

KNOW THE ENEMY:

A New Type of OPFOR Reflects Current Realities

by Major Kenneth C. Cary

*"If you know the enemy, and you know yourself, you need not fear the results of a hundred battles."*¹

A tanker's worst enemy might very well be a single dismounted enemy soldier equipped with a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG). Or perhaps it's a sniper positioned more than two kilometers away who can put a bullet through one of your tank commanders. At the operational level, your initial contact might occur when you lead your armored column into a sophisticated ambush that consists of 15 anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) teams, all firing at the same time and at selected targets. Maybe tanks aren't the target, but as you escort the battalion trains to resupply a sister unit, the vehicle carrying ammunition erupts into a ball of fire as it passes over a command-detonated mine. These are just a few capabilities of the "new" enemy, an enemy that we are just now beginning to understand and respond to.

Military operations in Afghanistan have many of us recognizing, some for the very first time, that there are some fundamental differences in how we deal with an enemy in the Contemporary Operational Environment (COE). Unfortunately, just as many fail to accept that there is any difference at all. We can attribute that particular mindset to the fact that the United States is the lead actor on the global stage. We're also the best trained, best equipped fighting force in the world. We're a world power, *the* world power, unstoppable and dominant. In addition, we have the most refined and robust intelligence apparatus at our disposal. Our various intelligence resources are in place to give us critical information on every potential and existing threat on the planet, whenever and wherever we need it. As long as we know everything there is to know about a specific threat country's forces, namely their equipment, tactics, techniques and procedures, we will know what they are capable of and can easily defeat them. We are also great students of war and we study the writings of numerous great

and ancient war philosophers, the most notable of whom is Sun Tzu. We regularly quote Sun Tzu's sayings to the point of axiom. Not to deny the relevance, or reverence, of any of his great works, but there's a big difference between "knowing the path, and walking the path."

A Catalyst for Change

It has been more than 13 years since the 1989 collapse of the Berlin Wall, and we're just now getting a look at a new Opposing Forces (OPFOR) doctrine. The new OPFOR may represent a world-class opponent, but it's a living

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enemy, an enemy we face today. This new OPFOR is an excellent match to any number of potential threat countries that exist in the COE. The TRADOC Threat Support Directorate (TSD) web site at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, recently released copies of the *FM 7-100, OPFOR Doctrinal Framework and Strategy, FM-700.1, OPFOR Operations*, and *FM-700.2, OPFOR Tactics* manuals. TSD can also provide a copy of the OPFOR Interim Training Support Package to all qualified instructors who wish to begin implementing the new OPFOR doctrine into training. However, many soldiers, even before reading the new manuals, are already saying, "We don't need a new OPFOR," and others will do just as much harm by adding the new manuals to their FM library without even cracking a cover. If you fall into either of

those two categories, don't be alarmed, because you're not alone. Change almost always meets with resistance, especially when those facing it have to do some changing of their own to keep up, but it's not change for the sake of change. What this OPFOR changes most is the "predictable conditions for victory." We all like the "old" OPFOR because we know it and can defeat it. But one thing's for certain: the new enemy isn't predictable, and neither will be our OPFOR.

Out With the Old, And In With the New

The conventional "Krasnovian" OPFOR doctrine has served our CTCs and battle labs for generations of officers across all branches. It was a fightable opposition that tested our Army's systems, functions, and services to their fullest. We even got a chance to validate our training against Iraq during the Gulf War. Desert Storm proved to everyone that we trained the right way to defeat the right kind of enemy. However, some still argue that we were a very fortunate coalition force. It's interesting to consider a very different outcome had Saddam Hussein been given a chance to read our new OPFOR manuals prior to the Gulf War. For many, the Gulf War only solidified the opinion that the United States war machine is the supreme military fighting force of the world. Our notion of battlefield superiority, especially in terms of technology and intelligence, has resulted in some very painful and costly operational lessons learned. Yet despite those lessons learned, many warfighters continue to hold fast to the belief that fighting an adaptive enemy is no different than fighting an enemy that marches to a timetable, has distinctive organizations and structures, and relies on numerical superiority to achieve victory.

The new OPFOR is the new enemy, but what's so new about it? To be sure, the new, adaptive enemy is older than the Former Soviet Union (FSU), which makes it older than our conventional "Krasnovian" doctrine. The key and critical difference for us, especially in

terms of training, is that the enemy doesn't follow the rules as we know them. This is a fundamental element of asymmetric or adaptive warfare. History is full of examples of military forces adapting their operations to overcome disadvantages and then defeat a numerically superior, better equipped, or better trained opposing force. This is no gross oversimplification of the facts; adaptive warfare is more a cause for victory than for defeat. Plainly put, the key to understanding adaptive or asymmetric warfare is in the ability to identify and exploit the weaknesses of your opponent while at the same time protecting your own assets.

The New Enemy and His Objectives

The road to better situational awareness begins with a look at how the *enemy* is described in the new OPFOR manuals. "*The military and non-military force of the 'State', a powerful, regionally dominant, nondemocratic nation that seeks hegemony within its region. The State views the U.S. as a potential threat to its regional and global aspirations. It seeks to undermine U.S. relations with other regional nations in order to increase its own. It seeks regional expansion. The State's goals are long-term. The State is aggressive yet patient.*"² and its "...*infrastructure and policy are representative of nations that may threaten U.S. interests.*"³ This template fits many former and current countries we have been involved with militarily, but it does not represent any one particular country, or state. It represents the *potential* of any number of states. This OPFOR model serves as a basis for developing the training conditions that match our current global environment. We call this enemy an OPFOR for training purposes, but we call them "threat countries" when we identify the state by name.

The primary operational objective of the *enemy* is the destruction of key U.S. systems. This "systems approach to combat" is a method employed by the enemy to target critical systems that we need to perform or accomplish our mission. For example, we would be extremely degraded in our response to enemy artillery fires if the enemy attacks and destroys our Q-36/37 radar systems. It's highly probable that we will have to take the fight to the enemy, and because of this it is imperative that



Photo by Robert L. Stevenson

Infantrymen move ahead to clear a street at the Fort Knox urban warfare complex.

we protect our critical non-combat systems. When comparing our capabilities as an extra-regional force to any number of regionally dominant states from around the world, one thing is clear from the beginning: the enemy will have the home-field advantage. When it comes to the close fight, a home-field advantage is a *big* advantage.

If the state cannot prevent us from entering the region, it will work to protect its key weapons systems while targeting ours. The *enemy* will accomplish this by placing his critical units and systems in sanctuaries, by mixing his special purpose forces in among the civilian populations, and by attempting to control the restricted terrain and urban environments.

The enemy's biggest advantage is time. He will attempt to control time completely and will use it to manipulate our actions by attacking us according to his schedule. His goal will be to create "windows of opportunity" where he can successfully destroy our key systems, even if it means accepting a reasonable degree of loss with the accomplishment of his mission. At a strategic level, his goal may be to force our early exit from the region by creating unacceptable casualties in an attempt to influence our national will, or more simply, he can just wait us out. The enemy knows the terrain in detail. He will work to draw us into the "close fight" in an attempt to negate our standoff capabilities. Standoff does not only refer to range, it also means spoofing our reconnaissance, intelligence, surveillance and target acquisition (RISTA) systems and sensors in an attempt to lull us into a false sense of security. Last, but equally important, the enemy will fight using rules of en-

gagement (ROE) he finds appropriate for the moment and will use our strict adherence to the ROE against us. For obvious reasons, operations under these conditions put us at a distinct disadvantage. Here are the additional enemy objectives:

No Force on Force - "*The enemy understands that "force-on-force" maneuvers may not be the best way to win wars and achieve one's goals.*"⁴ You will probably not see as many tank-vs-tank engagements develop on the COE battlefield, but that doesn't mean you won't see enemy tank formations either. What's important to study is how armor will be used in the close fight, namely in urban and restricted terrain. There is a high probability that some enemy armor may even be equipped with niche technologies that will either equal or exceed our capabilities.

Systems Approach to Combat - "*The enemy believes that a "systems approach to combat" is the most effective means of achieving success.*"⁵ With the emergence of digitization, we are becoming more and more reliant on systems that represent "single points of failure." Our biggest challenge on the COE battlefield will be protecting key systems that are mission-enabling or mission-enhancing.

Our National Will - "*The enemy believes that if it can disable our economy, capabilities, or even political stability by use of precision weapons and information warfare, it can cause our armed forces to lose its effectiveness...at the strategic level, the enemy may choose to target our political will and determination to continue the conflict.*"⁶ The events of September 11, 2001 serve as a perfect example of this

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attempt, and there’s a strong likelihood that we will experience this type of attack again. In regards to information warfare, it can range from false or uncomplimentary coverage of civilian casualties, to direct attacks on our computer systems.

Sanctuary - “The *enemy* has determined that it is able to use sanctuaries — both physical and moral — to protect itself from the effects of *our* stand-off RISTA and precision weapons.”⁷ This can take the form of “hugging” friendly units, to dispersion in urban environments, and the relocation of expensive and critical platforms and equipment into a friendly nation-state.

Deny Entry - “At the operational level, the *enemy* may focus combat and engineers on destroying all airstrips to prevent enemy forces from rapidly gaining a toehold in the region.”⁸ The enemy will seek to deny points of entry to combat forces. He can achieve this through the relocation of his forces and mining operations, to the use of chemicals and weapons of mass destruction targeted on air or sea points of debarkation. The enemy will do anything that may deny our entry into his region.

Adaptive - “At the tactical level, the *enemy* may decide to emphasize small unit and terrorist tactics rather than directly confronting a technologically and militarily superior force.”⁹ Working in three- or four-man teams, small units equipped with machine guns, sniper rifles, and ATGMs can significantly influence our actions, as well as our resolve. These enemy teams can easily blend in with local civilian populations and will enjoy extensive freedom of movement. These small units will pose the greatest risk to our force protection effort, both in terms of direct action, and in the targeting of our key systems.

The Close Fight

The two significant factors that characterize the COE are location and technology. In terms of location, “Complex terrain and urban environments with civilian populations and infrastructures are increasingly becoming centers of gravity and therefore required areas of operations.”¹⁰ Operations in these environments will involve close-combat operations that are resource-intensive, time-consuming, and costly. Compound-

ing the problem further is the increased presence of civilians, non-governmental organizations, and multinational corporations on the battlefield. Suffice it to say, “...in vast parts of the world, no man, woman, and child alive today will be spared the consequences of the newly-emerging form of war.”¹¹ As mentioned earlier, technical surprise will play a significant role in COE operations. “Technological advances, diversity, and access are generating changes in force structure and methods of operation as well as creating conditions for technological surprise. This situation has begun an erosion process that is slowly eating away at the technological overmatch the U.S. has enjoyed over the last decade.”¹² Access means availability, and availability, especially in terms of weapons like the RPG, provide serious bang-for-the-buck and lead to the proliferation of cheap but effective weapons. This will have a severe impact on COE operations, as many States are taking steps to, “...move away from today’s large, expensive, powerful machines toward small, cheap gadgets capable of being manufactured in large numbers and used almost everywhere.”¹³

The enemy knows we lack a desire to engage in the close fight. He will attempt to draw us into restricted environments, will engage us with cheap but highly effective weapons, and will target key systems in an attempt to influence our abilities in the region.

The real challenge, and a responsibility for all soldiers, is to try and, “get into the head of the enemy.” Not an easy task, especially when we can’t even pin down a specific threat country as our model, but in this case the need to accept the change is undeniable. It’s true that the former Soviet Union trained military fighting forces from around the world, and that a lot of their doctrine is still in practice today, mainly because much of that doctrine makes sense. So don’t be surprised to find some similarities. This is not change for the sake of change. This effort provides our OPFOR with a clean break in a mindset of detailed execution in exchange for a realistic COE enemy. This freedom to act outside of traditional guidelines is not intended to stimulate the growth of the OPFOR; it is designed to provide us a

training opportunity that will aid us in the development of leaders who are imaginative, innovative, and adaptive. We must train to fight the enemy on our terms, not his. “The goal of this kind of warfare will encompass more than merely “using means that involve the force of arms to force the enemy to **accept** one’s own will.” Rather, the goal should be “to use all means whatsoever — means that involve the force of arms and a means that do not involve the force of arms, means that involve military power and means that do not involve military power, means that entail casualties and means that do not entail casualties — to force the enemy to **serve** one’s own interests.”¹⁴ We must train to fight the enemy when, where, and how we choose.

The Armor School, “Actions on Contact”

At the Armor School, the 16th Cavalry Regiment began introducing adaptive and asymmetric warfare to its officers more than a year ago. The introduction ranges from independent study to classroom presentation and discussion, and finally to practical application in a field environment. Every student who attends the Armor Officers Basic Lieutenants Course and the Armor Captains Course is given supplementary study materials like our “Know Your Enemy” compact disk, which contains an extensive library of articles and information relating to asymmetric warfare. The disk is one of five in a comprehensive CD library provided to each Armor student. We use classroom and small-group instruction to facilitate discussions and to establish a consistent understanding of the enemy in the COE.

The most productive training experiences we provide our students are called “gauntlets.” Gauntlets are “multi-echelon, multi-grade, battle-focused leadership experiences conducted in constructive (TACOPS), virtual (simulation), and live (FTX) training environments.” We use “gauntlets” to bring together students from the NCO Academy, the Armor Officer Basic Lieutenants Course, and the Armor Captains Course, to function together to defeat an adaptive enemy.

Continued on Page 48

Know the Enemy

from Page 45

These shared learning experiences result in officers and NCOs who are, “self-confident, adaptive leaders who motivate teams to solve complex problems while operating in a full-spectrum environment in an Army transforming to an Interim and an Objective Force.”¹⁵ The Armor School continues to refine and enhance leadership development that trains our future leaders to, “Lead teams that are lethal at the point of contact.”

When discussing the new enemy, there are two words we should drop from our vocabulary — “always” and “never.” Those two words quickly sum up our understanding of the enemy in the COE. The authors of the new OPFOR manuals fully understand the importance of their mission to bring us this information; now it’s up to us to use it to our advantage. “Thus we know that there are five essentials for victory:

- He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight.
- He will win who knows how to handle both superior and inferior forces.
- He will win whose army is animated by the same spirit throughout all the ranks.
- He will win who prepared himself, and waits to take the enemy unprepared.
- He will win who has military capability and is not interfered with by his sovereign.

Victory lies in the knowledge of these five points.”¹⁶

We are literally standing on the doorstep of a new age of warfare, and we must embrace the fact that we are a principal actor in the COE. We are the enemy of our enemy, and as simple as that sounds, our awareness of that perception is often fleeting. The enemy knows and studies us, so let us know and study him.

Notes

¹Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Thomas Cleary (Translator), Shambhala Publications, Inc. January 1991.

²The Opposing Forces. (See also FM 7-100.1/2), TSD, TRADOC, Ft. Leavenworth, Kan., 28 August 2001.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰White Paper: Capturing the Operational Environment, TSD, TRADOC, Ft. Leavenworth, Kan., 2 February 2000.

¹¹*The Transformation of War*, Martin van Creveld, The Free Press, 1991.

¹²White Paper: Capturing the Operational Environment.

¹³Martin van Creveld.

¹⁴Unrestricted Warfare, Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, February 1999.

¹⁵Command Philosophy, COL John F. Antal, May 2000.

¹⁶Sun Tzu.

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