# SDMP Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

1. The special operations component command planning process (SOCC-P2) in the front half of this manual provides a framework for component-level tactical planning that complies with the ACO Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive. The SOCC-P2 is focused on supporting the theatre campaign and guides SOCC planning to support the joint force commander (JFC). The special operations task groups (SOTG) decision-making process (SDMP) offers the SOTGs and other subordinate units a common methodology for planning that is fully nested with the SOCC-P2. While “planning is planning”, the SDMP is intentionally focused on the tactical-level planning requirements of SOTGs and special operations air task groups (SOATGs).

2. The SDMP integrates the actions of the SOTG commander, his staff, the subordinate and supporting units, and any partner agencies or organizations in order to achieve the SOTG commander’s desired results. The process described helps the staff to think critically and creatively in order to develop viable alternatives that capitalize on the strengths of the SOTG while minimizing SOF’s inherent limitations (as described in AJP-3.5).

3. It is not always practical for the SDMP to use the same titles for the steps in the planning process as are used in the SOCC-P2. For steps 3 through 7, a more descriptive title is used instead of the operational-level titles used by SOCC-P2.

4. SOTG commanders start their decision-making process once a mission tasking is received from the SOCC, or when they identify a potential new mission for themselves. SOTGs may receive mission taskings and requests from a variety of sources, both internal and external to the task group.

   • JFC may request SOCC action on specific or categories of targets.

   • Other components may nominate targets for SOF action through the joint targeting process.

   • SOCC intelligence directorate, Intelligence Fusion Centre, or Special Operations Intelligence Branch, et al., may develop intelligence that is passed to the SOTGs.

   • Special operations task units (SOTUs) may propose missions based on their local actions.

   • Follow-on missions generated as a result of technical site exploitation.

5. No matter what the source, the intent is for the task groups (land, maritime, and air) to develop the plan that will achieve the SOCC commander’s (COMSOCC’s) guidance and intent, while mitigating the physical and political risk inherent in special operations. The SDMP

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<th>SOTG Decision-Making Process</th>
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provides a structured but flexible means to ensure complete planning and the COMSOCC’s priorities and intentions are met.

6. The SOTU and special operations air task unit (SOATU) may choose to use the unit leading procedures (ULP) described at the end of this manual for their planning in lieu of other, national processes. The SDMP and ULP are similar, but not identical. Commanders with a staff, usually SOTGs and SOATGs, will use the SDMP as their primary planning process. SOTUs and SOATUs rarely have a formal staff, thus responsibility for planning at the task unit level falls squarely on the small-unit leader. Task units may choose to use the ULP (page 41) as their planning process.

- Missions may be initiated via a warning order (WNGO) or a fragmentary order (FRAGO) from the SOCC. The SOCC may also send a partial concept of operations (CONOPS) to the SOTG for analysis and further development.

- Special operations forces (SOF) missions are often generated from the bottom-up, as the SOTGs develop targets and desired effects in their areas of operation (AOOs).

- At the SOTG level, a 7-step process for planning is used.
  - Each step builds on the previous step.
  - The steps are generally conducted in sequence, however, the staff may repeat steps as their understanding of the problem, environment, and mission requirements evolve during the conduction of the decision-making process.

- The SOTG should expect to begin the SDMP without complete information. There may be times when the SOTG is asked to begin planning in parallel to the SOCC before the higher headquarters (HHQ) plan is approved, such as during the contingency operations planning process. In such cases, the SOTG begins planning based on a WNGO or a FRAGO from the SOCC.
  - The SDMP requires active collaboration with higher and, if appropriate, lateral headquarters.
  - The SDMP will be as detailed as time, experience, and circumstances permit.

- The full, deliberate, SDMP is used when time and staff support are available.
  - Allows the development of an order.
  - SOTG commanders may alter the steps of the SDMP to fit time-constrained circumstances (page 38).

7. Figure I-1 illustrates the steps in the different planning processes.
Figure I-1. Planning Process Steps
DELIBERATE SDMP

Step 1 - Appreciation

1-1. The SOTG begins its SDMP with Appreciation. Upon receiving an order from the SOCC or actionable intelligence from one of the task units, the SOTG will activate its decision-making process. Whether the SOTG uses the deliberate planning process or a time-constrained process will depend on the time available until the mission execution is expected.

1-2. The purpose of the first step is to alert the staff, gather the appropriate planners, and establish an approach for addressing the problem. While the commander is the most important participant in the SDMP, the 2IC or operations officer will normally lead the staff planning process. The SOTG commander:

a. Is the decision maker.

b. Applies experience and judgement to guide the staff’s efforts.

c. Participates in the process at critical points.

d. Makes sound decisions based on staff inputs and recommendations.

1-3. The SOTG staff, led by the 2IC or the operations officer, helps the commander understand and visualize the problem. The staff’s role is to:

a. Analyse the mission.

b. Develop appropriate courses of action (COAs) and recommend a COA for approval.

c. Create reasonable and coherent CONOPS for approval by higher.

d. Create fully synchronized plans and orders.

e. Publish the plan or order.

1-4. **Alerting the Staff.** Upon receipt of a mission request, whether top-down or bottom-up, the 2IC or the operations officer alerts the staff.

a. Unit standard operating procedures (SOPs) will identify who should participate in the mission analysis and where they are to assemble.
Planning must involve representation from all staff branches beyond operations and intelligence. Planning should also include logistics, communications, legal, public Information, host nation (HN), coalition partners, etc., as appropriate.

Planners from the special operations air command (SOAC) and/or the maritime mobility element should be included, as appropriate.

The staff begins gathering pertinent documents:

(a) HHQ plans and orders.
(b) Available maps and overlays.
(c) Current Comprehensive Preparation of the Operational Environment products.
(d) Estimates from other military and civilian agencies.
(e) Running estimates from the SOTG staff, if available.

The commander or his designated representative will assign a planning area appropriate to the expected duration of the planning effort, size of the planning cell, operations security requirements, and communications needs.

Staff Preparation. Once the staff has been gathered, they begin developing their situational awareness. The staff:

a. Reviews higher commander’s guidance and intent.

b. Orients themselves to the operating environment.

c. Collects and reviews additional, pertinent reference materials, such as joint force headquarters’ SOPs, rules of engagement (ROE), Joint Prioritized Targeting List (JPTL), fire support coordination measures, intelligence summaries, etc.

d. Updates the running estimates by staff section (S1-S6).

Initial Assessment. The commander and staff will conduct a quick, initial assessment of the time and resources available to plan and execute the assigned mission. During this step, the staff helps the commander to determine:
1-7. **Allocate Time Available.** One of the key tasks during this initial phase is to create the timeline for planning and delivery. The timeline is based on the SOTG's receipt of mission up to the EALT. The SOTG commander must allow the maximum time available for the assigned and supporting SOTUs and SOATUs to plan and prepare for the mission.

a. Balance the desire for detailed planning with the need to give subordinates maximum time to prepare and rehearse. The $\frac{2}{3}$ rule is a good benchmark; provide subordinates $\frac{2}{3}$ of the time available, from receipt of mission to the EALT, to conduct their planning, preparations, and rehearsals.

**Important Note**

Time available is the single, best determinant of how detailed the planning will be.

b. Build a staff planning timeline:

(1) What products are due?

(2) When are the products due?

(3) Who is responsible?

(4) Who receives the products?

(5) What are the times and locations for known meetings and briefings?

**Best Practice**

Intentional parallel and collaborative planning improves efficiency and effectiveness of the staffs, plus improves the quality of the resulting plan.
1-8. **Issue Commander’s Initial Guidance.** Once the commander’s initial assessment has been completed and the timeline has been established, the staff may formally begin its planning process. The commander issues his initial guidance to the staff and the SOTUs, and, if applicable, to organic SOATUs. The initial planning guidance includes:

a. Guidance on how to abbreviate the planning process.

b. Authorization for necessary movements and pre-positioning of forces.

c. Authorization for any necessary reconnaissance and surveillance activities.

d. Direction to develop any initial requests for information.

e. Confirmation of locations and times for collaborative planning sessions, such as with the SOAC or the with the maritime mobility element.

1-9. **Issue a WNGO.**

a. The last task in this step is issuing a WNGO to the SOTUs that will execute the mission. A WNGO may also be issued to organic air or maritime mobility elements so that they may begin their planning and preparation processes.

b. WNGOs facilitate parallel planning by allowing the different elements to work simultaneously on their specific portions of the plan. Parallel planning requires aggressive information sharing to keep all elements focused on the objective and consistent with SOCC objectives and intent.

c. Annex A provides a sample warning order.
Step 2 - Orientation

2-1. During orientation, the commander develops his visualization of the problem. The SOTG commander and staff will gather, analyse, and evaluate information in order to fully orient themselves to the operational environment. The result of the staff’s mission analysis is a briefing to the commander, after which the commander will provide his intent and planning guidance so that the SOTG staff can develop appropriate COAs.

2-2. Analyse Higher HQ’s Orders. The SOTG commander and staff should thoroughly review the SOCC’s orders to determine how the SOTG can best contribute to the mission and achieve the SOCC commander’s intent. During this step the SOTG staff should completely understand the SOCC’s:

   a. Commander’s intent.
   b. Mission.
   c. Concept of the operation.
   d. Timeline.
   e. Missions assigned to other units sharing the battlespace.

2-3. If commanders and staffs misinterpret the SOCC’s mission, intent, and guidance, valuable time is wasted; this directly impacts the SOTUs’ and SOATUS’ abilities to plan and prepare. Should difficulties or contradictions be found in the SOCC’s order, the SOTG must immediately seek clarification. Liaison officers (LOs) from the SOTG to the SOCC are especially valuable in these situations because of the relationships they establish in the SOCC and their ability to work across the SOCC staff to gain needed clarification.

2-4. Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment (IPOE). To facilitate parallel planning, the SOCC J2 must provide all intelligence products to the SOTG/SOAC as soon as the products are usable, even if they are only partially completed. The LO from the SOTG can be very valuable in gathering appropriate intelligence products from the SOCC staff to facilitate SOTG planning.

2-5. Developing the IPOE is a continuous process of assessing the threat and environment in the target area. Although this step is led by the intelligence officer/non-
commissioned officer (NCO), the entire staff should participate and contribute in order to provide the commander with a complete analysis of the situation. During this step, the intelligence officer/NCO and staff will:

a. Define the environment to determine the factors that influence both friendly and adversary actions.

b. Describe the effects of the battlespace characteristics that both sides must address in the AOO.

c. Determine how the adversary normally organizes and operates when faced with similar situations.

d. Using the information above, develop the threat’s most likely and most dangerous COAs.

2-6. **Determine Mission Essential Tasks.** From their analysis of the SOCC’s order, the SOTG staff determines the specified tasks to be accomplished. Once the specified tasks are determined, the SOTG staff will determine the additional, unstated, tasks that must be accomplished in order to perform the mission. Mission essential tasks are those specified or implied tasks the commander determines are essential to mission success.

a. Specified tasks are assigned to an SOTG by the SOCC and may be written, oral, graphic overlays, or electronic. Paragraph 3 of the SOCC order will normally state the specified tasks, although it is possible that administrative, logistic, or communications tasks will be found in paragraphs 4 and 5. An additional source of specified tasks may be the annexes to the SOCC order.

b. Implied tasks are derived from a detailed analysis of the HHQs’ order, the opposing forces’ situation, and the environment; analysis of doctrinal requirements for each specified task might disclose further implied tasks. In simple terms, implied tasks are those additional tasks, not specified, that must be performed in order to accomplish the mission. Staff analysis, based on their professional expertise and judgment, is the source of the implied tasks.

c. Any task, either specified or implied, that must be successfully completed in order for the SOTG to accomplish its mission is a mission essential task. Mission essential tasks are always included in the SOTG’s restated mission statement. Mission essential tasks are the *what* of the 5-Ws.

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<td>Tasks must be clearly defined and measurable.</td>
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2-7. **Review Available Assets.** The SOTG commander and staff must review the capabilities and status of units in their current task organization. This includes any units attached or assigned to the SOTG, such as organic SOATUs and maritime mobility platforms, and attached conventional capabilities. The staff will then compare the capabilities required to accomplish the specified, implied, and essential tasks with the available assets. From this analysis, the staff will determine if they have the assets needed to accomplish the mission or if there are shortfalls. The identified shortfalls that are required for mission success must be made known to the SOCC.

a. Is any specialized equipment required? Is the special equipment “must-have” or “nice-to-have”?

b. Does the SOCC have additional assets, such as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), mobility, fires, etc., available to support the SOTG?

c. Are there other resources needed by the SOTG that the SOCC will request from the JFC or the other components? What is the timing required to request resources from external sources?

2-8. **Constraints and Restraints.** Constraints are specific actions dictated by the SOCC or HHQ that the SOTG must do, such as maintaining a reserve of one SOTU. Restraints, on the other hand, restrict the freedom of action by placing limitations on the SOTG. These restrictions prohibit certain actions, for example, conducting unilateral night raids. Constraints and restraints are normally found under coordinating instructions in paragraph 3 of the SOCC order; however, annexes may also include constraints and restraints.

2-9. **Critical Facts and Assumptions.** Plans and orders are based on facts and assumptions. The staff gathers facts and develops assumptions in order to build their plan.

a. Facts are statements of truths that include known data regarding the adversary, terrain, weather, friendly forces, time available, and other actors in the battlespace.

b. Assumptions take the place of necessary, but unknown, facts and reflect expected conditions that are likely to be true, but cannot be verified.
(1) Staff must consider HHQ assumptions and will derive their own assumptions.

(2) Assumptions must be logical, realistic, and essential for continued planning.

(3) Assumptions require the staff to develop branches and sequels, or new plans altogether, should the assumptions prove to be false.

c. Staffs must continuously review facts and assumptions to ensure their validity. Verifying assumptions may lead to commander’s critical information requirements (CCIRs).

2-10. Risk Assessment. The purpose of this step is to identify the hazards and to mitigate the risks inherent to the mission. When assessing operational risks, the risk to the mission and the risk to the force should both be considered.

a. Identify and assess hazards. A hazard is any condition with the potential to cause injury, illness, or death of personnel; damage to or loss of equipment; or mission degradation.

b. Determine the process used to assess the probability and severity of each risk in terms of its effect on the mission or to the force. If risk assessment guidance was not provided by the SOCC then the SOTG commander will develop his own risk assessment standards.

c. Develop and apply control measures to mitigate the risks or until risks are reduced to a level where benefits outweigh the potential costs.

d. Implement the control measures through SOPs, orders, briefings, or instructions.

2-11. Commander’s Critical Information Requirements. During this step in the process the staff identifies gaps in knowledge the commander needs in order to make good decisions during planning and execution. Commanders will determine their CCIRs based on recommendations by the staff. CCIRs are only applicable to the designating commander; in other words, a SOCC commander’s CCIR would not necessarily be the SOTG commander’s CCIR. The number of CCIRs is limited by the SOTG’s ability to collect, process, and disseminate the information. Excessive CCIRs reduce the focus of the collection effort.

a. Priority intelligence requirements (PIRs) focus on the adversary or on the operational environment. PIRs identify information about the enemy, terrain, weather, and any civil factors. Experience from recent operations indicates that intelligence about
civil factors may be as important as intelligence about the enemy. All staff sections may recommend PIRs, although the intelligence section manages the PIRs for the commander.

b. Friendly force information requirements (FFIRs) are critical information about friendly forces and supporting capabilities, identifying information about the mission, own units, available support, and time available. All staff sections provide the data for FFIRs. The joint operations centre information manager normally manages the FFIRs for the commander.

c. The relationship between CCIRs, PIRs, and FFIRs is illustrated in Figure 2-1.

![Figure 2-1. CCIRs Lead to Sound Decisions](image)

2-12. The commander will designate the essential elements of friendly information (EEFIs) that need to be protected. EEFIs are those critical aspects of friendly operations that if known by the enemy would lead to compromise, failure, or marginal results. EEFIs are not included in the CCIRs. Identifying the EEFIs and how they will be protected is the first step in the operations security plan.

2-13. **Develop the ISR Plan.** ISR synchronization is a key integrating process that helps the SOTG commander and staff prioritize, manage, and develop a plan to collect information requirements from organic and external sources. During mission analysis the staff identifies the information requirements necessary to develop situational awareness and to continue planning. The SOTG intelligence section leads the process of determining how the information requirements will be addressed. The result is the initial ISR synchronization plan.

2-14. ISR integration follows ISR synchronization. The SOTG operations officer leads the staff through ISR integration to task organic or attached ISR assets, or to submit support requests to the SOCC for ISR support from external resources, in order to satisfy the information requirements in the ISR synchronization plan. The ISR plan sets the special reconnaissance
(SR) assets in motion and may be issued as an order, or as part of an order. ISR synchronization:

a. Identifies requirements and intelligence gaps.
b. Assesses the ability of available assets to collect information.
c. Determines which information requirements should be filled by external resources.
d. Submits support requests to the SOCC for external ISR support.

2-15. **Develop a Proposed Restated Mission Statement.** The restated mission statement is the output of the mission analysis phase. Based on the mission analysis, the staff develops a proposed mission statement for the SOTG. This is a short, clear statement that describes the SOTG’s essential tasks and purpose, the action to be taken, and the reason for doing so. The *who*, *where*, and *when* of a mission statement are fairly straightforward. The *what* and *why* are more challenging to write and if not stated clearly can confuse the SOTUs/SOATUs.

a. *What* are the tasks to be accomplished and are expressed with action verbs. These tasks are measurable and can be grouped as “actions by friendly forces” or “effects on enemy forces”.

b. *Why* puts the tasks into context by describing the reasons for performing the tasks and provides the mission’s purpose. A clear, fully understood purpose is essential to successful mission command/mission orders.

c. *When* is often unknown, therefore, the commander will often use “on order” to designate the time for mission execution. This means that the SOTG must plan and position forces based on an expected time, knowing that the exact time will be based upon external factors such as adversary actions, HHQ direction, etc.

(1) An “on-order” mission is executed by the SOTG at an unspecified time in the future. SOTUs and SOATUs will develop their plans and orders, allocate resources, task-organize, and position forces for execution.
2-16. The proposed restated mission is presented to the SOTG commander for approval in the mission analysis briefing. Annex B provides a mission analysis briefing outline.

2-17. **Issue Commander’s Intent.** The commander’s intent is a clear, concise statement of what the SOTG must do to achieve the desired end state. It links the purpose of the mission with the conditions that define success. Intent statements will likely evolve during the planning process as more information is gathered, analysed, and applied. The commander’s intent is mandatory for all orders and it:

   a. States the key tasks that, along with the mission statement, provide the basis for the SOTUs and SOATUs to exercise initiative when unanticipated opportunities arise or when the original concept of operations no longer applies.

   b. Is typically 3-5 lines long at the SOTG level.

2-18. **Issue Commander’s Initial Planning Guidance.** After the commander approves the restated mission and his intent, he provides the staff with additional guidance to focus their efforts when planning the mission. This is the point where the commander conveys his visualization of the mission and the broad, general actions that will produce mission success.

   a. The commander should provide general guidance about the number and types of COAs he wants the staff to consider. This ensures the staff does not waste time developing COAs that the commander will not accept.

   b. The commander’s planning guidance may change as the situation changes, as new information is provided, or based on staff or SOTU inputs.

   c. The guidance provides the evaluation criteria the commander and staff will use later to measure the relative effectiveness and efficiency of the COAs.

   d. As time becomes constrained, the commander’s planning guidance must become more specific and directive. This approach increases the risk of overlooking or insufficiently examining details that may affect mission execution.
2-19. **Issue a Warning Order.** As soon as the commander issues his planning guidance, the staff sends a WNGO to the SOTUs/SOATUs so they can update their planning and preparations. At a minimum the WNGO contains:

   a. Approved mission statement.
   b. Commander's intent.
   c. Changes to task organization, if applicable.
   d. Attachments and detachments, if applicable.
   e. Unit AOO.
   f. CClRs and EEFI.s.
   g. Risk guidance.
   h. Military deception guidance.
   i. Essential stability tasks, if applicable.
   j. Specific priorities.

2-20. Annex A provides more detail and explanation in an annotated WNGO example.
Step 3 - COURSE OF ACTION DEVELOPMENT

3-1. After receiving the commander’s guidance, the SOTG staff will develop COAs that the staff will later analyse and compare in order to make a COA recommendation to the commander. A COA is a broad, potential solution to the identified problem. This step in the process generates creative options for the commander and staff to consider. The commander’s direct involvement ensures the staff receives accurate answers quickly when questions arise during the COA development process. The result should be COAs that the adversary will not expect.

3-2. Each proposed COA should position the force to exploit success and provide the flexibility to meet unforeseen circumstances. The key inputs to the COA development process and the typical products resulting from COA analysis are shown in Table 3-1.

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<th>Key Inputs</th>
<th>Key Outputs</th>
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<td>• Approved Mission Statement</td>
<td>• Commander’s Selected COAs</td>
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<td>• Commander’s Intent</td>
<td>• COA Sketches and Statements</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Specified and Implied Tasks</td>
<td>• Wargaming Guidance</td>
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<td>• Assumptions</td>
<td>• Updated Evaluation Criteria</td>
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<td>• Updated IPOE</td>
<td>• Updated Running Estimates</td>
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<td>• Running Staff Estimates</td>
<td>• Updated IPOE</td>
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<tr>
<td>• COA Evaluation Criteria</td>
<td>• Updated Assumptions</td>
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3-3. **Analyse Relative Combat Power.** The SOTG staff will use their running estimates as the basis of this analysis beginning with the current task organization and the personnel estimates and logistic status reports from the SOTUs and SOATUs. The planners, including the planners provided by the SOAC and the maritime mobility element, review asset availability in order to determine if additional assets will be required from external sources. The intelligence section will be working to determine the same information on the adversary.

a. The operations and the intelligence sections will consider the types of actions possible, from both the friendly and the adversary’s perspectives.
b. The operations and the intelligence sections should provide an honest appraisal of friendly and adversary vulnerabilities.

c. The operations officer should consider how to allocate existing resources.

3-4. **Develop Options.** Based on the analysis of relative combat power, the staff generates options that become the COAs. In a completely unconstrained environment, the goal is to develop several possible COAs. Since there is rarely enough time or resources available for unconstrained COA development, the commander normally limits the options with his commander’s planning guidance. Options should focus on adversary COAs in order of their likelihood, specifically the most likely adversary COA (MLCOA) and then the most dangerous adversary COA (MDCOA).

a. Brainstorming is the preferred technique for generating options as it normally produces the widest range of options and usually the most creative choices. Brainstorming takes time, however, and may not be possible in a time-constrained environment. See page 38 for more information on time-constrained planning.

b. Once options have been generated, the SOTG staff must remain unbiased and open-minded as they evaluate proposed COAs. The staff should be able to quickly identify COAs that are obviously not feasible and should also be able to modify others to accomplish the mission. Any options that are completely infeasible should be eliminated.

c. While determining the possible COAs, the staff must determine the resources needed for each type of mission being considered. For example, when considering infiltration methods the staff must address the size of the force necessary for the operation; the mobility assets available; weather, terrain, visibility, other competing missions; and any support requirements. The staff should also consider capabilities that may be available from external resources.

3-5. **Develop Scheme of Actions.** As the SOTG staff develops COAs it is helpful to remember that each COA must meet the following screening criteria. The staff may change, add, eliminate, or combine COAs as they evaluate the proposals against the screening criteria.

a. Suitability: Does the proposed COA accomplish the mission? In order to be considered, the proposed COA must comply with the commander’s intent, must accomplish the essential tasks that were identified during the mission analysis, and must achieve the commander’s desired end state.

b. Acceptability: Is the cost of executing the proposed COA justified by the expected results? Is the risk of potential failure justifiable?

c. Feasibility: Does the proposed COA accomplish the mission within the time available and with the resources available?
d. **Exclusiveness**: Is each proposed COA significantly different from the others? The differences can be in terms of scheme of manoeuvre, lines of effort, phasing, task organization, etc.

e. **Completeness**: Does the proposed COA fully address the restated mission and the commander’s intent?

f. **Complies with NATO doctrine**: Does each COA comply with Allied joint doctrine to the extent possible. Are deviations from doctrine justified and accepted by the commander?

3-6. **Array the Forces Available for Planning.** Once the decisive and supporting operations are identified, SOTG planners must determine the relative combat power necessary to accomplish the mission. Can unconventional or specialized techniques be used to increase the relative combat power of the SOTUs? Are additional elements available to influence relative superiority?

a. Initially organize and task friendly forces beginning with the decisive operation and then working backwards to include all supporting operations and attached capabilities. The SOTG should not array forces below the SOTU.

b. Seek opportunities to apply intangible factors—surprise, stealth, deception, speed, information, etc.—in order to sway the relative superiority during mission execution to favour friendly forces.

c. This initial laydown of forces and capabilities identifies the total number of units needed and any excess capability or shortfalls. Excess capability should be addressed in step 5, Develop a Scheme of Manoeuvre. Shortfalls will cause the planners to reassess the feasibility of the COA.

3-7. **Develop the Scheme of Manoeuvre.** For each COA, planners describe the actions that the SOTG will conduct in order to achieve the commander’s intent. Specific capabilities, which at the SOTG level usually translate into specific units, are identified and assigned at this point. Any control means, such as airspace coordination and fire support coordination, necessary to synchronize operations, deconflict with other special operations or conventional forces also operating in the battlespace, and mitigate risk should be identified. Supporting capabilities, such as ISR, technical site exploitation, law enforcement, lethal and non-lethal fires, logistic, etc., necessary to accomplish the mission should also be arrayed by time, space, and/or purpose in the scheme of manoeuvre. Based on the level of detail required by the SOTG commander and the time available for planning, the general scheme of manoeuvre for each COA should address:

a. **Purpose for the operation.**
b. Risk assessment.
c. Critical events.
d. Phasing.
e. Supporting actions.
f. C2 Structure.
g. ISR plan.
h. Fire support plan, if any.
i. Battlespace control means.
j. Mission essential tasks.

3-8. **Prepare COA Statements and Sketches.** Once the schemes of manoeuvre are determined, the staff prepares COA statements and supporting sketches to clearly depict how the SOTG will accomplish the mission. These COA statements and sketches are brief explanations of how the operation will be conducted and controlled (5-Ws and How). If there are friendly or neutral non-military elements such as HN government agencies and international aid organizations operating in the battlespace where the special operation is to be conducted, these organizations’ locations and concerns must be considered and addressed. The sketches provide graphic portrayals of the manoeuvre and supporting aspects of the COA. Combined, the statement and supporting sketch help the SOTG commander to visualize each of the COAs down to the SOTU/SOATU level, discern the relative advantages of each COA, and facilitate his ability to make sound decisions.

3-9. **Brief the Proposed COAs.** Once the COAs have been developed, it is recommended that the SOTG commander review them with the staff. Normally, this is not a formal briefing, but is a collaborative session/discussion to ensure the effectiveness and timeliness of the SOTG’s planning efforts. During the review, the commander confirms that the proposed COAs meet his planning guidance, updates the staff with any new guidance received from the SOCC commander, and chooses the COAs he wishes the staff to continue analysing and refining. Suggested topics for the COA review include:

a. Updates to the IPOE.
b. Review the MLCOA and MDCOA.
c. COA statements and sketches.
d. Reasoning behind each COA.
Step 4 - COURSE OF ACTION ANALYSIS

4-1. COA analysis provides the SOTG commander and staff a structured opportunity to determine which COA will best accomplish the assigned mission within acceptable risk considerations. It also identifies any potential coordination problems, conflicts during execution, and likely consequences (military, civilian, informational, social, and economic) of the SOTG's planned actions. COA analysis may require the SOTG planners to revisit elements of the proposed COAs.

4-2. Wargaming is the preferred method for COA analysis. Admittedly, wargaming can be difficult and time consuming, but it is extremely valuable. A wargame simulates the flow of each friendly COA against the adversary COAs. The results of wargaming reveal the relative strengths and weaknesses of each COA and provide insights and possibilities that may not have been considered during COA development. At the end of the wargame the commander chooses one COA for execution, combines the best attributes of several COAs, or sends the staff back to develop new COAs if unexpected conditions or requirements are identified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wargaming stimulates ideas, highlights the critical tasks, and provides an opportunity to discover unconventional and innovative solutions to a tactical problem. Successful SOTG staffs devote a significant amount of the time allotted for COA analysis and COA comparison to the wargame in order to ensure a thorough and comprehensive analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4-3. Rules for Wargaming

   a. Stay objective. Do not allow personalities or “what the commander wants” to influence the wargame.

   b. Record the results accurately.

   c. Continually assess feasibility, acceptability, and suitability of the COA. Reject a COA if it fails to meet these tests.

   d. Avoid premature conclusions.

   e. Do not compare the COAs against each other; COA comparison occurs later.
4-4. **Gather the Tools.** Before the analysis can begin, the staff gathers the tools and the personnel necessary to adequately represent the AOO and the flow of the mission. SOTGs may choose to use maps, sand tables, computer simulations, terrain board, or other tools in order to accurately reflect the terrain, infrastructure, and social environment. In addition, the staff will need a means of displaying the staff estimates, any event templates, a record of the wargame, the friendly and adversary COAs, and a means to post friendly and adversary units and organizations.

**Important Note**

Ensure liaisons from subordinate and lateral units are included in the wargame process. The liaisons are often the forgotten human “tools” that when included will significantly enhance the effectiveness of the wargame and the visualization of the battlespace.

4-5. **List Friendly Resources.** Friendly resources include all forces that have been selected to be involved in the mission for the COA being analysed, whether under SOTG command or in support of the SOTG. The SOTG commander and the planning staff must consider all available capabilities, military and civilian, and organic and external that can contribute to mission success. The types of resources to be considered may include law enforcement, paramilitary forces, and host government or coalition civilian agencies. In addition, the staff should address “green team” elements such as new/media organizations, non-governmental agencies, and civilian relief organizations.

4-6. **List Assumptions.** Are all previous assumptions still valid and necessary?

4-7. **List Known Critical Events and Decision Points.** Critical events are those actions that directly affect successful mission accomplishment. They include events that trigger another significant action or a decision by the adversary, are a complex and difficult friendly action, or have been designated as a mission essential task during mission analysis. Critical events should also consider if actions by friendly forces will cause a corresponding action by the civilian populace, the media, or other, non-military actors in the battlespace. The staff should post, in a place for all participating in the wargame to see, the list of critical events from the SOTG’s current position through mission accomplishment.

4-8. Decision points are times, events, or locations where the SOTG commander will likely have to make a key decision regarding a COA. Decision points may be associated with CCI Rs that describe the information (both friendly and adversary) needed for the commander to make a decision.
4-9. The staff should strive to keep the list of critical events and decision points manageable. When time available for planning is short, limit the list to only the most essential critical events and decision points.

4-10. **Choose a Wargame Method.** There are three common techniques for wargaming: the Belt Technique, the Box Technique, and the Avenue-in-Depth Technique. Each technique considers the area of interest and all adversary and other actors that may affect the outcome of the mission.

   a. **Box Technique.** The box technique (Figure 4-1) is the easiest to use when the time available is short and the enemy situation is fairly certain. The staff focuses on specific areas of the battlespace, such as critical events or decision points. A disadvantage of the box technique is that critical shaping or supporting actions may be overlooked to the detriment of the mission.

   ![Figure 4-1. Box Technique Wargame Method](image)

   b. **Belt Technique.** This is the most lengthy, but also most effective, technique for wargaming because the staff must analyze more events within the AOO. Normally, the battlespace is divided by phase lines and within each belt all actions and actors within the belt are considered simultaneously (Figure 4-2). Belts may be arranged vertically or horizontally in order to ensure the most thorough analysis.
c. **Avenue-in-Depth Technique.** The avenue-in-depth technique (Figure 4-3) focuses the staff on one avenue of approach at a time, beginning with the main effort. This allows the staff to wargame the battle in sequence from the assembly area to the objective. All critical events along the avenue of approach or line of operation are analysed.
4-11. **Choose a Method to Record and Display the Results.** The results of the wargame provide a record that the SOTG staff uses to build a task organization, to synchronize the SOTUs'/SOATUs' actions, and to prepare the orders. It also allows the staff to compare the COAs’ relative strengths and weaknesses (the next step in the SDMP). The recommended method is the synchronization matrix as it is easily transformed into a decision support template upon completion of the wargame.

### Table 4-1. Sample Synchronization Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time/ Event</th>
<th>H - 24 hours</th>
<th>H-hour</th>
<th>H + 24 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adversary Action</strong></td>
<td>Monitors movements</td>
<td>Defends from village</td>
<td>Retreat from village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civilian Population</strong></td>
<td>Normal pattern of life</td>
<td>Remains in homes</td>
<td>Return to normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decision Point</strong></td>
<td>Adversary leaders in place</td>
<td>Night, &lt; 10% illumination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOTG Units</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOTU 1</td>
<td>Complete rehearsals</td>
<td>Enter village</td>
<td>Protect village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOTU 2</td>
<td>Complete rehearsals</td>
<td>Assume blocking position</td>
<td>Protect village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOATU 1</td>
<td>Mission prep complete</td>
<td>Assault on HLZ Faith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOATU 2</td>
<td>Mission prep compete</td>
<td>Assault on HLZ Charity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partner Units</strong></td>
<td>Complete rehearsals</td>
<td>Assault with SOTUs</td>
<td>Protect village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>QRF</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>On Alert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intelligence</strong></td>
<td>Continue updates</td>
<td>Monitor</td>
<td>Monitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SR</strong></td>
<td>Monitor pattern of life</td>
<td>Overwatch</td>
<td>Monitor pattern of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joint Fires</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>On Call</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Site Exploitation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assault with SOTU 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Logistics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fuel</strong></td>
<td>Prepare FARP kits</td>
<td>On Call</td>
<td>On Call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEDEVAC</strong></td>
<td>On Alert</td>
<td>On Alert</td>
<td>On Alert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maintenance</strong></td>
<td>Aircraft mission ready</td>
<td></td>
<td>Repair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>SOTG CP at HLZ Charity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media</strong></td>
<td>Embedded journalists</td>
<td>PIO notifies</td>
<td>PIO updates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*C2 = command and control; CP = command post; FARP = forward arming and refuelling point; HLZ = helicopter landing zone; MEDEVAC = medical evacuation; PIO = public information office; QRF = quick reaction force*
4-12. The synchronization matrix (Table 4-1) allows the staff to synchronize the COA in time, space, and purpose with the adversary COA. The table provides columns for the time or phase of the operation. The first row is for detailing the most probable adversary action; the second row details the effects on the civilian population; and the third row is for the decision points for the friendly COA. The remainder of the matrix depicts the functional areas and major subordinate commands necessary for the operation.

4-13. **Wargame the COAs and Assess the Results.** All previous steps in the SDMP prepare the staff for this step. This is where the SOTG commander and the staff attempt to visualize the flow of the operation for each COA being analysed using friendly strengths and capabilities, adversary strengths and COAs, and the impact of other actors in the battlespace. It is an intentional and structured effort to walk through the moves, counter-moves, and effects on external actors during the planned mission, much as a chess player attempts to visualize how an opponent might respond to their planned move.

4-14. The personnel involved in the wargame should be those who were deeply involved in developing the COAs. The SOTG staff and advisors/liaisons analyze each critical event using an action - reaction - counteraction methodology. As weaknesses are discovered they are recorded in detail and in order so that they can be addressed later.

4-15. The action - reaction - counteraction methodology begins with the side holding the initiative. Reactions are the response from the other opponent. The wargame should consider the intended and unintended effects of each side's actions as they elicit responses from the civilian population and any civilian governmental or non-governmental agencies in the battlespace. The staff must also consider the impact of local, national, and global media during each turn. Branch plans are addressed or developed based on successful actions against adversary forces and unexpected civilian reactions.

a. The wargame begins with one side, normally the friendly force, stating its actions in detail, including the assets used, the shaping and supporting actions, the combat support (CS) and combat service support (CSS) capabilities required, and the intended effects on the civilian population and agencies in the battlespace. The friendly unit markers are moved on the map, terrain board, sand table, etc. The recorder uses the synchronization matrix to capture the actions by the units and functions.

b. The intelligence staff (or red cell if the staff is large enough to have both) uses the adversary COAs as the basis for the reaction. They execute the intended adversary COA, in addition to reacting to the first opponent’s move. Adversary unit markers are moved to graphically portray the changes in disposition, and again, the recorder uses the synchronization matrix to record the responses.

c. The SOTG then responds to the adversary's move with a counteraction. The counteraction can be based on a branch plan that may have been developed during the COA development step or can be the product of thoughtful discussion by the SOTG
based on the need to counter the adversary’s move. Friendly unit markers are moved again to portray the counteraction and the recorder updates the synchronization matrix.

d. If the SOTG staff is large enough to have wargame players to represent the civilian population, HN security forces, and the media, time should be given to allow them to describe how their functions will respond to actions by friendly and adversary forces.

e. This concludes the first turn of the first wargame pairing. The SOTG commander will determine how many turns he wishes to make, based on the number of phases and the time available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Red Flag</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wargame inputs that reflect the effects of friendly and adversary actions on the civilian populace, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the media must be from the cultural, social, and political perspective of the groups being representative. It can be a catastrophic error to assume the local populace will perceive NATO military actions in the same light as a Western audience might.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4-16. The SOTG staff will continue applying the action – reaction – counteraction methodology for each pairing of friendly and adversary COAs.

4-17. During the wargame, the commander can modify the COA based on how the turn develops, if he recognizes additional critical events or decision points, or if new opportunities arise. These changes should be incorporated into the COAs and recorded in the synchronization matrix.

4-18. The results of the wargame include:

a. Updated COAs including required branch and sequel plans.

b. Updated location and timing of the decisive point.

c. Updated task organization.

d. Re-allocated CS and CSS capabilities.

e. Identified additional CS and CSS support requirements.

f. Decision support template.

g. Identified additional critical events.
4-19. **Brief the Wargame (Optional).** If the commander did not participate in the wargame then it is prudent to provide him with a briefing on the results. This is not the COA decision briefing, but an informational presentation to keep the commander informed. The SOTG staff may also choose to provide a wargame briefing to subordinate staffs. If the SOTG determines that a wargame briefing is required, the suggested format is shown in the box to the right.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8</th>
<th>Wargame Briefing (Optional)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• SOCC’s mission, commander’s intent, and deception plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Updated IPOE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assumptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wargaming technique used</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Friendly and adversary COAs that were wargamed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Critical events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Possible adversary actions and reactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Possible impacts on civilians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Possible media impacts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Modifications to the COAs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Results of the wargame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 5 - COURSE OF ACTION COMPARISON

5-1. The goal of this step is to identify the advantages and disadvantages of each friendly COA. This is done by independently by comparing each of the friendly COAs against the evaluation criteria provided by the commander in his planning guidance. As a result of this process the staff will make a recommendation to the commander as to which COA to develop into a CONOPS and, eventually, an order.

Table 5-1. COA Comparison Inputs and Outputs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Inputs</th>
<th>Key Outputs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Wargame Results</td>
<td>• COA Evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Commander’s Evaluation Criteria</td>
<td>• Recommended COA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Updated Running Estimates</td>
<td>• Updated Running Estimates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Updated Assumptions</td>
<td>• Updated Assumptions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5-2. **Analyse the Advantages and Disadvantages.** Each staff member provides the advantages and disadvantages of each COA from his/her perspective. Specifically, the S1 presents the personnel analysis, the S4 provides a logistical point of view, the S6 offers the communications viewpoint, and so on. This analysis is based on the staff’s professional experience and judgement. Liaisons from the SOTUs and the SOATUs can be very helpful and it may be beneficial to include them in the process. Using the evaluation criteria provided earlier by the commander, the staff compares the strengths and weaknesses of the friendly COAs.

**Best Practice**

Many staffs have found it helpful to present the operations analysis last as supportability issues identified during the wargame may suggest needed modifications to the favoured scheme of manoeuvre.

5-3. **Compare the COAs.** The staff should compare and evaluate the COAs using a clear and logical manner. Normally, the staff prepares a decision matrix as it is a simple tool that ensures all evaluation criteria are considered; organizes the results of the staff’s judgement; and then presents the results of the COA comparison in a manner that easily helps the commander make a sound decision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Analyse Advantages and Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Each staff section provides their perspective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Based on staff’s professional experience and judgement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Include liaisons in the analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2</th>
<th>Compare the COAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Use criteria provided by commander</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evaluate each COA against the criteria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When building the decision matrix, the staff uses the evaluation criteria provided by the commander in his planning guidance. If the commander has not already stated weightings for the evaluation criteria, then the 2IC or the operations officer will assign the weightings based upon his understanding of the commander's intent. When assigning weights to the evaluation criteria, it must be clear whether higher or lower is “best”. A sample decision matrix is shown in Figure 5-1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>COA 1 Nickname</th>
<th>COA 2 Nickname</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simplicity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity of Command</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 (4)</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>2 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force Protection</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 (4)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force Protection</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>12 (17)</strong></td>
<td><strong>9 (12)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Higher is best

5-5. **COA Decision Briefing.** Once the analysis and comparisons are completed, the staff should be able to identify and defend their recommended COA to the commander. If the staff cannot reach a decision then the 2IC will determine which COA to recommend. The staff then delivers a decision briefing to the commander to present the results of their analysis and their recommended COA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>Commander’s Decision Briefing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Higher HQ intent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Restated mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Status of friendly forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Updated intelligence status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Own COAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Results of the wargame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Decision matrix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recommended COA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 6 - COURSE OF ACTION SELECTION

6-1. **Commander’s Decision.** At the conclusion of the COA decision briefing the commander will determine which COA is the most likely to achieve the desired results. If the commander rejects all the COAs presented, the staff will have to start over. If the commander chooses a modification to a COA as the selection, then the staff may have to wargame the revised COA, depending on how significant the modification is. The commander will determine if another decision briefing is required.

**Red Flag**  
It will have a significant negative impact on the subordinate SOTUs’ and SOATUs’ time available for planning and preparation if the commander rejects all COAs presented during the decision briefing. This is why the commander must be actively involved and the 2IC or operations officer must have the trust and confidence of the commander in order to lead the SDMP.

6-2. **Commander Provides Final Planning Guidance.** Once the commander is satisfied and choose a COA, he will issue his final planning guidance to the staff and to the SOTUs and SOATUs. The final planning guidance will contain any updates to the original commander’s intent, changes to the CCIRs, priorities for resources and capabilities (air, fires, ISR, CS, CSS), and any additional guidance to aid SOTU and SOATU planning and preparations.

6-3. If the commander changes the risk acceptance and mitigation guidance he provided earlier during orientation, this will need to be clearly presented to the SOTUs and SOATUs. Any changes to the risk criteria that may impact the SOCC’s mission must be approved by the SOCC commander. If time is available, the SOTG commander should discuss his risk analysis with higher, lateral, and subordinate commanders.

6-4. **Issue a Warning Order.** With the commander’s decision and final planning guidance confirmed, the staff will issue the final WNGO to the SOTUs and SOATUs. This WNGO contains all the information the subordinate units require to complete and update their planning and preparations.

6-5. The final WNGO, issued after the COA selection, normally includes:


b. Updated commander’s intent.
c. Updated CCI Rs and EEFIs.
d. CONOPS.
e. AOO.
f. Mission or principal tasks assigned to the SOTUs and SOATUs.
g. Any preparation or rehearsal instructions that are not already included in SOPs.
h. Final timeline.
Step 7 - PLAN AND ORDER DEVELOPMENT

7-1. There are two likely situations:

a. A new mission initiated by the SOTG commander, within the framework of his overall approved mission. In this case, the SOTG staff prepares a FRAGO, developed from the selected COA.

b. A new mission ordered by the SOCC commander. In this case the SOTG staff prepares a concept of operations (CONOPS), developed from the selected COA.

7-2. Prepare the Plan or Order. The staff should prepare a detailed CONOPS in the format specified by the SOCC. When required by the SOCC commander, the SOTG commander or his designated representative (SOTG LO to the SOCC) will brief the CONOPS to the SOCC for approval. If no changes to the CONOPS are directed by the SOCC, the SOCC staff will issue a CONOPS approval and the SOTG staff will further develop the CONOPS into an order.

7-3. If changes or clarification to the CONOPS are required, the SOCC commander will determine if an additional CONOPS approval briefing is needed.

7-4. Commander’s Review and Approval. After the approved CONOPS is turned into an order, the commander reviews and approves the order before it is transmitted to the SOTUs and SOATUs. The commander may delegate this authority to another in the chain of command.

7-5. Disseminate and Confirm. Once the order is transmitted, the subordinate units should immediately acknowledge receiving it. Acknowledging an order means it has been received and understood. If possible, the order should be briefed to the subordinate commanders and key staff members. This provides an opportunity to emphasize the commander’s intentions, clarify potential friction points, and answer questions as the plan shifts from future operations to current operations.

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**Plan and Order Development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Prepare the Plan or Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Commander’s Review and Approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Disseminate and Confirm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Important Note**
The CONOPS has to be prepared in a written text format. If the CONOPS has to be briefed to the SOCC commander and/or staff, the staff also prepares a CONOPS brief, preferably in PowerPoint format. The PowerPoint slides will be used to brief the CONOPS to the SOCC for approval, but the inherent limitations of PowerPoint prevent inclusion of details needed by the subordinates for their planning. A complete written CONOPS becomes the foundation for the final order.
ANNOTATED WARNING ORDER FORMAT

Copy No. ___ of ___ copies
SOTG Headquarters
Place of Issue
Date-time group of Signature
Reference Number

Warning Order ________________

References: List any maps, photographs, HHQ orders or plans, and other relevant documentation (optional). Use a new line for each reference, preceded by a capital letter. It is not necessary to list standard orders, SOPs, etc., which may be referred to in the body of the order.

Time zone to be used (optional).

Purpose statement: (Any specific taskings or requests to supported and supporting commanders.)

1. SITUATION. This is a short summary of the situation being addressed. Include 1-2 short sentences about the enemy situation and 1-2 short sentences about the friendly situation. This information can usually be found in the SOCC support plan. It is optional to include the HHQ's mission and intent.

2. MISSION. This is a concise statement of the mission being issued to the SOTG. If not all information is known (who, what, when, where, and why), state which parts of the mission statement are tentative. This paragraph will not be sub-paragraphed.

3. EXECUTION.

   Intent: Provide either the intent for the new mission or state, “No change”.

   a. Concept of the operation. Provide as much information as possible without being overly directive to the SOTG commander. This may be “None” for the initial WNGO.

   b. Scheme of manoeuvre. Likely “To be determined” for the initial WNGO.

   c. Tasks/missions to subordinate units. This also includes preparatory tasks such as movements to assembly areas, authorized surveillance and reconnaissance, etc. Sub-paragraphs will address each directly subordinated unit. Ensure “Task” or “Mission” is
include in sub-paragraphs’ titles. If it is obvious that an SOTU will require support from other SOTG subordinates (for example, and organic SOATU), include a sub-paragraph listing the supporting task for that subordinate.

d. Coordinating instructions. This is the final sub-paragraph of paragraph 3. Any information not routinely covered by SOPs that will increase coordination and collaboration among the units should be included. It may include the commander’s priorities, liaison instructions, and guidance on planning and rehearsals.

e. Additional information. Likely “None” for the initial WNGO, but will be updated during subsequent WNGOs as more details are known. May include EALT, additional ROE considerations, known constraints, CCIRs, risk guidance, etc.

4. SERVICE SUPPORT. Any administrative and logistical arrangements to support the operation. If no new instructions provided, state, “No change”.

5. COMMAND & SIGNAL. Brief description of command arrangements and communication and information systems (CIS) support requirements. Provide new information not covered by SOPs.

ACKNOWLEDGE: Provide instructions for acknowledging the order. The word, “ACKNOWLEDGE” may suffice. An acknowledgement to a WNGO means that it has been received and understood.

SOTG Commander’s last name in capitals
SOTG Commander’s rank
Fragmentary Order

References: (Mandatory) List any maps, photographs, HHQ orders or plans, and other relevant documentation. Use a new line for each reference, preceded by a capital letter. It is not necessary to list standard orders, SOPs, etc., which may be referred to in the body of the order.

Time zone to be used (optional)

Task Organization: Provide new information or state, “No change”. This information may also be provided in paragraph 3 or in an annex. If provided here, give the organization of the forces, including attached units, command relationships, and the names and ranks of the commanders when necessary.

1. SITUATION. (Mandatory) Detail any changes to the existing order.
   a. Enemy Forces. Provide new information or state, “No change”.
   b. Friendly Forces. Provide new information or state, “No change”.
   c. Attachments and Detachments. Provide new information or state, “No change”.
      If not provided above in Task Organization, include the names of the commanders and the time the attachments and detachments are effective.
   d. Commander’s Evaluation. (Optional) Provides a brief commander’s evaluation of the situation.

2. MISSION. (Mandatory) List the new mission for the SOTG. If the mission has not changed from that in the operation order (OPORD) that the FRAGO refers to, repeat the SOTG’s mission from that OPORD in full. If the SOTG’s mission has changed, provide a clear, concise statement of the task(s) to be accomplished by the SOTG. The mission is that which is given to the SOTG commander by the SOCC commander. In certain circumstances, however, an SOTG commander may derive his own mission in the interests of clarity and understanding. This situation may apply when the commander has not received a clear and succinct mission from
the SOCC commander, or when his mission analysis reveals a critical task which is crucial to the success of his mission, and that, in his judgement, must be emphasised. It is unlikely that the purpose of the mission will change and any new mission statement should support the SOCC commander’s intent. This paragraph must not be sub-paragraphed.

3.   EXECUTION.
   a.   Intent. (Optional) Provide either the intent for the new mission or state, “No change”.
   b.   CONOPS. (Mandatory) Provide either the CONOPS for the new SOTG mission or state, “No change”. Briefly describe the scheme of manoeuvre from start to completion stating where, when, and how the force is to achieve its purpose. If the mission involves two or more clearly distinct and separate phases, number and describe each phase in separate sub-paragraphs. Include key timings, either by “on order” or in reference to H-hour and priorities for fires and other combat support.
   c.   Tasks to Subordinate Units. (Mandatory) Each sub-paragraph addresses the specific missions or tasks assigned to each directly subordinate unit. If task organization has not already been provided, include it here.
   d.   Coordinating Instructions. (Mandatory) Provide new instructions or state, “No change”.

4.   SERVICE SUPPORT. (Mandatory) Describe any changes to the existing order or instructions, or state, “No change”.

5.   COMMAND & SIGNAL. (Mandatory) Describe any changes to the existing order or else state, “No change”.

ACKNOWLEDGE: Provide instructions for acknowledging the order. The word, “ACKNOWLEDGE” may suffice. An acknowledgement to a FRAGO means that it has been received and understood.

SOTG Commander’s last name in capitals
SOTG Commander’s rank
MISSION ANALYSIS BRIEFING FORMAT

Time permitting, the staff will brief the SOTG commander on the following:

1. Mission and commander’s intent of the HHQ two levels up.
2. SOCC’s mission, commander’s intent, and concept of the operation.
3. Initial IPOE.
4. SOTG commander’s guidance.
5. Proposed SOTG mission statement.
7. Pertinent facts and assumptions.
8. Constraints and restraints.
10. Initial risk assessment.
11. Proposed CCI Rs and EEFls.
12. Initial ISR plan.
13. Recommended timeline.
TIME-CONSTRAINED SDMP

1. There are times when the SOTG needs to develop sound and fully synchronized plans, but there is not enough time available to go through the entire SDMP in detail. Commanders can shorten the SDMP when time is limited but when mission requirements demand a simple, flexible, and tactically sound plan.

2. Time-constrained planning is normally required once the SOTGs have arrived in the AOO and have begun operations. It is expected that the SOCC guidance, IPOE, and the running estimates already exist. When time is limited, the mission analysis only needs to be updated, thus, the staff may be able to move very quickly into COA development.

3. An experienced staff should be able to shorten the time it takes to conduct the SDMP since they have already mastered the steps. While the process used in a time-constrained environment is the same as when conducting the deliberate SDMP, the commander may be able to do some of the steps mentally or with less involvement by the staff. The commander determines how to adjust the SDMP and gives specific guidance on where to focus and how he wants to save time.

4. Even the most detailed planning cannot address every possible branch or sequel. In addition, fleeting opportunities or unexpected adversary actions may require the SOTG to quickly generate new or modified plans. The following time-saving techniques are offered to help speed the SOTG’s planning process.
   a. **Increase Commander’s Involvement:** Although commanders cannot spend all their time with the planners, the greater the commander’s involvement in the planning, the faster the staff is able to plan. In a time-constrained situation, the commander has to rely on his own expertise, intuition, and creativity, in addition to his understanding of the environment and his professional training. By staying actively involved in the planning, commanders should be able to make some of the decisions without requiring formal briefings, such as the proposed COAs (Step 3) and wargame results (Step 4).
   
   b. **Limit the Number of COAs to Develop:** Limiting the number of friendly and adversary COAs to be developed and wargamed saves large amounts of time. This technique saves the time by focusing the staff on what the commander thinks is most important. The goal changes from generating a range of creative options for the commander and staff to consider, to developing an acceptable COA that meets mission requirements, even if the COA is not optimal. This is the technique with the potential to save the most time, but the commander accepts a higher degree of risk by not fully exploring all possible COAs.
   
   c. **Maximize Parallel Planning:** In a time-constrained situation it is critical for the staffs to find ways to increase the amount and quality of parallel planning. The importance of WNGOs increases when time is limited. A verbal WNGO issued immediately and followed up later with a written order saves more time than waiting to give guidance with a fully developed written order. The SOCC and SOTGs must share their IPOE products with the SOTUs and SOATUs as early and as often as possible.
Increase Collaborative Planning: Modern CIS allows the SOTG to have the same operational picture of the battlespace and to share documents in near real-time amongst geographically separated units. Video teleconference technology can also help increase the amount of collaborative planning among separated units. Liaisons are another means of increasing the collaboration during planning by ensuring the SOTUs and SOATUs are fully represented during the SOTG’s planning and by passing as much information as possible to their parent units. Both of these LO actions aid the subordinate units’ planning and preparation.

5. **Appreciation:** This step does not change when time-constrained. The commander’s role is to decide at this point whether the SDMP can and should be abbreviated and, if so, how he intends to shorten the process.

6. **Orientation:** When time available to conduct detailed mission analysis is limited, the commander and staff will use the updated running estimates to perform a hasty mission analysis and to derive a new restated mission, when required. Rapid mission analysis places a great deal of pressure on the intelligence staff to ensure the IPE is current and comprehensive enough for the commander and staff to make informed decisions. If the commander has been fully engaged in the mission analysis, it may be possible to omit the mission analysis briefing.

7. Another time-saving technique is to make the commander’s planning guidance more directive. Although this limits creativity and flexibility, the commander may direct the task organization and scheme of actions for each desired COA. The commander can also save time by limiting the adversary COAs to be developed.

8. **COA Development:** If the commander has been directive in his planning guidance, the limited number of desired COAs allows the staff to use the limited time available to the maximum effect. While limiting the COA development step to a single COA does save significant time, it is a risky approach. The commander can mitigate the risk by investing time in the wargame.

9. **COA Analysis:** The commander and staff must wargame the COAs to ensure all elements are integrated and synchronized. In order to save time during wargaming, the commander may choose to only wargame the essential elements of the COAs, modify COAs as their strengths and weaknesses are identified, or delete COAs in order to spend more time developing the COA he favours.

10. The staff may also choose to do a hasty wargame once the COAs are developed in order to provide the commander with an early recommendation. This allows the commander to refine the COAs prior to the deliberate wargame. Alternately, the wargame may be conducted only after a COA has been selected. In extremely time-limited situations, the hasty wargame may be the only opportunity to perform a wargame prior to developing the CONOPS.

11. When time-constrained, the staff should use the box technique (page 22), focusing on the most critical events and decision points. The staff prioritizes the critical events in terms of the mission essential tasks and wargames as many critical events and decision points as possible in the time available.
12. Another technique for saving time during COA analysis is to limit the evaluation criteria. The staff can save time by limiting the number of criteria to four or five, based on the restated mission statement, commander’s intent, and commander’s guidance.

13. When only one COA is developed and analysed, the purpose of the analysis is to verify, refine, synchronize, and integrate the COA and any necessary modifications. The staff should follow the wargaming process described in Step 4 as much as time allows in order to help the commander to fully visualize the flow of the operation and to identify potential branches and sequels. If only one COA is developed and wargamed, the staff must have the courage to admit if it is unsuitable, unacceptable, or not feasible. If this occurs, another COA must be rapidly developed.

14. **COA Comparison:** If the commander decides on a COA during the wargame or if only one COA is developed, this step can be eliminated.

15. **COA Selection:** If the commander fully participates in the planning process the decision should be apparent and the commander can make his decision at the end of the wargame. The staff is responsible for ensuring the COA is complete, with tentative task organization, COA statement, and tasks and purposes for each subordinate unit.

16. **Summary.** Time-constrained SDMP does facilitate rapid planning, when required, by focusing the staff on the SOTG commander’s specific mission requirements. The commander accepts that abbreviating the SDMP limits the staff’s flexibility and creativity. A shortened SDMP, therefore, increases the risk of not exploring all available options and perhaps overlooking a key factor or discovering an innovative or unconventional approach that may be more suited to a special operation.
UNIT LEADING PROCEDURES

1. Introduction. ULP extend the SDMP to the SOTU and SOATU level. ULP offers a proven process that enables task unit leaders to analyse a mission, develop a plan, and prepare their units for action. ULP consists of eight flexible steps that can be modified by task unit commanders to meet mission requirements. Task unit commanders should use whatever expertise is available at their level to enhance the quality of their ULP; planning should rarely be done alone.

2. Framework for ULP

   a. Receive the Mission. Task units may receive a mission in several ways. The SOTU missions may be intelligence-driven based on SOTU IPOE in their assigned battlespace, top-down from an SOTG tasking, or a follow-on mission as a result of site exploitation operations.

      • Upon receipt of a WNGO or FRAGO from the SOTG, the task unit commander acknowledges receipt and confirms understanding of the SOTG commander’s intent and concept of the operation. The task unit commander must seek clarification of any elements of the SOTG's order that is not understood. Once the mission is received and understood, the task unit commander makes an initial assessment of the situation and determines the time available for planning and preparation (including rehearsals and movements). This initial assessment is the basis of the SOTU/SOATU commander’s initial WNGO to the task unit.

   b. Issue a WNGO. SOTU/SOATU commanders issue the best WNGO possible, based on the information they have. Do not delay. Task unit commanders can, and should, update the WNGO later as more information becomes available.

      • Normally, the initial WNGO includes the mission and nature of the operation, units participating in the operation, tasks not already addressed in SOPs, and the timeline for the operation.

   c. Make a Tentative Plan. Once the initial WNGO has been issued and the task unit begins its preparatory actions, the commander and key subordinates (2IC, S2, S4, S6) will develop the tentative plan. This step essentially combines the Orientation, COA Development, COA Analysis, COA Comparison, and COA Approval steps from the SDMP. The process is significantly less structured at the SOTU level in large part because the SOTU commander does not have the staff to support planning that an SOTG commander has.

   d. Begin Necessary Movements. Once the tentative plan has been decided upon, the SOTU/SOATU commander will direct any movements necessary for mission preparation or pre-positioning of the unit prior to execution.

   e. Conduct Reconnaissance. If time and circumstances allow, the SOTU should insert a special reconnaissance team to observe the AOO prior to execution. First-hand assessment of the target area is invaluable at the SOTU level. If circumstances do not
permit insertion of an SR team, the SOTU commander needs to identify the reconnaissance and surveillance requirements needed (imagery, signals intelligence, human intelligence, change analysis, pattern of life, etc.) and then submit requests through the SOTG to gain ISR support from external resources.

f. **Complete the Plan.** The SOTU or SOATU commander will incorporate the ISR results into their tentative plan and then finalize the plan or order. The operations overlay, fire support plan, sustainment plan, and control means should all be completed and approved by the task unit commander. If time allows, the SOTU should conduct final coordination with lateral units and the SOTG before issuing the final order.

g. **Issue the Order.** Task unit orders are normally issued verbally and reinforced by graphic overlays and control means. Typically, the SOTU commander does not issue a commander’s intent; they reiterate and support the SOTG and SOCC commanders’ intents.

- The best place to issue the order is where the SOTU or SOATU is best able to view or visualize the objective or surrounding terrain. If security or other considerations preclude actual observation of the target area, the SOTU commander should issue the order on a sand table, terrain board, map with operations overlay, or computer depiction. The goal is to ensure all elements of the SOTU or SOATU are able to visualize the flow of the operation, prepare for any contingencies, and understand the critical events and decision points.

h. **Supervise and Refine.** Once the order is issued the SOTU or SOATU commander monitors the unit’s preparations, refines the order as new information becomes available, coordinates with lateral and higher units, supervises the mission rehearsal, and ensures the task unit is fully prepared for the mission.

3. **Summary.** Normally, the first three steps of ULP; receive the mission, issue a WNGO, and make a tentative plan, are conducted in order. The remaining steps are done based on mission requirements and time available. The final step, supervise and refine, is performed at every step along the process, either by the commander or by his designated representative.
LEXICON

Acronyms

2IC  second-in-command (also, deputy commander)
AOO  area of operations
BPT  be prepared to
CCIR  commander’s critical information requirement
CIS  computer and information systems
COA  course of action
COMSOCC  special operations component command commander
CONOPS  concept of operations
CS  combat support
CSS  combat service support
EALT  earliest anticipated launch time
EEFI  essential elements of friendly information
FARP  forward arming and refuelling point
FFIR  friendly force information requirement
FRAGO  fragmentary order
HHQ  higher headquarters
HN  host nation
HQ  headquarters
IPOE  intelligence preparation of the operational environment
ISR  intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
J2  intelligence directorate in a joint HQ, normally SOCC and above
JFC  joint force commander
JPTL  Joint Prioritized Targeting List
LO  liaison officer
MDCOA  most dangerous course of action (adversary)
MLCOA  most likely course of action (adversary)
NCO  non-commissioned officer
### SDMP Handbook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OPORD</td>
<td>operation order</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIR</td>
<td>priority intelligence requirement</td>
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<td>ROE</td>
<td>rules of engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDMP</td>
<td>SOTG decision-making process</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOAC</td>
<td>special operations air command</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOATG</td>
<td>special operations air task group</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOATU</td>
<td>special operations air task unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOCC</td>
<td>special operations component command</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOCC-P2</td>
<td>special operations component command planning process</td>
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<td>SOF</td>
<td>special operations forces</td>
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<td>SOP</td>
<td>standard operating procedure</td>
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<td>SOTG</td>
<td>special operations task group</td>
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<td>SOTU</td>
<td>special operations task unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>special reconnaissance</td>
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<td>ULP</td>
<td>unit leading procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>VTC</td>
<td>video teleconference</td>
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<td>WNGO</td>
<td>warning order</td>
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# Glossary of Terms

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<tr>
<th>Key Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Adversary</strong></td>
<td>A party acknowledged as potentially hostile to a friendly party and against which the use of force may be envisaged.</td>
<td>AAP-6</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Assumption</strong></td>
<td>A supposition on the current situation or a presupposition on the future course of events, either or both assumed to true in the absence of positive proof, necessary to complete an estimate of the situation as a basis for future decisions.</td>
<td>COPD, Dec 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Branch</strong></td>
<td>A contingency option built into the base plan executed in response to anticipated opportunity or reversal in order to retain the initiative and ultimately achieve the original objective.</td>
<td>COPD, Dec 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course of Action</strong></td>
<td>In the estimate process, an option that will accomplish or contribute to the accomplishment of a mission or task, and from which a detailed plan is developed.</td>
<td>AAP-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friendly Force Information Requirement</strong></td>
<td>Information the commander needs to know about his own forces, which might affect the commander’s ability to accomplish the mission.</td>
<td>AJP-01(D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mission</strong></td>
<td>A clear, concise statement of the task of the command and its purpose.</td>
<td>AAP-6</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
<td>A clearly defined and attainable goal to be achieved.</td>
<td>COPD, Dec 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Priority Intelligence Requirement</strong></td>
<td>Those intelligence requirements for which a commander has an anticipated and stated priority in his task of planning and decision-making.</td>
<td>AAP-6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>