

## Chapter 1

# Planning Overview

*“Planning involves projecting our thoughts forward in time and space to influence events before they occur rather than merely responding to events as they occur. This means contemplating and evaluating potential decisions and actions in advance.”<sup>1</sup>*

—MCDP 5, *Planning*

The Marine Corps Planning Process (MCP) supports the Marine Corps warfighting philosophy of maneuver warfare. Since planning is an essential and significant part of command and control, the Marine Corps Planning Process recognizes the commander’s central role as the decisionmaker. It helps organize the thought processes of a commander and his staff throughout the planning and execution of military operations. The Marine Corps Planning Process focuses on the mission and the threat. It capitalizes on the principle of unity of effort and supports the establishment and maintenance of tempo. The Marine Corps Planning Process is applicable across the range of military operations and is designed for use at any echelon of command. The process can be as detailed or as abbreviated as time, staff resources, experience, and the situation permit.

Planning is the act of envisioning and determining effective ways of achieving a desired endstate. It supports the commander in making decisions in a time-constrained and uncertain environment. Whether planning is performed at the strategic, operational, or tactical level, its key functions, as identified in MCDP 5, *Planning*, are to—

- Direct and coordinate actions.
- Develop a shared situational awareness.
- Generate expectations about how actions will evolve and how they will affect the desired outcome.

- Support the exercise of initiative.
- Shape the thinking of planners.

More than anything else, the considerations of time and uncertainty dictate the approach to planning, and are its defining features. Time is most often the scarcest resource and is vital to the planning process. The commander must adjust the planning process to optimize this perishable resource. When time is critical, the commander uses intuition, judgment, and experience to guide his staff and subordinate commanders. Since planning is future-oriented, and the future is uncertain, all planning is based on imperfect knowledge and involves assumptions. This uncertainty increases with the length of the planning horizon and the rate of change in the environment. Given the fundamental uncertainty of war, planners must recognize that planning will not eliminate uncertainty, but it allows the commander to decide and act effectively in the midst of uncertainty.

The Marine Corps Planning Process is applicable across the range of military operations and is designed for command and staff actions at any echelon of command. Commanders at higher echelons tend to use a more formal and detailed approach to the Marine Corps Planning Process. Higher echelons can consist of a component, Marine expeditionary force (MEF), and major subordinate commands (MSCs) (e.g., division, wing, or force service support group). These

commands typically consist of larger staffs, have longer planning horizons, and have access to more information. Commanders at lower echelons, such as a regiment and/or group and below, may modify the planning process to meet their situation (staff resources, shorter planning horizons, information available). Whether planning occurs at the component level, the battalion level, or the squadron level, the commander and his staff must master the Marine Corps Planning Process so they can fully participate in integrated planning.

The Marine Corps Planning Process is an internal planning process used by Marine Corps operating forces. It aligns with and complements the joint deliberate and crisis action planning processes found in Joint Pub 5-0, *Doctrine for Planning Joint Operations*. Appendix A discusses the relationship between the Marine Corps Planning Process and joint planning. When designated as a joint force commander or when preparing a supporting plan in a campaign, a Marine commander and his staff will use the joint planning procedures and the Joint Operation Planning and Execution System (JOPES) found in the Joint Pub 5 series. If planning an amphibious operation, a Marine commander and his staff refer to Joint Pub 3-02, *Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations*, for guidance.

## **1001. Tenets of the Marine Corps Planning Process**

The tenets of the Marine Corps Planning Process—top-down planning, single-battle concept, and integrated planning—are derived from the doctrine of maneuver warfare. These tenets guide the commander's use of his staff to plan and execute military operations. Top-down planning and the single-battle concept ensure unity of effort, while the commander uses warfighting functions (see app. B) as the building blocks of integrated planning.

### **a. Top-Down Planning**

Planning is a fundamental responsibility of command. The commander must not merely participate in planning, he must drive the process. His intent and guidance are key to planning. The commander uses planning to gain knowledge and situational awareness to support his decisionmaking process. His plan, communicated in oral, graphic, or written form, translates his guidance into a concept of operations. His subordinate commanders use his guidance and concept of operations to accomplish the mission.

### **b. Single-Battle Concept**

Operations or events in one part of the battlespace may have profound and often unintended effects on other areas and events, therefore a commander must always view the battlespace as an indivisible entity. The single-battle concept allows the commander to effectively focus the efforts of all the elements of the force to accomplish the mission. While the battlespace may be conceptually divided as deep, close, and rear to assist planning and decentralized execution, the commander's intent ensures unity of effort by fighting a single battle.

### **c. Integrated Planning**

Integrated planning is a disciplined approach to planning that is systematic, coordinated, and thorough. It is based on the warfighting functions of command and control, maneuver, fires, intelligence, logistics, and force protection. Planners use these warfighting functions to integrate the planning effort and supervise execution of the plan. Planners use integrated planning to consider all relevant factors, reduce omissions, and share information across all the warfighting functions. The key to integrated planning is the assignment of appropriate personnel to represent each warfighting function. This does not mean that a warfighting function representative cannot be a staff representative. A warfighting function representative must be knowledgeable and experienced in his functional area. See appendix B for further information on the warfighting functions.

## 1002. The Marine Corps Planning Process

The Marine Corps Planning Process establishes procedures for analyzing a mission, developing and wargaming courses of action (COAs) against the threat, comparing friendly COAs against the commander’s criteria and each other, selecting a COA, preparing an operation order (OPORD) or operation plan (OPLAN) for execution, and transitioning the order or plan to those tasked with its execution. The Marine Corps Planning Process organizes these procedures into six manageable, logical steps (see fig. 1-1). These steps provide the commander and his staff, at all levels, a means to organize their planning activities, to transmit plans to subordinates and subordinate commands, and to share a common understanding of the mission and commander’s intent. Interactions among various planning steps allow a concurrent, coordinated effort that maintains flexibility, makes efficient use of time available, and facilitates continuous information sharing. See appendix C for further information on organizing the planning effort.

### a. Mission Analysis

Mission analysis is the first step in planning, and it drives the Marine Corps Planning Process. Its purpose is to review and analyze orders, guidance, and other information provided by higher headquarters and to produce a unit mission statement.

### b. Course of Action Development

During COA development, planners use the mission statement (which includes the higher headquarters commander’s tasking and intent), commander’s intent, and commander’s planning guidance to develop COA(s). Each prospective COA is examined to ensure that it is suitable, feasible, acceptable, distinguishable, and complete with respect to the current and anticipated situation, the mission, and the commander’s intent.

### c. Course of Action War Game

Course of action wargaming involves a detailed assessment of each COA as it pertains to the enemy and the battlespace. Each friendly COA is

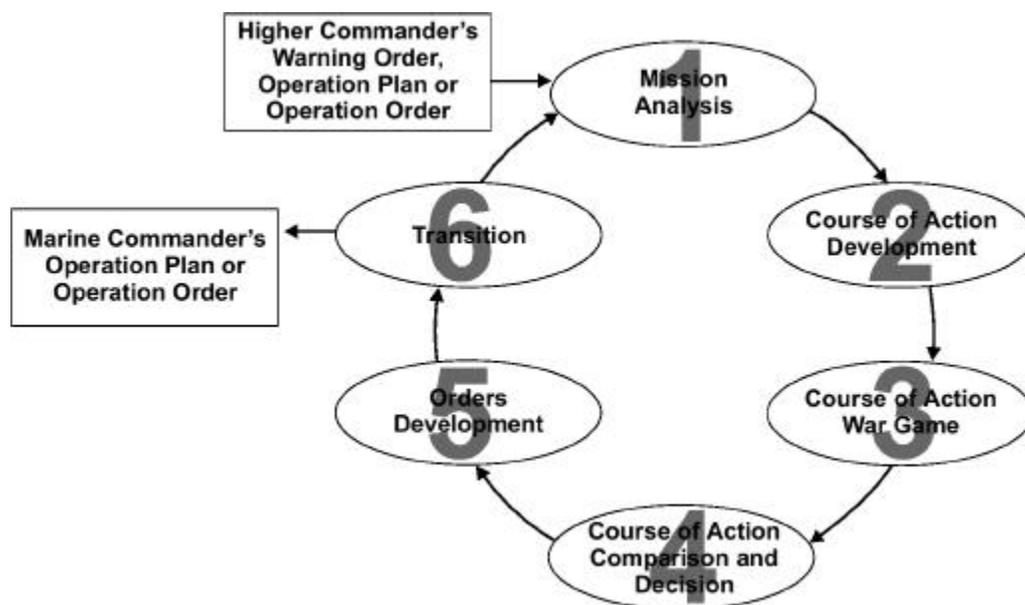


Figure 1-1. Steps in the Marine Corps Planning Process.

wargamed against selected threat COAs. Course of action wargaming assists planners in identifying strengths and weaknesses, associated risks, and asset shortfalls for each friendly COA. Course of action wargaming also identifies branches and potential sequels that may require additional planning. Short of actually executing the course of action, COA wargaming provides the most reliable basis for understanding and improving each COA.

#### **d. Course of Action Comparison and Decision**

In COA comparison and decision, the commander evaluates all friendly COAs against established criteria, then evaluates them against each other. The commander then selects the COA that will best accomplish the mission.

#### **e. Orders Development**

During orders development, the staff uses the commander's COA decision, mission statement, and commander's intent and guidance to develop orders that direct unit actions. Orders serve as the principal means by which the commander expresses his decision, intent, and guidance.

#### **f. Transition**

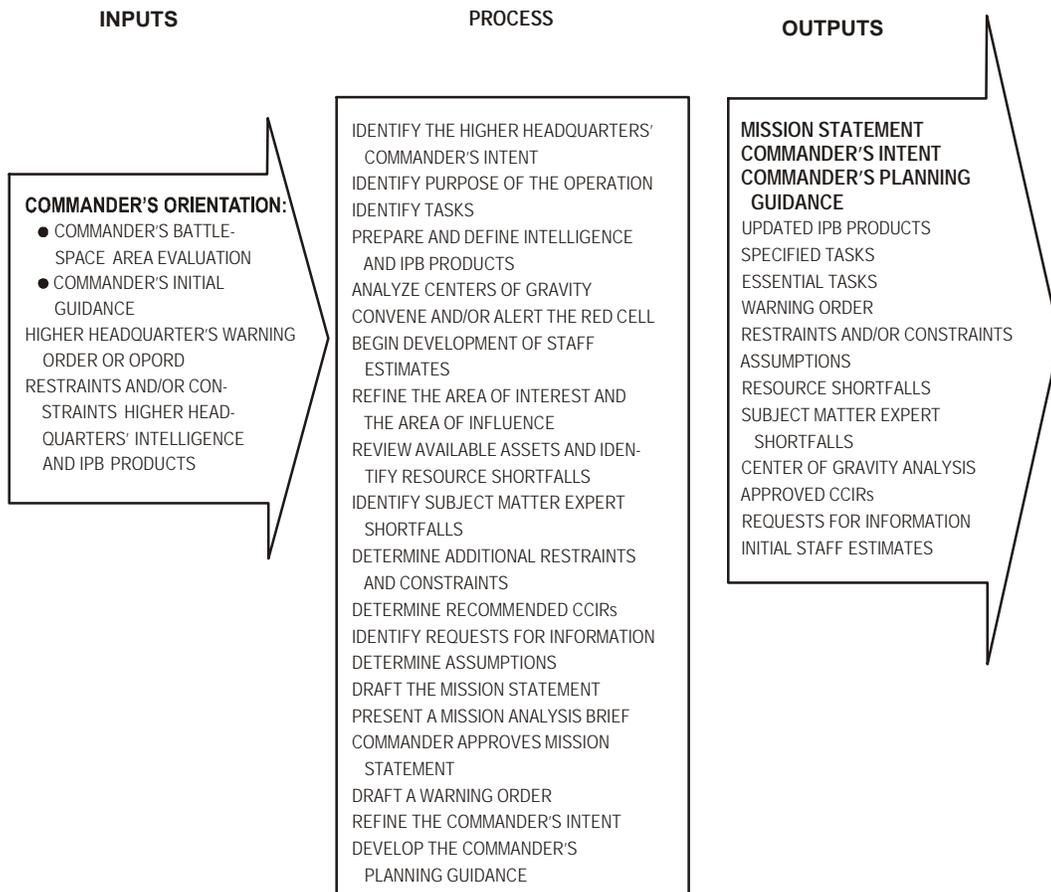
Transition is an orderly handover of a plan or order as it is passed to those tasked with execution of the operation. It provides those who will execute the plan or order with the situational awareness and rationale for key decisions necessary to ensure there is a coherent shift from planning to execution.

## Chapter 2

# Mission Analysis

*“There are two parts to any mission: the task to be accomplished and the reason . . . . The task describes the action to be taken while the intent describes the desired result of the action.”<sup>2</sup>*

—MCDP 6, *Command and Control*



**BOLD TEXT INDICATES MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS**

Mission analysis is the first step in planning. Its purpose is to review and analyze orders, guidance, and other information that is provided by higher headquarters in order to produce a unit mission statement. Mission analysis drives the remainder of the Marine Corps Planning Process.

The keys to successful mission analysis are preparation, professional competence, and the identification of the operation's purpose and all its essential tasks. A thorough mission analysis focuses the efforts of the commander and the staff, thereby saving time. The staff should be well

organized, prepared to plan as required, and begin development of staff estimates during mission analysis. To plan effectively, planners should have access to all documents relative to the mission, area of operations, etc. (e.g., standing operating procedures, operation plans).

Before the commander and the staff can begin mission analysis, they must develop an understanding of their potential employment. Their understanding must include the possible area of operations; probable mission; available forces; and political, military, and cultural characteristics of the area. They can gain this understanding from national-level intelligence products, other military and governmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, academia (military war colleges, developmental centers, etc.), businesses, and their innate knowledge. If operations are already underway, the commander and the staff will require less time and information to gain understanding and situational awareness.

## 2001. Inputs

Each step in the Marine Corps Planning Process begins with inputs. Inputs may derive from higher headquarters, the commander or staff, or outputs from previous steps. Inputs to mission analysis include, but are not limited to, the commander's orientation, higher headquarters' warning order or operation order, restraints and/or constraints, and higher headquarters' intelligence and intelligence preparation of the battlespace (IPB) products.

### a. Commander's Orientation

Initially, the commander's orientation is based on a preliminary analysis of available information. The commander's initial information may only be the purpose of the operation as assigned by higher headquarters, or it might include—

- Higher headquarters' plans, orders, and estimates, including IPB products.
- Force availability and suitability.

- Personal reconnaissance results.
- Intelligence preparation of the battlespace products and other input from the staff.

As more information becomes available, such as a higher headquarters order (including the mission and intent of the higher headquarters [two levels up] and the missions of supporting, supported, and adjacent commands), the commander conducts his preliminary analysis of the mission (or potential mission). The commander may conduct his analysis using mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available-time available (METT-T). He must also consider the ability of his command—personnel, materiel, and morale—to accomplish the mission.

Once the commander completes his preliminary analysis, he issues his commander's orientation. The commander's orientation includes the commander's battlespace area evaluation (CBAE) and initial guidance. Ideally, the commander personally issues his guidance to subordinate commanders and principal staff. The commander's orientation helps shape the remainder of the planning process.

**(1) Commander's Battlespace Area Evaluation.** The commander's battlespace area evaluation is the commander's personal vision based on his understanding of the mission, the battlespace, and the enemy. The commander uses this evaluation to develop, assess, and communicate knowledge to the staff. This knowledge supports the planning and decisionmaking processes. The CBAE may be as simple as the commander's initial thoughts or it may be as complex as the product of his detailed analysis. It identifies the battlespace, centers of gravity, commander's intent, and commander's critical information requirements.

**(a) Commander's Battlespace.** The commander's battlespace consists of his area of operations, the area of influence, and the area of interest. The commander uses the information he receives to create his initial view of the

battlespace. The commander passes his initial view of the battlespace to his planners for use throughout the remainder of the planning process.

The commander is normally assigned an area of operations. He considers his mission, forces, inherent warfighting functions requirements, and area of operations (assigned or proposed) to determine an area of influence. The commander compares his area of operations against the area of influence to determine if its size and location allow him to accomplish his mission. If, during the comparison process, the commander determines that the area of operations is too large, too small, or not located appropriately, he informs his superior commander.

The commander uses all the information discussed above to define his area of interest. An area of interest includes all the factors (e.g., enemy forces and capabilities, host nation support, flow of forces and supply, sustainment, command relationships, boundaries, fire support coordinating measures) that may influence the commander's operations. His area of interest also encompasses the area of influence and area of operations.

**(b) Center of Gravity.** MCDP 1, *Warfighting*, defines a center of gravity (COG) as any important source of strength. It may be mental, moral, or physical strength, power, or will. Centers of gravity may exist at each level of war: strategic, operational, and tactical. It may be tangible or intangible, and there may be multiple centers of gravity.

The concept of centers of gravity applies equally to both threat and friendly forces. At the tactical level, the enemy's center of gravity is normally an enemy unit. At the operational level, an enemy's center of gravity may also be a threat capability; e.g., the ability to mass fires or conduct resupply. Friendly centers of gravity are the strengths that the commander uses to attack enemy weaknesses and to protect his forces from enemy attack.

Subordinate commanders and staff personnel may assist the commander in the identification of centers of gravity. The G-2/S-2 may be particularly helpful in identifying enemy centers of gravity. If the commander is unable to identify enemy centers of gravity, he may substitute enemy strengths. The commander provides the staff with initial enemy centers of gravity so they can begin to identify possible shaping and decisive actions.

**(c) Commander's Intent.** Commander's intent is the commander's personal expression of the purpose of the operation. It must be clear, concise, and easily understood. It may also include how the commander envisions achieving a decision as well as the endstate or conditions that, when satisfied, accomplish the purpose.

Commander's intent helps subordinates understand the larger context of their actions and guides them in the absence of orders. It allows subordinates to exercise judgment and initiative—in a way that is consistent with the higher commander's aims—when the unforeseen occurs. This freedom of action, within the broad guidance of the commander's intent, creates tempo during planning and execution. Higher and subordinate commanders' intents must be aligned. The purpose of the operation may be derived from the "in order to . . ." portion of the mission statement or the execution paragraph of the higher commander's operation plan or operation order.

---

During commander's orientation, the commander may only know the purpose of the operation as assigned by his higher headquarters. As the commander proceeds through the planning process, he gains additional insight on METT-T. As a result, the commander may refine his intent to include how he plans to achieve a decision and reach the endstate that accomplishes the purpose of the operation.

**(d) Commander's Critical Information Requirements.** The commander's critical information requirements (CCIRs) identify information on friendly activities, enemy activities, and the environment that the commander deems critical to maintaining situational awareness, planning future activities, and assisting in timely and informed decisionmaking. The commander's critical information requirements focus the commander's staff and subordinate commanders planning and collection efforts. They help the commander tailor the command and control organization. The commanders critical information requirements are central to effective information management, which directs the processing, flow, and use of information throughout the force. While the staff can recommend CCIRs, only the commander can approve them.

**(2) Commander's Initial Guidance.** The commander develops his initial guidance using his commander's battlespace area evaluation, his experience, and the mission information available from higher headquarters. The commander's initial guidance provides the staff and subordinate commanders with additional insight on how the commander views the mission. Depending on the time available, the commander may provide general guidance and specific points he wants the staff and subordinate commanders to consider (a particular enemy capability, a certain task organization, etc.).

### **b. Higher Headquarters' Warning Order or Operation Order**

A verbal or written order from a higher headquarters provides important information used in mission analysis. The higher headquarters' planning products, such as operation plans, operation orders, and contingency plans provide input throughout the Marine Corps Planning Process. If higher headquarters' orders or guidance is unclear, the commander or the staff should immediately seek clarification. Liaison officers and higher headquarters planning representatives (e.g., G-5 liaison cell at joint force headquarters)

who are familiar with the plan can provide valuable information and should actively participate in the planning process.

### **c. Restraints and/or Constraints**

Restraints are things a command prohibits its subordinates from doing. For example, do not damage religious shrines, archeological sites, or civilian schools. Constraints are things that may limit a commander's freedom of action. For example, avoid damaging adjacent civilian buildings, use only precision-guided munitions to destroy key targets in the city. Restraints and constraints are included in the rules of engagement, commander's guidance, or instructions from higher headquarters. Simply put, restraints are things the commander cannot do; constraints are the things he must do.

### **d. Higher Headquarters' Intelligence and Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace Products**

Higher headquarters' intelligence products and the commander's IPB products are critical inputs to mission analysis. These products are the basis of the commander's IPB process and are updated and used throughout the operation. Higher headquarters' intelligence products include their IPB products, intelligence estimates, intelligence summaries, and Annex B, Intelligence, of the operation order. Intelligence preparation of the battlespace products that the commander receives from higher headquarters and the intelligence staff may include the modified, combined obstacle overlay and threat situation templates. See appendix D for more information on IPB products.

## **2002. Process**

Once planners understand higher headquarters commander's orders and intent and their own commander's battlespace area evaluation and initial guidance, they identify specified, implied, and essential tasks. Essential tasks are the foundation

of the mission statement because they define mission success. After evaluating the battlespace, commander's intent, available assets, restraints and/or constraints, assumptions, risks, initial CCIRs, ongoing intelligence operations, and the initial timeline, planners draft a mission statement. Planners list specified and implied tasks, assumptions, resource and subject matter expert shortfalls, restraints and/or constraints, and information requirements to help them identify essential tasks and develop the mission statement.

Planners present mission analysis results to the commander and the staff to ensure that the mission statement and identified essential tasks facilitate development of a COA that will accomplish the mission. After the mission analysis brief, the commander approves or modifies the proposed mission statement.

#### **a. Identify the Higher Headquarters' Commander's Intent**

The higher headquarters' operation order (OPORD) or fragmentary order (FRAGO) contains the higher commander's intent.

#### **b. Identify Purpose of the Operation**

The purpose of the operation may be found in the commander's intent (provided in the commander's orientation). If not specifically stated, the operation's purpose may be derived from the higher commander's intent or assigned missions or tasks. A clear understanding of the purpose of the operation is essential for maintaining tempo in both planning and execution.

#### **c. Identify Tasks**

Using the information provided in the commander's orientation and higher headquarters' orders, the staff identifies specified and implied tasks. Of these, tasks that define mission success and may be applicable to the force as a whole are further identified as essential tasks. Approved taskings may become the basis for subparagraph 3c of the 5-paragraph OPLAN or OPORD.

**(1) Specified Tasks.** Specified tasks are specifically assigned to a unit by its higher headquarters. Specified tasks are derived primarily from the execution paragraphs of the higher headquarters operation order, but they may be found elsewhere, such as in the mission statement, coordinating instructions, or annexes. Any specified task that pertains to any element of the unit should be identified and recorded.

**(2) Implied Tasks.** Implied tasks may not be specifically stated in the higher headquarters' order, but they are performed to accomplish specified tasks. Implied tasks emerge from analysis of the higher headquarters' order, the threat, and the terrain. Routine, inherent, or standing operating procedure tasks are not included in the list of tasks.

**(3) Essential Tasks.** Essential tasks are specified or implied tasks that define mission success and apply to the force as a whole. If a task must be successfully completed for the commander to accomplish his purpose, it is an essential task. The mission statement is derived from the essential tasks.

#### **d. Prepare and Refine Intelligence and Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace Products**

Higher headquarters' intelligence and IPB products are reviewed and refined by the staff. New intelligence and IPB products, to include enemy COAs, are prepared by the staff to support centers of gravity and mission analysis.

#### **e. Analyze Centers of Gravity**

The staff conducts a more detailed center of gravity analysis based on the CBAE to identify or refine threat and friendly centers of gravity and to determine which friendly and threat weaknesses are critical vulnerabilities. A critical vulnerability is something that a force needs to function effectively and is, or can be made, vulnerable to attack. Critical vulnerabilities provide an aiming point for the application of friendly strengths

against threat weaknesses. The staff identifies and directs the force's strengths against the enemy's critical vulnerabilities in order to hamper his ability to function; to defend, attack, or sustain his forces; or to command his forces. Once identified, critical vulnerabilities assist the commander in choosing where, when, and what will constitute decisive action. By attacking critical vulnerabilities, the commander increases the potential that the attack may in fact be a decisive action. The staff also identifies friendly critical vulnerabilities in order to protect friendly centers of gravity from enemy attack.

#### **f. Convene and/or Alert the Red Cell**

A red cell assists the commander in assessing COAs against a thinking enemy. It develops likely enemy COAs and portrays a doctrinally-correct enemy during wargaming. A red cell can range in size from an intelligence officer to a task-organized group of subject matter experts. A red cell refines the threat COAs that will be used during COA and wargaming, develops planning support tools such as the synchronization matrix, and may also participate in the analysis of enemy centers of gravity. See appendix E for more information on the red cell.

#### **g. Begin Development of Staff Estimates**

The staff begins to gather information that will be refined throughout the planning process and continuously develops and refines staff estimates. A staff estimate provides a logical and orderly examination of all factors that affect mission accomplishment. It provides the commander and the staff with necessary information that supports decisionmaking throughout the planning process and subsequent execution of the operation. Depending on the level of command and the time available, the staff estimate could be as formal as a detailed written document or as informal as an oral briefing. See appendix F for more information on formal staff estimates.

#### **h. Refine the Area of Interest and Area of Influence**

The staff refines the area of interest and area of influence, which are identified in the CBAE, based on the current terrain analysis and current analysis of friendly and threat centers of gravity, capabilities, and limitations. The size of the area of interest may change based on the commander's understanding of the situation. Refining the area of interest may generate requests for information. The extent of the area of influence may change if forces are added or deleted, equipment capability and availability change, or rules of engagement change.

#### **i. Review Available Assets and Identify Resource Shortfalls**

As mission analysis is conducted, resource or capability shortfalls are noted. The commander and staff identify critical shortfalls and request support from higher headquarters.

#### **j. Identify Subject Matter Expert Shortfalls**

Based on the activities anticipated during an operation, planners determine what specialized planning or other expertise may be required. If this expertise is not readily available, the commander should request augmentation.

#### **k. Determine Additional Restraints and Constraints**

Additional restraints and constraints may be identified as a result of mission analysis. If additional restraints and constraints are identified, they are recorded and carried forward for use in subsequent planning.

#### **l. Determine Commander's Recommended Critical Information Requirements**

Only the commander decides what information is critical, but the staff may propose CCIRs to the commander. Commander's critical information

requirements are continually reviewed and updated or deleted as required.

### **m. Identify Requests for Information**

Planners identify if additional information is required to support future plans or to conduct current operations. Based on the initial IPB and information requirements (including CCIRs), the commander and staff identify gaps in the available information and intelligence. As requests for information are identified, they are forwarded to the appropriate staff section for action or to higher headquarters for answers.

### **n. Determine Assumptions**

Assumptions are suppositions about the current situation or about future events that are assumed to be true in the absence of facts. They are made for both friendly and threat situations. Assumptions should only be used when necessary to allow the commander to make a decision concerning the COA. A valid assumption should answer all of the following questions:

- Is it logical?
- Is it realistic?
- Is it essential for planning to continue?
- Does it avoid assuming away a threat capability?

As planning continues, additional assumptions may be needed and previous assumptions may be deleted as the operation changes. A record is kept of assumptions in order to track and validate them as they are confirmed or disapproved. Assumptions are contained in operation plans, but are not included in operation orders. If the operation plan contains assumptions that are not validated before execution, the assumptions become part of the inherent risk of the operation.

If possible, assumptions are forwarded to higher headquarters for validation. This ensures that the higher headquarters commander understands the potential risks that a subordinate command is ac-

cepting. It may prompt the higher headquarters to pursue facts that support the assumption or to request additional information.

### **o. Draft the Mission Statement**

The purpose of the operation and the essential tasks are the foundation for mission statement development. Planners should determine if the purpose of the operation and essential tasks are still valid before they draft the mission statement. A properly constructed mission statement answers the following questions:

- **Who?** (the forces that will conduct the operation)
- **What?** (the type of operation)
- **When?** (the time the operation will start and end)
- **Where?** (the location of the area of operation)
- **Why?** (the purpose of the operation)

Who, what, when, and where are derived from the essential tasks. Why is derived from the purpose of the operation.

### **p. Present a Mission Analysis Brief**

The staff presents a mission analysis brief to the commander to obtain approval of the mission statement. The mission analysis brief reviews the products of mission analysis. The mission analysis brief may be as simple as a proposed mission statement, or it may include the following:

- Situation update (battlespace organization, area of operations, area of interest, area of influence).
- Intelligence estimate and IPB products (terrain analysis, weather analysis, threat integration [possible COAs]).
- Higher headquarters' mission.
- Higher headquarters' commander's intent (two levels up).
- Commander's intent.
- Commander's initial guidance.

- Review of purpose and tasks (specified, implied, essential).
- Review of assumptions.
- Review of restraints and/or constraints.
- Review of shortfalls (resources, subject matter experts).
- Center of gravity analysis (friendly, enemy).
- Requests for information.
- Recommended CCIRs.
- Proposed mission statement.

### q. Commander Approves Mission Statement

Once the commander receives the mission analysis brief, he may approve or modify the proposed mission statement or develop a new mission statement. He also approves all mission analysis products. Once the mission statement is approved, it remains valid unless a significant change occurs. The approved mission statement becomes paragraph 2 of the 5-paragraph operation plan or operation order.

### r. Draft a Warning Order

Once the commander approves or modifies the results of mission analysis, the staff may draft and issue a warning order to subordinate units. The warning order should include the approved mission statement (to include the commander's intent), the commander's guidance and any other information that will assist subordinate units with their planning (e.g., changes in task organization, earliest time of movement).

### s. Refine the Commander's Intent

After reviewing the mission analysis briefing and the mission statement, the commander may consider making refinements to his previously issued commander's intent.

### t. Develop the Commander's Planning Guidance

The commander's planning guidance focuses the staff during COA development. It should be specific enough to assist the planning effort, but not

so specific as to inhibit COA development. This guidance may be expressed in terms of warfighting functions, types of operations, forms of maneuver, etc.

<b>Types of Operations</b>	
<b>Offense</b>	<b>MOOTW</b>
Movement to Contact	Combating Terrorism
Attack	Counter Drug Operations
Exploitation	Humanitarian Assistance
Pursuit	NEO
	Strikes and Raids
<b>Defense</b>	
	Mobile Defense
	Position Defense
<b>Forms of Maneuver</b>	
	Frontal Attack
	Penetration
	Flank Attack
	Envelopment
	Turning Movement
	Infiltration

Planning guidance should include the commander's vision of decisive and shaping actions, which assists the staff in determining the main effort, phases of the operation, location of critical events, and other aspects of the operation the commander deems pertinent to COA development. Guidance may include (but is not limited to)—

- Threat vulnerabilities.
- Risk.
- Any further restraints and/or constraints.
- Decisive and shaping actions.
- Selection and employment of the main effort.
- Types of operations.
- Forms of maneuver.
- Command relationships.
- Task organization.
- Arrangement of the operation (phasing).
- Timing of the operations.

- Reserve.
- Evaluation of the battlespace.
- Mobility and countermobility.

**(1) Decisive Actions.** The purpose of any military operation is mission success. Decisive actions achieve mission success with the least loss of time, equipment, and, most importantly, lives. They cause a favorable change in the situation or cause the threat to change or to cease planned and current activities. For an action to be truly decisive, it must result in an action that is larger than itself. Decisive actions create an environment in which the enemy has either lost the physical capability or the will to resist. The unit conducting the decisive action is normally identified as the main effort.

**(2) Shaping Actions.** Shaping sets conditions for decisive actions. Shaping actions are activities conducted throughout the battlespace to influence a threat capability or force, or the enemy's decisionmaking process. The commander shapes the battlespace by protecting friendly critical vulnerabilities and attacking enemy critical vulnerabilities. Shaping incorporates a wide array of functions and capabilities and is more than just fires and targeting. It may include direct attack, psychological operations, electronic warfare, deception, civil affairs, information management, public affairs, engineer operations, and preventive medical services. Logistic operations (e.g., the stockpiling of critical ammunition, fuel, and supplies to facilitate future operations) shape both friendly and threat forces.

Shaping makes the enemy vulnerable to attack, impedes or diverts his attempts to maneuver, aids

friendly maneuver, and dictates the time and place for decisive actions. It forces the enemy to adopt courses of action favorable to the commander's plans. The commander attempts to shape events in a way that allows him several options, so that by the time the moment for decisive action arrives, he is not restricted to only one course of action.

## 2003. Outputs

Mission analysis activities produce outputs that are vital inputs to subsequent steps in the Marine Corps Planning Process. The required outputs are the mission statement, commander's intent, and commander's planning guidance. Additional outputs may include—

- Updated IPB products.
- Specified tasks.
- Implied tasks.
- Essential tasks.
- Warning order.
- Restraints and/or constraints.
- Assumptions.
- Resource shortfalls.
- Subject matter experts shortfalls.
- Center of gravity analysis (friendly and enemy).
- Approved CCIRs.
- Requests for information.
- Initial staff estimates.

All outputs should be retained and refined as necessary throughout the planning process.

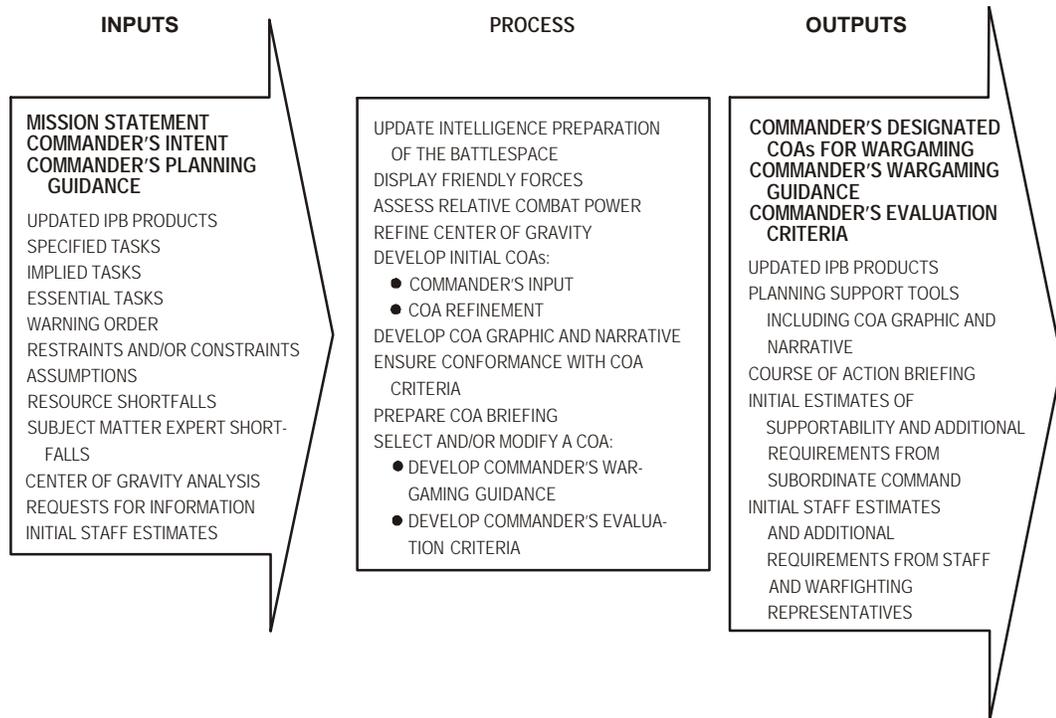


## Chapter 3

# Course of Action Development

*“Decisionmaking requires both the situational awareness to recognize the essence of a given problem and the creative ability to devise a practical solution.”<sup>3</sup>*

—MCDP 1, *Warfighting*



**BOLD TEXT INDICATES MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS**

A course of action (COA) is a broadly stated, potential solution to an assigned mission. The COA development step of the Marine Corps Planning Process is designed to generate options for follow-on wargaming and comparison that satisfy the mission, commander's intent, and guidance of the commander. During COA development, planners use the mission statement (which includes the higher headquarters commander's tasking and intent), commander's intent, and commander's planning guidance to develop courses of action.

Each prospective COA is examined to ensure that it is suitable, feasible, acceptable, distinguishable, and complete with respect to the current and anticipated situation, the mission, and the commander's intent.

Normally, the commander develops several COAs for follow-on wargaming and comparison. The commander may limit the number of COAs that the staff develops, especially if the staff is operating under severe time constraints.

## 3001. Inputs

Course of action development requires a mission statement, commander's intent, and commander's planning guidance before development can begin. Other planning tools useful in COA development include—

- Updated IPB products.
- Specified tasks.
- Implied tasks.
- Essential tasks.
- Warning order.
- Restraints and/or constraints.
- Assumptions.
- Resource shortfalls.
- Subject matter expert shortfalls.
- Centers of gravity analysis (friendly and enemy).
- Commander's critical information requirements.
- Requests for information.
- Initial staff estimates.

## 3002. Process

Planners develop broad COAs using METT-T, threat versus friendly capabilities assessment, and possible employment options. Using at least the minimum required inputs, planners consider two fundamental questions:

- What do I want to do?
- How do I want to do it?

Answering the question, "How do I want to do it?" is the essence of COA development. The following paragraphs address actions that assist COA development.

### a. Update Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace

Intelligence preparation of the battlespace enables planners to view the battlespace in terms of the threat and the environment. It helps planners determine how the enemy will react to proposed friendly COAs, the purpose of enemy actions, the most likely and most dangerous enemy COAs, and the type of friendly operations that the terrain and infrastructure will allow. It is critical that planners use IPB to answer the two fundamental questions—What do I want to do? How do I want to do it?—posed in COA development.

### b. Display Friendly Forces

The graphic display of friendly forces allows planners to see the current and projected locations of friendly forces.

### c. Assess Relative Combat Power

Relative combat power assessment provides planners with an understanding of friendly and threat force strengths and weaknesses relative to each other. While force ratios are important, the numerical comparison of personnel and major end items is just one factor that must be balanced with other factors such as weather, morale, level of training, and cultural orientation. The goals of relative combat power assessment are to identify threat weaknesses that can be exploited through asymmetric application of friendly strengths and identify friendly weaknesses that require protection from threat actions.

### d. Refine Center of Gravity Analysis

Center of gravity analysis began during mission analysis. The commander and staff refine center of gravity analysis based on updated intelligence and IPB products, initial staff estimates, and input from the red cell. The refined centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities are used in the development of the initial centers of gravity.

### e. Develop Initial Courses of Action

Using the commander's planning guidance, as well as updated IPB products, the relative combat power assessment, and center of gravity analysis, planners begin developing possible ways that the force can accomplish the mission. This requires creativity, imagination, and unbiased and open-minded participants. The number and detail of the COAs to be developed depend on the time available for planning. Planners do not judge or eliminate potential COAs; all possibilities are recorded for potential use. It is critical that COAs provide the commander with a variety of employment options. Factors that impact COA variety include—

- Commander's planning guidance.
- Forms of maneuver.
- Type of attack.
- Designation of main effort.
- Requirement for supporting effort(s).
- Scheme of maneuver (land, air, or maritime).
- Sequential and simultaneous operations.
- Sequencing essential task accomplishment.
- Task organization.
- Use of reserves.
- Rules of engagement.

Planners use METT-T and an array of employment possibilities to design a broad plan of "how" they intend to accomplish the mission. How they intend to accomplish the mission becomes the course of action.

**(1) Commander's Input to Initial Courses of Action.** The commander reviews the initial COAs to see if they meet his commander's intent. This is normally an informal review that is conducted as rapidly as possible. This review ensures that valuable time is not spent developing COAs that will not be approved. The commander may direct modifications to the initial courses of action or that additional courses of action to be developed.

**(2) Course of Action Refinement.** Using the commander's planning guidance and input from the initial COAs, the staff further develops, expands, and refines the courses of action to be used in COA wargaming. The staff may also recommend to the commander how a course of action should be wargamed. This recommendation may include the war game method to be used and which enemy COAs should be wargamed. See appendix E for a discussion of wargaming.

### f. Develop Course of Action Graphic and Narrative

The COA graphic and narrative clearly portray how the organization will accomplish the mission. Together, the graphic and narrative identify who (notional task organization), what (tasks), when, where, how, and why (intent). The COA graphic and narrative are essential and inseparable. Together, they help the commander, subordinate commanders, and the staff understand how the organization will accomplish its mission. The graphic clearly portrays the scheme of maneuver of the main and supporting efforts and critical maneuver and fire support control measures, such as objectives, boundaries, phase lines, and fire support coordination lines. The narrative provides the purpose and tasks of the main and supporting efforts, the reserve, and the sequencing of the operation. The COA graphic and narrative, when approved by the commander, form the basis for the concept of operations and operations overlay in the basic plan or order. See appendix D for more information.

### g. Ensure Conformance with Course of Action Criteria

Once courses of action are developed, they should conform with the following criteria:

- Suitability: Does the COA accomplish the purpose and tasks? Does it comply with the commander's planning guidance?
- Feasibility: Does the COA accomplish the mission within the available time, space, and resources?

- **Acceptability:** Does the COA achieve an advantage that justifies the cost in resources?
- **Distinguishability:** Does the COA differ significantly from other COAs?
- **Completeness:** Does the COA include all tasks to be accomplished? Does it describe a complete mission (main and supporting efforts, reserve, and associated risks)?

## h. Prepare Course of Action Brief

Developed courses of action, along with updated facts, assumptions, risk, etc., are briefed to the commander. Each course of action is briefed separately and is sufficiently developed to withstand the scrutiny of COA wargaming. Although the COA briefing is tailored to the needs of the commander and the time available, standardized briefing formats help focus the briefing and prevent omission of essential information. The COA briefing will include the COA graphic and narrative. It may also include—

- Updated intelligence estimate (terrain and weather analysis, threat evaluation).
- Possible enemy COAs (at a minimum the most likely and most dangerous, situation template[s]).
- Mission statement.
- Higher headquarters commander's intent.
- Own commander's intent.
- Commander's planning guidance.
- Relative combat power assessment.
- Rationale for each COA (why specific tactics were used, why selected control measures were used, why units are arrayed on the map as depicted).
- Updated facts and assumptions.
- Recommendations for wargaming (enemy COAs, evaluation criteria).

The COA briefing may also include initial estimates of supportability from subordinate commands and staff estimates. Estimates of supportability are provided by subordinate commanders. They evaluate the courses of action and

make recommendations on which course of action they can best support. Staff estimates are developed by the commander's staff and warfighting representatives. They summarize those significant aspects of the situation which influence the course of action, analyze the impact of all factors upon the course of action, and evaluate and determine how the means available can best support the course of action.

## i. Select and/or Modify a Course of Action

Following the COA briefing, the commander may select or modify the courses of action to be evaluated during COA wargaming. He may also provide additional COA and wargaming guidance and express his desires concerning evaluation criteria.

**(1) Develop Commander's Wargaming Guidance.** The commander's wargaming guidance may include—

- A list of friendly courses of action to be wargamed against specific threat courses of action (e.g., COA 1 against the enemy's most likely, most dangerous, or most advantageous COA).
- The timeline for the phase or stage of the operation.
- A list of critical events (e.g., shifting the main effort).
- Level of detail (e.g., two levels down).

**(2) Develop Commander's Evaluation Criteria.** Before the staff can begin the next step—the COA war game—the commander must choose the evaluation criteria he will use to select the course of action that will become his concept of operations. The commander establishes evaluation criteria based on METT-T, judgment, and personal experience. Commanders may choose evaluation criteria related to the principles of war, such as mass or surprise. These evaluation criteria help focus the wargaming effort and provide the framework for data collection by the staff. The

commander uses the collected data during COA comparison and decision. Other criteria may include—

- Commander's intent and guidance.
- Limitation on casualties.
- Exploitation of enemy weaknesses and/or friendly strengths.
- Defeat of the threat centers of gravity.
- Degree of asymmetrical operations.
- Opportunity for maneuver.
- Concentration of combat power.
- Speed.
- Balance between mass and dispersion.
- Success despite terrain or weather restrictions.
- Risk.
- Phasing.
- Weighting the main effort.
- Logistical supportability.
- Political considerations.

- Force protection.
- Time available and timing of the operation.

### 3003. Outputs

Course of action development activities produce outputs that drive subsequent steps in the Marine Corps Planning Process. Required outputs of COA development are the commander's designated COAs for wargaming, commander's wargaming guidance, and commander's evaluation criteria. Additional outputs may include—

- Updated IPB products.
- Planning support tools including the COA graphic and narrative.
- Course of action briefing.
- Initial estimates of supportability and additional requirements from subordinate commands.
- Initial staff estimates and additional requirements from staff and warfighting function representatives.

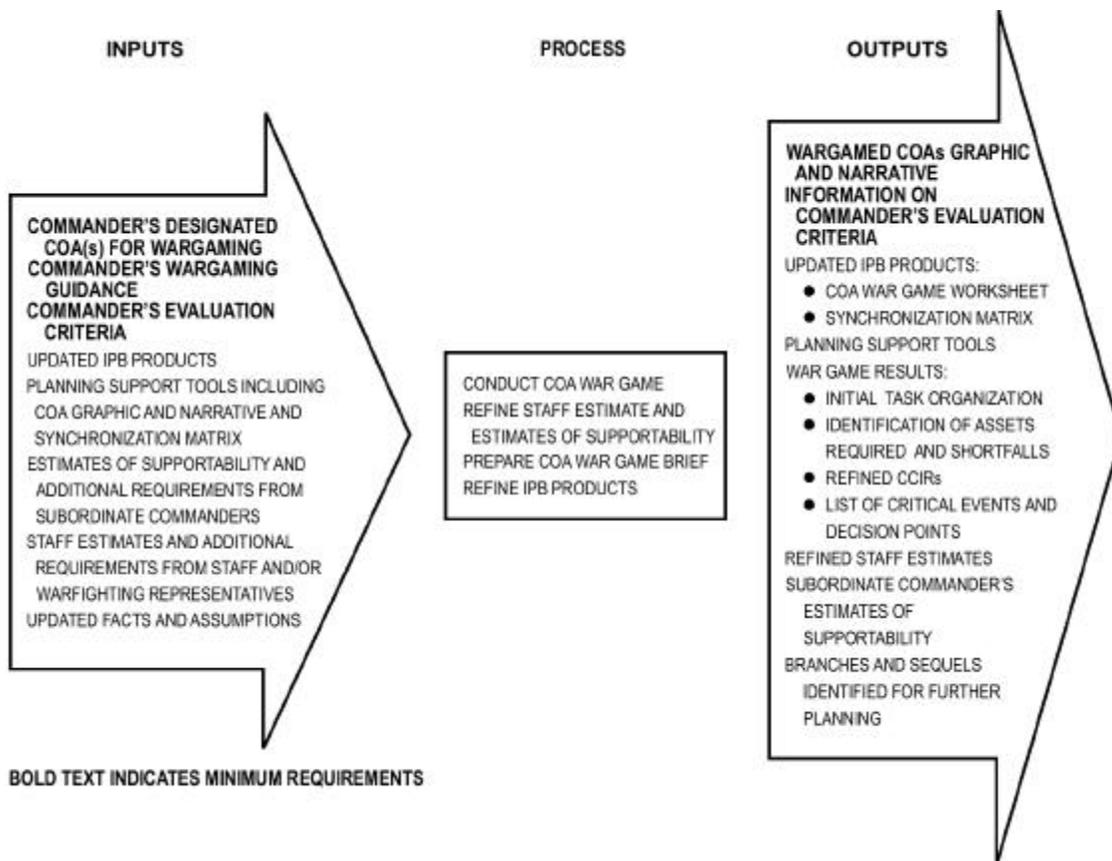


## Chapter 4

# Course of Action War Game

*“Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.”<sup>4</sup>*

—Sun Tzu



Course of action wargaming allows the staff and subordinate commanders to gain a common understanding of friendly—and possible enemy—courses of action. This common understanding allows them to determine the advantages and disadvantages of each course of action and forms the basis for the commander's course of action comparison and decision. It is based on wargaming and estimates prepared by the staff and subordi-

nate commanders. Course of action wargaming involves a detailed assessment of each course of action as it pertains to the enemy and the battlespace. Each friendly course of action is wargamed against selected threat courses of action. Course of action wargaming assists planners in identifying strengths and weaknesses, associated risks, and asset shortfalls for each friendly course of action. Course of action wargaming may

identify branches and potential sequels that require additional planning. Short of actually executing the course of action, COA wargaming provides the most reliable basis for understanding and improving each course of action.

## 4001. Inputs

Course of action wargaming requires the commander's designated courses of action for wargaming, wargaming guidance, and evaluation criteria. Other inputs useful in COA wargaming include—

- Updated IPB products.
- Planning support tools including the COA graphic and narrative and synchronization matrix.
- Estimates of supportability and additional requirements from subordinate commanders.
- Staff estimates and additional requirements from staff and/or warfighting representatives, including an updated intelligence estimate with an event template and threat courses of action.
- Updated facts and assumptions.

## 4002. Process

During COA wargaming, the staff evaluates the effectiveness of friendly courses of action against both the enemy's courses of action and the commander's evaluation criteria. The staff makes adjustments to identified problems and weaknesses of the friendly courses of action and identify branches and sequels. Each friendly course of action is wargamed independently against selected enemy courses of action. Course of action wargaming helps the commander determine how best to apply his strength against the enemy's critical vulnerabilities while protecting his critical vulnerabilities. Wargaming pits friendly courses of ac-

tion against enemy courses of action, it does not compare friendly courses of action against each other. Friendly courses of action are compared against each other in the next step, COA comparison and decision. Estimates provide the staff and subordinate commanders views on the courses of action. These views assist the commander during COA comparison and decision.

### a. Conduct COA War Game

The staff may conduct wargaming using the enemy's most likely, most dangerous, and most advantageous (to friendly forces) courses of action. The commander approves the enemy courses of action that will be used during wargaming. If possible, enemy courses of action are played by a "thinking enemy" in the form of a red cell. See appendix E for additional discussion on wargaming and the red cell.

When conducted formally, wargaming is a disciplined, interactive process that examines the execution of the friendly courses of action in relation to the enemy. When conducted informally, it may be as simple as a "What if?" conversation between the commander and staff. Wargaming relies heavily on the operational judgment and experience of the participants. Whether formal or informal, wargaming attempts to foresee the action, reaction, and counteraction dynamics of friendly versus enemy courses of action. During wargaming—

- Evaluate each course of action independently. Do not compare one course of action with another during the war game.
- Remain unbiased and avoid making premature conclusions.
- Continually assess the suitability, feasibility, acceptability, distinguishability, and completeness of each course of action.
- Record the advantages and disadvantages of each course of action.
- Record data based on commander's evaluation criteria for each course of action.

- Keep to the established timeline of the war game.
- Identify possible branches and potential sequels for further planning.

### **b. Refine Staff Estimates and Estimates of Supportability**

The commander's staff and subordinate commands continue to develop their staff estimates and estimates of supportability. These estimates are used during the next step, COA comparison and decision. Criteria used in the development of estimates may include—

- Risk assessment.
- Casualty projections and/or limitations.
- Personnel replacement requirements.
- Projected enemy losses.
- Enemy prisoners of war procedures.
- Intelligence collection requirements and limitations.
- Rules of engagement.
- High-value targets.
- High-payoff targets.
- Support (fires, logistics, aviation) strengths and limitations.
- Projected assets and resource requirements.
- Operational reach.
- Projected allocation of mobility assets, lift, and sorties versus availability.
- Requirement for prepositioning equipment and supplies.
- Projected location of units and supplies for future operations.
- Projected location of the combat operations center and command post echelons (rear, main, tactical).
- Command and control system's requirements.

### **c. Prepare Course of Action War Game Brief**

The COA war game brief presents the commander with the results of the staff's evaluation and

war game. The brief includes the advantages and disadvantages of each course of action and suggested modifications. It may also include—

- Enemy COA situation templates:
  - Updated intelligence estimate (terrain, weather, enemy).
  - Wargamed enemy courses of action.
- Mission analysis and COA development products:
  - Higher, supporting, supported, and adjacent commander's mission statements (two levels up).
  - Tasks and intent provided by higher headquarters.
  - Commander's intent for subordinate units.
  - Overview of courses of action.
  - Wargame technique used.
  - Wargamed critical events.
- COA war game products and results (see app. D for more information on Marine Corps Planning Process tools)—
  - COA war game worksheet.
  - Identification of any additional tasks.
  - Revised COA graphic and narrative.
  - List of critical events and decision points.
  - Branches and potential sequels.
  - Assets required and shortfalls.
  - New requests for information.
  - Estimated time required for the operation.
  - Any accepted risk.
- Recommended changes to the commander's evaluation criteria.

### **d. Refine Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace Products**

The staff refines and prepares IPB products as necessary to support the next step, COA comparison and decision.

### 4003. Outputs

COA war game activities produce outputs that drive subsequent steps in the Marine Corps Planning Process. Required outputs of COA wargaming are the wargamed COA graphic and narrative and information on the commander's evaluation criteria. Additional outputs may include—

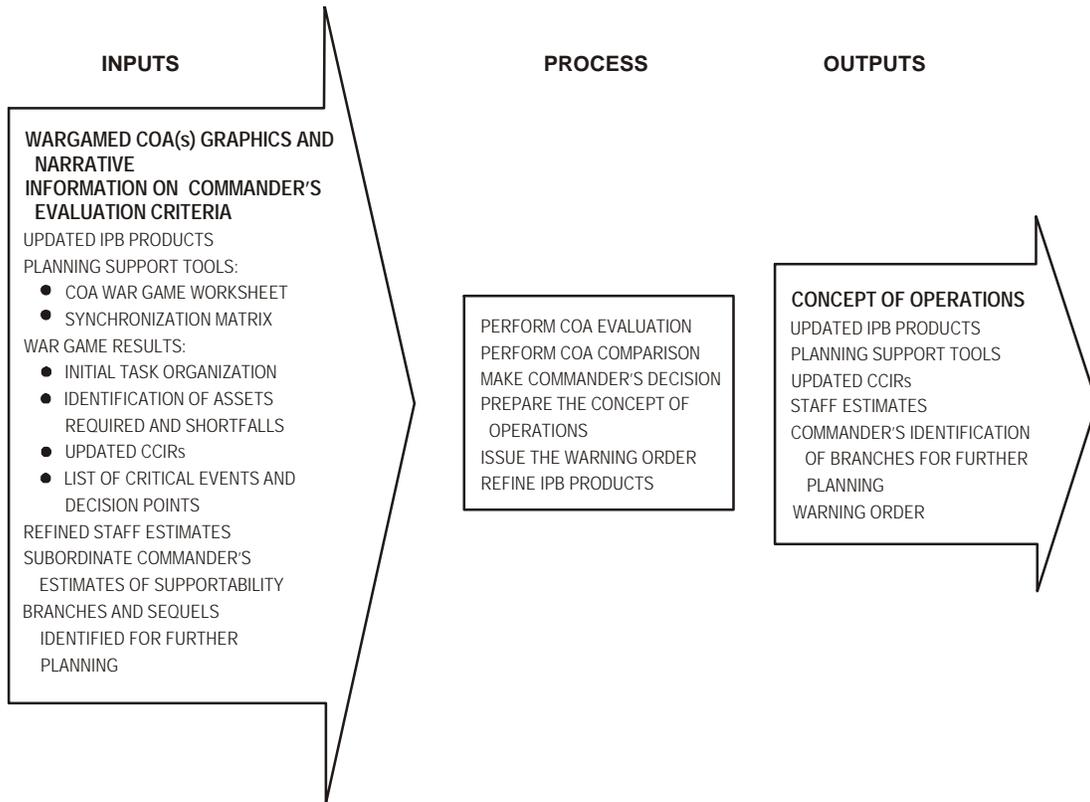
- Updated IPB products.
- Planning support tools:
  - COA war game worksheet.
- Synchronization matrix.
- War game results:
  - Initial task organization.
  - Identification of assets required and shortfalls.
  - Refined CCIRs.
  - List of critical events and decision points.
- Refined staff estimates.
- Subordinate commander's estimates of supportability.
- Branches and sequels identified for further planning.

## Chapter 5

# Course of Action Comparison and Decision

*“The first principle of a [commander] is to calculate what he must do, to see if he has all the means to surmount the obstacles with which the enemy can oppose him and, when he has made his decision, to do everything to overcome them.”<sup>5</sup>*

—Napoleon Bonaparte



**BOLD TEXT INDICATES MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS**

During COA comparison and decision, the commander evaluates all friendly courses of action against established criteria, evaluates them against each other, and selects the course of action that he believes will best accomplish the mission. The commander may also refine his mission statement (including his commander's intent and essential tasks) and concept of operations, and identify any branches of the chosen course of ac-

tion that needs further staff attention. Finally, a warning order may be issued to subordinate commanders.

This step requires the commander, subordinate commanders, and staff involvement from start to finish. Ideally, all participants attend one collective meeting. If attendance by all participants is not possible, the commander may interact with

subordinates in several separate meetings or through electronic means (e.g., video teleconference).

## 5001. Inputs

COA comparison and decision inputs require wargamed COA(s) graphics and narratives and information on the commander's evaluation criteria. Other inputs useful in COA comparison and decision may include—

- Updated IPB products.
- Planning support tools:
  - COA war game worksheet.
  - Synchronization matrix.
- War game results:
  - Initial task organization.
  - Identification of assets required and shortfalls.
  - Updated CCIRs.
  - List of critical events and decision points.
- Refined staff estimates.
- Subordinate commander's estimates of supportability.
- Branches and sequels identified for further planning.

## 5002. Process

The COA comparison and decision process at lower levels of command may simply be an informal exchange of information between the commander and selected staff members concerning the results of the war game. At higher levels of command, the process is normally a formal sequence of activities that may involve the following actions.

### a. Perform Course of Action Evaluation

The commander uses the information gathered, which was based on his evaluation criteria, to elect a course of action to develop into his concept of operations. In a discussion led by the commander or his representative (i.e., chief of staff, deputy commander), each course of action is examined against the commander's evaluation criteria. Advantages and disadvantages of each course of action are discussed and recorded. Subordinate commanders, staffs, and planners provide feedback in their areas of expertise.

The commander can evaluate courses of action through a number of approaches. One approach is to evaluate each course of action against all the commander's evaluation criteria to give the commander a view of the entire course of action. Another approach is to evaluate all of the courses of action against each of the commander's evaluation criteria so the commander gains a perspective from each separate criterion. Regardless of the approach used, staff and subordinate commanders provide estimates and judgments to the commander.

### b. Perform Course of Action Comparison

The results of the COA evaluation allow the commander to conduct COA comparison. The commander may use a comparison and decision matrix to help him compare one course of action against another. (See app. D for more information on the comparison and decision matrix.) Course of action comparison provides the commander with an understanding of the relative merit of each course of action and aids in his decisionmaking process.

### c. Make Commander's Decision

Once all courses of action are evaluated and compared, the commander selects a course of action.

In making his decision, the commander may—

- Select a course of action without modification.
- Modify a course of action to overcome disadvantages.
- Develop a new course of action by combining favorable elements of multiple courses of action.
- Discard all courses of action and resume mission analysis or COA development, as required.

Once the commander has made a decision, he should conduct a review of the course of action with subordinate commanders. He must review his mission statement to ensure that he has captured all essential tasks required by the selected course of action. The commander's decision guides the preparation of the concept of operations and orders development.

#### **d. Prepare the Concept of Operations**

The staff prepares the concept of operations that is the basis of the next step, orders development. The concept of operations is the basis for supporting concepts such as the concept of fires, logistics, or force protection. Included in the concept of operations is a general description of actions to be taken and a generic organization for combat.

The concept of operations includes a complete description with graphics and narrative.

#### **e. Issue the Warning Order**

With the preparation of the concept of operations, the commander may issue another warning order to allow subordinate commanders to begin concurrent planning.

#### **f. Refine Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace Products**

The staff refines and prepares IPB products as a result of COA comparison and decision.

### **5003. Outputs**

The output of COA comparison and decision provides the basis for orders development. The required output is the concept of operations. Additional outputs may include—

- Updated IPB products.
- Planning support tools.
- Updated CCIRs.
- Staff estimates.
- Commander's identification of branches for further planning.
- Warning order.

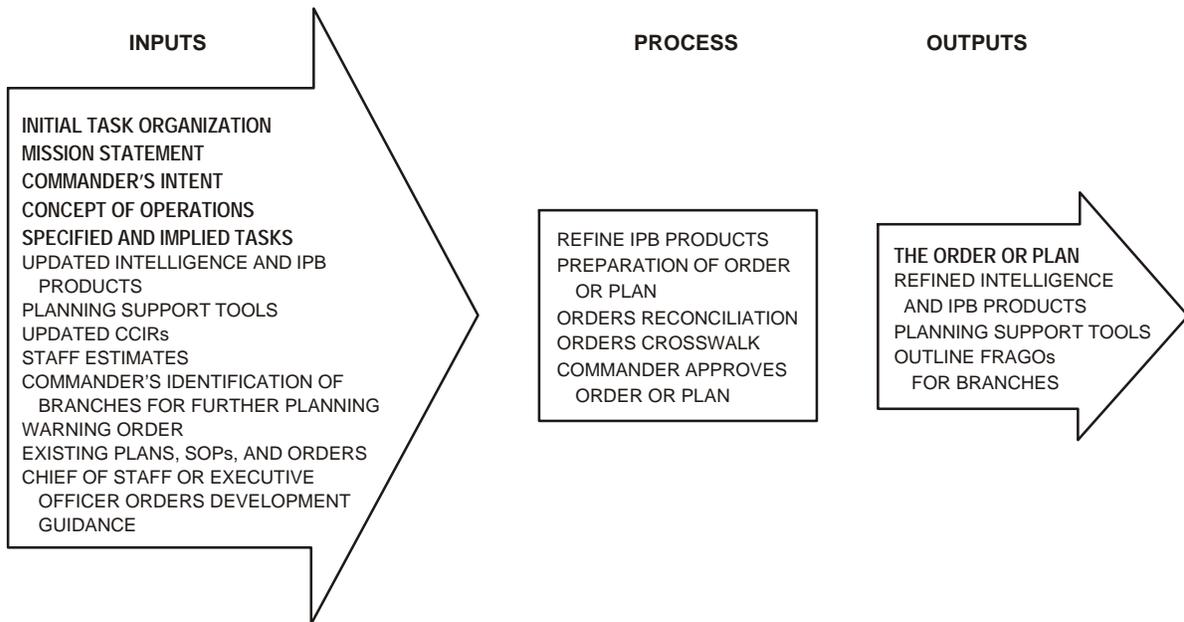


## Chapter 6

# Orders Development

*“As a rule, plans should contain only as much detail as required to provide subordinates the necessary guidance while allowing as much freedom of action as possible.”<sup>6</sup>*

—MCDP 5, *Planning*



BOLD TEXT INDICATES MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

The orders development step in the Marine Corps Planning Process communicates the commander's intent, guidance, and decisions in a clear, useful form that is easily understood by those executing the order. An order is a written or oral communication that directs actions and focuses a subordinate's tasks and activities toward accomplishing the mission. Various portions of the order, such as the mission statement and staff estimates, have been prepared during previous steps of the Marine Corps Planning Process.

The chief of staff or executive officer, as appropriate, directs orders development. The order contains only critical or new information—not routine matters normally found in standing operating procedures. A good order is judged on its usefulness—not its weight.

### 6001. Inputs

The initial task organization, mission statement, commander's intent, concept of operations, and

specified and implied tasks are the required inputs to orders development. Other inputs may include—

- Updated intelligence and IPB products.
- Planning support tools.
- Updated CCIRs.
- Staff estimates.
- Commander's identification of branches for further planning.
- Warning order.
- Existing plans, standing operating procedures, and orders.
- Chief of staff or executive officer orders development guidance.

## 6002. Process

Normally, the chief of staff or executive officer coordinates with staff principals to assist the G-3/S-3 in developing an order. The chief of staff or executive officer dictates the format for the order, sets and enforces the time limits and development sequence, and determines which annexes are published by which staff section.

### a. Refine Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace Products

The staff refines or prepares IPB products to support orders development.

### b. Preparation of Order or Plan

Orders are produced in a variety of forms. Orders or plans can be detailed, written documents with many supporting annexes, or they can be simple verbal commands. Their form depends on time available, complexity of the operation, and levels of command involved. Supporting portions of the order or plan, such as annexes and appendixes, are based on staff estimates, subordinate commander's estimates of supportability, and other planning documents. If the basic order has been published, a FRAGO may be issued to subordinate commanders. Whatever the format, orders

and plans must be clear, concise, timely, and useful. See appendix G for operation plan, operation order, annex, and appendix formats.

### c. Orders Reconciliation

Orders reconciliation is an internal process in which the staff conducts a detailed review of the entire order. This reconciliation ensures that the basic order and all the annexes, appendixes, etc., are complete and in agreement. It identifies discrepancies or gaps in the planning. If discrepancies or gaps are found, the staff takes corrective action. Specifically, the staff compares the commander's intent, the mission, and the CCIRs against the concept of operations and the supporting concepts (e.g., maneuver, fires, support). Priority intelligence requirements and the intelligence collection plan must support the CCIRs.

### d. Orders Crosswalk

During the orders crosswalk, the staff compares the order with the orders of higher and adjacent commanders to achieve unity of effort and ensure that the superior commander's intent is met. It identifies discrepancies or gaps in planning. If discrepancies or gaps are found, the staff takes corrective action.

### e. Commander Approves Order or Plan

The final action in orders development is the approval of the order or plan by the commander. While the commander does not have to sign every annex or appendix, it is important that he reviews and signs the basic order or plan.

## 6003. Outputs

The output of orders development is an approved order or plan. Additional outputs may include—

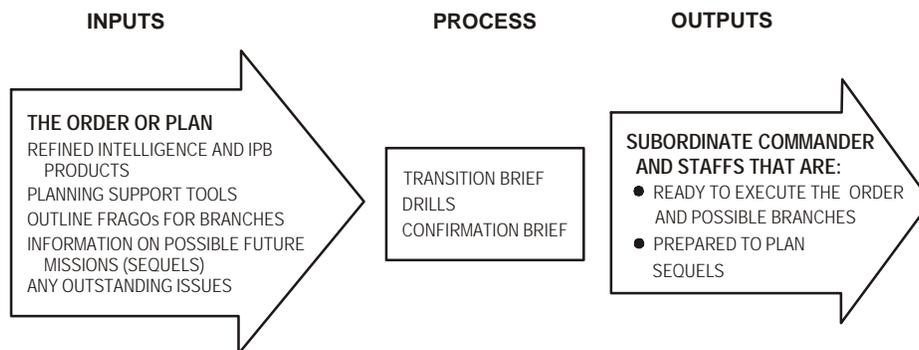
- Refined intelligence and IPB products.
- Planning support tools.
- Outline FRAGOs for branches.

# Chapter 7

## Transition

*“... plans and orders exist for those who receive and execute them rather than those who write them.”<sup>7</sup>*

—MCDP 5, *Planning*



**BOLD TEXT INDICATES MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS**

The purpose of transition is to provide a successful shift from planning to execution. It enhances the situational awareness of those who will execute the order, maintains the intent of the concept of operations, promotes unity of effort, and generates tempo.

Transition is a continuous process that requires a free flow of information between commanders and staffs by all available means. At higher echelons, such as the component, the MEF, or an MSC where the planners may not be executors, the commander may designate a representative as a proponent for the order or plan. After orders development the proponent takes the approved order or plan forward to the staff charged with supervising execution. As a full participant in the development of the plan, the proponent is able to answer questions, aid in the use of the planning support tools, and assist the staff in determining necessary adjustments to the order or plan.

Transition occurs at all levels of command. A formal transition normally occurs on staffs with separate planning and execution teams. Planning time and personnel may be limited at lower levels of command, such as the regiment, aircraft group, or below; therefore, transition may take place intuitively because the planners are also the executors.

### 7001. Inputs

For transition to occur, an approved order or plan must exist. The approved order or plan, along with the products of continuing staff actions, forms the input for transition. These inputs may include—

- Refined intelligence and IPB products.
- Planning support tools.
- Outline FRAGOs for branches.

- Information on possible future missions (sequels).
- Any outstanding issues.

## 7002. Process

Successful transition ensures that those charged with executing the order have a full understanding of the plan. Regardless of the level of command, such a transition ensures that those who execute the order understand the commander's intent, the concept of operations, and Marine Corps Planning Process tools. Transition may be internal or external in the form of briefs or drills. Internally, transition occurs between future plans or future and current operations. Externally, transition occurs between the commander and his subordinate commands.

### a. Transition Brief

At the higher levels of command, transition may include a formal transition brief to subordinate or adjacent commanders and to the staff supervising execution of the order. At lower levels, it might be less formal. The transition brief provides an overview of the mission, commander's intent, task organization, and enemy and friendly situation. It is given to ensure that all actions necessary to implement the order are known and understood by those executing the order. The commander, deputy commander, or chief of staff provides transition brief guidance, which may prescribe who will give the brief, the briefing content, the briefing sequence, and who is required to attend. Time available dictates the level of detail possible in the transition brief. Orders and supporting materials should be transmitted as early as possible

before the transition brief. The brief may include items from the order or plan such as—

- Higher headquarters mission (tasks and intent).
- Mission.
- Commander's intent.
- Commander's critical information requirements.
- Task organization.
- Situation (friendly and enemy).
- Concept of operations.
- Execution (including branches and potential sequels).
- Planning support tools.

### b. Transition Drills

Drills are important techniques used during transition to ensure the greatest possible understanding of the plan or order by those who must execute it. Drills improve the ability of the commander and staff to command and control operations. A transition drill is a series of briefings, guided discussions, walk throughs, or rehearsals used to facilitate understanding of the plan throughout all levels of the command. Transition drills are conducted by the commander and his subordinate commanders or the commander and the staff tasked with execution of the plan or order. Typically, a transition drill is the only drill used at lower levels of command, where the staff both develops and executes the plan. Transition drills increase the situational awareness of the subordinate commanders and the staff and instill confidence and familiarity with the plan. Sand tables, map exercises, and rehearsals are examples of transition drills.

### **c. Confirmation Brief**

A confirmation brief is given by a subordinate commander after he receives his order or plan. Subordinate commanders brief the higher commander on their understanding of commander's intent, their specific task and purpose, and the relationship between their unit's missions and the other units in the operation. The confirmation brief allows the higher commander to identify gaps in his plan, identify discrepancies between his and subordinate commander's plans, and learn

how subordinate commanders intend to accomplish their mission.

### **7003. Outputs**

The outputs of a successful transition are subordinate commanders and staffs that are ready to execute the order and possible branches and prepared to plan sequels.