the JUW 08 exercise design.

From “Top down” to “Bottom up” Methodology

Initial seminar discussions about an event-driven transition in the context of the given scenario were generally from a national, strategic or operational viewpoint. This top down approach generated a lot of interesting discourse about future US and world politics, but these discussions provided little insight into how best support a tactical commander given the mission to conduct an event-driven transition in a specific geographical area. However, what was agreed upon was that tactical level units do not plan at only the tactical level. Reflecting on recent OEF and OIF experiences, participants determined that many “tactical” commanders use what doctrine defines as operational art more than they use tactics.³

Using the top down approach, participants had initially planned to first determine what the endstate advisory organization would look like and then “wargame” this organization using the JUW 08 scenario. Trying to agree on all of the assumptions needed to approach the problem in this manner proved to be a difficult undertaking for a room full of people with diverse backgrounds. To aid in the development of needed assumptions, participants changed their methodology by focusing on several division-sized areas of operation and approaching transition from the “Bottom up,” or from the tactical commander’s point of view. This change in approach to framing the problem was possible because of the earlier observation that many tactical commanders were already using operational planning doctrine to plan their operations.

This approach is best explained in the recently published TRADOC Pam 525-5-500, Commander’s Appreciation and Campaign Design (CACD), which explains; “Traditional planning processes implicitly assume that plans and orders from higher headquarters have framed the problem for their subordinates. CACD recognizes that orders flow from higher to lower, but understanding often flows from lower to higher, especially when operational problems are complex. In these cases, a commander is often in a better position than his superiors to understand the full scope of a complex operational problem. Thus, it is more likely that commanders at all levels will frame the problem themselves and then share their understanding with their superiors and subordinates.”

Initial Development of the “Bottom up” Visualization Tool

In contrast to the conditions-based transition currently being conducted in OIF, participants in JUW 08 were confronted with an event-driven transition best described as “a drawdown of current US forces to an advisory organization in two years.” For a commander, the doctrinal way to approach this type of problem is through the process of developing situational understanding, determining a desired end state, then envisioning

³ See TRADOC PAM 525-5-500, p 12. “Some of what the average battalion commander does today is much more like operational art than tactics.”

the broad sequence of events by which the force will achieve that end state.⁴ Using this doctrinal approach to commander's visualization, participants set about framing the problem.

Starting with the current situation column in figure 1, participants identified the unit's current organization and the functions it was responsible for. It was then determined which of these capabilities or functions had to be retained in some form for as long as US forces were present in the unit's Area of Operation (AO). These essential functions or capabilities such as protection and sustainment were categorized as "enduring functions." Identifying specific host nation governmental, non-governmental and security organizations that these capabilities or functions will be transitioned to completed the current situation column.

Determining the desired end state for the transition of functions seemed straightforward at first. Participants listed all of the functions except those determined to be enduring as "transitioned" in the desired end state column of Figure 1 and then started to discuss what the end state organization should look like. It soon became clear that specifying the exact form of an advisory organization 2-3 years in the future would not be in the best interest of the units tasked with transitioning functions to host nation organizations. Each successive commander would be confronted with a different, continuously changing operational environment. An advisory organization of some type was the desired end state for US and Coalition forces, but a standardized organization was not the answer. Participants determined that to go further they needed an understanding of how a commander would approach this changing environment dynamic.

⁴ Commander's visualization is the mental process of developing situational understanding, determining a desired end state, and envisioning the broad sequence of events by which the force will achieve that end state. See FM 3-0 dated 27 Feb 2008, p.5-5.

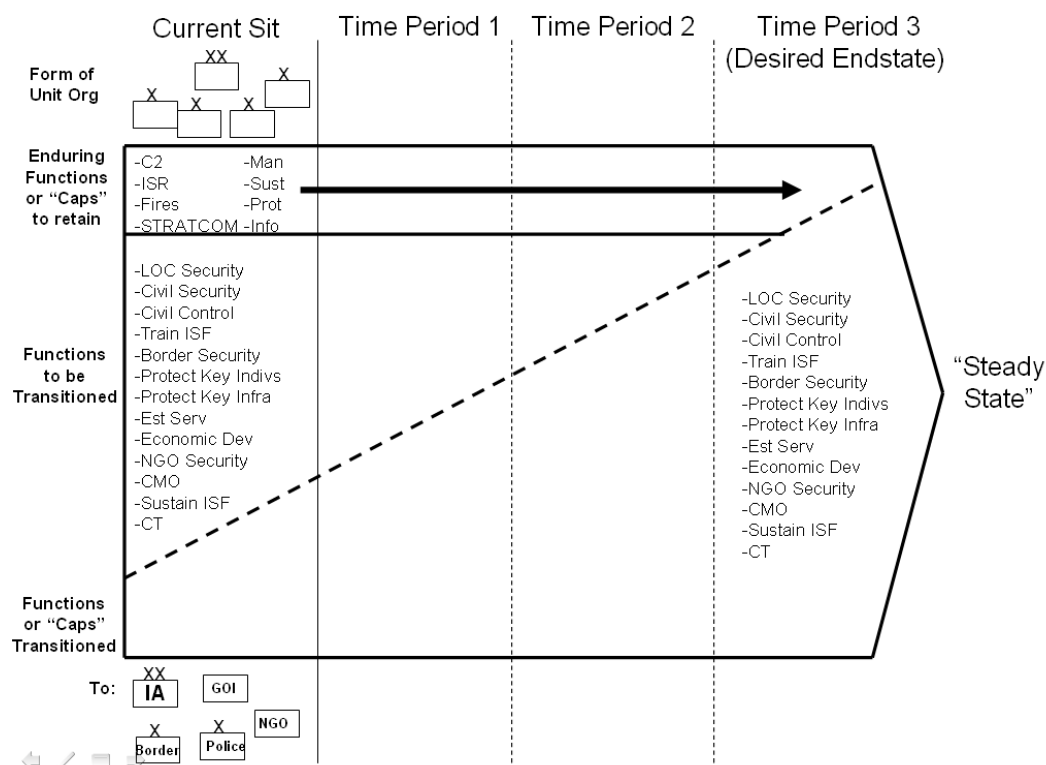


Figure 1: Current Situation and Desired End State⁵

The Operational Approach

The answer to understanding the JUV 08 operational environment from a commander's point of view was to determine the Operational Approach. The Operational Approach is the manner in which a commander contends with a center of gravity; directly or indirectly. Most JUV 08 participants determined the center of gravity to be; "influencing the various populations within each AO to support the efforts of local and national governments."⁶ Interim forms of organizations that could get a unit to its desired end state could not be developed until a way to influence the various populations was determined.⁷ Although discussed at length, time did not allow for the experimental cell participants to complete an in-depth operational approach.⁸ To help explain the complex environment tactical commanders will be operating in, Figure 2 below is a simple but

⁵ This figure and the others in this paper have been slightly modified from the originals developed in JUV 08 to better describe the problem solving processes used by participants. The data shown in each figure was derived from the JUV 08 scenario and is not intended to represent "the solution."

⁶ Framing (and reframing) the problem requires understanding and viewing the operational environment from a systemic perspective and identifying and analyzing centers of gravity. See FM 3-0 dated 27 Feb 2008, p. 6-7.

⁷ As commanders and staffs frame the problem, they determine the appropriate combination of defeat or stability mechanisms to solve it. See FM 3-0 dated 27 Feb 08, p. 6-9.

⁸ The *operational approach* is the manner in which a commander contends with a center of gravity; directly or indirectly. Commanders and staffs frame the problem and determine the appropriate combination of stability and defeat mechanisms to solve it. See FM 3-0 dated 27 Feb 2008, p. 6-9.

necessary tool that helps describe how a commander plans to contend with the various populations.

The Operational Approach (using Stability and Defeat Mechanisms)

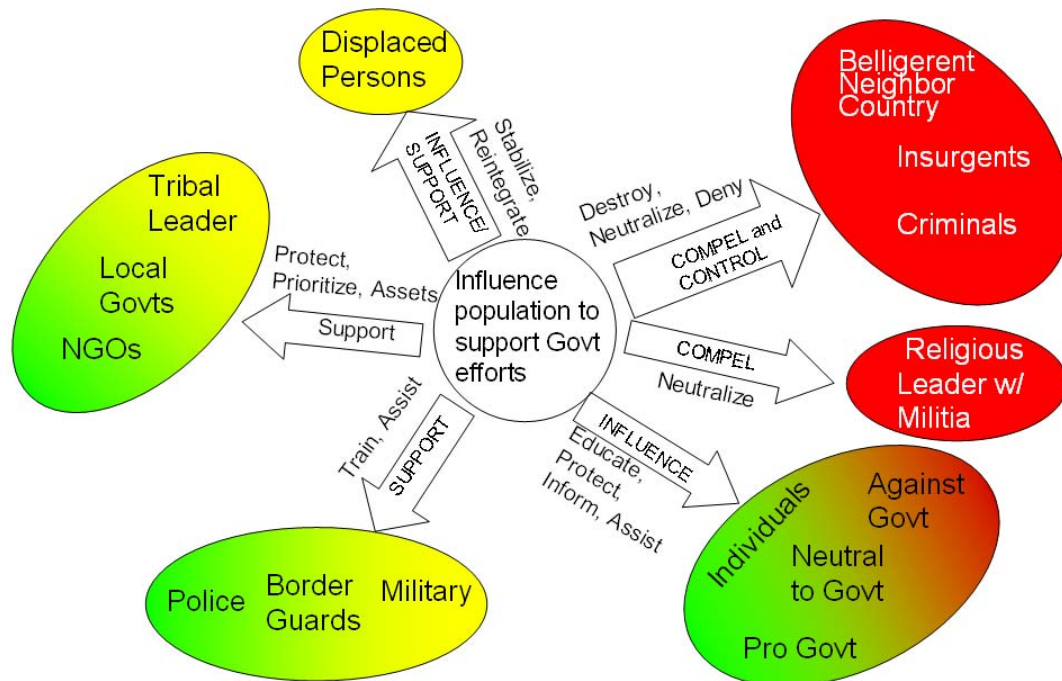


Figure 2: Operational Approach; US Army CGSC student example⁹

Transitioning Functions and “Overwatch”

After determining an initial Operational Approach, participants updated earlier planning assumptions and developed flexible courses of action that spanned several time-periods (events) and units. This was accomplished by determining the appropriate time to transition each function based on the given scenario in an assigned AO. With the transition of each function, the commander assumed some risk. This required some of the functions already transitioned to be placed in an “overwatch” status until a “good enough” point was reached.¹⁰

⁹ Operational Approach solution US Army CGSC students MAJ Jason Williams, MAJ Kevin Bass and MAJ Bradley Foose developed after analyzing the 1st Marine Division’s operational design for Operation Iraqi Freedom II shown in figure 4-3 of FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency dated Dec 06.

¹⁰ Showing functions in some form of an “Overwatch” status was suggested by Dr. David Kilcullen, during JUW 08.

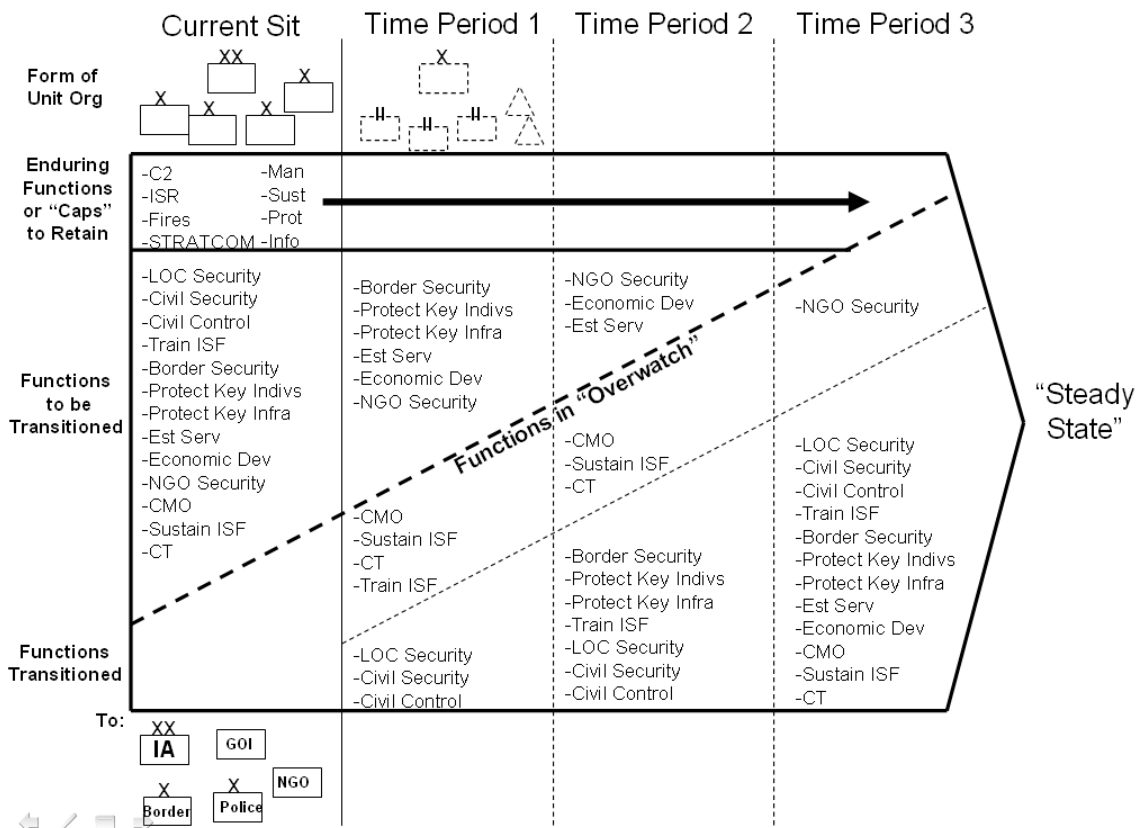


Figure 3: Transitioning Functions

During this process undesired events that occurred because of the risk assumed by transitioning a function or by changing the form of the organization were identified. The organization, no matter its form, must retain the capability to mitigate these risks. These are the events commanders must wargame against all developed courses of action to ensure flexibility. These same events will be the basis for Commander's Critical Information Requirements and the development of the Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance plan.

Only after it is decided when functions should be transferred is a new form of the organization determined; function determines form. No "cookie cutter" approach will work for determining what type of organization is appropriate during an event-driven transition. Commanders, each faced with a different situation, will require a unique mix of capabilities provided by conventional units, SOF, reconstruction teams, advisor teams, etc., at different times based on successes achieved from the application of stability and defeat mechanisms in their AO.

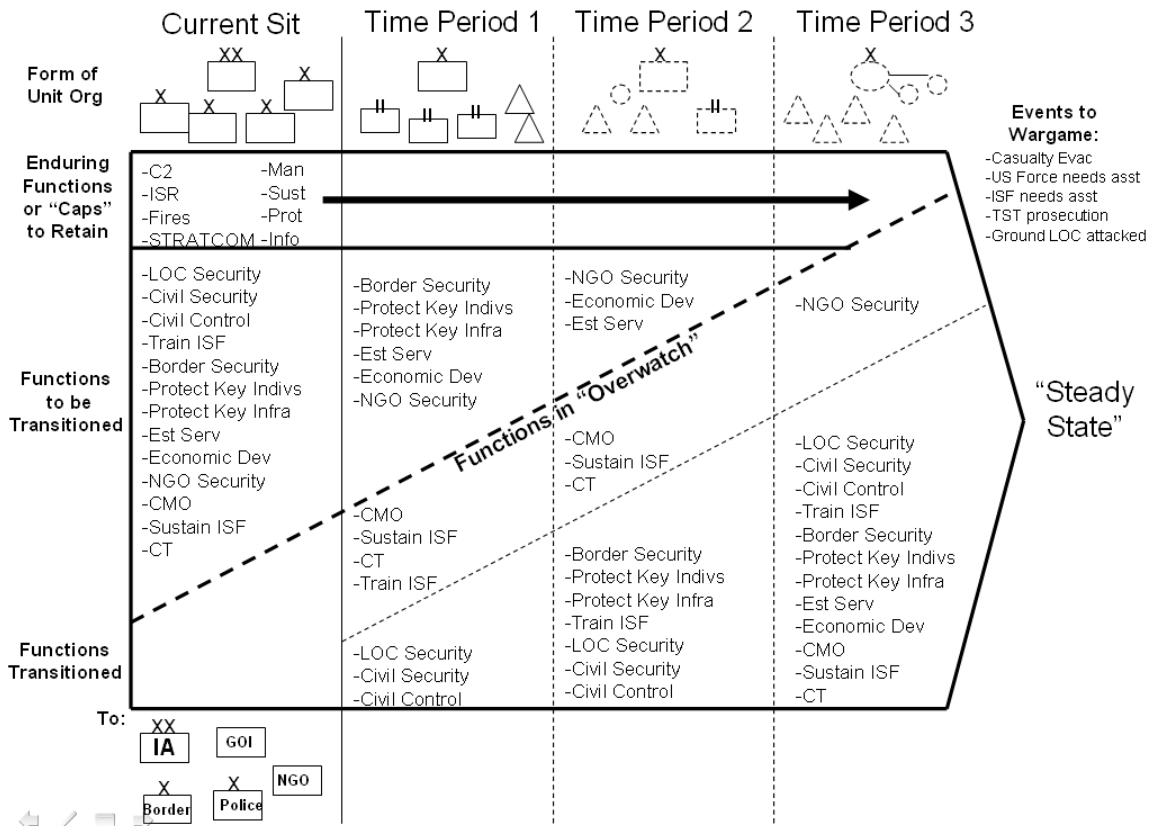


Figure 4: Overwatch and Forms of Organizations

Implications

The "Bottom Up" visualization tool should not be thought of as a "fill-in-the-blank" solution to a complex problem. As its name implies, participants thought of it as a tool to help them frame and describe a complicated problem. The keys to the success of this particular tool were its ability to describe a complicated situation from a commander's point of view, its recognition that solutions would have to be adjusted as the situation changes, and that when faced with considerable uncertainty, the commander on the ground needs the organic ability to mitigate accepted risk.

Visualization tools like those discussed in this paper can help organizations planning to execute an event-driven transition in several ways. They can help the commander conduct collaborative planning with subordinate commanders. They can help commanders describe their visualization to their commander and to the staff tasked with developing courses of action. And, just as importantly, they can be used to inform commanders who are trying to gain situational understanding so they can develop training plans for their units to assume the transition mission at a future date.

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