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Synchronization

Colonel Stephen J. Kirin, U.S. Army

Synchronization—the arrangement of military actions in time, space, and purpose to produce maximum relative combat power at a decisive place and time.

Joint Publication 1-02[1]

IN 1980, GENERAL DONN STARRY, then Commander, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), directed that "synchronization" be included as a fundamental tenet of AirLand Battle doctrine, in lieu of "integration."[2] Starry was convinced that synchronization not only better described the combat power that could be added by effective command and control but also suggested the potential for a "second order of sophistication in the proper application of combat power."[3] This observation was no doubt influenced by General William DePuy, a former TRADOC commander, who had suggested that a balanced doctrine should seek both "the concentration of forces in space via maneuver" and "the concentration of actions in time via synchronization."[4] Since Starry's decision, synchronization has not only established itself as a fundamental tenet of Army operations but has also become an essential part of joint doctrine.

Despite ever-increasing references to synchronization in current doctrine, however, it remains somewhat ambiguous and contentious. The root of this controversy lies in this concept's characterization as both a *process*—the arrangement of military actions as to time, space, and purpose—and an *effect*—maximum relative combat power at a decisive place and time. There are those who, for example, seeing the tenet as only a process, dismiss synchronization as just another label for "coordination." Competent staffs have been coordinating and arranging military actions for a long time, they argue; there is no need for another doctrinal term. Then there are those who, emphasizing the *linkage* between process and effect, suggest that synchronization is a disguise for centralized control. They hold that synchronization and decentralized execution are mutually exclusive imperatives. To achieve the desired products of synchronization,

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they contend, the commander must limit his subordinates' initiative and provide a rigid script for their activities.

Yet synchronization is in fact the "overarching operational concept" of joint doctrine.[5] Let us, therefore, explore this concept and examine the criticisms that have been made of it; we will find that they can be dismissed. To assist us in this exploration, we will review certain key decisions made during two illuminating campaigns of World War II. The first is Operation HUSKY, the Allied invasion of Sicily, in which the basic operational objective was achieved (through coordination), but a crucial opportunity was lost because synchronization was never realized. We will also examine, in greater detail, the actions of Field Marshal Sir William Slim in the decisive defeat of the Japanese in Operation EXTENDED CAPITAL, an offensive that can be considered a master-stroke of synchronization (with, it should be noted, decentralized execution).

The Art of Synchronization

Synchronization's inherent duality, as both a process and an effect, is certainly not a unique phenomenon. If one analyzes, for instance, the art of symphonic orchestration, one reaches conclusions that are remarkably applicable to the musical composer and the joint force commander. In fact, if we allow ourselves to look through the lens of the composer, certain critical implications of synchronization quickly come into focus.

For both the commander and the composer, the essence, the whole point, of their effort lies in the intended effect. The objective of all good music is to move the listener's soul, to excite an aesthetic response. This reaction, manifested perhaps by a listener's rhythmic hand-movements, a tapping foot, or more demonstrative "affective accompaniments," indicates an emotional involvement on the part of the listener.[6] Similarly, the litmus test of military synchronization is the impact on the enemy, and the desired response is the disorientation of the opposing commander. This shared concern for effect clearly reflects a focus on demonstrable results: the composer hopes to sway the audience, the commander intends to dominate the enemy, and both will learn whether they have succeeded from the behavior of their "targets."

Process, for its part, is again quite similar for the commander and composer, in two fundamental ways. The composer defines the musical theme, that germinating element that orders the continuity and dynamism of the symphonic movement. Having established this theme, the composer can distinguish principal ideas from subordinate thoughts, blend and contrast tones produced by various instruments, and unify the different movements of the overall composition.[7] Students of the operational art should quickly recognize here an analog of the commander's intent, that governing principle that sets the operation's course

and prescribes the level of means and effort required, making its influence felt down to the smallest operational detail. Second, the composer creates his work in terms of the entire orchestra, not the potential contribution of any particular instrument. He imagines the desired sound and then envisions how he will exploit the capabilities of the various instruments to achieve that sound. In a similar way, the joint force commander visualizes the new "end-state" to be achieved and deduces how subordinate activities must be sequenced and arranged in order to produce it.

Synchronization as a process, then, transcends the common notion of matrices, detailed rehearsals, written orders, or other integrating mechanisms. It is an exercise in analytical creativity for the commander, and it draws upon his ability to think in depth, comprehend time-space relationships, and appreciate the interaction between opposing forces. It demands a sense of unity and a power of judgment, raised to a marvelous pitch of vision.[8]

Operation HUSKY: Opportunity Lost

Having formed this somewhat abstract understanding of synchronization, it is appropriate that we explore how the concept has been applied in practice. We start with a counterexample—Operation HUSKY, the Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943, an operation in which synchronization was never achieved.

If the test for synchronization is the effect on the enemy, then Operation HUSKY was, at best, flawed. The Axis forces were indeed forced to evacuate Sicily, but the vast majority of their losses "were willing Italian prisoners," while the Germans executed the evacuation in a very methodical and successful fashion.[9] Almost the whole surviving German force (some forty thousand soldiers out of an original sixty thousand), with vehicles and tanks, reached the Italian peninsula, where it was to defend stubbornly against a later Allied invasion. German after-action reports indicate that the Axis forces took advantage of the deliberate movements of Allied units, the daily tea-breaks of the advancing Allied ground forces, and a naval bombardment routine that permitted Axis forces to move unharmed during certain predictable intervals.[10] Other sources suggest that the Allied concept of operations granted the Axis leadership time to organize its defenses and reinforce threatened areas.[11] Perhaps the most damning observation is that the German commander was able to conduct so effective a delaying action and evacuation because he was free to exercise "initiative without restraint."[12] Clearly, this is not the enemy response that synchronization intends.

In fact, it seems that in preinvasion Allied planning the requirement for synchronization was simply ignored. First, it was never clear who was in charge at the planning stage, what the commander's intent was, or even if one had been defined. An early scheme that called for staggered amphibious operations on

opposite sides of the island was scrapped in favor of a proposal to concentrate Allied strength at adjacent assault beaches in the southern half of the island. There were three command staffs involved: that of General Harold Alexander's 15th Army Group and also those of its two components, Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's Eighth Army, and George S. Patton's U.S. Seventh Army. Throughout the planning process, all influenced the plan and, as one historian suggests, "eventually too many cooks spoiled the broth."[13] Such a process yielded no unifying operational intent; General Alexander's operational concept, by his own account, was based on the reactions of Montgomery and Patton.[14]

Second, it is clear that the operation was never conceived in terms of "the entire orchestra." Even though planners recognized that the obvious Axis option was a delaying action in the vicinity of Mount Etna, no definitive provisions were made for that contingency. Air assets operated in isolation and despite prodigious preinvasion bombing, the beach defenses and the more mobile enemy divisions defending the interior of the island were left untouched. As the Axis forces executed their escape across the Strait of Messina, Allied naval forces "lay skulking outside in clear waters doing absolutely nothing."[15] They never attempted to reduce enemy air defenses in order to permit Allied air attacks on the escaping Axis forces, nor did they interdict the sea lines of communication by which the Germans were providing supplies to Messina on a daily basis.

Finally, none of the proposals for HUSKY aimed at the application of overwhelming combat power at the decisive place and time. The main artery of Sicily flowed through Messina, yet every version of the Allied plan called for ground operations at a pedestrian pace along the entire length of the island. Instead of strangling the enemy, the Allies stamped on "the enemy's toes and allowed him to scuttle away to fight another battle."[16] Despite a substantial numerical advantage, the Allies were more or less stymied by the defending Axis forces. Obviously, the Allies' arrangements had minimized, rather than maximized, their relative combat power. This was the time for analytical creativity, "the moment that cried out for the touch of genius," but, although the minimum—the seizure of Sicily—was achieved, the true opportunity was lost, because synchronization was never achieved.[17]

Operation EXTENDED CAPITAL

The preceding is in sharp contrast, with respect to the concept of synchronization, to the decisions and actions of Field Marshal Slim in the India-Burma theater in late 1944 and early 1945. His campaign, the first step in the liberation from the Japanese of Burma and ultimately Indochina, vividly demonstrates how

one commander successfully translated this theoretical concept into practice and thereby achieved overwhelming operational effect.

The Operation in Perspective. Operation CAPITAL (as it was first called) was the third phase of a four-phase campaign. During the first, conducted in India, Slim focused on building the newly formed British Fourteenth Army and correcting problems that had been apparent during the evacuation of Burma in 1943. He implemented extensive training programs, improved health and morale, rebuilt the troops' confidence, and, most importantly, inculcated in them his intent to destroy the Japanese army threatening India.[18] The second phase was a major operation on the Imphal Plain, in the easternmost part of India, near the Burmese border. Slim understood that the Japanese intended to attack in the central Burma-India border region in order to open a potential supply route to India, eliminate the British as a threat, and encourage the Chinese to sue for peace. He recognized that the key to success was to regain the initiative and force battle on terrain that would exploit the mobility of his own forces and extend the Japanese lines of communication. Consequently, he deployed to the Chin Hills (on the border) a covering force that, as the Japanese began their expected offensive, withdrew to join the remainder of Slim's command on the Imphal Plain.

In vicious battles at Kohima, to the north, and Imphal, the Japanese suffered overwhelming defeats, creating the opportunity for the third phase of the overall campaign: reentry into Burma. Slim intended, once he had achieved victory in this British offensive phase, to give the enemy no rest but immediately to initiate phase four, the advance to Rangoon and the elimination of the Japanese from Burma.[19]

Phase 3—Crossing the Irrawaddy. Slim's initial mission for the third phase, in the framework of the overall Allied strategic plan, was to occupy the Kalewa-Kalemyo area, secure the Shwebo Plain, and liberate Burma as far south as the Pakokku-Mandalay line. He felt, however, that these objectives were too limited and did not acknowledge the Japanese army as the operational center of gravity. His concerns were relieved in September 1944, when the Combined Chiefs of Staff directed that Burma as a whole be recaptured as soon as possible. Slim responded by planning to force another major battle at the earliest opportunity.[20]

His principal goal was straightforward—the destruction of the Japanese force. He took pains to ensure that this primary objective was clearly understood within his command. He personally developed the alternative courses of action, to be certain that they supported his purpose. For Operation CAPITAL, as for all his other campaigns, Slim drafted his own statement of intent. As Slim himself has written, the commander's intent section of the operations order "is usually the shortest of all the paragraphs, but it is always the most important, because it

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states—or it should—just what the commander wants to achieve. It is the one overriding expression of will by which everything in the order and every action by every commander and soldier in any army must be dominated."[21]

Slim's intent was focused and direct, and it made his desired end-state very clear: "In conjunction with NCAC* to destroy the enemy forces in Burma, to advance to the line Henzada-Nyaunglebin [to the south, near Rangoon] and to seize any opportunity to advance from that line and capture a South Burma port."[22]

Slim's Fourteenth Army consisted of two corps, containing in all seven divisions and two tank brigades. This organization, having recently tasted victory on the Imphal Plain, was aware that the Japanese, with the equivalent of eight divisions, had reached their culminating point and were in full retreat, in the midst of the monsoon season.[23] Slim's initial plan for CAPITAL was, like his overall intent, remarkably simple. It called for a coordinated attack down the Shwebo Plain: as depicted in Map 1, IV Corps on the left, representing the main effort, would cross the Chindwin River at Sittaung, seize Pinlebu, and then turn south to capture Shwebo. On the right flank, XXXIII Corps would cross the Chindwin River at Kalewa, drive southeast to seize Ye-U, and support IV Corps as necessary. Shwebo and Ye-U were considered decisive points because their airfields would allow Slim to extend his lines of communications, but his main focus remained force-oriented. His intent was to destroy the Japanese army north of Mandalay.[24]

The major operational restraints in this phase were logistical support and mobility. The Burma campaign itself was a secondary effort in a secondary theater, and Slim had to conduct it, under the harshest of conditions, with minimal resources.[25] The resupply routes stretched some five hundred miles from the railhead in India to Shwebo, across terrain that was disease-infested, plagued half the year with monsoon rains, and had few roads, which required a considerable engineering effort to maintain and improve.[26] Slim's analysis indicated that resupply would be difficult, if not impossible, without a substantial airlift. Unfortunately, even as the operation was getting underway and units were advancing towards their objectives, the bulk of his air transport assets were reassigned elsewhere in the theater. This forced the use of some ingenious expedients, such as the construction of over five hundred teak log barges to float supplies down the Chindwin and Irrawaddy rivers.

As for mobility, however, the Shwebo Plain did offer certain advantages, not least that it was out of the jungle. The Fourteenth Army could exploit the mobility and firepower of its armor and employ artillery at long ranges. Air support could be optimized; the transport aviation that remained to Slim was eventually to

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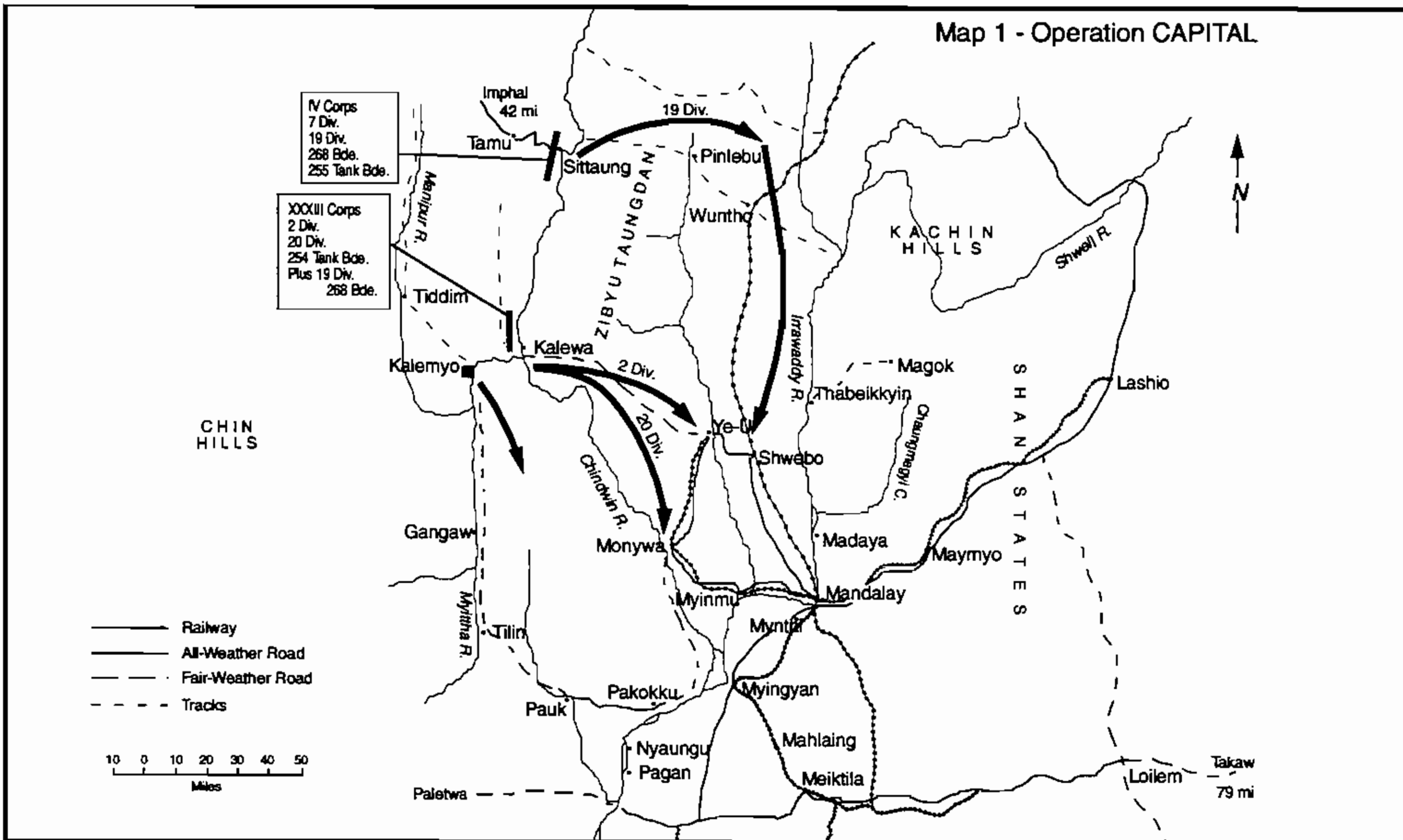
* Northern Combat Area Command, two Chinese divisions operating in northern Burma under (until October 1944) Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell, U.S. Army, and thereafter Lt. Gen. Dan I. Sultan.



Map 1 - Operation CAPITAL
IV Corps
7 Div.
19 Div.
268 Bde.
255 Tank Bde.
XXXIII Corps
2 Div.
20 Div.
254 Tank Bde.
Plus 19 Div.
268 Bde.
Imphal
42 mi
Tamu
Sittaung
19 Div.
Pinlebu
Wuntho
ZIBYU TAUNGDAN
Manipur R.
Tiddim
Kalewa
Kalemyo
2 Div.
20 Div.
KACHIN HILLS
Shweli R.
CHIN HILLS
Irrawaddy R.
Magok
Thabeikkyin
Lashio
Ye-U
Shwebo
Chindwin R.
Chaungmagyi C.
SHAN STATES
Gangaw
Monywa
Madaya
Maymyo
Myinmu
Mandalay
Myittha R.
Myntha
Tilin
Railway
All-Weather Road
Fair-Weather Road
Tracks
Pakokku
Myingyan
Pauk
Mahlaing
Nyaungu
Pagan
Meiktila
Loilem
Takaw
79 mi
Paletwa
10 0 10 20 30 40 50
Miles
Joseph R. Nunes, Jr.

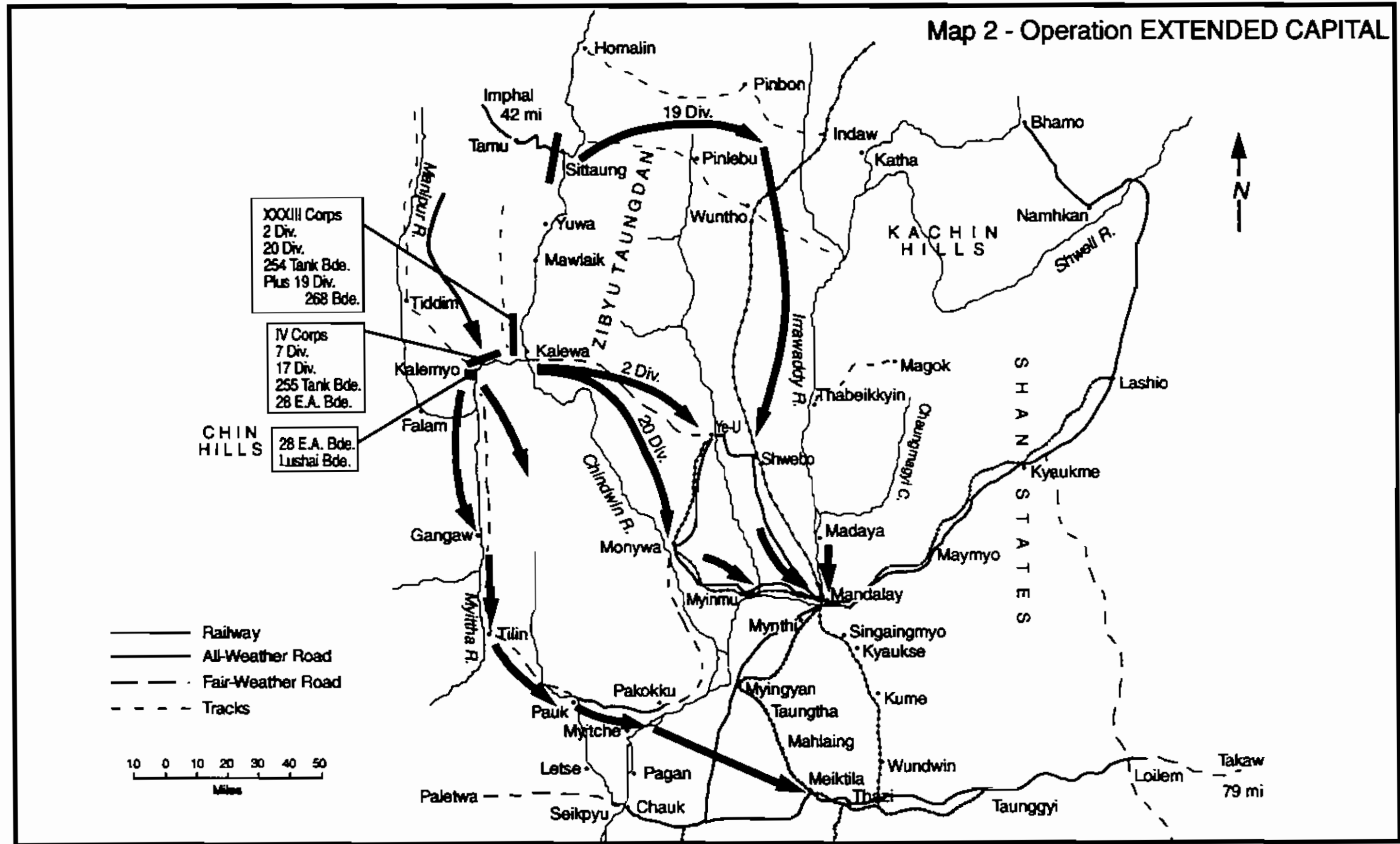
deliver over a thousand tons of supplies a day, fly a very high number of daily sorties, and conduct critical aerial reconnaissance. Finally, a battle on the Shwebo Plain would put the Irrawaddy River at the back of the enemy.

Slim was convinced that the Japanese would not relinquish Mandalay without a vicious battle, and this view became the primary assumption upon which he based his operational scheme.[27] Almost immediately, however, it proved invalid: the lead division of IV Corps passed through the Zibyu Taungdan Mountains with little resistance. Air reconnaissance revealed troop movement eastward across the Irrawaddy, and espionage sources indicated that the Japanese were occupying positions south and east of the river—all clear indications that the Japanese did not intend to fight on the Shwebo Plain.[28]

Slim recognized accordingly that his plan had run its course and that a quick change was needed; his response was to be considered the strategic master-stroke of the Burma campaign.[29] Under the new Operation EXTENDED CAPITAL, depicted in Map 2, Slim directed IV Corps to leave its lead division and one independent brigade in place, swing behind XXXIII Corps, and work south through the Gangaw Valley; emerging from that valley near Pauk, it was to seize a crossing over the Irrawaddy River in the Pagan-Pakokku area and drive southeast eighty miles to Meiktila. Meiktila, the main logistical center for the Japanese forces, was clearly a decisive point. "Crush that wrist, no blood would flow through the fingers, the whole hand would be paralyzed, and the Japanese armies on the arc from the Salween [River, in eastern Burma] to the Irrawaddy would begin to wither."[30] XXXIII Corps, reinforced with the units that IV Corps had left behind, would continue its originally planned drive on Mandalay from the north, still in a supporting role, but now seizing on the way a series of bridgeheads across the Irrawaddy.

The success of this revised plan depended on logistical flexibility, deception, and timing. As IV Corps moved through the Gangaw Valley, a distance of over two hundred and fifty miles, it had to build its own road and create airfields every fifty miles to allow effective resupply. IV Corps's advance was conducted under radio silence and with tight air cover to preclude Japanese observation. A false "IV Corps headquarters" was established in the XXXIII sector near Tamu; by its dummy radio traffic it was to convince the Japanese that IV Corps, still intact, was moving into the Shwebo Plain. XXXIII Corps, in turn, by its multiple crossings in the Thabeikkyin area, was to convince the Japanese that it was the main effort. Once these demonstrations had drawn the Japanese reserves to the north, east of the Irrawaddy, IV Corps, reinforced by one of the reserve divisions, would start its own crossings in the south.[31]

This operational design employed an indirect approach to attack the enemy center of gravity. Slim understood that he possessed neither the necessary supporting nor combat assets for a major river crossing. However, by making a series


Map 2 - Operation EXTENDED CAPITAL
Homalin
Pinbon
Imphal 42 mi
19 Div.
Tamu
Indaw
Bhamo
Sittaung
Pinlebu
Katha
ZIBYU TAUNGDAN
Manipur R.
XXXIII Corps
2 Div.
20 Div.
254 Tank Bde.
Plus 19 Div.
268 Bde.
Yuwa
Wuntho
KACHIN HILLS
Namhkan
Mawlaik
Shweli R.
Tiddim
IV Corps
7 Div.
17 Div.
255 Tank Bde.
28 E.A. Bde.
Kalewa
Kalemyo
2 Div.
Magok
Irrawaddy R.
Thabeikkyin
SHAN STATES
Lashio
CHIN HILLS
28 E.A. Bde.
Lushai Bde.
Falam
Ye-U
20 Div.
Chaungmagyi C.
Shwebo
Kyaukme
Chindwin R.
Madaya
Gangaw
Monywa
Maymyo
Mandalay
Myinmu
Myittha R.
Railway
All-Weather Road
Fair-Weather Road
Tracks
Myothi
Singaingmyo
Tilin
Kyaukse
Pakokku
Myingyan
Kume
Pauk
Taungtha
Myitche
Mahlaing
10 0 10 20 30 40 50
Miles
Letse
Pagan
Wundwin
Meiktila
Takaw
Loilem
79 mi
Paletwa
Thazi
Seikpyu
Chauk
Taunggyi
Joseph R. Nunes, Jr.

of smaller ones along a two-hundred-mile front, he could exploit two Japanese vulnerabilities. First, their lack of air support and reconnaissance would prevent the Japanese from identifying the primary crossing sites and therefore allow Slim to maintain the initiative. Second, the Japanese leadership had consistently forfeited its strength advantage by committing forces in piecemeal attacks.[32] Knowing that he was fighting outnumbered, Slim intended to defeat the Japanese through a synchronized offensive operation that did not directly challenge their massed strength.

On 10 February 1945, elements of XXXIII Corps crossed the Irrawaddy in several places, as planned, and within two days, as hoped, the Japanese had committed all available forces against that effort. On 14 February lead units of IV Corps crossed the Irrawaddy River and moved toward Meiktila. This was the decisive point; it was time for Slim to combine the effects of his combat power so as to shatter the coherence of the Japanese defense.

Every element of operational art—deception and surprise, flexibility, intelligence, air support, engineering, the use of reserves, risk, imagination, leadership, and focus on the objective—were now orchestrated, simultaneously and harmoniously. In the event, the combined effects of his movements and insights exceeded the potential of mere coordination; they created what proved to be "kaleidoscopic changes in the situation" for the defenders.[33]

The Japanese commanders, not knowing clearly where their enemies actually were, threw their forces hurriedly wherever the British seemed to reveal themselves. The Japanese elements defending Meiktila from a British force they had had no reason to believe was approaching, could not hope for reinforcements, because the reserves were racing north to meet what seemed to be a British thrust across the Irrawaddy. Thus when the defenders of Mandalay were attacked from the north, there was no help for them, either; the reserves were on the wrong side of the river, where there was no enemy to fight. XXXIII Corps then thrust through Mandalay, acting as the hammer that drove the Japanese straight into IV Corps, the anvil. By the conclusion of these battles, the eight Japanese divisions had been reduced to three infantry battalions; they had been eliminated as an effective fighting force. The Japanese had been trapped, not only by the movements of Slim's forces but also by his manipulation of their vulnerabilities and expectations; for them there was no good move "on the board," no coherent response to the Fourteenth Army's advance. The key to victory was instigation of ill coordinated actions among the larger Japanese formation by well coordinated and properly timed offensive thrusts by the smaller (and divided) British forces.

The Criticisms of Synchronization

We are now in a position to address the criticisms of synchronization mentioned earlier. First, there is the argument that "synchronization" and

"coordination" are one and the same; the record provides ample evidence to contradict this. The second contention, concerning the relationship between "initiative" and "synchronization," is much subtler and broader, and it requires more extensive refutation. Let us consider both objections.

Synchronization versus Coordination. We can readily resolve the apparent confusion between these two concepts. The events on the shores of the Irrawaddy River show clearly that synchronization is more than coordination. Synchronization has both internal and external aspects; it is both a process and an effect; and the measure of its effectiveness is the impact upon the enemy force. Coordination, on the other hand, is a purely internal matter; it is simply a process, one that seeks to orchestrate all available resources. Coordination, then, is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for synchronization. Operation HUSKY, with its combined amphibious landings and airborne assaults, was highly coordinated (notwithstanding a very serious "friendly fire" incident), but the results make it obvious that the campaign was not synchronized. It never achieved that "second order of sophistication" in the application of combat power that synchronization implies.

Synchronization versus Centralized Control. The second criticism has been usefully expressed in a 1993 study of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, asserting that the failure of the coalition forces to prevent the Iraqi Republican Guard's escape can be traced to a disproportionate application of the tenet of synchronization. The study contrasts General H. Norman Schwarzkopf's modern, synchronized force, whose tempo was governed by self-imposed limits of advance and whose units were expected to halt at planned phase-lines, to General Patton's Third Army of World War II—whose advance was limited only by the actions of the enemy (and its own fuel supply). Army doctrine, as the author of the study points out, directs today that "commanders will adjust tempo to maintain synchronization"; and therein, the criticism goes, lies the major danger of synchronization—that it forces commanders to focus on their own units rather than on the actions of the enemy. In short, synchronization is an excuse for micromanagement by senior commanders;[34] it opens the door to "scripting, which is an attempt to choreograph action with a rigid timeline."[35] For example, the U.S. II Corps commander in the Kuwait theater is described as having been so task-saturated by his seniors that he had no time to apply himself to the pursuit of the enemy.[36]

However, we can use the lens of the musical analogy to gain insight into this debate and, perhaps, see our way to resolution. As the composer creates his composition, he can define the degree of improvisation allowed each performer. At one extreme, he might impose total control, scoring the precise contribution of each instrument. At

the other, he might create a flexible structure whose final shape reflects the digressions of the musicians; in this open style, the composition takes a different form at each performance. Somewhere between these extremes lies a technique, known for centuries as the "figured bass," that requires performers to "think with their fingers" and improvise and embellish the composition at points specified by the composer.[37] With this approach, similar to improvisational jazz, the composer can score his music in an abbreviated fashion, a sort of musical shorthand, knowing that performers will draw on their own artistic skills to fill in the details.

For the joint force commander, the implications are obvious. Operating at the extremes implies either an intention to impose strict control (as, according to the observer cited above, was true of General Schwarzkopf) or a willingness to risk total chaos. Adopting the "figured bass" approach allows the commander to strike a balance, to reconcile the tension between the control required for synchronization and the initiative and improvisation demanded by the uncertainty of battle. U.S. Army doctrine warns that "initiative requires decentralization of decision authority to the lowest practical level. At the same time, decentralization risks some loss of synchronization. Commanders constantly balance these competing risks, recognizing that loss of immediate control is preferable to inaction."[38] Even Marine doctrine, which proclaims maneuver warfare, based on decentralized command, as the Corps's combat philosophy, explicitly recognizes the danger of inordinate decentralization; it prefers "harmonious initiative."[39]

Recognizing this, we return to Operation EXTENDED CAPITAL, in which Field Marshal Slim clearly achieved the needed balance. Slim's approach to operational leadership allowed him to maintain the command's focus on the objective while encouraging his subordinates to "think with their fingers," to improvise as necessary to achieve that objective. First, he made every effort to involve them in the planning process. Slim, realizing that the success of the operation would hinge upon the inputs of and agreements between the corps commanders, routinely briefed them, personally and at their own headquarters, and also solicited their reactions.[40] Second, he recognized the distinction between his role as army commander and theirs as corps commanders. Once they understood his intent, Slim did not hesitate to give them freedom to employ whatever tactical methods they felt were necessary.[41] That latitude is evident in Slim's later recollections of the Fourteenth Army's preparation for EXTENDED CAPITAL: "I left it to Corps Commanders to select the exact locations for their crossings, to choose which divisions should make them, and to prepare the best tactical plans and arrangements that the meagre resources I had allotted them would permit."[42] Slim himself, meanwhile, focused on his logistical system, ensuring that it was providing the supplies and ammunition needed for the planned movements, river crossings, and battles.

Once the offensive had begun, while he frequently went forward to observe an action, he did so primarily in the realization that battles seldom go according to plan and that it was his function to take advantage of opportunities that might arise. It was during a visit to IV Corps while it was preparing to cross the Irrawaddy River, for example, that he recognized that the moment had arrived upon which the whole battle plan rested; even then, however, rather than interfere he devoted himself to supporting the local commander.[43]

Finally, Slim believed that it was his responsibility to develop in his juniors a flexibility that would allow them to act without guidance from their superiors. Because of his confidence in his subordinates, Slim amended his intent for EXTENDED CAPITAL to authorize them "to take certain risks, which in other cases would not be justified."[44] He applauded one commander who acted swiftly and "seized a chance to slip across the Irrawaddy and at the same time make a dart at Shwebo, to 'shoot a goal when the referee wasn't looking.'"[45] He was a firm advocate of controlled yet decentralized execution: "This acting without orders, in anticipation of orders, or without waiting for approval, yet always within the overall intention, must become second nature in any form of warfare. . . . It requires in the higher command a corresponding flexibility of mind, confidence in its subordinates, and the power to make its intentions clear through the force."[46]

The essential question, then, is not whether synchronization implies a loss of initiative but, rather, how the joint force commander can achieve the balance between the control necessary for synchronization and the initiative demanded by the uncertainties of battle. Several senior leaders have recently addressed this issue and offered certain proposals. For example, General Gordon Sullivan, former Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, has described a need to share expectations, establish priorities, and enhance mental agility, while empowering subordinates to take independent action.[47] Each of these proposals, however, reflects Slim's approach; all are based on the view that operational commanders must generate a common view of the battlefield and a clear understanding of their intent while minimizing interference with subordinates.[48]

But these senior officers also clearly recognize that there can be no formulaic answer, no recipe that defines how the commander should achieve this balance between control and initiative that produces synchronization. There is, necessarily, a challenge in arranging mutual support in a large force engaging an enemy while at the same time granting subordinates the authority to exercise initiative to seize opportunities that arise in battle. To suggest an all-embracing theory would deny the importance of the commander's intuition, his *coup d'oeil*—that mix of experience, training, and situational awareness that allows him to deal with the uncertainty of combat. Some suggest that it may be the judicious

reconciliation of these competing imperatives, synchronization and decentralization—order and understanding on one hand, and initiative on the other—that defines the essence of the operational art.[49]

"The Quintessential Contribution of the Commander"

Some final thoughts on this concept of synchronization are in order. First, synchronization's claim to be the overarching operational concept is based on the expectation that the commander will define a cohesive operational theme, an intent and supporting concept, that will drive the design, organization, and execution of the entire campaign. This creative act is the quintessential contribution of the commander, the impact of which is conspicuous either by its presence or absence in our historical analyses. If present, it energizes the command, dominates its every action, magnifies the potential contribution of each subordinate element, and underwrites the command's ability to react to uncertainty—in all, underlies the dynamic synchronization observed in Operation EXTENDED CAPITAL; it creates a critical relative imbalance of combat power that allows the force to dominate the enemy. If absent, the command's combat power may go unused, the operation may lack focus; and consequently the enemy will remain a threat. To borrow an analogy suggested by a former field commander, synchronization puts a magnifying glass in the hands of the commander: if he positions the glass correctly—that is, if he applies the process of synchronization and duly arranges the assets available to him—he can achieve the effect he intends and burn whatever he is aiming his glass at.[50]

Second, significant intellectual energy has been expended in attempts to come to grips with the anticipated "Revolution in Military Affairs," to identify that lurking, cataclysmic change in how we will fight on future battlefields. There is evidence of what one author calls "a hell-bent rush to embrace the future," not to hang our hats on antiquated notions about how to fight the big wars of the past.[51] There are also those who argue that change may be less dramatic, that we are in fact already in the throes of a military *evolution*, that it is just a matter of time before the cumulative effects of several innovations make it obvious that the very character of warfare has changed.[52] Both camps, however, suggest that these changes will require fundamental changes in conceptual frameworks and doctrines.

One group of analysts, in order to visualize better the pending revolution, has proposed three "new warfare areas": "precision strike," "information warfare," and "dominating maneuver."[53] The first two concepts have received a good deal of coverage in the literature, but the concept of dominating maneuver, "the least well developed of the newly identified warfare areas," is quite interesting in terms of our analysis.[54] Under this concept, the commander, recognizing that he will

be unable to generate overwhelming force at every point of an increasingly complex and nonlinear battlefield, will search for the *punctus decisio*, where his force can deliver a decisive thrust at the decisive time. "Dominating maneuver" is defined as the "ability to place the right kinds and numbers of forces at the right place, in time and space, decisively defeating the enemy by attacking his operational concept or strategic plan."[55] This should sound familiar; Slim's victory in Burma, these authors assert, resulted from the Fourteenth Army's ability to execute dominating maneuver!

There is no need to debate the appropriate name, "synchronization" or "dominating maneuver"; the choice of labels is important only to avoid misunderstandings. What is critical is that this recent proposal confirms that the general concept is indeed an enduring one, a tenet whose applicability transcends particular technologies or the specific nature of a battlefield. It is as important today as it was for Field Marshal Slim, and it will be for the joint force commander in the next century.

Notes

1. U.S. Dept. of Defense, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, JCS Publication 1-02 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off. [hereafter GPO], 23 March 1994), p. 371.

2. "A concept called AirLand Battle [which] emerged [in the 1970s] . . . is the underlying strategy, operational concept, and tactical schema for the U.S. Army and the U.S. Air Force. Its precepts are that deep attack and the close-in battle are inseparable; seizing and holding the initiative through maneuver of forces is essential to success; [and that] the objective of battle is to win, not just to avert defeat." (Donn Starry, "The Profession of Arms in America," in *The Encyclopedia of the American Military*, eds. John E. Jessup and Louise B. Ketz [New York: Scribner, 1994], p. 479.) Its specific tenets are "agility," "initiative," "depth," and "synchronization" (U.S. Army Dept., *Operations*, FM [Field Manual] 100-5 [Washington, D.C.: GPO, 20 August 1982], p. 2-1).

3. John Romjue, *From Active Defense to Airland Battle: The Development of Army Doctrine, 1973–1982* (Fort Monroe, Va.: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Historical Office, June 1984), p. 57; and Crosbie E. Saint, "A CINC's View of the Operational Art," *Military Review*, September 1990, p. 71.

4. William E. DePuy, "Toward a Balanced Doctrine," *Army*, November 1984, p. 19.

5. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, Joint Publication 3-0 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, September 1993), p. II-6.

6. William H. Miller, *Everybody's Guide to Music* (Philadelphia: Chilton, 1961), p. 33.

7. Joseph Michlis, *The Enjoyment of Music* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), p. 42.

8. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), p. 112.

9. Hanson Baldwin, *Battles Lost and Won* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 225.

10. Hugh Pond, *Sicily* (London: William Kimber, 1962), p. 209.

11. Ibid.

12. Baldwin, p. 235.

13. Ibid., p. 194.

14. Carlo d'Este, *Bitter Victory* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1988), p. 321.

15. Pond, p. 212.

16. Ibid., p. 213.

17. Ibid.

18. Field Marshal Sir William Slim, *Defeat into Victory* (London: Cassell, 1956), p. 184.

19. Geoffrey Evans, *Slim as Military Commander* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1969), p. 203.

20. Slim, p. 378.

21. Ibid., p. 211.

22. Ibid., p. 394.

23. Ibid., p. 377.
24. Ibid., p. 380.
25. Evans, p. 213.
26. Duncan Anderson, "Slim," in *Churchill's Generals*, ed. John Keegan (London: George Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1991), p. 318.
27. Slim, p. 380.
28. Ibid., p. 390.
29. Evans, p. 187.
30. Slim, p. 393.
31. Ibid., p. 411.
32. Ibid., p. 415.
33. Ronald Lewin, *Slim: The Standardbearer* (London: Archon Books, 1976), p. 210.
34. J. G. Burton, "Pushing Them Out the Back Door," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, June 1993, p. 37, quoting FM 100-5.
35. Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr. (Maj., USMC), "Fighting in the Real World," *Marine Corps Gazette*, March 1994.
36. Burton, p. 40.
37. Michlis, p. 356.
38. FM 100-5, p. 2-6.
39. Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, FMFM (Fleet Marine Force Manual) 1 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, March 1989), p. 71.
40. Slim, p. 292.
41. Ibid., p. 312.
42. Ibid., p. 412.
43. Ibid., p. 426.
44. Lewin, p. 208.
45. Slim, p. 542.
46. Ibid.
47. Gordon R. Sullivan (Gen., USA), "Delivering Decisive Victory: Improving Synchronization," *Military Review*, September 1992, p. 7.
48. Saint, p. 71.
49. McKenzie, p. 66. See also Wayne P. Hughes, *Fleet Tactics: Theory and Practice* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1986), p. 29.
50. Saint, p. 9.
51. A.J. Bacevich, "Preserving the Well-Bred Horse," *The National Interest*, Fall 1994, p. 45.
52. Andrew Krepinevich, "Cavalry to Computers: The Pattern of Military Revolutions," *The National Interest*, Fall 1994, p. 31.
53. Jeffrey McKitrick et al., *The Revolution in Military Affairs*, draft paper, Science Applications International Corp., September 1994, p. 8.
54. Ibid., p. 14.
55. Ibid., p. 17.

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