

Tactical Terminology

CRISIS DECISION MAKING (Fog and Friction)

Tactical operations are among the most confusing of all situations encountered by law enforcement. All actions take place in an atmosphere of uncertainty. Information is always incomplete and may even be conflicting. Because of this, doubt and uncertainty pervade these situations. There is always a lack of knowledge related to the suspect, terrain, weather, innocent bystanders, even assisting law enforcement personnel. This uncertainty requires a commander to make decisions based upon probabilities for which he or she is always lacking accurate and timely data, and for which the consequences of failure can be devastating. This is one of the most pervasive attributes of these types of operations and results in a condition called "fog."

Aggravating the lack of good intelligence is the uncontrollable element of chance. "Chance consists of turns of events that cannot reasonably be foreseen and over which we have no control."¹ The myriad of uncontrollable factors, accompanied by the inherent risk in trying to control them, and compounded with the element of chance, creates a condition called "friction." Friction is the force that resists all action. It makes the simple difficult and the difficult seemingly impossible."² Friction may be psychological, as when a commander becomes overwhelmed by the amount of risk, or when chance favors a suspect. It is often self-induced, as when a commander suffers from indecision, fear of failure, or lack of a clearly defined goal. Friction can also be physical, as when

the suspect succeeds in some endeavor or the commander encounters an obstacle. Only a commander who has experienced the disappointment and frustration of trying to read in darkness or rain, or in attempting to control a situation with a broken radio, can appreciate the impact that physical obstacles have on emotional feelings and mental attitude. Thus, friction will always have a psychological as well as a physical impact. Like fog, friction is present in every tactical encounter.

¹ *Warfighting, FMFM-1*, Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, Washington, D.C. 20380-0001, p. 7.

² *ibid.* p.4.

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