MILITARY DECISION MAKING PROCESS (MDMP)

Key Points

1. The Nature of Planning and Decision Making
2. The Seven Steps of the Military Decision Making Process
3. Performing the Military Decision Making Process

Successful generals make plans to fit circumstances, but do not try to create circumstances to fit plans.

GEN George S. Patton, Jr.
How the Iraq War Plan Came Together

Early on in planning the Iraq war, GEN Tommy Franks said he identified five fronts: a northern front to protect the Kurds and oil fields; a southern front to seize oil fields and secure Basra and the port city of Umm Qasr; a western front in the desert; a Baghdad-Tikrit front to prevent Saddam from creating a last-ditch urban war nightmare; and an information war.

The Baghdad front posed special problems.

“We . . . knew that there was a possibility that the regime could circle the wagons or create a fortress in their strategic center of gravity, which was the Baghdad-Tikrit area,” Franks said.

He said he used air power to prevent Republican Guard divisions from falling back into Baghdad. Before the war started, the United States also was recruiting informants in Shiite Muslim areas “to create problems for the regime in Baghdad,” which was largely Sunni Muslim.

General Franks inherited an Iraq war-contingency plan from his CENTCOM predecessors that essentially called for a rerun of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, with a very heavy 500,000-man American force. In December 2001, at President Bush’s ranch in Crawford, Texas, Franks briefed Bush on that off-the-shelf plan.

Almost immediately Franks was presented with a plan to send in fewer than 80,000 American ground troops, supported by a heavy air campaign. The final plan, using 151,000, was a compromise developed over a long period of study and discussion, Franks said.

“There was no friction between me and Rumsfeld on this plan,” he said. “This was a national plan. It involved the service chiefs; it involved the service secretaries; it involved the president himself; it involved Don Rumsfeld; it involved me; it involved all of our staffs. I think we benefited from the fact that we had a long planning cycle, an opportunity to get ready.”

The war plan that was executed in March 2003 evolved after a year of study, four or five visits by Franks to Bush, and frequent phone conferences among his headquarters, the Pentagon, and the White House.

Franks said that while the planning continued he ordered a virtually invisible shifting of assets from Qatar to Kuwait, moving more heavy Army equipment to Kuwait and emptying warehouses at a US base in Qatar so they could be prepared to house a wartime command center.

The general said that in creating the war plan everyone involved examined a long list of what-ifs: urban warfare, use of weapons of mass destruction, burning the oil fields, and launching Scuds.
The Nature of Planning and Decision Making

Military operations are uncertain and unpredictable. They are complex endeavors—struggles between opposing human wills. Commanders face thinking and adaptive enemies. They can never be certain how enemies will act or how events will develop. Leaders who understand how time and uncertainty affect enemy and friendly forces are better equipped to develop effective plans. Given the nature of operations, the object of planning is not to eliminate uncertainty but to develop a framework for action in the midst of it.

Full-spectrum operations demand a flexible approach to planning that adapts to each situation. An effective planning process gives commanders and staffs a framework for thinking, while supporting their insight, creativity, and initiative. The Army uses three different but related processes to guide planning activities:

- The Army problem solving process
- The military decision making process (MDMP)
- Troop leading procedures (TLP)

The Army problem solving process provides a standard, systematic method to define and analyze a problem, develop and analyze possible solutions, choose the best solution, and implement an action plan that solves the problem. Problem solving applies to all Army activities and is the foundation of the Army’s two tactical planning processes: MDMP and TLP. The MDMP is more appropriate for headquarters with staffs. It outlines a logical sequence of decisions and interactions between the commander and staff for developing estimates and effective plans and orders. At lower tactical levels, commanders do not have staffs. Leaders at company level and below use TLP to plan and prepare for an operation.

Decision making is selecting a course of action as the best way to accomplish the mission. Planning is a form of decision making. Not all decisions require the same level of planning, however. Commanders make hundreds of decisions during operations in an environment of great uncertainty, unpredictability, and constant change. Some decisions are deliberate—the commander uses the MDMP and a complete staff to create and fully develop a written order. But the commander makes other decisions very quickly, resulting in a fragmentary order (FRAGO). When developing plans, commanders normally choose between analytic and intuitive decision making.

Analytic Decision Making

Analytic decision making approaches a problem systematically. Leaders analyze a problem, come up with several possible solutions, analyze them and compare them to a set of criteria, and select the best solution. The analytic approach aims to produce the best solution to a problem from among possible solutions. This methodical approach serves well for decision making in complex or unfamiliar situations by allowing leaders to break tasks into recognizable elements. It ensures that the commander and staff consider, analyze, and evaluate all relevant factors. It may help inexperienced leaders by giving them a system to
compensate for their lack of experience. The Army problem solving process and the MDMP are the Army’s analytical approach to decision making.

This analytic approach to decision making serves well when commanders have enough time to analyze a problem and its solution in detail. Analytic decision making takes time, however, and does not work well in all situations—especially during execution, when circumstances often require immediate decisions.

**Intuitive Decision Making**

Intuitive decision making is the act of reaching a conclusion through recognizing patterns. It draws upon a leader’s knowledge, judgment, experience, education, intelligence, boldness, perception, and character. This approach focuses on assessing the situation rather than comparing several options. A leader uses it when time is short or a quick decision is important. It relies on the experienced leader’s ability to recognize the key elements and implications of a problem or situation, reject impractical solutions, and select an adequate (rather than the best) course of action (COA).

Intuitive decision making is especially appropriate when time is limited. It significantly speeds up decision making. It does not work well, however, when leaders are inexperienced, the situation is complex or unfamiliar, or there are competing COAs.

Additionally, when leaders substitute assessment for detailed analysis, they may overlook some implications. Commanders use intuitive decision making when time is short and problems are straightforward. It is usually appropriate during execution.

**Combining Analytic and Intuitive Decision Making**

The two approaches to decision making are rarely mutually exclusive. Commanders often base an intuitive decision during execution on the situational understanding and products they received during an earlier MDMP. The staff may use part of the MDMP, such as wargaming, to verify or refine a commander’s intuitive decision if time permits. When commanders direct the MDMP under time limitations, many of the techniques, such as choosing only one COA, depend on intuitive decisions. Even in the most rigorous analytic decision making, intuitive decision making helps set boundaries for the analysis and fills in the gaps that remain.

Each method of decision making has strengths and weaknesses. Selecting one over the other depends primarily on the experience of the commander and staff, and on how much time and information are available. The analytic approach is more appropriate when time and information allow a commander to choose among different COAs, or when the staff is inexperienced. But the majority of tactical decisions a commander makes during execution—when time is short and information is lacking or doubtful—are intuitive.

**The Seven Steps of the Military Decision Making Process**

The MDMP applies to all conflict and military operations. Commanders with an assigned staff use the MDMP to organize their planning, share a common understanding of the mission and commander’s intent, and develop effective plans and orders.

The MDMP helps commanders and staffs organize their thinking. It helps them apply thoroughness, clarity, sound judgment, logic, and professional knowledge to reach decisions. The shaded boxes in Figure 1.1 depict the MDMP’s seven steps. Each step begins with inputs that build on previous steps. The outputs of each step drive subsequent steps. Early errors affect later steps. While the formal process begins when the commander receives a mission and its goal is the production of an order, planning continues throughout the operations process.

The lower portion of Figure 1.1 shows preparation and execution—although they are not part of the MDMP—to highlight the importance of constant planning. Once a commander and staff have produced a plan or order, they transmit it quickly enough to
**Figure 1.1** Inputs and Outputs of the MDMP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Input</th>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Mission received from higher HQs or deduced by commander and staff | **Step 1: Receipt of Mission** | * Cdr's Initial Guidance
| | | * WARNO
| | | * Restated mission
| | | * Initial Cdr's intent and planning guidance
| | | * Initial CCIR
| | | * Updated staff estimates
| | | * Initial IPB products
| | | * Preliminary movement
| Higher HQs order/plan | **Step 2: Mission Analysis** | * Restated mission
| | | * Initial Cdr's intent and planning guidance
| | | * Initial CCIR
| | | * Updated staff estimates
| | | * Initial IPB products
| | | * Preliminary movement
| Higher HQs IPB | | * Updated staff estimates and products
| Staff Estimates | | * COA statements and sketches
| | | * Refined Cdr's intent and planning guidance
| | | * War-Game results
| | | * Decision support templates
| | | * Task organization
| | | * Mission to subordinate units
| | | * Recommended CCIR
| | | * Decision Matrix
| Restated mission | **Step 3: COA Development** | * Decision Matrix
| | | * Refined Cdr's intent and planning guidance
| | | * Refined CCIR
| | | * High-payoff target list
| | | * OPLAN/OPORD
| Refined Cdr's intent and planning guidance | **Step 4: COA Analysis (War Game)** | * Decision Matrix
| | | * Refined Cdr's intent and planning guidance
| | | * Refined CCIR
| | | * High-payoff target list
| | | * OPLAN/OPORD
| Enemy COAs | | * Decision Matrix
| COA statements and sketches | | * Refined CCIR
| | | * High-payoff target list
| | | * OPLAN/OPORD
| War-Game results | **Step 5: COA Comparison** | * Decision Matrix
| | | * Refined Cdr's intent and planning guidance
| | | * Refined CCIR
| | | * High-payoff target list
| | | * OPLAN/OPORD
| Criteria for comparison | | * Decision Matrix
| | | * Refined CCIR
| | | * High-payoff target list
| | | * OPLAN/OPORD
| Decision Matrix | **Step 6: COA Approval** | * Decision Matrix
| | | * Refined Cdr's intent and planning guidance
| | | * Refined CCIR
| | | * High-payoff target list
| | | * OPLAN/OPORD
| Approved COA | **Step 7: Orders Production** | * Decision Matrix
| | | * Refined CCIR
| | | * High-payoff target list
| | | * OPLAN/OPORD

Note 1: A star depicts commander activities or decisions.

Note 2: Rehearsals and backbriefs occur during preparation and ensure an orderly transition between planning and execution.

Note 3: Preparation and execution, while not part of the MDMP, are shown to highlight the importance of continuous planning throughout the operations process.
those who will execute it that the subordinate units have time to produce their own plans and prepare for the operation. Rehearsals and backbriefs occur during preparation. They are essential to ensure that the units executing the orders have a clear understanding of the mission, commander’s intent, and concept of operations. During execution, plans are refined or planning for a new operation begins, as the situation requires. Leaders assess the plans constantly—during the planning, preparation, and execution stages. At any time during the operations process, the situation may require the commander to restart the MDMP. Examples of these circumstances include:

- The commander receives a new mission
- The commander receives or perceives a possible follow-on mission
- The commander must respond to unforeseen developments as the situation unfolds.

The MDMP can be as detailed as time, resources, experience, and the situation permit. It is detailed, deliberate, sequential, and time consuming. When enough planning time and staff support are available to thoroughly examine two or more friendly and enemy COAs, commanders and staff go through all the steps and substeps. This typically occurs when commanders are developing operation plans (OPLANs), when they are planning for an entirely new mission, or during training designed to teach the MDMP.

Commanders can alter the MDMP when time is short. In such conditions, commanders assess the situation, update their higher commander’s picture of the problem, and direct the staff to perform those MDMP activities needed to support the required decisions. Streamlined processes permit commanders and staffs to shorten the time needed to issue orders when the situation changes. When time is short, commanders take many MDMP steps at the same time. To an outsider, it may seem that experienced commanders and staffs omit key steps. In reality, however, they use existing products or perform steps in their heads instead of on paper. They also use many shorthand procedures and implicit communication. Fragmentary orders (FRAGOs) and warning orders (WARNOs) are essential in such situations.

Performing the Military Decision Making Process

The commander and staff perform the MDMP steps in Figure 1.1 one after another. There may not be distinct points at which one step ends and another begins.

Receipt of Mission

The MDMP begins when the commander receives or anticipates a new mission. This can come from an order issued by higher headquarters or from an ongoing operation. For example, the commander may decide—based on a change in the arrangement of enemy or friendly forces, or other battlefield factors—that there is an opportunity to accomplish the higher commander’s intent by a means different from the original concept of operations. When a new mission is identified, commanders and staffs go through the MDMP process and produce the outputs shown in Table 1.1.
SECTION 1

FIGURE 1.1

As soon as a unit receives a new mission, its operations section issues a WARNO to the staff alerting it of the pending planning process. The staff prepares for the mission analysis immediately after receiving a WARNO by gathering the tools needed for mission analysis. These include:

- Higher headquarters’ order or plan, with graphics
- Maps of the area of operations
- Both the unit’s and higher headquarters’ SOPs
- Appropriate FMs (especially FM 5-0)
- Existing staff estimates.

Once they have received the new mission, the commander and the staff must do a quick initial assessment. This is designed to make best use of the commander’s time while preserving time for subordinate commanders to plan and complete their own combat preparations. This assessment:

- Determines the time available from mission receipt to execution
- Determines the time needed for the unit and subordinate units to plan, prepare for, and execute the mission
- Determines the initial operational and staff timeline
- Determines which staff estimates are already available to assist planning.

The critical product of this assessment is an initial allocation of time. The commander and the staff must balance the desire for detailed planning against the need for immediate action. The commander must provide guidance to subordinate units as early as possible to allow them as much time as possible for their own planning and preparation.

As a general rule, commanders use the one-third, two-thirds rule. They allocate a minimum of two-thirds of available time for subordinate units to plan and prepare. This leaves one-third of the time for the commander and staff to plan. They use the other two-thirds for their own preparation. More than any other factor, time determines the depth of detail in which the staff can plan. The commander then issues the initial guidance.

The last step in the mission-receipt phase is to issue a WARNO to subordinate and supporting units. This order must include as a minimum the type of operation, the general location of the operation, the initial timeline, and any movement or reconnaissance to initiate. WARNOs make parallel planning easier. Parallel planning means that several echelons can work on their MDMPs at the same time. This is essential to speed up the process for subordinate units and allow them as much time as possible to conduct their own planning.
Mission Analysis

A thorough mission analysis is crucial to planning. Both the process and products of mission analysis help commanders refine their understanding of the situation and determine their mission. Accurate situational understanding helps them better visualize the operation. Mission analysis consists of 17 tasks, not necessarily sequential (see Figure 1.2). In addition to the staff’s mission analysis, commanders perform their own mission analysis. This gives them a frame of reference to assess the staff’s work and develop their mental picture of the situation. The staff uses running estimates to record assessments and other information. Anticipation, prior preparation, and a trained staff are the keys to a timely mission analysis.

Step 1: Analyze the higher headquarters’ order. The commander and staff thoroughly analyze the higher headquarters’ order. This step ensures they completely understand the higher commander’s intent, the mission, and the concept of the operation.

Step 2: Conduct initial intelligence preparation of the battlefield. The IPB is a systematic, continuous process of analyzing the threat and the effects of the environment on the unit. It identifies facts and assumptions that determine COAs to deal with likely threats. To facilitate parallel planning, the intelligence officer of the higher headquarters must provide all intelligence products to subordinate units as soon as they are usable, even if they are incomplete.

Step 3: Determine specified, implied, and essential tasks. Specified tasks are those that higher headquarters assigns to a unit. Paragraphs 2 and 3 of the higher headquarters’ order or plan state specified tasks. Implied tasks are those that the unit must perform to accomplish a specified task, but that the higher headquarters’ order does not state. Units derive their implied tasks from a detailed analysis of METT-TC: Mission, Enemy, Terrain, Troops, Time, and Civil considerations. After analyzing specified and implied tasks, they present for the commander’s approval a tentative list of tasks they must execute to accomplish the mission. These tasks are the essential tasks.

Step 4: Review available assets. The commander and staff examine the current task organization, support relationships, and status of all units. From this they determine if...
they have the assets needed to perform all specified and implied tasks. If they find shortages, they identify the additional resources they will need to succeed.

**Step 5: Determine constraints.** A higher commander normally places some constraints, or limits, on subordinate commanders’ freedom of action. Constraints can take the form of a requirement to do something (for example, maintain a reserve of one company) or a prohibition (for example, no reconnaissance forward of a certain line before H-hour).

**Step 6: Identify critical facts and assumptions.** The staff gathers two kinds of information concerning assigned tasks—facts and assumptions. Facts are statements of known information concerning the situation—including enemy and friendly dispositions, available troops, unit strengths, and material readiness. Assumptions are suppositions in the absence of facts about the current or future situation. They take the place of necessary, but unavailable, facts and fill the gaps in what the commander and staff know about a situation.

**Step 7: Perform risk assessment.** The commander and staff identify accident-risk hazards and make an initial assessment of the risk level for each hazard.

**Step 8: Determine initial commander’s critical information requirements (CCIR).** The CCIR identify information the commander needs to support a picture of the battlefield (visualization) and to make critical decisions. They help the commander filter the available information by defining what is important to accomplishing the mission. They also help focus the efforts of subordinates and staff, assist in allocating resources, and help staff officers make recommendations.

**Step 9: Determine the initial intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) plan.** Based on the initial IPB and CCIR, the staff, primarily the intelligence officer (G-2/S-2), identifies gaps in the intelligence available and develops an initial reconnaissance and surveillance plan to acquire more information.

**Step 10: Update the operational timeline.** The commander and staff refine their initial plan for using available time. They compare the time needed to accomplish essential tasks to the higher headquarters’ timeline to ensure they can accomplish the mission in the allotted time. The commander and staff specify when and where they will conduct the briefings that result from the planning process and when, where, and in what form they will rehearse. Commanders can gain planning time for their own and subordinate units by sending additional WARNOs as detailed plans develop.

**Step 11: Write the restated mission.** The executive officer or operations officer (XO or G-3/S-3) prepares a restated version of the unit’s mission based on the mission analysis. The restated mission must contain all the elements of a mission statement: who will execute the action (what types of forces); what type of action is contemplated (attack, defend); when the action will begin; where the action will occur; and why each force will conduct its part of the operation.

**Step 12: Deliver a mission analysis briefing.** Time permitting, the staff briefs the commander on the relevant conclusions of its mission analysis. This helps the commander and staff develop a shared vision of the upcoming operation’s requirements.

**Step 13: Approve the restated mission.** Immediately after the mission-analysis briefing, the commander approves the restated mission. This can be the staff’s recommended restatement of the mission, a modified version of the staff’s recommendation, or one the commander has developed.
Step 14: Develop the initial commander’s intent. During the mission analysis, the commander develops an initial intent for the operation. After reviewing the mission-analysis briefing and the restated mission, the commander modifies the intent statement if necessary.

The commander’s intent is a clear, concise statement of what the force must do to succeed and the desired end state. It provides the link between the mission and the concept of operations by stating the key tasks. Along with the mission, these tasks are the basis for subordinates to exercise initiative when unanticipated opportunities arise or when the original concept of operations no longer applies. The intent is normally expressed in four or five sentences and all orders must contain it. The mission and the commander’s intent must be written so that units two echelons down can understand them.

Step 15: Issue the commander’s planning guidance. After the commander approves the restated mission and states the intent, he or she provides the staff with additional guidance in planning the operation. By stating the planning options to consider or ignore, the commander can save staff members time and effort by allowing them to concentrate on developing COAs that meet the commander’s intent. The commander’s guidance must focus on the essential tasks supporting mission accomplishment. The guidance emphasizes in broad terms when, where, and how the commander intends to mass combat power to accomplish the mission according to the higher commander’s intent.

Step 16: Issue a warning order. Immediately after the commander gives this guidance, the staff sends subordinate and supporting units a WARNO.

Step 17: Review facts and assumptions. During the rest of the decision making process, the commander and staff periodically review all available facts and assumptions. New facts may change requirements and analysis of the mission. Whenever the facts or assumptions change, the commander and staff must assess how these changes affect the plan and make the necessary adjustments.

Developing Courses of Action

After receiving guidance, the staff develops courses of action (COAs) for analysis and comparison. If alternative courses of action are not necessary, they skip this step. The restated mission should provide the who, what, when, where, and why. The command guidance and intent focus the plan development within time constraints and the development of courses of action to support it. COAs must meet the criteria of:

- **Suitability**—each must accomplish the mission and comply with the commander’s guidance
- **Feasibility**—the unit must have the time, space, and resources to accomplish the mission
- **Acceptability**—the tactical or operational advantage gained by executing the COA must justify the cost in resources, especially casualties
- **Distinguishability**—each COA must differ significantly from any others
- **Completeness**—each must be a complete mission statement.

**Six Steps to Developing COAs**

Step 1: Analyze relative combat power. Combat power is the effect created by combining the elements of maneuver, firepower, protection, and leadership against the enemy. The commander integrates and applies the effects of these elements with other potential combat multipliers (combat support, combat service support, and available assets of other services) against the enemy. The goal is to generate overwhelming combat power to accomplish the mission at minimal cost.
**Course of Action Analysis**

COA analysis (war-gaming) is a disciplined process. It includes rules and steps that help commanders and staffs visualize the flow of a battle (see Figure 1.4). The process considers the arrangement, strengths, and weaknesses of friendly forces; enemy assets and probable COAs; and characteristics of the area of operations (AO). It relies heavily on an understanding of doctrine, tactical judgment, and experience. War-gaming focuses the
staff’s attention on each phase of the operation in a logical sequence. It is a recurring process of action, reaction, and counteraction.

War-gaming stimulates ideas, highlights critical tasks, and provides insights that planners otherwise might miss. It is a critical step in the MDMP, and commanders should allocate it more time than any other step. The commander or chief of staff/executive officer determines how much time is available for war-gaming and ensures this schedule is followed.

During the war game, the staff takes each COA and begins to develop a detailed plan, while determining its strengths or weaknesses. War-gaming tests and improves COAs. The commander and staff (and subordinate commanders and staffs if the war game is conducted collaboratively) may change an existing COA or develop a new COA after identifying unforeseen events, tasks, requirements, or problems.

**General War-Gaming Rules**

War-gamers must:

- Remain objective, not allowing personality or their sense of “what the commander wants” to influence them—they avoid defending a COA just because they developed it
- Accurately record advantages and disadvantages of each COA as they emerge
- Continually assess feasibility, acceptability, and suitability of each COA—if a COA fails any of these tests, they should reject it
- Avoid drawing premature conclusions and gathering facts to support such conclusions
- Avoid comparing one COA with another during the war game—this step occurs after war-gaming has ended.

**War-Gaming Steps**

The staff follows eight steps during the war-gaming process:

Step 1. **Gather the tools.** The staff gathers the necessary tools, materials, and data for the war game. Units must war-game on maps, sand tables, or other tools that accurately reflect the nature of the terrain.

Step 2. **List all friendly forces.** The commander and staff consider all available combat, CS, and CSS units that can be committed to the battle, paying special attention to support relationships and limits. The friendly-force list remains constant for all COAs the staff analyzes.
Step 3. List assumptions. The commander and staff review previous assumptions for continued validity and necessity.

Step 4. List known critical events and decision points. Critical events are those that directly influence mission accomplishment. They include events that trigger significant actions or decisions (commitment of an enemy reserve), complicated actions requiring detailed study (a passage of lines), and essential tasks identified during mission analysis. Decision points are events or locations on the battlefield where tactical decisions are required during mission execution.

Step 5. Determine evaluation criteria. Evaluation criteria are the factors the staff uses to measure the relative effectiveness and efficiency of one COA relative to other COAs following the war game. Evaluation criteria may include anything the commander desires, including principles of war, doctrinal fundamentals, and—most importantly—the commander’s guidance and intent.

Step 6. Select the war-game method. There are three recommended war-gaming techniques—the belt, the avenue-in-depth, and the box. Each one considers the area of interest and all enemy forces affecting the outcome of the operations. The techniques can be used separately or in combination.

- The belt technique divides the battlefield into belts (areas) running the width of the AO. The belt technique is most effective when terrain is divided into well-defined compartments; during phased operations (such as river crossing or airborne operations); or when the enemy is deployed in defined belts or echelons.
- The avenue-in-depth technique focuses on one avenue of approach at a time, beginning with the main effort. This technique is good for offensive COAs or in the defense when channeling terrain inhibits mutual support.
- The box technique is a detailed analysis of a critical area, such as an engagement area, a river-crossing site, or a landing zone. It is most useful when time is limited. When using this technique, the staff isolates the area and focuses on critical events in it. Staff members assume that friendly units can handle most of the situations on the battlefield and focus their attention on essential tasks. The box technique is the most effective technique to use below the battalion level.

Step 7: Select a method to record and display results. Recording the war game’s results gives the staff a record from which to build task organizations, synchronize activity, develop decision-support templates, confirm and refine event templates, prepare plans or orders, and analyze COAs based on identified strengths and weaknesses. Two methods are used to portray the action—the synchronization matrix and the sketch note.

- The synchronization matrix method allows the staff to synchronize the COA across time and space in relation to the enemy COA.
- The sketch note method uses brief notes concerning critical locations or tasks. These notes reference specific locations on the map or relate to general considerations covering broad areas. The commander and staff note locations on the map and on a separate war-game work sheet.

Step 8: War-game the battle and assess the results. During war-gaming, the commander and staff try to foresee the dynamics of a battle’s action, reaction, and counteraction. The staff analyzes each selected event by identifying the tasks the force must accomplish one echelon down, using assets two echelons down. Identifying the COAs’ strengths and weaknesses allows the staff to make adjustments as necessary.
Course of Action Comparison

The COA comparison starts with each staff officer analyzing and evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of each COA from his or her perspective. Using the evaluation criteria developed earlier, the staff then outlines each COA, highlighting its advantages and disadvantages.

The staff compares feasible courses of action to identify the one that is most likely to succeed against the most likely enemy COA and the most dangerous enemy COA. The selected COA should:

- Pose the minimum risk to Soldiers, equipment, and mission accomplishment
- Best position the force for future operations
- Provide the most flexibility to meet unknowns during execution
- Give subordinates as much latitude as possible for initiative.

Course of Action Approval

After completing its analysis and comparison, the staff identifies its preferred COA and makes a recommendation in a decision briefing to the commander. After the decision briefing, the commander decides which COA best supports accomplishing the mission. If the commander selects none of the considered courses of action, the decision making process will start at COA analysis (war-gaming). If the commander modifies a proposed COA or provides additional guidance, the refined or new plan must be derived from the war-game process.

Critical Thinking

Even though you’re unlikely to be directly involved in the MDMP, how will a knowledge of the process help you as a second lieutenant?

Orders Production

Based on the commander’s decision and final guidance, the staff refines the COA, completes the plan, and prepares to issue the order. The staff prepares the order or plan to implement the selected COA by turning it into a concept of operations and the required fire support. The commander can use the COA statement as a concept-of-operations statement. The COA sketch can become the basis for the operation overlay. Orders and plans provide all necessary information subordinates require for execution, but without unnecessary limits that would inhibit subordinate initiative.

Finally, the commander reviews and approves orders before the staff reproduces and briefs subordinates on them. The commander and staff should conduct confirmation briefings with subordinates immediately after issuing orders to ensure that subordinates understand the commander’s intent and concept.
Critical Thinking

What steps in the MDMP do you have experience with, either through ROTC or prior military service?

Critical Thinking

Consider the Iraq war plan vignette at the beginning of this section. In what ways do you think the one-year planning process followed the MDMP? In what ways do you think it diverged from the MDMP?
CONCLUSION

It should be clear by now that the MDMP is a very thorough, detailed process. The primary users of MDMP are unit leaders with staff organizations—normally at the battalion level or higher. The established and proven procedures of the MDMP combine elements of planning and operating to save time and achieve parallel decision making and planning.

The MDMP combines with and supports the troop leading procedures. Both follow similar problem solving steps. The key difference is the level of staff available to the decision maker. Smaller-unit leaders should use as much of the MDMP as feasible while implementing the TLP. The leadership decision a commander makes at the end of the MDMP results in an estimate of the situation that a unit leader can use to develop a tentative plan in the TLP. It is confirmed through reconnaissance to develop a completed order. Various outputs of the MDMP (for example WARNOs and OPORDs) feed back into and become inputs for the TLP.

Lack of time can be the most critical factor in the MDMP. It causes many of the challenges Army leaders face when using the MDMP. Under the one-third, two-thirds rule of time management, commanders should use no more than one-third of the available time for their own planning and for issuing a plan or order. The remaining two-thirds is for subordinates to plan and prepare for the operation.

**Learning Assessment**

1. List, and briefly describe, the seven steps of the MDMP.
2. Explain how the military decision making process integrates with and supports the troop leading procedure.
Key Words

- military decision making process (MDMP)
- backbrief
- higher headquarters
- intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB)
- specified tasks
- implied tasks
- essential tasks
- commander’s intent
- concept of operations

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