

# Effects-based Thinking in Joint Doctrine

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**M**uch discussion in *Joint Force Quarterly* and other media has occurred lately regarding what can broadly be called “effects-based ideas.” To bring clarity to this debate, it is worthwhile to consider exactly what published U.S. joint doctrine says—and does not say—on this topic.

For the record, one does not find the terms (or their related acronyms) *effects-based operations* (EBO) or *effects-based approaches to operations* (EBAO) anywhere in the 77-volume U.S. joint doctrine hierarchy. Furthermore, one does not find the terms (or acronyms) *operational net assessment* (ONA) or *system-of-systems analysis* (SoSA). What one does find is the inclusion of the term *effects* as an element of operational design—one of 17 such elements provided as “tools to help commanders and their staffs visualize the campaign or operation and shape the [concept of operations]” (see Joint Publication [JP] 3–0, *Joint Operations*, IV–5).

Current joint doctrine promotes a “Systems Perspective of the Operational Environment” (see JP 3–0, chapters II and IV). This perspective—or better understanding—“supports operational design by enhancing elements such as centers of gravity, lines of operations, and decisive points. This allows commanders and their staffs to consider a broader set of options to focus limited resources, create desired effects, avoid undesired effects, and achieve objectives.”

Not surprisingly, JP 5–0, *Joint Operation Planning*, takes the above into account as it details its subject matter. It would have been incomplete and inconsistent with JP 3–0 if it did not—something the joint doctrine community finds unacceptable.

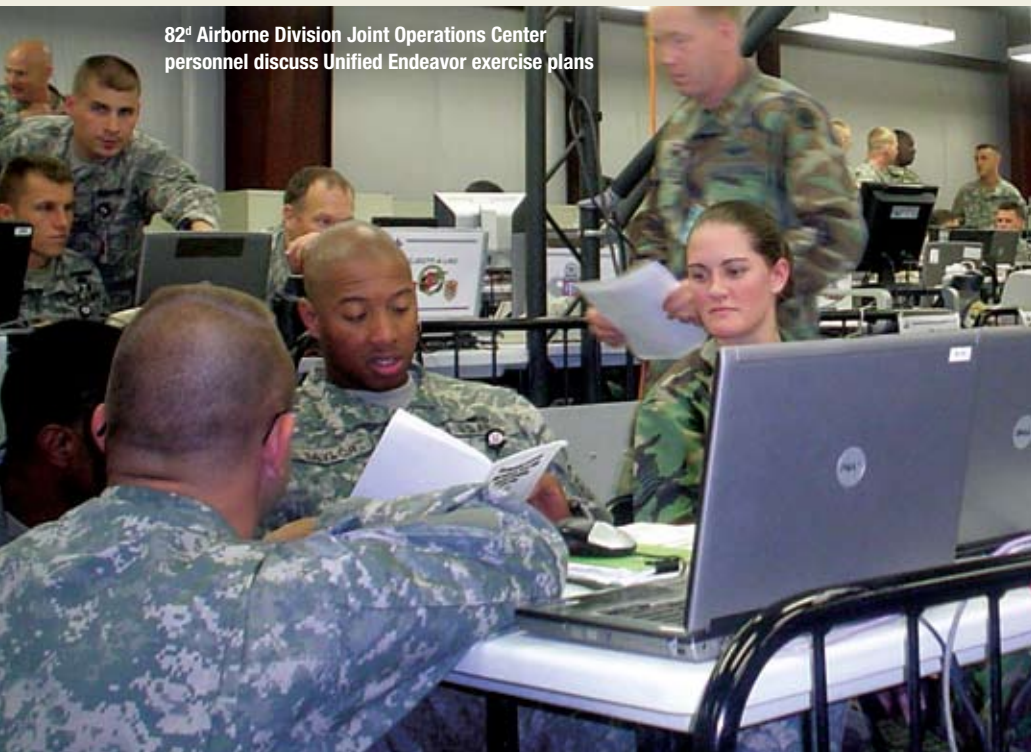
The “systems perspective” and the inclusion of “effects” as an element of operational design in both JP 3–0 and JP 5–0 should not be construed as U.S. joint doctrine blanket acceptance of EBO/EBAO in the fullness of

those ideas. Even considering that there is no definitive treatise on what constitutes EBO/EBAO, a nonpartisan analysis of the center mass of EBO/EBAO thinking would show that the bulk of the construct was *not* incorporated into joint doctrine. Authors on both sides of the discussion would do well to note the above and focus their arguments accordingly.

Two things pertain to the future of this discussion. First, it would benefit from homing in on the two topics included in current joint doctrine as recounted above. The question is not one of EBO/EBAO; instead, it goes directly to the relative efficacy of including “effects” as an element of operational design. A sample line of inquiry might consider if the construct of “effects”—in the context of articulating conditions to be established (or avoided)—helps or hinders clarification of the relationship of objectives and tasks in achieving an end. There are other such questions to be raised and analyzed. Regarding a “systems perspective,” this too would benefit from a careful parsing. Does the inclusion of this perspective suggest a universal truth that aids planning and assessment, or does the argument centered on key differences in system theory (related to closed, linear systems versus open, nonlinear systems) undercut the utility and practical applicability of the perspective?

Second, interested parties should note that both JP 3–0 and JP 5–0 are in formal assessment with a mind toward beginning revision in 2009. Joint doctrine purports to be recorded wisdom about our fundamental business in the Armed Forces, and wisdom is gained over time as ideas gain or lose stature on their own merits, clarity, and effectiveness. Arguments regarding “effects-based ideas” scoped with this in mind would provide good service to the shared goal of having joint doctrine that is both right and relevant. **JFQ**

82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division Joint Operations Center personnel discuss Unified Endeavor exercise plans



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