

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
MARINE CORPS CIVIL-MILITARY OPERATIONS SCHOOL
WEAPONS TRAINING BATTALION
TRAINING COMMAND
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STUDENT OUTLINE

CMO SUPPORT TO COURSE OF ACTION COMPARISON AND DECISION

CAC-PLAN-212

CIVIL-MILITARY OPERATIONS PLANNER COURSE

M020AQD

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

a. **TERMINAL LEARNING OBJECTIVE**. Given a mission, commander's intent, CPB planning support products and as a member of a Civil-Military Operations (CMO) Working Group, integrate Civil-Military considerations into the planning process, to support the commander's decision making by providing an understanding of the civil environment and the nature of the problem in order to identify an appropriate solution, in accordance with MCWP 3-33.1. (CACT-PLAN-2001)

ENABLING LEARNING OBJECTIVES

(1) Without the aid of references, define the purpose of COA Comparison and Decision step, in accordance with the MCWP 5-1 Ch 5. (CACT-PLAN-2001v)

(2) Without the aid of references, identify the COA Comparison and Decision injects, in accordance with the MCWP 5-1 Ch 5. (CACT-PLAN-2001w)

(3) Without the aid of references, identify the COA Comparison and Decision activities, in accordance with the MCWP 5-1 Ch 5. (CACT-PLAN-2001x)

(4) Without the aid of references, identify the COA Comparison and Decision results, in accordance with the MCWP 5-1 Ch 5. (CACT-PLAN-2001y)

1. **COA COMPARISON AND DECISION CONSIDERATIONS**

a. **Purpose.** The purpose of COA Comparison and Decision is to provide the commander an understanding of the relative merit of each COA and to aid in his selection of the COA that will best accomplish the mission (solve the problem).

b. **Determine the Relative Merit of each COA.** At a minimum, the Operational Planning Team (OPT)/CMO Working Group will aid the Commander in answering the following key questions:

(1) How do the COAs measure up against one another?

(2) What are the advantages and disadvantages of each COA?

(3) What are the risks and shortfalls of each COA?

(4) Do the COAs achieve an advantage that justifies the cost in resources?

c. **Who Answers the Key Questions.** During this step of the Marine Corps Planning Process (MCP) the OPT will take a back seat in planning and allow for the Commander and his primary staff to lead the effort. In view of this COA Comparison and Decision is commonly referred to as the "Commander's Step." The Commander is responsible for answering the key questions but he doesn't do it alone.

(1) The Commander will rely on his experience, judgment, knowledge, expertise, staff, and major subordinate command (MSC) Commanders to help him determine the course of action that best accomplishes the mission.

(2) MSC Commanders' "Estimate of Supportability" and the Staffs' "Staff Estimates" are both essential to the decision making process. However, they will require continued refinement throughout the MCP.

(3) The OPT is in a supporting role ensuring that any planning guidance and products are updated as required and available during this process.

d. **Ongoing Activities.** CMO planners must review injects for COA Comparison and Decision.

e. **Step Injects.** Ensure that all planning support products developed during the previous steps are brought forward to support the COA Comparison and Decision process. A helpful method used to facilitate dialogue during this step is to post relative planning support products on the bulkhead. Below is a list of support injects brought forward from the war game step that will be useful during the COA Comparison and Decision step:

- (1) The Wargamed COA(s)/Graphic and Narrative
- (2) Refined Staff Estimates and Estimates of Supportability
- (3) Updated CPB
- (4) War Game Results
- (5) Branches/Sequels
- (6) Decision Support Template/Matrix
- (7) Synchronization Matrix
- (8) War Game Worksheet
- (9) COA Comparison and Decision Matrix

2. **CMO COMPARISON AND DECISION ACTIVITIES**

a. **COA Comparison and Decision Process.** The COA Comparison and Decision process involves the evaluating the relative merit of each designated COA; comparing the COAs against one another, and a decision by the Commander. Once the decision is made by the commander, the staff prepares the Concept of Operations (CONOPS), issues a Warning Order, and updates staff estimates and planning products as required.

b. **Activities.** There are three major activities: the evaluation of designated COAs, the comparison of COAs, and a decision by the Commander.

(1) During the evaluation process the commander's designated COAs are evaluated against the commander's evaluation criteria. This is normally, a subjective analysis with comments regarding the advantages, disadvantages, and risks of each COA relative to the Commander's evaluation criteria.

(2) During the Comparison process, COAs are compared against one another using the results of the COA evaluation.

(3) Once the comparison process is complete the staff is prepared to discuss the results of their analysis and provide recommendations (from their perspective functional area or organization) to the commander to aid in his decision making.

c. **COA Evaluation.** The Commander (or his representative) leads the discussion to subjectively examine each COA. During this activity:

(1) Each COA is thoroughly evaluated against the commander's evaluation criteria. Evaluation criteria are a set of standards utilized by the commander and staff to determine the relative merit of each COA. COAs may be evaluated against the established evaluation criteria independently or simultaneously against each criterion using the comment method. The commander will also rely on the good judgment and experience of his staff, SMEs, and subordinate commanders during this process.

(2) Identify the advantages, disadvantages, and risks of each COA and record the results.

(3) The commander and staff may utilize a COA Evaluation Matrix to record, track, and analyze critical information.

d. **COA Evaluation Matrix (Individually).** Below is an example of the comment method evaluating individual COAs against the commander's evaluation criteria. Colors (as noted in a legend) may be used to highlight the advantages, disadvantages, and cause(s) for concern. This is repeated for each COA.

Commander's Evaluation Criteria	COA 1
Command and control	Requires greater communication and coordination with local leadership
Simplicity	Requires less coordination - US controls support assets and operational oversight
Responsiveness	High probability for the adversary to provide HA support before Host Nation is decisively engaged
Logistical Supportability	Lacks communications to those needing the relief
Fewer DCs on the MSRs	HN and local security forces /police patrol are capable of providing security along the MSRs
Effects of weather	Requires ~ a mile of visibility for the ACE to support relief supply drops

Risk	Convoys bringing in relief supplies within range of adversary rocket launchers
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e. **COA Evaluation Matrix (Simultaneously)**. In this matrix, COAs are simultaneously evaluated against each established evaluation criteria to determine their advantages, disadvantages, and risks. Again, there may be a legend at the bottom of the matrix color coded to highlight the advantages, disadvantages, and concerns of the COA. This process is repeated until all designated COAs are evaluated against all criteria and the results are accurately recorded. Only after the COA evaluation is completed should you begin the COA comparison process.

f. **COA Comparison**. There are several options and tools used to conduct COA comparison. Given the results of the COA evaluation the commander and staff are prepared to compare:

(1) How the COAs measure up against one another.

(2) What the advantages and disadvantages are.

(3) What the associated risks are.

(4) Ensure that a recorder is appointed and uses a support tool that the commander and his staff are familiar with. Some techniques commonly used during the comparison process are:

(a) Qualitative comparison using comments

(b) Quantitative comparison using numerical ranking

g. **Comparison and Decision Matrix (Qualitative)**. This is a useful tool for comparing each COA's advantages, disadvantages, and risks relative to the evaluation criteria. Bear in mind, that this is subjective analysis using the comment method in order to determine the optimal COA. Color coding may help highlight the relevance of each commitment provided in the matrix.

h. **Comparison and Decision Matrix (Quantitative)**. Below is an example of a quantitative matrix. The Commander assigns a weight to each evaluation criterion. The COAs are ranked against each criterion.

(1) The COA ranking is multiplied by the assigned weight of the established criterion. Carry this through each evaluation criterion and sum the totals. The COA with the

highest value is generally the most desirable COA. The matrix may reflect various techniques for weighing the COA against the commander's evaluation criteria. However, exercise caution in arriving at a conclusion. Although, numerically this may be the best choice, it still may not be as supportable in comparison to the others.

(2) After completing the comparison process, the commander should have an enhanced understanding of the relative merit of each COA to aid in his decision making. Above all, ensure that the products produced during the evaluation and comparison process are used during the decision making process and brought forward to the orders development step.

Criteria	Weight	COA #1	COA #2	COA #3
Fewer DCs on MSRs (faster Movement)	4	3 12	2 8	1 4
Avoid collateral damage	2	2 4	2 4	3 6
Engage key leaders	1	2 2	1 1	3 3
Gains cooperation of civilian populace	1	2 2	1 1	3 3
Preserves key infrastructure	2	3 6	2 4	1 2
Amount of HA likely to be needed	2	1 2	2 4	3 6
TOTALS		28	22	24

Notes: 1. Best COA is assigned the highest value of the three COAs.
 2. Formula to compute value is to multiply weight times ranking (1, 2, or 3) for that COA
 3. Highest number is most likely COA

i. **Refined CMO Staff Estimate.** The CMO Planner will ensure that the evaluation and comparison results are accurately recorded in the CMO Staff Estimate. It is also important, to review and update the CPB and the CA resource shortfalls identified during this step to support the commander's decision making. The refined CMO Staff Estimate will be used to feed the CMO Annex of the Operations Order. CMO Planners should also:

- (1) Identify CMO capability and capacity shortfalls.
- (2) Identify CMO resource shortfalls (i.e. logistical,

supply, and communications).

j. **Final Staff Estimate**. Although the staff estimate is refined throughout the planning process, there is a point during the process where staff members will inform the commander of capabilities within their functional area. Each Staff section should summarize significant aspects of the situation which influence the course of action. The CMO Planner should focus on and recommend to the Commander a COA most supportable from the CMO perspective.

k. **Commander's Decision Making Process**

(1) Commander synthesizes information

(2) Commander considerations:

(a) MSC Commander's estimates of supportability should indicate the subordinate unit's ability to support each COA and identify the risks associated with each COA.

(b) Commander's concerns and final staff estimates

(3) The Commander relies on his experience and knowledge

(4) Weigh the risk and consider shortfalls

l. **Commander's Decision Options**. After reviewing the COA evaluation and comparison products the Commander's selection options are:

(1) Select a COA (without modification)

(2) Modify a COA (Mitigate risk or overcome disadvantages)

(3) Develop a new COA (Combine favorable elements of multiple COAs)

(4) Discard all COAs (Resume Problem Framing and COA Development)

(a) If the commander discards all COAs presented; this might suggest that he has not been involved throughout the process or something significant has changed in the battlespace.

(b) If the Commander modifies the selected COA the OPT should fully develop the COA then conduct a war game.

m. **COA Decision.** Once the commander has decided on a COA that he believes will best accomplish the mission; he should review the approved COA with subordinate commanders. Review the commander's design, mission statement, and intent to ensure that the COA has captured all tasks designated essential. Given the approved COA, the staff refines the CONOPS to facilitate the entire command's detailed planning effort.

3. **COA COMPARISON AND DECISION RESULTS**

a. **Results.** Based on the approved COA and the refined CONOPS, the CMO planner will refine the CMO supporting concept (which becomes the CMO concept of support) and CMO staff estimate. With the preparation of the CONOPS, a new or updated Warning Order is published to inform subordinate commander's concurrent and detailed planning.

b. **Additional Results.** Additional results may include the commander's identification of branches for further planning or sequels for future missions. A branch plan is a contingency plan built into the base plan, used for changing the mission, orientation, or direction of movement of a force to aid success of the operation based on anticipated events, opportunities, or disruptions caused by adversary action or reactions. Plans for a sequel are based on the possible outcomes (success, stalemate, or defeat) associated with the current operation.

REFERENCES:

MCWP 3-33.1 MAGTF Civil-Military Operations
MCWP 5-1 Marine Corps Planning Process

