How Does the Concept of a Desired End State Help Us to Judge the Sicily Campaign in Retrospect?

- *Lt Col Govind Raj Ghimire*

Abstract

The Allied campaigns preceding the landings in the beaches of Normandy shaped the perceptions and thinking of allied commanders on how to conduct a large-scale invasion against the German held defences in France in the later stages of World War II. One such campaign in Sicily in the summer of 1943, "Operation Husky", is a study in case as to whether that campaign could be taken as a success or failure for the Allies in terms of meeting the desired end state. This paper examines the various events of the Sicily campaign and tries to identify how the concept of a desired end state can help to judge the success or failure of the campaign. Using information presented in academic and government literature as well as the documents from military history, the paper concludes that the lack of a clearly formulated desired end state allowed the political and military leadership to exercise enhanced flexibility which ultimately contributed towards achieving the strategic outcome of the campaign. The paper covers the definitions of end state at multiple levels and compares these with Husky. It also deals with how the relationship between operation and strategy played out during the Sicily campaign and concludes by emphasizing on the need to have synchronization between strategy and operation.

Keywords

Allied Campaign, Sicily, Husky, Wehrmacht, Axis, Objective, End State, Amphibious, Airborne, Casablanca, Naval, Air Force, Tactical, Operational, Strategic, Theatre, Mediterranean, Administrative, Maneuver, Alliance, Doctrine

Introduction

The Allied campaign in Sicily in the summer of 1943 was one of the significant campaigns in the Mediterranean theatre and it continues to raise debates among the scholars and students alike as to whether the "Operation Husky" (name for the campaign) can be taken as a success or failure for the Allies in terms of meeting the desired end state.

The Allied victory in Tunisia in May 1943 opened the possibility of taking the war directly to Italian shores. British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill was convinced that following Italian army's defeat in North Africa, one more successful operation would force Italy out of war which, in turn, might lead to Rome's defection from the Axis camp.[1] Casablanca conference in January 1943 provided the platform to plan and conduct the campaign in Sicily. The appointment of General Dwight Eisenhower as the head of the Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ) for the campaign provided the necessary strategic impetus to the campaign.[2]

Based on a brief background above, this essay aims to conduct a critical analysis of the Sicily campaign and tries to identify how the concept of a desired end state can help to judge the success or failure of the campaign. The central argument of the essay is that the Sicily campaign did not have a clearly formulated desired end state: however,

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[1]Zaloga, S. J. (2013). *Sicily 1943 The debut of Allied joint operations.* Oxford: Osprey Publishing.
[2] Ibid.

the lack of rigid end state allowed for enhanced flexibility on the political and operational leadership throughout the course of the campaign and ultimately, though indirectly, contributed towards achieving the strategic outcome of the campaign. The essay consists of two parts. The first part covers the definitions of end state at multiple levels and compares these with Husky. The second part deals with the critical analysis of how the relationship between operation and strategy played out during the Sicily campaign. Finally, the essay concludes by emphasizing on the need to have synchronization between strategy and operation.

Part 1 - Concept of Desired End State and Multiple Levels of End State

The DoD dictionary defines End State as, "The set of required conditions that defines achievement of the commander's objectives." Similarly, JP3-0 states that "a campaign plan...clearly defines an end state that constitutes success, failure, mission termination, or exit strategy: and serves as the basis for subordinate planning."[3] In such context the End State may describe what constitutes military victory but by no means should it be confused with successfully achieving the more encompassing Desired End State.[4]

Author Michael I. Handel argues that, "A campaign or a major joint/combined operation intended to end hostilities requires a clear statement of the desired (strategic) end state- the political, diplomatic, military, economic, social, ethnic, humanitarian and other conditions that the highest political leadership wants to exist after the end of the hostilities."[5] He is of the view that political and military leaders need to discuss, in detail, before framing the desired end-state and the desired end-state is the "key prerequisite to

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[3]Clark, S.A. (1999). Interagency Coordination: Strengthening the Link between Operational Art and the Desired End State. *Defence Research Paper, Naval War College*, 5-9.

[4] Ibid.

[5]Handel, M. I. (2003). Strategic Logic and Political Rationality: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel. In A. Bradford, K. F. Walling (Ed.), *Strategic and Political Rationality* (pp. 127). London: Frank Cass.

determining the method, duration, and intensity of applying one's available combat potential to accomplish a given military or theatre-strategic objective." [6] These definitions mentioned above would surely suggest that even though there was detailed discussion at the strategic level between the Allied political leaders as well as the military leaders in deciding to launch the campaign in Sicily, they simply couldn't translate those discussions into bringing an efficient campaign plan which included a definite end-state. Both the strategic level and operational level leadership had an idea about 'why' Sicily campaign was being launched but at no level tried to work on 'how' the campaign would be launched, conducted and terminated. As a result, the end state was constantly evolving throughout the campaign.

Part 2 - Sicily in Terms of relationship between Operation and Strategy

The Sicily campaign merits the continued debates till today because it involved some of the most prominent political leaders and some of the best military leaders to take part in the Second World War.

Douglas Porch argues that American President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his British counterpart Churchill viewed that launching major operation in Sicily would signal allied return to Europe and possible pay greater strategic dividends. They also thought that at the strategic level, the Sicily operation might relieve the pressure off Russian President Joseph Stalin and his forces and most significantly, the capture of the island might trigger Mussolini's downfall without having to invade the Italian mainland.[7] Surely, this would suggest that the political leadership at the strategic level was absolutely clear as to why they wanted to launch the operation in Sicily.

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Porch, D. (2004). *The Path to Victory in The Mediterranean Theater in World War II.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Similarly, Geoffrey M. McKenzie points out that the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CSS) for Husky delivered an outline plan (without much thoughts and preparation) on 23 January 1943 which included details only on initial invasion of Sicily and which lacked a detailed operational approach for conducting the operations in Sicily and "without a clear end state for Allied military forces."[8] Surely, these arguments seem to suggest that even though the politico-strategic leadership decided *why* to conduct the campaign, they did not come up with a desired end state of the Sicily campaign.

Furthermore, the minutes from Casablanca Conference in January 1943, as described in CCS Memorandum 155/1, mention that the Allies had planned the "occupation of Sicily with the object of:

- Making the Mediterranean Line of communications more secure.

- Diverting German pressure from the Russian front.

- Intensifying the pressure on Italy."[9]

These objectives drawn out by the team of Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) suggest that the military leadership simply followed the objectives agreed upon by the political leadership, as these were precisely the points which were stressed upon by Churchill when selecting Sicily for the invasion operation. The military leadership, combined with the naval and air forces commanders, could not agree upon and come up with a detailed campaign strategy of their own. This crucial flaw of the operational level

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[8] McKenzie, G. M. (2014). Operation Husky: Seeking An Operational Approach to Decisive Victory. *SAMS Monograph,USC& GSC,* 3-10.

[9] World War II: Inter-Allied Conferences. (n.d.). Casablanca Conference, January 1943: Papers and minutes of meetings. Retrieved October 12, 2024, from http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4013coll8/id/3688/rec/4

leadership hindered the efforts of the invasion forces from the onset as they failed to produce a synchronized, unified effort.

However, despite these gaps at the operational and strategic level, Operation Husky did have some positive aspects for the Allied forces. Douglas Porch writes that Husky proved to be "the coming-of-age of British combined operations… professionally recognized to be all-or-nothing affairs, inter-Service and technical to the last degree." Husky offered the excellent theatre for the Allies to practice inter-service cooperation as shown by the original amphibious landings which were models of planning and joint interoperability.[10] Similarly, Albert N. Garland argues that in the American invasion, 82nd Airborne Division was assigned a crucial role in Sicily and supported to deliver the employment of a significantly large strength of Allied airborne combat troops, the first of its kind until then, by parachute and glider, in order to support the ground troops. Sicily also proved to be the first operational theatre where the concept of the airborne division was tasted and thus broke new grounds for the US Army where, only until 1942, the concept was not accepted.[11]

Garland further writes that Husky witnessed a marked improvement in specialized crafts and in the techniques of amphibious operations compared to the North African landings of the previous year. Some important new crafts and ships played a prominent part during the operation for the first time. The most important of these were the "LST (landing ship, tank), the LCT (landing craft, tank), the LCI (landing craft, infantry), and the LCVP (landing craft, vehicle or personnel)." There was also the Dukw,

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[10] Ibid., 449.
[11] Garland, A. N. (1965). *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy.* Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army.

an ingenious vehicle able to swim and roll, with the main role of supplying the Seventh Army adequately over the beaches.[12]

Author Carlo D' Este cites one historian who described Sicily as "an Allied physical victory, a German moral victory."[13] He further argues that, even after the initial drawbacks and the lack of clarity in planning, the Allies still got the opportunities to gain a decisive victory over the Axis forces at various stages of the campaign, but those opportunities were either overlooked or squandered due to the lack of unity of effort among the commanders. As a result, instead of engaging in a swift maneuver battle and achieving a decisive victory, the Allied forces were compelled to fight a long and frustrating attritional campaign which lasted thirty-eight days. In the end, the vastly inferior Axis force of around 60,000 men with almost non-existent air and naval support succeeded in holding and then outwitting the vastly superior Allied force that exceeded 450,000 troops and conduct a successful evacuation.[14]

In attempting to judge whether the desired end state was achieved or not following Husky, it is important to see how the campaign affected the Axis forces as well.

According to Steven J Zaloga, the Allied invasion of Sicily on July 10, 1943 proved to be the turning point of war for Germany. The Wehrmacht was stretched on multiple fronts. This first Allied penetration into "Fortress Europe" threatened to force Italy's withdrawal from the war. Wehrmacht was forced to replace the Italian divisions with German troops owing to the Italian unit's occupation duties in Greece, Yugoslavia and southern France. Hitler had to call off the offensive in Kursk because of the clear impending threat to Italy. This change of events meant that Germany went from losing

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[12] Ibid., 104.
[13] Ibid., 551.
[14] Ibid., 552.

the strategic initiative to being in the defensive ever since. Operation Husky added the impetus in a series of other disasters that changed the fortunes of Germany in the war and, crucially, halted the German momentum.[15]

Furthermore, Christian Tripodi argues that "mistakes at the tactical level can lead to success at the operational level; success at the operational level can lead to failure at the strategic level."[16] When relating this argument to Operation Husky, it can be argued that even though the Allied land commanders could not achieve the required unity of effort to conduct a swift campaign and achiever a decisive victory on the ground, the lengthy attritional battle somehow achieved the desired effect on the strategic level. It was during the campaign that seismic political changes took place in Rome, ultimately completed with the removal of Mussolini from power. And even though there were faults in its operational planning conduct, the Sicilian campaign enhanced the abilities of the Allies to conduct complicated combined operations, and made the military commanders learn vital tactical skills that they would use to the decisive effect in the Normandy campaign next summer. From the Axis perspective, the unfolding of events on the Axis side seem to support the argument because the Wehrmacht and its military leaders were extremely successful in conducting a delaying and evacuation operation of their own forces, but that tactical success could not prevent the strategic event of Mussolini's removal from power.

Conclusion

Finally, Husky proved to be one of the pivotal campaigns of the Mediterranean theatre and, in the long run, helped the Allies to seize initiative and gain an upper hand over the Axis forces in the following campaigns in the European theatre. The central

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[15]Zaloga, S. J. (2013). *Sicily 1943 The debut of Allied joint operations.*Oxford: Osprey Publishing.
[16]Tripodi, C. (2017). Strategy, theory and history: Operation Husky 1943. *Journal of Strategic Studies,* 3-15.

argument of the paper was that although the Sicily campaign lacked clearly formulated desired end state, the lack of rigid end state allowed for enhanced flexibility on the political and operational leadership throughout the course of the campaign and ultimately, though indirectly, contributed towards achieving the strategic outcome of the campaign. The first part of the paper covered the definition of end state at multiple levels like the military and political level and how they could be related through Husky's perspective. The second part of the paper offered a critical analysis on the relationship between operation and strategy and how the lack of harmony between the two affected in the overall outcome of the Sicilian campaign.

To conclude, the detailed critical study of Operation Husky enables us to think about the war and doctrines in general. It reminds us that in any campaign, not only in the case of Sicily, while planning for the operations and preparing the doctrines, we need to accommodate the reality that only having a clearly written end state on paper does not guarantee success and might not give the results that we want.

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