CHAPTER 1
PLANNING OVERVIEW

Planning is the art and science of envisioning a desired future and laying out effective ways of bringing it about.

—Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 5, *Planning*

The Marine Corps doctrinal philosophy of maneuver warfare describes planning as an essential part of the broader field of command and control. The aim of command and control is to enhance the commander's ability to make sound and timely decisions. Effective decisionmaking requires both the situational understanding to recognize the essence of a given problem and the creative ability to devise a practical solution. Hence, an essential function of planning is to promote understanding of the problem—the difference between existing and desired conditions—and to devise ways to solve it. Planning involves elements of both art and science, combining analysis and calculation with intuition, inspiration, and creativity. The Marine Corps employs several planning processes:

- Troopleading steps, used principally as an introduction to planning by small unit leaders without staffs, comprise six steps—BAMCIS [begin planning, arrange for a reconnaissance, make the reconnaissance, complete the plan, issue the order, and supervise].
- For units with staffs, the Marine Corps planning process (MCPP), described in this publication, is most appropriate. It is also a six-step process (see fig. 1-1), comprising problem framing, course of action (COA) development, COA wargaming, COA comparison and decision, orders development, and transition. The Marine Corps often operates in a joint environment, where the MCPP is the vehicle through which commanders and their staffs in the operating forces provide input to the joint planning process (see app. A).
- If time does not allow use of the full, six-step MCPP, the commander and the planners may use the rapid response planning process (R2P2),

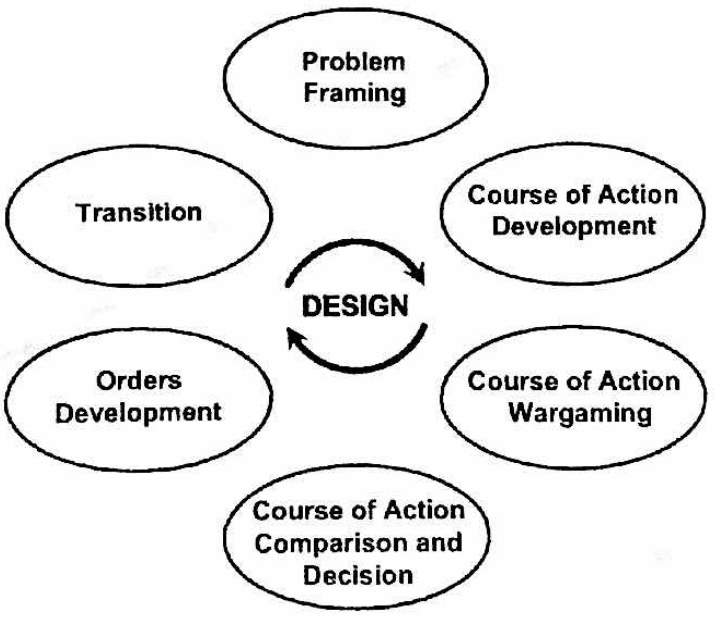

Figure 1-1. Overview of the Marine Corps Planning Process.

which is a time-constrained version of the MCPP. The R2P2 enables the Marine expeditionary unit (MEU) to plan and begin execution of certain tasks within six hours and is highly dependent on the use of standing operating procedures (SOPs).

Because planning must support the commander's decisionmaking—especially in a time competitive and evolving situation—the MCPP codifies the central role of the commander in planning. The process is applicable across the range of military operations and at any echelon of command. It can be as detailed or abbreviated as time, staff resources, experience, and the situation permit or require.

Doctrinal Underpinnings

Planning should never be viewed as an isolated activity or process; rather, as a part of the planning-execution-assessment continuum. Because situations change continuously, decisions are made in the face of relative uncertainty. While it is natural to seek additional information to lessen that uncertainty, it usually comes at the expense of time. Success in such a fluid environment demands that Marines think critically, examine the nature of the problem as well as the purpose of the operation, and learn and adapt during the entire planning-execution-assessment continuum. Environmental factors; enemy action; other stakeholders' involvement; updated intelligence; changing resources; revised guidance from higher headquarters (HHQ); and input provided as a result of operations and concurrent planning by subordinate, adjacent, and supporting units all contribute to making planning endeavors highly complex and nonlinear. The problem will evolve even while trying to solve it.

While this publication presents the six steps of the MCPP sequentially, planning seldom occurs in a straightforward manner. For example, information gained during COA development or wargaming will often require planners to return to the problem framing step of the planning process. Knowledge of the planning hierarchy is essential to the effective application of the MCPP.

As described in MCDP 5, at the highest level of the planning hierarchy is conceptual planning. It establishes aims, objectives, and intentions and involves developing broad concepts for action. In general, conceptual planning is a process of creative synthesis supported by analysis. It generally corresponds to the *art* of war. Developing tactical, operational, or strategic concepts for the overall conduct of military actions is conceptual planning.

At the lowest level of the hierarchy is detailed planning, which is concerned with translating the broad concept into a complete and realistic plan. Detailed planning generally corresponds to the *science* of war and encompasses the specifics of implementation. It generally is an analytical process of decomposing the concept into executable tasks, although it likely involves some elements of synthesis as well. Detailed planning works out the scheduling, coordination, or technical issues involved with moving, sustaining, administering, and directing military forces. Examples of detailed planning include load plans and air tasking orders. Unlike conceptual planning, detailed planning does not involve the establishment of objectives. Detailed planning works out actions to accomplish objectives assigned.

Between the highest and lowest levels of the hierarchy is functional planning, which involves elements of both conceptual and detailed planning. Functional planning is concerned with developing supporting plans for discrete functional activities, such as maneuver, fires, logistics, intelligence, and force protection.

Normally, due to the importance of conceptual planning, the commander directs the formulation of plans at this level. While the commander is

also engaged in both functional and detailed planning, the specific aspects of these are often left to the staff.

Conceptual planning provides the basis for all subsequent planning and should progress from the general to the specific. For example, the overall intent and concept of operations (CONOPS) lead to subordinate intents and CONOPS as well as to supporting functional concepts; these intents and concepts lead to the specifics of execution.

The planning dynamic does not operate in only one direction. Conceptual planning must be responsive to functional constraints. For example, the realities of deployment schedules (a functional concern) can dictate employment schemes (a conceptual concern). Functional planning in turn must be responsive to more detailed requirements of execution. In this way, the levels of planning mutually influence one another. Conceptual, functional, and detailed planning are seldom conducted sequentially because the situation and available information are continually evolving. While conceptual, functional, and detailed planning are described in sequence, in practice they are conducted in a more interactive manner due to uncertainty and time.

Introduction to Design

Design is the conception and articulation of a framework for solving a problem. It is appropriate to problem solving at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. As commanders conceptualize their operation, their periodic guidance is in the form of visualization, description, and direction and guides the staff throughout planning. Design provides a means to learn and adapt and requires intellectually versatile leaders with high-order thinking skills who actively engage in continuous dialogue and collaboration to enhance decisionmaking at all levels.

The purpose of design is to achieve a greater understanding of the environment and the nature of the problem in order to identify an appropriate conceptual solution. While not prescriptive or a checklist, design is based on—

- Critical thinking.
- Conceptual planning.
- Visualization.
- Emergence of a hypothesis.
- Continuous activity.

Critical thinking is purposeful and reflective judgment about what to believe or what to do in response to observations, experience, verbal or written expressions, or arguments. Critical thinking involves the high-order cognitive skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Analysis allows planners to see the parts and to recognize and explain patterns and meanings. Synthesis allows planners to predict and draw conclusions, create new ideas, and discuss "what if" situations. Evaluation allows planners to critique ideas, make recommendations, assess value, and make choices. All three high-order thinking skills are required in design.

Conceptual planning allows commanders, members of their staffs, and others to develop an understanding of the environment and problem as well as develop a broad approach to solve the problem. As the conceptual element of the planning hierarchy, design shapes the functional and detailed planning that follows. As the examples on page 1-4 show, at the campaign level, design may take the form of a campaign concept.

In both instances, the commander had a deep appreciation for the wholeness of the problem, including the adversary and environment. His resulting visualization concisely expressed how he intended to achieve success. The same is true at the tactical level where design may take the form of a commanders vision of actions. See app. J for another example of design.

Visualization is the commander's "mental snapshot in time" that represents his current understanding of the environment, the problem, or how

During the Korean War, General MacArthur succinctly restated his campaign concept in his *Far East Message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, "Operation planned mid-September is amphibious landing of a two-division corps in rear of enemy lines for purpose of enveloping and destroying enemy forces in conjunction with attack from south by Eighth Army." Guided by this design, his staff planned multiple COAs. This planning revealed that the most strategically advantageous COA—an amphibious assault at Inchon—also involved the greatest operational risks. General MacArthur accepted the risks of landing at Inchon and subsequent staff actions focused on the functional and detailed planning necessary to both flesh out the COA and minimize the attendant risks. The latter included using a discarded COA, a landing at Kunsan, as the basis for a deception effort.

In 1864 and 1865, General Grant's strategic concept called for coordinated military actions in Virginia, Georgia, and Tennessee. These actions were complemented by a naval blockade and put overwhelming, simultaneous pressure on all the Confederate armies, thereby removing their ability to shift resources to reinforce any one army.

he sees solving the problem. Human beings constantly form and reform mental images as their environments change or new information becomes known. Early in the planning process the commander shares his mental image with his staff, using his visualization to focus and guide their efforts. As planning progresses, the commander continues to update and provide a refined visualization through his guidance.

Understanding the environment and the nature of the problem will eventually lead to the emergence of a hypothesis on how the problem might be solved. The commander may visualize the hypothesis by describing how to move from an existing set of conditions to a desired set of conditions. This visualization requires the commander to understand the current situation, broadly define the future situation, and determine the necessary actions to bring about the desired future state. It is expressed using operational terms of reference and concepts that shape the language governing the conduct (planning, execution, and assessment) of operations. It addresses questions, such as—

- Will planning, execution, and assessment activities use traditional constructs, such as center of gravity (COG), decisive points, and warfighting functions?
- Are other constructs, such as leverage points, fault lines, lines of operations (LOOs), or critical variables, more appropriate to the situation? (More information on warfighting functions and LOOs can be found in app. B.)

Design is a continuous activity and must never be viewed as an isolated event occurring only during problem framing. It occurs throughout the planning-execution-assessment continuum. Design is a way of organizing conceptual work within an organization to assist commanders in understanding, visualizing, and describing the operational environment and to develop approaches to solving problems. Because the environment is dynamic, problems also evolve. As a result, design must occur throughout planning, execution, and assessment.

Synopsis of the Marine Corps Planning Process

A commander may begin planning on his own initiative, based on indications and warnings, or in response to specific guidance and direction from HHQ. The planning process is designed to promote understanding among the commander, his staff, and subordinate commanders regarding

the nature of a given problem and the options for solving it. The plans which result may be considered hypotheses that will be tested and refined as a result of execution and assessment. The six steps of the planning process are—

- **Problem Framing.** Problem framing enhances understanding of the environment and the nature of the problem. It identifies what the command must accomplish, when and where it must be done and, most importantly, why—the purpose of the operation. The purpose is articulated in the mission statement (task and purpose). The purpose of the operation, which is enduring, is restated and amplified as desired in the commander's intent. Since no amount of subsequent planning can solve a problem insufficiently understood, problem framing is the most important step in planning. This understanding allows the commander to visualize and describe how the operation may unfold, which he articulates as his commander's concept—his overall picture of the operation. The commander's concept is also known as the CONOPS, operational concept, or method. As planning continues, the commander's concept becomes more detailed, providing additional clarity and operational context. Design does not end with problem framing, because the situation constantly evolves and requires the commander to continually review and possibly modify his design.
- **COA Development.** The COA development step produces options for accomplishing the mission in accordance with commander's intent. It provides options for the commander; refines the design; and promotes understanding of the environment, problem, and the approach to solving the problem.
- **COA Wargaming.** The COA war game examines and refines the option(s) in light of adversary capabilities and potential actions/reactions as well as the characteristics peculiar to the operating environment, such as weather, terrain, culture, and non-Department of Defense (DOD) entities or stakeholders. This detailed examination of the operational environment and possible adversary reactions should forge a greater understanding of the environment, the problem, and possible solutions.
- **COA Comparison and Decision.** During COA comparison and decision, the commander reviews the pros and cons of the option(s) and decides how he will accomplish the mission, either by approving a COA as formulated or by assimilating what has been learned into a new COA that may need to be further developed and wargamed.
- **Orders Development.** The orders development step translates the commander's decision into oral/written/graphic direction sufficient to guide implementation and initiative by subordinates.
- **Transition.** The transition step may involve a wide range of briefs, drills, or rehearsals necessary to ensure a successful shift from planning to execution. A number of factors can influence how the transition step is conducted, such as echelon of command, mission complexity, and, most importantly, available time.

Tenets of the Marine Corps Planning Process

The tenets of the MCPP—top-down planning, single-battle concept, and integrated planning—derive from the doctrine of maneuver warfare. These tenets guide the commander's use of his staff to plan and execute military operations.

- **Top-Down Planning.** Planning is a fundamental responsibility of command. The commander must not merely participate in planning, he must drive the process. His personal involvement and guidance are keys to planning. The

commander uses planning to increase understanding of the environment and the problem to support his decisionmaking.

- **Single-Battle Concept.** Operations or events in one part of the battlespace often have profound and consequent effects on other areas and events; therefore, a commander must always view the battlespace as an indivisible entity. Commanders prepare for a single battle effort during planning primarily through their intent, which provides the larger context for subordinate units so they can exercise judgment and initiative when the unforeseen occurs while remaining consistent with larger aims.
- **Integrated Planning.** Integrated planning is conducted to coordinate action toward a common purpose by all elements of the force. Integrated planning is facilitated by the assignment of personnel with an appropriate level of knowledge of their respective organization or activity to the operational planning team (OPT). The key to integrated planning is to involve the right personnel from the right organizations in the planning process as early as possible to consider all relevant factors, reduce omissions, and share information as broadly as possible. (See app. C for information on organization for planning.)

Planning is a complex process of interacting activities with feedback loops. The six steps of the MCPP aid in understanding and generally follow a sequence; however, it is important to remember that planning is not a simple sequence of steps. Any one step of the process may involve multiple phases (see app. D for planning process diagrams). Any step in the process may feed back into a previous one. For example, conceptualizing a COA generally follows establishing goals and objectives, but it is difficult to establish meaningful goals and objectives without some idea of how to accomplish them. Likewise, new information received during orders development may reveal a weakness in the CONOPS, which would require the development of new COAs or a branch plan.