Chapter 3: Offensive Operations

This page is a section of FM 7-100.1 Opposing Forces Operations.

The OPFOR sees the offensive as the decisive form of operations and the ultimate means of imposing its will on the enemy. While conditions at a particular time or place may require the OPFOR to defend, defeating an enemy force ultimately requires shifting to offensive operations. Even within the context of defense, victory normally requires some sort of offensive action. Therefore, OPFOR commanders at all levels seek to create and exploit opportunities to take offensive action, whenever possible.

In the context of the theater strategic or operational level of war, offensive operations are often â conventionalâin nature. Conventional operations are not, however, the only form of offensive operations. Accordingly, this chapter includes discussions of operational-level offensive actions that do not rely only on large formations of mechanized or motorized units. Offensive operations may include operations done by paramilitary or irregular forces. The OPFOR recognizes the traditional forms of maneuver: envelopment, turning movement, infiltration, penetration, and frontal attack.

Strategic Context

Offensive operations are an important component of all OPFOR strategic campaigns. However, the scale and purpose of offensive actions may differ during the various types of strategic-level actions.

Regional Operations

Offensive operations during regional operations attempt to achieve strategic political or military decision by destroying the enemyâ will and capability to fight. This is brought about by destroying components of the enemyâ combat system. This may include discrete attacks on any of the four components of an enemyâ combat system: combat forces, combat support forces, logistics forces, and command and control (C2) and reconnaissance, intelligence, surveillance, and target acquisition (RISTA). It may also include an attempt to destroy one or more of the enemyâ systems simultaneously.

Due to its military superiority over a regional adversary in regional operations, the State is able to pursue primarily offensive military courses of action. It is also prepared to use offensive means against internal and possible extraregional threats.

The Stateâ military forces are sufficient to overmatch any single regional neighbor, but may not be a match for the forces an extraregional power can bring to bear. Thus, the State seeks to exploit its numerical and technological overmatch against one regional opponent rapidly, before other regional neighbors or an extraregional power can enter the fight. Thus, a characteristic of regional operations is a rapid tempo of offensive combat.

The Stateâ military goal during regional operations is to destroy its regional opponentsâ military power in order to achieve specific ends. The State plans regional operations well in advance and executes them as rapidly as is feasible in order to preclude intervention by outside forces. Still, at the very outset of these operations, it lays plans and positions forces to conduct access-control operations in the event of outside intervention. Extraregional forces may also be vulnerable to conventional operations during the time they require to build combat power and create support at home for their intervention.

In comparison to the forces of the Stateâ regional neighbors, the OPFOR is a relatively large and modern force. Therefore, it is capable of offensive operations against such opponents. The OPFOR will use armor, mechanized infantry, airborne, and heliborne forces, when available.

Generally, it will use infantry forces suitable for operating in the complex terrain that dominates portions of the region. When the OPFOR is dependent on infantry forces or irregular forces, it will attack by infiltration or maneuver to conduct ambushes of more capable enemy forces.

The OPFOR may attack along a suboptimal approach to exploit an enemy vulnerability or to achieve surprise. To maintain a high tempo of operations and reach key targets, the OPFOR often accepts the risk of bypassing pockets of resistance.

Transition Operations

Offensive operations play two key roles in transition operations. First, they are used to continue to achieve the State's regional goals as rapidly as possible, to make the act an extraregional power is trying to prevent a fait accompli. Second, they are a component of access-control operations to exclude the extraregional power from key areas and contain him in areas of the OPFOR's choosing. The OPFOR uses offensive operations to preclude or put a quick end to expansion of the conflict and to either consolidate its previous gains or conduct further operations against the original regional enemy.

During transition operations, military forces solidify gains made during regional operations. However, the central aim is to prevent or defeat outside intervention. Although transition operations are primarily defensive in nature, attacks will continue. As a minimum, the OPFOR will maintain counterattack forces at virtually all levels of command and will attempt to physically attack one or more components of an enemy's combat system. A combination of operational and tactical offensive and defensive actions help the OPFOR control tempo.

Military forces in the immediate vicinity of the point of intervention move into sanctuary as opportunity allows, making use of existing C2 and logistics. They conduct limited-objective attacks to secure positions, protect flanks, and control access. They may attack vulnerable early-entry forces before the enemy can bring his technological overmatch to bear. Even at this stage, the State may be able to inflict politically unacceptable casualties that could cause the extraregional power to terminate its intervention.

During transition operations, the OPFOR plans and conducts sophisticated ambushes to destroy high-visibility enemy systems or cause mass casualties. These ambushes are not always linked to maneuver or ground objectives, but are designed to have a huge psychological and political impact by demonstrating enemy vulnerability. The OPFOR may use niche technology it has acquired to achieve technological surprise and limited-duration overmatch in specific areas.

The OPFOR can use weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to deny an extraregional opponent the use of complex terrain for a period of time. This creates opportunities for operational forces to destroy key enemy systems with precision fires or to engage the enemy forces with fires and maneuver.

Transition operations are combined arms and/or joint efforts, although the air and naval forces increasingly revert to defensive measures to preserve their capability. Ground forces or, more often, Special-Purpose Forces (SPF) conduct raids against logistics sites, lines of communication (LOCs), and other vulnerable military targets in the region, along the routes to the region, and to the enemy's strategic depth. Occasionally, if the risks are worth the costs, the OPFOR attacks such targets by air and sea. It may also use long-range missiles or rockets to deliver conventional warheads or WMD against these kinds of targets. Paramilitary forces, air defense forces, and precision attack can also play important roles. The OPFOR may also use long-range weapons or SPF to conduct attacks outside the theater, to divert enemy resources to protect politically or ecologically sensitive targets.

Adaptive Operations

Once an extraregional power commits forces in the region, the OPFOR does not avoid battle. It

seeks it often, but on its own terms. Battles will occur at a place and time of the OPFOR's choosing and involve dispersed maneuver, precision fires, and simultaneous actions by all services of the Armed Forces as well as affiliated forces. Tactical counterattacks characterize adaptive operations, and larger counteroffensive operations are undertaken when feasible.

During adaptive operations, the OPFOR may conduct limited-objective operational- and tactical-level offensive actions to prevent buildup of intervening forces, to facilitate the defense, or to take advantage of an opportunity to counterattack.

When the OPFOR can create a window of opportunity or exploit opportunity created by natural conditions that limit or degrade enemy capabilities, its forces move out of sanctuary and attack. They try to force the enemy to operate in areas where OPFOR interdiction fire can be most effective. The OPFOR uses windows of opportunity to destroy key enemy systems or cause mass casualties.

Purpose of the Offense

All offensive operations are designed to achieve the goals of a strategic campaign through active measures. However, the purpose of any given offensive operation varies with the situation. The primary distinction among types of offensive operations is their purpose. Thus, the OPFOR recognizes three general types of offensive operations according to their purpose: to destroy, seize, or expel.

Attack to Destroy

An attack to destroy is designed to eliminate a target entity as a useful fighting force. Operational-level attacks to destroy usually focus on key enemy combat formations or capabilities. Not every soldier or system need be destroyed for such an attack to be successful. Attacks to destroy are often focused on a single component of an enemy's combat system. For example, it may be enough to remove the enemy force's ability to sustain itself or exercise effective command and control. Therefore, attacks to destroy are often focused on the logistics and C2 systems of the target entity. Such attacks are most often conducted during regional operations. However, an attack to destroy may also occur during transition or adaptive operations, whenever the OPFOR can recognize and exploit a window of opportunity.

Attack to Seize

An attack to seize is designed to gain control of a key terrain feature or man-made facility. The OPFOR does not adhere to the idea that seizure may be accomplished simply by placing a feature in weapons range. In the OPFOR lexicon, seize means to have OPFOR soldiers on and/or in the feature in question. Attacks to seize can occur as part of all strategic-level courses of action during OPFOR strategic campaigns. In regional operations, the seizure may facilitate the movement of an exploitation force. In transition or adaptive operations, the seizure may be part of a campaign to control access into the theater.

Attack to Expel

An attack to expel is used to force the defender to vacate an area. Attacks to expel often have a strong information warfare (IW) component, so that the enemy removes himself from the area largely through a loss of resolve. Attacks to expel typically focus on a key enemy capability or vulnerability. Attacks to expel are primarily conducted within the context of transition or adaptive operations.

Planning Offensive Operations

For the OPFOR, the key elements of planning offensive operations are

- Determining the level of planning possible (planned versus situational offense).
- Organizing the battlefield.
- Organizing forces.
- Organizing IW activities (see Chapter 5).
- Determining the objective of the offensive operation.

Offensive actions during transition and adaptive operations are not able to rely simply on massing combat power at a decisive point. Such actions typically include increased use of—

- Infiltration.
- Perception management (see Chapter 5) in support of operations.
- Affiliated forces in support of operations.

Planned Offense

A planned (deliberate) offense is an offensive operation or action undertaken when there is sufficient time and knowledge of the situation to prepare and rehearse forces for specific tasks. Typically, the enemy is in prepared defensive positions and in a known location. The OPFOR plans an offense using the method described in Chapter 2. Key considerations in offensive planning are—

- Selecting a clear and appropriate objective.
- Determining which enemy forces (security, reaction, or reserve) must be fixed.
- Developing a reconnaissance plan that locates and tracks relevant enemy targets and elements.
- Creating or taking advantage of a window of opportunity to free friendly forces from any enemy advantages in precision standoff and situational awareness.
- Determining which component or components of an enemy's combat system to attack.

Situational Offense

The OPFOR may also conduct a situational (hasty) offense. It recognizes that the modern battlefield is chaotic. Fleeting opportunities to attack an enemy weakness continually present themselves and just as quickly disappear. Although detailed planning and preparation greatly mitigate risk, they are often not achievable if a window of opportunity is to be exploited.

The following are examples of conditions that might lead to a situational offense:

- A key enemy unit, system, or capability is exposed.
- The OPFOR has an opportunity to conduct a spoiling attack to disrupt enemy defensive preparations.
- An OPFOR unit makes contact on favorable terms for subsequent offensive action.

In a situational offense, the commander develops his assessment of the conditions rapidly and without a great deal of staff involvement. He provides a basic course of action to the staff, who then quickly turn that course of action into an executable operational directive. The situational offense relies heavily on implementation of battle drills by subordinate tactical units (see FM 7-100.2).

Organization of the battlefield in a situational offense is normally limited to minor changes to existing control measures. Organization of forces in a situational offense typically requires the use of detachments or tactical groups (see FM 7-100.2). The nature of situational offense is such that it often involves smaller, independent forces accomplishing discrete missions dispersed from the main body of the operational-strategic command (OSC).

Organizing the Battlefield for the Offense

In his operation plan, the commander specifies the organization of the battlefield from the perspective of his level of command. Within his unit's area of responsibility (AOR), as defined

by the next-higher commander, he designates AORs for his subordinates, along with zones, objectives, and axes related to his own overall mission.
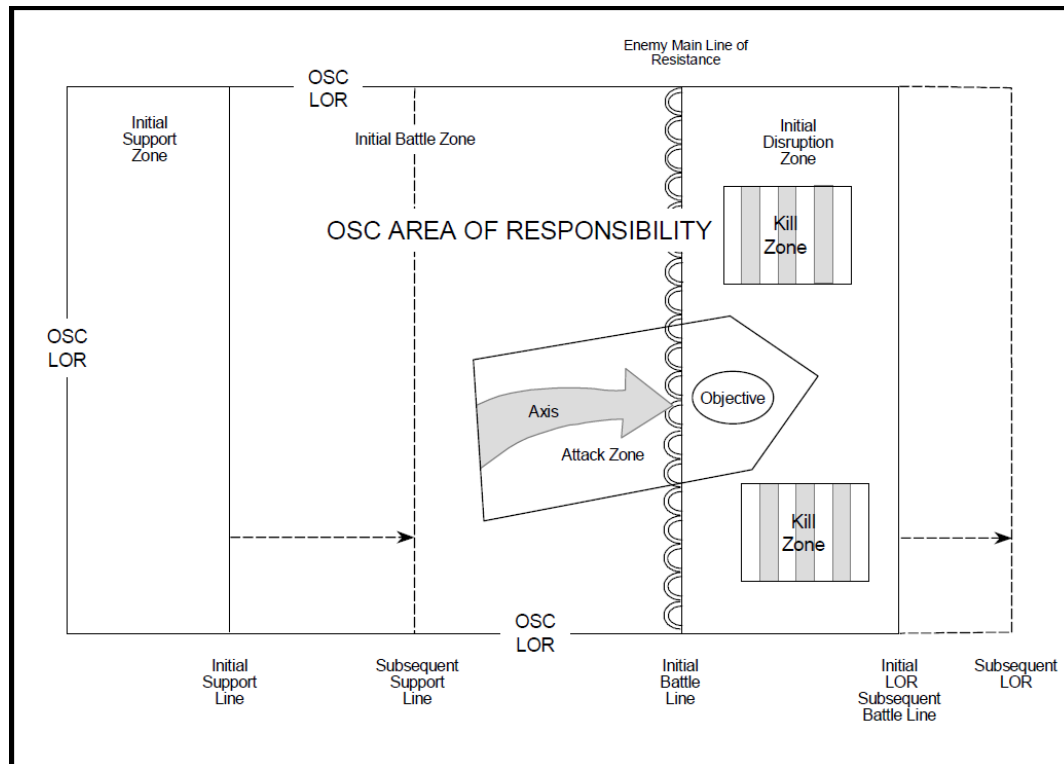

Figure 3-1. Example of an AOR (Linear Battlespace)
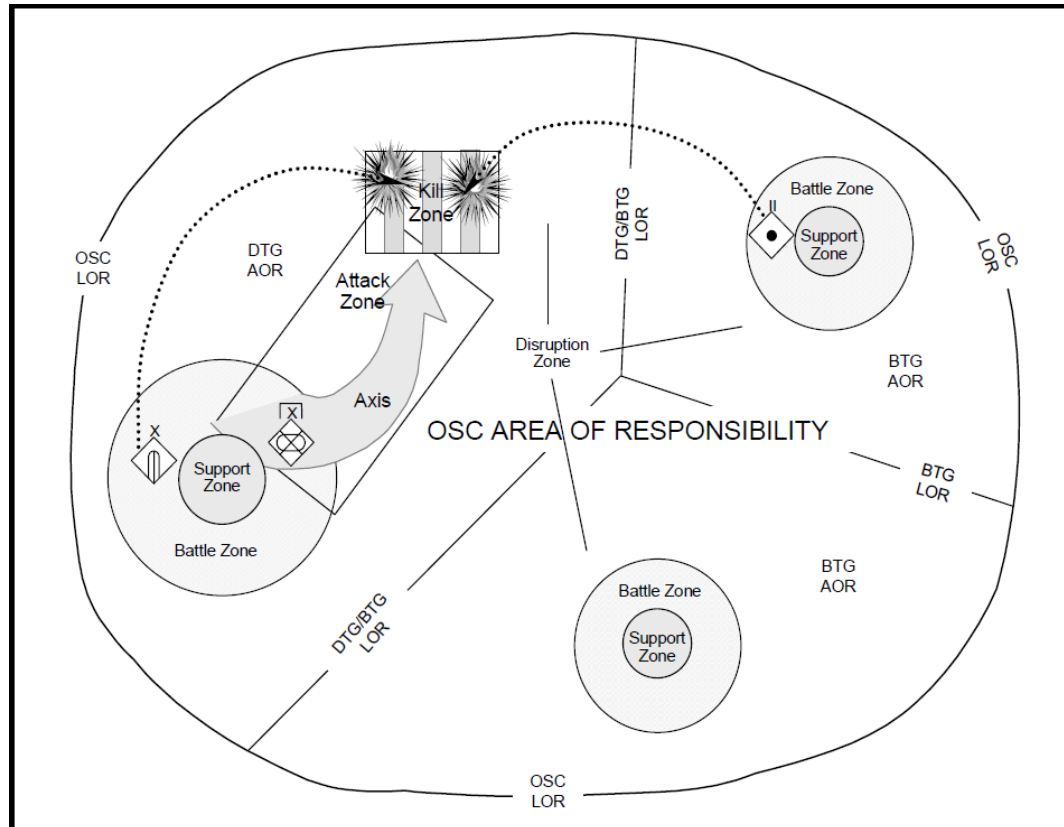
Areas of Responsibility

Figure 3-2. Example of AOR (Nonlinear Battlespace)

OPFOR AORs normally consist of three basic zones: the disruption zone, the battle zone, and the support zone. These zones have the same basic purposes in all types of offense. In the offense,

AORs also may contain one or more attack zones, kill zones, objectives, and/or axes. Zones may be linear or nonlinear in nature. See Figures 3-1 and 3-2 for generalized examples of AORs and zones.

The intent of this method of organizing the battlefield is to preserve as much flexibility as possible for subordinate units within the parameters that define the aim of the senior commander. An important feature of the basic zones in an AOR is the variations in actions that can occur within them in the course of a specific offensive operation.

Disruption Zone

In the offense, the disruption zone is that battlespace in which the OPFOR seeks to use direct and indirect fires to destroy the integrity of enemy forces and capabilities without decisive engagement. In general, this zone is the space between the battle line and the limit of responsibility (LOR). In linear operations, it typically begins at what the OPFOR anticipates to be the enemy main line of resistance and extends to the LOR. The dimensions of this zone are based on OPFOR weapons envelopes and the targets the OPFOR wishes to affect. For example, counterreconnaissance activity may draw the attention of enemy forces and cause them to enter the kill zone of a sophisticated ambush (described later in this chapter) executed by long-range precision fires.

The OSC disruption zone may be the aggregate of the disruption zones of subordinates, such as division and brigade tactical groups (DTGs and BTGs). However, assets directly controlled by the OSC could also operate throughout the OSC disruption zone. In that case, each subordinate would be responsible for a portion of the OSC disruption zone, and that portion would constitute the subordinate' disruption zone within its own AOR. In other cases, an OSC disruption zone may extend beyond those of its subordinates, to include an area occupied by forces sent out under direct control of the OSC. OSC-level forces could include SPF and affiliated forces, which could be operating in enemy-held territory even before the beginning of hostilities. There could also be stay-behind forces in areas seized by the enemy. A field group (FG) or theater commander controlling multiple OSCs can have a disruption zone and may assign an OSC to operate in that zone.

In the offense, the disruption zone exists to

- Disrupt defensive works and preparations.
- Delay or fix enemy counterattacks or response forces.
- Attack lucrative targets (key systems or vulnerable troops).

Disruption forces often maneuver to fix enemy forces and place long- range fire on key enemy units. They can also strip away the enemy' reconnaissance assets (to deceive him of the location and configuration of the attack) while denying him the ability to acquire and engage the OPFOR with deep fires. This includes an air defense effort to deny aerial attack and reconnaissance platforms from targeting forces in the zone. A disruption force seeks to conduct highly damaging local attacks. It ensures that a covered withdrawal route exists to avoid decisive engagement.

Typical systems, units, or facilities to be attacked by a disruption force are

- C2 systems.
- RISTA assets.
- Aviation assets.
- Precision fire systems.
- Logistics support areas.
- LOCs.
- Mobility and countermobility assets.
- Casualty evacuation routes and means.

The disruption zone is bounded by the battle line and the LOR of the overall AOR. In linear

offensive operations, the higher headquarters may move this LOR forward as the force continues successful offensive operations. Thus, the boundaries of the disruption zone will also move forward during the course of an operation. The higher commander can push the disruption zone forward or outward as forces adopt a defensive posture while consolidating gains at the end of a successful offensive operation and/or prepare for a subsequent offensive operation.

Battle Zone

In the offense, the battle zone is that battlespace in which the OPFOR seeks to fix and/or destroy enemy forces through simultaneous or sequential application of all components of combat power. The dimensions of this zone are based on OPFOR objectives and the time-space relationships for the forces involved. The battle zone is separated from the disruption zone by the battle line and from the support zone by the support line. The commander may adjust the location of these lines in order to accommodate successful offensive operations. In a linear situation, those lines can shift forward during the course of a successful attack. Thus, the battle zone would also shift forward.

In the offense, the battle zone exists toâ

- Control forces in proximity to the enemy.
- Define objectives.
- Support understanding of roles and missions.

Forces operating in the battle zone engage the enemy in close combat to achieve a specific operational objective. This objective is typically one of the following:

- Create a penetration in the enemy defense, through which exploitation forces can pass.
- Draw enemy attention and resources to the action.
- Seize operationally significant geographic areas.
- Inflict casualties on a vulnerable enemy unit.
- Prevent the enemy from moving a part of his force to impact OPFOR actions elsewhere on the battlefield.

In nonlinear offensive operations, multiple battle zones may exist, and within each a certain task would be assigned to the OPFOR unit or units charged to operate in that space. The tasks given to the units that operate in the zone can range from demonstration to attack. The battle zone provides the commander of those units the battlespace in which to frame his operations.

Support Zone

The support zone is that area of the battlespace designed to be free of significant enemy action and to permit the effective logistics and administrative support of forces. Security forces operate in the support zone in a combat role to defeat enemy special operations forces and other threats. Camouflage, concealment, cover, and deception (C3D) measures throughout the support zone aim to protect the force from standoff RISTA and precision attack. If the battle zone moves during the course of an operation, the support zone would move accordingly.

Attack Zone

The attack zone is the assigned zone of action for an attacking force. In operation plans and directives, the senior commander assigns attack zones to subordinate units.

Kill Zone

A kill zone is a designated area on the battlefield where the OPFOR plans to destroy a key enemy target. Kill zones are tied to enemy targets and the OPFOR weapon systems that will engage them, and not a particular zone of the AOR. They may be designated by a senior commander in order to focus combat power.

Objectives and Axes

An objective is a geographic location or physical object, the seizing and/or holding of which is a goal of an offensive operation.[1]Â An axis is a control measure showing the location through which a force will move as it proceeds from its starting location to its objective.

Organizing Forces for the Offense

In planning and executing offensive actions, the OPFOR organizes and designates various forces according to their function. This provides a common language for how the OPFOR fights functionally, rather than geometrically. The functions do not change, regardless of where the force might happen to be located on the battlefield. Thus, functional forces that perform the common operational and tactical tasks of disrupting, fixing, assaulting, exploiting, providing security, and deceiving are logically designated as disruption, fixing, assault, exploitation, security, and deception forces, respectively. A force held in reserve is designated as a reserve, until it receives a mission to perform a specific function.

In his operation plan, the operational-level commander specifies the organization of the forces within his level of command. Thus, subordinate forces understand their roles within the overall operation. However, the organization of forces can shift dramatically during the course of an operation, if part of the plan does not work or works better than anticipated. For example, a unit that started out being part of a fixing force might split off and become an exploitation force, if the opportunity presents itself.

Each of the separate functional forces has an identified commander. This is often the senior commander of the largest subordinate unit assigned to that force. For example, if two DTGs are acting as the OSCâ fixing force, the senior of the two DTG commanders is the fixing force commander. Since, in this option, each force commander is also a subordinate unit commander, he controls the force from his unitâ command post (CP). Another option is to have one of the OSCâ or FGâ CPs be in charge of a functional force. For example, the forward CP could control a disruption force or a fixing force. Another possibility would be for the IFC CP to command the disruption force or the exploitation force or any other force whose actions must be closely coordinated with fires delivered by the IFC.

In any case, the force commander is responsible to the OSC or FG commander to ensure that combat preparations are made properly and to take charge of the force during the operation. This frees the operational-level commander from decisions specific to the forceâ mission. Even when tactical-level subordinates of an OSC or FG have responsibility for parts of the disruption zone, there is still an overall OSC or FG disruption force commander.

Disruption Force

In the offense, the disruption force would include the disruption force that already existed in a preceding defensive situation (see Chapter 4). It is possible that forces assigned for operations in the disruption zone in the defense might not have sufficient mobility to do the same in the offense or that targets may change and require different or additional assets. Thus, the disruption force might require augmentation.

Fixing Force

OPFOR offensive operations are founded on the concept of fixing enemy forces so that they are not free to maneuver. The OPFOR recognizes that units and soldiers can be fixed in a variety of ways. For exampleâ

- They find themselves without effective communication with higher command.
- Their picture of the battlefield is unclear.

- They are (or believe they are) decisively engaged in combat.
- They have lost mobility to due to complex terrain, obstacles, or WMD.

In the offense, planners identify which enemy forces need to be fixed and the method by which they will be fixed. They then assign this responsibility to a force that has the capability to fix the required enemy forces with the correct method. The fixing force may consist of a number of units separated from each other in time and space, particularly if the enemy forces required to be fixed are likewise separated. A fixing force could consist entirely of affiliated irregular forces. It is possible that a discrete attack on logistics or C2 (or other systems) could fix an enemy without resorting to deploying large fixing forces.

Assault Force

The assault force is charged with creating the conditions that allow the exploitation force the freedom to operate. In order to create a window of opportunity for the exploitation force to succeed, the assault force may be required to operate at a high degree of risk and may sustain substantial casualties. However, an assault force may not even make contact with the enemy, but instead conduct a demonstration.

Exploitation Force

The exploitation force is assigned the task of achieving the objective of the mission. It typically exploits a window of opportunity created by the assault force. However, effective IW, a mismatch in system capabilities, or even the enemy's own dispositions may create a situation in which the exploitation force is able to achieve the objective without a formal assault force. An exploitation force could engage the ultimate objective with fires only.

Security Force

The security force conducts activities to prevent or mitigate the effects of hostile actions against the overall operational-level command and/or its key components. If the commander chooses, he may charge this security force with providing force protection for the entire AOR, including the rest of the functional forces; logistics and administrative elements in the support zone; and other key installations, facilities, and resources. The security force may include various types of units—such as infantry, SPF, counterreconnaissance, and signals reconnaissance assets—to focus on enemy special operations and long-range reconnaissance forces operating throughout the AOR. It can also include internal security forces units allocated to the operational-level command, with the mission of protecting the overall command from attack by hostile insurgents, terrorists, and special operations forces. The security force may also be charged with mitigating the effects of WMD.

Deception Force

When the IW plan requires combat forces to take some action (such as a demonstration or feint), these forces are designated as deception forces in close-hold executive summaries of the plan. However, wide-distribution copies of the plan refer to these forces according to the designation given them in the deception story.

Reserves

At the commander's discretion, forces may be held out of initial action so that he may influence unforeseen events or take advantage of developing opportunities. OPFOR offensive reserve formations are given priorities in terms of whether the staff thinks it most likely that they will act as a fixing, assault, or exploitation force. The size and composition of an offensive reserve is entirely situation-dependent. (See Chapter 4 for more detail on the various types of reserves, some of which are more common in defensive operations.)

Preparing for the Offense

In the preparation phase, the OPFOR focuses on ways of applying all available resources and the full range of actions to place the enemy in the weakest condition and position possible. Commanders prepare their forces for all subsequent phases of the offensive operation. They organize their forces and the battlefield with an eye toward capitalizing on conditions created by successful attacks.

Establish Contact

The number one priority for all offensive operations is to gain and maintain contact with key enemy forces. As part of the decision-making process (see Chapter 2), the commander and staff identify which forces must be kept under watch at all times. The OPFOR will employ whatever technical sensors it has at its disposal to locate and track enemy forces, but the method of choice is ground reconnaissance. It may also receive information on the enemy from the civilian populace, local police, or affiliated irregular forces.

Make Thorough Logistics Arrangements

The OPFOR understands that there is as much chance of an offensive operation being brought to culmination by a lack of sufficient logistics support as by enemy action. Careful consideration is given to carried days of supply and advanced caches to obviate the need for easily disrupted LOCs.

Modify the Plan When Necessary

The OPFOR takes into account that, while it might consider itself to be in the preparation phase for one operation, it is continuously in the execution phase. Plans are never considered final. Plans are checked throughout the course of their development to ensure they are still valid in light of battlefield events.

Rehearse Critical Actions in Priority

The commander establishes the priority for the critical actions expected to take place during the operation. The force rehearses those actions in as realistic a manner as possible for the remainder of the preparation time.

Executing the Offense

The degree of preparation often determines the nature of the attack in the execution phase. Successful execution depends on forces that understand their roles in the operation and can swiftly follow preparatory actions with the maximum possible shock and violence and deny the enemy any opportunity to recover. A successful execution phase often ends with transition to the defense in order to consolidate gains, defeat enemy counterattacks, or avoid culmination. In some cases, the execution phase is followed by continued offensive action to exploit opportunities created by the operation just completed.

Maintain Contact

The OPFOR will go to great lengths to ensure that its forces maintain contact with key elements of the enemy force throughout the operation. This includes rapid reconstitution of reconnaissance assets and forces and the use of whatever combat power is necessary to ensure success.

Modify the Plan When Necessary

The OPFOR is sensitive to the effects of mission dynamics and realizes that the enemy's actions may well make an OPFOR unit's original mission achievable, but completely irrelevant. As an example, a unit of the fixing force in an attack may be keeping its portion of the enemy force tied down while another portion of the enemy force is maneuvering nearby to stop the exploitation force. In this case, the OPFOR unit in question must be ready to transition to a new mission quickly and break contact to fix the maneuvering enemy force.

Seize Opportunities

The OPFOR places maximum emphasis on decentralized execution, initiative, and adaptation. Subordinate units are expected to take advantage of fleeting opportunities so long as their actions are in concert with the purpose of the operational directive.

Dominate the Tempo of Operations

Through all actions possible, the OPFOR plans to control the tempo of operations. It will use continuous attack, IW, and shifting targets, objectives, and axes to ensure that operational events are taking place at the pace it desires.

Types of Offensive Action

The types of offensive action in OPFOR doctrine are both tactical methods and guides to the design of operational courses of action. An FG or OSC offensive operation plan may include subordinate units that are executing different offensive and defensive courses of action within the overall offensive mission framework.

Attack

An attack seeks to achieve operational decision through primarily military means by defeating the enemy's military power. This defeat does not come through the destruction of armored weapons systems but through the disruption, dislocation, and subsequent paralyzation that occurs when combat forces are rendered irrelevant by the loss of the capability or will to continue the fight. Attack is the method of choice for OPFOR offensive action. There are two types of attack: integrated attack and dispersed attack.

The OPFOR does not have a separate design for "exploitation" as a distinct offensive course of action. Rather, exploitation is considered a central part of all integrated and dispersed attacks.

The OPFOR does not have a separate design for "pursuit" as a distinct offensive course of action. A pursuit is conducted using the same basic course-of-action framework as any other integrated or dispersed attack. The fixing force gains contact with the fleeing enemy force and slows it or forces it to stop while the assault and exploitation forces create the conditions for and complete the destruction of the enemy's C2 and logistics structure or other systems.

Integrated Attack

Figure 3-3. Integrated Attack (Linear Battlespace Example1)

Integrated attack is an offensive action where the OPFOR seeks military decision by destroying the enemy's will and/or ability to continue fighting through the application of joint and combined arms effects. Integrated attack is often employed when the OPFOR enjoys overmatch with respect to its opponent and is able to bring all components of offensive combat power to bear. It may also be employed against a more sophisticated and capable opponent, if the appropriate window of opportunity is created or available. See Figures 3-3 through 3-5 for examples of integrated attacks.

The primary objective of an integrated attack is the enemy's will and ability to fight. The OPFOR recognizes that modern militaries cannot continue without adequate logistics support and no military, modern or other- wise, can function without effective command and control.

Integrated attacks are characterized by—

- Not being focused solely on destruction of ground combat power but often on C2 and logistics.
- Fixing the majority of the enemy's force in place with the minimum force necessary.
- Isolating the targeted subcomponent(s) of the enemy's combat system from his main combat power.
- Using complex terrain to force the enemy to fight at a disadvantage.
- Using deception and other components of IW to degrade the enemy's situational understanding and ability to target OPFOR formations.
- Using flank attack and envelopment, particularly of enemy forces that have been fixed.

The OPFOR prefers to conduct integrated attacks when most or all of the following conditions exist:

- The OPFOR possesses significant overmatch in combat power over enemy forces.
- It possesses at least air parity over the critical portions of the battlefield.
- It is sufficiently free of enemy standoff reconnaissance and attack systems to be able to operate without accepting high levels of risk.

Organizing Forces for an Integrated Attack

An integrated attack employs fixing, assault, and exploitation forces. A disruption forces exists,

but is not created specifically for this type of offensive action.

Fixing Force. The fixing force in an integrated attack is required to prevent enemy defending forces, reserves, and quick-response forces (QRF) from interfering with the actions of the assault and exploitation forces. The battle will develop rapidly, and enemy forces not in the attack zone cannot be allowed to reposition to influence the assault and exploitation forces. Maneuver forces, precision fires, air defense units, long-range antiarmor systems, situational obstacles, chemical weapons, and electronic warfare (EW) are well suited to fix defending forces.

Assault Force. The assault force in an integrated attack is charged with creating conditions that allow the exploitation force to rapidly penetrate enemy defenses. Since the exploitation force is principally required to act within the window of opportunity, the assault force may successfully employ infiltration of infantry to carefully pre-selected points to assist the exploitation force in its penetration. Smoke and suppressive artillery and rocket fires, combat engineer units, and air-delivered weapons are also suited to this mission.

Exploitation Force. The exploitation force in an integrated attack must be capable of penetrating or avoiding enemy defensive forces and attacking and destroying the enemy' s support infrastructure before he has time to react. An armored or attack helicopter unit is often best suited to be the core of an exploitation force in an integrated attack due to the combination of mobility, protection, and firepower possessed by such forces.

Dispersed Attack

Dispersed attack (also known as decentralized attack) is the primary manner in which the OPFOR conducts offensive action when threatened by a superior enemy and/or when unable to mass or provide integrated C2Â to an attack. This is not to say that the dispersed attack cannot or should not be used against peer forces, but as a rule integrated attack will more completely attain objectives in such situations. Dispersed attack relies on IW and dispersion of forces to permit the OPFOR to conduct tactical offensive operations while overmatched by precision standoff weapons and imagery and signals sensors. The dispersed attack is continuous and comes from multiple directions. It employs multiple means working together in a very interdependent way. The attack can be dispersed in time as well as space. See Figures 3-6 and 3-7 for examples of dispersed attacks.

The primary objective of dispersed attack is to take advantage of a window of opportunity to bring enough joint and combined arms force to bear to destroy the enemy' s will and/or capability to continue fighting. To achieve this, the OPFOR does not necessarily have to destroy the entire enemy force, but often just a key portion of that force.

Selecting the appropriate portion of the enemy to destroy is the first step in planning the dispersed attack. This element is chosen because of its importance to the enemy and varies depending on the force involved and the current military situation. For example, an enemy force dependent on one geographical point for all of his logistics support and reinforcement would be most vulnerable at that point. Disrupting this activity at the right time and to the right extent may bring about operational decision on the current battlefield or it may open further windows of opportunity to attack the enemy' s weakened forces at little cost to the OPFOR. In another example, an enemy force preparing to attack may be disrupted by an OPFOR attack whose purpose is to destroy long-range missile artillery, creating the opportunity for the OPFOR to achieve standoff with its own missile systems. In a final example, the key system chosen may be the personnel of the enemy force. Attacking and causing mass casualties among infantrymen may delay an enemy offensive in complex terrain while also being politically unacceptable for the enemy command structure.

Dispersed attacks are characterized by

- Not being focused on complete destruction of ground combat power but rather on destroying

a key portion of the enemy force (often targeting enemy C2 and logistics).

- Fixing and isolating enemy combat power.
- Using smaller, independent subordinate elements.
- Conducting rapid moves from dispersed locations.
- Massing at the last possible moment.
- Conducting simultaneous attack at multiple, dispersed locations.
- Using deception and other components of IW to degrade the enemy's situational understanding and ability to target OPFOR formations.
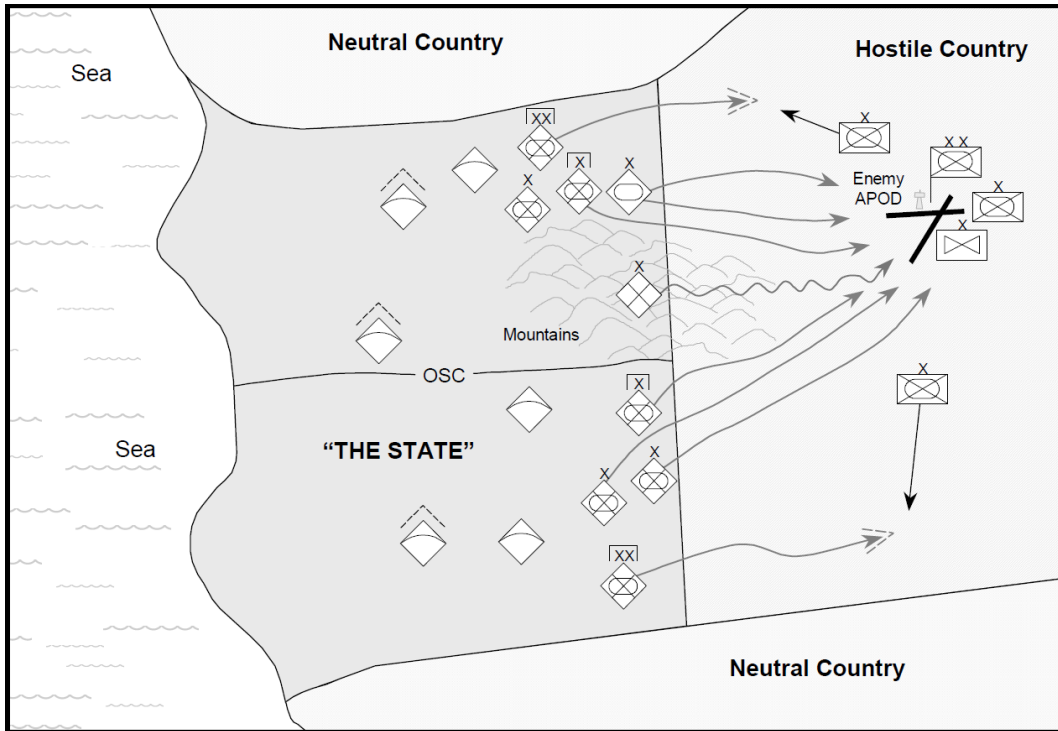

Figure 3-6. Dispersed Attack (Example 1)

The window of opportunity needed to establish conditions favorable to the execution of a dispersed attack may be one created by the OPFOR or one that develops due to external factors in the operational environment. When this window must be created, the OPFOR keys on several tasks that must be accomplished:

- Destroy enemy ground reconnaissance.
- Deceive enemy imagery and signals sensors.
- Create an uncertain air defense environment.
- Selectively deny situational awareness.
- Maximize use of complex terrain.
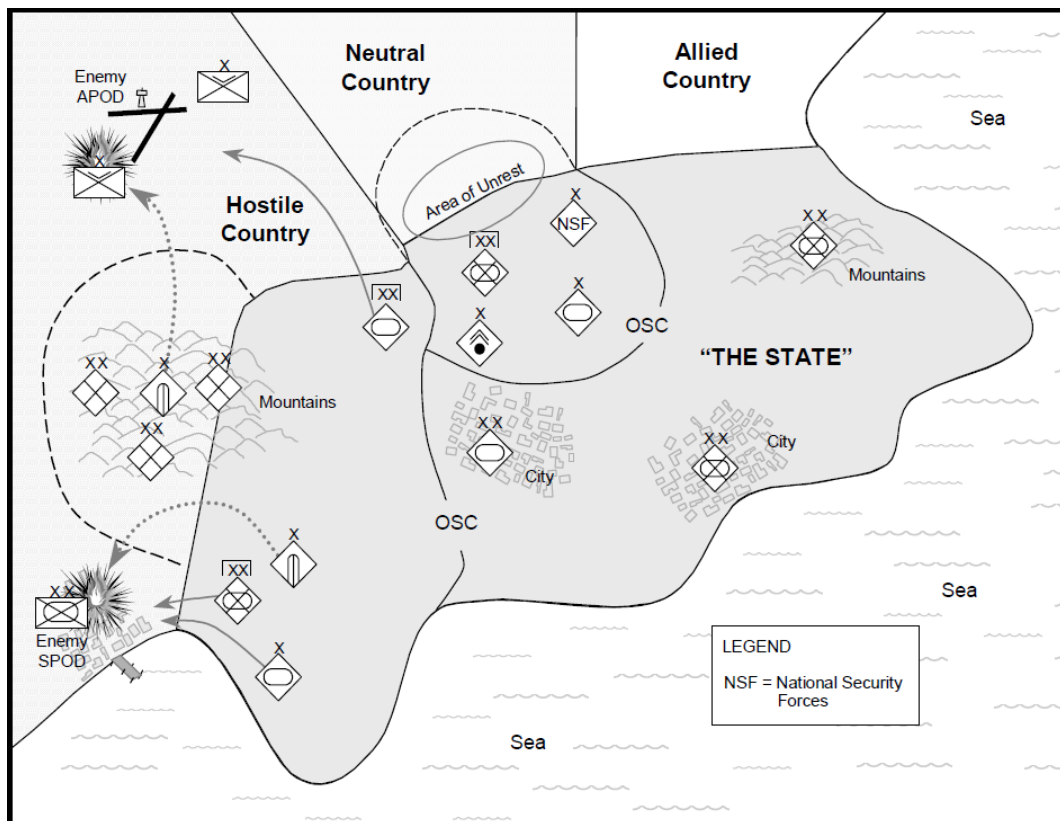
Figure 3-7. Dispersed Attack (Example 2)

Organizing Forces for a Dispersed Attack

A dispersed attack employs fixing, assault, and exploitation forces. A disruption force exists, but is not created specifically for this type of offensive action. Deception forces can also play an important role in dispersed attack operations.

Fixing Force. The fixing force in a dispersed attack is primarily focused on fixing enemy response forces. Enemy reserves, response forces, and precision fire systems that can reorient rapidly will be those elements most capable of disrupting a dispersed attack. Maneuver forces, precision fires, air defense and antiarmor ambushes, situational obstacles, chemical weapons, and EW are well suited to fix these kinds of units and systems.

Assault Force. The assault force in a dispersed attack is charged with creating favorable conditions for the exploitation force to rapidly move from dispersed locations and penetrate or infiltrate enemy defenses. Since it is the exploitation force that is principally required to act within the window of opportunity, the assault force may successfully employ infiltration of infantry to carefully pre-selected points to assist the exploitation force in its penetration. Smoke and suppressive artillery and rocket fires, combat engineer units, and air-delivered weapons are also suited to this mission. Dispersed attacks often make use of multiple assault forces separated in time and/or space.

Exploitation Force. The exploitation force in a dispersed attack must be capable, through inherent capabilities or positioning relative to the enemy, of destroying the target of the operation. An armored force may be the weapon of choice to maneuver throughout the battlefield as single platoons in order to have one company reach a vulnerable troop concentration or soft C2 node. Alternatively, the exploitation force may be a widely dispersed group of SPF teams set to attack exposed logistics targets simultaneously. Dispersed attacks often make use of multiple exploitation forces separated in time and/or space, but often oriented on the same objective(s).

Limited-Objective Attack

A limited-objective attack seeks to achieve results critical to the strategic campaign plan (SCP) by destroying or denying the enemy key capabilities through primarily military means. The results of a limited-objective attack typically fall short of operational decision on the day of battle, but may be vital to the overall success of the SCP. Limited-objective attacks are common during adaptive operations in which the objective is to preserve forces and wear down the enemy, rather than achieving a military decision.

The primary objective of a limited-objective attack is a particular enemy capability. This may or may not be a particular man-made system or group of systems, but may also be the capability to take action at the enemy's chosen tempo.

Limited-objective attacks are characterized by—

- Not being focused solely on destruction of ground combat power but often on C2 and logistics.
- Denying the enemy the capability he most needs to execute his plans.
- Maximal use of the systems warfare approach to combat (see Chapter 1).
- Significant reliance on a planned or seized window of opportunity.

At the operational level, there are three types of limited-objective attack: sophisticated ambush, spoiling attack, and counterattack. One of these types, the sophisticated ambush, requires conditions similar to those needed for a dispersed attack, but is executed by autonomous tactical-level forces with the OSC providing coordination and support. The other two types, the spoiling attack and counterattack, share some common characteristics, but differ in purpose.

Sophisticated Ambush

A sophisticated ambush is the linking in time and task of RISTA, attacking forces, and window of opportunity to destroy key enemy systems or cause politically unacceptable casualties. What makes a sophisticated ambush "sophisticated" is not the actual attack means. In fact, the actual ambush is executed by tactical-level forces. (See FM 7-100.2 for examples.) What makes it "sophisticated," however, is the linking of sensor, ambusher, window of opportunity, and a target that affects an enemy center of gravity. This typically requires sophisticated ambushes to be planned, coordinated, and resourced at the operational level.

Like any other ambush, a sophisticated ambush is conducted against a moving or temporarily halted target. In this case, however, the IW plan is designed to facilitate infiltration or positioning of the ambushing forces and expose the target. The OSC will be involved in IW planning and the coordination of operational-level assets needed to support the ambush.

A sophisticated ambush is conducted by forces autonomous on the battlefield, but linked by C2 and purpose. It can often involve affiliated forces, particularly when conducted as part of adaptive operations. A sophisticated ambush is not necessarily tied to scheme of maneuver in that the larger part of the OPFOR force may be involved in an operation not directly related to the ambush.

Sophisticated ambushes are characterized by—

- A key enemy target that, if destroyed, would significantly degrade the enemy's will or ability to fight.
- OPFOR sensor(s) with capability and mission to find and track the target. Sensors are often ground reconnaissance, but may include unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or satellites.
- A C2 method to link the ambushing forces and sensors.
- Supporting operation(s)—usually primarily IW—to create a window of opportunity for the ambushing forces to act.

A sophisticated ambush requires conditions similar to those needed for a dispersed attack. However, since less combat power is typically at risk in a sophisticated ambush, the window of opportunity does not need to be as extensive. The window of opportunity needed to establish

conditions favorable to the execution of a sophisticated ambush may be one created by the OPFOR or one that develops due to external factors in the operational environment. When this window must be created, the OPFOR keys on several tasks that must be accomplished:

- Destroy enemy ground reconnaissance in the ambush area.
- Deceive enemy imagery and signals sensors.
- Establish effective air defense protection for ambushing forces.
- Selectively deny situational awareness.
- Maximize use of complex terrain.
- Locate and track enemy security and response forces that could interfere with the ambush.
- Locate and track ambush target.

Spoiling Attack

A spoiling attack is designed to control the tempo of combat by disrupting the timing of enemy operations. This is accomplished by attacking during the planning and preparation for the enemy's own offensive operations. Spoiling attacks do not have to accomplish a great deal to be successful. Conversely, planners must focus carefully on what effect the attack is trying to achieve and how the attack will achieve that effect. In some cases, the purpose of the attack is to remove a key component of the enemy's force array or combat system so it is unavailable for the planned attack and therefore reduces his overall chances of success. More typically, the attack is designed to slow the development of conditions favorable to the enemy's planned attack. See Figure 3-8 for an example of a spoiling attack.
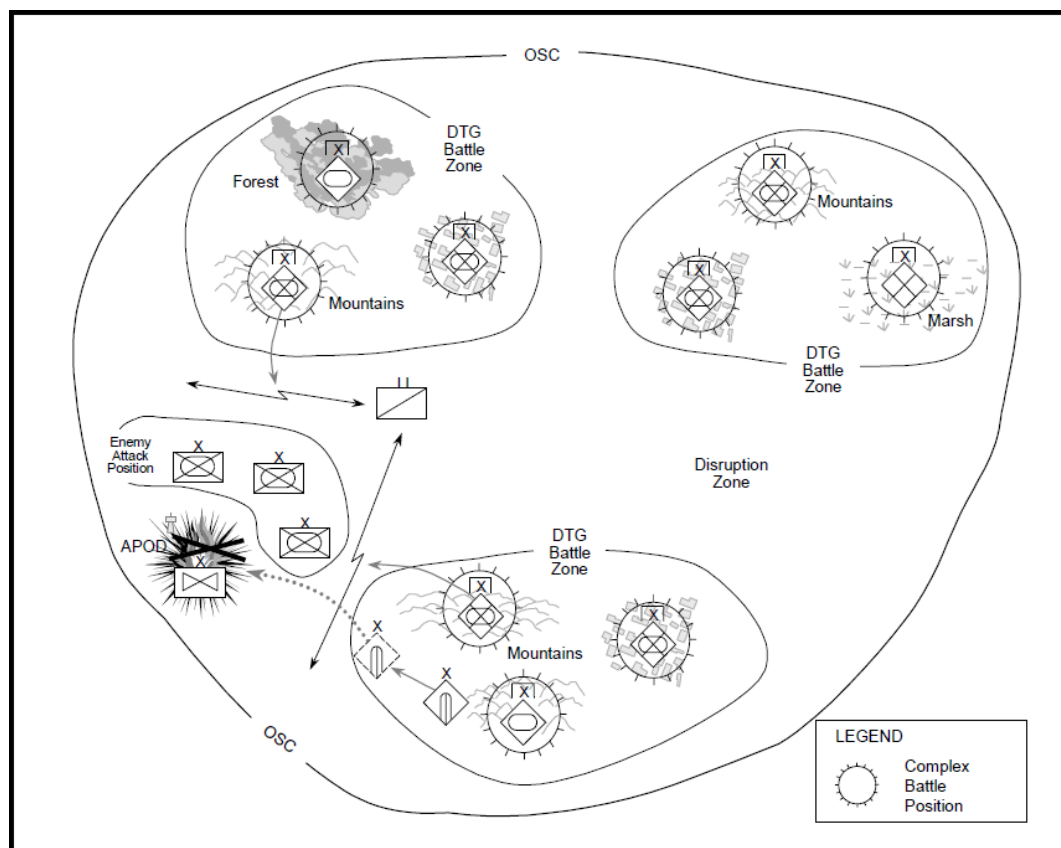

Figure 3-8. Spoiling Attack (Example)

Quite often, the spoiling attack develops as a situational attack (see above). This occurs when an unclear picture of enemy dispositions suddenly clarifies to some extent and the commander wishes to take advantage of the knowledge he has gained to disrupt enemy timing. This means that spoiling attacks are often conducted by reserve or response forces that can rapidly shift from their current posture to attack the enemy.

Spoiling attacks are characterized by—

- A requirement to have a clear picture of enemy preparations and dispositions.
- A number of independent subordinate unit actions.
- Highly focused objectives.
- The possibility that a spoiling attack may open a window of opportunity for other operations.

The OPFOR seeks to have the following conditions met in order to conduct a spoiling attack:

- RISTA establishes a picture of enemy attack preparations.
- Enemy security, reserve, and response forces are located and tracked.
- Enemy ground reconnaissance in the attack zone is destroyed or rendered ineffective.

Spoiling attacks are actually executed using one of the other types of offensive action as the base method: integrated attack, dispersed attack, or sophisticated ambush. Thus, the forces engaged in a spoiling attack would be organized accordingly. The primary difference between a spoiling attack and the other types of limited-objective attack is the purpose of the attack.

Counterattack

A counterattack is designed to cause an enemy offensive operation to culminate and allow the OPFOR to return to offensive operations. A counter-attack is designed to control the tempo of operations by returning the initiative to the OPFOR. Like a spoiling attack, a counterattack often develops as a situational attack, when the commander wishes to take advantage of a fleeting opportunity. The difference is that the counterattack occurs after the enemy begins his attack. See Figure 3-9 for an example of a counterattack.

Counterattacks are characterized byâ

- A shifting in command and support relationships to assume an offensive posture for the counterattacking force.
- A proper identification that the enemy is at or near culmination.
- The planned rapid transition of the remainder of the force to offensive operations.
- The possibility that a counterattack may open a window of opportunity for other operations.

The OPFOR seeks to set the following conditions for a counterattack:

- Locate and track enemy reserve forces and cause them to be committed.
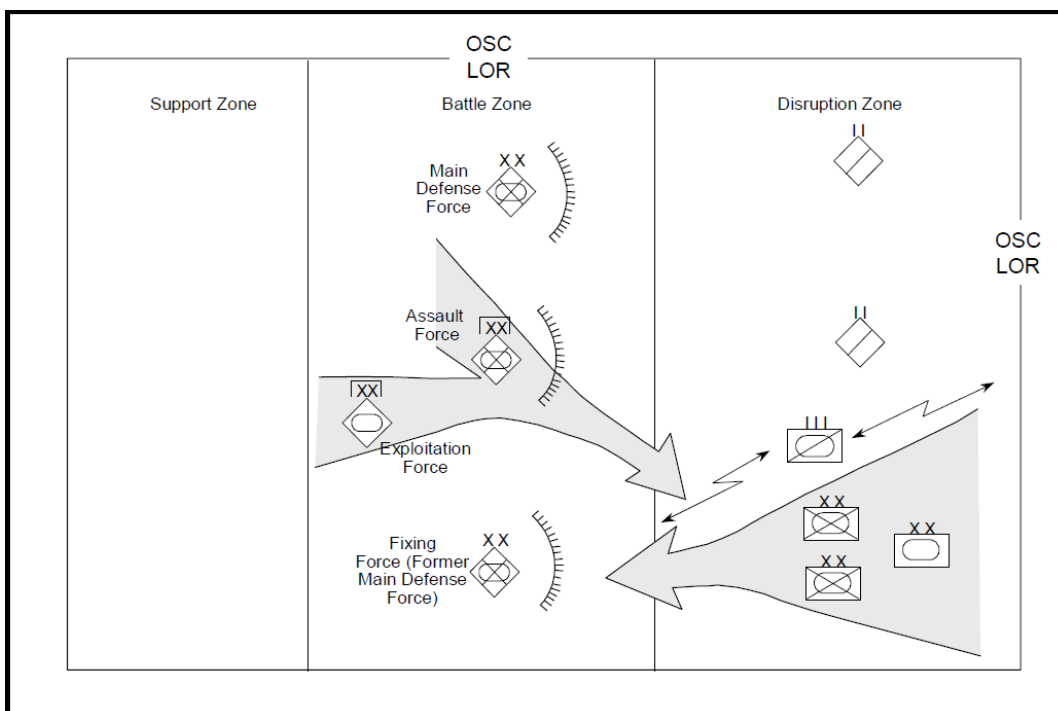- Destroy enemy reconnaissance forces that could observe counterattack preparations.

Figure 3-9. Counterattack (Example)

Organizing Forces for a Counterattack

Since counterattacks develop out of a defensive posture, the organization of forces involves the rapid shifting of some forces from their previously defensive roles to attack the enemy. Generally, the disruption force was already part of a previous OPFOR defensive posture and continues to perform the same functions during a counterattack. Like other offensive actions, a counterattack employs fixing, assault, and exploitation forces. Within the context of a larger defensive action, these forces come from the main defense force and/or the reserve, and they collectively make up the counterattack force. Other forces in the AOR may continue to perform their original defensive roles.

Fixing Force. The fixing force in a counterattack is that part of the force engaged in defensive action with the enemy. These forces continue to fight from their current positions and seek to account for the key parts of the enemy array and sure they are not able to break contact and reposition. Additionally, the fixing force has the mission of making contact with and destroying enemy reconnaissance forces and any combat forces that may have penetrated the OPFOR defense.

Assault Force. In a counterattack, the assault force (if one is used) is assigned the mission of forcing the enemy to commit his reserve so that the enemy commander has no further mobile forces with which to react. If the fixing

force has already forced this commitment, the counterattack design may forego the creation of an assault force.

Exploitation Force. The exploitation force in a counterattack maneuvers through or bypasses engaged enemy forces to attack and destroy the enemy's support infrastructure before he has time or freedom to react. An armored or attack helicopter unit is often best suited to be the core of an exploitation force in a counterattack due to the combination of mobility, protection, and firepower possessed by such forces.
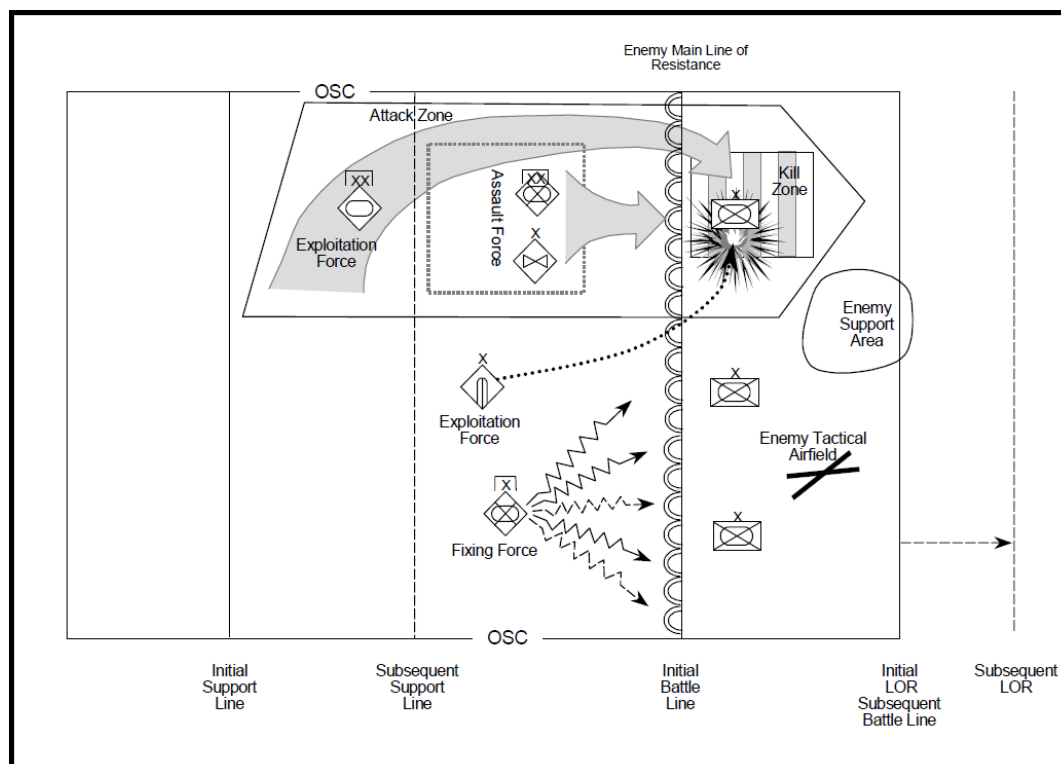
Strike

Figure 3-10. Strike (Example 1)

A strike is an offensive course of action that rapidly destroys a key enemy organization through a synergistic combination of massed precision fires and maneuver. The targeted enemy formation is usually a battalion task force or larger. Defeat for the enemy does not come through the simple destruction of armored weapon systems or combat soldiers but through the subsequent paralyzation that occurs when a key organization is completely devastated in a small span of time. See Figures 3-10 and 3-11 for examples of strikes. The overall objective is to destroy an enemy formation, typically after carefully setting the conditions for its destruction. The strike can be employed in larger operations that are either defensive or offensive in nature.

The primary objective of a strike is the enemyâ s will and ability to fight. The OPFOR recognizes that modern militaries cannot rapidly reconstitute entire combat formations and that significant destruction is both capable of removing all momentum possessed by a combat formation and eliminating support at home for continued combat operations.

Strikes are characterized byâ

- Being focused on the complete destruction of a particular enemy formation.
- Typically following a period of reconnaissance fire (see Chapter 7).
- Requiring effective and integrated C2 and RISTA means.
- The use of complex terrain to force the enemy to fight at a disadvantage.
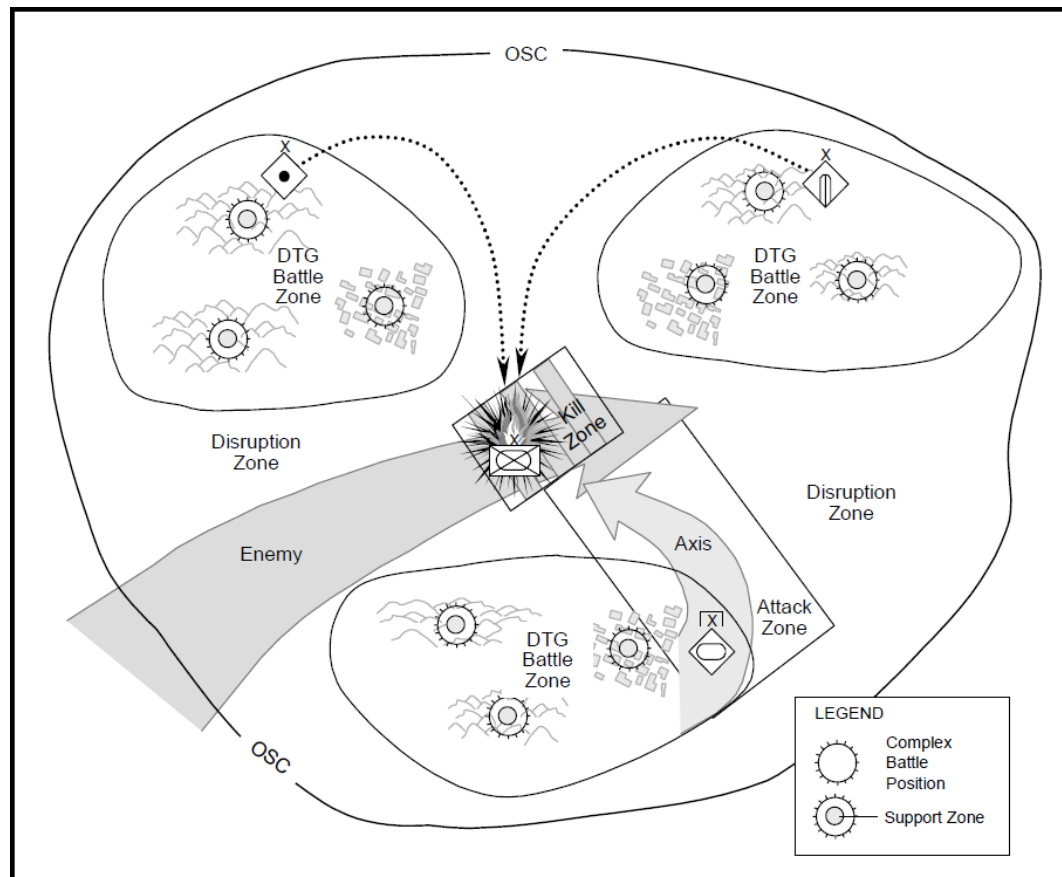- Significant reliance on deception and other IW measures.

Figure 3-11. Strike (Example 2)

The window of opportunity needed to establish conditions favorable to the execution of a strike may be one created by the OPFOR or one that develops due to external factors in the operational environment. When this window must be created, the OPFOR keys on several tasks that must be accomplished:

- Destroy enemy ground reconnaissance.
- Deceive enemy imagery and signals sensors.
- Create an uncertain air defense environment.
- Selectively deny situational awareness.

- Maximize use of complex terrain.

Reconnaissance Fire

In addition to the above, the OPFOR will typically precede a strike with significant reconnaissance fire (see Chapter 7) designed to remove one or more key capabilities from the enemy force. The targeted capabilities could be ground reconnaissance, effective C2, effective logistics, or casualty evacuation.

Organizing Forces for a Strike

A strike employs fixing, assault, and exploitation forces. The disruption force can play an important role in determining when the target formation will enter the kill zone for the strike.

Fixing Force. The fixing force in a strike is primarily focused on fixing enemy forces that might come to the aid of the target formation. The battle will develop rapidly, and enemy forces cannot be allowed to reposition to influence the assault and exploitation forces. Maneuver forces, Â precision fires, air defense units, long-range antiarmor systems, situational obstacles, chemical weapons, and EW are well suited to fix defending forces.

Assault Force. The assault force in a strike is charged with creating the conditions that allow the exploitation force to complete the destruction of the target formation. Since the exploitation force is principally required to act within the window of opportunity, the assault force may successfully employ infiltration of infantry to carefully pre-selected points to assist the exploitation force in its action. Smoke and suppressive artillery and rocket fires, combat engineer units, and air-delivered weapons are also suited to this mission.

Exploitation Force. The exploitation force in a strike has the mission of completing the destruction of the target formation. Strike exploitation forces are almost always combinations of highly lethal ground maneuver formations and precision long-range fire systems. A strike must be capable of eliminating the target enemy force before the higher enemy commander has time to react. An armored or attack helicopter unit is often best suited to be the core of an exploitation force in a strike, due to the combination of mobility, protection, and firepower possessed by such forces. However, a strike may be successfully executed without any maneuver forces, and the exploitation force may consist entirely of long-range fire systems.

References

1. ⬛ The term objective may also refer to the defined aim(s) of a particular operation. It is not always tied to ground or places. It could be a desired effect on a particular enemy formation or capability.