

Panama, 1988-1999: The Disconnect between Combat and Stability Operations

Lawrence Yates, Ph.D.

ON WEDNESDAY, 20 December 1989, the United States launched a military invasion of Panama, the outcome of which ended a 2-year crisis with that country's dictatorial regime headed by General Manuel Antonio Noriega, commander of the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF). Code-named Operation Just Cause, the U.S. invasion that began shortly before 0100 on the 20th included numerous combat engagements between U.S. and PDF units.

Later that morning, as several battles were still in progress, the ranking U.S. commander on the scene ordered a related undertaking—Operation Promote Liberty—and forwarded his operations order (OPORD) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) for approval after the fact. Designed to deal with disruptions caused by fighting and by the fall of Noriega's regime, the plan authorized two actions: civil-military operations (CMO) to stabilize the situation in Panama by restoring order and basic services, and civil affairs (CA) activities to support the new "democratic" Panamanian Government U.S. authorities had put into place at the onset of the invasion.¹

Operation Just Cause continued until 11 January 1990 and Operation Promote Liberty continued, as anticipated, until the end of the year. For several weeks, however, the two operations overlapped, which meant that, in many cases, U.S. troops who were or had been engaged in combat and combat-related operations performed stability operations as well.

The Crisis

The crisis that culminated with Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty began in June 1987 with the outbreak of public demonstrations in Panama against Noriega's regime. By early 1988, this internal affair escalated into a U.S.-Panamanian confrontation. Noriega resorted to anti-American rhetoric and actions in hopes of deflecting domestic criticism. The United States expressed

increasing concern over Noriega's alleged illegal activities, which ranged from corruption and election fraud to drug trafficking and murder.

As the crisis worsened so, too, did the formerly cordial relations between PDF and U.S. military personnel stationed in areas that, under Canal treaties signed in the late 1970s, had yet to pass from American to Panamanian control. In early February, after Federal grand juries in Florida handed down indictments against Noriega and some of his associates for their alleged violations of U.S. antiracketeering and antidrug laws, the two countries found themselves on a collision course from which neither could easily veer without losing face or conceding perceived national interests.

Given the deteriorating situation and the fact Noriega had everything to lose, U.S. policymakers could not rule out some kind of military action by him against U.S. citizens and interests in Panama. In fact, U.S. military personnel and their dependents were already targets of PDF intimidation. Thus, it was only prudent for Washington to contemplate the worst-case scenario of actual hostilities between the two countries. Should those fears be realized, U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), a joint headquarters overseeing U.S. military activities in Central and South America, would be responsible for conducting operations against Panamanian forces.

At the beginning of 1988, however, SOUTHCOM had no plan for treating the erstwhile, friendly PDF as a hostile entity. To remedy this, SOUTHCOM Commander General Frederick F. Woerner, Jr., directed his staff to begin contingency planning for the crisis while he sought JCS authorization to draw on other commands for required forces. The JCS granted him that authority on 28 February 1988.

The first iteration of a SOUTHCOM OPORD based on the JCS directive was dated 4 March 1988 and code-named Elaborate Maze. The plan consisted of four phases—three calling for de-

fensive operations and one for offensive military action—that could be executed in response to a variety of possible PDF provocations. The phases did not have to be executed independently or in sequence and, once executed, different phases could overlap. If, however, U.S. forces engaged in the fourth, or combat phase, the plan made clear the Noriega dictatorship would be a casualty of the operation—a “regime change” in today’s parlance.

Bringing down the government did not mean destroying all institutions under it, however. For example, while the PDF would be bloodied in fighting and decapitated in terms of its top leadership, the organization would be preserved to be reformed and rebuilt so that, minus Noriega and his inner circle, it could contribute to the country’s security and stability under a new, U.S.-supported government. What was missing from OPORD Elaborate Maze was any plan for restoring order and services to postwar Panama and for providing support to the new government until it was able to discharge its duties effectively.

Surprised by the omission, SOUTHCOM civil affairs officers asked for and received permission to draft a fifth CMO phase.² Their postinvasion prognosis envisaged a Panama in which normal government functions had deteriorated; various public and private services had been disrupted; and the PDF had been decapitated and stripped of its combat capabilities. Under such conditions, neither civilian demonstrations nor looting, vigilantism, or an upswing in ordinary criminal activity could be ruled out. Isolated pockets of resistance might also spring up, and terrorists might employ sabotage or guerrilla tactics against vulnerable targets, such as U.S. citizens and facilities or the new, post-Noriega government. Faced with these prospects, SOUTHCOM would have to stabilize the situation and restore law and order until the new Panamanian government could function on its own.

Drawing on American experience at the end of World War II, CA planners anticipated that SOUTHCOM’s commander would assume full political-military responsibility for U.S. interests in Panama once combat began and would preside over a military government for about 30 days. During that time, the commander would gradually hand over various governmental functions to the U.S. Embassy or to the new Panamanian government.

Referred to by some as an afterthought to the original Elaborate Maze OPORD, a characterization Woerner denied, various CMO and CA activities postulated in the expanded OPORD were

intended to be integrated, as warranted, with combat operations. In reality, the two phases became increasingly separated in the planning process. To begin with, in April 1988, the JCS directed Woerner to simplify Elaborate Maze by breaking it down into separate OPORDs.

The first three phases of OPORD Elaborate Maze, calling for defensive operations and, at some point, a buildup of U.S. forces in Panama, became OPORD Elder Statesman (later changed to OPORD Post Time). The invasion/combat phase became OPORD Blue Spoon, and the CMO/CA phase became OPORD Krystal Ball, later changed to OPORD Blind Logic. Although it was not derived from OPORD Elaborate Maze, a related plan, OPORD Klondike Key, was used to evacuate U.S. citizens from Panama.

Collectively known as the Prayer Book, each of these OPORDs received its own special attention, often with little more than passing reference to the others, particularly for OPORDs Blue Spoon and Blind Logic. SOUTHCOM’s Joint Staff, Operations (SCJ3), Plans Division conducted planning for OPORD Blue Spoon, and the Joint Staff, Civil Affairs (J5), Policy and Strategy Division, conducted planning for OPORD Blind Logic.³

Operational security (OPSEC) dictated that, once separated, the two OPORDs be compartmentalized, with access to them granted only to people having a need to know, which meant only a few high-level SOUTHCOM officers were aware of the contents of both plans or understood the way the two were meant to interact in the event of hostilities. Teams of CA Army reservists who rotated in and out of Panama to help SCJ5 personnel draft OPORD Blind Logic did not have access to the Blue Spoon OPORD. Furthermore, confining each OPORD to military channels, a condition of OPSEC, precluded input from various U.S. Government civilian organizations whose employees were experts in planning and performing many of the nonmilitary activities OPORD Blind Logic enumerated. This division of labor during the planning process was reflected in supporting OPORDs.

Joint Task Force (JTF) Panama, a headquarters activated by Woerner in April 1988 and located just a few miles from SOUTHCOM at Fort Clayton, Panama, fleshed out the details for conventional combat operations in OPORD Blue Spoon, while Woerner relied on the visiting reservists to work on the supporting civil-military operations task force (CMOTF) plan for OPORD Blind Logic.⁴ Again, OPSEC prevented any meaningful coordination between the JTF and the reservists.

In writing the supporting plan for OPORD Blue Spoon, JTF Panama had to consider at least two contingencies. One posited a no-notice attack by the PDF that would require U.S. forces in Panama to hold the line until reinforcements from the United States arrived. In the second, and preferred, contingency, the United States would determine the time and course of events. In that scenario, a buildup of U.S. troops in Panama under OPORD Post Time would precede the execution of combat operations.

Believing a U.S. invasion of Panama would hurt America's image and interests throughout Latin America, Woerner hoped the buildup itself would resolve the crisis by pressuring PDF officers to remove Noriega rather than risking an invasion of their country and the destruction of their organization. If, however, the psychological effect of the buildup failed to produce "a Panamanian solution" to the crisis, forces would most likely execute OPORD Blue Spoon.⁵ In that event, forces arrayed under JTF Panama would include a Civil Affairs Forces (CAF) element.⁶ Before hostilities began, CAF liaison officers would attach themselves to forward tactical units, and once combat operations began, the CAF would conduct simultaneous civil-military operations, with emphasis on managing civilians displaced by the fighting.

Thus, even though there had been little or no formal coordination between officers planning the supporting OPORDs for Blue Spoon and Blind Logic, there was at least recognition in mid-1988 that tactical units under JTF Panama would encounter immediate CMO-related issues and would need some capability for responding to them. Many more details regarding the interaction of the two plans needed to be worked out, but planners had made a promising start. Events would conspire, however, to reverse much of that progress.

Joint Task Force Panama was built around U.S. Army South (USARSO), SOUTHCOM's Army component. Several officers on Woerner's staff, as well as in the Pentagon and elsewhere, doubted USARSO had the resources necessary for effective contingency planning or for being a warfighting headquarters should Blue Spoon be executed. Consequently, in late 1988 the Pentagon decided to make the XVIII Airborne Corps (an organization specializing in contingency operations) the executive agent for planning OPORD Blue Spoon conventional operations and the warfighting headquarters for the plan's execution.

Woerner welcomed the planning realignment, which USARSO deeply resented, but was skep-

tical of having the XVIII Airborne Corps as his warfighting JTF. For one thing, the XVIII Airborne Corps was headquartered at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and unlike the U.S. military commands, units, and personnel located in Panama, it had not been exposed daily to the complexities and nuances of the crisis. It was also unaccustomed to the in-country environment in which most of the indigenous population was friendly—or at least not hostile—to the United States. An invasion conducted in a traditional way might be a heavy-handed venture that, while resolving the problem of Noriega, would leave many undesirable consequences in its aftermath. Woerner thus refused to give the XVIII Airborne Corps commander anything but a vague notion of when the Corps might be brought to Panama to execute Blue Spoon in the event of an invasion.

The decision that formally introduced the XVIII Airborne Corps into the planning process occurred during a relative lull in the crisis that lasted until May 1989. Then, in the wake of the violence that followed the Panamanian presidential election on 7 May 1989, U.S. President George H.W. Bush sent additional U.S. forces into Panama in what was code-named Operation Nimrod Dancer. The deploying units included a brigade headquarters from the 7th Infantry Division (Light) (ID[L]), a battalion from that division, a battalion from the 5th Mechanized Division, and a company of U.S. Marines. Considered a partial execution of OPORD Post Time, the buildup enabled U.S. forces in Panama to assert U.S. treaty rights in the country while increasing psychological pressure on the PDF to remove Noriega. But, Operation Nimrod Dancer was not meant to be a prelude to combat operations, so units designated to serve in the Blue Spoon CAF did not deploy.

Besides the troop buildup, Operation Nimrod Dancer also witnessed the arrival in Panama of a three-man team of XVIII Airborne Corps planners. SOUTHCOM officers working on Blind Logic took advantage of the visit to engage in some much needed coordination. Among other things, the CA officers in SCJ5 wanted to be sure the XVIII Airborne Corps was giving adequate attention to OPORD Blue Spoon's CMO mission.

So the process of restoring law and order and government services could get under way during and immediately following combat operations, XVIII Airborne Corps planners needed to coordinate and arrange for the timely arrival of CMO support forces, such as military police (MP), engineers, medics, CA units, and reserve personnel, and to determine the point at which control of

these forces would be chopped from a JTF operated by the XVIII Airborne Corps to the CMOTF commanded by SOUTHCOM's J5 director.

SCJ5 and XVIII Airborne Corps planners discussed the implications of OPORD Blind Logic for Blue Spoon and reached some tentative agreements, which SOUTHCOM believed would inform the planning efforts back at Fort Bragg. The XVIII Airborne Corps headquarters, however, did not regard these agreements as formal taskings and continued to focus almost exclusively on OPORD Blue Spoon's combat mission. Unfortunately, the realization of this disconnect between the two planning shops did not come until much later, on the eve of Operation Just Cause. In the meantime, CA planners working on OPORD Blind Logic incorrectly believed the XVIII Airborne Corps fully grasped and was acting on the fact that, if it became the warfighting headquarters, "the law and order mission and emergency service restoration mission would belong to the JTF" manned by the XVIII Airborne Corps' commanding general and his staff.⁷

In the midst of all this activity, the Pentagon announced that Woerner would be stepping down as the SOUTHCOM commander, to be succeeded by General Maxwell Thurman. The change of command was scheduled for 30 September 1989. The news was greeted with some relief at Fort Bragg, where the XVIII Airborne Corps commander and the commander of the special operations forces, designated under Blue Spoon, had never been happy with Woerner's strategy. Even after Operation Nimrod Dancer, deployments still called for a gradual buildup of U.S. forces in Panama before the United States initiated combat operations.

Both commanders at Fort Bragg believed the gradual buildup sacrificed the principle of surprise and forfeited the tactical initiative to the enemy. They preferred, instead, a plan that would employ overwhelming force in simultaneous attacks against a variety of PDF targets. In early August, Thurman visited Fort Bragg, received a briefing on Blue Spoon that included the two commanders' reservations, and informed those present that, once he took command at SOUTHCOM, he would support a new plan that emphasized both mass and surprise.

XVIII Airborne Corps planners had a draft of such a plan ready by the time Thurman took over from Woerner. Events smiled on their efforts. Three days after the change-of-command ceremony, a number of disaffected PDF officers launched what turned out to be an abortive coup against Noriega, a fiasco in which many of the par-

ticipants paid with their lives. In the bloody aftermath of the failure, it was unlikely another group of PDF officers would mount a similar attempt to oust Noriega. With a Panamanian solution to the crisis only a remote possibility, a U.S. invasion of Panama became all but inevitable.

Given this prognosis, Thurman asked the XVIII Airborne Corps to make some revisions to its new plan then sent it as Operation Plan (OPLAN) 90-2 (Blue Spoon) to the JCS for approval, which was given on 3 November 1989. OPORD 1-90, the updated SOUTHCOM version of Blue Spoon, had been revised to reflect, in general terms, the contents of the XVIII Airborne Corps' supporting plan (a reversal of standard procedure in which supporting plans are preceded by the general guidance contained in plans issued by higher headquarters).

In its mission statement, OPLAN 90-2 contained the words "prepare to restore law and order, and support the installation of a U.S.-recognized government in Panama." Furthermore, the rules of engagement included the following statement: "Conduct all operations to minimize collateral damage to nonmilitary personnel and facilities, and limit economic hardship to Panama."⁸ Yet, despite these references and allusions to stability operations, little in OPLAN 90-2 dealt with the necessary tasks involved. Rather, the focus was on combat operations, an emphasis Thurman supported. (Since taking over as SOUTHCOM commander, Thurman had not received a briefing on Blind Logic because of staff shortages and more pressing priorities in the SCJ5 shop.) In planning sessions at SOUTHCOM and Fort Bragg, little more than lip service was paid to the Blue Spoon CMO mission. The same was true of the mission to protect U.S. citizens in Panama. At a planning meeting in October, the XVIII Airborne Corps commander, Lieutenant General Carl Stiner, was quoted as saying, "Don't worry about the civilians till after Blue Spoon. We'll be busy neutralizing the PDF."⁹

The high priority that Thurman, Stiner, and others gave to combat operations made sense in terms of minimizing U.S. casualties and collateral damage. There was also the obvious to consider: unless the PDF were defeated, concerns about stability operations would become moot. Offsetting the lack of attention given the Blue Spoon CMO mission was the planners' assumption that the most serious fighting would be over in a matter of hours, after which tactical units would have plenty of time to transition from combat to stability operations.

If Operation Blind Logic planners at SCJ5 were not so sanguine, there was another group that was also worried about how the XVIII Airborne Corps would handle its stability mission. Under OPLAN 90-2, the 7th ID(L) at Fort Ord, California, was scheduled to arrive in Panama as a follow-on unit after most of the fighting was over, which meant, to planners at Fort Ord, that the division's three brigades (one of which was already in Panama as a result of the Operation Nimrod Dancer troop buildup) would be heavily involved in CMO. For that reason, a principal planner for the division's version of OPORD Blue Spoon contacted the XVIII Airborne Corps and suggested that the issue of CMO coordination needed to be put on the agenda for the next planning session in Panama scheduled for mid-December. The XVIII Airborne Corps readily agreed.¹⁰

The desired discussion, however, never took place. Two days before the session was to begin, guards at a PDF roadblock in Panama City shot and killed a U.S. Marine. The next day, 17 December 1989, Bush made the decision to execute OPORD Blue Spoon, renamed Operation Just Cause. Thus, the planning session in Panama turned into a war council, with the opportunity to do some last-minute tweaking of the combat plan. Thurman emphasized that U.S. citizens had to be protected, but the consensus was that this objective could best be achieved through the swift use of force against the PDF.

As Thurman, Stiner, and their staffs were going over OPORD Blue Spoon in detail, the SCJ5 was trying to update OPORD Blind Logic, which still contained the assumption that the SOUTHCOM commander would head a military government in Panama for a period of about a month. In fact, the Bush Administration had decided to replace the Noriega regime with members of the Panamanian opposition who had been elected to office in May, but whose victory had been annulled by Noriega in the election's violent aftermath. This new arrangement clearly obviated SOUTHCOM's plans for a U.S. military government. An attempt to overhaul OPORD Blind Logic on the eve of the invasion to bring it in line with new realities proved too complicated to complete, so a new, shorter OPORD was drafted, the annexes to OPORD Blind Logic were included with it, and the message was forwarded to the JCS on 20 December. The next day, the Pentagon approved execution of the plan as Operation Promote Liberty.

On the eve of Operation Just Cause, then, disconnects still existed between the invasion plan and the CMO plan with respect to the conduct of

stability operations. This meant the tactical units preparing to take part in the invasion concentrated on their combat roles, devoting little or no attention to the stability operations they would be called on to perform, which probably would have been the case even if coordination had been better during the planning phase.

Unit commanders were more likely to be concerned about minimizing their casualties and defeating the PDF, which was now targeted for destruction, than with any police-type work that would arise during the combat phase. Some in-country units were reminded they would have to deal with the Panamanian population well after the fighting was over, but this caution caused few, if any, of its recipients to redirect their preparations from combat-related necessities to CMO.

The Invasion

Once Operation Just Cause began, two situations quickly surfaced that brought home the disconnects in the planning process. The first situation concerned Panamanian refugees. That the fighting would drive some civilians from their homes was taken for granted, and the plans called for setting up refugee centers, but no staff officer or commander had anticipated what actually happened.

In Panama City, when a neighborhood next to the PDF main headquarters burned to the ground, up to 10,000 Panamanians were forced to flee their homes. This number of refugees was well in excess of the most liberal predictions made during the planning phase. More than that, many, if not most, of these now homeless Panamanians were heading straight for U.S. combat lines at the PDF headquarters while the battle there—the most fierce in Just Cause—was still in progress.

The U.S. task force commander on the scene quickly rerouted civilians to a nearby high school, which was immediately transformed from a military aid station into a refugee center. The facility was soon filled beyond capacity, with those crowded inside the building and athletic field finding themselves confronted with backed-up toilets; an insufficient food supply; the intermingling of mothers and children with drug dealers; armed criminals, and PDF members who had shed their uniforms; and a host of other dangers and inconveniences. It took several days to get the center running fairly efficiently. Of even greater consequence, more than a year later the plight of those Just Cause refugees who still remained homeless posed a major scandal for the U.S.-installed government (which was voted out of power in the first

regularly scheduled elections).¹¹

The second situation that arose involved widespread looting that began shortly after the invasion got under way and continued for 3 to 4 days. Planners had anticipated the problem but had not arranged for the troops necessary to control it. For, while the U.S. military had launched Operation Just Cause with overwhelming force, much of the force advantage was measured in technological terms, not in manpower.

In some battles, such as at PDF headquarters, the force ratio of U.S. to PDF troops was a mere 1 to 1. Furthermore, troops that would have been ideally positioned for stability operations in the commercial and residential center of Panama City under Woerner's plan had been redirected, under Thurman and the Corps' plan, to attack enemy targets on the periphery of the city. Thus, looting in the capital (and in Colón on the other side of the isthmus) that began on 20 December went unchecked for several days, with a cost to the Panamanian economy of an estimated \$1 to \$2 billion.

As with U.S. combat units, U.S. MPs were stretched too thin to stop the looting. They found themselves running a detention center, guarding convoys, and performing other security tasks instead. There simply were not enough MPs to cover all the law and order problems that needed to be addressed in the first days of the operation. (Putting this into perspective, one XVIII Airborne Corps planner wrote in 1991: "There are not enough MPs in the Army to handle the Panama City crime even today.")¹²

Fortunately, most of the battles fought during Operation Just Cause ended within hours, as anticipated, and victorious U.S. combat troops began to assume such followup activities as apprehending PDF and other suspects; guarding housing areas and various official facilities; searching out arms caches; exercising governmental functions in several towns and villages; and, in general, restoring law and order. In short, they began serving as police officers; engineers; social workers; civil affairs and civic action officers; mayors; and governors.

For some units, the adjustment from warrior to police officer or mayor caused serious problems, especially when restrictive rules of engagement (ROE) for combat were replaced by even more highly restrictive ROE for the stability operations that followed. Still, most combat units performed their new, unorthodox tasks well, and within a few days, a semblance of order was restored to the main urban areas in Panama. That most U.S.

combat units had not been prepared to conduct stability operations was seen as a shortcoming in the planning and preparation for the invasion, but at least one senior commander later noted that he doubted his conventional forces could have trained adequately for the mission-essential tasks required by the complexities of the stability operations he faced.¹³

As U.S. troops restored law and order and conducted damage control, they also had the mission of supporting the newly inaugurated government. Ideally, CA personnel would take the lead in this kind of endeavor, but many of these specialists were in Reserve Components (RC) units, and the Pentagon had removed a recommended RC callup from SOUTHCOM's plan.

Months before the invasion, the SCJ5 had anticipated this development and had identified individual RC volunteers with the required experience for deployment to Panama. Yet, by the time some of these volunteers arrived during Operation Promote Liberty, Regular Army or other military personnel were performing their anticipated tasks. Some reservists ended up in one of several organizations that, in working on law and order and nationbuilding issues, found their functions overlapping. Daily coordination meetings helped sort out the disarray, and the commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, weighed in with a recommendation for the long term. The result was the activation of the Military Support Group (MSG), an organization placed under JTF Panama to oversee Promote Liberty activities. When the MSG disbanded a year later, it left behind a relatively stable country with a functioning government.¹⁴

In retrospect, Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty were quite successful. But, that is not to say the plans for each were flawless or that they had been adequately coordinated during the planning process. Consider, for example, the mindset reflected in the terminology used to describe the operations. In discussions before, during, and after the invasion, Operation Just Cause was generally referred to as the conflict phase, and Operation Promote Liberty was referred to the postconflict phase. These terms suggested sequential operations when, in fact, the two began almost simultaneously.

The overlap had been anticipated, but few planners or troop units had prepared themselves for its ramifications. XVIII Airborne Corps planners took the position that their "focus was rightly concerned with the neutralization of the PDF."¹⁵ Planners in the SCJ5 shop argued that the XVIII Airborne

Corps' focus should have included stability operations, yet the new SOUTHCOM commander did not press this position, largely because he was almost completely ignorant of OPORD Blind Logic and its implications. The combat units employed in Operation Just Cause by and large replicated the XVIII Airborne Corps' approach. They, too, focused on winning the war; held in abeyance related noncombat missions until the PDF had been defeated; and engaged in a good deal of on-the-job or "earn while you learn" training.

In April 1990, as a liaison officer from the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command wrote: "Where do we train an infantry or artillery battalion to run a city, take care of prisoner/refugees, feed and police the populace, and operate the public utilities? Superb effective execution of METLs [mission-essential task lists] was the norm for all units involved in [Operation] Just Cause. But they had to chart new ground as they faced real challenges in conducting foreign internal defense (FID), civil affairs (CA), civic action, and psychological operations (PSYOP). We had combat (direct action) units working in the political, economic, and social (or indirect) arenas. When, where, and how do we prepare conventional Army forces to do this? They knew what they were sent here to do: protect U.S. lives and property as effectively as possible. They did. They were, however, given no warning order for a follow-on nationbuilding mission. If they had been, how would they have prepared? What's the METL?"¹⁶

When planners of combat operations pay little attention to stability operations that are likely to occur simultaneously with the fighting, and when combat units prepare only to do battle and shun police work as unbefitting a warrior, there is always the possibility, even the probability, that the combat, especially in an urban area, will result in a breakdown of law and order of such magnitude and duration that a period of chaos will follow. Such a chaotic period occurred in Panama during Operation Just Cause and lasted, in this case, for several days, during which the economy was damaged, property was destroyed, and individual lives disrupted.

As combat troops learned to perform the unorthodox tasks necessity forced on them, and as Operation Promote Liberty finally hit its stride, most of the negative effects of the chaos (save for the refugee issue) were rectified. Despite the sluggish flow of promised U.S. aid to the country, the economy bounced back, the population remained largely pro-American, no pockets of resistance surfaced, a new government began functioning, and elections were held as scheduled.

But, amid the successful outcome of Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty, one nagging question remained: Would a disconnect between combat and stability operations in a future conflict lead to greater chaos over a longer period and with less satisfactory outcomes? The U.S. military and the political community that oversees it need to seriously contemplate the answer to that question. **MR**

NOTES

1. The Panamanian president and two vice presidents the United States helped install just before the invasion had been elected to their positions the previous May, only to have the results of the national election annulled by General Manuel Noriega. U.S. officials could maintain, therefore, that they had paved the way for the legitimate political leaders of Panama to assume their rightful positions.

2. For more information on drafting OPORD Elaborate Maze and the need for a civil-military operations (CMO) phase, see John T. Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing the Restoration of Panama* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute [SSI], 15 April 1992), 7-8.

3. On the organizational arrangements for drafting Blue Spoon and Blind Logic principal and supporting OPORDs, as well as the effect of OPSEC considerations, see *ibid.*, 7-24.

4. GEN Frederick F. Woerner, Jr., also activated a joint special operations task force (JSOTF) that controlled special operations forces during the execution of Blue Spoon. But, because these units were to conduct surgical strikes in Panama and then depart, the JSOTF, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, did not concern itself with law and order and other CMO issues.

5. Woerner, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 30 April 1991.

6. Unclassified Joint Task Force (JTF) Panama briefing slides, no date.

7. Fishel, 20-24.

8. JTF-SOUTH Operations Plan (OPLAN) 90-2 (Blue Spoon), 3 November 1989. See also the mission and the rules of engagement (ROE) in U.S. Commander in Chief, South (USCINCSO), OPORD 1-90 (Blue Spoon), 30 October 1989.

9. Memorandum for: J3, 20 October 89, Major Points from XVIII Planning Meeting, Panama archives, Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth,

Kansas.
10. MAJ Harry Tomlin, interview by author, 22 March 1991, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

11. COL William Connolly, interview by author, 29 January 1990; LTC Les Knoblock, interview by author, January 1990, Fort Clayton, Panama.

12. XVIII Airborne Corps planner, letter to author, 12 September 1991.

13. Conrad C. Crane, *Landpower and Crises: Army Roles and Missions in Smaller-Scale Contingencies during the 1990s* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, 2001), nn. 26 and 28. On the changing and restrictive ROE, one participant in Operation Just Cause wrote that the concepts contained in the International Laws of Land Warfare "took on a new meaning when applied to the role of constable. Deadly force could only be used in self-defense and to protect American and Panamanian lives. Minimum force would be used in establishing law and order. Warning shots had to be fired in all cases, and it was mandatory to shoot only to wound. Chambering a round while not in imminent danger and clearing buildings by fire were forbidden. At roadblocks we could fire only if a vehicle attempted to breach, and then we could shoot only to disable the vehicle, not the occupants." The result was that many soldiers were not "sure when to use force, or when [to] shoot, or what to do if . . ." Clarence E. Briggs III, *Operation Just Cause: Panama, December 1989* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1990), 96, 104.

14. See Fishel for the story of nationbuilding in Panama, including establishing the Military Support Group (MSG) functions.

15. XVIII Airborne Corps letter.

16. LTC Mike W. Menser, Memorandum to Distribution List, 1 April 1990, Monthly Report, 104-105. Briggs also cites the need to modify infantry training to include "distinct modules dealing with rules of engagement."

Lawrence A. Yates is a historian with the Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He received a B.A. and an M.A. from the University of Missouri at Kansas City and a Ph.D. from the University of Kansas. He wishes to thank John T. Fishel, Ph.D., National Defense University, for reviewing this article and suggesting several welcome changes.