Enemy Course of Action Development

by Major Matthew Fontaine

Introduction

Time. It's the staff's most finite and critical resource when planning operations. This is especially true for the S-2 during the mission analysis step of the military decision-making process. Throughout mission analysis, the S-2 leads the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) process to determine all valid enemy courses of action (COAs), also known as threat COAs. The enemy COA is just one of various overlays, charts, matrices, and sketches identified in doctrine as IPB outputs.[1]

Time-constrained environments, like those at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), compound the challenge of developing quality enemy COAs. During JRTC rotation 18-08, the 2nd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division's brigade combat team staff adhered to the general rule, and the brigade commander's explicit order, to allocate a minimum of two-thirds of available time for the subordinate units to conduct their planning.

In accordance with this guidance, our brigade executive officer strictly allocated mission analysis time based on the receipt of the higher headquarters orders. This resulted in just 12 hours to prepare our initial mission analysis briefing. Toward the end of the operation, the time allocated for mission analysis was only 2 hours. Under these time constraints, waiting for the higher headquarters to publish an order was not an option.

At JRTC, our S-2 section kept pace by anticipating how our operation would unfold and by developing a series of potential enemy COAs *before* the receipt of mission. These enemy COAs were developed with the understanding that some, if not most, of their details would later require significant refinement. Others would be discarded wholesale after the receipt of the mission. This was OK. When conducting operations, we found it better to spend at least 2 hours early on, to save an hour later when planning time was severely limited. What follows is the five-step framework (see Figure 1) we used to rapidly generate and refine enemy COAs.

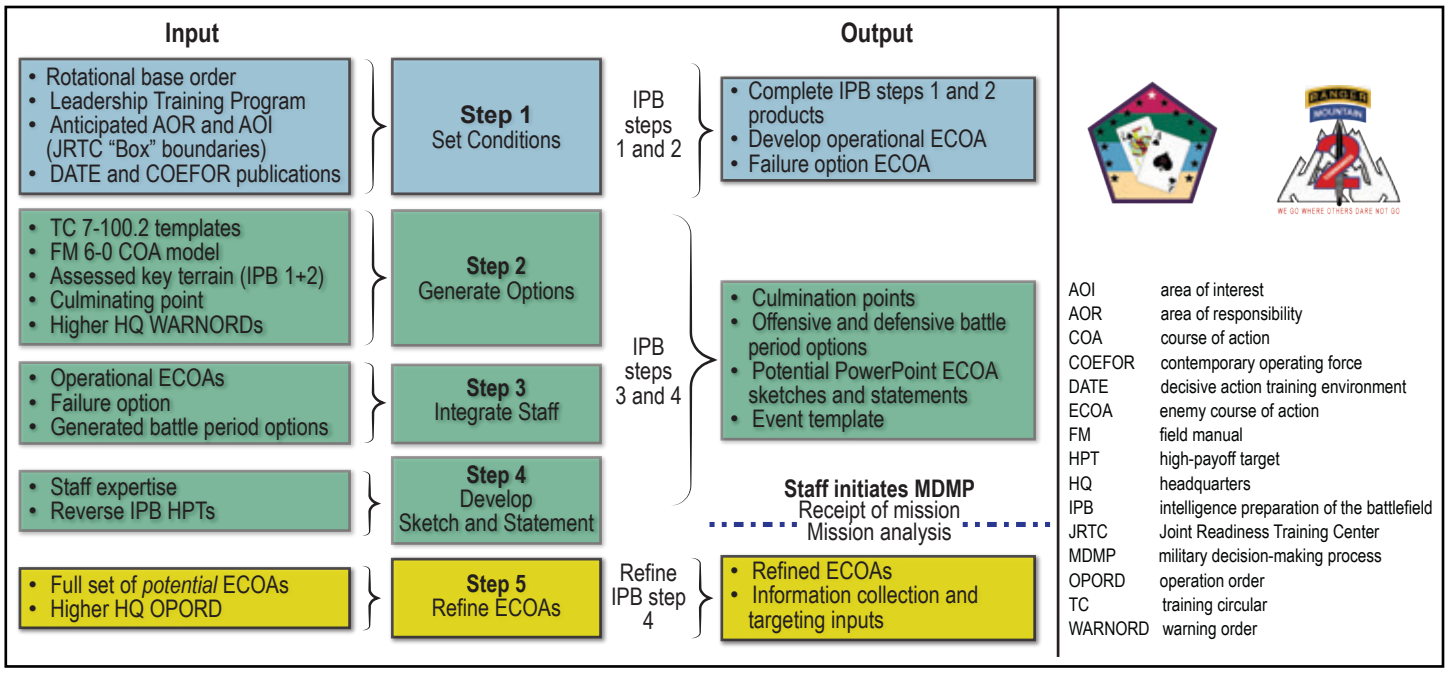


Figure 1. Enemy COA Development in a Time-Constrained Environment

Step 1: Set Conditions

We leveraged spare time to the fullest to plan during reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI). Specifically, four efforts enabled the rapid development of enemy COAs later on.

- **First**, we completed IPB steps 1 and 2 for the entire training area.
- **Second**, we fully developed the assessed Joint Task Force 21 enemy COA for the brigade combat team area of operations (see Figure 2 on the next page). This enemy COA described in broad terms how the enemy could achieve its end state. Working out the joint task force enemy COA details better enabled us to visualize how our entire operation would likely unfold.
- **Third**, we developed a "failure option" COA, anticipating what actions the enemy might take if unable to achieve its end state (see Figure 3 on the next page).
- **Fourth**, we templated anticipated enemy positions within key terrain and population centers to get ahead on microanalysis in support of the subordinate units (see Figure 4 on the next page).

These efforts enabled us to visualize how the entire operation was likely to unfold. We predicted the next series of offensive objectives and likely locations of defensive arrays for the next phase using key terrain as a guide. Thinking about the enemy's objectives holistically from the start, and the enemy's failure option, improved our ability to define the brigade's close and deep fights throughout the rotation.

Step 2: Generate Options

We began the process of developing potential enemy COAs with a short brainstorming session. Brainstorming for the next battle period occurred once we issued the brigade order but before the combined arms rehearsal. Using key terrain and assessed enemy strength to inform our analysis, we anticipated where and when friendly and enemy forces would likely culminate during the current phase. We then generated a series of enemy options using the offensive and defensive templates described in TC 7-100.2, *Opposing Force Tactics*. Sketches helped the team to quickly think and identify the full range of actions the enemy could take to accomplish their next mission. After generating options, we brought the rest of the staff into the IPB process.

Step 3: Integrate the Staff

IPB is most effective when the full staff is integrated into the analysis.[2] However, a formal reverse IPB process is time-consuming, and in our experience, it offers few results if the S-2 section has not already generated an initial framework. We found that a 30-minute reverse IPB session immediately following brainstorming efficiently and effectively incorporated expertise across the staff.

We began the working group by presenting our generated options. Having this common enemy framework at the start enabled the staff to quickly build on our initial ideas. We recommend that warfighting function leads come prepared with reverse IPB checklists that identify aspects of their areas most relevant to the fight. For example, a sustainment IPB checklist ensures that potential high-payoff targets, such as sustainment command posts, are included in the overall analysis. The unit standard operating procedure contains the checklist, and it is updated as particularly significant aspects of each warfighting function are brought to light. With staff input, an initial enemy COA for each generated option is developed.

Step 4: Develop the Sketch and Statement

As with friendly COAs, enemy COAs are best framed using statements and sketches. A good enemy COA tells a story. It succinctly describes the enemy's aim, means, and approach to achieving its end state. The enemy COA title captures the key elements of the enemy narrative and serves as an aid to distinguish one enemy COA from another. Memorable enemy statements and sketches rapidly develop shared understanding in time-constrained environments so that solutions can quickly be produced and acted upon.

While unit standard operating procedures vary, we found that a single PowerPoint slide per enemy COA was the best tool for shared understanding. These slides were an excellent briefing tool, better than acetate over a map, and superior as a deliverable—easy to disseminate in both digital and hardcopy formats for future study. Each enemy COA slide contained only the essential elements necessary for framing the problem and was free of the minutia that tends to obfuscate briefings conducted under severe time constraints.

ATP 2-01.3, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield*, notes that doctrinal friendly COA development models are an excellent tool when developing enemy COAs.[3] While true, simple modifications to the friendly COA statement and sketch in FM 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*, produce more effective and timesaving enemy COAs.[4] In a time-constrained environment, we recommend that each enemy COA sketch and statement include the following information:

- Type of attack or defense to be used—*integrated attack* and *dispersed attack* or *maneuver* and *area defense*.
- Organization of the enemy area of operations using the three basic zones: *battle, disruption,* and *support*. The sketch may also include *attack* and/or *kill zones*.

Mission: 171BTG fixes coalition forces IOV LEESVILLE, SANGAN, AVELINO (3411) and the MPS to establish blocking positions against 2/10BCT north of OAKDALE.

1711 (ME)
T: Seize SANGAN, MPS (OBJ CHRYSLER); Secure HWY 28; Fix
P: Prevent massing of CBT PWR on 173BTG

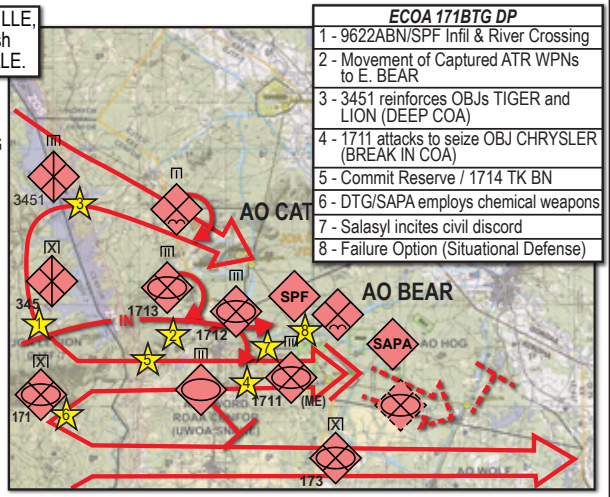
1712 (SE1)
T: Seize and control LEESVILLE
P: Enable entry into AOs BEAR and CAT

1713 (SE2)
T: Seize ANACOCO; Secure HWY 171
P: Ensure FoM to AO CAT

1714 (SE3)
T: Reserve to 1711; Block HWY 171 south of ROSEPINE
P: Prevent massing of CBT PWR on 1711

3451 (SO5)
T: O/o reinforce AVELINO LFS (OBJs TIGER, LION)
P: Enable the seizure of TOLEDO DAM by 345BTG

ECOA 171BTG DP
1 - 9622ABN/SPF Infil & River Crossing
2 - Movement of Captured ATR WPNs to E. BEAR
3 - 3451 reinforces OBJs TIGER and LION (DEEP COA)
4 - 1711 attacks to seize OBJ CHRYSLER (BREAK IN COA)
5 - Commit Reserve / 1714 TK BN
6 - DTG/SAPA employs chemical weapons
7 - Salasyl incites civil discord
8 - Failure Option (Situational Defense)



Concept of Operations
PHI - SPF Infiltration and River Crossing: 19-25JUN, 9622ABN/SPF infiltrates to set conditions for offense ICW SAPA; 17DTG defeats 350BDE.
PHII - Expand Operational Zone: 25-27JUN, 1712 seizes LEESVILLE; 1713 seizes ANACOCO; 3451 seizes AVELINO (OBJs TIGER, LION).
PHIII - Secure GLOCs and Seize OBJ CHRYSLER: 27-29JUN, 1711 seizes SANGAN and MPS; 1714 establishes blocking positions S. HWY 171.
PHIV - CATK: 29JUN-TBD, 1711 defends MPS (OBJ CHRYSLER); 1714 CATKS to defeat coalition forces to set conditions for OAKDALE block.

Figure 2. Assessed Joint Task Force Enemy COA

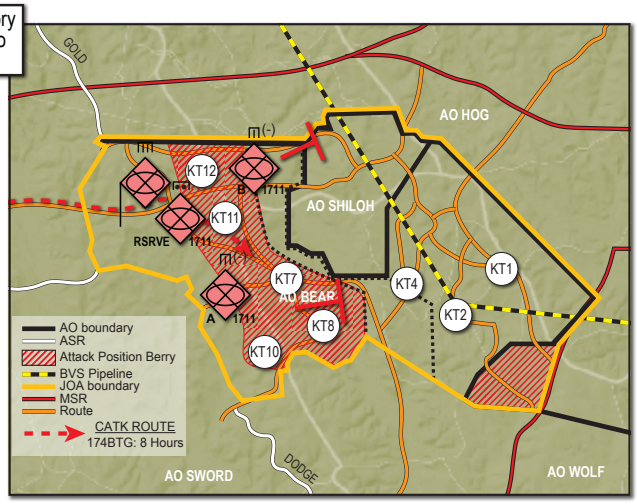
Mission: 1711BDET retains captured territory to inflict politically unacceptable casualties to enable a favorable negotiated settlement.

(ME) A 1711
T: Seize/Fix KT 4 (OBJ CHRYSLER)
P: Prevent massing of CBT PWR on 173BTG

(SE1) B 1711
T: Seize/Control SANGAN
P: Enable FoM within W. AO BEAR

RSRVE 1711
Priorities: Counter penetration; Reinforce A-1711

174
T: Defeat
P: Prevent penetration of DTG BZ; inflict casualties



Concept of Operations
1711 assumes defensive positions west of WEST FORK CREEK with a DZ (oriented west of KT4 and MARGHOZ) and a BZ (oriented along KT7, 8, 10, IVO MARJANI, and KT 12) to retain captured Atropian territory, inflict politically unacceptable coalition casualties, and set the conditions for a negotiated settlement favorable to ARIANA. 1711 executes the failure option if it is unable to seize or retain MPS/fix coalition forces in eastern AO BEAR and in the event the 174BTG is defeated or fixed, and they are unable to prevent the defeat of 1711.

Figure 3. Failure Option Enemy COA

Mission: SPF retains OBJ CHRYSLER to prevent coalition forces from gaining control of critical infrastructure and gain time for the 1711 offense.

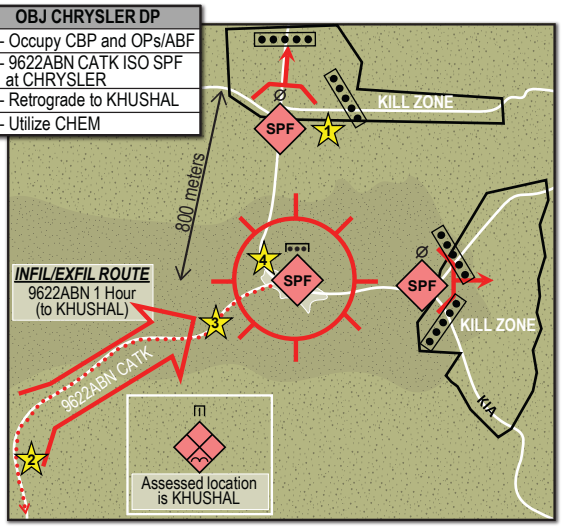
SPF
Main Defense Force
T: Retain
P: Prevent coalition forces from gaining control of critical infrastructure

Ø SPF ABF x2
Disruption Force
T: Disrupt
P: Prevent coalition FoM along GLOCs

Composition:
- 25-35 fighters; organized in 4-8 PAX ABF DZ and a 15-25 Main Defense Force
- Equipment includes 60/82mm mortar, RPG, AT-13, UAS, SA-18, sophisticated communication

Disposition:
- Defensive positions in KT/AoA with good LOS
- Use of C3D and urban areas to prevent targeting when not actively defending site
- Work ICW SAPA/SALASYL for intelligence, DA, and to incite civil discord

OBJ CHRYSLER DP
1 - Occupy CBP and OPs/ABF
2 - 9622ABN CATK ISO SPF at CHRYSLER
3 - Retrograde to KHUSHAL
4 - Utilize CHEM



Concept of Operations
PHI - Infiltrate and Occupy OBJ: 20JUN-25JUN: SPF movement to OBJ CHRYSLER and KHUSHAL and defensive preparation.
PHII - Establish Disruption Zone: O/o. AD/AT ABF teams sent out to establish Disruption Zone along GLOC.
PHIII - Occupy Battle Positions: O/o. SPF Main Defense Force occupies battle positions MPS/OBJ CHRYSLER.
PHIV - Retain MPS: SPF defends to disrupt 2/10JFE.

Figure 4. Key Terrain Enemy COA

Mission: 9622ABN/SPF retains OBJ CHRYSLER and controls KT4 to retain critical infrastructure and set the conditions for the 1711BDET attack.

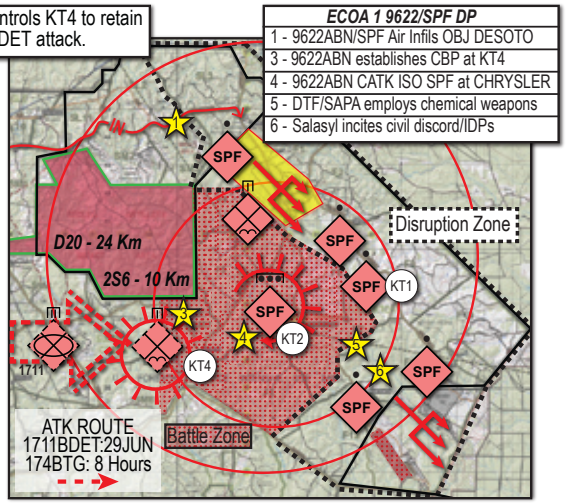
T: Control KT4
P: Enable 1711 FoM into eastern AO BEAR

T: Retain MPS; Disrupt OBJ DESOTO, TAA BERRY, FoM IVO KT1
P: Gain time for 1711 attack; retain critical infrastructure

9622ABN CDET Composition:
- 90-120 fighters
- MMG, AT-13, RPG, SA-18

SPF Composition:
- 40-60 fighters: organized in 4-6PAX AT/ADA Teams; Anti-landing force; PLT-sized element IVO MPS
- Equipment may include captured Atropian weapons: T-80, BMP-2, BRDM-2, Scout Cars, D-30, ZSU 23-4

Disposition:
- Defensive positions in KT/AoA with good LOS
- Use of C3D and urban areas to prevent targeting
- Work ICW SAPA/SALASYL for intelligence, DA, and to incite civil discord



Concept of Operations
PHI - Seize Initial Objectives: 19-24 JUN, 9622ABN and SPF infiltrates AO BEAR (air/ground) to seize KT and establish Disruption Zone.
PHII - Disruption Operations: 24-27JUN, 9622ABN and SPF defend KT4 and KT2 (OBJ CHRYSLER) and disrupt 2/10 entry into AO BEAR.
PHIII - 1711 Entry AO BEAR: 27JUN, B-1711 seizes SANGAN; 9622ABN controls KT4 and SPF controls/fixes coalition forces at OBJ CHRYSLER.
PHIV - 1711 Attack: 29JUN-TBD, 9622ABN enables FoM of 1711 into E. AO BEAR; 1711 attacks to seize MPS and defeat 2/10BCT.

Figure 5. Enemy COA 1 - Dispersed Defense

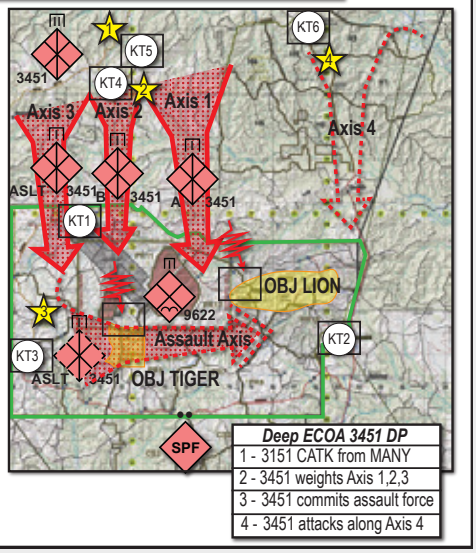
Mission: 3451BDET CATKS to Seize OBJs TIGER and LION IOT enable the seizure of the TOLEDO BEND DAM.

T: Seize OBJs LION and TIGER
P: Enable the seizure of TOLEDO DAM by 345BTG

T: Fix OBJ LION from Axis 1
P: Enable FoM of the Assault Force

T: Fix OBJ TIGER from Axis 2
P: Enable FoM of the Assault Force

T: Seize OBJs TIGER and LION along the Assault Axis
P: Enable FoM of the Assault Force



Concept of Operations
PHI - 3451 Committed: Upon the collapse of the 9622ABN/SPF DZ, 3451 initiates movement from MANY.
PHII - Entry in AO CAT: 3451 enters AO CAT, secures ASR JETTA (east to west GLOC) and key intersections (KT4,5). 3451 determines axis of fixing and assault forces.
PHIII - 3451 Fixing: 3451 attacks along Axis 1 and 2, fixes enemy at OBJs TIGER and LION. Assault Force attacks along Axis 3, and moves into attack positions IVO KT3 (ECOA 1) or along Axis 4 (ASR GOLD) ECOA 2.
PHIV - Seizure of OBJs: Assault force attacks to seize OBJs TIGER and LION.

Figure 6. Enemy COA 2 - Situational Offense

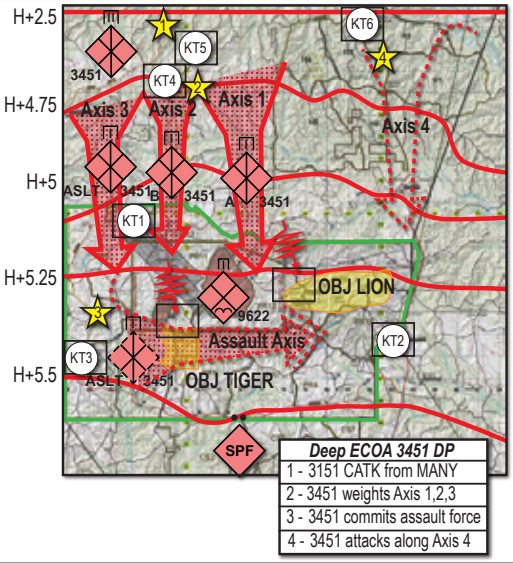
Mission: 3451BDET CATKS to Seize OBJs TIGER and LION IOT enable the seizure of the TOLEDO BEND DAM.

T: Seize OBJs LION and TIGER
P: Enable the seizure of TOLEDO DAM by 345BTG

T: Fix OBJ LION from Axis 1
P: Enable FoM of the Assault Force

T: Fix OBJ TIGER from Axis 2
P: Enable FoM of the Assault Force

T: Seize OBJs TIGER and LION along the Assault Axis
P: Enable FoM of the Assault Force



Concept of Operations
PHI - 3451 Committed: H+2hrs, Upon the collapse of the 9622ABN/SPF DZ, 3451 initiates movement from MANY.
PHII - Entry in AO CAT: H+2.5hrs, 3451 enters AO CAT, secures ASR JETTA (east to west GLOC) and key intersections (KT4,5). 3451 determines axis of fixing and assault forces.
PHIII - 3451 Fixing: H+5.25hrs, 3451 attacks along Axis 1 and 2, fixes enemy at OBJs TIGER and LION. Assault Force attacks along Axis 3, and moves into attack positions IVO KT3 (ECOA 1) or along Axis 4 (ASR GOLD) ECOA 2.
PHIV - Seizure of OBJs: Assault force attacks to seize OBJs TIGER and LION.

Figure 7. Enemy COA with Integrated Timed Phase-Lines

- Key terrain relevant to the current phase and axis of attack drawn in accordance with assessed avenues of approach.
- Designation of the main effort.
- Task and purposes of subordinate units, organized and designated according to their function in the planned offensive or defensive action. For instance, disruption, fixing, assault, or exploitation.
- Desired end state (outlined in the threat mission statement).
- Decision points. If possible, provide the amount of time necessary to complete each broad action or to arrive at each decision point.
- A memorable enemy COA title that captures the key elements of the enemy narrative.[5]

We developed at least two feasible and distinguishable enemy COAs from the generated options using these guidelines (see Figures 5 and 6 on the previous page). Each enemy COA had an accompanying event template or timed phase-lines integrated directly into the sketch (see Figure 7 on the previous page). The phase-lines determined the time or place in which the enemy commander had to make a decision and served as the basis for the initial collection plan.

Step 5: Refine Enemy COAs

Remember, all the work described above occurs before the receipt of mission. As an example, during RSOI we produced full sets of offensive and defensive enemy COAs to minimize the potential of being caught with insufficient time. Upon receipt of the mission, we learned that the enemy would initially be defending. This meant half of our enemy COAs were eliminated from the start. However, this also meant we were able to spend our first 12 hours refining our defensive enemy COAs.

As a result of our preplanning, we immediately began to operationalize our two defensive enemy COAs during mission analysis. After refining our enemy COAs, our brigade analysts and the battalion S-2s used the bulk of the brigade mission analysis time to create more detailed IPB products, both digitally and on acetate. Armed with a nearly complete enemy COA, our collection manager was in a better position to request echelon's above brigade information collection assets 72 hours out. Our plans team also had better inputs into the targeting working group.

Conclusion

During the conduct of operations, every minute of planning time counts. Developing operational, failure, and multiple battle period enemy COAs before receipt of the mission maximizes available time. Use mission analysis to refine your enemy COAs, conduct detailed planning, and facilitate collaborative efforts. Anticipate how your operation will unfold, and your S-2 section will keep pace in demanding time-constrained environments.

Endnotes

1. Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 2-01.3, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 1 March 2019), 2-2.

2. Ibid., 1-4–1-5.

3. Ibid., 1-4.

4. Department of the Army, Field Manual 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 5 May 2014), 10-7. Change 1 was issued on 11 May 2015. Change 2 was issued on 22 April 2016.

5. Ibid.

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