DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL MICHAEL JOHNSON, ART OF DESIGN COURSE AUTHOR AND SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES (SAMS) ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM LEADER, FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS; CLINTON J. ANCKER, III, DIRECTOR, COMBINED ARMS DOCTRINE DIRECTORATE, FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS, VIA TELECONFERENCE SUBJECT: "THE ART OF DESIGN: A MILITARY APPROACH TO CRITICAL THINKING" TIME: 10:00 A.M. EDT DATE: TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 2009

(Note: Please refer to www.dod.mil for more information.)

LINDY KYZER (Army Public Affairs): Okay. With that, I believe I have 10:00 a.m. now. So again, this is Lindy Kyzer with Army Public Affairs. Thank you so much, everyone, for joining us.

This morning, we're very pleased to have with us from the Combined Arms Center Colonel Michael Johnson. He is the art of design course author and School of Advanced Military Studies Advanced Military Studies Program Seminar leader at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I only practiced that twice, people. (Laughter.) We also have Clinton Ancker III. Mr. Ancker is the director of the Combined Arms Center Doctrine Directorate at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

They're here to talk about "The Art of Design: A military approach to critical thinking." With that, I will turn it over to the experts.

So, Colonel Johnson, did you have a couple minutes of opening remarks.

COL. JOHNSON: We're going to ask Clinton to start off and then I'll come in.

MS. KYZER: Okay.

MR. ANCKER: Okay. Well, good morning. As she said, I'm Clinton Ancker. I run the Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate here at Fort Leavenworth.

First off, I'd like to thank everyone for joining us today for a discussion about design doctrine. We're going to incorporate that into a revision of our planning manual, which is now going to become the operations process, and this is scheduled to be published in October of 2009.

First off, what is design? It's an approach to critical and creative thinking that enables a commander to create understanding about a unique situation, and visualize and describe how to generate change. Design doctrine represents a necessary and innovative change to existing Army decision-making and planning doctrine. When leaders are faced with vague and ill-defined problems that do not have immediate solutions, they need a way to help them

reach a more thorough understanding of the operational environment and a more in- depth understanding of what they are being required to do.

Design accounts for the dynamic and multi-dimensional nature of the operational environment through a methodology, built for collaborative understanding, synthesizes multiple perspectives all seeking to achieve a desired end state.

Design is also compatible with a whole-of-government approach that integrates the collaborative efforts of the departments and agencies of the U.S. government to achieve unity of effort towards shared understanding and shared goals.

The bottom line is that any doctrine we introduce must contribute to greater military effectiveness. Design focused on the cognitive tools that will help leaders and soldiers succeed in an air of persistent conflict.

The Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate has been the lead for developing the design doctrine, but we build upon the work that the School of Advanced Military Studies, the Army Capabilities Integration Center, and in particular Third Army and U.S. Army Central Command design team to capture the best practices of emerging design doctrine.

This doctrine represents the culmination of the lessons learned from current operations, Army wargame experimentation, intensive senior leader discussion and teaching that's been ongoing in SAM since 2004. We look forward to hearing your perspectives and questions.

And with that, I'll turn it over to Colonel Mike Johnson.

COL. JOHNSON: And I don't have a lot to add just coming from School for Advanced Military Studies.

That -- good thing is, this year, the school is celebrating its 25th anniversary and a quarter-century of excellence in education, really developing our best officer and our junior leaders at the major level to think critically and creatively, and then go out to the force and bring that to different units as they go out, mostly at the division and corps level, and sometimes a little bit higher than that.

And as Clint said, we've been working with TRADOC and unified quest over in SAMS for about four or five years in developing design, and then really in the last two years have put that -- all our understanding into a curriculum, which is about 25 lessons, oriented towards design and critical thinking, understanding other cultures, the design methodology itself, leadership and communication, and kind of wrapping that all into a design curriculum that's in the classroom; and then a series of three practical exercises that each lasts two weeks and which students then take and can do experiential learning with design and then really the last couple years captured that learning issue and wrote a couple articles for Military Review that came out in the last edition, and have helped with Clint in terms of bringing this together and getting it out into doctrine so that it's something usable for the force, and with the recognition that a lot of people out in the Army are already working on elements of design and trying to codify that into some sort of doctrine that can bring that together.

So really from SAMS' perspective, working the education piece for the majors that go out to the units and that they can be value-added when they get there through some of the design processes and methodologies that we're teaching.

So as Clint said, I think we turn it over to questions, and we go from there.

MS. KYZER: Great. And Rob Stewart with NCOcall.com, did you have a question?

Q Yes. Design. I've read the articles in Military Review, and I also read an article by Dr. Veigel (sp) in Joint Force Quarterly that kind of criticizes the design specifically used in Israeli Defense Force operations in Lebanon in 2006. So I know there's some controversy on the design, especially when you get the old school operational planning versus operational design.

At what level is operational design incorporated? Is it at BCT-and-above level, or are you looking at battalion-and-below level as well?

MR. ANCKER: Well, first off, let me address Dr. Veigel's (sp) article in Joint Force Quarterly. There is a lot of valid criticism about what happened to the Israelis in Lebanon in 2006. But if you read the Winograd Report, the real problem there is that they didn't have a common language that folks were using. There were unclear terms and orders issued in a fairly undifferentiated manner that folks just didn't understand.

One of the things we are trying to do with this design doctrine is ensure that across the Army we have a common language and common understanding so that everybody is reading off the same sheet of paper.

Now with respect to the echelons that this is pitched at, it really is dependent on the situation. If you're a company or a battalion commander with a very clearly-understood combat mission, you probably won't do design. But if you're a battalion commander who is told to go out and create stability in an area of operations in Iraq or Afghanistan or somewhere else, and you're given a very ill-defined mission in a very complex environment, there are elements of design that would be very, very useful in helping you to understand this.

I think our consensus for the most part is that the higher the echelon the greater the probability that they will use design in any given problem. But it is certainly applicable at lower echelons in situations where your background and experience don't give you the ability to immediately understand the problem.

MR. : And I think Dr. Veigel (sp) was really looking straight at systemic operational design as described probably by Dr. Navet (sp) in some of his works, and I think we, at least at SAMS, have started to move, tried to move beyond that. There's criticism in terms of complicated language and an inability really to get to produce products or something that is useable to a planning staff or to the unit versus just continually looking in an understanding of the environment. Systemic operational design: It's very difficult to find anything that's really written down from some of the authors who have advocated that. And so we've tried to go and move it as Clint said to something more useable, more tangible, more understandable for the force so that there's a common language that's out there.

And I think the doctrine that's emerging is getting beyond the initial systemic operational design theories, and giving the force the ability to do that.

Q So this is more of an asymmetrical warfare tool versus a conventional warfare tool?

COL. JOHNSON: I don't know that I would necessarily say that. It's when you, kind of a commander looks out there and he has an ill- structured, ill-defined problem that no one can really get their hands on in really a complex environment, and there's a perceived need to act. You may determine that you don't really need to do anything, but you don't know that, but you think you do when you start.

You know, I think there are a lot of environments that are extremely complicated when you really get down to it and look at it. So I don't think I would box it into any one echelon, as Clint said, or box it into any one type environment. You know, it's really going to be the commander's call when he looks at that.

And it's really a cognitive tool link to battle command. And we tell commanders to execute battle command, but we really don't give them a methodology to do that. And design attempts to give a methodology to help the commander.

Q Thank you.

MS. KYZER: And David Axe with War is Boring, did you have a question?

Q Hi. This is David Axe with The War is Boring. So I have to admit, this is all sort of new to me, this notion of design. But it does concern me a little bit that what we're doing is papering over or trying to compensate for lack of clear mission statement in a very broad sense entering into a conflict and a lack of clear leadership at the most senior levels and lack of strategy.

Why are we, why would we need systems for helping brigade commanders or whoever figure out what their mission is? In what kind of scenario? I mean, this seems insane to place significant forces in a conflict where they aren't actually clear on what their objectives are, or maybe not their objectives but what their strategy is for handling a given crisis.

Could you react to that? MR. ANCKER: Yes. This is Clint Ancker. There may be circumstances where a brigade is given very clear orders, very clear objectives, and yet the environment they are operating in is so complex that you can't simply start into the planning process, where you have to analyze all of the very intricate relationships between parties in the area of operations; you need to understand second and third-order effects of your operations. And where you are dealing with complex problems for which your background and experience may not suit you, you need to go out and get outside expertise on that.

And design, even when given clear orders or a clear mission, may be applicable for understanding the environment in which you are going to execute those orders and execute that mission. And it is a tool to help you understand that environment.

COL. JOHNSON: I think there's also an acknowledgement that the initial problem that you believe is a problem may be valid but it changes over time. You know, it's a unique situation that you go into, and situations exist not necessarily problems. And so things change over time, design allows you hopefully to learn and see that the environment and complexity is changing. And so the initial mission or problem that you were dealing with has now changed, and you have to adjust to go after what that new problem is and at least inform higher of that.

So that situation and complexity changes continually, and you have to be cognizant that that will happen.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MS. KYZER: And Brian Care With a Major's Perspective did you have a question?

Q My name is Brian (unclear). I have a little problem with the mute button there. I completely echo what the two gentlemen have said. It's funny, after going through the design blog and learning what we've learned and seeing what I saw in Iraq how much utility there is, and also what I saw being done on the ground there that I didn't realize was actually being done and thinking about things and how useful it was, especially with ill-defined problems where, exactly like you said, sir, you might have a very clear mission statement but the situation is so complex that you really have to get your hands around it, and then you have to take into account reframing because things do change.

The caution I have for you gentlemen is, with everything that's being done, the doctrine, the FMI that's going to be codified and coming out in the fall with the schoolhouse and the teacher right now with SAMS and other smaller areas in other places, what do you see is the next logical step forward after we have accomplished what we're working on now? MR. ANCKER: Well, I'm going to make one real quick statement, and then turn it over to Mike. I write doctrine, but that's only the first step. The most important part of this I think is not going to be codifying it, because that's just the first step. The most important piece is the educational process because this is not something you can pick up the manual, read it, and have an intuitive understanding of how you're going to solve this problem. It is more complex than that.

So we're going to have to have a very good educational program to explain to people how to do this, practical examples, etcetera. And I'll turn it over to Mike to talk about that for a second.

COL. JOHNSON: Yeah. Clint's exactly right. And so I think that you'll see a two-pronged approach.

One will be to educate the operational force that's out there in terms of people going around and actually explaining the new doctrine and what design is and how hopefully to use it, and so that when the majors graduating from SAMS go out to the force, they are now running into people that at least understand design, and they can talk the same language instead of a new language.

And then with the second prong approach we'll be getting it into the education system, and not necessarily teaching design methodology as it is in the manual but actually starting at precommissioning and through our earlier

schools and critical and creative thinking and educating people to start working at a higher cognitive level.

You know, a lot of the manuals are written at the analysis level, and where I think there's a need that we have to go up into synthesis and knowledge and judgment and understanding, up at those higher levels. And we need to push ourselves to get to those areas.

And so that will start very early on, so we develop adaptive leaders through the education system and not just purely in the training system.

Now we do a lot of educational of leaders in the training side of the house, but it's got to also get into the education side of the house as well. So we have to inform the force, we have to get it into education, and then some of that will probably morph into the training aspect as well, of what we do.

And I think as the Army updates its leader development over the next few months that you'll see some of that starting to happen.

MR. ANCKER: Let me add just two real quick points to what Mike said. The critical thinking piece is probably as important as design itself, and we are actually writing a critical thinking appendix for doctrine for the Command and Control Manual that will go into a little more detail on that. And I agree with Mike completely that we need to start that almost at the precommissining level.

And secondly, in addition to the educational programs here, the battle command training program I suspect will be teaching a block or educating folks on design as part of their seminars. And that will be a very important part of socializing this within the Army. Q Exactly, gentlemen. That's kind of what I was hoping to hear, because I know definitely it's something I would have liked to have seen in CCC or BCTT, warfighters, things of that nature. So, great. Thank you very much.

MS. KYZER: Okay. This is Lindy Kyzer. I'll open the forum. Are there any additional questions out there?

Q Yes. This is Rod Stewart. Just to follow up on what you were talking about the education system: with the current classes that you have going on at SAMS, I am going to go ahead and make this leap of faith and this assumption that when the courses started you had a lot of old school, violence-of-action, operational thought, and teaching the design was probably difficult because it was a complete paradigm shift. Could you speak on that?

COL. JOHNSON: This is Mike Johnson again. I'm not so sure it's a complete paradigm shift. Most of the majors coming through now have done two, possibly three tours over in Iraq or Afghanistan. So as Major Carol (sp) said, they've seen a lot of this on the ground and maybe just didn't recognize what was going on with design. But it is a paradigm shift, and initially there is some resistance, in my opinion from what I've seen with the students wanting to go this direction. But once they go through the curriculum, they see that they just have more tools. It's about giving more tools that people can hearken back on when you're back out in units and say, I just don't have one way to do this, I have three or four ways to look at it."

And having that available at least to choose from and recognizing that you're choosing those tools to use, and then it just makes you better prepared

to deal with complex situations and ambiguity that's out there. So I think you're right; there is a little bit of that resistance. But you know, you go through a year of really expanding your education, and it's a master's degree education that they are getting throughout the SAMS course. And like any masters degree, it should expand the horizons and open up new thought processes.

And we hope we're achieving that throughout the course to give a better understanding and more tools for them to use. Does that answer the question?

Q Absolutely. But how does design differ from the MDMP and developing different courses of action?

MR. ANCKER: Well, let me take a stab at that. If you read the MDMP right now, there is an explicit assumption that you understand the nature of the problem you're dealing with. And if you read FM50, our current planning manual, it talks about intuitive and rational decision-making. But in both cases it assumes that you have a fairly good background and understanding of the types of operations you're conducting. Design really complements the change in Army's doctrine that says, We're going to pay a lot more attention to stability operations and in fact have raised them to a level coequal with combat operations. That puts us into an environment where our MCO, our major combat operation focus in the past does not ideally suit us for, and where our background and understanding of these problems may not be as thorough as it would otherwise.

And if you look at the discussion of mission analysis and achieving understanding in the current MDMP, it's really quite shallow because of the assumption that you understand the fundamentals of the problem.

There are only a couple of paragraphs that talk about mission analysis in there. This is going to be an entire chapter that provides a methodology for a much more in-depth look at the entire operational environment, that takes a much broader approach to developing not only an understanding of your current conditions that you want to change, but articulating much more clearly the desired conditions you want to get to, and then it talks about some broad general approaches.

So it is very significant expansion of what was really treated very lightly in previous versions of the manual.

COL. JOHNSON: If I could just add on real quick one thing Clint said, there's a recognition that we're -- the United States Army is really good at solving problems. The question is, are we solving the right problem? And that's what design tries to get at. We'd really have to try and make a good effort to get at the right problem to make a significant change or transform wherever the area we're at for lasting change, so we don't have to go back or-you know, we're there for a reason, and we have to get at it.

So it's really about solving the right problem, and design focuses on that.

Q The design is basically going to complement the MDMP and operational planning?

COL. JOHNSON: Yeah. There is no intent to subvert anything out of MDMP or normal planning processes. That all works very well. People are very comfortable with it. It's an up-front piece or it can be done simultaneously.

It's to help the commander in terms of his battle command to understand, get at the right problem, and then be able to visualize and describe that to his organization so that they can do effective planning.

MR. ANCKER: Now one of the disadvantages or one of the slams against the SOD is it never actually got to planning anything. It was an iterative process that went on indefinitely to continually generate understanding. One of the things that we have done very deliberately is said that the overall goal of all of this is to get into an operation with a much better understanding of what it is you're trying to do and what are the factors involved. And so design, framing the operational environment, framing the problem needs to lead to a directive, a planning directive, that is then given to a planning team that will actually conduct the MDMP and do all of the other things that are necessary to create an operations order and synchronize and operation.

So it's not a standalone process. It feeds into and complements what we're already doing.

MS. KYZER: This is Lindy Kyzer again. We have about seven minutes left. David Axe, did you have any other questions?

Q No, I don't. Thank you.

MS. KYZER: Okay. Again, I'll open the floor then.

COL. JOHNSON: This is Mike Johnson. David, can I go back to your earlier question and maybe just give you a personal example that might at least lend a little bit to the nebulousness that goes on out there?

In terms of, you know, one night I got a call as a squadron commander to provide a QRF for a force the next morning that was going to go into Southeast province of Baghdad called Madaiin. Went down about 9:00, 2100, met with the commander, had no real idea of his key maneuver. And we went in the next day with the QRF and all of a sudden I owned all of Madaiin with that Iraqi brigade commander. And nobody knew that that was going to be the outcome of the operations. So no one higher understood the situation. I had a much better situation, and over time had to really develop the plan to execute different kinds of operations for the next seven to eight months in that suburb of Baghdad down there.

So the only guidance was to provide a QRF for a mission that we thought was going to end the next day, which ended up being a long- term mission with myself and an Iraqi brigade commander and the police all kind of now taking charge of this area down there. No guidance from higher other than to provide a QRF. And then you have to figure all those things out. That happens to commanders at all levels continually I think in the current environment we're in. And then you have to I think design actually. We were probably doing it and just didn't know it. Does that make sense?

Q Sure. Thanks.

MS. KYZER: Okay. Again I'll open the floor to any last-minute additional questions. Okay. If we're good, then I'll go ahead and turn it over to you two gentlemen for any closing remarks, or if there were any topics or particular areas that we did not touch upon that you wanted to address. COL. JOHNSON: No. Again, from the SAMS perspective with 25 years of educating officers, we continue to update the curriculum and to be as relevant as we can.

We do that with design in the hope that -- we'll continue to do that not only with the full curriculum but also with design. And SAMS was actually expanded. We've gone from six seminars a year ago and we will have by this summer nine seminars, each seminar for about 16 students, not just Army but all services plus foreign officers that are within the program. So SAMS is expanding and changing the curriculum to be relevant for today.

MR. ANCKER: I'd just add that design is I think a very good example of the fact that the Army is a learning organization. We've analyzed what's going in the field, we've found a gap in our doctrine and our education system. We did a lot of research on this. We did a lot of experimentation that has changed significantly over the past four years that we've been experimenting at it. We've now validated what we think is a pretty good proposal, and we're going to put this in doctrine. We're going to put it in the education system.

But this will only be the first step in the design process. We will continually evaluate this as we get more practical experience, and we expect that this will change over time as we design our design process and reframe the design based on practical experience in the field. And we'll expect this to continue to evolve over the next several years.

MS. KYZER: Excellent. Thank you so much, sir. Thank you again, Colonel Johnson; and thank you, Mr. Ancker, for your time. With that, this concludes the roundtable. Thanks, everyone.

COL. JOHNSON: Thanks.

END.