THE EFFECTS-BASED APPROACH TO OPERATIONS (EBAO)

Last Updated: 22 Nov 2016

- The effects-based approach to operations (EBAO) is defined as “an approach in which operations are designed, planned, executed, and assessed in order to influence or change system behavior to achieve desired outcomes.”

- EBAO is not a planning methodology; it is a way of thinking about operations that provides guidance for design, planning, execution, and assessment as an integral whole. More specifically, EBAO is an approach in which:

  - Operations are driven by desired ends (objectives and end states), and should be expressed in terms of desired effects, not defined by what available forces or capabilities can do.

Principles of EBAO

- EBAO is comprehensive—it cuts across all domains and dimensions, disciplines, levels, and instruments of national power. EBAO provides an overarching way of thinking about action that encompasses operational design, planning, execution, and assessment of operations involving all instruments of national power across the range of military operations.

- EBAO integrates strategy—all design, planning, execution, and assessment efforts—into a unitary whole.

- EBAO emphasizes that war is a uniquely human endeavor—a dynamic and often unpredictable process involving the collision of interactively complex, adaptive systems.

- EBAO emphasizes that warfare is non-linear and “interactively complex.”

- Causes and effects are usually hard to trace and harder to demonstrate, since common “linear” rules often do not apply. Most cause-effect relationships important to warfighters involve indirect and often intangible, unquantifiable linkages normally discerned inductively (through real-world observation), not deductively (by proving a theorized outcome through logic alone).

- EBAO should account for how all actors, especially the adversary, may respond to planned actions.
Commanders and strategists should also consider that the beliefs, customs, and habits of adversaries not trained in a Western worldview may not respond in ways anticipated by Americans (mirror imaging), potentially creating unanticipated and unfavorable higher-order effects.

- **EBAO is about creating effects, not about platforms, weapons, or particular methods.**

- **EBAO focuses on behavior, not just physical changes.**
  
  EBAO emphasizes that there are alternatives; that the ultimate aim in war is not just to overthrow the enemy’s military power, but to compel them to do one’s will.

- **EBAO seeks to achieve objectives most effectively, then to the degree possible, most efficiently.**

- **EBAO should consider all possible types of effects.**
  
  Warfare has traditionally focused on direct effects and more immediate indirect effects like attrition. An effects-based approach should consider the full array of outcomes in order to give decision-makers a wider range of options and provide a realistic estimation of unintended consequences.

- **EBAO is not new.**
  
  History’s great commanders approached warfare from an effects-based perspective, though not so named, when they looked beyond mere destruction of enemy forces to the more general problem of bending the enemy to their will.

*For more complete discussion of EBAO, [click here.](#)*