

MSTP Pamphlet 5-0.5

Course of Action Development



MAGTF Staff Training Program
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MSTP Pamphlet 5-0.5

Course of Action Development

This pamphlet supports the academic curricula of the Marine Air Ground Task Force Staff Training Program (MSTP).

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November 2001

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
MSTP Center (C 467) MCCDC
3300 Russell Road
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5069

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FOREWORD

1. **PURPOSE.** MSTP Pamphlet 5-0.5, *Course of Action Development*, is designed to assist the staff officer participate as part of an operational planning team (OPT) during the development of a course of action (COA) for the commander's review and approval.

2. **SCOPE.** This pamphlet provides specific techniques and procedures for use by staff officers that are supporting or assigned to an OPT. While the pamphlet is primarily focused at the Marine expeditionary force (MEF) level, these techniques may be used by staff officers and OPTs at Marine Corps component and major subordinate commands.

3. **SUPERSESSSION.** None

4. **CHANGES.** Recommendations for improvements to this pamphlet are encouraged from commands as well as from individuals. The attached User Suggestion Form can be reproduced and forwarded to:

Commanding General (C 467)
Training and Education Command
3300 Russell Road
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5. **CERTIFICATION.** Reviewed and approved this date.



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Throughout this pamphlet, masculine nouns and pronouns are used for the sake of simplicity. Except where otherwise noted, these nouns and pronouns apply to either sex.

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Table of Contents

Part I	Introduction	1
1001	Operational Design	1
1001a	Visualize	1
1001b	Describe	2
1001c	Direct	3
1002	Marine Corps Planning Process	3
1002a	Tenets	5
1002b	Steps	5
1003	Outputs from Mission Analysis	7
1003a	Mission Statement	7
1003b	Commander's Intent	8
1003c	Planning Guidance	8
1003d	Additional Outputs	9
Part II	Developing a Course of Action	11
2001	Understanding the Enemy	11
2002	Review the Approved Mission Statement	13
2003	Review Commander's Battlespace Area Evaluation and Guidance	13
2004	Display Friendly Forces	14
2005	Assess Relative Combat Power	15
2006	Review Centers of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities	17
2007	Review Essential Tasks	18
2008	Develop Initial Courses of Action	18
2008a	Getting Started	19
2008b	Battlefield Framework	20
2008c	Sequencing and Synchronization	23
2008d	Task-Organization	25
2008e	Control Measures	26
2009	Develop Supporting Concepts	26
2009a	Concept of Intelligence	27
2009b	Concept of Fires	27
2009c	Concept of Logistics	27
2010	Plan for Assessment	28
2011	Review the Courses of Action	28

Part III	Recording and Presenting a Course of Action	31
3001	Recording a Course of Action	31
3001a	Course of Action Narrative and Graphic	31
3001b	Synchronization Matrix	33
3001c	Task-Organization	34
3002	Course of Action Brief	34
Part IV	Preparation for Wargaming	37
4001	Select and/or Modify a Course of Action	37
4002	Develop Commander's Wargaming Guidance	37
4003	Develop Commander's Evaluation Criteria	38
4004	Additional Course of Action Development Outputs	38
Appendix A	Course of Action Development Quick Reference Checklist	41
Appendix B	Glossary	45
Appendix C	References	51
Figures		
1-1	Commander's Vision of Decisive and Shaping Actions and Sustainment	4
1-2	Marine Corps Planning Process Steps	6
2-1	Event Template	12
2-2	Sample Mission Statement	13
2-3	Sample Commander's Battlespace Area Evaluation and Guidance	14
2-4	Friendly Forces	15
2-5	Essential Tasks	18
2-6	Single-Battle	20
2-7	Battlefield Framework	21
2-8	Relative Combat Power at the Point of Contact	22
2-9	Synchronize Using Time Phase Lines	23
2-10	Synchronize the Warfighting Functions	24
2-11	Synchronize the Tasks and Purpose	24
2-12	Task-Organization	25
2-13	Course of Action Development Actions	29
3-1	Course of Action Graphic and Narrative	32

Tables

2-1	Example of Tangible Relative Combat Power Assessment	16
2-2	Example of Intangible Relative Combat Power Assessment	16
2-3	Example of Enemy Center of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities	17
2-4	Example of Friendly Center of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities	17
3-1	Synchronization Matrix	33

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Part I

Introduction

A course of action (COA) is a broadly stated, potential solution to an assigned mission. COAs are created during the COA development step of the Marine Corps Planning Process (MCP). A COA generates options for follow-on wargaming and comparison to satisfy the mission and the commander's intent and guidance. During COA development, planners use the commander's operational design and the output from the preceding mission analysis step of the MCP to develop courses of action.

1001. Operational Design

Commanders initiate the conduct of operations with a design that will guide their subordinate commanders and the staff in planning, execution, and assessment. This operational design is the commander's tool for translating the operational requirements of his superiors into the tactical guidance needed by his subordinate commanders and his staff. The commander uses his operational design to *visualize*, *describe*, and *direct* those actions necessary to achieve his desired end state and accomplish his assigned mission. It includes the purpose of the operation, what the commander wants to accomplish, and how he envisions achieving a decision.

Creation of the commander's operational design begins during the initial phases of mission analysis and guides the efforts of the operational planning team (OPT) as it examines the battlespace, the higher commander's intent, and assigned tasks. It continues to evolve and guide the staff as the OPT begins to develop the initial COAs. Refinement of the commander's operational design continues throughout the MCP.

a. Visualize

Visualization of the battlespace and the intended actions of both the enemy and the friendly force is a continuous process that requires the commander

to understand the current situation, broadly define his desired future situation, and determine the necessary actions to bring about the desired end state. During the *visualize* portion of operational design, the commander determines the aims and objectives of the operation. The commander should understand the situation and develop a clear picture of what is happening, how it got that way, and how it might further develop. The commander evaluates the mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available (METT-T) and any other information on the situation or potential taskings from higher headquarters. He develops an initial view of friendly actions, desired effects and their results, and determines the means to achieve those results.

Part of the commander's thinking should also include assuming the role of the enemy, considering what the enemy's best course of action may be, and deciding how to defeat it. This helps the commander develop increased situational awareness. The commander must also address possible outcomes and the new situations that will result from those possibilities. As the situation changes, so will the solution and the actions that derive from it.

As the commander considers these questions, he visualizes what he thinks he has to accomplish to achieve a decision and best support his higher commander's operation. This becomes the basis for his commander's battlespace area evaluation (CBAE) and guidance which he provides to his subordinate commanders and the planners in the describe portion of operational design.

b. Describe

The commander then articulates (describes) this visualization to his subordinate commanders and staff through his CBAE and guidance. By describing his visualization in this concise and compelling method, the commander focuses his staff on developing relevant, appropriate, and feasible COAs. Description begins when the commander articulates his vision through his CBAE and initial guidance. The commander then uses this visualization to focus and guide the staff as they conduct mission analysis to determine the mission of the force. It is the basis for all subsequent planning.

Mission analysis provides the commander and his staff with additional insight on the situation. Combined with any intelligence or operational

updates, mission analysis may prompt the commander to refine his vision, confirming or modifying his commander's intent or other initial guidance on decisive and shaping actions and sustainment.

Once the mission statement has been produced, the commander and staff are ready to further develop the operational design by describing in COA development how the command will achieve a decision through decisive and shaping actions. They also describe how these actions will be sustained.

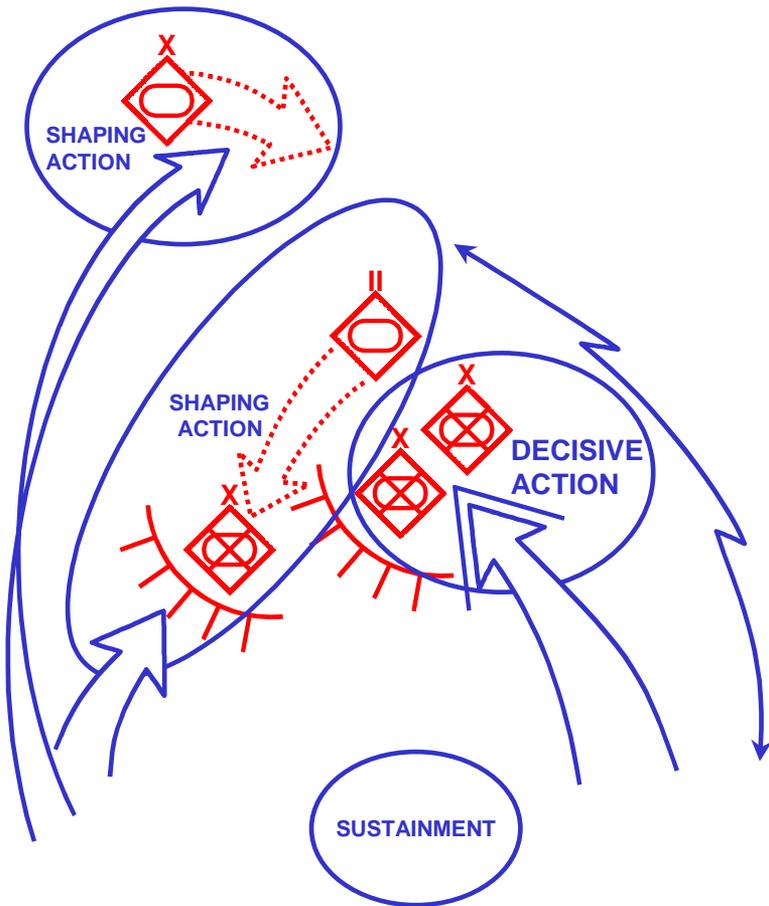
c. Direct

Finally, the commander directs the conduct of operations by issuing orders, assigning missions and priorities, making decisions, and adjusting his planned actions as necessary based on assessment. The commander and the staff determine the specifics of implementing the operational design through the operation plan or order. Armed with the description of how the commander intends to achieve a decision and obtain his desired end state, planners conduct integrated planning using the battlefield framework and the six warfighting functions to develop and war game COAs.

Once a COA is selected and the plan or order is completed, the direct portion of operational design concludes with the transition of the plan or order to the subordinate commander's 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. (See Figure 1-1 on page 4.)

1002. Marine Corps Planning Process

The MCPP supports the Marine Corps warfighting philosophy of maneuver warfare. Since planning is an essential and significant part of command and control, the MCPP 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 MCPP focuses on the mission and the threat. It capitalizes on the principle of unity of effort and helps establish and maintain tempo. The MCPP can be as detailed or as abbreviated as time, staff resources, experience, and the situation permit.



The purpose of this operation is to defeat the enemy's first tactical echelon. I see the enemy's tactical strength as his mobile reserves. I cannot let the enemy commit these reserves in a decisive manner. To support the higher commander's plan, I will have to keep the reserve armored brigade from committing against our higher commander's main effort or being used decisively against my forces. I want to shape the enemy by having him first commit his reserve armor battalion against my secondary effort. Simultaneously, by using lethal and non-lethal fires, I want to control the timeline for the commitment of the enemy's reserve armored brigade and, once committed against my forces, I want to limit its capability. These shaping actions will allow me to fix the enemy reserves while I mass my combat power at the time and place of my choosing. I want to exploit my tactical center of gravity—my superior tactical mobility—and combined arms. I want to avoid the enemy's fixed defenses and focus my decisive action against the enemy's flank to defeat the two isolated mechanized battalions. Once defeated, I want to rapidly focus on the defeat of his remaining mechanized and reserve units that were fixed by my supporting effort. I want a viable security force protecting the flank of my main effort. My sustainment must be task-organized and positioned forward to allow the force to maintain operational momentum.

Figure 1-1. Commander's vision of decisive and shaping actions and sustainment.

a. Tenets

MCWP 5-1, *Marine Corps Planning Process*, identifies three tenets—

- **Top-Down Planning.** Planning is a fundamental responsibility of command. Commanders must not merely participate in planning but must drive the process. The commander's intent and guidance are central to planning. He uses planning to gain knowledge and situational awareness to support his decisionmaking process. His plan, communicated in oral, graphic, or written format, translates his guidance into a design for actions by his subordinate commanders that will accomplish the mission.
- **Single-Battle Concept.** The single-battle concept allows the commander to effectively focus the efforts of all the elements of the force to accomplish his mission. A commander must always view the battlespace as an indivisible entity, for operations or events in one part of the battlespace may have profound and often unintended effects on other areas and events. While the battlespace may be conceptually divided into deep, close, and rear to assist planning and decentralized execution, the commander's intent ensures unity of effort by fighting a single-battle.
- **Integrated Planning.** Integrated planning provides the commander and his staff a disciplined approach to planning that is systematic, coordinated, and thorough. It is based on the warfighting functions. Integrated planning helps planners 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 the warfighting functions in the planning process.

b. Steps

The MCPP establishes procedures for analyzing a mission, developing and wargaming COAs against the threat, comparing friendly COAs against the commander's criteria and each other, selecting a COA, and preparing an operation order (OPORD) for execution. It organizes planning into six manageable and logical steps. (See Figure 1-2 on page 6.)

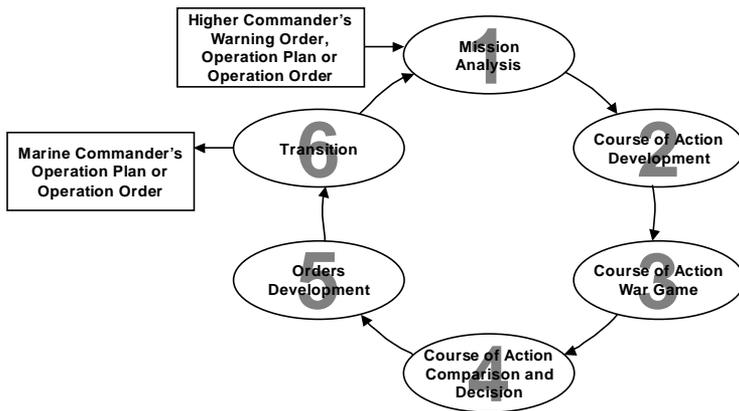


Figure 1-2. Marine Corps Planning Process steps.

The MCPP provides the commander and his staff a means to organize their planning activities and transmit the plan to subordinate commanders. It establishes procedures for analyzing a mission, developing and analyzing COAs against the threat, comparing friendly COAs against each other, selecting a COA, and preparing an operation order for execution. Each step of the MCPP consists of inputs, a process, and outputs.

- **Mission Analysis.** Mission analysis is the first step in planning, and it drives the MCPP. Its purpose is to review and analyze orders, guidance, and other information provided by higher headquarters and to produce a unit mission statement.
- **Course of Action Development.** During COA development, planners use the commander’s operational design and products created during mission analysis to develop initial COAs. 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. This step of the MCPP is the focus of this pamphlet and is considered in greater detail in Part II.
- **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 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.

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.

1003. Outputs from Mission Analysis

Mission analysis provides the commander and his staff with additional insight on the situation. Combined with any intelligence or operational updates, mission analysis may prompt the commander to refine his vision, confirming or modifying his commander's intent or other initial guidance on decisive and shaping actions and sustainment. The required outputs from mission analysis are the mission statement, commander's intent, and commander's planning guidance. These products will guide the OPT as it develops COAs.

a. Mission Statement

The purpose and essential tasks are the foundation for mission statement development. Planners should determine whether or not the purpose and essential tasks are still valid before drafting the mission statement. A properly constructed mission statement answers the questions—

- **Who?** The forces that will conduct the operation.
- **What?** The type of operation.
- **When?** The time the operation will start and its possible duration.
- **Where?** The location of the operation.
- **Why?** The purpose of the operation.

The who, what, when, and where are derived from the essential tasks. The why is derived from the purpose of the operation.

b. 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 end state or conditions, that when satisfied, accomplish the purpose. Commander's intent helps subordinates understand the larger context of their actions and guides them in absence of orders. It allows subordinates to exercise judgment and initiative when the unforeseen occurs—in a way that is consistent with higher commanders' aims. This freedom of action—within the broad guidance of the commander's intent—creates tempo during planning and execution. Higher and subordinate commander's 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 (OPLAN) or OPORD.

c. Planning Guidance

Planning guidance describes how the commander visualizes the operation unfolding. Based on his mission and intelligence preparation of the battlespace (IPB) the commander will know what his force needs to do to achieve a decision—what the decisive action will be, what shaping is required to set the conditions for decisive action, and what sustainment is needed to accomplish the mission.

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 the warfighting functions, types of operations, forms of maneuver, etc. Planning guidance should address the commander's vision of decisive and shaping actions to assist the staff to determine the

main effort, phases of the operation, location of critical events, and other aspects of the operation the commander believes is important to COA development. Guidance may include (but is not limited to)—

- Threat vulnerabilities.
- Risk.
- Any further restraints/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.

d. Additional Outputs

Additional products may be produced during mission analysis and can include—

- Updated IPB products (enemy COAs, modified combined obstacle overlay, doctrinal and situational templates, and high- value targets).
- Specified tasks.
- Implied tasks.
- Essential tasks.
- Warning order.
- Restraints/ constraints.
- Assumptions.
- Resource shortfalls.
- Subject matter experts shortfalls.
- Center of gravity (COG) analysis (friendly and enemy).
- Approved commander's critical information requirements (CCIRs).
- Requests for information.
- Initial staff estimates.

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Part II

Developing a Course of Action

COA development is the most challenging step in the planning process. The OPT must use its collective experience and judgment to creatively develop different ways to accomplish the mission and achieve the desired end state. During COA development, the OPT uses the battlefield framework to translate the commander's operational design and planning guidance into initial COAs.

2001. Understanding the Enemy

COA development starts when the entire OPT reviews the existing IPB products made by the G-2. During mission analysis, the G-2 developed an enemy database and began production of IPB products. These products should include a detailed analysis of the terrain and environment, concentrating on the opportunities and limitations imposed on the enemy by terrain, weather, and hydrography.

The G-2 also analyzed the enemy's weapon systems, capabilities, doctrine, and intent, developing a list of high-value targets (HVTs) and likely enemy COAs. These enemy COAs will be developed to the greatest extent possible, depicting what the enemy will do and its likely reactions to friendly operations. An event template is the best way to graphically depict enemy COAs. (See Figure 2-1 on page 12.)

A Red Cell is also convened to further develop the enemy COAs in the context of the OPT's plan. The Red Cell will provide the OPT with a thinking enemy that it can consult during COA development and that will oppose the COA during the war game.

As necessary, planners with special expertise may contribute their individual analysis and modify the IPB products accordingly. This process allows the OPT to focus on the battlespace in terms of the environment and

the threat. It helps the planners determine how the enemy will react to proposed friendly COAs, determine the purpose of enemy actions and probable COAs, as well as what friendly operations the terrain and infrastructure will allow.

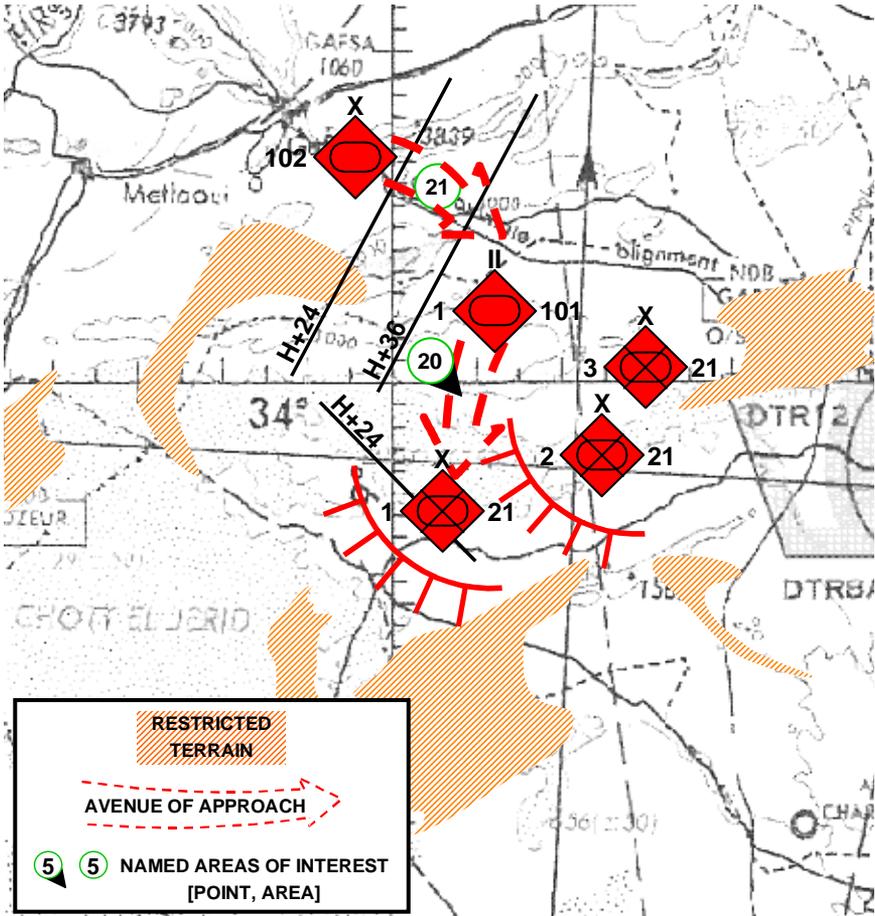


Figure 2-1. Event template.

COA development begins with IPB; integrating IPB products and focusing on the enemy’s potential COAs keeps the planners focused on the enemy. As friendly COAs are developed, they should be based on the enemy’s capabilities and probable intent. IPB is dynamic and continuous; even subtle

alterations to the enemy’s potential COAs must be briefed to the OPT in a timely manner as these changes may require adjustments to the friendly COA(s).

2002. Review the Approved Mission Statement

The OPT should review once again the mission statement it developed and the commander approved during mission analysis. All OPT members should understand the mission and the tasks that must be accomplished to achieve mission success. Following this review or upon the receipt of new information or taskings from higher headquarters, if the mission statement appears inadequate or outdated then the OPT should recommend appropriate changes. (See Figure 2-2.)

On order, I MEF attacks in zone to defeat the first tactical echelon in order to prevent the first tactical echelon from attacking the joint task force main effort’s eastern flank.

Figure 2-2. Sample mission statement.

2003. Review Commander’s Battlespace Area Evaluation and Guidance

The commander provided his CBAE as part of his operational design at the beginning of planning. As a result of the mission analysis process, based on the information that the OPT provided, the commander may refine his CBAE. The commander also gave the OPT his planning guidance. This guidance will be linked to the commander’s operational design—how he visualizes the operation unfolding. Based on the IPB, the commander knows what his force needs to do to achieve a decision—decisive action, what shaping is required to set the conditions for decisive action, and what sustainment is needed to accomplish the mission. The commander’s intent must be captured in the OPT’s planning efforts. (See Figure 2-3 on page 14.)

COMMANDER'S INTENT: The purpose of this operation is to prevent the first tactical echelon from attacking the joint task force main effort's eastern flank.

METHOD: To support the higher commander's plan, we have to keep the reserve armored brigade from committing against our higher commander's main effort or being used decisively against my forces. I want to shape the enemy by having him first commit his reserve armor battalion against my supporting effort. Simultaneously, by using lethal and non-lethal fires, I want to control the timeline for the commitment of the enemy's reserve armored brigade and, once committed against my forces, I want to limit its capability. These shaping actions will allow me to fix the enemy reserves while I mass my combat power at the time and place of my choosing. I want to avoid the enemy's fixed defenses to defeat the mechanized brigades and focus my decisive action against the reserve armored brigade. Once defeated, I want to rapidly focus on the defeat of his remaining mechanized and reserve units that were fixed by my supporting effort.

END STATE: Defeat the enemy's first tactical echelon and have the 102nd Armored Brigade commit to reinforce first tactical echelon. Once committed I want them defeated.

CENTER OF GRAVITY: I see the enemy's tactical strength as his mobile reserves. I cannot let the enemy commit these reserves in a decisive manner. I want to exploit my center of gravity—my superior tactical mobility—and combined arms.

BATTLESPACE: I see the enemy maximizing the use of obstacles and terrain to fix our forces, then exploit with fires and mobile counterattack forces. Maximize the use of our aviation as well as JFACC assets in our deep operations. I am concerned about enemy units penetrating my eastern flank as well as reinforcing from the north. Ensure that we maximize the use of theater collection assets to identify and monitor these enemy units.

COMMANDER'S CRITICAL INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS: Indications of 102nd Armored Brigade moving south prior to H-Hr. Indications of enemy armor battalions (and higher) moving into our AO.

GUIDANCE: I want a viable security force covering the flank of my main effort. My sustainment must be task organized and positioned forward to allow the force to maintain operational momentum. Consider an attack on the flank and an envelopment. I want a regimental-size reserve that is capable of defeating the 102nd Armored Brigade.

Figure 2-3. Sample commander's battlespace area evaluation and guidance.

2004. Display Friendly Forces

Based on the IPB done by the G-2 and Red Cell—and the CBAE and guidance provided by the commander—the OPT is familiar with the enemy force, and is now ready to examine the friendly force and its capabilities. Beginning with a review of the friendly situation, the OPT should graphically display friendly units to allow the planners to see the current and projected locations of friendly forces. The location of friendly forces and any relocation or support required because of their current disposition will impact the development of the COA. (See Figure 2-4.)

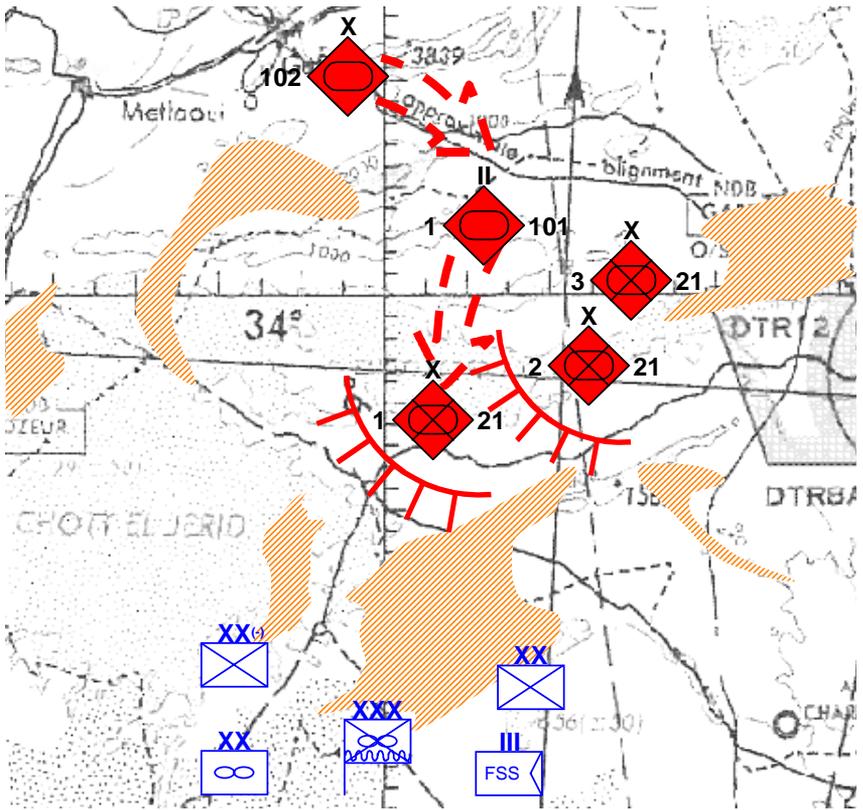


Figure 2-4. Friendly forces.

2005. Assess Relative Combat Power

A relative combat power assessment provides planners with an understanding of friendly and threat force strengths, weaknesses and capabilities relative to each other. While force ratios are important, the numerical comparison of personnel and major end items is just one indicator that must be balanced with other factors, such as weather, morale, level of training, and cultural orientation. The assessment of relative combat power helps the commander and the staff size the force required for the mission, resource the force and identify risks. For more information on assessing relative combat power during planning see MSTP Pamphlet 2-0.2, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace*.

The goal of relative combat power assessment is to identify those threat weaknesses that can be exploited through asymmetric application of friendly strengths (COGs). Conversely, the commander seeks to protect friendly weaknesses from threat actions. Relative combat power assessment helps to determine:

- What type of operation is possible.
- How and where the enemy may be vulnerable.
- What additional resources may be required.
- How to allocate existing resources.

The following tables are examples of relative combat power assessment.

	MEF	Enemy	Remarks
EQUIPMENT			
Tanks	116	143	+ Quality/Readiness/Systems
Artillery	108	72	+ Accuracy/Ability to mass/Ammunition
240mm Mortars	0	24	- Quantity
Armored Infantry Vehicles	504	144	+ Quality/Readiness/Systems
UNITS			
Tank Battalions	3	3	+ Quality/Readiness/Systems
Infantry Battalions	18	9	+ Quality/Readiness/Mobility/Quantity
AIRCRAFT			
F/A-18	36	–	
AV-8B	32	–	
AH-1W	36	–	

Table 2-1. Example of tangible relative combat power assessment.

Factor	Rating	Remarks
Leadership	Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior officers well educated and formally trained in the operational art. • Experienced junior officers and noncommissioned officers.
Morale	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent cohesion and esprit. • Well equipped. • Troops have demonstrated discipline in recent intensity engagements.
Training	Marginal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually fights as independent brigades. Not experienced in conducting and controlling multi-brigade combined arms operations.

Table 2-2. Example of intangible relative combat power assessment.

Used together, IPB and relative combat power allows planners to develop COAs with a greater likelihood of success. They help the commander and the OPT synchronize the MAGTF’s actions to maximize combat power at critical points in time and space during the single-battle. The OPT uses IPB products (such as terrain analysis and enemy COAs) and relative combat power assessments to anticipate engagements. Integrating these tools during COA development gives the OPT a better understanding of the battlefield framework. This allows them to organize the force into the main effort, reserves, and security, as well as assign tasks to supporting efforts, determine forms of maneuver, and plan rear area actions.

2006. Review Centers of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities

The commander and the staff review and refine their COG analysis (begun during mission analysis) based on updated intelligence and IPB products, initial staff estimates, and input from the Red Cell. The refined enemy and friendly COGs and critical vulnerabilities are used in the development of the initial COAs. (See Tables 2-3 and 2-4.)

Center of Gravity	Critical Vulnerabilities
Mobile reserves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Command and control. ● Air defense. ● Logistics. ● Wireless communications system.

Table 2-3. Example of enemy center of gravity and critical vulnerabilities.

Center of Gravity	Critical Vulnerabilities
Combined arms and tactical mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rear area (heavily dependent on fuel; seaports of debarkation vulnerable). ● Command and control.

Table 2-4. Example of friendly center of gravity and critical vulnerabilities.

The COG analysis helps the commander orient on the enemy and compare his strengths and weakness to those of the enemy. The OPT takes the commander’s operational design, reviews it, and focuses on the friendly and enemy COGs, critical vulnerabilities, and HVTs and high-payoff targets (HPTs). Friendly COGs are used to attack or exploit enemy critical vulnerabilities—not enemy COGs.

By looking at friendly COGs and vulnerabilities, the OPT understands the capabilities of their own force, potential main efforts to be applied in decisive actions against the enemy, and those critical vulnerabilities that will require protection. Protection resource limitations will probably mean that the OPT cannot plan to protect each asset individually, but rather develops overlapping protection techniques. The strength of one asset or capability may provide protection from the weakness of another.

2007. Review Essential Tasks

Regardless of the eventual COA, the OPT should plan to accomplish the higher commander’s intent by understanding its essential task(s) and purpose and the intended contribution to the higher commander’s mission success. The OPT can ensure that all the COAs developed will fulfill the command mission and the purpose of the operation by conducting a review of all essential tasks developed during mission analysis. (See Figure 2-5.)

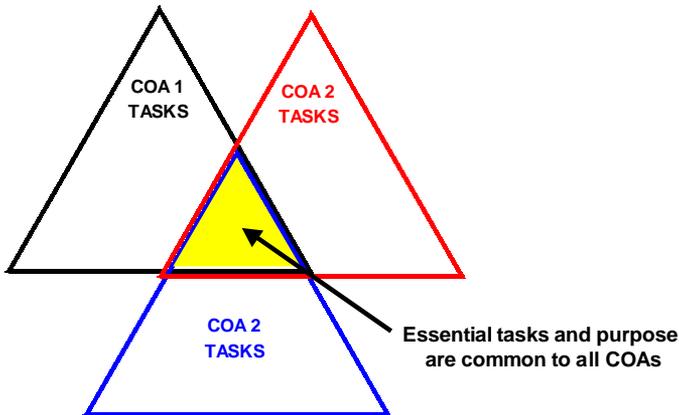


Figure 2-5. Essential tasks.

2008. Develop Initial Courses of Action

Once the OPT has completed its review of the friendly and enemy forces and essential tasks, it is ready to begin to create the initial COAs. Using the technique of battlefield framework; timing, sequencing, and synchronization; task-organization; and control measures is a useful method to turn the commander's visualization into a COA. See Appendix A for a COA development quick reference checklist to assist the OPT through this step of the MCPP.

a. Getting Started

Friendly and enemy forces are arrayed (two-levels down) for both current and projected locations. At the MEF-level, the OPT displays regiments, groups, brigades, independent battalions, and specialized units. At the major subordinate commands, the OPT displays battalions and independent or specialized companies. The OPT arrays friendly and enemy forces on militarily-usable terrain as depicted by the modified combined obstacle overlay. This allows the OPT to—

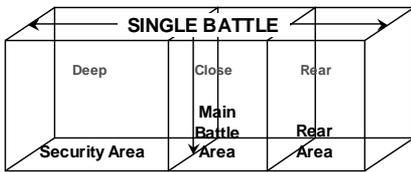
- Clearly picture the forces necessary to accomplish assigned tasks.
- Determine ratios of friendly to enemy units.
- Determine a proposed forward edge of the battle area or line of departure.
- Consider a deception plan.

The OPT uses the force lay-down as a method to translate the commander's intent into types of operations and forms of maneuver. In this manner, the OPT can more easily determine where and when the commander's operational design envisions decisive action occurring. By arranging friendly and enemy forces and taking into account the modified combined obstacle overlay, the OPT can answer a key question in the COA development process: What is possible against this enemy? The OPT should decide when and where the main effort will fight and under what conditions by looking at the type of operation and which form of maneuver can best accomplish the mission. See MCDP 1, *Marine Corps Operations*, for information on types of operations and forms of maneuver.

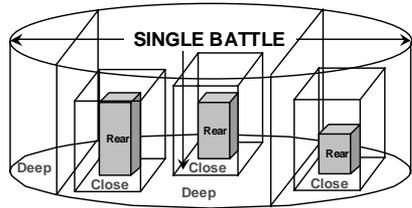
b. Battlefield Framework

The battlefield framework is a technique of breaking the battlespace down into manageable aspects. The first way to examine the battlespace is spatial; the second is by task. This simple technique allows the OPT to focus on the single-battle.

The MAGTF conducts distinctly different operations in the deep, close, and rear areas of the battlespace. These operations are not necessarily restricted to, or characterized by distance or location; rather, they are actions that must be accomplished for other functions to be effective. The OPT should conceptually look at these operations and ensure they are synchronized as a single-battle. (See Figure 2-6.)



Linear



Non-Linear

Figure 2-6. Single-battle.

The second aspect of the battlefield framework is task-oriented (main effort, reserve, and security). (See Figure 2-7 on page 21.)

For the main effort to succeed, it will often need the help of supporting attacks to maneuver to a position of advantage. The COA may include supporting attacks and the forces required to conduct the supporting attacks. Supporting efforts allow the commander to shape the battlespace. The commander's operational design will be the starting point in the development of the main and supporting efforts.

Once this is completed, the OPT returns to the combat power assessment to determine what the friendly force looks like in relation to the enemy. This helps the OPT to properly resource and task-organize the force. The OPT looks two levels down to allow for proper task-organization and allocation of resources. A combat power assessment may be conducted for the COAs main and any supporting effort (see Figure 2-8).

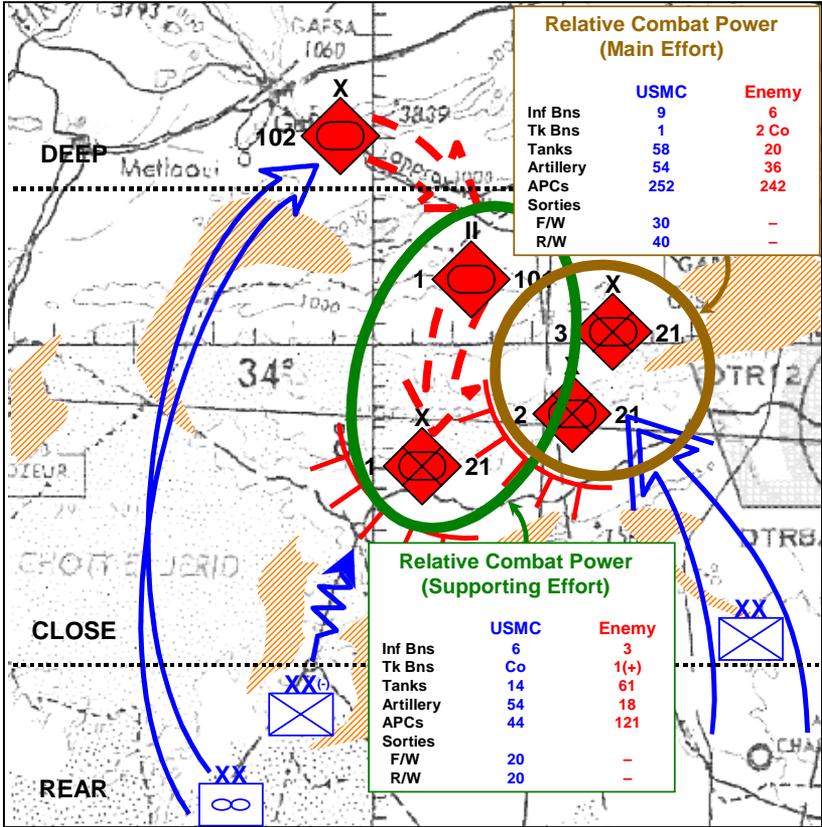


Figure 2-8. Relative combat power at the point of contact.

The reserve must have mobility equal to or greater than the most dangerous enemy ground threat and it must be able to fight the most dangerous enemy ground threat. The reserve is used to exploit success or to react to unforeseen actions by the enemy. Not only should the OPT designate a reserve but it should envision how the reserve will be employed and under what conditions in time and space.

The last task-oriented element is security. Security operations protect the force from surprise and reduce unknowns in any situation.

c. Synchronization

Once the OPT has developed a COA, it should see how it can best synchronize (arrange in terms of time, space, and purpose) the actions of all the elements of the force. The OPT should determine the anticipated duration of engagements, when and under what conditions the main effort may change, when the main effort is committed, and when success should be exploited with the reserves. One method of synchronizing actions is the use of time phase lines that depict when enemy and friendly critical actions will occur. Realistic rates of movement allow for the effects of weather and terrain should be used. (See Figure 2-9.)

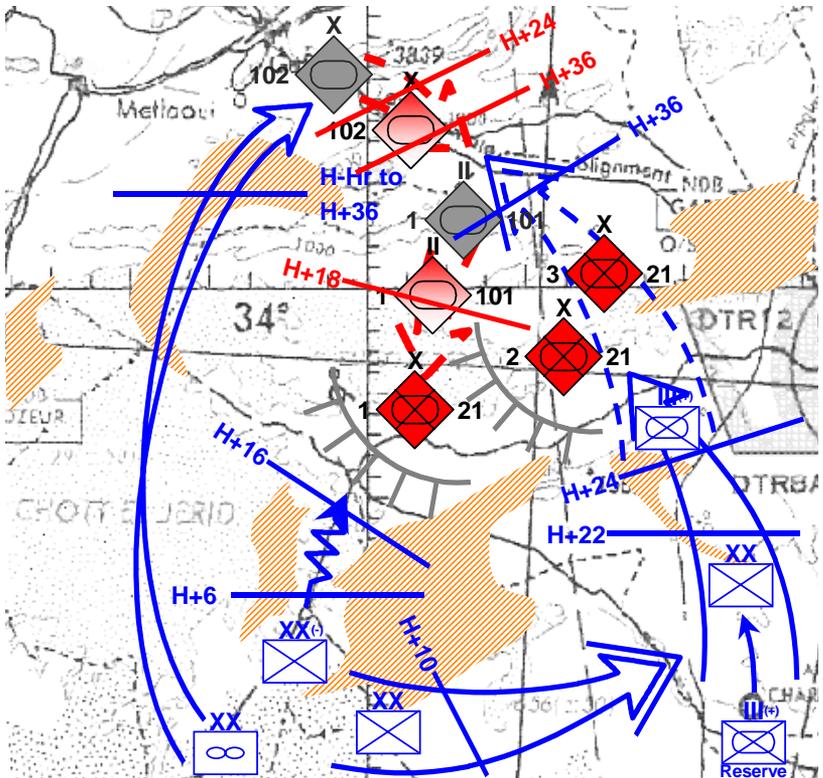


Figure 2-9. Synchronize using time phase lines.

The OPT depicts the synchronization of actions across time and space in the COA graphic and in the narrative. This effort is recorded on the synchronization matrix. The synchronization matrix is started during COA development and refined during the war game.

In addition, the OPT should synchronize across the warfighting functions (command and control, maneuver, fires, intelligence, logistics, and force protection). Developing the synchronization matrix during COA development allows the OPT to identify and record anticipated friendly and enemy actions across the warfighting functions. The OPT also ensures that the major subordinate commands and higher headquarters plans are mutually supporting with those of the MAGTF. (See Figure 2-10.)

JFC	MANEUVER	FIRES	INTEL	FORCE PROTECTION	COMMAND & CONTROL	LOGISTICS
JFLCC	MANEUVER	FIRES	INTEL	FORCE PROTECTION	COMMAND & CONTROL	LOGISTICS
MEF	MANEUVER	FIRES	INTEL	FORCE PROTECTION	COMMAND & CONTROL	LOGISTICS
MSCs	MANEUVER	FIRES	INTEL	FORCE PROTECTION	COMMAND & CONTROL	LOGISTICS

Figure 2-10. Synchronize the warfighting functions.

One way to synchronize actions is by the tasks and purpose assigned to subordinate units; these tasks should be reviewed to ensure they support the overall mission statement. (See Figure 2-11.)

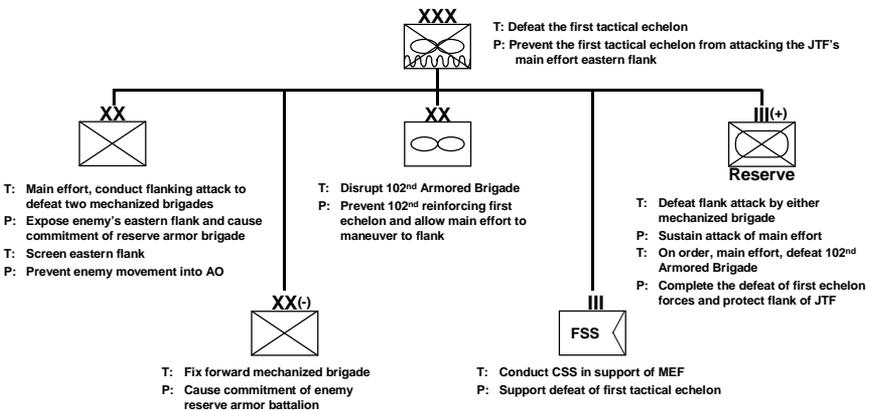


Figure 2-11. Synchronize the tasks and purpose.

The task and purpose of each unit in the force should “nest” with the other units, as well as with the higher headquarters’ task and purpose. It is through this synchronization process that the OPT ensures that the entire command is working to achieve the desired end state.

d. Task-Organization

The OPT should develop a detailed task-organization (two-levels down) to execute the COA. This process begins with the overall relative combat power assessment conducted earlier. The commander and the OPT determine appropriate command relationships to include tactical mission assignments and support relationships. They look in detail at the main and supporting efforts, the reserve, and security forces. They compare each force to the enemy forces they will face to identify risk and potential for asymmetric use of the force. This ensures that each force is constructed, sized, and supported according to its assigned tasks. (See Figure 2-12.)

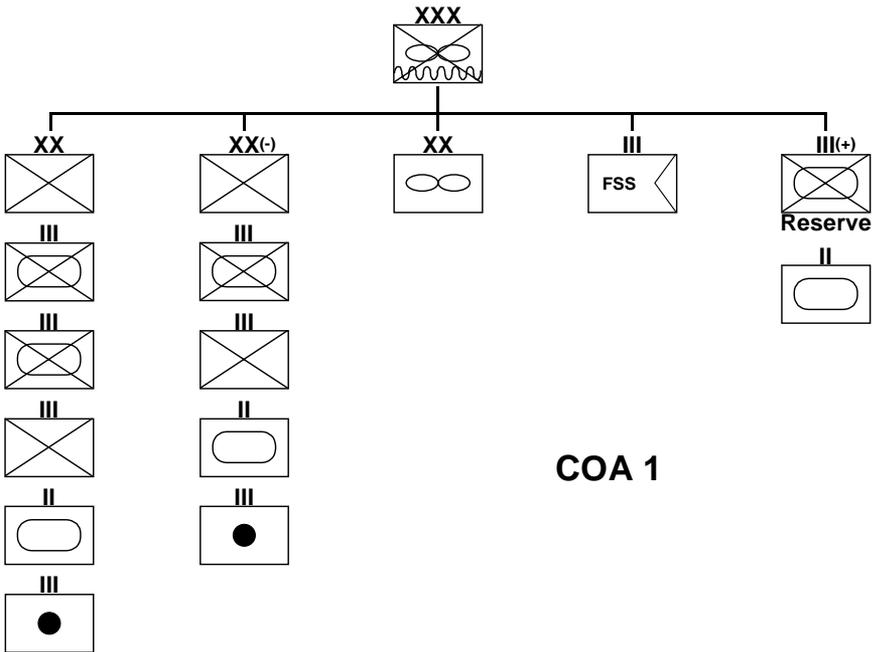


Figure 2-12. Task-organization.

e. Control Measures

The OPT now determines the control measures that can be used to best command and control the single-battle. Control measures assigned to the major subordinate commands should ensure they have adequate battlespace and flexibility to accomplish their assigned tasks and protect their force from enemy action. These control measures will:

- Provide coordination.
- Facilitate operations and tempo.
- Delineate responsibilities.
- Decentralized execution.
- Impose restrictions.

Control measures adopted by the OPT can include:

- Unit boundaries, one level down.
- Time of attack.
- Axis of advance.
- Direction of attack.
- Limit of advance.
- Fire support coordinating measures.
- Other control measures to include: phase lines, ground/air axis, assembly areas, and designation of main effort, supporting effort, reserve, and location of command posts. (For a more detailed listing of control measures, see Appendix A.)

2009. Develop Supporting Concepts

A scheme of maneuver is not enough for a complete COA. To fully develop a COA, the OPT should begin creating supporting concepts. These supporting concepts also allow the OPT to synchronize all the essential warfighting functions of the force within the battlespace. While not all inclusive, (additional supporting concepts such as information operations may be required, depending on the COA), concepts should be developed for fires, intelligence, and logistics. The development of supporting concepts by the OPT will ensure they are tied to the developing COA.

a. Concept of Intelligence

The concept of intelligence is more than IPB. It should indicate how intelligence will be collected, processed, analyzed, and disseminated to support the COA, other supporting concepts, and the major subordinate commands. The concept should look at the collection assets and how they will be tasked and allocated to answer the CCIRs, detect HPTs, and confirm or deny enemy activity and COAs at designated named areas of interest (NAIs). The OPT concept should be of sufficient detail that the G-2 can create the detailed collection, reconnaissance, surveillance and counterreconnaissance, and target intelligence plans that will be integrated with and support the COA.

b. Concept of Fires

The development of the concept of fires is an integrated effort by the entire OPT, not simply the fires representatives working in isolation after a scheme of maneuver has been developed. The OPT uses the battlefield framework to develop targeting objectives and priorities of fire. They apply the targeting process (decide, detect, deliver, and assess) to ensure that fires are synchronized with both maneuver and intelligence plans. Focusing on specific enemy units and capabilities, the OPT reviews the HVTs and converts appropriate targets into HPTs that will support the COA. NAIs and targeted areas of interest (TAIs) are developed and intelligence collection assets requested to detect the desired HPTs. The OPT should determine the task, purpose, method (of delivery) and effects of required fires. The desired effects (disrupt, delay, limit, divert) of fires on the enemy will be determined in wargaming.

c. Concept of Logistics

No COA is complete without a plan to sustain it properly. The concept for logistics developed by the OPT should focus on capabilities and capacities vs. requirements. The OPT may have to consider shifting of priorities, priority of work, support relationships, how units are organized, and whether to displace sustainment forward prior to going into the attack. It is better to plan an operational pause than have it imposed unexpectedly on the force.

2010. Plan for Assessment

Assessment answers the commander's question, "*How are we doing?*" It is the continuous appraisal of military operations to determine progress toward established goals. Assessment helps the commander identify success or failure, determine the extent to which required conditions have been met for follow-on actions, and recognize whether a particular end state has been reached. More specifically, assessment should enable the commander to estimate the overall progress of an operation as it unfolds in the battlespace. By estimating this progress, the commander can make informed decisions for future actions.

The COAs developed by the OPT should identify the tasks, associated conditions, and measures of effectiveness (MOEs) that are required to complete the essential tasks. Later, the OPT uses these tasks (actions), conditions, and MOEs to develop Annex X, Execution Checklist.

By properly articulating tasks, conditions, and MOEs, planners establish the "nuts and bolts" for assessing operations in execution. This assessment plan, ultimately captured in the operation order, must clearly identify the required tasks, conditions, and MOEs so that success or failure can be readily recognized throughout the force. It should also delineate the procedures for managing information so that the commander receives the information he needs for decisionmaking.

2011. Review the Courses of Action

Once the OPT finishes the initial COAs, it should conduct a final review of them to ensure they comply with the following criteria—

- **Suitability.** Does the COA accomplish the purpose and tasks and 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 which justifies the cost?
- **Distinguishability.** Does the COA differ significantly from other COAs (either in forms of maneuver, choice of main effort, or sequencing of events)?

- **Completeness.** Does the COA include all tasks to be accomplished and describe a complete mission (main and supporting efforts, reserve, and associated risks)?

In addition, planners should also consider any specific criteria provided by the commander's planning guidance.

If the commander has not seen the COAs previously, he should review the initial COAs to see if they meet his commander's intent. He will normally conduct this review informally and as rapidly as possible. This ensures that valuable time is not spent completing COAs that will not be approved. The commander may direct modifications to the initial COAs or that additional COAs be developed.

In summary, COA development consists of the following actions:

- Understand the enemy.
 - Review enemy laydown.
 - Use IPB products.
 - Use the Red Cell.
- Review the approved mission statement.
- Review CBAE and guidance using his operational design.
- Display friendly forces.
- Assess relative combat power.
- Review COGs and critical vulnerabilities.
- Review essential tasks.
- Develop initial COAs based on the commander's visualization.
 - Battlefield framework (spatially and task-oriented).
 - Timing, sequencing, and synchronization.
 - Task-organization.
 - Control measures.
- Develop supporting concepts.
 - Concept of intelligence.
 - Concept of fires.
 - Concept of logistics.
- Plan for assessment.
- Review the COAs.

Figure 2-13. Course of action development actions.

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Part III

Recording and Presenting a Course of Action

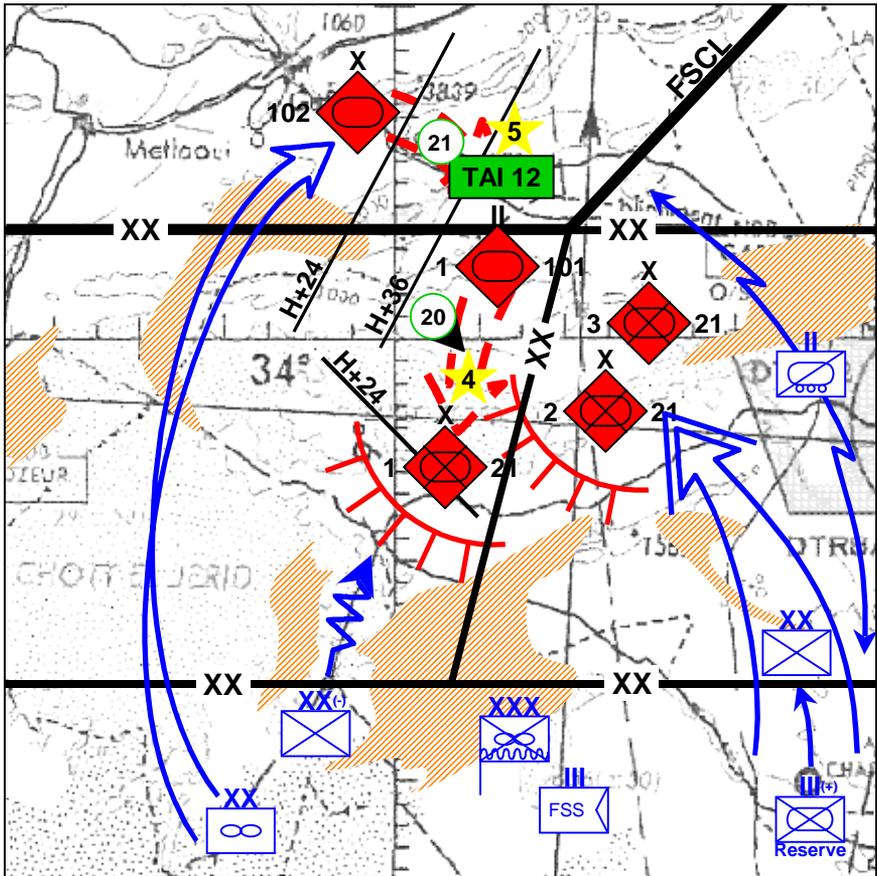
Developed COAs, along with updated facts, assumptions, and risks are briefed to the commander for approval for wargaming. Each COA is briefed separately, includes the recording tools used to capture the COA, and is sufficiently developed to withstand intense scrutiny. Although the COA brief is tailored to the needs of the commander and the amount of time available, standardized briefing formats help focus the brief and prevent omission of essential information.

3001. Recording a Course of Action

The final step in the development of a COA is the creation of a complete COA graphic and narrative and supporting synchronization matrix. These three planning products should depict all the units, tactical tasks, and supporting control measures and discuss the COA in terms of the single-battle and the battlefield framework.

a. Course of Action Narrative and Graphic

The COA narrative and graphic is a written description and visual depiction of a COA. They show how the unit will accomplish the mission and explain the scheme of maneuver. They should describe how the COA achieves the commander's vision of decisive actions, shaping actions, and sustainment through the battlefield framework of deep, close, and rear operations. The COA narrative and graphic should include the subordinate unit tasks and purpose with the end state. It should describe the task organization, type of operation, form of maneuver, array of forces, how supporting efforts relate to the main effort (to include a reserve if designated), priority of fires, and control measures. The COA narrative and graphic, when approved by the commander, forms the basis for the concept of operations and operations overlay in the OPLAN or OPORD. (See Figure 3-1 on page 32.)



On order the MEF attacks in zone to defeat the first echelon. **Close Operations**—In the west, a division (-) conducts a supporting attack to fix the 1-21st Mechanized Brigade and cause the commitment of the 1-101st Armor Battalion, the enemy reserve. To support this attack our deception effort will focus on portraying this supporting attack as our main effort. Upon the commitment of the 1-101st Armor Battalion, our *main effort*, consisting of a division, conducts a flanking attack through the gap between the 2-21st and 3-21st Mechanized Infantry Brigades and defeats the 1-101st Armor Battalion. Fires will disrupt any movement of the 2-21st and 3-21st Mechanized Infantry Brigades and the enemy division's command and control. The *reserve* is a mechanized regiment (rein) that follows the main effort and is prepared to defeat a flank counterattack from either the 2-21st or 3-21st Mechanized Infantry Brigade. If not committed against the two mechanized brigades, on order it will defeat the enemy operational reserve, the 102nd Armored Brigade. **Deep Operations**—The wing disrupts the 102nd Armored Brigade from reinforcing the first echelon. **Rear Operations**—FSSG conducts CSS to support the main effort and conducts refuel on the move to maintain operational momentum. **Security**—Division screens the eastern flank.

Figure 3-1. Course of action graphic and narrative.

b. Synchronization Matrix

A synchronization matrix indicates when critical functions occur over time and their relationship with other events. It is used during COA development and the COA war game and focuses capabilities and asset allocation in relation to the enemy (selected COA), time and space, and events. It helps ensure that actions in time and space are focused on accomplishing the mission. The synchronization matrix displays the plan's cohesion and provides details not found in either the graphic or the narrative. It can be used as a starting point for initial actions during the wargaming step of the MCPP. It helps the war game process follow the COA exactly as it was developed by the OPT. (See Table 3-1.)

TIME/EVENT		Pre D-Day	D-Day – D+ /Stage A	D+ /Stage B
Enemy Action		Enemy establishes defenses	Enemy defends in place; 1-101 st Armor Battalion reserve commits	2-21 st and/or 3-21 st Mechanized Infantry Brigade counterattacks
Decision Point			DP#4 – Main effort conducts flank attack on 2-21 st and 3-21 st Mechanized Infantry Brigades	DP#5 – If no counterattack, reserve attacks 102 nd Armored Brigade
MANEUVER	Deep		ACE attacks 102 nd Armored Brigade	ACE continues attack on 102 nd Armored Brigade
	Close		Div(-) attacks 1-21 st Mechanized Infantry Brigade	Main effort continues attack on 2-21 st and 3-21 st Mechanized Infantry Brigades
	Reserve			Be prepared to defeat counterattack; on order defeat 102 nd Armored Brigade
	Rear			
	Mobility			Main supply routes for support to main effort
	Counter mobility			
INTELLIGENCE			Reconnaissance in zone: TAI#12 and NAI#21	
	NAI/TAI	DP#4 and 5 active	NAI#20 – 1-101 st Armor Battalion moving	
FIRES	Lethal		ACE fix 102 nd Armored Brigade, neutralize 301 st /302 nd Arty Battalion	Attack 102 nd Armored Brigade and artillery
	Nonlethal			
LOGISTICS	Sustainment	Establish supply stockages	MCSSDs with regiments; establish FARP per order	
	Transport	Conduct route reconnaissance		
COMMAND AND CONTROL			Prepare to shift main effort	
	IW/C2W	Build enemy EOB NODAL analysis	Attack command and control nodes between brigades	Attack battalion-level and above command and control
FORCE PROTECTION		Designated TCF	Counterreconnaissance in zone; counterterrorism	Screen eastern flank
	NBC/Air Defense		TMD assets forward	

Table 3-1. Synchronization matrix.

c. Task-Organization

The task-organization captures how the OPT intends to structure and resource the force to accomplish the COA. It identifies the organization for combat of the command two levels down. The organization for combat is how the commander will group organic and attached combat, combat support, and combat service support elements for employment with other supporting forces to support his concept of operations, as well as the command relationships to most effectively control his organization. The OPT considers the mission statement, tasks assigned to subordinate units, terrain and enemy strength in each subordinate unit area, and the amount of combat power, including maneuver and fire support units, available to each commander.

3002. 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 the commander and subsequent COA wargaming. Although the COA brief 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 brief 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.

Each COA is briefed to the commander and his primary staff separately. They should be discussed in enough detail to answer the five W's (who, what, when, where, why) and as much of the how as is necessary to ensure coordination and understanding), and provide a basic understanding of each COA's approach to accomplishing the assigned mission.

Although the COA development backbrief will be tailored to suit the needs of the commander, the following format is a starting point to ensure the OPT does not omit essential information. The brief focuses on the information needs of the commander and begins by reviewing the knowns and unknowns that have been carried forward to this point in the MCPP. Briefing items can include:

- Updated intelligence estimate.
- Enemy's most likely and most dangerous COAs.
- Mission statement.
- Higher commander's intent.
- Own commander's intent.
- Commander's planning guidance.
- Relative combat power assessment.
- COA task organization.
- COA(s) graphic and narrative.
- Rationale for COA(s).
- Updated facts and assumptions.

Each COA is presented using its graphic and narrative. The COA narrative is the focus of the brief with the graphic used to portray the actions as they will take place within the battlespace. The synchronization matrix is a tool used by the OPT to ensure the arrangement of actions in time and space are

focused on accomplishing the mission. However, this tool is only used by planners and is not meant to be used as a briefing tool itself. The matrix does, however, display the plan's cohesion and provides details not found in either the graphic or the narrative. The briefer must ensure that the commander understands what the OPT intends for each COA.

Part IV

Preparation for Wargaming

COA wargaming allows the staff and subordinate commanders to gain a common understanding of friendly—and possible enemy—COAs. This common understanding allows them to determine the advantages and disadvantages of each COA and forms the basis for the commander's COA comparison and decision. It is based on wargaming and estimates prepared by the staff and subordinate commanders. COA wargaming involves a detailed assessment of each COA as it pertains to the enemy and the battlespace. Each friendly COA is wargamed against selected threat COAs. COA development is not complete until the commander selects a COA for wargaming and develops his wargaming guidance and evaluation criteria.

4001. Select and/or Modify a Course of Action

Following the COA briefing, the commander approves the COAs as created. He may also modify the COA to ensure that it complies with his operational design. He then directs that the COAs selected be wargamed by the OPT.

4002. Develop Commander's Wargaming Guidance

COA wargaming assists the planners in identifying strengths and weaknesses, associated risks, and asset shortfalls for each friendly COA. COA wargaming may identify branches and potential sequels that require additional planning. Short of actually executing the COA, COA wargaming provides the most reliable basis for understanding and improving each COA.

For the war game to be effective, the commander should indicate what aspects of the COA he desires to be examined and tested. Wargaming guidance may include a list of friendly COAs to be wargamed against specific threat COAs (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 (i.e., shifting the main effort), and level of detail (i.e., two levels down).

4003. Develop Commander's Evaluation Criteria

The commander must also choose the evaluation criteria he will use to select the COA that will become his concept of operations. Commanders establish evaluation criteria based on METT-T, judgment, and personal experience. 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 the COA comparison and decision step of the MCPP. Commanders may choose evaluation criteria related to the principles of war, such as mass or surprise. 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.

4004. Additional Course of Action Development Outputs

The COA development process may result in the creation of other products that might prove of value during the succeeding steps of the MCPP. These products include—

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

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Appendix A

Course of Action Development Quick Reference Checklist

	ACTION
Review commander's operational design, CBAE, guidance	Commander may issue planning guidance with respect to COA development; decisive, shaping, and sustaining actions; and battlefield framework: deep, close, and rear.
Review enemy laydown/update IPB products/use Red Cell	Review MCOO, doctrinal, situation, and event template. Key terrain identified. Graphically array friendly and enemy forces. Develop the relative combat power assessment. Track changes to enemy situation
Display friendly and enemy forces	Two levels down: MEF-level COAs display brigades/regiments/groups, and separate battalions; major subordinate command COAs displays battalions/separate companies.
Assess relative combat power	How and where is the enemy vulnerable? What friendly capabilities pertain to the operation? What types of operations are possible from enemy and friendly perspectives? What additional resources may be needed? How to allocate existing resources? Analyze combat power at point of contact between friendly and enemy forces for main effort, reserve, and security.
Review COGs and critical vulnerabilities	Review COGs and critical vulnerabilities.
Review essential tasks	Review all tasks and mission statement.
Develop initial COAs based on the commander's intent and planning guidance	Work backward from the PURPOSE of the operation, the END STATE conditions that achieve the purpose, enemy COGs/critical vulnerabilities, to decisive (main effort) and shaping (shaping actions/lethal and non-lethal) actions, security, and reserves. Array friendly and enemy forces (two-levels down); both current and projected locations. Battlefield Framework—Think time and space at the MEF-level—deep, close, rear operations; who is responsible for each operation and area? Determine composition and ratio of friendly to enemy forces necessary to accomplish tasks of main effort, shaping actions, security and reserve forces.

<p>Develop initial COAs based on the commander's intent and planning guidance (continued)</p>	<p>Determine which forms of maneuver best exploit the combined arms of the MAGTF across the entire battlespace. Where do you want to force, accept, or refuse battle?</p> <p>Determine types of operations and forms of maneuver (forms of maneuver are linked to the modified combined obstacle overlay which tell the OPT "what is possible") that lead you to a decision. Offensive Operations: movement to contact, attack (hasty, deliberate, spoiling, counterattack, raid, feint, demonstration), exploitation, pursuit. Forms of Maneuver: frontal attack, flank attack, envelopment (single/double), turning movement, infiltration, penetration. Types of Defense: mobile (orients on the destruction of the enemy through offensive action), position (deny enemy access to critical terrain for a specified period of time). Forms of Defensive Maneuver: defend and retrograde. Forms of Retrograde: delay, withdrawal (under pressure and not under pressure), retirement.</p> <p>Employment of Reconnaissance Assets. National, theater, joint, organic. Forms of Reconnaissance: zone, area, point, route, reconnaissance in force. Forms of Security: screen (observe and report), guard (T/O to operate apart and protect the main force), cover (prevent surprise and deceive the enemy).</p> <p>Phases—Stages—Parts. Name each in sequence (for example—pre-hostilities, lodgment, shaping, combat operations, decisive operations, exploitation, stabilization, follow-through, post-hostilities, and redeployment). Each state should have a beginning and an end state, or conditions that determine transition to the next.</p> <p>Develop HVTs into HPTs. Can the target be acquired? Can the target be attacked (lethal/non-lethal)? Is the target a critical node? Is attacking by fires necessary to the success of the friendly COA?</p> <p>Draw graphics and control measures (unit boundaries, lines of departure, phase lines, ground and air axis, assembly areas, fire support coordinating measures, main effort/supporting efforts/reserve) that allow the major subordinate commands to protect the force and accomplish the missions.</p> <p>Develop deception plan if applicable.</p> <p>Assign headquarters location and position. The OPT should not plan on exceeding the allocated headquarters' span of control. Generally, a headquarters controls at least two subordinate maneuver units, but not more than five. If planners need additional headquarters, they note the shortage and resolve it later. Task-organization takes into account the entire battlefield framework. It also accounts for the special command and control requirements of operations that have special requirements such as passage of lines, river crossing, or air assaults.</p>
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<p>Develop initial COAs based on the commander's intent and planning guidance (continued)</p>	<p>Ensure synchronization by beginning to develop synchronization matrix.</p> <p>Review the commander's planning guidance against the COA.</p> <p>Ensure that the COA is: suitable (accomplishes the mission [purpose] and complies with the commander's guidance); feasible (accomplishes the mission with available time, space and resources); distinguishable (significantly different from other COAs in forms of maneuver or attacking enemy COG through critical vulnerabilities); acceptable (accomplishes an advantage that justifies the cost in resources); complete (accomplishes all the tasks in accordance with the commander's guidance).</p>
<p>Brief the commander and battle staff on initial COAs</p>	<p>Brief the initial COA to the commander. Ensure Red Cell representatives are present. Make necessary modifications. Refine graphics (boundaries, lines of departure, phase lines, ground and air axis, assembly areas fire support measures, main effort/supporting efforts/reserve) and write COA narratives (broad overview as a concept of operations (major subordinate command tasks) as conducted in phases or stages with end state for each. Tasks and purpose of the main effort/supporting efforts/reserve). Organize reserves based on anticipated capabilities.</p>
<p>Develop supporting concepts (intelligence, fires, and logistics)</p>	<p>Concept of Intelligence: collection plan; CCIRs; reconnaissance and surveillance plan; counterreconnaissance plan.</p> <p>Concept of Fires: review targeting priorities of JFC, MAGTF commander; convert HVTs to HPTs based on the targeting priorities (Can collection assets acquire the HVT? Can the HVT be attacked with lethal or non-lethal assets? Is the attack of the HVT necessary to the success of the friendly COA?); identify HPTs within those formations/facilities; develop conditions/MOE (success); allocate/request assets and plan to detect; integrate fire support events or actions with maneuver planning and intelligence.</p>
<p>Plan for assessment</p>	<p>The continuous appraisal of military operations to determine progress toward established goals. Continuous—attempts to determine overall effectiveness of the command's actions; Based on mission, intent, end state; provides basis for future action/adaptation.</p>
<p>Develop a complete COA narrative and sketch</p>	<p>Who: Task-organization. What: Tasks for each unit. Where: Delineation of battlespace. When: Time for designated activities to occur. How: Method. Why: Purpose.</p> <p>Enemy known and templated locations; single-battle—deep, close, and rear operations; main effort, supporting effort(s), security, sustainment, and reserve units/efforts depicted; fire support coordinating measures; control measures; ground/air axis of advance; headquarters locations; assembly areas; ACE sites and CSSAs; reconnaissance and security operations.</p>

COA development brief	Updated intelligence estimate, enemy most likely and most dangerous COAs, mission statement, higher commander's intent, own commander's intent, commander's planning guidance, relative combat power , assessment, COA task-organization, COAs graphic and narrative, rationale for COA(s), updated facts and assumptions.
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Appendix B

Glossary

Section I Acronyms

Note: Acronyms change over time in response to new operational concepts, capabilities, doctrinal changes, and other similar developments. The following publications are the sole authoritative sources for official military acronyms:

1. Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*.
 2. MCRP 5-12C, *Marine Corps Supplement to the Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*.
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CBAE	commander's battlespace area evaluation
CCIR	commander's critical information requirement
COA	course of action
COG	center of gravity
DP	decision point
HPT	high-payoff target
HVT	high-value target
IPB	intelligence preparation of the battlespace
MAGTF	Marine air-ground task force
MCDP	Marine Corps doctrinal publication
MCPP	Marine Corps Planning Process
MCRP	Marine Corps reference publication
MCWP	Marine Corps warfighting publication

MEF	Marine expeditionary force
METT-T	mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available
MOE	measure of effectiveness
MSTP	MAGTF Staff Training Program
NAI	named area of interest
OPLAN	operation plan
OPORD	operation order
OPT	operational planning team
TAI	targeted area of interest

Section II Definitions

Note: Definitions of military terms change over time in response to new operational concepts, capabilities, doctrinal changes, and other similar developments. The following publications are the sole authoritative sources for official military definitions of military terms:

1. Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*.
 2. MCRP 5-12C, *Marine Corps Supplement to the Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*.
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C

centers of gravity—Those characteristics, capabilities, or localities from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight. (JP 1-02)

combat power—The total means of destructive and/or disruptive force which a military unit/formation can apply against the opponent at a given time. (JP 1-02)

commander's battlespace area evaluation—A methodology that supports the entire planning and decisionmaking process by aiding the commander in the visualization, development, assessment, integration, translation, and final transmission of knowledge to the staff and planning team. Also called **CBAE**. (MCRP 5-12C)

commander's critical information requirements—Information regarding the enemy and friendly activities and the environment identified by the commander as critical to maintaining situational awareness, planning future activities, and facilitating timely decisionmaking. Also called **CCIR**. **Note:** CCIRs are normally divided into three primary subcategories: priority intelligence requirements, friendly force information requirements, and essential elements of friendly information. (MCRP 5-12C)

course of action—1. A plan that would accomplish, or is related to, the accomplishment of a mission. 2. The scheme adopted to accomplish a task

or mission. It is a product of the Joint Operation Planning and Execution System concept development phase. The supported commander will include a recommended course of action in the commander's estimate. The recommended course of action will include the concept of operations, evaluation of supportability estimates of supporting organizations, and an integrated time-phased data base of combat, combat support, and combat service support forces and sustainment. Refinement of this data base will be contingent on the time available for course of action development. When approved, the course of action becomes the basis for the development of an operation plan or operation order. Also called **COA**. (JP 1-02)

critical vulnerability—An aspect of a center of gravity that if exploited will do the most significant damage to an adversary's ability to resist. A vulnerability cannot be critical unless it undermines a key strength. Also called **CV**. (MCRP 5-12C)

I

intelligence preparation of the battlespace—(See joint Pub 1-02.) In Marine Corps usage, the systematic, continuous process of analyzing the threat and environment in a specific geographic area. Also called **IPB**. (MCRP 5-12C)

M

main effort—The designated subordinate unit whose mission at a given point in time is the most critical to overall mission success. It is usually weighted with the preponderance of combat power and is directed against a center of gravity through a critical vulnerability. (MCRP 5-12C)

mission—1. The task, together with the purpose, that clearly indicates the action to be taken and the reason therefore. 2. In common usage, especially when applied to lower military units, a duty assigned to an individual or unit; a task. (JP 1-02)

O

operational planning team—A group built around the future operations section which integrates the staff representatives and resources. The operational planning team may have representatives or augmentation from

each of the standard staff sections, the six warfighting functions, staff liaisons, and/or subject matter experts. Also called **OPT**. (MCRP 5-12C)

R

reserve—1. Portion of a body of troops that is kept to the rear, or withheld from action at the beginning of an engagement, in order to be available for a decisive movement. (JP 1-02)

S

supporting effort—Designated subordinate unit(s) whose mission is designed to directly contribute to the success of the main effort. (MCRP 5-12C)

synchronization—1. The arrangement of military actions in time, space, and purpose to produce maximum relative combat power at a decisive place and time. 2. In the intelligence context, application of intelligence sources and methods in concert with the operational plan. (JP 1-02)

T

task-organization—In the Marine Corps, a temporary grouping of forces designed to accomplish a particular mission. Task organization involves the distribution of available assets to subordinate control headquarters by attachment or by placing assets in direct support or under the operational control of the subordinate. (MCRP 5-12C)

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Appendix C

References

Joint Pub 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*

MCDP 1-0, *Marine Corps Operations*

MCDP 5, *Planning*

MCWP 5-1, *Marine Corps Planning Process*

FM 34-130/MCRP 2-12A, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield*

MCRP 5-12C, *Marine Corps Supplement to the Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*

MSTP Pamphlet 5-0.2, *Operational Planning Team (OPT) Facilitator's Guide*

MSTP Pamphlet 5-0.3, *MAGTF Planner's Reference Manual*

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