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Module 3: Operational Art

25 August 2025

Session 3.2 DBF: Factors

Response

Primary Post (*by August 25, 2025*)

Effective operational planning depends on the interaction of objectives that give direction, factors that limit or enable action, and the theater or area of operations that frames the fight. Strategy fuels this trio by linking ends with ways and means in order to shape space and decide how campaigns unfold.

The objective comes first. It directs and focuses the effort. It is the rally point where operations line up. Operational art ties "ends, ways, means, and risks" together (U.S. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2022, p. xiii) through regressive planning that starts with the desired end state and works backward. Without this, even great tactics fall short, since "tactical brilliance can rarely overcome operational incompetence" (Wegge, 2025, "Why Study OPART?" section).

Operational factors of space, time, force, and information decide what is possible. "The art of warfare is to obtain and maintain freedom of action" by "properly balancing" these factors (Vego, 2009, p. III-3). Time is relentless, and once "lost can never be recovered" (Vego, 2009, p. III-19). Space is the stage of war, and unlike time it can be regained (Vego, 2009, pp. III-7, III-60).

Information, if timely and relevant, lets commanders act with speed and confidence (Vego, 2009, p. III-3; U.S. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2022, pp. III-2, III-16). Force is more than numbers, shaped by morale, training, and will (Vego, 2009, p. III-34). Lose the balance, through attrition, deception, or friction, and everything shifts. When it does, operations must shift too (Vego, 2009, p. III-4).

The theater defines the field. Its area of operations, size, and geometry are shaped by the "scale of the military objective" (Vego, 2009, p. IV-3). Distances, positions, and lines of communication form the skeleton of sustainment and must be evaluated against the purpose of the campaign.

In summary, objectives set the direction, factors limit or enable action, and theaters frame the fight. Together, they form the heartbeat of planning, the pulse that drives a campaign to success or to failure.

References

U.S. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (2022). Joint campaigns and operations (Joint Publication 3-0). Washington, DC: Author.

Vego, M. (2009). Joint operational warfare: Theory and practice. Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College.

Wegge, M. (2025, August 19). Week 17 - Op Art; Sessions 3.0 - 3.2. [Presentation slides]. Joint Military Operations Department, U.S. Naval War College.

Secondary Post #1 (*by August 27, 2025*)

SECONDARY POST RESPONSE

Hello, Vicki. Your post effectively captures how the objectives, operational factors, and theater or areas of operation interact with one another. I would add a little more here. Vego (2009, p. II-3) described the objective as the first step in theater design, because the scope and scale of the aim dictate the space to cover, the time required, and the forces to commit. However, those same factors also push back on the commander's objective. Vego (2009, p. III-4) warned that time, space, and force are living constraints, pressing back against the commander's intent. They move, they push, and change what a commander is able to do. Hime (2013, pp. 9–10) proved it at Leyte. The plan to isolate Japan demanded the Philippines, but speed, distance, and force decided how that aim turned into actual areas of operation. It does not go in one direction, it goes both ways. Vego (2009, p. III-3) argued that commanders begin with the objective, then regress backward, testing if the factors make it feasible. Goals lead, while factors set the constraints. From there, theaters are built with intent.

References

- Hime, D. N. (2013). The Leyte Gulf case study. In The United States Naval War College Joint Military Operations Department. Newport, RI: Naval War College.
- Vego, M. (2009). Joint operational warfare: Theory and practice. Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College.

Secondary Post #2 (*by August 27, 2025*)

Hello Emmanuel, you made good use of Liddell Hart's point about clarity of objectives. What struck me is how much he was echoing Clausewitz, who reminded us that "war is merely the

continuation of policy by other means” (Clausewitz, 1989, p. 87). The political objective is the end, while the military aim is only the means. Hart sharpened this into a warning: victory in itself is useless if it fails to create “a better state of peace” (Liddell Hart, 1952, p. 1). This view forces us look beyond the operations and battles. An objective should follow the policy and not waste energy on fights that do not matter. Vego (2009, p. II-3) added that the scale of the aim dictates the span of space, time, and force, but even a well-balanced design risks irrelevance if it does not connect back to policy. Leyte worked as an operation, but its true value was in how it advanced strategy rather than in the destruction of fleets alone.

References

Clausewitz, C. von. (1989). On war (M. Howard & P. Paret, Eds. & Trans.). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1832)

Liddell Hart, B. H. (1952). The objective in war. *Naval War College Review*, 5(10), 1–30.

Vego, M. (2009). Joint operational warfare: Theory and practice. Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College.

Feedback from Professor Wegge

Jeff,

*Meets expectations. Good work. You covered all of the pertinent points in your Answer and responses. The key points of this DBF are: 1. OpO is primary AND the CJTF’s starting point. 2. Balancing the factors (Time is the most critical because it cannot be recovered or regenerated). 3. There is a **Reciprocal nature** between OpO and Factors - as Factors change, so **can** OpO. 4. The AO is defined by OpO and Op Factors.*