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Editor's Note: This is the first of a three-part article, stay tuned for the next two parts over the coming days.

The division is the Army's [principal tactical warfighting formation](#) during large-scale combat operations (LSCO). Therefore, Warfighter exercises, which are the key training event for division headquarters, become critical to improving the Army's preparedness to conduct large-scale combat operations. In November 2022, the 3rd Infantry Division (3ID) conducted Warfighter Exercise 23-2 alongside the 40th Infantry Division (40ID) of the California Army National Guard. Overall, the exercise was a success in a variety of ways, the most important of which was how much the staff learned about systems, processes, and warfighting. From a command-and-control perspective, the division maintained a 96-hour planning horizon, which is the goal of a division headquarters, but rarely achieved. To do this, the division realized planning must be flexibly aligned with targeting, grounded by operation assessments, and couched in relevant planning horizons.

Leaders often describe concepts like deception, dilemma, decision space, and risk, but they are arduous to put into practice, requiring a well-trained staff and commander. At first, it was incredibly difficult to effectively illustrate to our commanding general the attendant interaction of these four concepts and even more difficult to describe them simply enough for subordinate units to execute. And, while true convergence requires the use of the joint force, 3ID managed to achieve [a level of convergence](#) at the division level during its most recent Warfighter Exercise.

Indeed, 3ID did arrive at its ultimate objective with enough combat power to conduct a counterattack against the enemy's reserve. Getting there was less about our tactical genius and more about staff processes to support the commanding general's intuition and instinctive capacity to [discern through the chaos](#) what was happening and what needed to be done. What follows is an explanation of how the division successfully achieved these convergence outcomes - exploitable opportunities that [enable freedom of action](#) and mission accomplishment. Through this three-part series, we will describe the lessons our plans team and the division staff learned during our most recent Warfighter exercise.

Aligning Planning and Targeting Uncertain, dynamic, and [chaotic environments](#) force units to adapt rapidly. During LSCO, the division is immersed in uncertain, dynamic, and chaotic environments, and the staff must be prepared to recognize this, and consequently, understand how these circumstances affect the desired planning horizon. Staffs should begin by internally and externally (to subordinate, adjacent units, and higher headquarters) communicating what the division's desired planning horizon is, so subordinate units can adjust their planning horizons pursuant to the division's. An easy way to do this is: first, align the planning process with the targeting and ATO cycle; and second, develop a chart which clearly illustrates what each integrating cell's focus is daily. This ensures that initial courses of action can receive the commanding general's targeting guidance to support the desired effects (see Table 1 below).

| CAO: 25OCT22 | Day/NOV | 31 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | FAAR |
|-------------------|---------|-----|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------|
| Targeting Process | | ATO | ATO KA | ATO KB | ATO KC | ATO KD | ATO KE | ATO KF | ATO KG | ATO KH | ATO KI | ATO KJ | ATO KK | ATO KL | ATO KM | ATO KN | |
| Receive Guidance | | | KE | KF | KG | KH | KJ | KK | KL | KM | | KN | KO | KP | | | |
| Approve Targets | | | KD | KE | KF | KG | KH | KJ | KK | KL | | KM | KN | KO | KP | | |
| Validate Targets | | | | KD | KE | KF | KG | KH | KJ | KK | | KL | KM | KN | KO | | |
| Review Targets | | | | | KD | KE | KF | KG | KH | KJ | | KK | KL | KM | KN | | |
| Assess | | | | | | KC | KD | KE | KF | KG | | KH | KJ | KK | KL | | |
| | | ATO | ATO KA | ATO KB | ATO KC | ATO KD | ATO KE | ATO KF | ATO KG | ATO KH | ATO KI | ATO KJ | ATO KK | ATO KL | ATO KM | ATO KN | |
| G5 focuses on... | | KE | KF | KG | KH | KJ | KK | KL | KM | KN | | KO | KP | KQ | KR | | |
| G35 focuses on... | | | KB/KC/KD | KC/KD/KE | KD/KE/KF | KE/KF/KG | KF/KG/KH | KG/KH/KJ | KH/KJ/KK | KJ/KK/KL | | KK/KL/KM | KL/KM/KN | KM/KN/KO | KO/KP | | |
| G33 focuses on... | | | KA | KB | KC | KD | KE | KF | KG | KH | | KJ | KK | KL | KM | | |

Table 1: Planning and Targeting Aligned

However, this chart is fragile in terms of its ability to survive contact with a dynamic enemy and dynamic environment. Therefore, it should be used as a known point from which to shift as the situation requires. During the Warfighter exercise, 3ID continually updated and disseminated this document to ensure all units’ planning horizons were aligned. However, the key is to determine *when* and *why* the unit should alter its planning horizon.

Adjusting Planning Horizons

Determining *when* and *why* to [alter the division’s planning horizon](#) is challenging – a risk decision in and of itself. Should the division keep its planning horizon at 96-hours, then it runs the risk of expending staff energy on something which may not come to fruition. Should the division reduce its planning horizon to 48-hours or 72-hours, then it runs the risk of ceding the initiative to the enemy through unanticipated opportunities. Planning too far in advance may be futile if the organization cannot survive the challenges squarely in front of them. Ultimately, however, it is [neither right nor wrong](#) to alter the planning horizon provided the division is doing it intentionally. Given the fundamentally uncertain nature of war, staffs must recognize that the object of planning is not to eliminate or [minimize uncertainty](#) but to enable commanders and staffs, at echelon, to decide and act effectively amid that uncertainty.

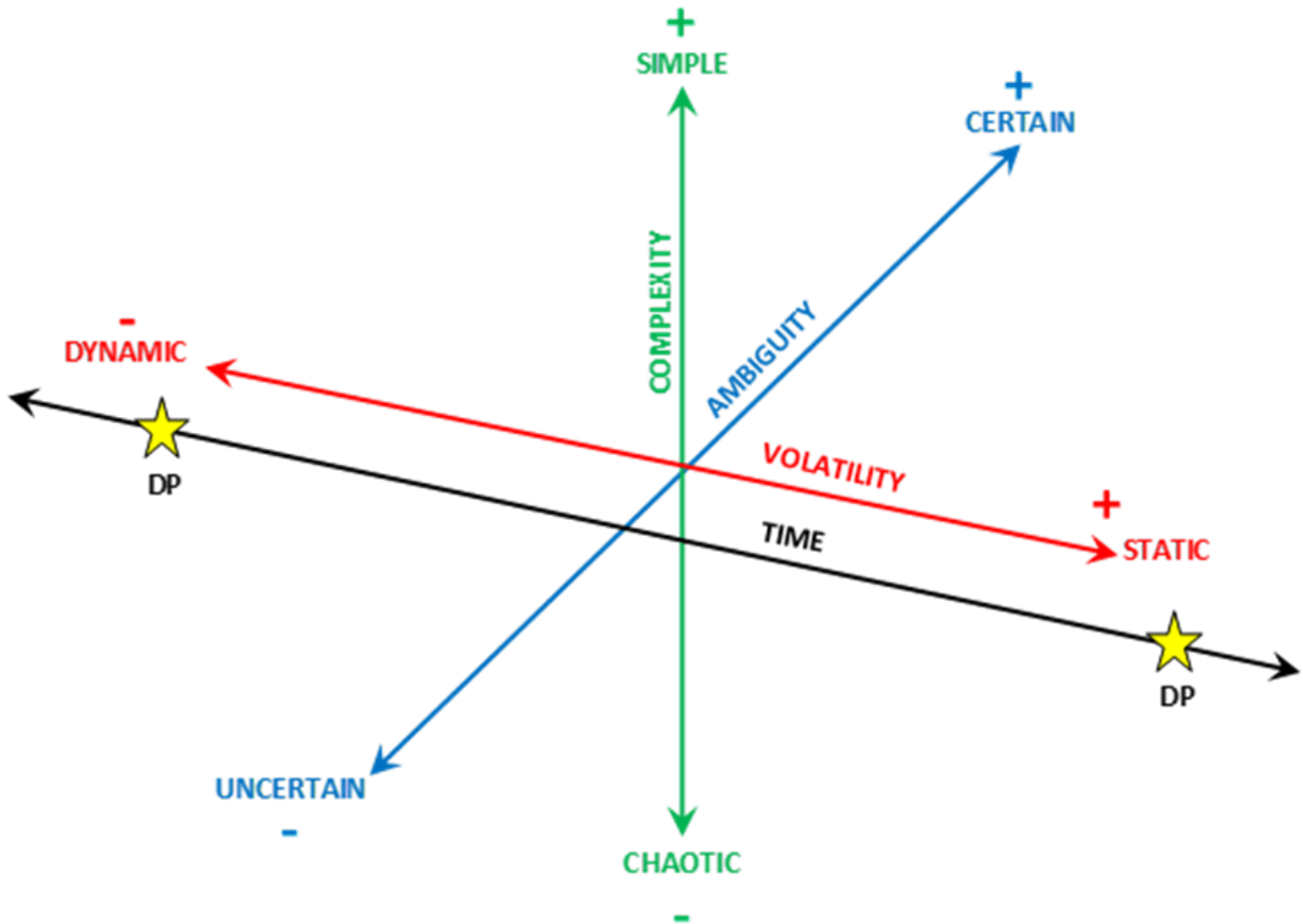


Image 1: Sense-Making Model for [Determining Planning Horizons](#)

This sense-making model can help commanders and staffs determine *when* and *how* to alter their planning horizon. With the division's initial planning horizon at 96-hours, the unit must assess the volatility, complexity, and ambiguity of the operational environment (OE). When the OE is simple, certain, and static - that is when the OE is clear, stable, and easily discernable, then a unit can increase its planning horizon. When the OE is chaotic, uncertain, and dynamic - that is when cause and effect remain invisible, events within it are indecipherable, and rapidly changing, then a unit should decrease its planning horizon. 3ID planners used this mental model, based on the common operational picture (COP) and anticipated enemy actions, to continually assess and decide upon the planning horizon.[10] When an adjustment was necessary, the planners proposed the change to the division chief of staff (COS), who made the decision.

This mental model can also inform changes to staff organization, specifically when to adjust the size of integrating cells. For example, the unit may not have a great need for planners looking 96-hours out, if the preponderance of staff energy must be devoted to the here and now to survive, or better, to exploit an opportunity. The two decision points on the “time” axis indicate under what conditions a decision like this should be made - one when the planning horizon is so short the future operations (FUOPS/G35) cell becomes the most important and most staffed integrating cell - or two when looking deep is vital.

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