

TACTICAL TERMINOLOGY

By Sid Heal

Planning & Implementation

(Focus of Effort and Main Effort)

Successful tactical resolutions necessitate the completion of a number of missions. Requirements such as ensuring the safe release of hostages, capturing the suspect, recovering the "loot," protecting the crime scene, or gathering evidence are all vital to the overall success of an operation.

Each of these missions is further comprised of an almost infinite number of individual assignments. Tasks such as traffic control, containment, press liaison and the like also contribute to the success of missions. Some missions can be accomplished rather quickly with only one or two persons, while others may take hours or days and require the combined efforts of a large number of individuals. Some require special skills, while others can be fulfilled by almost anyone. Many of these missions are performed simultaneously, and are in competition with each other for personnel and resources. Because tactical operations are also time sensitive, some are more important at different times than others. With all these factors in play, it becomes obvious that some method of prioritizing and coordinating the activities of everyone involved is essential. This is achieved by identifying the **focus of effort** and the **main effort**.

A *focus of effort* describes a concentration of interest or activity. In tactical operations, the focus of effort is what the commander identifies as the predominant activity or assignment that must be accomplished to achieve a successful resolution. All other assignments and missions are subordinate. Thus, anyone is able to resolve a conflict without burdening a commander with minutia.

Similar in concept but distinct in application is the *main effort*. The main effort identifies the agency, unit, or component which has been assigned as the primary means to accomplish the interest or activity defined by the focus of effort. Where the focus of effort is used to identify what needs to be done, the main effort identifies who is to do it. All other units and components are intended to support the main effort.

An example of the uses of these concepts may be easily demonstrated in a hostage scenario. A commander issuing guidance to his personnel might provide the following:

"Initially, the focus of effort will be the safe release of the hostages. The main effort during this phase of the operation will be the hostage negotiation team. If an

intervention becomes necessary, the main effort will move to the SWAT team. Once the hostages are freed, the focus of effort will shift to the capture of the suspect and the main effort will be the SWAT team."

By providing these simple instructions, the commander identifies what needs to be done and when as well as who needs to do it. Focus of effort and main effort are concepts which provide everyone the ability to coordinate and work through conflicts without overwhelming a commander with nonessential details. ■



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