THE MARINE CORPS PLANNING PROCESS
STEP ONE: PROBLEM FRAMING

KEY INPUTS

Higher Headquarters (HHQ)
- Guidance & Intent
- Mission Statement
- WARNO*/OPORD*
- Intelligence/IPB Products
- Confirmation Briefs

Situational Information

Commander and Staff
- Experience
- Expertise
- Judgment

KEY RESULTS

Graphic & narrative describing the current and desired state
Broad Operational Approach
Initial estimates of supportability (MSC)
Initial staff estimates (Staff)
Approved Mission Statement
Commander’s Intent
Course of Action (COA)
Development guidance

DESIGN

- Describe the Current and Desired States
- Define the Problem Set
- Develop the Broad Operational Approach

STAFF ACTIONS

- Task Analysis
- Center of Gravity Analysis
- Relative Combat Power Analysis
- Assumption/Limitations
- CCIRs*/RFIs*
- Draft Mission Statement
- Resource Shortfalls
- Estimates (Staff & MSC*)
- Update IPB products
- Red Cell/Green Cell/Red Team

*WARNO: Warning Order
OPORD: Operations Order
CCIR: Commander’s Critical Information Requirements
RFI: Requests for Information
MSC: Major Subordinate Command
Purpose: To gain an understanding of the environment and the nature of the problem set.

**STAFF ACTIONS**

Concurrent and Complementary

1. Analyze Tasks
   - Specified: Anything specified (OPORD*, Mission Statement, etc.)
   - Implied: Necessary to accomplish a specific task
   - Essential: Specified or implied tasks that MUST be performed to accomplish mission

2. Analyze Center of Gravity
   - Enemy and friendly (COG*, CC*, CR*, CV*)

3. Develop Assumptions
   - Logical
   - Realistic
   - Essential for planning
   - Doesn’t assume away an adversary capability

4. Determine Limitations
   - Restraints: What can’t be done
   - Constraints: Something you must do

5. Develop Mission Statement
   - Who, What, Where, When, Why
   - Must address the problem set

6. Propose Initial CCIRs
   - Planning CCIRs
   - Operational CCIRs

7. Perform Ongoing Activities
   - IPB* product refinement
   - Red Cell activities/Green Cell activities
   - Refinement of staff estimates and estimates of supportability
   - Battlespace refinement
   - Resource shortfalls identification
   - Commander’s Critical Information Requirement review/update
   - Requests for information

**DESIGN**

Goal is to achieve understanding through critical thinking and dialogue

1. Commander’s Orientation
2. Describe the current and desired states of the operating environment
3. Define the problem set
   - As they exist within the environment
   - Preventing the environment from progressing toward the desired state

4. Develop the Broad Operational Approach
   - Input and synthesis of both design and staff actions
   - Graphic and Narrative
   - Commander’s initial intent and guidance

5. Develop Mission Statement
   - Who, What, Where, When, Why
   - Must address the problem set

6. Propose Initial CCIRs
   - Planning CCIRs
   - Operational CCIRs

7. Perform Ongoing Activities
   - IPB* product refinement
   - Red Cell activities/Green Cell activities
   - Refinement of staff estimates and estimates of supportability
   - Battlespace refinement
   - Resource shortfalls identification
   - Commander’s Critical Information Requirement review/update
   - Requests for information

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*COG: Center of Gravity
CC: Critical Capabilities
CR: Critical Requirements
CV: Critical Vulnerabilities

*IPB: Intelligence preparation on the Battlespace

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## THE MARINE CORPS PLANNING PROCESS
### STEP TWO: Course of Action Development

### KEY INPUTS
- Design & Staff Actions
- Operational Approach
- Approved Mission Statement
- Commander’s Intent
- Commander’s COA Development Guidance

### KEY RESULTS
- COA graphic & narrative
- Refined IPB & intelligence products
- Planning support tools
  - DST*/DSM*/Synch Matrix
- Estimates of Supportability
- Staff estimates
- Commander’s Wargaming Guidance and Evaluation Criteria
- Updated WARNO

### Activities
- Establish battlespace framework
- Array forces (friendly, adversary, population)
- Assign purpose and then tasks for each subordinate element
- Task organize
- Sequencing of actions to achieve the mission
- Divide operation into phases
- Integrate activities across time and space
- Establish control measures
- Present COA Development brief to Commander

*DST: Decision Support Template  
DSM: Decision Support Matrix
COA DEVELOPMENT

Purpose: Develop one or more options for accomplishing the mission in accordance with the commander’s operational approach.

Operational Approach

- Commander’s Intent
- Commander’s COA Guidance
  - Types of Operations
  - Forms of Maneuver
  - COG Analysis
  - Battlespace Framework
  - Influence & Deception Activities
  - Risk Guidance

COA Criteria

1. Feasible: Accomplishes mission with the available time, space, and resources
2. Acceptable: Worth the cost
3. Suitable: Accomplishes the task and purpose
4. Distinguishable: COAs differ from each other
5. Complete: Address all the tasks

Activities

1. Establish Battlespace Framework
   - Organize the battlespace
     - Spatial/functional
     - Deep, close, rear
     - Decisive, shaping, sustaining
   - Organize the force
     - Main effort, supporting effort, reserve, security

2. Array Initial Forces
   - Determine RCPA* required to accomplish task
   - Array forces starting with decisive operations and continuing with shaping and sustaining operations

3. Assign Purpose and Then Tasks
   - What is necessary to accomplish mission?

4. Convert Generic Units to Specific Units

5. Task Organize
   - Structure and resource the force to conduct operations
   - Establish command and support relationships

6. Sequencing
   - Arrangement of actions to achieve the mission

7. Phasing
   - Divide operations into phases

8. Develop COA Narrative and Graphic and Synch Matrix

9. Determine Control Measures

10. Rough Cut COA Brief
    - Rough Task Organization
    - Rough COA Graphic & Narrative

11. COA Refinement
    - Develop supporting concepts

12. Conduct COA Development

13. Commander’s Wargaming Guidance Evaluation Criteria

*RCPA: Relative Combat Power Analysis
THE MARINE CORPS PLANNING PROCESS
STEP THREE: Course of Action War Game

**KEY INPUTS**
- COA graphic & narrative
- Planning support tools
- Estimates of supportability
- Staff estimates
- Commander’s wargaming guidance & evaluation criteria

**Activities**
- Assign War Game billets
- Collect documents & tools
- Select War Game technique
- Conduct COA War Game
- Record COA War Game results
- Refine staff estimates, estimates of supportability, & supporting concepts
- Present War Game brief

**KEY RESULTS**
- Identified branches & sequels
- Refined IPB & intelligence products
- Refined staff estimates
- Refined estimates of supportability
- Approved COAs for comparison and decision
- Comparison criteria/guidance
## COA War Games

### Purpose
**To Improve the Plan**
1. Validate COAs by testing each COA against a thinking adversary
2. Improve each COA
3. Evaluate strengths & weaknesses of each COA
4. Better understand problem and environment

### Inputs
- Commander’s Wargaming guidance
- Commander’s evaluation criteria
- IPB products
- Planning support tools

### War Game Techniques
- Key Events or Sequence of Critical Tasks
- Avenue in Depth
- Belt
- Box

### Activities
1. Organize for Wargaming
2. Gather documents & tools
3. Select a War Game technique
4. Conduct a War Game
   - Roll call
   - Orientation to the War Game board
   - Commander’s War Game guidance
   - Confirm task organization two levels down
   - Review CCIRs and assumptions
   - Review critical events to be war gamed
   - Identify war game method to be utilized
   - Red/Green cells brief their COAs to be war gamed
   - Review rules of War Game
   - Execution of turns

**Action**
- Describe operations to all friendly units
- Describe the mission/tasks
- Describe the desired outcome

**Reaction**
- Describe operations of all friendly units
- Describe probable outcome of contact

5. Record and display War Game results
   - War Game worksheet
   - Synchronization Matrix

6. Assess the War Game results

### Civilian Reaction
- Describe actions of other actors in the OE*

### Counteraction
- Identify additional actions and resources required
- Modify COA as necessary

*OE: Operating Environment*
THE MARINE CORPS PLANNING PROCESS
STEP FOUR: COA Comparison and Decision

KEY INPUTS
• Updated IPB products
• Updated, complete COAs
• COA war game worksheet
• COA evaluation worksheet
• Resource shortfalls
• Updated CCIRs
• Decision Support Template & Decision Support Matrix
• Branches & sequels identified for further planning

Activities
Evaluate COAs against Commander’s Evaluation Criteria
Compare COAs
Commander’s Decision

KEY RESULTS
Approved COA
Guidance for branches & sequels
Updated WARNO
## COA Comparison And Decision

### Purpose
For the Commander to **evaluate** all friendly COAs against established criteria, then **compare** each COA against each other, and **decide** which COA best accomplishes the mission.

### Steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Evaluate Course of Action</th>
<th>Compare Courses of Action to each other</th>
<th>Commander's Decision</th>
<th>Refine the Concept of Operations</th>
<th>Update the Warning Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 | The separate evaluation of each COA against the Cmdr's Evaluation Criteria with special consideration to advantages, disadvantages, and risk. | The comparison of each COA to each other using the advantages, disadvantages, and risks developed in the evaluation step. | The Commander selects the COA that best accomplishes the mission. There are four options:  
• Select  
• Modify  
• New  
• Discard | The concept of operations is a general description of actions to be taken and a generic organization for combat that serves as the basis for supporting concepts, functional or detailed Planning, and branch and Sequel planning. | The Warning Order allows subordinates to continue concurrent planning. |
| 2 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 5 |  |  |  |  |  |

### Potential Evaluation Criteria
- Principles of war
- Limitation of casualties
- Exploitation of the adversary’s weaknesses/friendly strengths
- Population considerations
- Opportunity for maneuver
- Concentration on combat power
- Speed
- Supportability
- Political considerations
- Force protection
- Risk assessment
THE MARINE CORPS PLANNING PROCESS
STEP FIVE: ORDERS DEVELOPMENT

PURPOSE
The Orders Development Step translates the commander’s decision into oral, written, and graphic direction sufficient to guide subordinate planning, execution, and initiative.

KEY INPUTS
- Approved COA
- CONOPS*

ACTIVITIES
- Refine the CONOPS
- Prepare the order or plan
- Orders reconciliation
- Orders crosswalk
- Approve the order or plan

KEY RESULTS
- Approved order or plan
- Planning support tools

*CONOPS: Concept of Operations
ORDERS DEVELOPMENT

Activities

- Refine the CONOPS: Refined staff estimates and IPB products from the approved COA allow planners and supporting staff sections to proceed with functional and detailed planning.

- Prepare the order or plan: The Chief of Staff or Executive Officer dictates the format for the order, sets and enforces the time limits and development sequence, and assigns responsibility for annex development to the appropriate staff sections.

- Orders reconciliation: An internal process during which the staff conducts a detailed review of the entire order.

- Orders crosswalk: An external process in which the staff compares its order with the order of higher, adjacent, and subordinate commanders to achieve unity of effort and ensure the superior commander’s intent is met.

- Approve the order or plan: Commander’s signature

Types of Combat Orders

<table>
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<tr>
<th>OPORD</th>
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<tr>
<td>A directive issued by a commander to subordinate commanders for the purpose of effecting the coordinated execution of an operation.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Fragmentary Order (FRAGO)</th>
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<tr>
<td>An abbreviated form of an operation order issued as needed after an operation order to change or modify that order or to execute a branch or sequel to that order.</td>
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<tr>
<th>WARNO</th>
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<tr>
<td>A preliminary notice of an order or action that is to follow.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Execute Order (EXORD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An order to subordinates that directs them to execute existing orders or plans and conveys guidance not provided in earlier instructions.</td>
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THE MARINE CORPS PLANNING PROCESS
STEP SIX: TRANSITION

KEY INPUTS
Approved order or plan
Planning support tools
IPB & intelligence products

ACTIVITIES
- Transition brief
- Transition events (rehearsals, drills exercises, briefs)
- Confirmation briefs

KEY RESULTS
Subordinate commanders & staff ready to execute the order
Ongoing development of plan for branches and sequels

Successful transition enhances the situational understanding of those who will execute the order, reinforces the intent of the commander, promotes unity of effort, and generates tempo.
Transition Briefs
(Future to Current Ops, Higher HQ to Lower)

- Internal transition is when the planning staff moves its plan to execution (Future Operations to Current Operations)
- External transition occurs between the commander and subordinate commanders

Transition Events

Confirmation Brief
(Subordinate to HQ)

Transition Event Options
- Map brief
- Terrain model brief
- Communications exercise
- Rehearsal of concept drill
- Combined Arms rehearsal
- Key leader rehearsal
- Reduced force rehearsal
- Full dress rehearsal