



COPD V3.0 AND IMPLICATIONS ON THE JOINT LEVEL

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The Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive / COPD, version 2.0, has been in recent years a guide for planners at the strategic and operational levels who need to understand and implement specific operations planning processes. Consistently applied by the member states of the Alliance, the Directive has reached the stage where the lessons identified have required its revision, with a view to improving and aligning it with the new requirements of the operating environment. Thus, the publishing of the COPD version 3.0 at NATO level established the process of modifying procedures or maturing thinking at the strategic and operational levels. Following the guidelines of previous versions, COPD version 3.0 describes in detail the planning processes specific to the strategic and operational levels, remaining the same indispensable tool necessary for planners to carry out the operations planning process.

Keywords: COPD; operations planning; directive; operational level; planning process.

Introduction

The Allied Command Operations Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive, Version 3.0 (v3.0), known among military planners as COPD¹ v3.0, was officially released on January 15, 2021 and it completely reviewed the previous 2013 edition (ACO COPD Interim Version 2.0 (v2.0)), as a result of lessons identified following the development of specific exercises, applications and operations, or as a result of changes in NATO command or force structures.

The new directive continues the approach of the previous edition, namely to provide guidance on the planning of operations, by providing processes, procedures, methods and models, but without ensuring the perfect recipe for success in military operations.

The comparative analysis of the two documents (COPD Interim v2.0, respectively COPD v3.0) which was the basis of this article, will not reflect any change or renumbering of paragraphs, page framing or word replacement. Through this article, I aimed to highlight the novelty elements of COPD v3.0 and to highlight the changes and additions that appeared in the planning process at the operational level.

¹ *** COPD – Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive.

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Common elements

COPD v3.0 does not actually address the tactical level, where operations planning is still guided by national procedures and provisions, but to the operational and strategic command levels and to other operational level commands within NATO command structures. However, the rationale behind the directive must also be understood by the distinctive structures of the tactical level. The Directive can even be adopted by these structures in order to be able to carry out collaborative planning, because the tactical level products influence the rate at which those at the upper echelons are developed. In the same way, the Directive has maintained its level of classification so that it can be used, understood and applied by all members of the Alliance, or by other interested nations, in accordance with the specific provisions existing for these situations.

The reason of the planning process remains simple, in the sense that, it is dependent on the directions and products of the strategic level, the structures/commands at the operational level being in a permanent dialogue with the subordinate structures. The phases of the planning process at the operational level remain unchanged, being designed to develop both the proposals and products, required by the strategic level, as well as the directions, directives and orders necessary for the tactical level.



The presentation and detail of the planning process² keep the same line with the previous version, the existing changes being minor and only with the purpose of systematizing the information. These changes aim at organizing paragraphs, introducing new terms used at NATO level, highlighting activities or processes, renaming non-permanent structures or working groups³ and are likely to bring that clarity and improvement that underpinned the review of COPD Interim v2.0.

COPD v3.0's approach to defining the end state, objectives and effects remains unchanged, with direct implications for maintaining the operational design structure achieved at the operational level.

From the point of view of the physical background elements⁴ that the planning documents must comply with, there are no changes compared to the previous version. In this way, the standard format for the main planning documents ensures both the familiarity with them and their easier understanding and the consideration of important aspects related to the planning and conduct of operations, thus facilitating the decision-making process. There are also no changes to the identification and naming of operations plans, the plan identification system presented and explained in COPD Interim v2.0. being used in the current version as well.

Elements of Novelty

The COPD v3.0 analysis highlighted changes and additions to the previous edition both in the specific chapters detailing the planning processes specific to the strategic and operational levels, and in the introductory chapter, where the framework that ensures the planning of operations

² *** N.A.: Each phase of the operational level specific process is structured as follows: the introduction which also includes the purpose of the phase, characteristic elements of the phase, prerequisites, desired outcomes, organizations, roles and responsibilities, external coordination and main phase activities.

³ *** N.A.: An example would be the renaming at the strategic level of the *Response Direction Group (RDG)* in the *Cross Functional Action Team (CAT) Plans*.

⁴ ***N.A.: Both versions set out the following elements that must be contained in the concept or plan of operation: document cover, letter of promulgation, table of contents/ list of effective pages, record of changes, main body and annexes, which include appendices and tables.

is presented. Thus, the relevant novelty elements, identified in COPD v3.0, have been grouped in *general*, which provide the necessary framework for operations planning and *specific*, which directly refer to the planning process carried out at the operational level.

The group of general novelties begins by replacing the phrase *operational environment* with *operating environment* to describe "a composite of the conditions, circumstances and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander" (COPD Interim V3.0 2021, K-7). This amendment ensures the correspondence with the term presented and detailed in *NATO Term, The Official NATO Terminology Database* (NATO Term 2022) and used at the level of Alliance member states.

As provided in existing national and NATO doctrines, the conditions of each of the six PMESII⁵ domains of the engagement space can be influenced by the application of one or a combination of the four instruments of power. The new COPD v3.0 addresses the instruments of power in the light of the construction of DIME^{6,7}, given that NATO, as a Security Alliance, exercises control only over diplomatic/political (partially) and military (primarily) instruments.

The presentation of the phases of the *NATO Crisis Response Process* (previously referred to as the *NATO Crisis Management Process*) reinforces that, an understanding of how strategic decision-making at the NAC⁸ level ensures, within a reasonable timeframe, assessments and strategic-level advice needed to plan and execute an operation.

The transition from *planning in a multi-dimensional environment* to *planning in a multi-domain environment* will be one of the planning challenges, for both the military and civilian partners. In this context, in order to prepare and execute complex and multi-domain operations, it is necessary to develop a properly detailed operational plan of the planning process,

⁵ *** PMESII – Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure and Information.

⁶ *** DIME – Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic.

⁷ *** N.A.: COPD Interim Version 2.0 presented and detailed the instruments of power in terms of PMEC construction – Political, Military, Economic, and Civil.

⁸ *** North Atlantic Council.

incorporating all relevant factors for the efficient conduct of operations. Designed to prepare the Alliance for possible security risks, pre-existing operations plans specific to *advance planning* have been complemented by two new types: *Graduated Response Plan/ GRP* and *Sequenced Response Plan/ SERP*.

In support of collaborative and parallel planning, COPD v3.0 briefly presents three planning tools developed based on functional web applications/services, used at NATO level: INTEL FS⁹, TOPFAS¹⁰ and LOGFAS¹¹. The purpose of these tools, which are characterized by flexibility, is the support provided to the staff involved in the planning and execution of operations, at the political, strategic, and operational levels. However, depending on the role of the tactical level and the particularities of the planning process, these tools can also be used at this level. Compared to the previous version, in which there were made only references to these tools, usually in the footer section of the pages, depending on how they could support different processes or products, COPD v3.0 presents these tools in a separate paragraph, with their specific destinations, components, and options.

Emphasizing the *role of commanders* from the very first pages of the Directive (COPD Interim V3.0 2021, 1-2) during the planning process is important for further understanding of how they direct the planning team and make the sound decision, within the timeframe appropriate to each phase of the planning process. In addition, the new approach to the role of the commander in terms of interaction with the staff demonstrates that he remains the central figure in leading the whole process. The overview of the commander's interaction with the staff/planning group presented graphically by COPD v3.0 (COPD Interim V3.0 2021, 4-6) confirms that his presence throughout the process ensures the alignment of the planning effort with its intention in order to fulfill the assumed operational objectives.

In the same way, the definition and presentation from the first chapter of the concepts and notions on *Operational art, Risk and*

opportunity, Campaign synchronization and, especially, *Levels of command*, has the role of introducing and explaining the essence of these notions, being used subsequently throughout the Directive where it details the planning processes specific to the strategic and operational levels.

The specific elements, improved or modified in COPD v3.0, are presented progressively in the order in which a planner should identify, analyze, and integrate them into a planning product.

It is true that the joint planning process at the operational level also involves establishing reciprocal and supporting requirements, thus providing the basis for the implementation of strategic directions and guidance. In this way, depending on the nature of the crisis and the political and military level directions, the external coordination of operational level activities has been completed by a variety of external entities, authorized and appropriate to the proposed military purpose. Other operational level commands (nominated at all stages of the process), the Cyberspace operations center or the Standing joint logistic support group are some examples of complementing the structures already nominated for external coordination.

The integration of the *Operational planning and liaison element/ OPLE* at the strategic level, ensures not only the relationship of the planning groups at the two levels, but also the support of the upper echelon in the development of their own products. Composed of staff with experience in operational level planning and who has interacted with the planning group/JOPG¹², OPLE is familiar with the planning process of the command it represents, as well as with the particularities of the strategic level and ensures, in the new version, the coordination of actions between two levels.

If the term CPOE¹³ was used in COPD Interim v2.0 to describe the appreciation of an operating environment, COPD v3.0 brings the term CUOE¹⁴ to the attention of planners, thus emphasizing the need to *acquire knowledge, interpretation and understanding of their meaning* in the context of a crisis. Presented as a process

⁹ *** Intelligence Functional Support.

¹⁰ *** Tool for Operations Planning Functional Area Services.

¹¹ *** Logistic Functional Area Services.

¹² *** JOPG – Joint Operations Planning Group.

¹³ *** Comprehensive Preparation of Operational Environment.

¹⁴ *** Comprehensive Understanding of the Operating Environment.



between departments/structures of a command, the CUOE is supported by the various functional and special areas of the staff, some of which have their own process to contribute to the CUOE, such as JIPOE¹⁵, detailed at NATO level in AJP-2 (COPD Interim V3.0 2021, 4-13).

Equally important is the specification in Phase 1¹⁶ of the operational process, in which, the intelligence / J2 staff leads the JIPOE process to develop and monitor an initial understanding of the crisis, while the planning group interacts with intelligence staff to identify information and knowledge requirements, as part of CUOE development. This delimits, if necessary, the responsibilities for the development of JIPOE and CUOE, as well as the fact that the two processes are not identical but only complementary.

In order to understand the operating environment and the impact of the environment on the planning and execution of the joint operation, the planning group performs, at the beginning of Phase 3¹⁷ of the planning process, an analysis of time, space, force, and information factors and their specific relationships. The analysis, which was not presented in COPD Interim v2.0, will help operational level planners in the further analysis of key factors and centers of gravity. By detailing the time, space, force and information factors and the specific relationships between them, COPD v3.0 ensures alignment with the provisions of AJP-5, *Allied Doctrine for Operations Planning* (AJP-5 2019, A-1).

A key element of operational art is the identification of ways in which the centers of gravity of primary actors can be influenced so that the objectives set at the level of military art can be accomplished. Because the analysis and identification of centers of gravity is an ongoing process, COPD v3.0 brings a number of completions, expected by planners and useful at the same time, to the concept of center of gravity at the operational level, thus completing the limited information available in previous edition. In this regard:

- The definition of the center of gravity has been updated, identical to the NATO approach

¹⁵ *** JIPOE – Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operating Environment.

¹⁶ *** N.A.: Phase 1 – Initial situational awareness of a potential/actual crisis.

¹⁷ *** N.A.: Phase 3 – Operational estimate.

in *NATO Term, The Official NATO Terminology Database* (NATO Term 2022), (COPD Interim V3.0 2021, 4-53);

- It has been firmly stated that, at the operational level, the center of gravity will always be *an entity*, thus eliminating discussions about where it could be identified. It is also important to specify that, when developing the courses of action, the entity that will be the answer to the question *Who will conduct the operation?*¹⁸ should become the center of gravity for that course of action (COPD Interim V3.0 2021, 4-75).

- More details on the center of gravity are provided, giving this concept due importance for the operational level;

- The analysis of the center of gravity focuses on the key characteristics/elements of each actor, starting with the assessment of goals and objectives, critical capabilities, critical requirements and critical vulnerabilities and culminating with the establishment of the center of gravity. According to the new version, the main step in the analysis of the center of gravity is to draw conclusions, where objectives and potential effects can be determined, so that they can exploit vulnerabilities, gaps or deficiencies in the previously identified elements of an opponent or their own forces;

- Even if a method/procedure for the actual identification of the center of gravity at the operational level is not yet detailed, the information provided in this version ensures a unified approach to this issue. Certainly, the details presented in *Annex B* of AJP-5, the *Allied Doctrine for Operations Planning*, together with the elements of COPD v3.0 will ensure the clarity needed to understand the concept of center of gravity.

In the section on operational risks, a number of additions were made for understanding the importance of the risk (both likelihood of occurrence, gravity of impact, mitigation measures) and the need to involve the commander in determining its level of acceptability. In

¹⁸ *** N.A.: According to COPD v3.0, the planning group's own courses of action need to answer a number of edifying questions. The question *Who will conduct the operation?* must have an answer in those main forces or capabilities required to carry out the specific actions to obtain the operational effects.

the same section, the concept of *operational opportunities* is presented as a novelty at the operational level and it is usually related to risk-taking in the analysis of time, space, forces/actors, and information factors in the joint operations area (COPD Interim V3.0 2021, 4-57). Thus, the operational level planning products formats have been complemented by this new concept, and in validating the mission analysis and operational framework, the commander must also assume the risk and opportunity analysis made by the planning group. The same analysis will be repeated, improved and revised during the elaboration of the concept and the plan, specific to the operational level.

In order to achieve operational design, COPD v3.0 proposes a logical way to develop the operational framework, together with the view that the actual order or approach, used by the planning team may vary, depending on the actual situation, the guidance provided by the commander and the experience of the group.

Thus, the first concept of the operational framework to be developed is the lines of operations, because their development will shape the development of the plan and the conduct of operations¹⁹, and, therefore, the implicit approach of COPD v3.0 is that there should be a line of operation for each operational objective. This is followed by the determination of the decisive conditions, the operational effects, the actions, the sequencing and phasing to ensure continuity and tempo, the determination of branches, sequels and decision points and the development of provisional missions for subordinates. The introduction, definition and detailing of *decision points* in the operational framework was intended to optimize the execution and synchronization of available resources, following a decision of the commander²⁰.

Following the elaboration of the operations plan at strategic level and the approval of the

¹⁹ *** N.A.: In COPD Interim v2.0 there is a specification that the line of operation ensures the connection of the effects and decisive conditions with an operational objective, since, normally, there should be a line of operation for each objective.

²⁰ N.A.: More details on *decision points* can be found in the Allied Command Operations Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive, Version 3.0, SHAPE, 2021, pp. 4-65, 4-66.

plan/plans at operational level, there is a requirement to adjust, coordinate and direct the subsequent activities, at strategic and operational level, in time and space, depending on the evolution of the operating environment. Along the same line, COPD V3.0 proposes as solution the *Strategic Coordination Order/SCO*. Thus, this order is the mechanism and, at the same time, the product, which provides guidance and directions to subordinate commands for the synchronization of plans and operations at the operational level, as part of the overall military campaign. It is estimated that the SCO will be a relatively short and concise document, focused only on current or future changes, thus having a relatively short development and approval cycle. The format of an SCO is not set, but it is expected to follow the standard format of an operation order/OPORD (COPD Interim V3.0 2021, 3-128)

If the synchronization of the military campaign is carried out at the strategic level by the Comprehensive Crisis and Operations Management Centre/ CCOMC, through the Strategic Coordination Order/ SCO, at the operational level the synchronization, detailed directions and guidance of subordinates are achieved with the help of the Joint Coordination Order/ JCO. In the new version, the process of approving and issuing a JCO is much better framed in time: from a deliberate process that takes several days to a process of approval and issuance that normally covers 3 cycles of the Joint Coordination Board/JCB (initial project, coordinated project and final project) (COPD Interim V3.0 2021, 4-128).

What is missing in COPD v3.0?

The present analysis, which expresses certain views based on personal experience, has also identified some elements, that have been overlooked in the new version, and, in addition, some inconclusive expressions, which could be misinterpreted by military planners.

It is well known that operations planning involves the development of various products, at different levels of military art, in a collaborative manner and often under relentless pressure of time. The planning processes used at each level ensure both the reflection of the proposals made at the level of the upper echelons and the elaboration



of orders or clarifications sent to the subordinate structures, in accordance with the vision and directions of the commander.

In order to make this possible, communication is the key. In support of communication and, implicitly, of planners, COPD Interim v2.0 presented in *Annex A* defining elements regarding the objectives, effects and decisive conditions and, more importantly, a practical approach regarding their drafting (COPD Interim V2.0 2013, A-1÷A-5). This ensures a standardization of the way of thinking and writing of these elements, but also, a common language between the planning groups at different levels, with real advantages in the available timeframe. COPD v3.0 has abandoned this annex due to that fact that these provisions have been previously adopted and only need to be refined or to the fact that they will be reintroduced into various operating procedures or functional guidelines.

Another example is the removal of examples and details regarding the particularities of the conclusions and deductions specific to the factors analysis, existing in the previous version. Again, the arguments in favor of maintaining them in the new version are based on standardization, common language and time management.

One aspect that is not necessarily missing but only confusing is the use of different terms for the same processes or products. Thus, the name of the *operational design* is not resolved or at least agreed, because in COPD v3.0 both the name of *operations design* and *operational design* (but also *operations framework* and *operational framework*) are used. This may be due to the joint work during the elaboration of the Directive. Certainly, this ambiguity will be eliminated in the near future, especially since the *Allied Doctrine Joint for Operations Planning* (AJP 5) used, in the 2019 edition, the name of *operations design*.

Among the inconclusive expressions, in the new version there is the possibility to interpret the way in which the Concept of operation/CONOPS and the Plan of operation/OPLAN are related. Although it is not clearly and unequivocally stated, there is a reference that after elaboration,

CONOPS should become an annex to the OPLAN. These issues can be found in the paragraphs that discuss the wargaming and the synchronization of courses of action and the development of the plan of operation (COPD Interim V3.0 2021, 4-83, 4-111). The approach is at least surprising, given that both CONOPS and OPLAN are separate documents of the planning process and have the same format, as COPD v3.0 presents and exemplifies in *Appendix 7 to Annex B*. Furthermore, the footnote of Annex C of that Directive sets out elements relating to the drafting of the main body of CONOPS and OPLAN and Annex A of these, which do not argue or mention the transformation of CONOPS into an annex to OPLAN. Transforming the concept into an annex to the plan only creates confusion in such a complex area.

Conclusion

To sum up, COPD v3.0 remains the basic planning tool of the structures involved in operations planning at the strategic and operational levels, and the necessary guide for directing operations planning for the tactical level. In an increased number of pages compared to the previous version, the new version brings together notions of theory and practice on operations planning while providing the necessary processes and products.

The planning and execution of the joint operation are activities led by the commander and carried out by the planning group. While the processes and tools for carrying out these activities are provided by COPD v3.0, decision-making, based on the recommendations of the planning group and the intuition, experience and judgment of the commander ensure their continuity. Logically, the Directive will be further amended as a result of regular review of doctrines and manuals/guides at the Alliance's level, or as a result of lessons learned from the use of this variant. Yet, this must be perceived as a normality and not as a failure, given that the planning process can be permanently influenced by actions, phenomena or concepts.



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