



Force multipliers

By Sid Heal

An implied objective of every tactical intervention is to impose the will of the commander.¹ Like other tactical principles, however, what is easy in concept can be exceedingly difficult in application. Regardless of whether the opposition is enemy forces or the forces of nature, the side that is most capable of overcoming the resistance will prevail. All things being equal, chance plays the most critical role, yet all things are never equal! Indeed, no rational person would ever surrender success to chance and seeks any advantage to make success more achievable. Of the most fundamental of these advantages is called a *force multiplier*.

plier applies to individuals. The invention and widespread use of the .45-caliber Colt Peacemaker in 1873 was so critical that it was dubbed “the gun that won the West.” The physical size and strength of a gunfighter was irrelevant. An ability to effectively employ this weapon put anyone in parity. In fact, the saying, “God didn’t make all men equal, but Col. Colt did!” crassly expressed its importance.

While dilettantes usually see force multipliers as physical objects, pundits quickly grasp other, even more significant, benefits from less tangible factors. One of the best examples is the efficacious use of

arranged for replenishment and reinforcements, or fortified a defensive location. Even more important is personal preparedness such as proficiency gained by training, education and experience. Closely associated with personal preparedness, and probably still more important yet, are the skills and abilities of a highly trained team. This is so because the innate human failings of a single individual can be compensated for by teammates. Thus, a team of people collaborating in harmony creates a synergy surpassing numbers alone.

Distinct from, but closely related to, preparedness is situational awareness. Situational awareness describes a person’s knowledge and understanding of the circumstances, surroundings, and influences with regard to an unfolding situation.³ A lack of situational awareness can be disconcerting at best and disastrous at worst. Consider needing to purchase a hammer in a large department store and after stepping off the elevator you find yourself in lady’s lingerie and not the hardware department. The confusion, even momentarily, is a disruption that can be exploited in tactical situations. Consequently, the opponent who has a better appreciation for the situation at hand gains a substantial, even decisive advantage.

One of the most effective but often neglected force multipliers is ingenuity. An imaginative approach to any problem, but especially those involving adversaries, provides unexpected methods and options that not only surprise opponents but may even leave them dumbfounded for countermeasures. As one Marine Corps general was fond of saying, “The best tactics not only leave your enemy defeated, but confused!”⁴ While ingenuity, by definition, gravitates toward the unorthodox, some methods have proven so effective that they are repeatedly used with success. Diversions,⁵ for example, are not usually ingenious in concept, but tend to be highly dependent upon imagination and resourcefulness in application.

A force multiplier is defined as any capability or advantage that, when added to and employed, significantly increases the potential of an individual or organization, and thus enhances the probability of success. A force multiplier can be as diverse as a superior weapon or a better idea. The only requirement is that it provides some markedly greater advantage.

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Indubitably, the most recognizable force multiplier takes on some form of superior weapon or equipment. For example, the development of the atomic bomb in World War II provided a decisive advantage. All other factors, even the size and commitment of the opposing armies, became secondary. Likewise, the advantage of a force multi-

time. This is easily illustrated with competitive games. For example, in the game of baseball a “force play” is one in which a runner is put out when forced by the batter to move to the next base but a fielder holding the ball touches the base first. Thus, the opponent who has the advantage of time is successful. Likewise, the “fast break” in basketball or the “breakaway” in hockey are not a different tactics, but rather the same tactics applied faster than an opponent can effectively react.²

In the same manner, preparedness is a force multiplier. Preparedness is multifaceted and takes on many forms. Consider the advantages presented when one opponent has gathered and staged critical equipment,

The complexity and uncertainty inherent in tactical operations makes complications and setbacks the norm. When they occur it is easy to become discouraged and flounder. One of the most powerful force multipliers is a feeling of fellowship and camaraderie. This esprit de corps provides a countervailing force that is impossible to overestimate and provides a resilience like no other. A force with high morale is far more capable of compensating and recovering from pitfalls and failures than one who is not. All things being equal (and by now it should be apparent that all things are never equal), a force with high morale is more powerful than one without. It is a poor commander who neglects or discounts the value of high morale as a contribution for operational effectiveness.

To be certain, physical force multipliers are the most well-known, but it should now be understood that these types really represent just a small fraction of the possibilities. In point of fact, a force multiplier can be anything that forces an adversary to consider the consequence of their actions. This is why a mere threat can be so powerful.⁶

Regardless of the form a force multiplier takes, however, two general characteristics predominate. The first is that greater possibilities lie outside the physical realm. Consequently, some of the most benign actions can have profound effects. The second is that they tend to be non-lethal. This is because most force multipliers are incapable, in and of themselves, of inflicting death, but rather work either by enhancing the effective employment of lethal force or by creating conditions where it may not be necessary at all. ◀

Endnotes

1. The importance of this concept is explained in "Characteristics of Crises and Conflicts," *The Tactical Edge*, Fall 2002, pp. 57-58.
2. For more information on the importance of time, see "Maneuvering in Time," *The Tactical Edge*, Fall 2001, pp. 60-61.
3. For more information on the situational awareness, see "Situational Awareness and a Common Operational Picture," *The Tactical Edge*, Spring 2002, pp. 55-56.
4. General A.M. Gray, 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps.
5. As used here, diversions refer to deceptions and distractions. For more information on diversions, see "Diversions," *The Tactical Edge*, Fall 2000, p. 69.
6. For more information on threats, see "Expressed and Implied Threats," *The Tactical Edge*, Spring 1996, p. 71.

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