

## Navy Planning – It's a Process, Not a Checklist

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The Navy Planning Process (NPP), as institutionalized in NWP 5-01, provides a good process for planners to assist a Commander in making good decisions. It must be clearly understood, however, that NWP 5-01 describes a process and is not a checklist to be blindly followed. To employ the NPP as more than just an analytic checklist, planning practitioners must *internalize* the concepts of planning so that the process becomes intuitive. The only way to do this is to be educated on the process and then use it extensively. In that vein, it is critical for Navy professionals to understand that the NPP is not just for planning major operations. If the NPP is internalized, the concepts become natural to use for making any decisions or providing any recommendations, including at the tactical level, non-warfighting challenges, and even in your daily life.

Infrequent, episodic use of the NPP drives planners to a checklist mentality of planning. By not having internalized the planning concepts and employing NWP 5-01 as a checklist, planners will often miss many of the nuances that make the NPP a true process. Most of the nuances are found in the linkages among the various steps and sub-steps that build upon each other throughout the NPP. Specific examples follow.

The concepts of Governing Factors (GF) and Evaluation Criteria (EC) are by definition linked together and are crucial to efficiency in planning. GF are determined early in the planning process and become the starting point for determining ECs that are used to conduct Course of Action (COA) Comparison. NPP recommends developing draft GFs in Mission Analysis as part of the Commander's Planning Guidance. Development of GFs is also a sub step in COA Development. The important aspect of GFs is to identify aspects of the situation that the Commander considers critical and ensure that the COAs and the order completely address those considerations. Thus, GFs are formulated early in the NPP, must be validated or updated throughout the process, and are instrumental in selecting a COA (as the core of ECs) and writing the order. Understanding the flow of GFs/ECs throughout the process and their value in presenting a COA recommendation that fits the Commander's view of the situation should ensure that planners pay strict attention to the development and refinement of GFs/ECs. As addressed in NWP 5-01, GFs/ECs must be clearly defined and understood by all involved in the planning process. Development and approval of GFs/ECs must be taken seriously throughout the NPP to ensure the work done in planning aligns with the Commander's thinking.

The concept of Centers of Gravity (COG), both Friendly (FCOG) and Enemy (ECOG), is foundational to the planning process. NWP 5-01 identifies ECOG as an input (part of intelligence products) to Mission Analysis and FCOG as a sub step of Mission Analysis. A danger

in a checklist mentality with COG is that planners may determine FCOG/ECOG and then just set that information aside. Determination of COG is itself a process that, when done properly, can give great insight to the planners throughout the rest of the NPP. If planners conduct COG analysis and deconstruction with the value of COG in mind, they will give that analysis due regard and emphasis. Planners ought to use COG analysis as a basis for COA Development with the understanding that COA validity only exists if each COA undermines (destroys, neutralizes, etc.) the ECOG while protecting the FCOG. Additionally, COG analysis is critical to the planners identifying and mitigating risk in each COA.

The synchronization matrix and decision support matrix/decision support template (DSM/DST) are planning process decision aid tools that also, when used properly, thread throughout the planning process. Planners may balk at spending any time on these products early in the NPP, but both concepts are valuable in assisting decision-making recommendations early in the NPP and are invaluable to transition of the plan to execution. While starting a synchronization matrix or DSM/DST early may seem inefficient because their main value will not be realized until transition to execution, and information found in these products will require modification throughout the NPP, in reality when used properly they coalesce information in a tabular and graphic representation that help planners identify gaps or seams in the ongoing planning effort. The products must be built and accurate for transition; waiting to build them after COA Decision will lose the benefits achieved by concurrent development of the products during earlier steps.

Development of the Operational Assessment plan is another critical concept that must be woven throughout the NPP as shown on page G-3 of NWP 5-01. Typically where this becomes an issue is in the collaboration of the assessment cell and the operational planning team throughout the planning process. If assessment is viewed as a “bolt on” task after planning is finished, planners may miss some critical, nuanced timing events within the plan that earlier knowledge of assessment challenges may help with. For instance, identifying JFMCC Phase transition criteria may be based on knowledge gained from assessment processes that is challenging to acquire. Granted, the true benefits of assessment is realized in execution, however, a great assessment plan must be built concurrently with planning to be effective.

Creation of an approved list of Commander’s Critical Information Requirements (CCIR) is another whole-of-planning effort. By definition, CCIRs are important to the commander and are truly critical to successful execution of the order. CCIRs are foundational to the DSM/DST, assessment, risk analysis, and more than likely have a direct relationship to GF/ECs. While NWP 5-01 only truly addresses CCIRs as an output of Mission Analysis, it is important that they are continually reviewed, updated, and approved throughout the planning process. As CCIRs are

tied directly to events which will require a decision by the commander, knowledge gleaned from conducting planning may add to, delete from, or alter CCIRs recommended to and approved by the commander. CCIRs is another planning concept that is started in Mission Analysis, modified or validated throughout the planning process, and instrumental to effective execution of the order.

Staff Officers will often think of Operational Design (conceptual planning) as a precursor step to Mission Analysis in the NPP. While initial Design efforts are in place to underpin the detailed planning process with initial guidance and intent, it is better viewed as ongoing interaction between the commander and the staff (operational planning team, staff principals, etc.) throughout the planning process to inform the commander about the specific challenge and develop the best solution with the resources at hand. Every time the commander is briefed, feedback is really part of Design as the plan is shaped by the “conversation” between the commander and the staff. CCIRs, GF/EC, the assessment plan, and the Concept of Operations should all be influenced by the on-going Design process imbedded in the overall planning process.

The plan or order developed by the detailed planning process can only be effective if it is executable by the functional components of the staff (e.g. N2, N4, N6, etc.). Thus, it is absolutely crucial that valid staff estimates are developed concurrently and collaboratively with the base plan. Without validating and integrating intelligence, logistics, and communications estimates (among others) throughout the planning process, the plan at best will be inefficient and at worst is doomed to fail. Additionally, CCIRs and decision points may often times be tied to functional capabilities performing successfully. The operational planning team must ensure that functional staff components are informed of details and tasks as planning is progressing to preclude developing COAs that are not supportable.

The above paragraphs discuss seven planning concepts that must be woven throughout the planning process. Of note, these seven in particular are discussed in individual annexes in NWP 5-01. By using NWP 5-01 as a checklist, novice planners will miss the details inherent in the complexity of Navy planning. There are many more concepts (IPOE, CONOPs development, planning with subordinates, etc.) that also thread throughout effective planning. A professional planner will have internalized and practiced the Navy Planning Process to a degree that application and value of all of these concepts are clearly understood and able to be intuitively practiced.

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