As this integrated planning continues, the commander chooses a course of action and, if time and situation allow, the staff conducts detailed planning to provide further direction to the force and prepare necessary operation plans and orders. Once the plan or order is completed, the direct portion of operational design concludes with the transition of the plan or order to the subordinate commanders and the staff that will execute it. The operational design, once developed into an operation plan or order, is the basis for execution and aids the commander and the staff as they execute operations.

The commander assesses the success of the operation by comparing the envisioned operational design—as expressed in the operation order—with what is actually occurring in the battlespace. If the assessment indicates the need to modify or adjust the operational design, the commander will again visualize what must be done and then he and the staff will describe how it will be accomplished by modifying or adjusting the battlefield framework. Fragmentary orders, branch plans or sequels to direct the operation will be prepared and issued, if necessary.

PLANNING

As described in MCDP 5, planning is the art and science of envisioning a desired future and laying out effective ways of bringing it about. It encompasses envisioning this desired end state and arranging a configuration of potential actions in time and space that will realize the end state. Planning is an essential element of command and control and the responsibility to plan is inherent in command. It is a truism that planning is half of command and control. The fundamental object of command and control is also the fundamental object of planning—to recognize what needs to be done in any situation and to ensure appropriate actions are taken. This requires commanders who can visualize what they want to happen, the effects they want to achieve, and how they will employ their forces to achieve their goals. They must be able to contemplate and evaluate potential decisions and courses of action in advance of taking action. The commander must be constantly aware of how much time a situation allows for planning and make the most of that available time. Whether planning is done deliberately or rapidly, the commander must display an acute awareness of the time available. All planning is time sensitive.

Planning can be viewed as a hierarchical continuum with three levels of planning—conceptual, functional, and detailed. All three levels are used at various times in the Marine Corps Planning Process (MCPP), such as the use of conceptual planning during mission analysis, functional planning during course of action development, and detailed planning during orders development.

While the commander is primarily involved at the conceptual level, he is an important participant throughout the planning process and must supervise his subordinate commanders and the staff in their efforts at the functional and detailed levels of planning. The commander's conceptual planning provides the basis for all planning performed by the staff. He must organize and train his staff to gather, manage, and process information essential to the commander's decisionmaking process. The size and capabilities of the staff depend on the level of command and the information and decisionmaking needs of the commander.

The MCPP is the vehicle the Marine Corps component or MAGTF commander and their staffs use to provide input to the joint planning process. It interfaces with the joint planning system during the supporting plan development phase in deliberate planning and during the situation development phase during joint crisis action planning. The Army's planning process closely resembles the MCPP, enabling close coordination in planning and execution among Marine Corps and Army forces assigned supporting missions or attached to the other Service. MAGTF planners must ensure that IO planning begins at the earliest stage of operation planning, is nested within the IO plans of the higher headquarters, and fully integrated into the MAGTF operations plan.

COMMANDER'S BATTLESPACE AREA EVALUATION

CBAE is the commander's personal vision based on his understanding of the mission, the battlespace, and the enemy. It is his visualization of what needs to be done and his first impressions of how he will go about doing it. He uses CBAE to articulate his initial view of the operational design. This visualization is used to transmit critical information to subordinate commanders and the staff and is the basis for the commander's planning and decisionmaking. It identifies the commander's battlespace, center of gravity and critical vulnerabilities, the commander's intent, and his critical information requirements. The staff normally assists the commander in preparing much of his CBAE, including battlespace appreciation, center of gravity analysis, and determining commander's critical information requirements. The G/S-2 is particularly helpful to the commander in determining possible enemy centers of gravity.

Analyze and Determine the Battlespace

As described in chapter 4, the commander's battlespace consists of his AO, area of influence, and area of interest. The commander analyzes his assigned AO, comparing the capabilities of his forces with the mission assigned to determine his area of influence. He then visualizes how he will use his forces within the battlespace to accomplish his mission. This visualization allows the commander

to recognize critical information requirements that will determine the extent of his area of interest.

The commander compares his AO to his area of influence to determine whether the AO's size and location will allow him to accomplish his mission. If the AO is too small to allow the commander to use all the assets of the MAGTF effectively to accomplish the mission, then he should request a larger AO be assigned. If he determines that the AO assigned is too large for his force or that it is not located to best accommodate the MAGTF, then he should request a new or modified AO, or additional forces, from his commander. Regardless of its size, the MAGTF commander must be able to command and control his forces throughout the assigned AO.

Centers of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities

The commander continues to visualize what he must do and how he thinks he will use his force to accomplish that mission. An important aspect of the commander's visualization includes his analysis of centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities. This analysis, based on the expected enemy COA, assists the commander in visualizing the relative strengths and weaknesses of the enemy and friendly forces.

As discussed in MCDP 1, a center of gravity is an important source of strength. Both enemy and friendly forces have centers of gravity. Depending on the situation, centers of gravity may be intangible characteristics such as resolve or morale. They may be capabilities such as armored forces or aviation strength. They may be the cooperation between two arms, the relations in an alliance or a force occupying key terrain anchoring an entire defensive system. Employing friendly strengths or centers of gravity to directly attack the enemy's strength should be avoided whenever possible. Rather, the commander seeks to employ his strength against threat weaknesses. To accomplish this task, the commander must identify the enemy's critical vulnerabilities; i.e., vulnerabilities that permit destruction of a capability without which the enemy cannot function effectively. Attacking critical vulnerabilities may achieve effects that bend the enemy to the commander's will.

Critical vulnerabilities provide an aiming point for the application of friendly strengths against threat weaknesses. The commander directs his force's strength at those capabilities that are critical to the enemy's ability to function—to defend, attack or sustain himself or to command his forces. The commander focuses on those critical vulnerabilities that will bend the enemy to his will most quickly. He must establish a process to identify those capabilities that are vulnerable and whose destruction or disruption will achieve the desired results. 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 the decisive action. Friendly critical vulnerabilities must also be identified to protect the friendly center of gravity from similar attack by the enemy.

The commander's analysis of centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities during CBAE may require refinement as more information about the enemy and the tactical situation becomes available. The commander will continue to refine his visualization of the battlespace and his mission, which may require him to modify or delete his current choice for centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities. Center of gravity and critical vulnerability analysis is an ongoing process and the commander's thinking on these items during CBAE may be radically altered during the remainder of the planning process and once the plan is executed.

Commander's Intent

The commander continues his CBAE by describing the interaction of the enemy, his own force and the battlespace over time and how he will achieve a decision that leads to the desired end state. He communicates this vision to his subordinates through the most important element of CBAE—commander's intent.

As described in MCDP 1, 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 end state, conditions, or effects that, when satisfied or achieved, accomplish the purpose.

Commanders 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 commander's intent must be aligned. Commander's intent must be promulgated and clearly understood two levels down so that commander's intent and the resulting concepts of operation are "nested" to ensure unity of effort. Nested commander's intent ensures that while subordinates have the freedom to conduct their part of the operation as their situation dictates, the results of these disparate actions will contribute to achieving the higher commanders desired end state.

Commander's intent focuses on the enduring portion of any mission—the purpose of the operation—which continues to guide subordinates' actions, while the subordinates' tasks may change as the situation develops. As the commander proceeds through planning and his situational awareness grows, he may refine his intent. He may also include how he envisions achieving a decision—his method—as well as the end state that, when satisfied, accomplishes the purpose of the operation.

The commander's intent provides the overall purpose for accomplishing the task assigned through mission tactics. Although the situation may change, subordinates who clearly understand the purpose and act to accomplish that purpose can adapt to changing circumstances on their own without risking diffusion of effort or loss of tempo. Subordinate commanders will be able to carry on this mission on their own initiative and through lateral coordination with other units.

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. Commanders use CCIRs to help them confirm their vision of the battlespace, assess desired effects, and how they will achieve a decision to accomplish their mission or to identify significant deviations from that vision.

Not all information requirements support the commander in decisionmaking. CCIRs must be linked to the critical decisions the commander anticipates making. They focus the commander's subordinate commanders and staff's planning and collection efforts. The number of CCIRs must be limited to only those that support the commander's critical decisions. Too many CCIRs diffuse focus.

CCIRs help the commander tailor his command and control organization. They 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. CCIRs are continually reviewed and updated to reflect the commander's concerns and the changing tactical situation.

CCIRs are normally divided into three subcategories: priority intelligence requirements, friendly force information requirements, and essential elements of friendly information. A priority intelligence requirement is an intelligence requirement associated with a decision that will critically affect the overall success of the command's mission. A friendly force information requirement is