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Professor Mark Wegge

Module 3: Operational Art

18 August 2025

Session 3.1 DBF: The Primacy of the Objective

Response

Primary Post (*by August 18, 2025*)

Gold Thomas DBF 3.1

Japan's war effort at Leyte was simple, brutal, and doomed: preserve the empire by holding the Philippines, break the U.S. foothold, and destroy its transports.

Japan's strategic objective was defensive as it confronted an American production machine that outbuilt and out-replaced at scale. Tokyo aimed to preserve its empire, hold the Philippine gate and keep the southern resource routes open, thereby buying time to pressure U.S. political will toward hesitation (Hime, 2013, p. 15).

Therefore, the theater-strategic objective was to hold the Philippines because the archipelago anchored Japan's inner defense and sea communications. Vego stated that "properly determining the objective is the first and perhaps the most important step in planning and executing military action at any level" (2009, p. II-20). The Japanese chose to defend the Philippines to keep the war's arteries open, but they lacked the resources to achieve it.

Operationally, Japan chose the Sho-Go plan to deceive the U.S. fleet and destroy the invasion transports to force a decisive outcome. Decoy carriers lured Halsey north while Center and Southern forces broke in to deny the sea at the decisive point (Hime, 2013, pp. 15, 24). As Drachinifel put it, the Japanese were not seeking to decisively engage Admiral Halsey's forces, but rather used their carriers as a decoy to draw his fleet away so they could attack the more vulnerable amphibious forces and hamper the liberation of the Philippines (U.S. Naval Institute, 2024).

In conclusion, preserving the empire meant holding the Philippines, smashing the Leyte lodgment, and destroying U.S. transports. Strategic, theater-strategic, and operational objectives aligned on paper, but as Vego (2009, pp. II-6, II-10, II-12) warned, misaligned ends, ways, and means turned coherence into catastrophe.

References

Hime, D. N. (2013). The Leyte Gulf case study. U.S. Naval War College, Joint Military Operations Department.

U.S. Naval Institute. (2024, September 17). Battle of Leyte Gulf: A conversation with Drachinifel [Video, 16:53]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_PbiiaHSSm8

Vego, M. (2009). Joint operational warfare: Theory and practice (2nd ed.). U.S. Naval War College.

Secondary Post #1 - GOLD (*by August 21, 2025*)

SECONDARY POST RESPONSE

Jordan, you did a great job explaining what Japan was trying to do at all three levels of war. I appreciate how you discussed how the Japanese tactical actions were supposed to lead to bigger strategic goals. It helped convey how the Sho-Go 1 plan was supposed to work as a whole. That said, I would argue Japan's alignment faltered not in logic but in feasibility. As Hime explains, the Navy's plan depended on achieving local sea control by defeating enemy naval forces (Hime, 2013, p. 15). However, the Japanese Army and Navy had different plans and rarely coordinated under a single joint command. Japan's fuel was running low, and its best pilots were gone, making the plan even harder to pull off. The Army doubted it would work and figured the fleet probably would not make it back (Hime, 2013, p. 25). Although the objectives aligned on paper, the mismatch between ends, ways, and means made effective execution impossible. Excellent post with a strong structure.

References

Hime, D. N. (2013). The Leyte Gulf case study. U.S. Naval War College, Joint Military Operations Department.

Secondary Post #2 - BLUE (*by August 21, 2025*)

DBF 3.1 SECONDARY POST RESPONSE

William, well said. I would add that the U.S. operational objective to secure a lodgment at Leyte required both ground and naval success. Opening the gulf meant eliminating Japanese naval threats from multiple directions. As the Navy section of the Imperial General Headquarters

assessed, the best way to prevent enemy landings was by achieving local sea control through decisive naval action (Hime, 2013, p. 15). The Allied plan followed the same thinking. Halsey's Third Fleet went north to attack Ozawa's decoy carriers, Kinkaid's Seventh Fleet blocked the Southern Force at Surigao Strait, and MacArthur's troops handled the landings on shore. These efforts were designed to support the theater-strategic goal of cutting Japan's access to southern resources and the broader strategic aim of ending the war. While these were not without coordination challenges, the actions aligned around shared objectives. Sea control enabled landings. Landings secured the Philippines. The Philippines choked Japan's lifeline.

References

Hime, D. N. (2013). The Leyte Gulf case study. U.S. Naval War College, Joint Military Operations Department.

Feedback from Professor Wegge

Jeff,

Meets Expectations. You were close enough without using the actual terms. The Japanese SO was to force the Allies to a negotiated peace that allowed them to keep their conquests. Their method of "forcing" the allies to negotiate was either outright defeat (not likely at this point) or inflicting enough casualties to bring them to the table. Neither worked.

The missing OPO piece was the said casualties above. Therefore, nested objectives.

Tune in to, or watch after, Tuesday's Office hours (Week 18) when I cover objectives and why this is important. You can also review Office Hours PDF that I will post Tuesday night.

Strategic Objective (SO) is directly tied to Desired End state (DES). What is the national leadership trying to achieve? How would they ultimately retain the Southern Resource Area and other conquests? Think D in DIME... with a lot of help from the M.

TSO is sound.

OPO is good, you've got the first half, but it lacks a key piece. Think combat damage. The Allies were already

Response

Update after feedback:

SO: Japan's leadership sought survival by holding the Philippines to retain the Southern Resource Area. The Desired End State was preserving oil and leverage for diplomatic pressure (D), secured through military control (M) of the islands.

TSO: Still sound. Defend the Philippines as the anchor of Japan's inner defense and sea lines to the south.

OPO: Beyond destroying transports, Sho-Go aimed to inflict heavy combat damage on the U.S. fleet to slow the advance and weaken Allied naval dominance. This was meant to preserve Japan's access to the Southern Resource Area and thus sustain the broader strategic aim of empire survival.