

APPLYING COMBAT POWER IN THE CONTEXT OF VUCA AND JIIM OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract: The present study is aligned with the concerns of different armies to identify solutions regarding the operational adaptation of military structures to the demands of current and future operational environments. The volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) character of the various operational environments determines the military structures to operate from a joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational (JIIM) perspective in order to reach the desired end state. From this perspective, the adjustment of combat functions becomes the groundwork for the proposed variant of the combat power adapted to support the operational flexibility and the organizational versatility of the forces.

Keywords: operational environment, VUCA, JIIM, operational adaptation, combat functions, combat power

1. Introduction

By way of analysis of different current operational environments (COE), such as those in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, we find that the tactical military structures encountered real difficulties, especially when approaching urban areas of operation, due to the fact that the situation on the field was completely different from what had

been anticipated in the planning. These operational challenges were determined by the fact that the COEs and, in particular, the FOEs, have VUCA-type characteristics, requiring a JIIM approach (table 1) and, consequently, testing the operational flexibility of the forces, as well as the agility of the leaders.

Table 1. COE/FOE characteristics – actional understanding and approach

CHARACTERISTICS		DESCRIPTION/IMPLICATIONS
Means of understanding	Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous – VUCA	volatility – “created by instability in both the rate of change of information and the specifics of a given situation” [1] that occur in the same operational environment JOA/AOO;
		uncertainty - “the inability to have complete understanding of a given situation and the difficulty in forecasting the effects of a proposed change” [2];
		complexity – given by the multitude of actors present in the operational environment (adversary, indigenous population, regional/local security forces);
		ambiguity – is being shaped when a “decision maker does not understand the significance of a given event or situation” [3].

Modalities of approach	Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational – JIIM [4]	joint - activities involving structures within two or more categories of forces;
		interagency - activities that involve structures within two or more agencies/ministries, including the Ministry of Defense (MOD), so as to reach a common end state;
		intergovernmental - activities designed to coordinate the efforts between the own MOD and the local/regional institutions belonging to other states.
		multinational - activities carried out by at least two contingents of different nationalities in the framework of a coalition/alliance operation

Therefore, the following questions arise:

- *How can we survive in an environment where it is almost impossible to understand what is happening?*
- *How should we plan knowing that the plan will only survive in the first hours of execution?*
- *How can we prepare for success in VUCA environments?*
- *How should we adapt to reach the desired end state?*

These key questions will constitute the reference framework for further research, starting from the definition of combat power in relation to the combat functions specific to the doctrine of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and will end with generating combat power adapted by adjusting specific combat functions.

2. Analysis of combat power in relation to the current operational contexts

Prior to the identification of combat functions according to NATO doctrine, the concepts of fighting and combat power should be clarified. Generally, fighting power represents “*the current state of a force at a given moment ... resulting from the entire process of force generation - equipment, training, doctrine, morals and other factors that assign a force to a commander*” [5]. Starting from this definition, we can say that if the fighting power represents the state of a force before the start of the operation process (planning), the combat power is materialized by applying the fighting power during execution using the combat functions [6]. Their understanding can be realized in relation to the data in table 2, highlighting the combat functions according to the NATO doctrine facilitated by the exercise of leadership and information between the organic structures.

Table 2. Components of fighting and combat power

		+ leadership (multiplies and unifies the elements of combat power)		
Fighting power	combat functions	intelligence	informational activities	movement and maneuver
		fire support	command and control - C ₂	
			logistic support	protection
Combat power		+ information (communication between own structures)		

In order to understand the need to adapt the combat power, as shown in the table above, we will refer to the context of the Inherent Resolve Operation, especially to the decisive stage of this operation, which occurred between October 2016 and July 2017. Led by the Iraqi security forces with the support of the international coalition forces - Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF), the final state was the liberation of Mosul from under the occupation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). At that time, Mosul, the capital of the Nineveh province, located in northern Iraq, was established as the ISIS Center of Gravity (COG) in Iraq, and, at the same time, an ISIS pivotal point in ensuring control of the north-western area of Iraq, by facilitating the influx of fighters from the Syrian city of Raka, which was the de facto capital of the jihadist group. Broadly speaking, the operation, whose conception was that the Kurdish-Peshmerga forces attack from the North and East, the Iraqi security forces from the South, while the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) would block the city from the South and West, had an accentuated hybrid character, as it employed not only conventional, but also unconventional tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs).

Returning to the issue of this article, the creation of kinetic/non-kinetic effects within this offensive operation could be achieved by targeting a combat power presented in table 2. Even though its manifestation eventually led to the desired end state, consisting in elimination of the ISIS resistance forces in Mosul, there were, however, a number of challenges in maintaining/directing the operation (C2, intelligence), in modeling the audiences of interest (informational activities, maneuver, fire support), and in supporting the operation (protection, logistical support).

Regarding the direction of the operation at C2 level, the main challenge was the difficulty of coordinating the entire spectrum of forces (Iraqi conventional

forces, Special Forces, Kurdish -Peshmerga forces, forces belonging to the mobilized units of the population, CJTF forces, etc.). In contrast, in exercising the intelligence combat function, there were problems regarding the accuracy of the information, both in terms of source credibility, as well as in what concerned the veracity of the information. There were also difficulties in disseminating intelligence products from the CJTF to the Iraqi security forces.

In what concerns the modeling of the audiences of interest, the main challenges were:

- informational activities - the difficulty of countering ISIS propaganda in eroding the image of local authorities;
- maneuver - the impossibility of using the tactical structures at battalion/brigade level and of the entire spectrum of the maneuver forms specific to offensive operations;
- fire support - generating collateral damage by using missile launch systems such as the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), M777 howitzers or platforms dedicated to close air support (CAS).

Finally, in what regards the support of the operation, there were also a number of problems. At the level of protection, the main challenge was the difficulty of counteracting the effects of ISIS attacks with chemical substances, while for the logistical support, the impossibility of evacuating the entire damaged technique represented the main highlighted difficulty.

3. Adjusting combat functions

Based on the highlighted challenges, in the context of the FOEs, perceived as having VUCA characteristics, the tactical military structures should be operationally adapted, which primarily implies an adaptation of the combat power by adjusting the current combat functions. Against this background, a variant of the adapted fighting power is presented in table 2.

Table 3. Adapting the fighting/combat power to the requirements of the VUCA and JIIM environments

		+ leadership (multiplies and unifies the elements of combat power)		
Fighting power	Combat functions	intelligence (includes informational activities)	engagement	maneuver (<i>maneuvrism approach</i>)
			<i>mission command</i>	
		fire support	logistic support	protection
Combat power		+ information (communication between own structures)		

By analyzing the data in the above table, the most significant changes should be made at the following levels: C2, intelligence, maneuver, and engagement respectively. As a result, during operations in VUCA and JIIM type environments, C2 should be used in the sense of command through missions, in order to maximize the organized initiative and the freedom of action of the leaders of the subordinate structures. The following level, intelligence, should be used in a more comprehensive sense, so as to include information activities. Through this adjustment, intelligence will no longer be only passive, through the generation of intelligence products, but also active, by creating non-kinetic effects in order to model the audiences of interest. Instead, the maneuver should be applied in the sense of maneuverist approach, in this way targeting not only the physical component, but the moral and conceptual character specific to combat power. Last but not least, according to the American model, a new combat function, engagement, should be formalized within the NATO doctrine, allowing "to interact with the partners of the unified action in order to maximize operational adaptation" [7]. Consisting of those "tasks and systems that ensure the influencing of

local population behavior, security forces and local/regional governmental entities" [8], this combat function should be correlated with informational activities within the intelligence component.

4. Conclusions

In view of the presented information, the COE/FOE approach by military tactical structures should be carried out from the JIIM perspective in terms of maneuver, fire and effects (MFE), operational support (OS) and force sustainment (FS) [9].

For their harmonization, the adaptation of the military tactical structures, generating operational flexibility and organizational versatility, must be supported by a robust combat power, based on the adjustment of combat functions. Only in this way can the commander, the General Staff and the subordinate structures diminish the VUCA degree specific to COE/FOE in order to effectively engage the entire typology of audiences.

The adapted combat power model, presented in this article, can be the foundation for the operational and organizational adaptation to the demands of the VUCA environments by the military tactical structures of NATO.

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