

THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH IN THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

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Abstract: *The collapse of the bipolar model in the World has led to new forms of use of military force. Efforts to resolve conflicts using military means have resulted in changes in the way and methodology of using military force. That is why in NATO, the models of Comprehensive approach in the planning and conducting of military operations are established and approved. A keystone for efficiency and quality in the conduct of a military operation is the decision-making process by the Combined Joint Task Force.*

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Changes in the security environment call for new guidelines in the Alliance's policy and the implementation of new methods to prevent and resolve conflicts. This inevitably leads to change, reconfiguration and overall transformation of the organization of forces, the organization of the system of management and interaction and the planning of the methodology in the Alliance. This process leads to a change in procedures and mechanisms for information exchange in intelligence and decision-making procedures. It is clear that the rapidity of the response in the early stages of tackling the crisis situation and in the context of the rapidly changing environment, with much more flexible and adapted procedures, is of great importance. This necessitates a rapid and close interaction between the hierarchical levels of the command structure and the constant interaction with external organizations and structures in the governmental and non-governmental sector. As a result of these reasons, NATO has adopted and enforced the comprehensive approach to joint planning of operations, demonstrating the necessity, importance, and commitment of the largest military organization to change the mechanisms and structures for the adequate use of military force in the modern security environment.

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

According to COPD¹ NATO currently recognizes six (6) domains within engagement space. They are:

Political. Any grouping of primarily civil actors, organisations and institutions, both formal and informal, that exercises authority or rule within a specific geographic boundary or organisation through the application of various forms of political power and influence. It includes the political system, parties and main actors. It must be representative of the cultural, historical, demographic and sometimes religious factors that form the identity of a society.

Military. The armed forces, and supporting infrastructure, acquired, trained, developed and sustained to accomplish and protect national or organisational security objectives. This also covers the internal security aspects of a country.

Economic. Composed of the sum total of production, distribution and consumption of all goods and services for a country or organisation. It includes not only economic development of a country, but also the distribution of wealth.

¹ Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive 04 October 2013

Social. The interdependent network of social institutions that support, enable and acculturate individuals and provide participatory opportunities to achieve personal expectations and life-goals within hereditary and nonhereditary groups, in either stable or unstable environments. It covers the social aspects such as religion, a society's structure, the legal and judicial system, policing and supporting infrastructure, humanitarian, etc.

Infrastructure. The basic facilities, services, and installations needed for the functioning of a community, organisation, or society. Includes logistics, communications and transport infrastructures, schools, hospitals, water and power distribution, sewage, irrigation, geography, etc.

Information. The entire infrastructure, organisation, personnel, and components that collect, process, store, transmit, display, disseminate, and act on information. Encompasses the information and communication media.

Through an analysis of the goals, strength, weaknesses and interdependencies of the main actors within these six domains, knowledge is developed about the behaviour of the main actors within the engagement space. That knowledge is then used by decision makers at all levels to determine how these actors might be influenced in ways that achieve the Alliance's strategic objectives and end state, thereby contributing to the international community aims.

Conditions in each of the six system domains of the engagement space can be influenced by the application of one, or a combination of, the four instruments of power:

Military. The military instrument refers to the application of military power, including the threat or use of lethal and non-lethal force, to coerce, deter, contain or defeat an adversary, including the disruption and destruction of its critical military and non-military capabilities. It can also refer to the constructive use of military forces to secure and/or support stabilization and reconstruction or as a tool in helping solve complex humanitarian disasters and emergencies. The military is NATO's main instrument.

Political. The political instrument refers to the use of political power, in particular in the diplomatic arena cooperating with various actors, to influence an adversary or to establish advantageous conditions². NATO member nations employ NATO and other IO's to combine their political power and influence on the international scene, speaking and acting with the same purpose, to create greater effect.

Economic. The economic instrument generally refers to initiatives, incentives and sanctions designed to affect the flow of goods and services, as well as financial support to state and non-state actors involved in a crisis. The aggregation of the economic instruments of NATO nations could act as a significant lever, provided that nations would use their economic instruments in a way that supports the achievement of the NATO end state and also other stated international community goals.

Civil. The civil instrument refers to the use of powers contained within areas such as the judiciary, constabulary, education, public information and civilian administration and support infrastructure, which can lead to access to medical care, food, power and water. It also includes the administrative capacities of international, governmental and non-governmental organizations. The civil instrument is controlled and exercised by sovereign nations, IOs and NGOs. Nonetheless, through interaction and enhanced mutual understanding, NATO can work with those that have access to the civil instrument of power in order to coordinate with them, and possibly adjust our own activities to create synergies with theirs.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

According to ADRP 5-0³ the military decisionmaking process is an iterative planning methodology to understand the situation and mission, develop a course of action, and produce an operation plan or order (ADP 5-0). The military decisionmaking process (MDMP) integrates the activities of the commander, staff, subordinate headquarters, and unified action partners to understand the situation and mission; develop and compare courses of action; decide on a course of action that best

²The NCRSM (2011) refers to "diplomatic" options for dealing with a crisis.

³„Army Doctrine Reference Publication“ No. 5-0

accomplishes the mission; and produce an operation plan or order for execution. The MDMP helps leaders apply thoroughness, clarity, sound judgment, logic, and professional knowledge to understand situations, develop options to solve problems, and reach decisions. This process helps commanders, staffs, and others think critically and creatively while planning. The MDMP results in an improved understanding of the situation and a plan or order that guides the force through preparation and execution.

The MDMP consists of seven steps (figure 1). Each step of the MDMP has various inputs, a method (step) to conduct, and outputs. The outputs lead to an increased understanding of the situation and to facilitating the next step of the MDMP. Commanders and staffs generally perform these steps sequentially; however, they may revisit several steps in an iterative fashion, as they learn more about the situation before producing the plan or order.

Commanders initiate the MDMP upon receipt of or in anticipation of a mission. Commanders and staffs often begin planning in the absence of a complete and approved higher headquarters' operation plan (OPLAN) or operation order (OPORD). In these instances, the headquarters begins a new planning effort based on a warning order (WARNO) and other directives, such as a planning order or an alert order from their higher headquarters. This requires active collaboration with the higher headquarters and parallel planning among echelons as the plan or order is developed.

The MDMP facilitates collaboration and parallel planning. The higher headquarters solicits input and continuously shares information concerning future operations through planning meetings, warning orders, and other means. It shares information with subordinate and adjacent units, supporting and supported units, and other military and civilian partners. Commanders encourage active collaboration among all organizations affected by the pending operations to build a shared understanding of the situation, participate in course of action development and decisionmaking, and resolve conflicts before publishing the plan or order.

The MDMP also drives preparation. Since time is a factor in all operations, commanders and staffs conduct a time analysis early in the planning process. This analysis helps them determine what actions they need and when to begin those actions to ensure forces are ready and in position before execution. This may require the commander to direct subordinates to start necessary movements, conduct task organization changes, begin surveillance and reconnaissance operations, and execute other preparation activities before completing the plan. As the commander and staff conduct the MDMP, they direct the tasks in a series of WARNOs.

The commander is the most important participant in the MDMP. More than simply decisionmakers in this process, commanders use their experience, knowledge, and judgment to guide staff planning efforts. While unable to devote all their time to the MDMP, commanders follow the status of the planning effort, participate during critical periods of the process, and make decisions based on the detailed work of the staff. During the MDMP, commanders focus their activities on understanding, visualizing, and describing.

The MDMP stipulates several formal meetings and briefings between the commander and staff to discuss, assess, and approve or disapprove planning efforts as they progress. However, experience has shown that optimal planning results when the commander meets informally at frequent intervals with the staff throughout the MDMP. Such informal interaction between the commander and staff can improve the staff's understanding of the situation and ensure the staff's planning effort adequately reflects the commander's visualization of the operation.

The chief of staff (COS) is a key participant in the MDMP. The COS manages and coordinates the staff's work and provides quality control during the MDMP. To effectively supervise the entire process, this officer clearly understands the commander's intent and guidance. The COS provides timelines to the staff, establishes briefing times and locations, and provides any instructions necessary to complete the plan.

The staff's effort during the MDMP focuses on helping the commander understand the situation, make decisions, and synchronize those decisions into a fully developed plan or order. Staff activities

during planning initially focus on mission analysis. The products that the staff develops during mission analysis help commanders understand the situation and develop the commander's visualization. During course of action (COA) development and COA comparison, the staff provides recommendations to support the commander in selecting a COA. After the commander makes a decision, the staff prepares the plan or order that reflects the commander's intent, coordinating all necessary details.

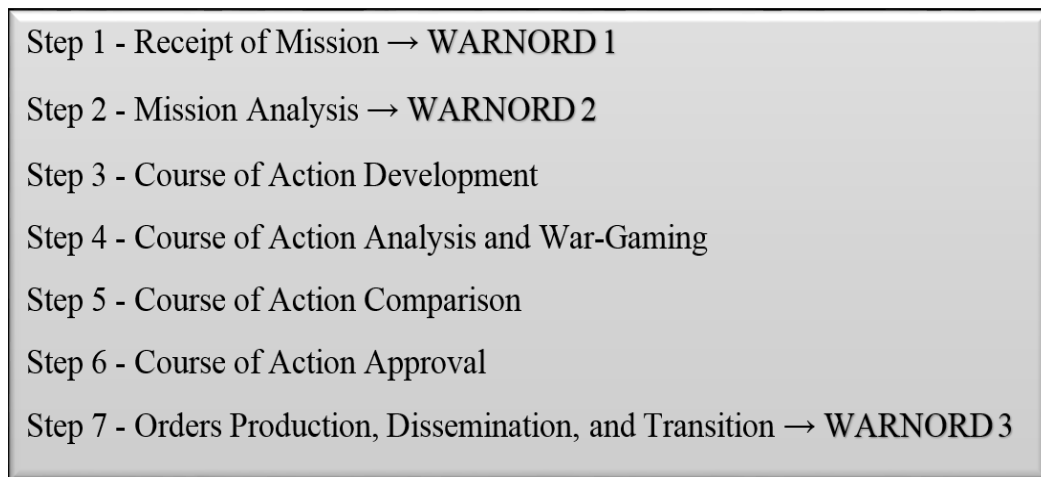


Figure 1. Steps in the MDMP

STEPS IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The main activities in the decision-making process are as follows:

STEP 1—RECEIPT OF MISSION

- Alert the Staff and Other Key Participants
- Gather the Tools
- Update Running Estimates
- Conduct Initial Assessment
- Issue the Commander's Initial Guidance
- Issue the Initial Warning Order

STEP 2—MISSION ANALYSIS

- Analyze the Higher Headquarters' Plan or Order
- Perform Initial Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield
- Determine Specified, Implied, and Essential Tasks
- Review Available Assets and Identify Resource Shortfalls
- Determine Constraints
- Identify Critical Facts and Develop Assumptions
- Begin Risk Management
- Develop Initial Commander's Critical Information Requirements and Essential Elements of Friendly Information
- Develop the Initial Information Collection Plan
- Update Plan for the Use of Available Time
- Develop Initial Themes and Messages
- Develop a Proposed Problem Statement
- Develop a Proposed Mission Statement
- Present the Mission Analysis Briefing
- Develop and Issue Initial Commander's Intent
- Develop and Issue Initial Planning Guidance
- Develop Course of Action Evaluation Criteria
- Issue a Warning Order

STEP 3–COURSE OF ACTION DEVELOPMENT

- Assess Relative Combat Power
- Generate Options
- Array Forces
- Develop a Broad Concept
- Assign Headquarters
- Develop Course of Action Statements and Sketches
- Conduct a Course of Action Briefing
- Select or Modify Courses of Action for Continued Analysis

STEP 4–COURSE OF ACTION ANALYSIS AND WAR-GAMING

- Gather the Tools
- List All Friendly Forces
- List Assumptions
- List Known Critical Events and Decision Points
- Select the War-Gaming Method
- Select a Technique to Record and Display Results
- War-Game the Operation and Assess the Results
- Conduct a War-Game Briefing (Optional)

STEP 5–COURSE OF ACTION COMPARISON

- Conduct Advantages and Disadvantages Analysis
- Compare Courses of Action
- Conduct a Course of Action Decision Briefing

STEP 6–COURSE OF ACTION APPROVAL

After approving a COA, the commander issues the final planning guidance. The final planning guidance includes a refined commander’s intent (if necessary) and new CCIRs to support execution. It also includes any additional guidance on priorities for the warfighting functions, orders preparation, rehearsal, and preparation. This guidance includes priorities for resources needed to preserve freedom of action and ensure continuous sustainment.

Based on the commander’s decision and final planning guidance, the staff issues a WARNORD to subordinate headquarters. This WARNORD contains the information subordinate units need to refine their plans. It confirms guidance issued in person or by video teleconference and expands on details not covered by the commander personally. The WARNORD issued after COA approval normally contains:

- The area of operations.
- Mission.
- Commander’s intent
- Updated CCIRs and EEFI.
- Concept of operations.
- Principal tasks assigned to subordinate units.
- Preparation and rehearsal instructions not included in the SOPs.
- A final timeline for the operations.

STEP 7–ORDERS PRODUCTION, DISSEMINATION, AND TRANSITION

- Plans and Orders Reconciliation
- Plans and Orders Crosswalk
- Approving the Plan or Order

Step 7 bridges the transition between planning and preparations. The plans-to-operations transition is a preparation activity that occurs within the headquarters. It ensures members of the current operations cell fully understand the plan before execution. During preparation, the responsibility for developing and

maintaining the plan shifts from the plans (or future operations) cell to the current operations cell. This transition is the point at which the current operations cell becomes responsible for controlling execution of the operation order. This responsibility includes answering requests for information concerning the order and maintaining the order through fragmentary orders. This transition enables the plans cell to focus its planning efforts on sequels, branches, and other planning requirements directed by the commander.

In conclusion, this decision-making process is sufficiently flexible, detailed and gives the commander the freedom to choose the best way to accomplish the mission. This is extremely important in mission command and joint planning when we have decentralized exertion. The main figure in this process is the figure of the commander, assisted by his headquarter. Professionalization and training of staff from the headquarters are of great importance because it greatly facilitates the commander's work and improves the efficiency of the whole process.

Abbreviations:

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

CCIR - Commander's Critical Information Requirement

EEFI - Essential Elements of Friendly Information

COA - Course Of Action

SOP - Standing Operating Procedure

WARNORD - Warning Order

MDMP - Military Decisionmaking Process

COS - Chief of Staff

OPORD - Operation Order

OPLAN - Operation Plan

IO - International Organisation

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

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