

The Staff Principal's Role in the Navy Planning Process

By Prof. Steve Kornatz

Introduction. A primary reason that staffs exist is to assist the Commander in making informed, effective decisions. The Navy Planning Process (NPP) is the tool employed across all levels of staffs to provide a construct to organize, analyze, and synthesize data and ideas into executable decisions. Because of the scope and complexity of decisions required by a Fleet Commander, various levels of the staff have specific tasks relative to building informed operational-level recommendations and decisions. In the NPP, the Commander is obviously at the pinnacle of the process as the decision-maker and his/her role in complex decision-making is well laid out in the Maritime Component Commander Guidebook. It is also very clear that cross-functional staff personnel who comprise the operational planning teams (OPT) are responsible for the detailed planning and recommendations that underpin the commander's decision. The OPT's methodology for conducting planning is well defined in NWP 5-01, Navy Planning. What is less well defined is the crucial role of the senior staff officers, often called "staff principals" who usually fill single-digit N-code staff billets. No doctrinal publication exists to assist the staff principals in conducting their role in the NPP.

Because the staff principals are senior officers, are generally very experienced, and have regular interactions with the Commander they are essential to bridging the gap between the OPT and the Commander. Additionally, their unique staff positions and relationships with the Commander make them crucial to injecting efficiency and effectiveness into the NPP. Staff principals are not the decision-maker, nor should they be knee-deep in the planning being conducted in the OPT room. However, they must endeavor to add value by ensuring that Commander's guidance is understood and the planners are able to synthesize the knowledge required for the Commander to make a good decision. To address the lack of doctrine for staff principals, this article offers a list of 15 recommended tenets for staff principals to consider as they assist an OPT in providing solid recommendations to the Commander.

(1) Primacy of the objective. This is a basic principle of planning in general. However, there is value in the staff principal maintaining a holistic view of the planning process. This includes ensuring that the OPT does not stray from or add to the specific objectives for which the plan or order is being written. In routine touch-points with the OPT, as well as during pre-briefs and in read-ahead documents, the staff principal must ensure that the OPT is staying on task with respect to the specified objectives.

(2) Objective => COG => Critical Vulnerabilities => attack/defend in COAs. When under pressure, planners, especially novice planners, may get a "checklist" attitude about the NPP. It is not uncommon for planners to actually conduct a center of gravity (COG) analysis and deconstruction but then set that information aside. A few pointed questions from a staff

principal to the OPT can guarantee the proper integration of COG information throughout the NPP. Questions such as:

- Is the identified COG the force that actually accomplishes the objective?
- How does each proposed course of action (COA) mitigate friendly COG critical vulnerabilities?
- How does each COA capitalize on the identified enemy COG critical vulnerabilities?
- Does Risk analysis account for identified critical vulnerabilities and their mitigation means?

(3) Command and Control (C2) Organization is derived from COAs. Under the pressure of a deadline, it can be enticing for planning teams to simply apply identical C2 organizations to each COA. By doctrine, however, the C2 organization should be designed to support the specifics of each individual COA. While the same C2 organization may work for differing COAs the OPT must be able to explain to the staff principal how and why each C2 organization supports each COA.

(4) Supported/supporting relationships with peer components.

Supported/supporting command relationships may be established between components so that one can obtain assistance from the other for the accomplishment of a given task. Components plan in parallel and are naturally focused on their own assigned tasks. So an OPT may have difficulty getting a peer component to agree to supporting tasks until that peer component's planning effort is complete. However, a supported Commander's ability to achieve an objective may depend upon the efforts of a supporting Commander. An example is establishment of tanker tracks to support CFMCC air strikes. CFMCC staff principals need to be ready to contact other component staff principals to facilitate the required support and know when to push the issue to the Deputy Commander or Commander. The same applies to the CFMCC in a supporting role. The staff principals need to assist the OPT in determining what CFMCC resources can be applied to another component's efforts and what resources should be held for maritime-specific tasking.

(5) Collaboration up, down, across, and within. The staff principals should ensure that the OPT has collaborated with all necessary stakeholders in their planning efforts. If the OPT runs into barriers to collaboration inside or outside the staff, it can be more easily resolved by a senior officer (staff principal) than a junior officer on the OPT. This includes issues like requests for clarification from higher headquarters, approval of supporting tasks needed from peer components, resource constraints imposed upon subordinate staffs, and lagging staff estimate work within the CFMCC's functional areas.

(6) Coalition integration. Integrated coalition operations are the standard for U.S. operations, especially in the maritime domain. The staff principal should scrutinize the OPT's recommended integration of coalition partners to ensure it meets the Commander's expectations. Verify that coalition partners operating within the U.S. C2 structure possess the capabilities (ASW, IAMD, communications, language, etc.) they are being tasked to take on. Are

the coalition partners going to rely on U.S. sustainment (food, fuel, ammo, etc.) or bring their own? Did the OPT consider all options for including coalition partners in command (CTF, CTG) positions? Does the OPT have clarity on what levels of intelligence can be shared with individual coalition partners?

(7) Rules of Engagement (ROE), Request for Forces (RFF), Assumptions, Relative Combat Power Analysis (RCPA), Governing Factors (GF), Commanders Critical Information Requirements (CCIRs), Operational Reserve, Military Deception, Assessment, Risk. While this appears to be a diverse range of topics related to planning, in reality they are all planning considerations that are threaded throughout the planning process. Due to the complex nature of these concepts, the OPT would derive benefit from staff principal assistance.

Concerning ROE, staff principals can add value by ensuring that JAG support is available to the OPT and that proposed supplemental ROE are in line with the Commander's thinking.

Staff principals can help validate RFF requirements and ensure justification and associated risks are in line with the Commander's thoughts.

Valid, Commander-approved Assumptions are critical to the planning process with the understanding that they require resourcing to prove or disprove the Assumption as true. Staff principals can ensure the OPT's Assumptions are valid and that staff resources are dedicated to verifying their veracity.

There is an art to conducting a RCPA that is beneficial to the planning process. A good RCPA requires integration of operators and intelligence professionals to try to understand both the enemy's capability and intent. RCPA in the maritime domain can be particularly tricky when dealing with an enemy that possesses asymmetric capabilities. Staff principals can assist the OPT by lending their expertise to the details behind RCPA.

Governing Factors (GF) and the related Evaluation Criteria (EC) are key to aligning Commander's guidance with the concept of operations. As defined in NWP 5-01, GF are "...aspects of the situation that the Commander deems critical to the accomplishment of the mission." Similarly, EC are standards used to compare COAs and will include GF and other criteria developed by the staff. The OPT would benefit from the staff principals' view of GF and EC throughout the NPP.

CCIRs are information requirements critical to timely decision-making by the Commander. As the OPT and staff develop the list of CCIRs, early review by the staff principals will provide validation to the OPT as they work the CCIR process.

The use of an operational reserve and military deception are coming back into favor as valuable options in maritime operations. However, while both concepts can serve to lower risk to mission, both also require dedication of resources to be effective. Staff principals can assist the

OPT by ensuring that both concepts are considered in planning, and that the resources required will satisfy the Commander's expectations.

Assessment and Risk are planning concepts that thread throughout the NPP and directly impact order execution. Staff principals' value with these concepts arises from ensuring the Assessment cell is involved with the OPT throughout the entire process, and that the cell is required to brief the Assessment Plan. Similarly, Risk Assessment is a complex concept with many nuances. Staff principals must ensure that the OPT is analyzing and presenting risk in line with the Commander's expectations, that they are focusing on risk to mission, that they are identifying and recommending risks to be delegated to subordinate commanders, and the identified operational level risks are mitigated. Additionally, the staff principals should have a better understanding of the Commander's personal risk acceptance threshold and ensure the OPT's plan does not exceed that threshold.

(8) Cyber/SAP/STO integration. Offensive and defensive cyber capabilities, Special Access Programs (SAP), and Special Technical Operations (STO) are limited access programs of which few OPT members will have detailed awareness. Even if not "read in" to the programs themselves, the staff principals should facilitate OPT access to those personnel with access so that the concept of operations employs all available capabilities and minimizes risk to mission and forces while maintaining proper operations security.

(9) To increase tempo of operations, be more proactive, less reactive. "Offensive" is a foundational principle of war. An offensive mindset serves to increase the tempo of operations and keeps the enemy in a reactive mode. The staff principals should ensure that the COAs developed by the OPT meet the Commander's Guidance and Intent for establishing and maintaining a proactive (offensive-minded) tenor across all phases and functions.

(10) Planning processes institutionalized/internalized/practiced. If a staff and its planners view the NPP as a checklist, they will miss many of the detailed linkages that run throughout the NPP. The idea of the NPP as a process that facilitates decision-making gives the NPP a more intellectual sense that will allow innovation by the planners. Staff principals should work to ensure that all staff officers internalize NPP as a process and understand its nuances. Besides ensuring staff officers are properly educated in planning, staff principals can institutionalize planning by employing the NPP concepts in every recommendation presented by the staff. This may sound onerous, but the more the planning process is used, adapted, and practiced, the more innate the concepts will become for warfighting planning efforts.

(11) Staff estimates synchronized in plan. Staff principals typically lead functional areas on the staff that are responsible for writing staff estimates and annexes or appendices to the plan/order. Time pressures, particularly during crisis action planning, can naturally lead to functional areas on the staff conducting planning that may become disassociated from the base order that is being crafted. If allowed to continue, this can lead to COAs being recommended

that are not, for instance, logistically supportable. While their functional areas are critical, the staff principals must strive to maintain a holistic view of the planning process and ensure all of the COAs being developed by the OPT are in fact viable within their functional area. This will be enabled by ensuring consistent, high-quality functional area representation on the OPT and routine back briefs to the functional area (N code) lead and staff.

(12) Conceptual => detailed planning. Conceptual planning is Design, usually thought of as framing the problem to provide Commander's guidance to the planners who will conduct the detailed planning. NWP 5-01 presents Design as a multiple step process. However, like the NPP, Design cannot be executed effectively as a checklist – it too is a process. As some of the most experienced officers on the staff, staff principals should be intimately involved in the Design process that begins at crisis onset and iterates throughout the planning process. Effective Design by the Commander and staff principals is invaluable to the planners and the planning process. It helps the Commander shape his thoughts on what the problem is, and generally how he sees it being resolved. This will turn into guidance to the planners and intent to the subordinate commanders. Each time the planners brief the Commander, the Design process is being updated as the Commander's view of the problem and best COA are developed.

(13) Shape the plan. The role of the staff principal can be summed up in the phrase “shape the plan.” Staff principals' efforts should be added value spanning the separation between the Commander's guidance, desires, and personality and the OPT's efforts to develop a detailed, workable plan. The staff principal must provide nuanced support to the planning effort by understanding the challenges, inside and outside the staff, faced by the OPT and providing solutions that sometimes only senior officers can provide. Additionally, the staff principals typically have established trust and access to the Commander such that interim confirmation of the OPT's thoughts can be addressed with the Commander and guidance updated prior to a formal briefing.

(14) Brief: quality/content/format/transition process. Information and decision briefs are critical to a successful planning process. OPT members are typically junior officers for whom briefing a three or four star Admiral may be a career highlight. Staff principals need to take ownership of the briefing process and ensure the success of the junior officer briefer. Typically this is done through read-aheads and pre-briefs to staff principals prior to the formal briefing of the Commander. This will ensure the quality, content, and format of the brief meets the Commander's expectations. Staff principals also need to consider how (or even if) the staff grooms and creates good briefers. Effectively briefing senior officers is something that all officers should be able to do but is difficult to learn through on the job training.

The transition process within staff time horizons (e.g. Future Plans to Future Operations or Future Operations to Current Operations) can be done in various ways. These include formal and informal transition briefs as well as rehearsal of concept drills and full dress rehearsals. The

staff principals, not the OPT, should decide on the transition methodology to be used. The process selected will depend upon several issues such as: complexity of the concept of operations, timeliness to execution, base order vs. fragmentary order, and crisis action vs. deliberate planning.

(15) No surprises. One metric of success for staff principals, who essentially lead and manage the staff for their Commander, is the character of the decision briefs to the Commander. If a quality brief is delivered and there are no surprises to any of the stakeholders, then the staff is likely functioning at a high level of effectiveness.

A “no surprises” brief requires a great deal of communicating –up, down, across and internally. When this is done well, higher headquarters liaisons feel the maritime concept of operations meets the Joint Task Force Commander’s requirements. Subordinate commanders and staffs understand their tasking, have resources to accomplish the tasks, and see how their tasks fit into the overall plan. Peer components understand the plan, so that supporting and supported tasks are identified and supportable. Most importantly, all functional areas of the CFMCC staff know their requirements and are confident they can be accomplished.

A “no surprises” brief is meant to imply that everyone believes the recommended decision is viable. However, it does not necessarily imply that everyone agrees that the proposed recommendation is the best solution for their functional area. The logisticians may feel a non-recommended COA is more logistically supportable than the recommended COA, and all stakeholders should be aware of that fact. However, a non-viable COA should never be presented to the Commander.

Conclusions. The above proposed staff principal tenets can be summarized into three areas: responsibility, leadership, and evaluation. First, staff principals must feel responsibility for the plan, the planning process, and the planners. Next, staff principals must provide sage leadership to the planners and the rest of the staff, fostering total staff collaboration. Last, staff principals must continuously and rationally evaluate the plan with a holistic viewpoint throughout the planning process. If staff principals can enable the staff through such efforts, the planners will experience success in two critical areas. First, the planners will be able to effectively collaborate their efforts (up, down, across, within) providing detailed planning that is viable on a timeline that speeds up planning (and execution) tempo. Second, the planners will know their conceptual limits, be supported by a whole of staff effort, and provide innovative COAs that maximize resource effectiveness.

Because doctrine does not exist on how to be an effective staff principal, staff principals must rely on their leadership and operational experience to manage the staff’s efforts. The above proposed tenets help to scope the staff principal’s roles and priorities in their jobs, which are so crucial to staff success.

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