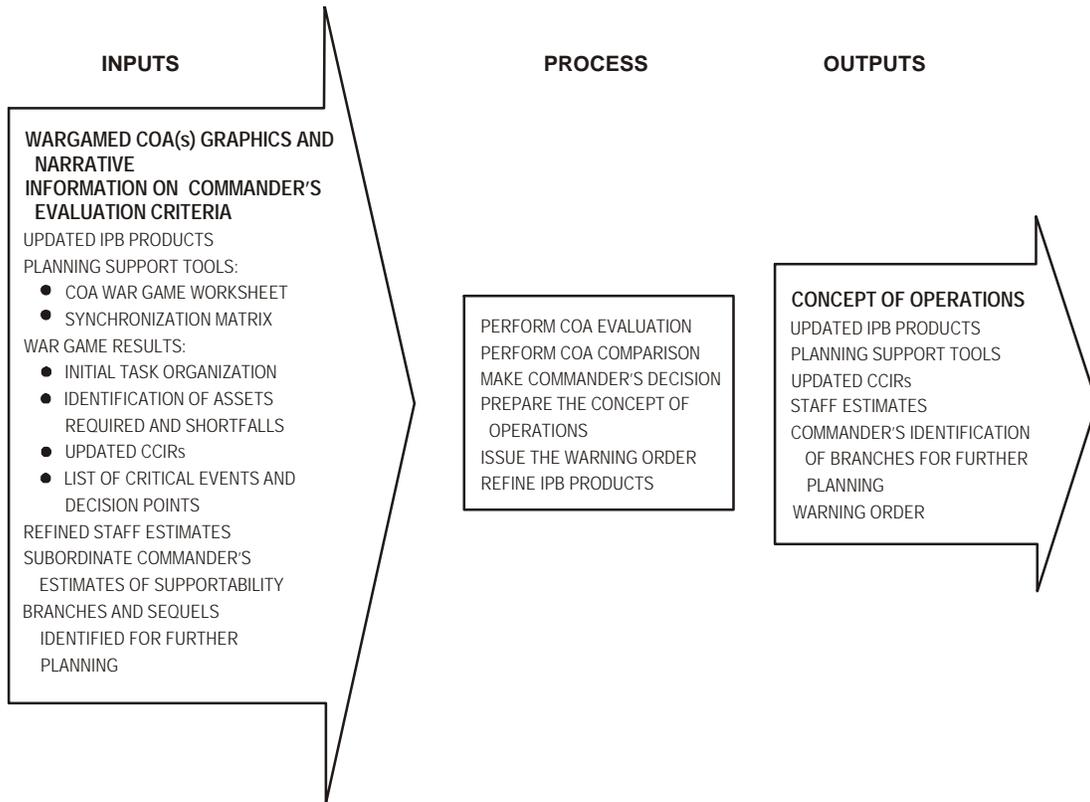


Chapter 5

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.”⁵

—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.