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Module 3: Operational Art

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Summative Assessment #5

Question #1

1. Using the Falklands/Malvinas conflict case study, determine the objectives and associated centers of gravity for both major participants in the conflict. Include your analysis using Op Art concepts and terminology to support your argument. The answer should include:
 - a. The relationship between Strategic guidance, the Desired End State, the operational objectives, and the military conditions for success.
 - b. COG Selection: A consideration of the Critical Factors (both strengths and weaknesses) to support your operational COG selection for each side.
 - c. COG Deconstruction: How each opposing side chose to attack/deal with the opponent's center of gravity as well as protect their own. This should include a discussion of Critical Capabilities, Critical Requirements, and Critical Vulnerabilities associated with the COGs.

Response

British success and Argentine failure turned on clear operational objectives (OPO), sound identification of centers of gravity (COG), and exploitation of critical vulnerabilities (CV) during the Falklands/Malvinas conflict. The United Kingdom's (UK) operational objective was to repossess the islands to restore self-determination and deter future aggression. Argentina's OPO was to hold the occupied islands long enough to force a favorable political settlement.

Operational art framed both efforts. As Joint Publication 3-0 (JP 3-0) puts it, "Operational art is the cognitive approach by commanders and staffs ... to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, means, and risks" (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS], 2022, p. xiii).

Strategic guidance set the desired end state (DES) and drove each OPO. For the UK, London required Argentine withdrawal and restoration of lawful governance, and the War Cabinet held that line despite losses (Hime, 2010, p. 25). The desired end state was restored self-determination and credible deterrence of future aggression. The OPO was to repossess the islands in order to achieve that end state. Military conditions for success included maritime superiority, local air superiority, a protected lodgment, isolation of the theater, and defeat of the Port Stanley defensive complex (Hime, 2010, pp. 20-22; JCS, 2020, p. IV-20). Within days, the UK announced a 200-nm maritime exclusion zone (MEZ), later expanded to a Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ), to isolate the theater and shape later phases, an application of operational reach and arrangement to set these conditions and avoid culmination (Hime, 2010, pp. 59-60, 20; JCS, 2020, pp. IV-20, IV-29, IV-34). For Argentina, strategic guidance sought regime legitimacy through sovereignty over the Malvinas and a negotiated outcome on favorable terms. The OPO was to hold the islands long enough to force such a settlement. Military conditions for success

were denial of British sea control, sustained attrition of the carrier screen and amphibious shipping, continuous air and maritime resupply of the garrison, and maintenance of the Port Stanley air and command and control (C2) complex under time pressure before British buildup ashore (Hime, 2010, pp. 22-25, 35-36; JCS, 2020, pp. IV-25-IV-26).

Using Vego's critical factors, the operational COGs follow directly from each side's objective. Before selecting the COG, it is essential to understand that any COG blends tangible and intangible sources of power. Tangibles include forces, platforms, and physical infrastructure. Intangibles include leadership quality, doctrine, cohesion, morale, legitimacy, and will to fight. Intangibles gain importance as objectives grow more political and as the level of war increases, while at the operational level, the COG is usually mostly physical even as it relies on intangible integrators such as command structure, C2 systems, and common doctrine and training (Vego, 2009, pp. VII-15, VII-18-VII-20; JCS, 2020, p. IV-24). Applied here, the United Kingdom's initial carrier task group COG fused tangible carriers, air groups, and escorts with intangible joint integration and training. Argentina's garrison COG fused tangible numbers, prepared positions, and the Port Stanley airfield complex with brittle intangibles of interservice cohesion, night-fighting proficiency, and morale (Vego, 2009, pp. VII-15, VII-18-VII-20).

For the United Kingdom, the opening sea-air phase featured critical strengths (CS) in the carrier task group's ability to mass combat power for sea control and local air superiority, while critical weaknesses (CW) included limited organic early warning and the fragility of picket defenses. The critical vulnerabilities (CV) clustered in the carrier group's outer core, escorts, and replenishment links were exposed to sea-skimming missiles and low-level attack. Because the inner core concentrated decisive combat power and the outer core hid the weaknesses and vulnerabilities, the carrier-centered task group was the proper operational COG for this phase.

Once ashore, the land combat force became the COG as the source of massed strength was decisive to seizing Port Stanley (Vego, 2009, pp. VII-22-VII-29).

For Argentina, given an operational objective to hold the islands, the garrison on East Falkland, the ground force plus C2 around Port Stanley, represented the source of massed strength linked to the objective. CSs included numbers, prepared positions, and interior lines around the capital. CWs included uneven training, night-fighting deficiencies, and brittle interservice command relationships. The principal CVs sat in outer-core elements the garrison required to function, sea lines of communication (SLOC), and runway capacity for air sustainment. The garrison, enabled by the Stanley air complex, was therefore the correct operational COG (Vego, 2009, pp. VII-15-VII-20).

Having identified the COGs through CSs, CWs, and CVs, the next step was to deconstruct them into critical capabilities (CC), requirements (CR), and vulnerabilities (CV) to create operational approaches that avoided strengths and exploited weaknesses (JCS, 2020, p. IV-34; Vego, 2009, pp. VII-13-VII-20). This process of deconstruction and protection followed doctrine. JP 5-0 instructs commanders to attack an adversary COG indirectly by striking CVs that lead to COG defeat while avoiding enemy strength (JCS, 2020, p. IV-34). The British executed that approach. For the United Kingdom, key CCs were to project, protect, and sustain the amphibious lodgment through sea control, local air superiority, and operational fires. CRs included carriers with embarked air groups, escorts, and replenishment shipping, amphibious lift, a secure SLOC from Ascension, joint C2 and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), and adequate fuel and ordnance afloat. CVs included exposed picket ships susceptible to sea-skimming missiles, logistics ships operating in confined waters, and extended SLOCs vulnerable to interdiction (JCS, 2020, pp. IV-25-IV-26; Hime, 2010, pp. 20, 25, 35-36). The TEZ and subsequent maritime

operations isolated the islands and choked Argentine resupply (Hime, 2010, p. 20). The sinking of General Belgrano, conducted outside the TEZ with War Cabinet approval, removed the most dangerous surface threat and induced the Argentine fleet to remain in port, which opened the window for amphibious operations and reduced risk to the British COG (Hime, 2010, pp. 25, 61). The long-range BLACK BUCK raids inflicted minimal runway damage and little sustained attrition to the Argentine air order of battle (AOB). However, they contributed to pressure on the garrison's air sustainment CR and complicated Argentine operational design (Hime, 2010, pp. 22–23). British air defenses were stressed by Exocet sea-skimming missiles and low-level bomb runs. The loss of HMS Sheffield to AM-39 Exocet underscored the fragility of picket defenses and the need to protect the British COG while prosecuting the main effort (Hime, 2010, p. 25).

From the lodgment forward, British ground maneuver exploited Argentine CVs. Goose Green pulled Argentine reserves away from the main approaches. The night attacks that cracked the defensive belt west of Stanley exploited weaknesses in Argentine C2 and air defense coverage highlighted earlier in the campaign. This sequencing reflects JP 5-0 guidance to use decisive points derived from critical factors to create leverage against the COG when a single blow is not feasible (JCS, 2020, pp. IV-33-IV-34; Vego, 2009, pp. IX-135-IX-145).

Argentina's deconstruction effort aimed at the British COG in the maritime-air phase. The Fuerza Aérea Argentina and Armada Argentina sought to attrite the carriers and their screen with Exocet and low-level bombing, an indirect approach that targeted the British protection and sustainment functions rather than the amphibious force itself. This matches JP 5-0's description of attacking CVs to impose cumulative operational effects when a direct attack is too risky (JCS, 2020, p. IV-34). The approach achieved painful tactical results, yet it failed to prevent lodgment, buildup, and the march on Stanley, which shows how effects that do not sever the opponent's operational

COG or its CCs rarely change outcomes (JCS, 2020, pp. IV-25-IV-26; Hime, 2010, pp. 35-36).

For Argentina, the CC was to maintain the Port Stanley defensive complex as a cohesive fighting system. CRs included uninterrupted maritime and air sustainment, functioning theater C2 and communications, integrated air defenses, and adequate morale and training in the conscript-heavy force. CVs included exposed sea lines, limited runway length at Stanley, degraded naval freedom of action after the loss of General Belgrano, uneven night-fighting proficiency, and brittle interservice coordination (JCS, 2020, pp. IV-25-IV-26; Hime, 2010, pp. 22-25, 35-36).

A common counterargument holds that Argentina's operational COG was its sea-denial complex, including the combination of surface combatants, land-based strike aviation, and anti-ship missiles, because these instruments bloodied the Royal Navy and threatened the carriers. However, the view fails at the level of operational logic. The Argentine OPO was to hold the islands, not merely to punish the fleet at range. JP 5-0 emphasizes that COGs are "linked to objective(s)" and at the operational level are "mostly physical," often the force that holds decisive ground or enables it to be held (JCS, 2020, p. IV-23). The sea-denial complex was a powerful critical strength, but it served the garrison that physically held the objective. British isolation of the theater, lodgment, and ground advance, therefore, targeted the right COG and collapsed Argentine resistance where it mattered.

The relationship among strategic guidance, end state, objectives, and military conditions stayed consistent on the British side. Political resolve and legitimacy generated the desired end state, which drove an OPO to repossess. That OPO translated into conditions such as maritime superiority, a defended lodgment, and the defeat of the Port Stanley defensive complex. JP 5-0 labels "objective" the single most important element of design, the anchor for arranging operations in time and space to avoid culmination and reach the end state (JCS, 2020, p. IV-20).

In summary, once we frame the campaign with operational art and test COG choices against the adversary's objectives and critical factors, the pattern is clear. The UK protected and then shifted its COG from the carrier task group to the land force as the fight moved ashore. It attacked the Argentine garrison's critical requirements with isolation, then exploited critical vulnerabilities in C2, air defense, and sustainment until the garrison failed. That is exactly the indirect-to-direct rhythm JP 5-0 describes for defeating a COG when a single decisive blow is not available (JCS, 2020, pp. IV-33-IV-34).

References

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