

Expert Rationale

This was a very interesting scenario when we first presented it because our experts were decidedly split on how to handle the situation. Most of our experts viewed the situation from a strictly tactical perspective: What were the best tactics to secure Oasis quickly and without undue casualties? They answered this way:

Expert Rationale #1:

Decision #1

As you assess the situation and develop your plan, what do you consider to be the most important considerations? Select the three (3) most important options from the list below.

X	a. Secure the town (and especially the pump house) at all costs.
	b. With a hostile embedded news crew, don't do anything that could cause a scandal.
X	c. Minimize friendly casualties.
X	d. Minimize collateral damage; that will not look good on the evening news.
	e. Figure out how to accomplish the mission without a fight.
	f. Show the locals who is in charge right from the beginning and there won't be any trouble.
	g. Make sure the news crew is safe and out of the way at all times.

Decision #2

What actions would you be most likely to include as part of your concept of operations? Check all that apply.

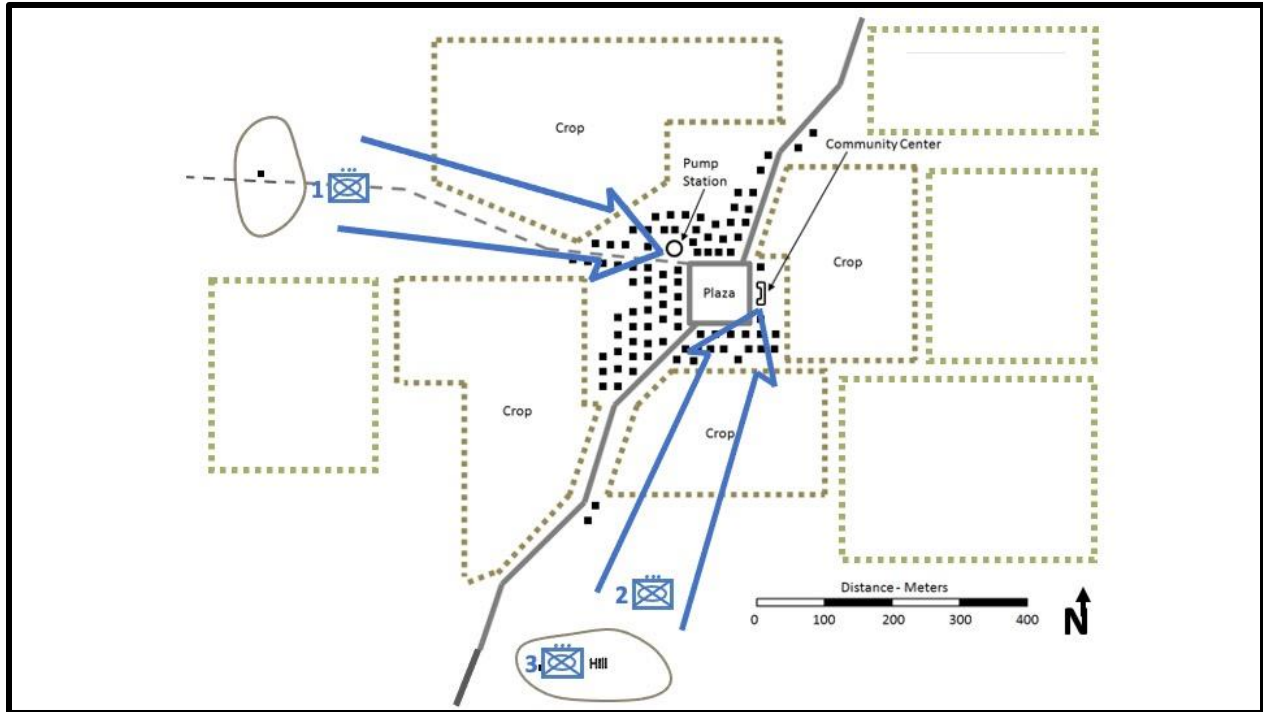
X	a. Sneak in through the crop fields on foot under cover of darkness to achieve the element of surprise.
	b. Approach on the road in daylight.
	c. Conduct mortar prep fires to keep militia forces suppressed as you approach.
X	d. Seize the pump station (the town's lifeline) as an objective.
X	e. Seize the community center ("high" ground and symbolic center) as key terrain.
	f. Conduct a diversion on one side of town while approaching from another.
	g. Drive straight into the center of the plaza in the middle of the day and ask to speak to the community leaders.
X	h. Set up a base of fire with one platoon while entering the town with the other two.
	i. Quickly seize the egress points (southwest, northeast and northwest corners) to prevent hostile elements from escaping.

	j. Strike quickly and decisively to overwhelm any resistance before it can get organized.
	k. Occupy the hill west of town as a potential base of fire.
X	l. Occupy an overwatch position on the hill south of town.
	m. Halt a vehicle heading into town and have them escort you.

This group felt that accomplishing the mission—i.e., securing the town (1a)—was paramount and that minimizing casualties on both sides (1c)(1d) was next in order of importance. The experts were sensitive to the fact that the presence of the news crew complicated things and highlighted the importance of acting with discrimination. Minimizing casualties would accomplish the collateral imperatives of avoiding a scandal (1b) and keeping the news crew safe (1g). The experts felt that avoiding a fight (1e) was all well and good, but not at the expense of securing the town. They also felt that coming in strong to show who is in charge (1f) contradicted the imperative for discrimination.

These experts therefore opted for attempting to infiltrate the town under cover of darkness (2a) and seizing the pump house (2d) and community center (2e), the key terrain in the town, by surprise. Infiltrating units would fire only when fired upon, and there certainly would be no mortar prep (2c), which would inflict civilian casualties. While infiltrating with two platoons to seize the key terrain, the experts would establish a position with the third platoon on the southern hill (2l) to provide a base of fire if needed.

This group felt that dawn will find you in control of the two pieces of key terrain. As Sun Tzu said: “Seize something the enemy cherishes, and he will conform to your desires.” You would be in a position to dictate terms to the local leaders.



Expert Rationale #2

However, a significant minority of the experts—tending to be those with special forces experience—approached the situation very differently. They saw the situation not fundamentally as a tactical problem but as part of the battle of narrative and perception. They answered like this:

Decision #1

As you assess the situation and develop your plan, what do you consider to be the most important considerations? Select the three (3) most important options from the list below.

	a. Secure the town (and especially the pump house) at all costs.
	b. With a hostile embedded news crew, don't do anything that could cause a scandal.
X	c. Minimize friendly casualties.
X	d. Minimize collateral damage; that will not look good on the evening news.
X	e. Figure out how to accomplish the mission without a fight.
	f. Show the locals who is in charge right from the beginning and there won't be any trouble.
	g. Make sure the news crew is safe and out of the way at all times.

Decision #2

What actions would you be most likely to include as part of your concept of operations? Check all that apply.

	a. Sneak in through the crop fields on foot under cover of darkness to achieve the element of surprise.
X	b. Approach on the road in daylight.
	c. Conduct mortar prep fires to keep militia forces suppressed as you approach.
	d. Seize the pump station (the town's lifeline) as an objective.
	e. Seize the community center ("high" ground and symbolic center) as key terrain.
	f. Conduct a diversion on one side of town while approaching from another.
X	g. Drive straight into the center of the plaza in the middle of the day and ask to speak to the community leaders.
	h. Set up a base of fire with one platoon while entering the town with the other two.
	i. Quickly seize the egress points (southwest, northeast and northwest corners) to prevent hostile elements from escaping.
	j. Strike quickly and decisively to overwhelm any resistance before it can get organized.
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X	m. Halt a vehicle heading into town and have them escort you.

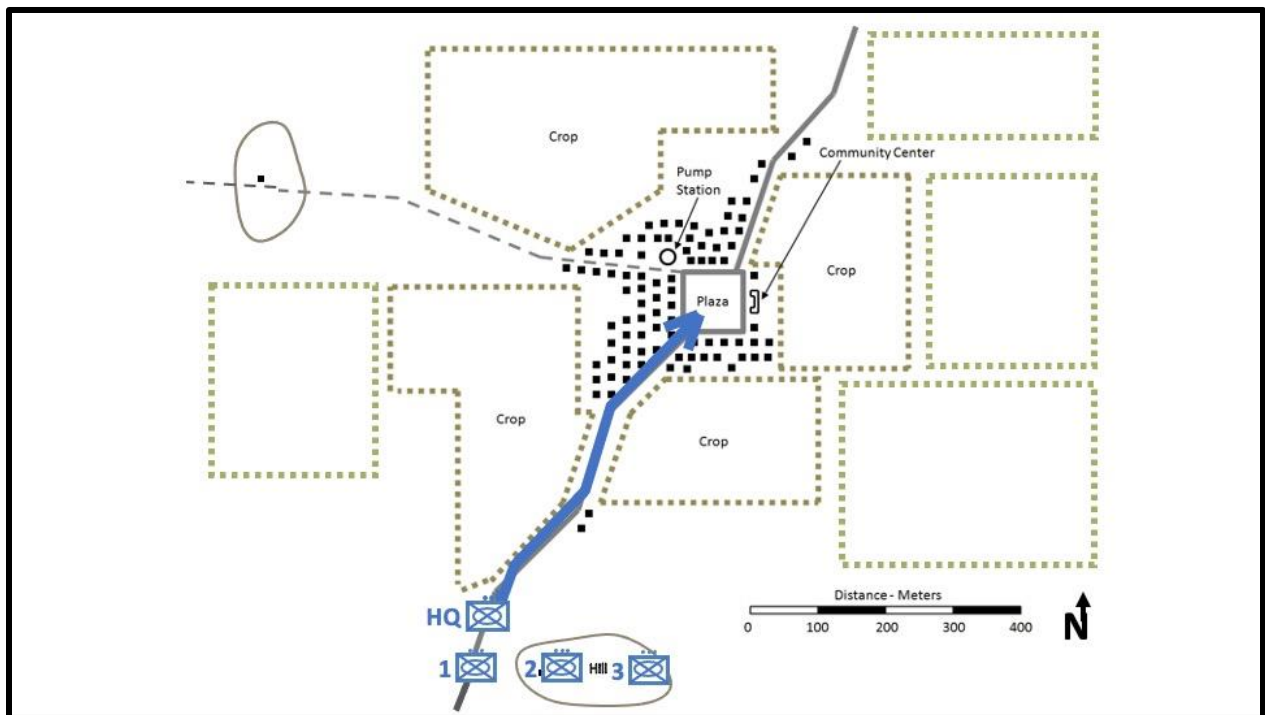
This group saw the fundamental problem as accomplishing the mission without a fight (2e)—or at least with minimal violence. Minimizing casualties on both sides (2c)(2d) would be an outgrowth of that approach but was also an important imperative in its own right. A pitched battle to seize the town would capture the town but end up a net loss in the bigger picture.

This group felt the town militia would fight to defend their homes if attacked, so the imperative was to give them no cause. An attempt to infiltrate by surprise at night (2a) likely would be detected—it is hard to be stealthy while approaching through the open desert, especially in armored vehicles—and the militia, feeling that the town was under attack, would fight. This group preferred an iron-fist-in-the-velvet-glove approach: demonstrate that resistance would be futile while also appearing nonthreatening. This group therefore opted for approaching directly up the road in daylight (2b) to show the full strength of the company, dropping off the bulk of the company in a very visible position outside of town (2l), and driving straight into the town plaza with small element with a local escort (2g)(2M).

Three headquarters vehicles would drive into town at a reasonable speed with the escort vehicle, through the plaza, to the community center with no more

than a squad as security. Ask to meet with the community leaders and militia leaders (if they are not one and the same). Talk to them in sight (if possible) of your platoons arrayed on line a few hundred meters away. One of your security detail would be carrying a radio in plain sight and regularly communicating with whomever is on the other end—presumably the row of armored vehicles facing the town. Explain to the local leaders that U.S. forces will need to make temporary use of their town to set up a supply point. Make it clear that you are not conquering them or taking them prisoner. You will not harm their women. You will cause as little disruption as possible to their daily lives. Ask if there is anything you can do for them in terms of supplies, medical attention, etc. If there are any incidents of mistreatment by U.S. troops, they should let you know. Explain that your troops will now enter to secure the town with weapons elevated.

This group felt that an approach based purely on tactical considerations likely would result in a firefight, which is exactly what you don't want. They felt this situation called for more of a psychological approach.



We first presented this scenario before the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, when most military officers were thinking in terms of conventional combat. We suspect that after two decades of irregular warfare, the minority approach described here might be more prevalent today.