

by Larry Kay, Josh Cosmos, Dan DeNeve, Nicole Courtney, Jeremy Mounticure

Editor's Note: In this final article of our three-part series, the authors will describe the staff's attempt to create "decision space" for the commanding general, while also highlighting where they fell short in planning and execution.

The term "decision space" is so frequently used that you would assume it is defined in doctrine, but it is not. Ultimately, they think it best to reference the conventional wisdom of Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, who opined on the definition of obscenity during *Jacobellis v. Ohio* in 1964, "...**I know it when I see it...**" While we do our best to define decision space below, each commander (and staff) will likely "**know it when they see it.**"

Defining Decision space

Entering the exercise, one of the G5 section's goals was to provide the commander with 96-hours or more decision space. Despite the ubiquity of the phrase "decision space," the term varies from book to book and leader to leader. [Decision points](#) are clearly defined, but the space in which to make them - presumably the "decision space," is not. And, the more the G5 section sought to help the commander visualize "decision space," the more challenging it

became. The G5 section found that decision space is the accumulation and coalescence of time, resources, space, decisions, risk, and information.

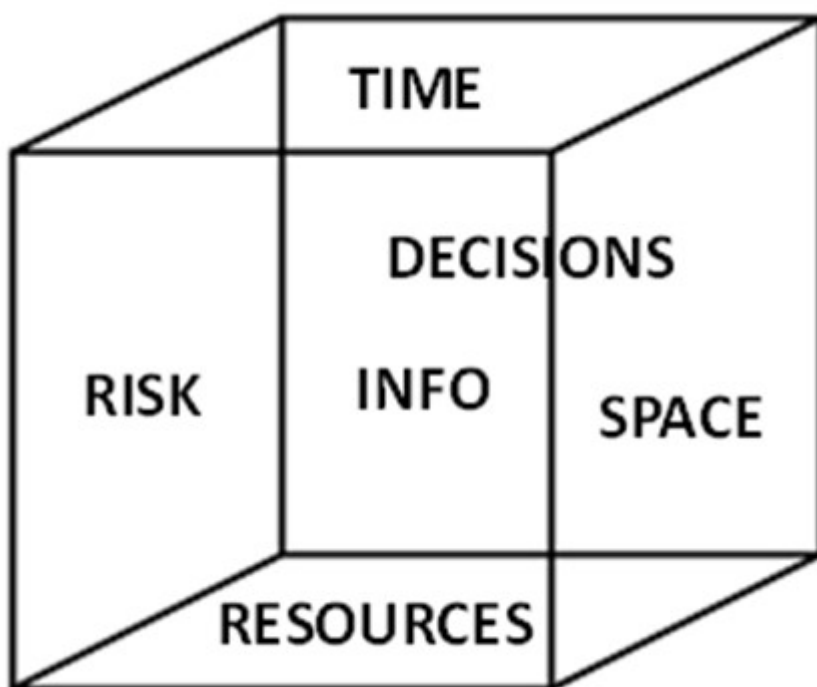


Image 2: “Decision Space”

Eventually, the planners afforded the commanding general the ability to see the battle unfold before making a decision, while depriving the enemy the same. With space, the planners established the desired distance and posture from the enemy and objectives, while minimizing the potential for enemy exploitation. With resources, the planners ensured the organizations were sustained long enough to achieve the desired effects. With decisions, the planners articulated which decisions belonged to the commanding general and which belonged to other leaders and staffs at echelon. With risk, [the planners balanced audacity and imagination](#) against risk and uncertainty to strike at a time, at a place, and in a manner unexpected by enemy forces. And, with information, the planners developed a situational understanding of the OE through information collection and analysis. However, [much like the idea](#) that *military genius* consists of, “a harmonious combination of elements, in which one or the other ability may predominate but none may be in conflict with the rest,” decision space, and the cube above which clumsily represents it, will likely expand, contract and become amorphous as the operation progresses. The trick is for the staff to continually

strive to increase the commanding general's decision space by every measure. Additionally, if the enemy dominates in one measure, the staff can strive to dominate in another measure to expand decision space and regain the initiative.

What We Got Wrong

While this article emphasizes where the 3ID G5 section succeeded to share our best practices, there was also plenty to improve upon. First, the G5 section did not effectively manage its sleep and rest plan. It was not until everyone in the tent was awake for more than 24-hours that we directed the planners to rest at certain times. Second, while we did eventually communicate well with our rear command post (RCP), at first, they were often left out of significant planning discussions, specifically with the commanding general. Notably, this deprived planners an opportunity to participate in working groups, which occurred in the RCP. The greater point being that 3ID did not have enough planning power to resource the RCP, and other command nodes with the quantity of quality planners they would need in a real, multi-domain, large-scale, combat operation. By the end of the exercise, however, the G5 team managed to incorporate the RCP in the planning, but we should have done it from the beginning.

Warfighter 23-02 helped the G5 section see itself and learn how to be better planners, staff officers and future commanders. While most post-Warfighter articles focus on how brutally the unit defeated the enemy, this article aimed to share some processes and best practices that other planners can potentially use to help their commanding general achieve 96-hours of "decision space," while also identifying warfighting challenges divisions will likely experience in real LSCO. Indeed, 3ID arrived at its ultimate objective, postured to conduct a counterattack against the enemy's principal reserve. Getting there was less about our tactical genius and more about staff process to support the commanding general's intuition and instinctive capacity to discern through the chaos what was happening and what actually needed to be done.

Aligning planning with targeting through the use of a widely disseminated and simple table optimizes staff energy to create convergence outcomes. The amount of complexity, ambiguity, and volatility within the OE directly influence a unit's planning horizons, and planning horizons must be continually assessed to ensure they support the OE. What distinguishes a plan from a good idea are operation assessments, which are used by agile planners to directly influence iterative planning. Meanwhile, quick, informal, and purposeful huddles during which the staff converges on emergent problems prove invaluable in a dynamic environment. Finally, for a dilemma to prompt the enemy to make a poor decision (as desired), the division nearly always must increase the risk to force, and leaders and staff

must become accustomed to the gradual increase of risk resident in LSCO. As well, effectively deceiving the enemy requires extensive planning and risk assumption. As 3ID sets its sights on the next mission, the G5 team will be sure to use the lessons it learned during this exercise to continually improve.

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