

LESSON 3 COURSE OF ACTION DEVELOPMENT

*“Successful generals make plans to fit circumstances, but do not try to create circumstances to fit plans.”
—General George S. Patton, Jr.*

Lesson Introduction

Course of action (COA) development is the second step of the MCPP, and it continues to build upon the information and analysis derived from the first step, Mission Analysis. COA Development is the first opportunity since IPB to look at a map and begin to visualize how the MEF will accomplish its mission. As the COA sketch and synchronization matrix are developed, you may find fewer details than originally expected. Essentially, during COA Development, the basics of the COA are created for further development in the third step of the MCPP, COA War Game. It is during the COA War Game that the plan takes a more detailed form. The purpose of COA Development is to create a few feasible, suitable, acceptable, and distinguishable COAs for the commander’s comparison and decision. In fact, the commander or his chief of staff determines the number of COAs. There is nothing magical about the number of COAs an operational planning team (OPT) should develop. The OPT must be mindful, however, that a prerequisite for generating overall operational tempo is to generate tempo in planning. Time is a crucial factor and the number of COAs developed is time dependent. A key to successful COA Development is to create COAs with diversity. The OPT has an obligation and duty to provide a range of realistic options for the commander.

Student Requirements by Educational Objective

Requirement 1

Objective 1. Recognize the inputs, tasks, and outputs associated with the COA Development step.

Objective 2. Use the COA Development step to create the appropriate outputs of this step in the context of an operational or tactical situation. [JPME 2(c),3(a)(c)]

Read:

- MCWP 5-1, pp. 3-1 to 3-5 and Appendix F pp. F-1, F-3 to F-7 and scan pp. F-9 to F-32 (11 pages reading, 17 pages scanning)
- MCDP 1-0, pp. 6-29 (section on Phasing) to 6-30 (2 pages)

The interactive multimedia instruction (IMI) (Web/CD-based) product allows each student to use COA Development in a practical application setting. You can accomplish objective 2 only by using the practical application portion of the IMI product.

**** View the Interactive Multimedia Instruction for lesson #3 immediately following this lesson’s summary.**

Requirement 2

Objective 3. Understand and apply essential task analysis.

Essential task analysis, although not presented in MCWP 5-1, was developed to augment the center of gravity analysis, which was initially accomplished during Mission Analysis and further refined in COA Development. The essential task analysis helps the OPT focus on the actual mission statement. It helps us determine whether the essential tasks are too broad or whether they fail to address enemy centers of gravity. Essential task analysis is the process of taking each essential task within the mission statement and breaking it down into conditions, desired effects, and activities necessary to accomplish it. (It is similar to the center of gravity analysis, COG-CC-CR-CV, construct.) Conditions enable us to accomplish the essential task. Threat forces, friendly forces, noncombatants, and infrastructure are all factors affecting the conditions of the battlespace. Desired effects are what we want to happen to achieve the condition. Desired effects are localized or point to specific effects or activities that can be identified and delegated to subordinate units for more detailed planning. Activities are actions we must accomplish to achieve the desired effects. Warfighting function representatives and other subject matter experts may present desired effects and activities. Desired effects and activities do not have to be restricted to capabilities of available forces as long as appropriate resource shortfalls are properly identified and recorded.

Determining what kinds of activities are necessary to accomplish the individual essential task is often intuitive, but by decomposing the essential tasks into these various components, the OPT gets a better sense of what kinds of tasks to give subordinates to accomplish the overall mission. Additionally, if the mission statement and the center of gravity analysis are disconnected in any way, the essential task analysis will force that discovery and provide the OPT a means to deal with it appropriately while in the COA Development step.

Granted, there may or may not be sufficient time for the OPT to conduct essential task analysis. Certainly a well-executed center of gravity analysis may be sufficient to continue planning; however, the benefits of an essential task analysis should not be discarded without careful thought.

Below is an example of taking one essential task from the following mission statement and conducting an essential task analysis.

Mission Statement: On order, II MEF, in conjunction with coalition forces, defends in sector in order to protect the Mezzouna oil fields and Sfax and halt further advances of Libyan forces from the south. Be prepared to (1) assume JTFT reserve if Libya breaks the 30-day cease fire and (2) conduct offensive operations against Libyan forces to restore the Tunisian border.

Essential task for analysis: Defend in sector to halt further Libyan advances. (See essential task analysis below)

Essential Task	Conditions What will enable me to accomplish the essential task?	Desired Effects What do I want to have happen that will achieve the condition?	Activities What do I have to do to achieve the desired effects?
Defend in sector to halt Libyan forces from advancing.	Block movement of I Libyan Corps.	Physical inability to move.	Establish minefields and obstacles. Seize key bridges. Block with aviation-delivered fires.
	Defeat forward maneuver brigades.	Forward brigades fixed.	Establish kill zones and TAIs. Focus aviation fires on forward brigades. Mass artillery.
	Neutralize command & control.	Western Operational Group (WOG) and I Libyan Corps command links disrupted. LOCs interdicted.	Concentrate direct-fire weapons. Fixed-wing aviation target C2 nodes, CPs, and LOCs. UW attacks against same.
	Artillery neutralized.	Unable to deliver accurate fires.	Conduct IO/C2W. Maximize deception, low-visibility ops, and obsuration. Kill observers.

Lesson Summary

COA Development depends on both a good current situational awareness and a good Mission Analysis. It is an integrated process that produces options from which a commander may choose. A valuable COA describes a realistic way to accomplish the unit's mission. Normally, we seek to develop several substantially different COAs for comparison, but in some cases, especially when operations are under severe time constraints or when building planning tempo is even more critical, we develop only the number of COAs that are absolutely necessary. The mission statement, along with the commander's intent and planning guidance, define and focus the COA Development process. Each action and

activity supports the essential tasks listed in that mission statement and the aims of the commander. Specific outputs such as the commander’s designated COAs for war gaming, war gaming guidance, evaluation criteria and updated IPB products, planning support tools (including the COA graphic and narrative), the course of action briefing, initial estimates of supportability, the additional requirements from subordinate commanders, initial staff estimates, and the additional requirements from staff and warfighting function representatives are generated as part of the COA Development step. In essence, COA Development permits commanders and staffs to generate ideas and concepts that satisfy mission requirements while allowing for some ideas or requirements to be tabled or set aside for later consideration.

JPME Summary

AREA 1					AREA 2				AREA 3					AREA 4					AREA 5				
A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	
							X		X		X												