PLANNING OPERATIONS: AIR FORCE PLANNING IN THE CONTEXT OF JOINT PLANNING

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Joint operation planning is an integrated process for orderly and coordinated problem solving and decision-making across the spectrum of conflict. In its peacetime application, the process allows the thorough and fully coordinated development of plans for operations during steady-state conditions as well as contingencies. During crises, the process is shortened as needed to support the dynamic requirements of changing events. During execution, the process adapts to accommodate changing factors in the operational environment and maximize the flexibility of operations. For today's commanders, plans are useful as necessary points of departure— planning as a process is still the most important.

Joint operation planning is conducted at every echelon of command, during peacetime as well as conflict, and across the range of military operations. Joint operation planning is accomplished through the adaptive planning and execution (APEX) system, which is "the Department of Defense- (DOD-)level system of joint policies, processes, procedures, and reporting structures, supported by communications and information technology, that is used by the joint planning and execution community to monitor, plan, and execute mobilization, deployment, employment, sustainment, redeployment, and demobilization activities associated with joint operations" (JP 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*). The APEX system facilitates iterative dialogue and collaborative planning between the many echelons of command, including between the commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR), who usually acts as the joint force air component commander (JFACC), and the joint force commander (JFC) and other components. This helps ensure that the military instrument of national power (IOP) is employed in accordance with national priorities, and that plans are continuously reviewed and adapted to accommodate changes in strategic guidance, resources, the actions of adversaries and other actors, and the operational environment. Joint operation planning also identifies capabilities outside the DOD, and provides the means of integrating military actions with those of other IOPs and multinational partners in time, space, and purpose to create all effects necessary to achieve objectives required to attain the desired end state.

The APEX System formally integrates the activities of the entire joint planning and execution community (JPEC), which facilitates seamless transition from operational design and planning efforts to execution in times of crisis. APEX, and the joint operation planning and execution system (JOPES) technology that underpins it, provides for planning that is integrated from the national level down to theater and component levels.

STEADY-STATE PLANNING

The steady state is a stable condition involving continuous and recurring operations and activities with simultaneous absence of major military, crisis response, and contingency operations (Air Force Instruction [AFI] 10-421, *Operations Planning for the Steady State*). The steady state is characterized by shaping operations and activities at a relatively low level of intensity, urgency, and commitment of military forces. Steady-state shaping operations are designed to influence the operational environment in order to deter and prevent future conflict, mitigate operational risks, and strengthen United States and partner capabilities to respond to crises and contingencies. Steady-state planning operationalizes combatant commanders' (CCDRs') strategies for their geographic theaters or global functional responsibilities. Theater and functional strategies outline a CCDR's vision for integrating and synchronizing military operations with other IOPs, as well as the activities of partner nations and international organizations, in order to achieve strategic objectives.

The DOD's principal steady-state plan is the CCDR theater campaign plan. It is the instrument through which the CCDR militarily executes his or her strategy, by comprehensively and coherently integrating steady-state activities with contingency operations. The CCDR's campaign plan conveys a design for operations that achieve prioritized theater and global campaign objectives[1], and serves as the integrating framework that informs and synchronizes all subordinate and supporting planning and operations.

CCDR theater campaign plans focus on steady-state activities—including military engagement, security cooperation, and other ongoing operations—considered achievable over a two- to five-year planning horizon. The delineated operations seek to generate and sustain defense posture, deter unwanted adversary behavior, and shape the operational environment so as to proactively defuse strategic problems before they become crises and resolve crises before they reach the stage requiring large-scale military operations.

At the same time, campaign plans should set the conditions for success should contingency operations become necessary. Contingency plans for responding to crises can then be derived from the overarching campaign plan as branch or sequel plans, articulating designs for supporting subsequent operations and campaigns.

COMAFFORs support steady-state planning through their own strategy documents, which outline the COMAFFOR's long-term vision for the Air Force component to the CCDR and provide an Airman's perspective on the CCDR's strategy. Component-specific activities in support or the CCDR's campaign plan are contained in in the COMAFFOR's campaign support plan (CSP) and country plans. The COMAFFOR's country plans are theater security cooperation plans at the operational level that align with the CCDR's respective country plans. They focus on achieving country-level objectives related to partner relationships, capacities, and capabilities; as well as

[1] Derived primarily from the *Guidance for Employment of the Force.*

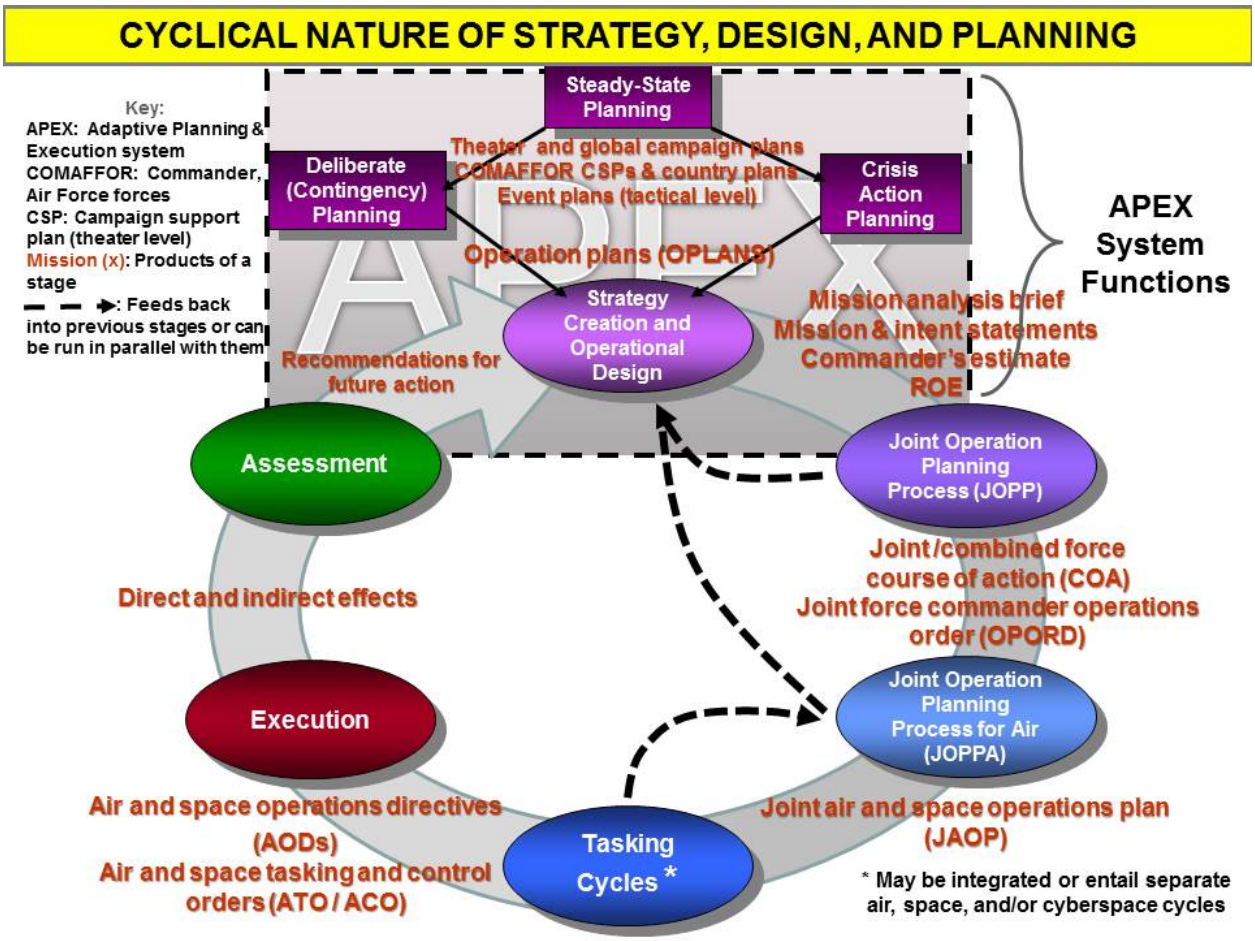
access and interoperability. For detailed guidance concerning steady-state planning, see AFI 10-421.

DELIBERATE AND CRISIS ACTION PLANNING

Under the larger APEX "umbrella," joint operation planning for contingencies is divided into deliberate and crisis action planning (CAP). Deliberate planning in the context of APEX is a process that is used to develop global and theater campaign plans, which operationalize a CCDR's ongoing theater or functional strategies in peacetime, as well as joint operation plans for contingencies identified in joint strategic planning documents. "Traditional" contingency plans (the type that have been developed by the JPEC for decades) are now often considered branches of ongoing CCDR theater or functional strategies. During deliberate planning, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), and CCDRs determine the level of detail required and participate in in-progress reviews of each respective plan. This process prepares for possible contingencies based on the best available information and using forces and resources apportioned in strategic planning documents. It relies heavily on design assumptions about political and military circumstances that may prevail when the plan is implemented. Plan production generally takes six or more months and involves the entire JPEC. The Air Force Service component (the COMAFFOR's staff) usually develops supporting plans following the same process used by the JFC. During the steady state, this plan is a campaign support plan. During contingencies, this plan is the COMAFFOR's component plan.

CAP procedures are used in time-limited situations to adjust previously prepared operation plans (OPLANs) or otherwise conduct design and planning for military action. Here, the crisis may occur with little or no warning, the situation will be dynamic, and time for planning may be very limited. Operational design and planning should revalidate or correct the majority of the assumptions made during deliberate planning, if accomplished. In some cases, however, commanders and their strategists must start the process with a "blank slate," accomplishing design and planning based on assumptions made in the absence of facts or the products of previous deliberate planning. An adequate and appropriate military response in a crisis demands flexible procedures keyed to the time available, rapid and effective communications, and use of previous planning and detailed databases and region analyses whenever possible. CAP often entails the positioning of forces, or at least the start of that process. CAP generally produces joint operation orders and other orders associated with the time-sensitive execution of operations.

JOPES technology and processes are still a vital, necessary part of Air Force planning, even though the joint operation planning process (JOPP) and joint operation planning process for air (JOPPA) are often accomplished separately from APEX system processes. JOPES helps planners focus on the identification and flow of resources and sequencing required to support a given course of action (COA) determined by APEX processes. Once a COA is selected, JOPES helps create detailed time-phased force and deployment data (TPFDD) to support the JFC's plan of operations. This entails reconciliation of the TPFDD with the requirements of the operation's major tasks and phasing. The areas in which the joint operation planning and JOPES processes overlap are shown in the shaded area in the figure, "The Cyclical Nature of Strategy, Design, and Planning."



Cyclical Nature of Strategy, Design, and Planning

There are no separate joint or Air Force procedures for deliberate and crisis action planning beyond some internal coordination and staffing procedures at the various component headquarters. When developing supporting plans, some of the steps may not be as in-depth, as they may reiterate work already done by the JFC and staff.

The contribution of JOPES processes extend beyond the TPFDD and other deployment considerations. These processes also provide a whole series of staff estimates and coordination steps, conducted by national-level agencies down through Air Force major command staffs carrying out force-provider responsibilities. Further, only JFC and Service component (e.g., the COMAFFOR's) staffs possess the information technology infrastructure to interface with many JOPES processes, thus the air operations center's (AOC's) contribution to JOPES is dependent upon the COMAFFOR's staff.[2] Specifics concerning the products of the deliberate and crisis action planning processes can be found in the JOPES/APEX manuals.[3]

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[2] That is, those elements of the COMAFFOR's staff that do not directly support the COMAFFOR's operational responsibilities as JFACC; these elements remain explicitly under the COMAFFOR (as the "A Staff") to help accomplish his or her responsibilities as Air Force Service component commander. See Volume 3, *Command*, for a delineation of the COMAFFOR's responsibilities.

[3] Further information on these (and other forms of planning) can be found in CJCS Manuals 3122.01-03, *JOPES*, Volumes I through III. See CJCS Guide 3130, *APEX Overview and Policy Framework*, for more information. See also JP 3-30 for the general joint perspective on the JOPPA.

Absorbing lessons learned and adapting to them appropriately is critical to operational success. Observations should be captured after every operation in the form of lessons learned. Events should be documented in detail to provide information that improves planning and execution of future actions. Planners should review after-action reports and other lessons-learned analysis in preparation for the planning process to ensure they benefit from past experience, and use what they learn to inform and adapt both steady-state and contingency planning.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OPERATIONAL DESIGN AND PLANNING

In many respects, operational design constitutes a necessary "front end" of planning, since the commander should frame the problem he or she seeks to solve and determine its scope and parameters. It logically forms the first steps of campaign, deliberate, crisis action, and other operational planning. It makes sense to determine an operation's overall end state before detailed steady-state or employment planning begins (or, for that matter, before many aspects of force deployment and sustainment planning begin). In other respects, design and planning are complementary and even overlap: Design may begin before initiation of the JOPP or JOPPA, but some portions of the mission analysis stage of the JOPP and JOPPA may provide insights needed to properly frame an operational problem. Design often begins with step 1 of the JOPP ("Initiation"), but certain formal products of contingency planning (such as warning and planning orders) may be issued after design efforts have begun but before more detailed planning has started. Design often also continues after completion of initial JOPP and JOPPA planning. There is no clear demarcation between when design ends and planning begins (or vice versa), especially during the "first round" of design and planning. Strategists often also identify possible branches and sequels at various points based on planning assumptions. In doing so, they must often make assumptions in the absence of facts in order to allow planning to continue. The need for many assumptions is typical of designing and planning for ill-structured problems.

Later, during plan execution and assessment, operational design may be conducted in concert with planning to adapt to emerging situations or behaviors. In this part of the process, commanders and strategists determine whether to implement pre-planned branches or sequels, or even initiate complete re-design of an operation.