PLANNING AND INFORMATION OPERATIONS

Last Updated: 28 April 2016

Properly integrated employment of Information-related capabilities (IRCs) can create desired effects that accomplish objectives at tactical, operational, and strategic levels. Information operations (IO) is a critical military function because it presents viable options to commanders for conducting operations across the range of military operations (ROMO), not just during hostilities. IRCs can be used in restricted, contested, or politically sensitive areas where traditional air, land, and sea operations may not be permitted. The employment and phasing of IRCs may vary based on mission or availability, but the function of IO has broad application and effects. IO should be incorporated seamlessly and early throughout the operation planning, execution, and assessment processes, because of its broad application and effects and also because of its inherent challenges. The large number of potential IRCs that may be applied and the complexity of integration require extensive coordination. While IO requires early and extensive planning, there should not be a separate IO planning process or IO plan from the standard joint operation planning process (JOPP) and products. IO planners should provide appropriate inputs during each step of the JOPP for air (JOPPA) and the air tasking cycle.

Multiple IRCs can be integrated into planning across the ROMO. IO integration of IRCs is planned within the framework of the JOPP. IO planning should be integrated into the joint force commander's (JFC's) deliberate and crisis action planning. Moreover, IRCs should be integrated throughout the plans, then developed and executed by all supporting commands. Supporting component planning should be consistent with campaign plans, operation plans (OPLANs) and operation orders (OPORDs) developed by the JFC.

Multiple annexes in operation planning products contain IO contributions to the overall effort and should be reviewed by the IO planner. Development of these annexes is the supported commander's responsibility but requires coordinated effort between the JFC, supporting combatant commands, and component level staffs.[1]

Deliberate Planning

During deliberate planning, theater planners normally incorporate IO planning into theater campaign plans (TCPs) and OPLANs. However, IO requirements should be

[1] JP 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, provides a list of joint operation planning products.

considered as part of the overall campaign or operational plan, and thought should be given to use of IO during operational design; such requirements should not simply be limited to a single appendix or single phase of an OPLAN. IO planning should be embedded throughout the planning process so that IRCs are appropriately integrated into every phase of the commander's plan. The majority of deliberate planning occurs within the Air Force Service component, AFFOR; consequently, IO and IRC planners should be embedded throughout the AFFOR staff, especially the A-3 and A-5. Planners should ensure IO is thoroughly addressed in a campaign support or contingency support plan's primary annex, Annex C, Operations (Appendix 3), and should coordinate closely with other lead planners to ensure IO is tied into all relevant annexes.

Reachback support

Reachback support may be requested to provide IRC-specific expertise or information to augment theater planning. This cooperation facilitates a comprehensive and realistic development of force requirements in support of theater OPLANs. Likewise, IRC requirements and IO planning considerations should be included in functional combatant commander's plans supporting theater operations. Planners should also ensure deployable IRCs are included in the time phased force and deployment data. Integration of IRCs is the responsibility of the geographic combatant commander and the commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR). The need to establish formal command relationships for reachback, or federated, support may vary depending on the purpose and extent of support.

Crisis Action Planning

Because of the time-sensitive nature of crisis action planning, it may be challenging to address IRC requirements if not previously identified. Certain IRCs may need substantial lead time for coordination up to the Secretary of Defense (SecDef)-level due to their political sensitivity or because they are controlled by other organizations such as national agencies, civil organizations, or even commercial enterprises. The end result of crisis action planning produces OPORDs and fragmentary orders that can be executed to satisfy SecDef direction.

Again, commanders should consider IO options throughout operational design and planning, and IRCs should be fully integrated into the development of all courses of action (COAs). During COA development, IO planners should identify tasks for IRCs in support of theater objectives and examine the role and contributions of IRCs in the various phases of the OPLAN. Knowledge of global and theater IRCs will enable the commander to make an informed decision. IO planners should also be embedded in red teams during COA wargaming.

Plan Development

Theater planning can help integrate IRCs and effects throughout the JFC's TCP or OPLAN. For OPLANs, this is normally accomplished through the JOPPA, which combines the mission activities and desired effects into a coherent plan to support the

JFC's overall plan.[2] The result is the joint air operations plan (JAOP). Again, there is no separate IO planning process or plan. The JAOP should include the integration of all allocated and assigned theater IRCs and all requests for theater support from global-mission IRCs. Theater IRCs, and effects derived from deployed and organic theater IRCs under the COMAFFOR's control, should be integrated into day-to-day operations through the air tasking order. The majority of JAOP development occurs within the air operations center (AOC); consequently, IO planning and IRC expertise should be embedded throughout the AOC. Finally, IO and IRC planners may coordinate with functional operations centers to synchronize and deconflict the development of their planning products such as the joint space operations plan and the space operations directive.

Planning Factors

As an integrating function, the IO planner is typically not responsible for the specific employment planning of the provided IRC. For instance, the electronic warfare (EW) coordination cell plans and employs EW capabilities, the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) collection manager and platform liaison plans and employs ISR capabilities, and the AFFOR A6 is responsible for planning theater communications. Some IRC assets are controlled at the national level due to their global access and multi-mission capabilities, yet they provide tactical effects and capabilities as well. Additionally, because they operate over a vast information environment, resources may not always be available for use.

Global-Theater Integration

Many IRCs have global requirements for national defense, requests from multiple theaters, and are continuously employed or executing tasking orders. This requires timely deconfliction and integration with other elements of the theater operation. Integrating various IRCs is accomplished through deliberate coordination processes between the theater AOCs and functional operations centers. The employment of IRCs at the operational level is accomplished through tasking orders that deconflict and integrate the full range of capabilities with theater operations. Theater IO and IRC planners should coordinate with functional operations centers to synchronize and deconflict the ATO with functional tasking orders, such as the joint space tasking order and cyber tasking order.

Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment (JIPOE)

JIPOE provides commanders at all levels with knowledge of the information environment to effectively conduct planning. Knowledge of the information environment enables commanders to anticipate future conditions, establish priorities, and exploit emerging opportunities. JIPOE is a continuous analytical process to describe the operational environment, evaluate the adversary and other actors, and help determine adversary COAs. IO and IRC planners especially require detailed analysis of the information environment, including:

---

[2] See JP 3-30, *Command and Control for Joint Air Operations*, and Annex 3-0, *Operations and Planning*, for more information on the JOPPA and products such as the JAOP and air operations directive.

- ✪ Command and control networks, organizations, and infrastructure.
- ✪ Media infrastructure.
- ✪ Cultural demographics of the population and subgroups.
- ✪ Key decision makers and their behavioral patterns, decision-making processes, and advisors/relationships.
- ✪ Adversary exploitation of the information environment.
- ✪ Key communicators.

Given the long lead times often required for producing IO-relevant intelligence, requirements should be identified as early as possible in the planning process. An established IO-intelligence relationship will help with understanding types of information available and better defining requirements.

Sequencing and Phasing of IO

Understanding the sequence of operations over time is critical to effective planning. Commanders and planners often use phasing as a way to arrange and conduct a complex operation in manageable parts. The main purpose of phasing is to integrate and synchronize related activities, thereby enhancing flexibility and unity of effort during execution. The commander determines the number and actual phases of an operation. Phases in a plan are sequential, but during execution there will often be some simultaneous and overlapping execution of the activities within the phases.

During the shaping and/or deterrence phase(s) (often "phase 0 or phase 1" of an operation in OPLANs[3]), joint IO is often the main means by which the combatant commander or JFC can deter aggression and prevent escalation of hostilities. Often, the objective is to convince adversaries that planned or potential COAs that threaten the United States' vital interests are so undesirable that they give up hostile plans and choose COAs more favorable to US objectives. While conducting operations intended to seize the initiative from an adversary, IO efforts may still be focused on garnering support for unified actions and establishing conditions conducive to political solutions to the situation. At the same time, the JFC must prepare IO for potential hostilities, including recognizing and preempting dangers inherent in the information environment.

During portions of an operation devoted to seizing the initiative and dominating an enemy, IO planning will likely involve developing advantages across the information environment to facilitate execution of component missions (such as gaining and maintaining air superiority and other major combat). Normally, the objective in these

[3] See JPs 3-0, *Joint Operations* and 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* for a discussion of the joint phasing model.

phases is to break the enemy's will for organized resistance, reduce casualties and collateral damage, act as a force multiplier, and hasten and smooth transition to post-conflict operations.

During the stabilization phase(s) of an operation, IO once again may become the main effort. It should be flexible enough to simultaneously support stabilization and combat operations. The objective is to change the perceptions and behaviors towards favoring US and multinational objectives, support the peacetime elements of friendly policy, and assess the impact of current operations on the ability to transfer overall regional authority to a legitimate civil entity. During phases devoted to legitimizing civil authority, IO should help influence the attitudes of local and regional populations to regard friendly civil authority objectives favorably.

Planning for Effects

All planners, including IO and IRC planners, should approach planning problems using an effects-based perspective. The IO planner's focus is not just about the integrated employment of IRCs, but more so on creating desired effects to achieve military objectives. Therefore, an effects based approach to operations (EBAO) is an ideal approach to IO planning. IO focuses primarily on affecting the cognitive dimension of the information environment. Effects can manifest at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels depending on the message or action, so IO and IRC planners should consider that any tactical action can result in strategic effects.[4]

Direct and Indirect Effects

IO planners should consider the indirect effects that IRCs may create beyond the direct effects. Indirect effects from IRC actions tend to resonate more with the audience and manifest in desired behavior and decision making. However, they take time to manifest and are more difficult to identify, characterize, and attribute. Because indirect effects take time to manifest and are more difficult to assess, IO planners should coordinate requirements and planning early and manage the commander's expectations for timing of approval and results.

Additionally, IO planners should not overlook the importance of pre-planning certain responses to proactively counter actions an adversary is known to take. For example, if an adversary is known to exploit damaged areas by publishing falsified or misleading images, or providing those images to media outlets, IO planners could account for such actions before the mission is executed, during the targeting process. For any mission occurring in an area known for this type of exploitation, IO planners could request friendly assets in the area collect post-event imagery to ensure an accurate image is available should the need arise. Such a response would serve as a counterpropaganda effort before the adversary's attempts gained any ground.

Unintended Effects

[4] See Annex 3-0, *Operations and Planning*, for a description of effects and EBAO.

All actions have the potential to generate unintended effects or consequences, whether caused by error, inadequate planning, or unforeseen circumstances. Examples of an unintended direct effect may be collateral damage from an air strike or collateral interference from electronic jamming. Examples of unintended indirect effects may be a local village unwilling to provide a safe area for downed airmen or a host nation government denying access to airspace. All planners, including IO planners and IRC planners, should possess a deeper understanding of indirect behavioral effects and should proactively coordinate on plan annexes and target lists to identify potential risks of unintended effects; as well as consult with political and legal advisors, CCS representatives, and targeteers for information regarding rules of engagement and prohibited/restricted targets lists.

Targeting

Targeting is defined as "the process of selecting and prioritizing targets and matching the appropriate response, considering operational requirements and capabilities."[5] Targeting supports the process of linking the desired effects to actions and tasks. The IO and IRC planner should participate in all aspects of the joint targeting cycle, to include developing targets for nomination to the joint force target list.

See Annex 3-60, *Targeting*, for further information.

---

[5] JP 3-60, *Joint Targeting*.