

Understanding battlespace is a fundamental, yet complex prerequisite for any commander to achieve mission success. It cannot be overlooked by any commander because it applies from the company level all the way to the Marine expeditionary force (MEF), component, and joint task force. Once commanders and planners recognize how their battlespace is organized, and understand the reach of their capabilities, their battlespace can be subdivided and assigned to subordinate units along with tasks that achieve the commander's purpose. For example, a light armored reconnaissance (LAR) battalion commander assigned a screening mission needs to have a detailed knowledge of his battlespace so that he can effectively utilize the terrain, relative to the enemy's disposition, in order to support the ground combat element's movement. Initial analysis of the battlespace is essential in determining potential resource shortfalls, developing force requirements, assigning control measures, and determining potential risk. If the commander inadequately analyzes and organizes his battlespace, he may jeopardize mission success and increase the risk to his force.

The commander provides the staff his initial view of his battlespace as part of his commander's battlespace area evaluation. This initial view consists of the commander's visualization of his area of operations (AO), area of influence, and area of interest. This initial look will foster discussion between the commander and staff that will enhance their collective situational awareness and assist in making informed decisions.

AREA OF OPERATIONS

"An operational area defined by the joint force commander for land and naval forces. Areas of operation do not typically encompass the entire operational area of the joint force commander, but should be large enough for component commanders to accomplish their missions and protect their forces."

Joint Pub 1-02

Figure 1 depicts a notional layout of battlespace—how it might look in a perfect world—an area of operations encompassed by an area of influence, surrounded by an area of interest. Each of these pieces of battlespace requires further discussion.

Area of Operations

Once a commander is assigned an AO he begins to evaluate the area and determine whether he has enough terrain to conduct his operation and accomplish his mission. The AO is the tangible part of battlespace that is used as a basis to derive the area of influence and area of interest.

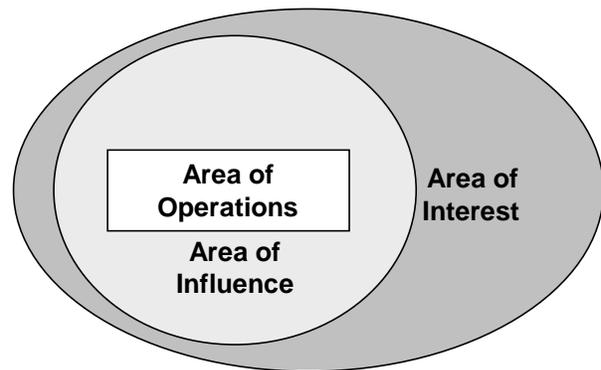


Figure 1

The initial evaluation of the AO should be based on mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, and time available (METT-T) and an examination of what space is needed for the force to operate. One of the challenges in determining this space requirement often faced by Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) commanders and staffs resides in gaining a full appreciation of the space requirement and "footprint" of each disparate element of the MAGTF. Once the requirement for space is identified, the results are compared to the actual AO assigned and then compared against the area of influence.

The commander may determine that his AO is too restrictive because his capabilities extend well beyond the AO or there isn't sufficient space to allow freedom of maneuver. In this case, the recourse is to ask the higher headquarters commander for a larger AO. If the request is denied, it is incumbent on planners to ensure they develop courses of action and concepts of operations with appropriate control measures that facilitate maneuver and freedom of action, not restrict it further.

If, on the other hand, the commander feels that his area of operation is too large, this must be addressed as well. In this case, some options are to request more forces/capabilities be assigned to him, or request joint asset augmentation for a particular phase or stage of the operation to fill the shortfall. If both of these options fail, another option may be to sequence the operation in a manner that does not require control/influence throughout the entire AO simultaneously.

For example, our notional LAR battalion commander might determine that the size of the area he was assigned to screen exceeds his organic capability to do so. He might consider requesting rotary-wing support to augment his force in order to enhance his ability to perform the assigned mission. Another option might be to conduct his operation in sequential fashion, providing doing so still accomplishes the purpose of his mission (the “in order to…”).

Area of Influence

A sound AO evaluation requires a fundamental understanding of the area of influence. The limits defining the area of influence are a subjective call; there is no recipe or checklist to follow. The area of influence will depend on the commander and what he is comfortable with, how he defines influence or control, and of course, METT-T. So how do you determine the size of an area of influence? The tendency is to make the size of the area of influence about equal to the greatest range of a combat system—at the higher MAGTF levels, usually fixed-wing aviation. With long-range weapons and aircraft that can fly around the world, this method of determining area of influence may not be the most useful. Commanders may be better served by considering which of the warfighting functions they can perform within the envisioned area of influence.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>AREA OF INFLUENCE</u></p> <p>"A geographical area wherein a commander is directly capable of influencing operations by maneuver or fire support systems normally under the commander's command or control."</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Joint Pub 1-02</p>

General Anthony Zinni, former Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Central Command and commanding general of I MEF, has said that to control an area, a commander must be able to accomplish four things:

1. See the Battlespace, or sense it—are there adequate assets and planning tools to tell me when I see something and tell me when and where I need to act?
2. Control events and coordinate action you want to take place.
3. Strike deep.
4. Maneuver deep.

Given these requirements, he felt that a MEF’s area of influence is about 180 kilometers/108 miles.

It is essential that both the commander and his planners understand the realm of capabilities that define their ability to influence or control an area and that they use this information in the evaluation of their AO. (See Figure 2.) This sounds like an academic discussion until you consider the consequences of not being aware of the inability to control or influence actions throughout an area of operations—the inability to engage an enemy or set conditions for success by shaping in the deep fight or not being able to protect key infrastructure in the rear to continue force sustainment.

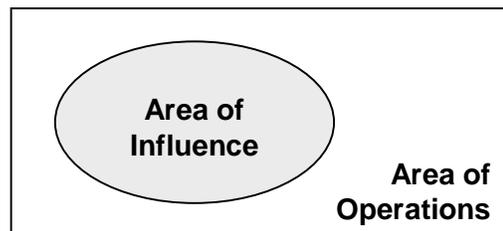


Figure 2

Again, our LAR battalion commander will consider additional deep battlespace forward and to the flanks of the AO for his area of influence. He may consider his direct observation capability and ability to direct fires beyond the forward boundary to help him determine his area of influence.

Area of Interest

Like the area of influence, the area of interest is also subjective in nature. While the area of interest includes the AO and area of influence, the area of interest may stretch way beyond the other parts of his battlespace. A technique that has been used to help frame this area is to pose the questions “Where is the enemy and where are his friends?” and then “Where am I, and where are my friends?” The answers to these questions help identify the size, location, and activities that constitute the commander’s area of interest.

AREA OF INTEREST

"That area of concern to the commander, including the area of influence, areas adjacent thereto, and extending into enemy territory to the objectives of current or planned operations. This area also includes areas occupied by enemy forces who could jeopardize the accomplishment of the mission."

Joint Pub 1-02

Another key point to remember is that this area may be non-contiguous (see Figure 3). For example, a forward deployed MEF may have an area of interest back in the continental United States while the time phased force and deployment list is being executed. It may also potentially have areas of interest around airbases in other countries neighboring his AO. Using the non-contiguous aspect of the areas of interest conserves time and scarce collection assets. Assets will be allocated and time will be invested to provide the information required. Identifying non-contiguous points vice large generic areas is a technique that can conserve these valuable resources.

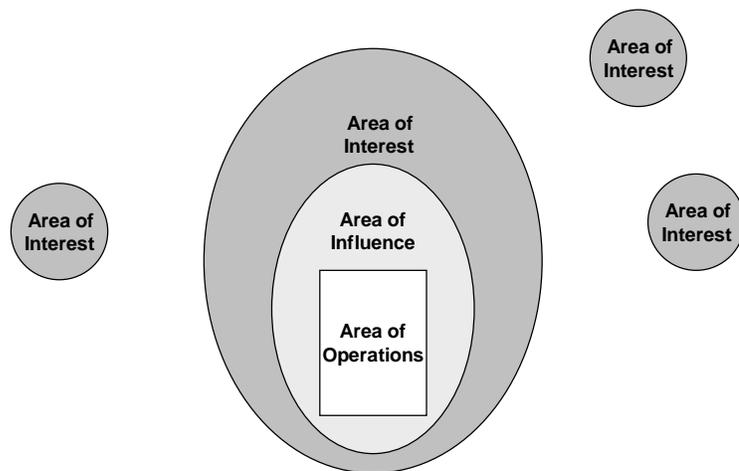


Figure 3

Our LAR battalion commander, when determining his area of interest, will consider critical information such as the location and movement of enemy second echelon armor forces to his front and the status of the lines of communication to his rear that support his high tempo of operations.

Conclusion

The experience of the commander and his principal staff and the detailed planning of the OPT and staff are complementary pieces of a necessary information exchange. Sharing knowledge and experience about the area of operations, area of influence, and area of interest will help commanders and their planners make more informed decisions as well as plan and execute effectively.