

Chapter 1

Fundamentals of the Operations Process

The chapter describes the nature of operations in which commanders, supported by their staffs, exercise mission command. Next, this chapter defines and describes the operations process. A discussion of the principles commanders and staffs consider for the effective execution of the operations process follows. The chapter concludes with discussions of the integrating processes, continuing activities, battle rhythm, and running estimates.

THE NATURE OF OPERATIONS

1-1. To understand doctrine on mission command and the operations process, Soldiers must have an appreciation for the general nature of operations. Military operations are human endeavors, contests of wills characterized by continuous and mutual adaptation among all participants. In operations, Army forces face thinking and adaptive enemies, differing agendas of various actors (organizations and individuals), and changing perceptions of civilians in an operational area. As all sides take actions, each side reacts, learns, and adapts. Appreciating these relationships among human wills is essential to understanding the fundamental nature of operations.

1-2. In operations, friendly forces fiercely engage a multifaceted enemy force. Each side consists of numerous diverse and connected parts, each interdependent and adapting to changes within and between each other. In addition, an operational environment is not static. It continually evolves. This evolution results, in part, from humans interacting within an operational environment as well as from their ability to learn and adapt. The dynamic nature of an operational environment makes determining the relationship between cause and effect difficult and contributes to the uncertainty of military operations.

1-3. Uncertainty pervades operations in the form of unknowns about the enemy, the people, and the surroundings. Even the behavior of friendly forces is often uncertain because of human mistakes and the effects of stress on Soldiers. Chance and friction contribute to the uncertain nature of operations. The sudden death of a local leader that causes an eruption of violence illustrates chance. The combinations of countless factors that impinge on the conduct of operations, from broken equipment that slows movement to complicated plans that confuse subordinates, are examples of friction.

1-4. During operations leaders make decisions, develop plans, and direct actions under varying degrees of uncertainty. Commanders seek to counter the uncertainty of operations by empowering subordinates at the scene to make decisions, act, and quickly adapt to changing circumstances. As such, the philosophy of mission command guides commanders, staffs, and subordinates throughout the conduct of operations.

MISSION COMMAND

1-5. *Mission command* is the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations (ADP 6-0). This philosophy of command fosters an environment of mutual trust and shared understanding among commanders, staffs, and subordinates. It requires a command climate in which commanders encourage subordinates to accept prudent risk and exercise disciplined initiative to seize opportunities and counter threats within the commander's intent. Through mission orders, commanders focus their orders on the purpose of the operation rather than on the details of how to perform assigned tasks. Doing this minimizes detailed control and allows subordinates the greatest possible freedom of action. Finally, when delegating authority to subordinates, commanders set the necessary conditions for success by allocating appropriate resources to subordinates based on assigned tasks.

1-6. Mission command is also a warfighting function. The *mission command warfighting function* is the related tasks and systems that develop and integrate those activities enabling a commander to balance the art of command and the science of control in order to integrate the other warfighting functions (ADRP 3-0). Through the mission command warfighting function, commanders and staffs integrate the other warfighting functions into a coherent whole to mass the effects of combat power at the decisive place and time. (See ADRP 6-0 for a detailed discussion of mission command and the mission command warfighting function.)

THE OPERATIONS PROCESS

1-7. The Army's framework for exercising mission command is the *operations process*—the major mission command activities performed during operations: planning, preparing, executing, and continuously assessing the operation (ADP 5-0). (See figure 1-1.) Commanders, supported by their staffs, use the operations process to drive the conceptual and detailed planning necessary to understand, visualize, and describe their operational environment; make and articulate decisions; and direct, lead, and assess military operations.

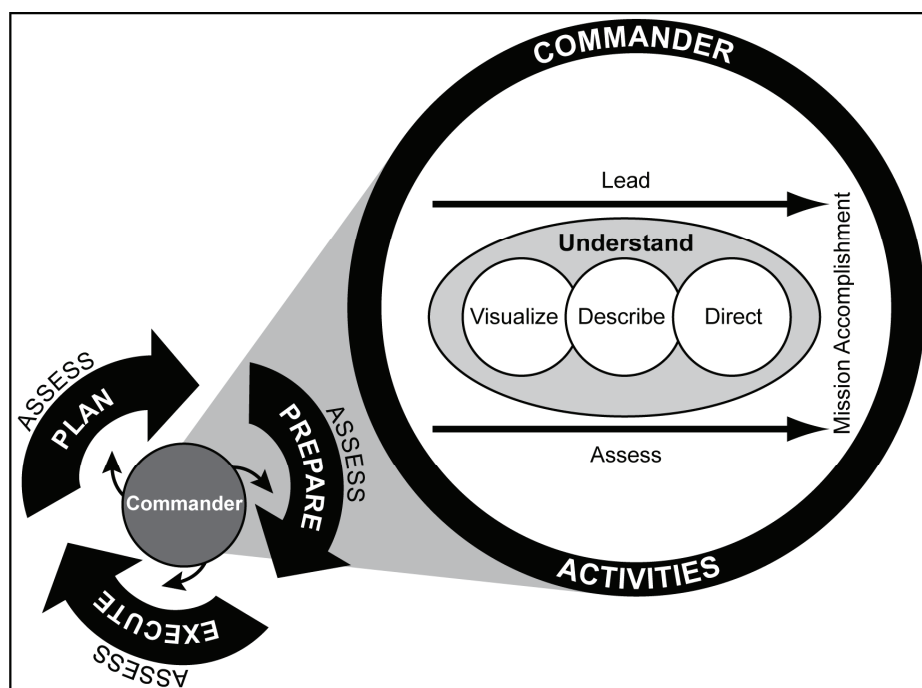


Figure 1-1. The operations process

1-8. The activities of the operations process are not discrete; they overlap and recur as circumstances demand. Planning starts an iteration of the operations process (see chapter 2). Upon completion of the initial order, planning continues as leaders revise the plan based on changing circumstances. Preparing begins during planning and continues through execution (see chapter 3). Execution puts a plan into action by applying combat power to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative to gain a position of relative advantage (see chapter 4). Assessing is continuous and influences the other three activities (see chapter 5).

1-9. Both the commander and staff have important roles within the operations process. The commander's role is to drive the operations process through the activities of understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing operations as depicted in figure 1-1. The staff's role is to assist commanders with understanding situations, making and implementing decisions, controlling operations, and assessing progress. In addition, the staff assists subordinate units (commanders and staffs), and keeps units and organizations outside the headquarters informed throughout the conduct of operations. (See ATTP 5-0.1 for a detailed discussion of the duties and responsibilities of the staff.)

PRINCIPLES OF THE OPERATIONS PROCESS

1-10. The operations process, while simple in concept (plan, prepare, execute, and assess), is dynamic in execution. Commanders and staffs use the operations process to integrate numerous tasks executed throughout the headquarters and with subordinate units. Commanders must organize and train their staffs and subordinates as an integrated team to simultaneously plan, prepare, execute, and assess operations. In addition to the principles of mission command, commanders and staffs consider the following principles for the effective use of the operations process:

- Commanders drive the operations process.
- Build and maintain situational understanding.
- Apply critical and creative thinking.
- Encourage collaboration and dialogue.

Principles of mission command

- Build cohesive teams through mutual trust.
- Create shared understanding.
- Provide a clear commander's intent.
- Exercise disciplined initiative.
- Use mission orders.
- Accept prudent risk.

COMMANDERS DRIVE THE OPERATIONS PROCESS

1-11. Commanders are the most important participants in the operations process. While staffs perform essential functions that amplify the effectiveness of operations, commanders drive the operations process through understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing operations. Accurate and timely running estimates (see paragraphs 1-68 to 1-71) are key knowledge management tools that assist commanders in driving the operations process. (See figure 1-2.)

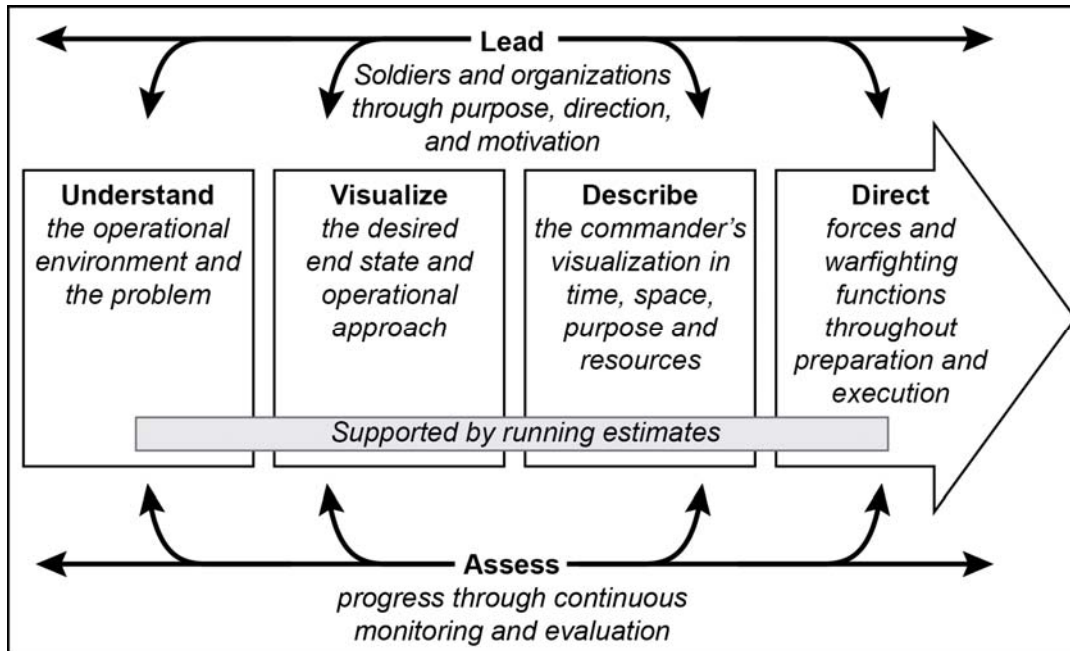


Figure 1-2. The commander's role in the operations process

Understand

1-12. Understanding is fundamental to the commander's ability to establish a situation's context. It is essential to effective decisionmaking during planning and execution. Analysis of the operational and mission variables (see paragraphs 1-32 to 1-35) provides the information used to develop understanding and frame the problem. In addition, conceptual and detailed planning assist commanders in developing their initial understanding of the operational environment and the problem (see chapter 2). To develop a better understanding of an operational environment, commanders circulate within the area of operations as

often as possible, collaborating with subordinate commanders and with Soldiers. Using personal observations and inputs from others (to include running estimates from the staff), commanders improve their understanding of their operational environment throughout the operations process.

1-13. Information collection (to include reconnaissance and surveillance) is indispensable to building and improving the commander's understanding. Formulating commander's critical information requirements (CCIRs), keeping them current, determining where to place key personnel, and arranging for liaison also contribute to improving the commander's understanding. Greater understanding enables commanders to make better decisions throughout the conduct of operations.

Visualize

1-14. As commanders begin to understand their operational environment and the problem, they start visualizing a desired end state and potential solutions to solve the problem. Collectively, this is known as *commander's visualization*—the mental process of developing situational understanding, determining a desired end state, and envisioning an operational approach by which the force will achieve that end state (ADP 5-0). Assignment of a mission provides the focus for developing the commander's visualization that, in turn, provides the basis for developing plans and orders. During preparation and execution, the commander's visualization helps commanders determine if, when, and what to decide, as they adapt to changing conditions.

1-15. In building their visualization, commanders first seek to understand those conditions that represent the current situation. Next, commanders envision a set of desired future conditions that represents the operation's end state. Commanders complete their visualization by conceptualizing an *operational approach*—a description of the broad actions the force must take to transform current conditions into those desired at end state (JP 5-0). (See figure 1-3.)

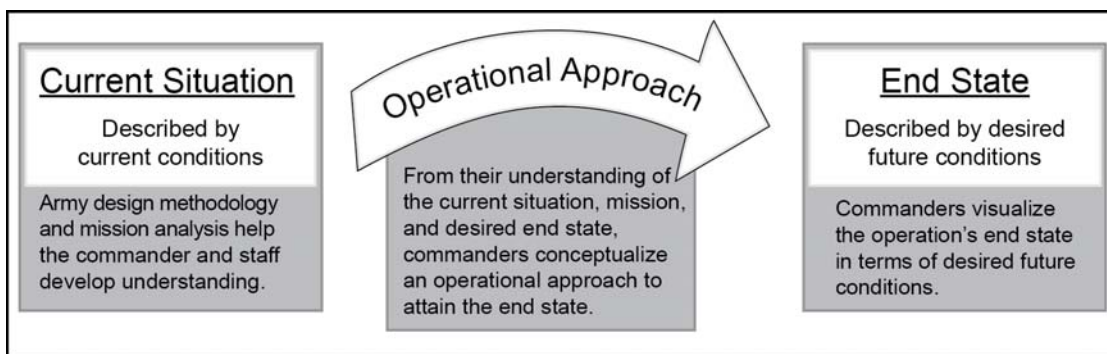


Figure 1-3. Completed commander's visualization

1-16. Commanders apply the Army design methodology and use the elements of operational art (see ADRP 3-0) when developing and describing their commander's visualization. They also actively collaborate with higher, subordinate and adjacent commanders, the staff, and unified action partners to assist them in building their visualization. *Unified action partners* are those military forces, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and elements of the private sector with whom Army forces plan, coordinate, synchronize, and integrate during the conduct of operations (ADRP 3-0). Because of the dynamic nature of military operations, commanders must continuously validate their visualization throughout the operations process.

Describe

1-17. After commanders visualize an operation, they describe it to their staffs and subordinates to facilitate shared understanding and purpose. During planning, commanders ensure subordinates understand their visualization well enough to begin course of action planning development. During execution, commanders describe modifications to their visualization in updated planning guidance and directives resulting in fragmentary

orders that adjust the original order. Commanders describe their visualization in doctrinal terms, refining and clarifying it, as circumstances require. Commanders express their visualization in terms of—

- Commander's intent.
- Planning guidance, including an operational approach.
- Commander's critical information requirements.
- Essential elements of friendly information.

Commander's Intent

1-18. The *commander's intent* is a clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state that supports mission command, provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander's desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned (JP 3-0). During planning, the initial commander's intent drives course of action development. In execution, the commander's intent guides disciplined initiative as subordinates make decisions when facing unforeseen opportunities or countering threats.

1-19. Commanders develop their intent statement personally. It must be easy to remember and clearly understood by commanders and staffs two echelons lower in the chain of command. The more concise the commander's intent, the easier it is to recall and understand. (See chapter 2 for a discussion of writing the commander's intent statement.)

Planning Guidance

1-20. Commanders provide planning guidance to the staff based upon their visualization. Planning guidance must convey the essence of the commander's visualization, including a description of the operational approach. Effective planning guidance reflects how the commander sees the operation unfolding. It broadly describes when, where, and how the commander intends to employ combat power to accomplish the mission, within the higher commander's intent. Broad and general guidance gives the staff and subordinate leaders' maximum latitude; it lets proficient staffs develop flexible and effective options.

1-21. Commanders use their experience and judgment to add depth and clarity to their planning guidance. They ensure staffs understand the broad outline of their visualization while allowing them the latitude necessary to explore different options. This guidance provides the basis for the concept of operations without dictating the specifics of the final plan. As with their intent, commanders may modify planning guidance based on staff and subordinate input and changing conditions. (See ATTP 5-0.1 for a detailed discussion of developing and issue planning guidance.)

Commander's Critical Information Requirements

1-22. A *commander's critical information requirement* is an information requirement identified by the commander as being critical to facilitating timely decisionmaking. The two key elements are friendly force information requirements and priority intelligence requirements (JP 3-0). A commander's critical information requirement (CCIR) directly influences decisionmaking and facilitates the successful execution of military operations. Commanders decide to designate an information requirement as a CCIR based on likely decisions and their visualization of the course of the operation. A CCIR may support one or more decisions. During planning, staffs recommend information requirements for commanders to designate as CCIRs. During preparation and execution, they recommend changes to CCIRs based on assessment. A CCIR is—

- Specified by a commander for a specific operation.
- Applicable only to the commander who specifies it.
- Situation dependent—directly linked to a current or future mission.
- Time-sensitive.

1-23. Always promulgated by a plan or order, commanders limit the number of CCIRs to focus the efforts of limited collection assets. The fewer the CCIRs, the easier it is for staffs to remember, recognize, and act on each one. This helps staffs and subordinates identify information the commander needs immediately. While most staffs provide relevant information, a good staff expertly distills that information. It identifies

Direct

1-28. Commanders direct all aspects of operations by establishing their commander's intent, setting achievable objectives, and issuing clear tasks to subordinate units. Throughout the operations process, commanders direct forces by—

- Preparing and approving plans and orders.
- Establishing command and support relationships.
- Assigning and adjusting tasks, control measures, and task organization.
- Positioning units to maximize combat power.
- Positioning key leaders at critical places and times to ensure supervision.
- Allocating resources to exploit opportunities and counter threats.
- Committing the reserve as required.

Lead

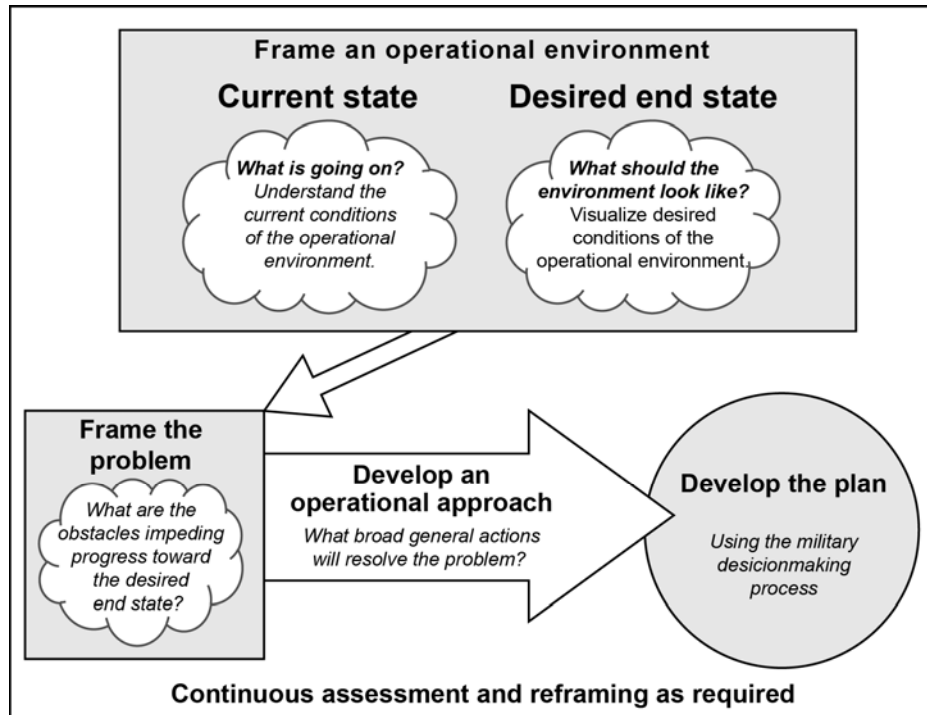
1-29. Through leadership, commanders provide purpose, direction, and motivation to subordinate commanders, their staff, and Soldiers. In many instances, a commander's physical presence is necessary to lead effectively. Where the commander locates within the area of operations is an important leadership consideration. Commanders balance their time between leading the staff through the operations process and providing purpose, direction, and motivation to subordinate commanders and Soldiers away from the command post.

Assess

1-30. Commanders continuously assess the situation to better understand current conditions and determine how the operation is progressing. Continuous assessment helps commanders anticipate and adapt the force to changing circumstances. Commanders incorporate the assessments of the staff, subordinate commanders, and unified action partners into their personal assessment of the situation. Based on their assessment, commanders modify plans and orders to adapt the force to changing circumstances.

BUILD AND MAINTAIN SITUATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

1-31. Success in operations demands timely and effective decisions based on applying judgment to available information and knowledge. As such, commanders and staffs seek to build and maintain situational understanding throughout the operations process. *Situational understanding* is the product of applying analysis and judgment to relevant information to determine the relationships among the operational and mission variables to facilitate decisionmaking (ADP 5-0). Building and maintaining situational understanding is essential to establishing the situation's context, developing effective plans, assessing operations, and making quality decisions throughout the operations process. Commanders continually strive to maintain their situational understanding and work through periods of reduced understanding as the situation evolves.



Reframing

2-49. Through continuous assessment, the commander and staff monitor the operational environment and progress toward setting conditions and achieving objectives. Assessment helps commanders measure the overall effectiveness of employing forces and capabilities to ensure that the operational approach remains feasible and acceptable in the context of the higher commander's intent and concept of operations. If the current operational approach is failing to meet these criteria, or if aspects of the operational environment or problem change significantly, the commander may decide to begin reframing efforts.

2-50. Reframing is the activity of revisiting earlier design hypotheses, conclusions, and decisions that underpin the current operational approach. In essence, reframing reviews what the commander and staff believe they understand about the operational environment, the problem, and the desired end state. At any time during the operations process, the decision to reframe may be triggered by factors such as—

- Assessment reveals a lack of progress.
- Key assumptions prove invalid.
- Unanticipated success or failure.
- A major event that causes “catastrophic change” in the operational environment.
- A scheduled periodic review that shows a problem.
- A change in mission or end state issued by higher authority.

2-51. During operations, commanders decide to reframe after realizing the desired conditions have changed, are not achievable, cannot be attained through the current operational approach, or because of change of mission or end state. Reframing provides the freedom to operate beyond the limits of any single perspective. Conditions will change during execution, and such change is expected because forces interact within the operational environment. Recognizing and anticipating these changes is fundamental to Army design methodology and essential to an organization's ability to learn.

THE MILITARY DECISIONMAKING PROCESS

2-52. 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 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.

2-53. The MDMP consists of seven steps as shown in figure 2-6 on page 2-12. 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.

2-54. 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.

2-55. 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.

Key inputs	Steps	Key outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher headquarters' plan or order or a new mission anticipated by the commander 	<p>Step 1: Receipt of Mission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commander's initial guidance Initial allocation of time
Warning order		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher headquarters' plan or order Higher headquarters' knowledge and intelligence products Knowledge products from other organizations Army design methodology products 	<p>Step 2: Mission Analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem statement Mission statement Initial commander's intent Initial planning guidance Initial CCIRs and EEFI Updated IPB and running estimates Assumptions
Warning order		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mission statement Initial commander's intent, planning guidance, CCIRs, and EEFI Updated IPB and running estimates Assumptions 	<p>Step 3: Course of Action (COA) Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COA statements and sketches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tentative task organization - Broad concept of operations Revised planning guidance Updated assumptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated running estimates Revised planning guidance COA statements and sketches Updated assumptions 	<p>Step 4: COA Analysis (War Game)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refined COAs Potential decision points War-game results Initial assessment measures Updated assumptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated running estimates Refined COAs Evaluation criteria War-game results Updated assumptions 	<p>Step 5: COA Comparison</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluated COAs Recommended COAs Updated running estimates Updated assumptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated running estimates Evaluated COAs Recommended COA Updated assumptions 	<p>Step 6: COA Approval</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commander-selected COA and any modifications Refined commander's intent, CCIRs, and EEFI Updated assumptions
Warning order		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commander-selected COA with any modifications Refined commander's intent, CCIRs, and EEFI Updated assumptions 	<p>Step 7: Orders Production, Dissemination, and Transition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved operation plan or order Subordinates understand the plan or order
<p>CCIR COA</p>	<p>commander's critical information requirement course of action</p>	<p>EEFI IPB</p> <p>essential element of friendly information intelligence preparation of the battlefield</p>

Figure 2-6. Steps of the military decisionmaking process

2-56. 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.

2-57. 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.

2-58. 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.

2-59. The chief of staff (COS) or executive officer (XO) is a key participant in the MDMP. The COS or XO 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 or XO provides timelines to the staff, establishes briefing times and locations, and provides any instructions necessary to complete the plan.

2-60. 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.

ARMY DESIGN METHODOLOGY AND THE MILITARY DECISIONMAKING PROCESS

2-61. Depending on the situation—to include the familiarity of the problem—commanders conduct Army design methodology before, in parallel with, or after the MDMP. When faced with an unfamiliar problem or when developing initial plans for extended operations, commanders often initiate the Army design methodology before the MDMP. This sequence helps them better understand the operational environment, frame the problem, and develop an operational approach to guide more detailed planning.

2-62. Commanders may also elect to conduct the Army design methodology in parallel with the MDMP. In this instance, members of the staff conduct mission analysis as the commander and other staff members engage in framing the operational environment and the problem. This focus helps commanders better understand aspects of the operational environment. The results of mission analysis (to include intelligence preparation of the battlefield and running estimates) inform commanders as they develop their operational approach that, in turn, facilitates course of action development during the MDMP.

2-63. In time-constrained conditions requiring immediate action, or if the problem is familiar, commanders may conduct the MDMP and publish an operation order without formally conducting Army design methodology. As time becomes available during execution, commanders may then initiate Army design methodology to help refine their commander's visualization and the initial plan developed using the MDMP.

KEY COMPONENTS OF A PLAN

2-69. The unit's task organization, mission statement, commander's intent, concept of operations, tasks to subordinate units, coordinating instructions, and control measures are key components of a plan. Commanders ensure their mission and end state nest with those of their higher headquarters. While the commander's intent focuses on the end state, the concept of operations focuses on the way or sequence of actions by which the force will achieve the end state. The concept of operations expands on the mission statement and commander's intent. Within the concept of operations, commanders may establish objectives as intermediate goals toward achieving the operation's end state. When developing tasks for subordinate units, commanders ensure that the purpose of each task nests with the accomplishment of another task, with the achievement of an objective, or directly to the attainment of an end state condition.

COMMANDER'S INTENT

2-92. The commander's intent succinctly describes what constitutes success for the operation. It includes the operation's purpose, key tasks, and the conditions that define the end state. It links the mission, concept of operations, and tasks to subordinate units. A clear commander's intent facilitates a shared understanding and focuses on the overall conditions that represent mission accomplishment. During execution, the commander's intent spurs disciplined initiative.

2-93. The commander's intent must be easy to remember and clearly understood by leaders and Soldiers two echelons lower in the chain of command. The shorter the commander's intent, the better it serves these purposes. Commanders develop their intent statement personally using the following components:

- Expanded purpose.
- Key tasks.
- End state.

2-94. When describing the expanded purpose of the operations, the commander's intent does not restate the "why" of the mission statement. Rather, it addresses the broader purpose of the operations and its relationship to the force as a whole.

2-95. **Key tasks are those activities the force must perform as a whole to achieve the desired end state.** Key tasks are not specified tasks for any subordinate unit; however, they may be sources of implied tasks. Acceptable courses of action accomplish all key tasks. During execution—when significant opportunities present themselves or the concept of operations no longer fits the situation—subordinates use key tasks to keep their efforts focused on achieving the desired end state. Examples of key tasks include terrain the force must control or an effect the force must have on the enemy.

2-96. The end state is a set of desired future conditions the commander wants to exist when an operation is concluded. Commanders describe the operation's end state by stating the desired conditions of the friendly force in relationship to desired conditions of the enemy, terrain, and civil considerations. A clearly defined end state promotes unity of effort among the force and with unified action partners.

CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

2-97. The *concept of operations* is a statement that directs the manner in which subordinate units cooperate to accomplish the mission and establishes the sequence of actions the force will use to achieve the end state. The concept of operations expands on the commander's intent by describing how the commander wants the force to accomplish the mission. It states the principal tasks required, the responsible subordinate units, and how the principal tasks complement one another.

Nested Concepts

2-99. ***Nested concepts is a planning technique to achieve unity of purpose whereby each succeeding echelon's concept of operations is aligned by purpose with the higher echelons' concept of operations.*** An effective concept of operations describes how the forces will support the mission of the higher headquarters and how the actions of subordinate units fit together to accomplish the mission. Commanders do this by organizing their forces by purpose. Commanders ensure that the primary tasks for each subordinate unit include a purpose that links the completion of that task to achievement of another task, an objective, or an end state condition.

Sequencing Actions and Phasing

2-100. Part of the art of planning is determining the sequence of actions that best accomplishes the mission. The concept of operations describes in sequence the start of the operation to the projected status of the force at the operation's end. If the situation dictates a significant change in tasks, task organization, or priorities of support during the operation, the commander may phase the operation. A *phase* is a planning and execution tool used to divide an operation in duration or activity (ADRP 3-0). For each phase of an operation, the commander designates a main effort. (See JP 5-0 for a discussion of phasing joint operations.)

2-101. Ideally, commanders plan to accomplish the mission with simultaneous actions throughout the area of operations. However, resource constraints and the friendly force's size may hinder the commanders' ability to do this. In these cases, commanders phase the operation. A change in phase usually involves a combination of changes of mission, task organization, priorities of support, or rules of engagement. Phasing helps in planning and controlling, and phasing may be indicated by time, distance, terrain, or event.

Decisive Points and Objectives

2-102. Identifying decisive points and determining objectives are central to creating the concept of operations. A *decisive point* is a geographic place, specific key event, critical factor, or function that, when acted upon, allows commanders to gain a marked advantage over an adversary or contribute materially to achieving success (JP 3-0). Examples of potential geographic decisive points include port facilities, towns controlling key road networks, distribution networks and nodes, and bases of operations. Specific events and elements of an enemy force may also be decisive points, such as commitment of a reserve or unit that delivers weapons of mass destruction. Decisive points have a different character during operations dominated by stability. These decisive points may be less tangible and more closely associated with important events and conditions. Examples include, but are not limited to—

- Participation in elections by a certain group.
- Electric power restored in a certain area.
- Police and emergency services reestablished.

2-103. Often, a situation presents more decisive points than the force can act on. The art of planning includes selecting decisive points that best lead to mission accomplishment and acting on them in a sequence that most quickly and efficiently leads to mission success. Once identified for action, decisive points become objectives.