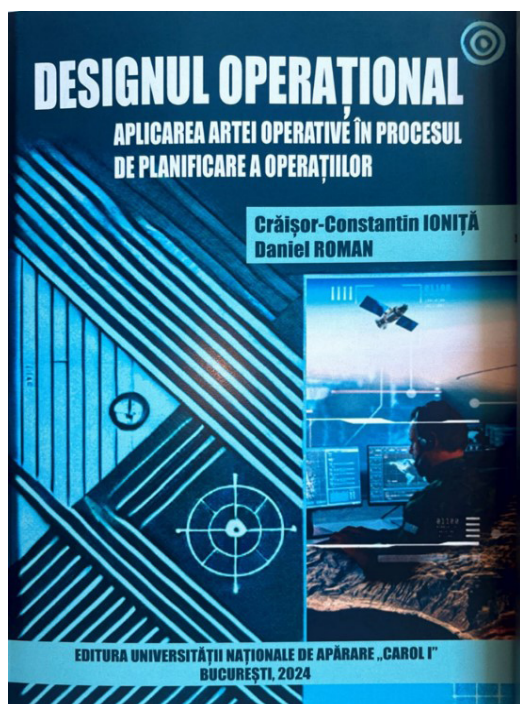


OPERATIONAL DESIGN

Applying Operational Art into the Planning Process of Operations

by Brig. Gen. (Ret.) SR Crăişor C. IONIŢĂ
and Col. Asoc. Prof. Daniel ROMAN

One of the most recent books published by the ‘Carol I’ National Defence University Publishing House, titled *Operational Design. Applying Operational Art into the Planning Process of Operations*, provides a more comprehensive and



dynamic perspective, on the significance of art in the military field. It explores how the key elements of operational design are developed and utilized to support the commander’s decision-making cycle while also serving as a tool to facilitate the operational planning process. As stated in the cited book, this design represents the applicability of operational art in the planning process for operations, by defining the problem setting to achieve a sufficient level of understanding, which will automatically lead to finding a solution for its resolution.

Both authors of the book, respectively Brigadier General (Ret.) Crăişor C. Ioniţă, Scientific Researcher, and Colonel Daniel Roman, Associated Professor, are members of the academic staff of the ‘Carol I’ National Defence University,

with in-depth experience in strategic and operational-level planning and conduct of operations, leadership training, concept development and experimentation, and scenarios development, as well as full involvement in applying critical thinking in high military education and defence scientific research. As a result, in addition to its practical applicability in the military educational process (real knowledge of those



operational design elements which have an important impact in the decision-making cycle and operations planning process), the book also includes detailed scientific analysis on the support provided by the design to the statesmen and military leaders' vision regarding potential future conflicts. Thus, it becomes a valuable tool for assessing the consequences of planning and conducting warfare at the strategic and operational levels.

As the authors mention, the book consists of seven chapters and is aimed both at professionals within the national defence system who are directly involved in the decision-making and operations planning processes, as well as at students in various forms of higher military education. It serves as a useful, necessary and indispensable tool in the decision-making and planning task forces at the operational/ joint level.

To achieve their objectives, the authors start from the idea that operational design teaches us how to think and relies on the clear definition of the problem to be solved within the political and strategic context of the modern operating environment. It is also connected to the civilian sector, where the design and quality of operations conducted by a private company are the only ways to compete in the capital market. Thus, a business model that highlights the strengths and weaknesses or the performance and quality of the companies' activities.

Essentially, operational design is a process led by a commander and developed by their subordinate staff to analyse ideas, synthesize concepts, facilitate learning, and promote a common understanding of the strategic context and the problem that drives the organisation toward finding an effective solution. The task force that deals with the operational design represents an extension of the commander's intellect. Therefore, the purpose of such team is not to think on behalf of the commander, but to critically and creatively help them conceptualize the problem at hand.

Representing a cognitive foresight activity, operational design is developed in its entirety, meaning from the desired end state to the existing situation, focusing on how to reach this end state in the most effective and efficient way possible. The transition from the future to the present is made by highlighting/outlining key elements of this design, an element that supports the logical and foresight approach to the operations planning process and, implicitly, decision-making by military leaders. Even if it is also completed at the strategic level, the quintessence of operational design is represented by the operative art, which establishes the 'way forward' for achieving the proposed objectives and reaching the desired end state.

The book uses 35 well-designed images and two descriptive annexes in support of or as arguments for the authors' statements and ideas. These figures highlight some systemic analysis for the modern operating environment – PMESII, ASCOPE, METT-T, VUCA, etc. –, and how conceptual models can be established to analyse of unstructured problems and transform them into structured problems, for which solutions can be identified, like several models of 'learning processes' – SOD,



LUMAS or ‘Design Thinking’. The figures and annexes also present how this methodological learning support can be improved by artificial intelligence products, especially algorithms and analytical software platforms.

The 128-page volume contains a lot of data and information, making it not an easy read; however, at the same time, it constantly challenges the reader to filter the details presented through their mind and to synthesize the most interesting and relevant ones. However, once the reader becomes absorbed in the reading, the book can no longer be set aside, with both the inserted images and detailed appendices contributing to a better understanding, as well as the bibliography that the authors have used. Therefore, we recommend this book to all those studying the planning and conduct of military operations, and to anyone interested in the decision-making system within Romanian Armed Forces, to better understand how it incorporates both elements of military science and operational art. This is because operational design represents the most important element of this art applied in the operations planning process, serving as a facilitator, and because design encompasses the visionary elements of the military leader – the intention and the manoeuvre scheme (the so-called ‘sketch’ in the civilian environment) -, as well as possible ways to solve the problem that has arisen.

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