
Chapter 3

Planning Effectively

“No plan survives contact with the enemy.”¹

—Helmuth von Moltke

“Plans must be simple and flexible. Actually they only form a datum plane from which you build as necessity directs or opportunity offers. They should be made by the people who are going to execute them.”²

—George S. Patton

Having arrived at a common understanding of the fundamental nature of planning and having discussed the theory of planning, we now describe the characteristics of effective planning. In other words, how do we plan effectively, and what are the features of good plans?

PLANNING IN MANEUVER WARFARE

Proper planning is essential to the execution of maneuver warfare. Planning is an inherent and fundamental part of command and control, and commanders are the single most important factor in effective planning. Maneuver warfare demands a flexible approach that adapts planning methods to each situation, taking into account the activity being planned. It requires an approach that can apply the various aspects of planning theory as appropriate. This planning approach must encourage rather than stifle creativity. Maneuver warfare depends on insight and creativity in commanders and the planners who support them.

Planners must be always sensitive to the importance of tactical and operational tempo and ensure that planning facilitates rather than inhibits tempo. In fact, effective planning should accelerate tempo by anticipating decisions and actions. This emphasis on tempo, while a guiding principle, is not an

unbending rule. We should weigh the advantages of acting more quickly against the advantages of preparing more thoroughly.

Maneuver warfare requires plans with the proper level of detail—neither so detailed that they squash initiative nor so general that they provide insufficient direction. The proper level of detail depends on each situation and is no easy task to determine. As a rule, plans should contain only as much detail as required to provide subordinates the necessary guidance while allowing as much freedom of action as possible.

Effective maneuver warfare planning is based on the recognition that war is intrinsically uncertain and unpredictable. Effective planning seeks not to eliminate uncertainty and risk, but to provide a framework that facilitates effective and focused action in the face of uncertainty and risk. Effective planning also recognizes the limits of foresight in a complex and changeable environment like war. Effective planning does not try to impose precise order and control on the battlefield—to try to turn war into something it is not. Instead, planning should provide enough structure to facilitate necessary cooperation and direction, but not so much structure that we sacrifice flexibility, tempo, or initiative. Recognizing the proper balance in any given situation requires judgment.

The maneuver warfare approach to planning sees planning not only as a way of directing and coordinating actions but also of generating shared situational awareness and expectations, supporting the exercise of initiative, and structuring the thinking of commanders and planners. Maneuver warfare emphasizes planning as a continuous learning and adapting process rather than as a scripting process. Maneuver warfare requires the ability to extemporize—to be able to depart from the original plan to exploit fleeting opportunities—and planning importantly provides the point of departure for such adaptation in execution.

The maneuver warfare approach to planning emphasizes the importance of establishing clear objectives even as it recognizes the difficulty of doing so in a complex, uncertain, and shifting environment like war. Effective planning should generally proceed from the establishing of goals and objectives to the conceiving of broad courses of action to the detailing of the practical implementation of those courses of action. At the same time, the conceptual aspects of planning—to include establishing goals—should be responsive to the detailed requirements of execution.

The maneuver warfare approach to planning is based on the belief that in typically complex and shifting tactical and operational situations, the best approach is usually to plan in rough outline and delegate as many decisions as possible to subordinates empowered to act on their own authority.³ In order to act appropriately, these subordinates require a thorough

understanding of the overall purpose or goal, which can only be provided by higher authority.

SITUATIONAL FACTORS

Three types of factors drive each planning effort.⁴ First, there are *external factors* stemming from the environment. These include the time pressure placed on planners, the type and degree of uncertainty that planners must handle, and the instability and turbulence of the situation. Next, there are *internal factors* stemming from the availability and capabilities of the planners themselves. These include the skills and degree of experience and expertise. Internal factors also include the tools and equipment available to support the planning process. Last, there are *task-related factors* having to do with the nature of the activity being planned. Among other factors, these include the characteristics of the activity itself, the complexity of the situation, the clarity and stability of goals, and the availability of resources. Is the situation fluid or static? Is the plan a tactical plan or a technical one? Is the envisioned end state clear? Is it likely to change?

There are numerous factors to consider, most of them interrelated and some in conflict with one another. Some factors are always more important than others, and some are more important in some situations, but not in others. The following discussions are not exhaustive but give an idea of how we should take various factors into account in our planning process and in our plans.

Time pressure exerts a major influence on the type of plan we develop. It takes longer to develop detailed and integrated plans. As a result, where time is short, we might do better to develop broader, modular plans. Similarly, it takes longer to develop optimized plans; when time is short, it may be better to accept a less than optimal but workable plan.

Uncertainty is another major factor that impacts on planning and plans. Where uncertainty is high, plans should generally be broad, loosely coupled, and highly flexible. Such situations favor modular plans that are easily repaired. Conversely, where certainty is relatively high or the reasonable expectation of friction or enemy interference is low, plans can be more detailed and integrated.

The scarcity of critical resources may drive us to develop detailed and integrated plans that tend to make more efficient use of resources.

Integrated and complicated plans tend to require more expertise to develop but less expertise to execute. They are more difficult to design because of the various elements that must be coordinated. Where different planning staffs are not collocated and coordination is difficult, loosely coupled plans may be preferable.

If subordinate commanders are less experienced, we may be compelled to develop more detailed plans that provide more guidance while requiring less judgment in execution. Conversely, where subordinates are experienced, we can develop

plans that provide subordinates the latitude to adapt to circumstances.

No two situations are the same, and different situations require different planning techniques and different types of plans. That said, however, the Marine Corps' warfighting doctrine is based on a view of war as a time-competitive, interactive clash characterized by high levels of friction, uncertainty, disorder, and unpredictability. Such conditions favor simple, modular, flexible, and timely plans.

SIMPLE PLANS

Simplicity is one of the fundamental tenets of our planning philosophy. Plans should be as simple as each situation allows because in war even the simplest plans are difficult to carry out. There is an important difference between simple and simplistic—the latter referring to something that is made overly simple by ignoring the natural complications of the situation. We realize that each plan must deal with the complexity of its situation and that some situations require more complicated plans than others. However, this is not to say that a complex situation automatically requires an equally complicated plan. Some complex problems may have surprisingly simple solutions.

We prefer simple plans because they are easier to generate and comprehend. They are easier to implement and, more

importantly, to implement well—the simpler a task, the more easily we can master it. Simple plans are generally easier to modify or repair—an essential quality given the friction and disorder of war. Finally, simple plans are also usually a better starting point from which to adapt to the unforeseen.

There are several ways to simplify plans. First, we should keep the number of actions or tasks in the plan to the minimum required by the situation. This is largely a function of organization. Fewer actions simplify the problems of command and control. Too many tasks can exceed the limits of an effective span of control. We can often reduce the number of actions by grouping related actions together. By placing this group of actions under the authority of a subordinate, we can also distribute the planning load throughout the organization rather than bearing it all in one place. These grouped actions must be logically related, or we will unduly complicate the situation for the subordinate.

We can simplify by developing plans that are as broad as the situation permits. We simplify by minimizing the burden of detail, where possible leaving those details to subordinates and again distributing the planning load. For example, instead of designing the coordination of two subordinate units, we can direct the units to effect the necessary coordination locally. The key is to develop plans that are broad but not vague.

Finally, even though a situation may be complex and may require numerous actions, we should try to develop a plan that

is embodied in a simple, compelling concept that captures the essence of the situation. Sometimes the simplest plans are the most inspired. Conceptualization is no mean ability; it is a function of insight and vision. It is part of the creative element of planning and cannot be captured by following any set procedure. A compelling concept that includes the underlying intent conveys the logic of the plan in simple but powerful terms. This allows subordinates to act out of understanding and thus lessens the requirement for explicit instructions covering every eventuality.

LOOSE, MODULAR PLANS

Success in war requires coordinated effort—the cooperation of two or more elements for the accomplishment of a common task. Coordination occurs in time or space or both. Examples include two units performing a passage of lines, an envelopment conducted by two units, preparatory fires shifting off an objective as an assault element closes, or a close-air strike involving suppression of enemy air defenses.

Providing for necessary coordination is one of the primary functions of planning and plans. Plans provide a mechanism for coupling those activities that must be coordinated and cannot be coordinated effectively another way. How tightly or loosely coupled the elements of a plan should be depends on a variety of factors discussed in the previous chapter. Some

activities require tighter coupling than others. Some situations permit looser coupling than others. Some parts of a plan may be tightly coupled while other parts of the same plan are loosely coupled.

For most tactical or operational situations, which tend to be characterized by friction, uncertainty, disorder, and enemy interference, we should strive to design relatively loose, modular plans. Compared to tightly coupled, integrated plans, modular plans are generally simpler to execute and control, are easier to modify, better endure the effects of friction and disruption, and provide greater latitude in execution.

Loose coupling is also an important way of achieving simplicity. Loose coupling supports simplicity by lessening the need for designed coordination measures. A modular plan allows each subordinate element to plan with some degree of independence of the others, simplifying the overall planning effort.⁵

A plan can provide for necessary coordination in several ways. The simplest and loosest way is to direct two elements to coordinate locally. Another way is to provide the mechanism for coordination—such as a control measure—but to let the elements involved effect the coordination as necessary. A third way is to provide the coordination mechanism *and* to regulate its use. Of these, the first is the most flexible, and the last is the most controlled. Situation permitting, the first is most preferable, and the last least preferable in providing subordinate units latitude to adapt to changing circumstances.

Plans should not attempt to couple actions which do not need to be coupled. As important as coordination can be, it occurs at the cost of flexibility and freedom of action. This point seems self-evident, but sometimes attempts are made to couple unrelated elements in a plan. This is usually done in an effort to achieve a degree of control of the situation that is rarely attainable nor even desirable. Instead, the goal should be to uncouple elements of the plan as much as possible consistent with the need for unity of effort. Any time we are about to establish some control measures to coordinate two or more parts of a plan, it is not a bad idea to ask ourselves: *Do these actions need to be coupled?*

As a general rule, plans with many control and coordination measures—especially restrictive measures—tend to be tightly coupled. This does not mean that to achieve loose coupling we simply eliminate control and coordination measures from plans. Such measures serve an essential purpose when properly used. Instead, this means that we conceive plans in such a way when possible that direct coordination between elements of the plan is not necessary for the success of the plan. This function of conceptual design is no simple task. It may be that some elements of the plan can support each other indirectly rather than directly, as the example of Allenby's campaign plan in 1918 showed.

Establishing loose coupling is in part a function of task organization. To organize subordinate units into self-sufficient tactical units by assigning them the necessary support

lessens the need for the centralized coordination of support. This also simplifies command and control (although possibly at the expense of the efficient use of resources).

As a very simple example of planning loose coupling, consider the coupling between a scheme of maneuver and a plan for supporting fires. A ground attack supported by scheduled fires is a tightly coupled system. The movement and fires are synchronized. Changing one necessitates changing the other. This example describes an extremely simple system of only two parts. Consider the complications in a tightly coupled tactical plan of average complexity. By comparison, a ground attack supported by on-call targets is a loosely coupled system. The two parts are asynchronous: changing the timing of one does not necessitate changing the other, although the fires can still be used to support the movement. This is not to imply that scheduled fires are bad—like other examples of tight coupling, they are sometimes necessary—but merely to illustrate how we can increase flexibility by developing loosely coupled, modular plans.

ADAPTIVE, FLEXIBLE PLANS

Planning is a way of adapting the organization to its surroundings in two ways: by designing actions in advance of the need to act and by supporting the exercise of initiative during

execution. Because of the unpredictability of war, a good plan should be flexible, allowing us to adapt quickly to a broad variety of circumstances. This obviates the need to develop explicit courses of action for an unlimited number of possible contingencies. The level of flexibility in a plan should be in direct proportion to the level of uncertainty and fluidity in the situation.

Initiative is central to maneuver warfare. We should plan with this thought firmly in mind. A good plan does not eliminate the need for initiative, but facilitates initiative. Patton's quotation at the beginning of this chapter captures this idea in describing a plan as "a datum plane from which you build as necessity directs or opportunity offers."

We should not think of a plan as an unalterable solution to a problem, but as an open architecture that allows us to pursue many possibilities. A good plan should maximize freedom of action for the future. It is a mistake to think that the goal is to develop plans and then implement them as designed. We will rarely, if ever, conduct an evolution exactly the way it was originally developed.

This emphasis on adaptability and flexibility must be tempered by an intelligent understanding of where necessary couplings exist in the plan. We do not have complete freedom to depart from the scheme without consideration. We certainly do *not* have the freedom to depart from the larger intent of a plan. We must be sensitive to ways any departures may affect the

other parts of the plan and must therefore keep others informed of our actions.

How do we design adaptive, flexible plans? First, we establish objectives that are broadly, but not vaguely, defined, objectives which provide latitude in the manner of accomplishment. Second, as we have discussed, we develop loose, modular plans. These allow subordinates to adapt without infringing on other parts of the plan. Third, we develop plans with feedback mechanisms designed to provide information about how the action is developing and to identify the need to make adjustments to the plan. We may explicitly design decision points, points in a plan of action requiring a decision about how to proceed in execution. Fourth, we should design plans of action that permit multiple options in execution. We may design specific *branches* and *sequels*, planned alternatives or follow-on phases for likely contingencies, but we should also maintain the flexibility to pursue other options that are not planned. We should not try to develop plans for every possible eventuality. We should not develop so many contingencies that we cannot prepare adequately for any of them. Fifth, we should develop plans which provide shared situational awareness and mutual expectations. A common understanding improves the ability to recognize the need to adapt and to cooperate with others while doing so. Finally, we develop orders and plans that provide a compelling logic for action that makes it easier for subordinates to exercise initiative while conforming to the higher purpose. The compelling logic for action finds expression in the commander's intent for each subordinate.

TIMELY PLANS

Timely plans are directives that are issued in a way that allows subordinates ample time to make preparations and issue their own orders. *Few factors are more important to success than giving subordinates enough time to prepare. We frequently underestimate the time required for directives to permeate through the various echelons of an organization.*

In many situations, a warning order may be useful to provide subordinates time to begin preparations for a contemplated action.⁶ Moreover, because planning is an iterative process, it is often advisable to issue partial instructions as they are available rather than wait to issue a complete directive. Subordinates can then begin their own planning.

PLANNING IN TIME

Effective planning requires not only issuing timely plans but also planning in time. Planning in time has two aspects. First, it requires making effective use of the time available for planning. Second, it means configuring efforts over time to create a meaningful sequence of actions that lead economically toward the envisaged goal. It is difficult to state without exception that any one consideration is always more important than any other, but in nearly all situations, time is the critical factor. Whether

done rapidly or deliberately, all planning requires an acute awareness and judicious use of time: *all planning is time-sensitive.*

In general, planning should not occur at the expense of tempo. At the same time, if time is available and there is no advantage to acting more quickly, there can be little excuse for not taking the time to plan adequately. A company commander who spends an hour deliberately developing a detailed plan in the heat of a crisis when seconds matter is as much at fault, with respect to proper use of time, as a division commander who has days to prepare for an amphibious landing and hastily develops an ill-conceived ship-to-shore plan.

We must be constantly aware of how much time a situation allows for planning—realizing that this will usually be an estimate—and we must make the most of that available time. This means being aware of potential tradeoffs between decision planning and execution planning. In allocating planning time, we cannot take only our own planning requirements into account, but we must also consider the planning requirements of subordinates.

We must be aware of any advantages to be gained by using less than the full time available, and we must weigh such advantages in tempo against the advantages of more thorough planning. At the same time, we should recognize the moment when taking the time to consider our actions beforehand may allow us to act more quickly later. We must recognize that

situations are dynamic rather than static—the situation continues to change *while we plan for it*, and the longer we take to plan, the more the situation will have changed. Finally, we should know when it is time to stop planning and to begin executing. We should recognize that there may be times when planning—or additional planning—is not justified.

It is a common tendency to project plans too far into an uncertain future. The quotation from Moltke at the beginning of this chapter, that no plan survives contact with the enemy, is well known. Many plans do not last even that long. Because we cannot anticipate the unforeseeable, we tend to assume the future will be a linear projection of the present and recent past, and we frequently underestimate the magnitude of changes in the pattern of events over time. Consequently, our assumptions about the future, especially the distant future, are often greatly in error. Therefore, effective planners do not try to plan too far into the future. They maintain nearer time horizons for commitment planning and spend relatively more time doing contingency or orientation planning.

Planning in time means having a realistic appreciation for time-distance factors. It means understanding how long it takes to initiate certain actions and not trying to plan actions that are already outside of our window of opportunity.

PLANNING AS SHAPING

The discussion of planning in time leads us to a related concept—planning as shaping, the idea of conceiving and taking actions now with an eye toward future advantage. Planning is a primary means by which we give advantageous shape to the course of events over time. Shaping the course of events means exploiting and cultivating opportunities that arise naturally as well as actively creating and developing advantages. Ideally, when the decisive moment arrives, the issue has already been resolved. Our actions leading to this point have so shaped the conditions that the result is a matter of course. We have shaped the action decisively to our advantage. In this respect, a commander tries not so much to precisely direct the actions of subordinates, but instead to provide subordinates with every possible advantage over the opponent.

We should try to shape events in a way that allows us several alternatives and avoids irreversible commitments.⁷ The object of planning in this regard is to provide the maximum degree of freedom for future action. In this way, we make it more difficult for the enemy to anticipate and counter us. We want to ensure that when the moment of encounter arrives, we have not narrowed ourselves to only one course of action.

Examples of shaping include planning a deception to influence the enemy's expectations; canalizing, delaying, or blocking the movement of enemy forces; devising a program to strip the enemy of a particular critical capability; and drawing an enemy force into unfavorable terrain.

Effective shaping requires an appreciation for appropriate time horizons, whether those horizons are measured in the days and weeks of senior commanders or the minutes, hours, and days of tactical commanders. Planning horizons are situation-dependent, although generally the higher the echelon, the longer the horizon, and the longer the horizon, the less specific we can be in our plans. Usually we must be able to plan with several different horizons simultaneously and to plan in different modes for each. We can think in terms of a *commitment horizon* within which we are confident enough of our ability to forecast events that we can commit to a particular plan. Beyond that horizon, we can think of a *contingency horizon* within which we can plan for several different contingencies without committing to any one. Beyond the contingency horizon, we realize the situation is too uncertain to plan for specific contingencies, and we instead perform orientation planning that allows us to respond quickly and flexibly to a broad variety of circumstances. (See figure 6.)

To use planning to shape the action does not mean to establish a detailed timetable of events far into the future. We have already concluded that in war we cannot expect to shape the conditions of war with any sort of precision. Rather, we

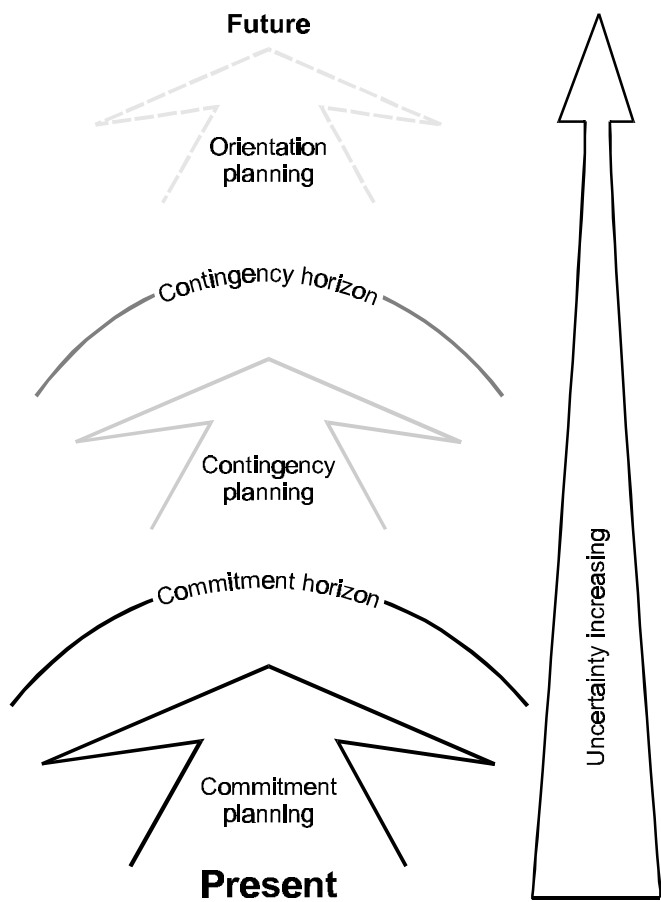


Figure 6. Planning horizons.

attempt to shape the general conditions of war—we try to achieve a certain measure of ordered disorder. The further ahead we think, the more general must be our designs. As events approach, we can try to influence them more positively, but we should realize that we can rarely orchestrate them with any meaningful degree of precision.

Shaping events over time requires both forward and reverse planning—thinking forward to the next feasible step, and the next after that, while also thinking backward from the desired future. However, we must keep in mind that the envisaged end state is an aiming point for planning purposes and not necessarily a permanent goal.

CONTINUOUS, EVOLUTIONARY PLANNING

Planning is a continuous process involving the ongoing adjustment of means and ends. We should also view planning as an evolutionary process involving continuous adjustment and improvement. We can think of planning as solution-by-evolution rather than solution-by-engineering. We should generally not view planning as trying to solve a problem in one iteration because most military problems are too complex to be solved that way. In many cases, it is more advisable to find a workable solution quickly and improve the solution as time permits. What matters most is not generating the best possible plan but achieving the best possible result. In many cases, a reasonable

course of action executed quickly and aggressively is better than an optimal course executed too late. We should generally view planning as evolving continuously and iteratively *toward* the best executable solution that circumstances allow until the process is interrupted by the imperative to act. Effective planning continuously refines and deepens the plan as time permits.

Likewise, we should see each plan as an evolving rather than a static document. Like planning, plans should be dynamic; a static plan is of no value to an adaptive organization in a fluid situation.⁸

Because militaries are hierarchical organizations, planning is generally seen as proceeding sequentially from the top of the organization toward the bottom. This is true to some extent as orders from above provide the basis for planning at each level. However, an organization characterized by continuous planning must plan in parallel—all echelons planning at the same time. Continuous planning requires continuous coordination laterally and between echelons as plans are adjusted and refined over time.

PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

Similarly, we should see planning as fundamentally a participatory process.⁹ We should always keep in mind that the main benefits of planning derive not from consuming the pro-

ducts—that is, plans—but from engaging in their production. In other words, as valuable as plans may be, the process of planning matters more because of the learning and shared understanding that result when planning is done properly. Consequently, “planning cannot be done *to* or *for* an organization; it must be done *by* it.”¹⁰ As a rule, any commander affected by a plan should have the opportunity to contribute to it.

Effective planners do not so much plan for others as they facilitate others’ planning for themselves by providing the necessary guidance, context, and resources. Planning should be decentralized as much as the situation permits. Those responsible for executing should have the freedom to develop their own plans. The reason is not only that they are closest to the problem but also that they will naturally feel a greater responsibility for the success of a plan of their own creation. This is not to say that the senior commander should not issue centralized guidance. In fact, the senior commander must provide an overall plan of action that harmonizes the actions of all the elements of the force, but the increasingly detailed elements of design should generally be left to successively lower echelons.

Participatory planning requires open sharing of information throughout the organization. It cannot be done in isolation.

COMMANDERS AND PLANNERS

Effective planning absolutely requires direct involvement by the commander. Planning is a fundamental responsibility of command. In any organization, the commander should be the chief planner. Commanders who do not participate in planning do not benefit from the learning that takes place.

Commanders must not merely participate in planning but must drive the process. They do this in a variety of ways. They make sure that their assumptions and estimates of the situation are clearly understood. They provide clear, forceful planning guidance to their staff and subordinates. As the responsible authority and the most experienced member of the organization, the commander should especially be involved in the conceptual aspects of decision planning.

Commanders should manage the planning effort to ensure the correct harmony among the various aspects of planning discussed in chapter 2. They ensure that the planning effort is sensitive to time constraints, directing the transition in tempo between deliberate and rapid planning. They establish appropriate planning horizons and determine the appropriate planning mode—commitment, contingency, or orientation. They establish the appropriate level of specificity in plans, guarding against planning in too much detail. They should also promote loose, modular plans that allow subordinates broad latitude in execution.

By their example, commanders should establish an environment in which planning is a valued and productive activity. They should ensure that planning does not become merely the rote application of procedure but retains its creative elements. Commanders should ensure that any planning procedures adopted facilitate thinking about the future rather than become a substitute for thinking about the future. Commanders should evaluate plans not on how much time and energy went into the preparation, but on whether they provide the basis for effective action.

Commanders may or may not participate much in the actual drafting of orders, but they are responsible for drafting their intent. Field Marshal Sir William Slim wrote that the intent phrase of the mission statement “is always the most important because it states—or it should—just what the commander intends to achieve. It is the one overriding expression of will by which everything in the order and every action by every commander and soldier in the army must be dominated. It should, therefore, be worded by the commander himself.”¹¹

Commanders may be assisted in planning by a staff and sometimes by a designated planning staff. A good planning staff will help to keep the commander oriented on the future and will bring up various planning issues requiring the commander’s attention. Planners must be taken into the commander’s council, or they cannot understand the requirements and constraints under which commanders must operate and therefore cannot support them.¹²

Each commander will employ the staff differently based on individual aptitudes and temperaments, both the commander's and individual staff members'. We typically think of a staff as providing analytical support. A planning staff will be deeply involved in execution planning, translating the commander's concept into a directive. This is largely an analytical process that can be formalized to a certain extent. A commander will frequently also use the analytical skills of the staff to support decision planning by analyzing some specific issue or problem to provide advice on feasibility, costs, requirements, and so on. Finally, a commander will frequently use the analytical skills of the staff to scrutinize a potential course of action. This not only means making recommendations as to the feasibility or supportability of the concept, but also identifying potential problems, decision points, and contingencies.¹³

A good commander will also tap the intuitive skills resident in the staff. The degree of participation is based on the abilities of selected staff members and their individual relationships with the commander. Commanders may use members of the staff to help brainstorm a course of action or to help commanders understand their own thought processes. Because of the uncertainty of war, many times a commander can initially provide only the vaguest of ideas and intentions. In such instances, the staff can act as a sounding board for potential concepts and estimates or can help to draw out and articulate the commander's ideas. In many cases, the commander will also use the staff to recommend alternative courses of action for consideration.¹⁴

The planning staff should not be an isolated section with sole authority and responsibility for planning. The more isolated and autonomous a planning staff, the less effective it will be.¹⁵ Planners should be closely linked with executors—ideally, they should be the same people—so that they can stay in touch with the constraints and realities of execution. Those who understand a plan best are those who developed it. The only way that an executor can understand a plan as well as a planner is to have participated in the planning.

PLANS AND ORDERS

Commanders issue orders and plans to subordinates to give effect to their decisions. Except in extreme cases, all directives to a unit should be issued to the commander of that unit. Likewise, orders and instructions to a unit should emanate from its immediate superior commander. By these means, authority and responsibility are fixed, and the channels of command are established. We should bypass echelons of command only by exception, and in such cases both the issuing and receiving commanders should notify intermediates of the new instructions as soon as possible.

Directives should not trespass on the province of subordinates. Directives should convey the minimum amount of

instruction necessary for effective execution. Instructions that repeat matters of training or standard procedure weaken a directive, which should generally contain only information particular to the action being ordered.

While planning can be a valuable learning process for planners, plans and orders exist for those who receive and execute them rather than those who write them. Directives must be written with an appreciation for the practical problems of execution. They must facilitate rather than complicate action. They should not be so complex that they become an impediment to comprehension. For example, orders generally should not include instructions for more than a few likely contingencies. Above all, directives must be adapted to the circumstances under which they will be received and executed.

Directives should be as clear, simple, and concise as each situation permits. Elaborateness and extreme detail are not generally characteristics of effective plans and orders. The more urgent the situation, the greater the need for brevity and simplicity. Where possible, we should use oral orders that are communicated directly between principals. Short sentences are easily understood. Superfluous, trite, or trivial phrases weaken an order and create ambiguity. To aid understanding, we should make widespread use of map overlays, graphics, and other visual techniques, as these tend to improve and expedite understanding.

Directives should contain a statement of the intent behind the ordered actions to ensure the intelligent cooperation and initiative of subordinates. This statement of intent should be brief, unambiguous, and compelling. It should be brief enough that a subordinate can keep it clearly in mind during the disorder and stress of action without having to refer to written instructions.

Orders should instruct only so far as conditions can reasonably be foreseen. Orders which attempt to arrange details too far in advance usually have to be countermanded. Such changes tax the communications system, cause confusion and misunderstanding, impose needless hardships on personnel, and harm morale.

Standard order formats expedite understanding, prevent omissions, and facilitate ready reference. However, content, clarity, and conciseness are more important than format. Slavishly following a prescribed format can result in rigid form and unimaginative content not consistent with the unique requirements of each situation.

In general, orders should not merely repeat information and instructions from higher authority; rather, orders at each echelon should adapt the scope of information and the level of detail to the particular situation.

CONCLUSION

Our approach to planning recognizes and accepts the complex, uncertain, disorderly, and time-competitive nature of war and seeks to provide commanders with the best means to win under those conditions. We recognize the limits of design under such conditions. We recognize that planning cannot impose order and control on the battlefield, and it should not try. At the same time, we recognize the importance of planning in preparing us to act in a purposeful, prepared way in this environment. We seek to achieve a balance between providing the necessary focus, direction, and coordination and allowing the necessary latitude for initiative and adaptation. In this respect, we recognize that the commander is the single most important factor in effective planning. The commander disciplines the planning process so that it is sensitive to time, planning horizons, level of detail, and simplicity. Under the commander's direction and guidance, the process shifts among the various planning modes, types, and levels, seeking to harmonize the factors that define the planning environment. The commander also disciplines the product to ensure that the resulting plan is relevant to the moment and suitable to subordinates.

Our objective is to plan in a way that maximizes tempo, flexibility, and adaptability in action. We recognize that few plans will ever be carried out the way they are designed and that, in fact, they are not meant to be. We realize that the measure of a good plan is not whether it is executed as intended, but whether it provides the basis for effective action.

The ultimate measure of effective planning is the answer to the following question: Can we act faster and more effectively than the enemy?