by Ronald Sprang

Commanders are critical to an organization's success. Large Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) stress a unit's leaders, systems and processes, which require unremitting focus and leadership. Commanders must train their organizations to operate the routine things routinely with effective systems and processes across time horizons and to be successful despite unforeseen circumstances. Once the organization is sufficiently trained, the commander can then focus on the array of tasks only he/she may execute.

The following five focus areas allow the commander to focus the organization on required decisions, which are critical to achieve mission success.

Quality Commander's Intent

Commanders must understand, visualize, describe, direct, lead and assess during the operations process. Commanders' involvement throughout each step of the plan, prepare, execute, and assess process will ensure the staff and subordinate commanders have a

shared understanding of the requirements. Commander's intent is the fundamental baseline for a commander to lay out, from start to finish, the key tasks that must be accomplished to achieve a desired end state, which ultimately "provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander's desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned." Importantly, key tasks "are not specified tasks for any subordinate unit. Subordinates use key tasks to keep their efforts focused on achieving the desired end state."

Quality commanders' intent provides clarity for the staff and subordinate units while streamlining the information processing. Good commanders' intent is resilient to information overload, ambiguity, or environments that contest or deny information transmission.

"The commander's intent becomes the basis on which staff and subordinate leaders develop plans and orders. A well-crafted commander's intent conveys a clear image of an operation's purpose and desired end state. The commander's intent provides a focus for subordinates to coordinate their separate efforts."

Additionally, when understood two levels down, the commander's intent opens pathways for effective dialogue with subordinate and adjacent unit commanders. Instinctively, they will understand where their organizations fit into the big picture and can enable shared understanding to support complementary purposes of their own units and the units to the left and right. As commanders, the complexity and difficulty of our task comes with ensuring intent is understood two levels down, if not more.

Commander's Critical Information Requirements (CCIR)

Well-developed CCIRs enable precise reporting and management of collection assets to enable the commander to make timely and effective decisions. Understanding is fundamental to the commander's ability to visualize the enemy he faces in the Operational Environment (OE) and respond with the forces available relative to the time, space, and assets available. The commander's depth of understanding of this particular problem is the product of several factors. Well-developed CCIR allows the organization to filter and organize information to feed timely and effective decision making in a dynamic and complex environment. CCIR is in essence triaging information in the fight. FM 3-55, Information Collection, emphasizes the role of the commander to direct information collection activities by, "1) Asking the right questions to focus the efforts of the staff; 2) Knowing the enemy. Personal involvement and knowledge have no substitutes; 3) Stating the commander's intent clearly and decisively designating CCIRs; 4) Understanding the information collection assets

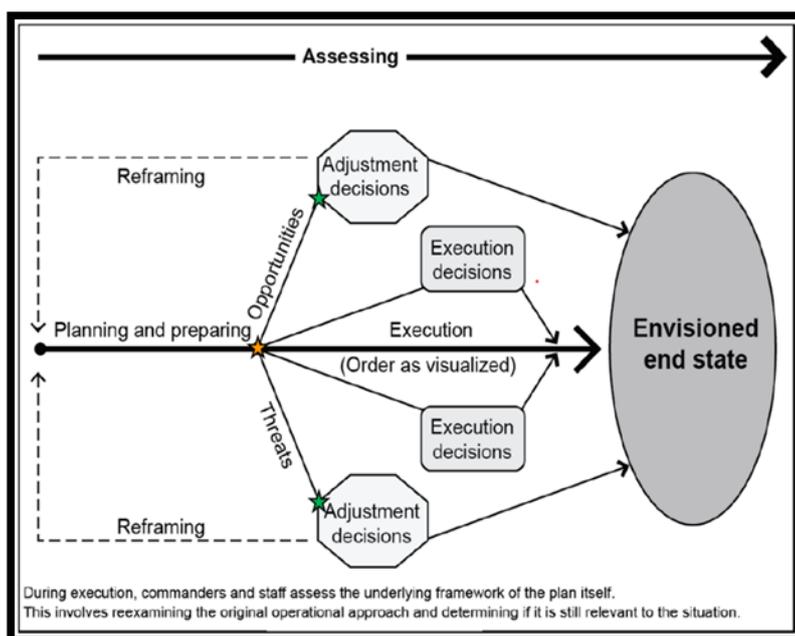and resources to exploit the assets' full effectiveness."

Additionally, commanders must prioritize scarce collection resources by providing their guidance and their intent early in the CCIR process. This ensures maneuver capabilities, cavalry squadron, and battalion scouts are integrated into the plan. In order to effectively fight for information, commanders issue reconnaissance guidance that is published following the mission analysis brief along with draft Commander's Critical Information Requirements (CCIR), Information Requirements (IR), and Essential Elements of Friendly Information (EEFI). Prioritizing collection requirements early will enable further refining of the COA and aid in wargaming. In large scale combat operations, collection capabilities are limited at the BCT level. The Brigade and Battalions must wean themselves from the notion of the last 20 years that intelligence collection platforms above brigade will be persistent and in support of all maneuver elements. Corps and Divisions will fight against peer threats and echelons above brigade collection assets and plans will be in support of the deep fight as a priority over BCT requirements. Although they may at times align with the BCT, more BCTs in the fight means more competition for limited resources. Additionally, peer threats will contest air space and possess counter-UAS capabilities. Commanders must, "1) Identify and update CCIRs; 2) Tie CCIRs directly to the scheme of maneuver and decision points; 3) Limit CCIRs to only the commander's most critical needs (because of limited collection assets); 4) Aggressively seek higher echelons' collection of, and answers to, the information requirements; 5) Ensure CCIRs include the latest time information is of value (LTIOV) or the event by which the information is required."

Effective Commander's Planning Guidance

The Commanders have multiple opportunities to provide guidance for planning and execution. At a minimum, guidance is required following the mission analysis prior to going into course of action development. Publishing a commander's planning guidance can enable parallel or concurrent planning by subordinate units. This will assist in refining intelligence collection, fires targeting, and allow the cavalry squadron and scout platoons to assist in the collection plan more effectively to buy decision space and time. A thorough and completely developed threat course of action, including collection plan and decision support tools, provides the commander the opportunity to understand decisions for the enemy and themselves over time. Precise collection guidance will allow the staff to refine areas of interest and targets with deliberate time windows. In addition to reconnaissance guidance, the commander can then prioritize maneuver elements against critical collection requirements and decisions that either the enemy or friendly commanders must make with effective information requirements to empower subordinate units to collect in a timely manner.

The time and space relationship will enable units to manage the tempo and synchronization of the BCT fight. The relationship between time and space impacts decisions for both the enemy and friendly commander. The common operational picture (COP), including the commander's fighting products, is the primary decision making tool for a commander and must be maintained by the staff within each command post. A well maintained COP allows the commander, staff and subordinate units to see the natural flow of operations (timing, tempo and synchronizations of assets and decisions).

Leaders will anticipate decisions as they relate to synchronizing combat power at the decisive point, mitigating risk, preventing failure, and exploiting success. During the fight, the information flow is driven through the reporting process guided by the CCIR as the primary fighting product. Effective CCIR acts as a filter and time saver because they guide subordinate commanders to ensure they report information needed for effective decision making

Assessing

Reframing

Adjustment decisions

Execution decisions

Opportunities

Planning and preparing

Execution
(Order as visualized)

Envisioned end state

Threats

Execution decisions

Reframing

Adjustment decisions

During execution, commanders and staff assess the underlying framework of the plan itself.
This involves reexamining the original operational approach and determining if it is still relevant to the situation.

⭐ 7 minute Drill:
1. Ignore
2. Change COA
3. Inform for action

⭐ Assess Time available:
1. MDMP
2. RDSP

Commanders Initial Intent & Guidance

Directed Planning Process:

ADM   MDMP   Condensed MDMP   NLT OPORD:

                                              Steps:_____   _____

Initial Purpose:

What I see as the Key Task:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

End State:

CAR:

Sustainment:

Fires:

Mission Command:

Movement & Maneuver		Protection	
Mission Command		Sustainment	
Fires		Intel	

Guidance Sketch

MSN Statement:

Task Org Guidance/Enabler integration:

PIR:

FFIR:

Identify Conditions Setting and Critical Transitions

A commander's experience helps shape guidance for the staff through not only commander's intent and CCIR but also identifying critical transitions by elements of combat power and conditions required. Early identification of these aspects will focus the staff's planning efforts to ensure the COA they develop comprehensively addresses the friendly, enemy, and environmental disposition of the potential operation. Synchronization is the arrangement of military actions in time, space, and purpose to produce maximum relative combat power at a decisive place and time. Combat power is the, "the total means of destructive and/or disruptive force that a military unit/formation can apply against the opponent at a given time." The Army further designates eight elements of combat power. As commanders and staff progress in their training and level of understanding, they begin to intuitively understand the interdependent relationship of all elements of combat. Applied at the critical time and place with synchronized mass and effects against the enemy, operators can achieve maximum synergistic impact to accomplish key tasks while simultaneously mitigating risk.
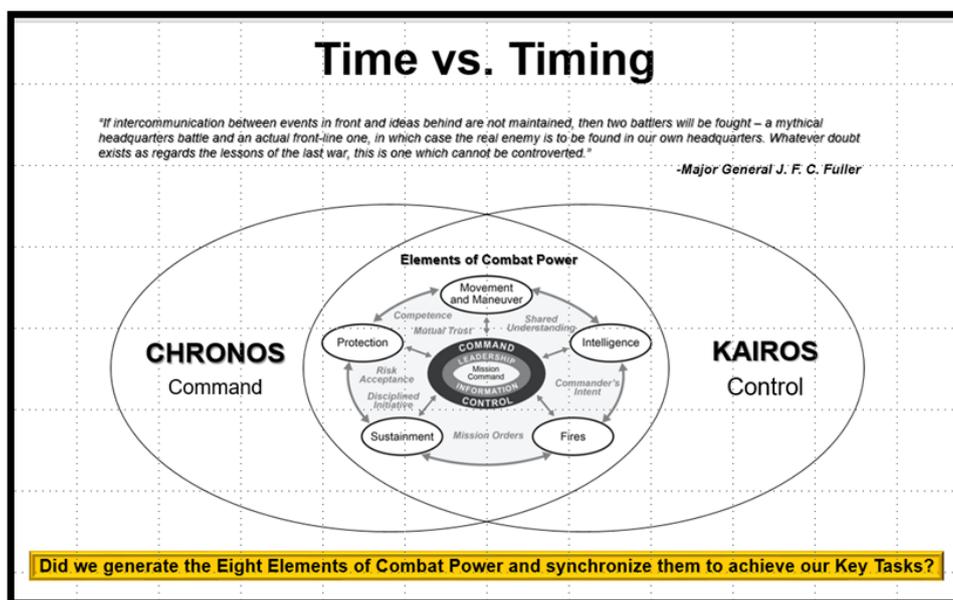
Assessing relative combat power in relation to the enemy is ongoing throughout the operations process. The new FM 5-0 recently released and ATP 5-0.2-1 effectively outlines considerations. Below are some considerations by each element of combat power, which will assist commanders and staff to consider 2nd and 3rd order effects. These considerations impact transitions, placement of critical systems and leaders, and conditions required with respect to time, the OE and the enemy.

Seeing the Big Picture

Understanding where the battalion and brigade fit into the commander's mission alongside intent is vital. Furthermore, how the mission and intent align with ascending organizational purposes is equally paramount. Commanders must ensure the staff and organization understand their role in the higher commander's fight, the synchronization required, prioritization of assets, and how the enemy commander (one and two levels up) can develop the situation and make decisions. The interconnected requirement of adjacent unit actions necessitates increased coordination and understanding of overall tempo. Understanding and visualization requires analysis of the fight to ensure we are solving our commander's problems, keeping the fight nested and synchronized, and fighting the enemy – not the plan.

The enemy will get a vote as the fight unfolds.

Changing conditions provide ephemeral opportunities to capitalize on enemy weakness or mitigate risk if recognized and reported in a timely manner. Effective visualization of the fight through the COP allows commanders at echelon to identify potential opportunities for enemy exploitation rather than self-imposed rigidity associated with plans, timelines, and communication.

Furthermore, systems and processes often fail when we oversimplify the understanding of the enemy and the OE while we are overconfident in friendly capabilities. Commanders and staff are often myopically focused on movement and maneuver and exclude required focus on the other elements of combat power. When inadequate focus is placed on enablers the organization cannot leverage effects at the decisive point. Additionally, enablers must maneuver on the battlefield. If that is overlooked the action must still take place creating friction on movement, terrain management and echeloning capability keeping all assets in a place they can be leveraged.

Conclusion

Sun Tzu [accurately described](#) an axiom required for effective combined arms maneuver: "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle." We commanders are fundamental in leading the operations process through effective guidance, leveraging our experience to guide the staff and subordinate commanders to achieve the overall purpose. It is critical to define up front how you want to visualize the fight in relation to the enemy and the OE nested within the purpose of higher HQs and adjacent units. Your visualization will guide the development of the COP around decision requirements for the

enemy commander and you with a focus on critical transitions and conditions required for success.

LTC Ron Sprang is a career infantry officer, with over 20 years of active service, currently serving as the Task Force Two Senior Observer, Coach, Trainer (OCT) at The Joint Readiness Training Center. His most recent assignment was as battalion commander for 2-12 CAV, 1st Cavalry Division. He was commissioned through the United States Military Academy in 2002 and holds two Master's Degrees

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