

# A CINC's View of Operational Art

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*In September 1990, just as the crisis with Iraq was beginning, General Crosbie E. Saint, US Army, Europe and Seventh Army commander in chief, gave Military Review this frank analysis of an army group commander's role. His observations and recommendations for the "fighters, integrators and shapers" in their practice of operational art is as valid today as it was on the eve of Desert Storm.*

**T**HE US ARMY Field Manual 100-5, *Operations*, defines operational art as "the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of war or a theater of operations through the design, organization and conduct of campaigns and major operations." This leaves much interpretation as to how to "employ military forces." In NATO, the army group commander has to answer that challenge. Getting the right mix of forces to the decisive place and time invariably sets the conditions for success. We all agree there are a number of places to put forces; the questions are: "Which place is decisive, and when is it decisive?" Although simply stated, this positioning is a delicate process in execution, akin to no other talent higher-level commanders must have. When combined with multinational and theater political considerations as in NATO, practicing the operational art becomes uniquely challenging. In the succeeding paragraphs is my description of how to practice the operational art better than the "bad" guy—which is what it is all about. The salient feature of this description should apply to any theater in which we may have to fight, and any kind of war.

I begin with what should happen when ground combat finally occurs, whether it is the first, second or 20th battle of a campaign. (I note here that I believe modern warfare has moved past the days of a single, climatic battle and into a series of violent pockets of conflict.) Well-trained soldiers and leaders of the companies decide the close battle, the "clash of short swords." The army group commander, on the other hand, has the task of setting the conditions for these

company victories long before swords flash and soldiers die. In fact, as you go up the chain of command, all commanders must do what is appropriate to prepare the battlefield for those companies.

In my view, there are three roles soldiers and commanders play: *fighters*, *integrators* and *shapers*. The fighters are the swordsmen-killers who close with the enemy and destroy him at the place and time others have set. Fighters live in companies and battalions, reaching out to kill everything within reach. Fighters know war in its most intimate sense; they practice tactics and techniques rehearsed in training areas and exercises. Good warriors are ferocious fighters in close combat—they are the teeth of the fighting machine.

At the next level, one step removed from the fighters, are the integrators. This is not a clear separation though, as brigades are both fighters and integrators. The integration process, occurring mostly at brigade and division levels, focuses all available combat power at the right place and time—where the fighters are. Additionally, integrators must decide when to fight, when not to fight and whom to fight.

Shapers bring the normally disparate combat elements together in sequence, over time. The shaper's product is the essence of operational art. Shaping is tricky; corps and army group commanders have to balance the means at hand with the constraints and restrictions of the political, military and geographical environments. Constraints are the specified and implied tasks in the mission; restrictions are things that cannot be done. Implicit in the shaper's role is the end state.

The shaper must start by clearly defining the answers to two key questions:

- What should the world look like after the campaign is successfully completed?
- Do I have the resources to “get there from here”?

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The corps commander is about half shaper and half integrator, and the army group commander is about three quarters shaper and one quarter integrator. The pivotal element, then, for these commanders is to get enough guidance from their superiors to be able to answer the questions and then make the tough decisions based on the information available.

I think it is also quite possible for the army group commander to get into strategy depending on the constraints of his mission. For example, instructions to operate in a particular area might well involve constraints, which will give the operation a strategic twist. The sheer size of an army group’s area of operations today, coupled with the enormous level of detail that media elements devote to military operations, muddies the waters separating operations from strategy. The army group commander must be aware of these tendencies.

The converse holds true for the theater commander. His strategic decisions, including resource allocation, make him one quarter operator and three quarters strategist. The theater commander is a shaper in his own right. The point is that roles overlap at every level, and everyone has to be aware of the need for careful coordination in campaign planning and execution.

The operational process starts with the theater commander, who provides the army group commander with the ends to be achieved, resources available and a definition of constraints and restrictions. All are crucial elements of the shaping process. The army group commander takes this guidance and combines resources and limitations to paint a picture of the desired ends (or he identifies what else he needs to accomplish the campaign objectives).

Once the end state and resource allocation phases of initial campaign planning are well under way, the

army group commander further shapes the operation in his mind through the staff planning process. He links movements and battles, establishing control measures and contingency plans. Here is where the army group commander earns his pay; for once the forces deploy to fight, he can do little to influence the ensuing action in real time. I say, then, that the army group commander lives in future time. His decision cycle normally covers 72 to 96 hours out.

The stark truth about the army commander’s role as a shaper before the campaign begins underscores a potential danger—what I call the “squad leader mentality.” Army group commanders must avoid doing everyone else’s jobs after they have laid the groundwork for the campaign. The notion that the army group targets the enemy is erroneous; the army group cannot target anything because it lacks the communications, timely intelligence and up-to-the-minute scheme of maneuver to kill the “right” somebody. The army group does not yet have the means to gain an accurate picture of circumstances and conditions at the fighter level. On a modern scale, Adolf Hitler’s disastrous decision to command the *Wehrmacht* personally in 1942 represents the calamitous results of the squad leader mentality. Lacking the elements cited earlier, Hitler, nonetheless, charged ahead with a faulty decision process, leaving the German army to consistently fight the last battle instead of the next one.

In our recent Operation *Just Cause*, the US Southern Command commander, General Maxwell R. Thurman, successfully avoided the pitfalls of the squad leader mentality, allowing the commander on the ground, Lieutenant General Carl W. Stiner, to fight the campaign—and we won it quickly and at relatively small cost. Like Thurman did in Panama, future army group commanders must think and act as shapers, providing prudent, personal control when necessary, while avoiding too much interference with their subordinates.

Thinking 72 to 96 hours out, the army group commander and his staff must successfully predict who will need additional resources and when. Simply reinforcing a corps bloodied in today’s battle will not work; the army group must stick to the plan until it becomes painfully obvious that some change must be made within the planning cycle. Otherwise, the army group becomes reactive and loses the initiative.

Catastrophic emergencies should not occur above the corps level (if we accept the fact that they should occur at all). The army group should function normally, avoiding knee-jerk reactions to reports that are already several hours old when they arrive at group

headquarters. Commanders who avoid the tendency to do their subordinates' jobs will be able to dictate the terms of battle through any temporary crises.

## Reserves

A key element of shaping and integrating at the army group level is the employment of reserves, using engaged or unengaged forces in future time. I really do not like the word "reserve," for it implies a force with no known future purpose. Presently, reserve implies a force used "in reaction" to an enemy action. I view the reserve as an "attack force," one that is saved out of the battle so as to be able to take advantage of a vulnerability of the enemy, to execute the next step of the battle, to complete the scheme of maneuver. The reserve is the army group maneuver unit; in American sport terms, it is the linebacker in football or the striker in soccer.

I dwell on this because it is important in the scheme or conduct of battle. For the shapers, reserves are the instruments of integration; that is, they are the tools for army group commanders to win campaigns. Victory in every battle may not be feasible: George Washington, Ulysses S. Grant and Viscount Sir William J. Slim were excellent army commanders who clearly appreciated the critical importance of husbanding reserves until the right moment. They won pivotal campaigns through judicious use of their reserves. (I still think the use of the term "reserve" means an "oh my gosh" force to far too many people.)

My technique for employing engaged forces as reserves is to task commanders to have certain forces available within a designated time window. Subordinate commanders then have the flexibility to use those forces within the "be prepared" time period. However, the responsibility for the subordinate commander is to provide a force that is mission capable when called. This is preferred over "putting a unit on a string" that can only be used with permission from above. The corps or division commander must be careful, then, not to lose sight of the "be prepared" order and subsequently chew up his designated part of the army group reserve.

Fundamental for successful combat today and tomorrow is understanding effective use of reserves. These forces are my aces; I use them to maintain the initiative and crush an attacking force according to my scheme of maneuver or to exploit a penetration and pursue a defeated enemy to destruction. The reserve is not a "fire brigade" to be used only when we are in dire straits. As I stated earlier, army group commanders should not have emergencies, anyway.

Generally, Central Army Group (CENTAG) will lack sufficient forces to exploit every opportunity. At the operational level, it is important to focus our combat

power and exploit only those vulnerabilities that fit into the overall scheme of maneuver and the theater campaign plan. Even if an operation promises success, if the success will not support achieving the commander's overall intent, the reserves are better used elsewhere.

Enemy vulnerabilities appear and disappear rapidly; hence, the absolute requirement for agility within our maneuver forces, sustainment system and the command and control lash-up that ties everything together. For example, if an enemy is unable to overcome the effects

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of friendly follow-on-forces attack (FOFA) operations, he will have insufficient follow-on forces to maintain his desired operational tempo. Following his doctrine, he may transition into a hasty defense. The interval between this transition and when he reinforces the defense becomes a critical window of opportunity. It must be exploited quickly by the level of command that sees this window before the hasty defense becomes a prepared defense.

## Maneuver

What about maneuver? Like employing reserves, maneuver (gaining and maintaining positional advantage) is a key weapon in the arsenal of integrators and shapers, just as it is for fighters. Maneuver also includes positioning sustainment and command and control assets. The scope of maneuver today makes it an intricate process.

In focusing combat power, we need to conceptualize the meaning of that term. The Germans have the term *Schwerpunkt*, and we Americans have the principle of mass or concentration. I think these ideas are often misunderstood. The term "mass" is inadequate because it has the connotation of "let's all go down there." I look at combat power in terms of focus—much like a flashlight on the battlefield. I want to move it around, so that important things will happen. If crossing a river is critical to my plan, I need to focus my combat power so there is nothing the enemy can do to prevent me from

crossing the river. *Schwerpunkt* is useful if you use the flashlight analogy. Even better, is considering combat power as a tool akin to the magnifying glass under the sun's rays—if you focus it correctly and manipulate its movements, you burn whatever you are aiming at.

In the defense, positional advantage is the cornerstone of success; only mobile forces can gain that advantage in modern combat. I look for ways to use mobility to get into position to trap the enemy and shoot him in the back; that is, focus the flashlight beam on his vulnerability. If you can shoot the enemy in the opposite direction of his orientation, you will roll up his formation. By focusing on the combat column, you get that opportunity—hit him where he least expects it. You move your artillery so it is within range, and you move the rifleman where he can shoot. You shoot from your advantage into his disadvantage.

Tanks do not exist to sit around, and it is improper to use them to fight a larger enemy in a positional defense. Positional defense against a large force is like dancing with a bear. If the bear ever puts his arms around you, you are going to dance to his tune. A larger attacking force will pin down the position defender, driving the defense into the ground. If you let the attacker use his numerical advantage to freeze your mobility, you face a huge volume of indirect fire that will not allow you to leave your protected position. All hope of mobility will be lost.

The mobile defender must strike hard and move fast, hitting the attacker in the flank or rear and then shifting before the enemy can reorient to make the battle a head-on encounter. In a similar vein, from an army group level, mobility means knowing how to move a force such as a division or corps. Today, we do not know instinctively how long it takes to move a corps from point A to point B, like we do a company. Yet, we must know that information to ensure that our schemes of maneuver are based on reliable information. Army group commanders must demand training standards for large units to move fast. I want divisions to be able to move in a short period of time on multiple routes, with command and control systems that will allow them to move faster than the enemy. Divisions should be able to attack from the march column, in stride.

In the offense, the same principles apply to mobile warfare. Move fast, in large-unit formations, and strike hard with all of the combat multipliers combining on a less organized enemy. Operational planning at all levels for the integrators and shapers should be driven by these principles. Maneuver is the essence of surprise (accomplish your purpose before the enemy can effectively react). If we train commanders to think on that level, we will have come a long way toward winning

the campaign before the first shots are fired.

If you use your systems correctly, you gain a second order of sophistication in the proper application of combat power. We do not have the luxury of being able to waste any of our precious resources. You have to look for the larger, long-term effect of targeting. For example, you take out the enemy artillery because enemy fires limit the capability of antitank fires—not just because the enemy artillery drops shells on you. Combat power has to be focused on the right targets. That requires good intelligence. We must use deception cleverly so the enemy is always guessing wrong; we must always be doing what the enemy least expects.

Relating these concepts to commanding an army group in Germany, certain constraints become key considerations. Lacking operational depth, we must use a forward defense. The enemy thereby has the option of where and when to attack, and it is impossible to protect all the places where he might place his *Schwerpunkt* and focus his combat power. Hence, we must have mobile defenses with covering forces, screens and the like. Within our geographic and political framework, we must have the ability to allocate and move forces in a scheme of maneuver to protect as much territory as far forward as possible. Proper initial placement of forces is one answer to our forward defense requirement; agility and initiative, once the battle is joined, is the other.

I have told my corps commanders that the first battle belongs to them, and that falls into my earlier statements concerning the decision-making capabilities and limitations of being an army group commander. I want to be able to tell them where I will prepare for the second battle and define the overall parameters for success. I do not want to be partially successful—I want to win. The army group must make timely decisions that will not disrupt or lose the corps' first battles, but those decisions must help win the second battle. My job as a practitioner of the operational art is to set the scene for the next battle and the one after that, until the strategic objective, the successful protection of the Federal Republic of Germany, is won.

The critical ingredient necessary to transform a commander's desire to exploit an opportunity into actual maneuver on the battlefield is tough, focused, realistic training. Proper training establishes the command mind-set at all levels toward recognizing and capitalizing on enemy vulnerabilities. This training is a requirement for all elements of combat power. Staffs must produce plans quickly (the staff is truly an element of combat power); sustainment must react quickly; and air and ground operations must be synchronized rapidly. Maneuver battalions must cross the line of departure on time and execute their plan violently. Every unit must

use decision support templates routinely. All parts of this complicated system must operate and function properly. That truism puts a premium on practice.

## Joint and Combined Operations

A second important aspect of the transformation of operational theory into reality in Europe is the necessity of successful joint and combined operations. There are many problems inherent in this aspect of modern war. Joint problems stem from different perceptions and missions. The air forces, for example, have both a tremendous amount of combat power and a high degree of vulnerability while using that power. Since they can react so fast, their targeting is done the night or moment before the event; but at the army group, we plan three to four days out. So the two are like oil and water; they do not mix well. Our technological advances in missiles and helicopters have further clouded the issue, because we increasingly reach out longer distances in shortened time frames. So, what was once a clearly defined division of responsibility is now confused. We have yet to fully sort that problem out to my satisfaction.

For our operations, synchronization of air and ground assets is critical. Strong conflicts loom between air/ground arenas in terms of operational fire orientation and missions. For example, assume the NATO regional commander, who makes joint decisions, decides to go to a maximum defensive air posture. Does he understand what he just did to the army group? He has decided that the army group will get very few air interdiction or battlefield air interdiction sorties. That, in turn, means it will not be using many assets to fight deep. Under these circumstances, the AirLand Battle concept is weakly executed because the enemy's second echelon will close at the time and place of its choosing. Under the current force organization, when the joint commander goes to maximum defensive air posture, the army group commander can win the first battle, but lose the second battle, because in a maximum defensive air posture, the army group commander loses a portion of an important dimension of his scheme of maneuver—deep fires. The regional commander, therefore, must fine-tune the allocation of these scarce resources.

Combined operations dictate another set of considerations. National corps have differing capabilities, and that is a key consideration in operational planning. The corps is the centerpiece around which tactical operations revolve. It is the largest truly habitual national unit integrated with other national corps into an international army group. The level of international integration can always be lowered commensurate with support, doctrine and system interoperability. There are two fundamental ways to cope with the different national corps organiza-

tions. If you have uneven capabilities, you can take the stronger assets away from the corps that has them, keep them at army group level and share them with the have-nots. We did that with the air forces of NATO. We took the air forces away from each country and assigned them to allied tactical air forces so we could share them across the board. The only trouble is that perhaps we now have them at such a high level that they have lost their integrated role as a flexible element of combat power. Since air assets are not available several days in advance now because of the level of control at which they are held,

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ground commanders have fallen into planning schemes of maneuver without these assets. Operational ground commanders should not change plans on a daily basis; yet, air assets can operate that way.

The regional air commander should determine which army group needs air support three days out, and thereby fit into the ground planning cycle; otherwise, air support becomes reactive, falling prey to the same pitfalls that could cripple the operational ground commander. The operational ground commander should determine who needs air most in the army group based on the 72- to 96-hour planning cycle. To do that, the joint and combined leaders have to decide which army group will get what air three to four days out. Air support should be dependable and predictable so the integrator commander can base his relative long-term plan on its availability. Holding some air for emergencies is understandable, but it should not be the method for allocating all air assets. To withhold it all diffuses its impact in conjunction with other forces.

The second way to achieve equity in ends and means with combined forces is to tailor mission assignments. A national force structure is put together so all the pieces fit. When you remove a part, you unhinge the balance of that national force. That is why I do not advocate taking organic assets away from national forces. I may, however, ask them to do things for their allies in

their proximity on a mission basis for limited periods of time. If I do that, I can preserve the synergism and cohesiveness essential to combined success. The army group commander in coalition war must tailor the assigned mission to national unit capabilities. This is not an easy task.

Implicit in the effective employment of national forces in combined operations is an understanding of the capabilities and limitations of each unit you command. The army group commander must know the national characteristics of each unit he commands intimately.

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For example, German corps have drones; US corps do not. It is national corps capabilities, then, that help define boundaries, missions, depth of areas and the speed with which they can move around the battlefield. All these things have an impact on your decision and what you ask your subordinates to do. Finally, the army group commander has to determine which corps work together well and employ them accordingly. This is where you attain synergism and the combined arms effect so important in winning battles.

There are six other elements critical to the army group commander as the shaper and integrator in campaign planning and execution:

- Intelligence.
- Initiative.
- Sustainment.
- Communications.
- Operational fires.
- Command and control.

These areas reinforce the foundation discussed in earlier paragraphs, whereby the army group commander gives subordinate commanders the time, space and resources to meet the enemy on our terms and destroy him.

**Intelligence** should allow the commanders to picture the battlefield, rather than receive only data. We need to change the current system where the next higher level collects information and filters it down. A better approach would be to let the user of the intelligence be the collector of the information; however, that is not practical at present. Since the commander cannot con-

trol information everywhere, we must define the area in which commanders need information. First, we have to stop the practice of furnishing commanders and staffs everything outside their area. Rather than overwhelming the system, allocate the area of operations in terms of the mission, which, in turn, defines the appropriate areas of influence and interest. Commanders need to control the priority of collection efforts in those areas that will influence their battle and scheme of maneuver. They need access to all the intelligence available about those particular areas. If I want them to see farther, I move their boundaries to give them a different horizon.

**Deception** must be a part of the scheme of maneuver. The central focus for deception operations should be the corps. I believe there are three rules for deception:

- All corps players in the deception must be in harmony to support the deception effort.
- The success of the plan cannot be dependent on the success of the deception plan.
- If the enemy fails to act, your deception plan has failed.

Being deceived is not enough—a favorable enemy decision based on a false picture is required. Whatever you want the enemy to do must seem advantageous to him. Deception must be a synchronized effort. To do this, you may well have to keep the deception plan a close-held secret—that way everyone else thinks what he is doing is real.

**Initiative** is a tremendous asset, particularly if we are opposed by a foe whose lower-unit method of operation is rigid. For the army group commander, initiative should be a key part of the end state of the campaign. We can seize, retain and exploit the initiative best by ensuring all elements of the army group work together to make initiative the underlying thread of all planning. It should drive our scheme of maneuver, which defines the bounds in which our initiative operates.

**Sustainment** succeeds only when the logistician is welcome in the operations center. The logistician must know the scheme of maneuver before it is approved and included in the operations order. In the modern world of scarce resources, we must husband what we have and use it effectively. Those tenets must be followed assiduously, for logistics can quickly overcome any operational plan if it is poorly planned and executed. Systems are key to fighting with mobility, so we need effective standing operating procedures for resupply and evacuation. Essentially, we must have procedures that work for inventory, transport and reconstitution. Any one of the three can stop the best operations plan. Reconstituted forces, for example, must be handled carefully. The most effective reconstitution is to pull a unit out of the fight, resupply people and equipment and

transport it back to the fight once any required training is finished. Although undesirable, we will still be forced to reconstitute units with individuals and things, but it is not the best way. The aim is to prepare a unit so that when it returns to the fight and hits the enemy, even if unexpectedly, it has its act together.

**Communications** allows army group commanders to prepare their corps for the next battle. You do not get up one morning and start the next plan. In fact, plans sort of meld together. The army group commander must understand how to do that because he cannot personally control all the little elements in the corps.

Personalities play a very large part in determining the way the army group commander talks to his corps commanders. Some corps commanders need blunt, forceful directions, and others need positive stroking. Some are on your frequency and understand very quickly what you are saying. Others have just been brought up in a whole different world. In any case, there is an awful lot of interface that goes on between the army group commander and the corps commanders. I use the written word; I use the staff; and I use the telephone.

Normally, I want to talk to more than one person at a time. If the plan has a scheme of maneuver that involves the coordination of commanders of two of your large subordinate units, then get them in the same van and talk it over. If it is necessary, go to each of them individually. If you do not, you have confusion. It is just a flat, 100 percent guaranteed rule. When you personally talk to commanders, things come out that you cannot get from a telephone conversation. I have no doubt about the need for that kind of personal coordination. That is the reason why a corps or army group commander needs a mobile command post. The commander can send it out ahead of time to someplace convenient and then bring commanders together to get everything synchronized.

Remember, army group commanders are normally talking about events that will happen some number of days in the future. It is not necessary to rush up to the area of the battle between 0800 and 0900 that morning. What is needed is to get close enough to each corps commander so that he does not have to leave his battle and will not get killed while he is traveling to see the army group commander. The bottom line is this: however you get it to him, the corps commander must buy into the plan—either willingly or forcefully. That is the only way the army group's scheme of maneuver also becomes his scheme of maneuver. It is the only way that the plan becomes his personal knowledge. If you have the feeling he cannot grasp your scheme or is not going to execute it as you intend, you either change the plan, stay there with him or fire him. You cannot have it any other way.

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**Operational Fires** should be a product of using air interdiction, battlefield air interdiction and ground-launched missile or helicopter fire allocation within the allotted time frame. The issues raised center on the fact that we do not have a current unit of measure for firepower. We do not know how to express firepower other than to speak in terms of sorties, numbers of tubes and numbers of helicopters. Percentages of destruction are not adequate terms for measuring killing, either. The more essential issue is the question, "How do I know how much firepower (assuming we can somehow measure it effectively) I have in my flashlight beam to be projected in time and space?" At present, I cannot tell whether I have enough; thus, I have no way to portray what I need over time. We are working on it.

**Command and Control** requires both using staffs effectively and the understanding that the war continues even during daily briefings. I recommend that corps commanders omit all but essential meetings dictated by the course of battle. Otherwise, the corps commander becomes wedded to a routine that inhibits his fighting ability. Command is fluid, in that the commander must be aware of the situation at any point in time. That way he can make the correct decision at the critical time. Staffs can coordinate on a routine basis, but a commander must have more latitude than a routine gives him. Since army groups are separated from the daily battle, a routine decision cycle is helpful.

This flexibility for commanders carries over into the age-old problem of rest. I always tell my subordinates, "If you want your commander to stay up all night for days on end, he can stay up for a period, but you will have to live with the decisions he makes." They always respond, "Go to sleep." If the commander must extend beyond normal waking limits, he must be willing to accept the risks involved in doing so. And, it must be worth the long-term price.

I will summarize by outlining my approach to preparing for and being an army group commander as COMCENTAG. All of the concepts discussed in the preceding paragraphs are the result of experience at

differing levels of command. Over time, I learned the principles of integrating and shaping from exercises and those who have taken the time to mentor me. I have also studied history, reading the campaigns of great captains such as “Stonewall” Jackson to gain an appreciation of the concept of smaller forces against larger ones.

My reading and experience seem to confirm the

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notion that the principles of effective army group command have not essentially changed over time. A winning commander infuses his force with his spirit. He talks to subordinates personally, so he knows they understand his orders. He allows them to fight their portions of the campaign without undue interference.

At each higher level, the distance between the fighting and the thinking lengthens, because someone has to synchronize the next battle, or the present one may not matter. It is hard for an army group commander to think four or five days out; I can certainly see how many in the past have fallen victim to the squad leader mentality. I must never forget what is going on at the point of flashing swords, but I have to let that fight be won by the commander and soldiers on the scene. If you have no faith that your subordinate in war can do the task, the fathers and mothers of your soldiers demand that you replace the subordinate with one who can do the task.

The successful army group commander must have full knowledge of the careful balance among operations, tactics, logistics and strategy. He must be a psychologist, capable of reading the psyche of his army at any point in time. Above all else, he must have vision to understand the end state and then plot the path for his army group to get there, weaving a trail through uncertainty, constraints and restrictions. Shaping all these elements becomes far more an art than a science. The genius is the commander who can mold his scarce resources into an effective killing machine, focused on critical objectives. He makes his presence known and felt when required, knowing when to effect decisive action and when to give his well-trained warriors with the sharp swords the chance to win big. **MR**

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