

Rules of Engagement in Multinational Operations

by LtCol Stephen M. Womack

In combined operations the SROE are not necessarily the guidelines that will carry the day, and agreeing on suitable ROE can become a critical issue.

U.S. Marine involvement in future conflict may occur more and more on a coalition or alliance basis. In fact, the doctrine set forth in *Joint Pub 3.0* provides that, "... U.S. forces should be prepared to operate within the framework of an alliance or coalition under other-than-U.S. leadership."

As noted in the previous article, new Standing Rules of Engagement (SROE) were approved by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in October 1994. These rules, in both a classified and unclassified version, have been largely hailed by commanders and operators alike for providing U.S. forces with a "boilerplate" set of rules of engagement (ROE) already in place when conflict occurs. Of equal significance is the fact that these rules are *permissive* rather than *restrictive*; i.e., a commander may use the weapon of choice, unless specifically prohibited, tempered only by *proportionality* and *necessity*.

The SROE are no doubt an indispensable tool to the warfighter during U.S.-led operations, comprised substantially of American forces. However, there exists a real danger in creating a mindset that SROE will always extend fully to multinational operations organized under a coalition or alliance structure when Marines may be called upon to play a critical role.

This article focuses on three issues common to ROE formulation in coalition and alliance operations. Who makes the rules? What role should the Marine component commander play in ROE development? How should we train for ROE under a coalition construct with non-U.S. leadership?

The Rulemakers

The driving force behind all ROE is mission accomplishment based on strate-

gic and operational objectives attained by defeat of enemy centers of gravity. This is basic Clausewitz. Thus, meaningful ROE must strike a balance between force protection and those objectives handed down by the political equivalent of the U.S. National Command Authorities, whether it be the U.N., NATO, or other political body responsible for the coalition or alliance.

As warfighters and planners we should not spend too much time arguing over political restrictions that hamper a "model set" of ROE that a commander would like to have in a perfect world. Certainly, the notion of force protection, focused on the least loss of personnel, equipment, and supplies, is instinctively ingrained in all Marines, and we must do all we can to maximize that principle. However, once the Nation signs up to the multinational operation, having carefully assessed risk analysis, ROE will be tailored to its strategic ends or goals. It then becomes the commander's obligation to exploit every advantage that he can in planning, training, and employment in order to ensure that his forces are prepared within the framework of that structure.

For example NATO ROE are *restrictive* in nature, unlike the *permissive* SROE. As a defensive alliance, the use of preemptive force to eliminate a threat to friendly forces has been very narrowly interpreted by the North Atlantic Council, the political arm of NATO comprised of representatives from all member states. This interpretation has significant impact on ROE and requires unanimous consent before changes are made. The Council has historically avoided authorizing use of force that could be interpreted as "starting World War III." Despite the demise of a bipolar world,

changes in the direction of more aggressive rules are not yet readily apparent. For example, during the successful rescue of Air Force Capt Scott O'Grady, shot down over Bosnia during U.N. Operation DENY FLIGHT, NATO ROE were in effect, which made it more difficult for aviation elements of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit to counter the ground threat than would have been the case under application of the JCS SROE. However, because of situational awareness, rigorous training, and continuous communications of those executing the operation, effectively adapting to theater ROE worked out satisfactorily.

Last year Exercise ATLANTIC RESOLVE '94 was conducted by five NATO countries, including the United States, in Grafenwohr, Germany. This was the first major post cold war exercise replacing REFORGER, which historically tested NATO's ability to defend against a conventional Warsaw Pact attack on Western Europe. Among the many exercise goals were establishment of NATO command and control relationships and familiarization with NATO ROE. As staff judge advocate (SJA) for the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) to the Multinational Joint Task Force, it was painful at times having our requested ROE pared back under North Atlantic Council scrutiny in order to meet its more restrictive charter. However, Marines, under operational control of the Joint Maritime Force Component Commander, and all other U.S. forces playing this 15,000-man command post exercise gained a valuable understanding of how U.S. forces work under the NATO Alliance, to include ROE formulation. In this regard, it is important for us to remember that our relative success with ROE during RESTORE HOPE

in Somalia, under a multinational coalition, was due in large measure to having a preponderance of U.S. forces, headed up by a Marine JTF commander where the opportunity to influence ROE was decidedly in our favor. This will not always be the case when Marines get the call.

Commander's Role

Consistent with joint doctrine, multinational force component commanders should seek early on to involve all member nations in the decisionmaking process consistent with the terms established at the founding of the alliance or coalition. This is especially true of ROE development. This means that the Marine commander takes the opportunity to voice his concern over ROE up front in the initial planning phases of the multinational operation. He must take a "hands on" approach in developing his concept of ROE and any supplemental rules he believes necessary to mission success. In the past it has often been the habit to simply assign the SJA the task to write Appendix 8 (ROE) to Annex C of an operation order or plan. When this happens, meaningful integration of the operational art with force protection considerations is potentially weakened.

Simply stated, ROE planning in coalition operations must receive at least the same careful consideration as courses of action development, for example. This is especially true in peace enforcement and peacekeeping operations under

Articles 6 and 7 of the U.N. charter, a current growth industry that traditionally has involved Marines. Here, because of the explosive potential of accelerating force application, great care must be exercised. This is best guaranteed by the commander dedicating the right amount of time in insightful planning for ROE in the multinational construct at the earliest stages and on a continuous basis.

Finally, the commander must establish a close working rapport with other military leaders to ensure not only unity of effort but a common understanding of the ROE finally established by the political entity with authority for the operation. Or, better stated in the words of Adm John F. "Sandy" Woodward, Royal Navy, who commanded British naval forces in the Falklands:

... Meanwhile, I shall have to amplify the ROE so that all commanding officers can know what I am thinking, rather than apply their own interpretation, which might range from 'ask them for lunch to nuke 'em for breakfast'.

Training

As Marines, we have always sought to train like we fight. We have done it well in the combat arms and logistical support roles. One reason for success is because training for each element is directed and monitored at the *institutional* level while implemented at the *command* level. ROE training should be no different. The logic is simple. Direction and oversight at headquarters not only ensures standard-

ization of training functions, but also provides a vehicle as "honest broker" to guarantee a continuous and systematic syllabus of instruction Marine Corps wide. It is true that attention is focused on ROE and the law of armed conflict as part of the Marine Corps Law of War Course, a good program delivered by the individual mobilization augmentation detachment under the auspices of the Marine Corps University. However, there is currently no overall requirement that establishes a program of instruction for ROE training or makes such training mandatory.

With the likelihood of increased participation by Marines in operations other than war, many built around a coalition or alliance structure, the target audience of training should be every Marine, regardless of specialty or assignment. Since the Gulf War, Marine expeditionary forces have periodically trained their major subordinate commands in ROE, but it has not been uniformly or consistently done. As Marines transfer in and out of the Fleet with greater frequency because of reduced numbers, skills atrophy. Also, non-FMF Marines will frequently be called on to plus up a deployment package. The best time to build the right mindset about ROE is as early as possible in the Marine's career in order to provide a ready foundation to build upon when the call comes.

In summary, we know from experience that the next operational commitment could easily require many Marines, with vastly different experience levels, to make life and death decisions perhaps in the span of a nanosecond. Equally true is the fact that an understanding and application of the ROE under which they are operating could well become a critical element in determining success or failure of the mission. It is thus essential that ROE training take on the same significance as any other combat skill.



A Marine stands his security post during a parade in Cap-Haitien, Haiti in support of Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY.

>LtCol Womack is SJA, Commander, Marine Corps Air Bases, West, El Toro. His operational experience includes serving as SJA to: ATF, 5th MEB/CPG-3 during DESERT SHIELD/STORM; Marine Component Command during JTFLA (Los Angeles civil disturbance, May '92); I MEF FWD during Operation CONTINUE HOPE (Somalia); SOCEUR during NATO Exercise ATLANTIC RESOLVE '94.