

Adaptive Planning

Not Your Great Grandfather's Schlieffen Plan

Soldiers conduct combined arms rehearsal in Afghanistan to establish plan of action for next day's mission

U.S. Army (Michael Zuk)



BG Mark T. Kimmitt, USA, chief military spokesman for the Coalition Provisional Authority, and Dan Senor, Coalition Information Center director, brief press on handover of responsibilities to the Iraqi government

U.S. Air Force (Jacob N. Bailey)

By ROBERT M. KLEIN

Background: Demolished Iraqi vehicles line roadway in Euphrates River Valley after Operation Desert Storm

On December 13, 2005, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld approved the Adaptive Planning (AP) Roadmap and directed its “expeditious implementation.”²¹ This act represented a significant shift in the way the Department of Defense (DOD) thinks about military planning. The impetus for change was a recognition that the accelerating pace and complexity of military operations require that the President, Secretary of Defense, and combatant commanders have the ability to respond quickly to new threats and challenges.

Adaptive Planning is the joint capability to create and revise plans rapidly and systematically, as circumstances require. It occurs in a networked, collaborative environment, requires the regular involvement of senior leaders, and results in plans containing a range of viable options that can be adapted to defeat or deter an adversary to achieve national objectives. At full maturity, AP will

form the backbone of a joint adaptive system supporting the development and execution of plans, preserving the best characteristics of present-day contingency and crisis planning with a common process.

The need to overhaul the DOD planning and execution system becomes more evident when it is viewed against the backdrop of history. Planning today is a late 19th-century concept born out of the German general staff system. It thus seems fitting that a discussion about transforming the planning process begins with the history of the Schlieffen Plan.

A Fatal Assumption

From a strategic and military perspective, the Schlieffen Plan represented an imaginative solution to Germany's strategic challenge of being sandwiched between a vengeful France and a hostile Russia. Moreover, it offered the real prospect of using strategic maneuver to overcome technological

advances in firepower and the lethality of warfare between 1870 and 1914. Named for its author, Alfred Graf von Schlieffen, the plan called for rapid mobilization and the swift defeat of France with a holding action against Russia.

But the plan's key assumption, that Germany could mobilize before France or Russia, proved its fatal flaw. Mobilization was tied to such precise timetables that once the trains began to roll, any attempt to stop them would cause mass disruption—a potentially lethal decision if the corresponding enemy troop trains continued to the frontiers.

Contingent on Germany's ability to mobilize quickly, the plan backed political decisionmakers into a corner by limiting options and time to negotiate. Moreover, the event of either French or Russian mobilization was tantamount to a German declaration of war on both nations. The Schlieffen Plan and equivalent schemes of the other great powers comprised a classic example of game theory,

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in which all players try to maximize returns. To a large measure, the rulers of Europe, who bungled their way to war in August 1914, became victims of their own planning.²

Following World War I, the U.S. military began to formalize a planning process, and the result was the elaborate series of procedures known as the Colored Plans. These arrangements provided the basis for strategy, as well as joint and combined operations, in World War II.³ Planning improvements in the second half of the 20th century included the Joint Operational Planning and Execution System

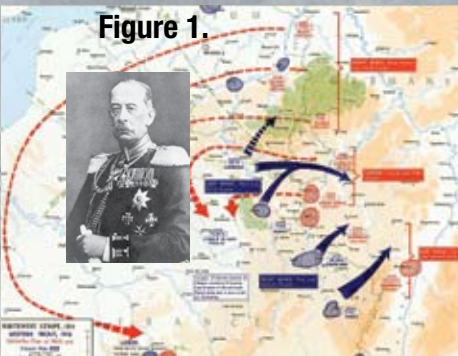
outlined Operations Plan (OPLAN) 1003, the invasion of Iraq. Secretary Rumsfeld found the existing plan frustrating. Essentially a replay of Operation *Desert Storm* in 1991, it called for a slow, massive logistic buildup to support an invasion force of 500,000. The methodical scheme with its months-long timeline did not square with the Secretary's ideas for a transformed military. The plan had been on the shelf since its approval in 1996 and was updated in 1998, but its assumptions, as Secretary Rumsfeld quickly pointed out, were woefully out of date and did not reflect current intelligence.

In a meeting

process into a capability suited to rapidly changing conditions.

Simply put, the 24-month contingency planning cycle was too slow and inflexible to keep up with fast-paced world events and altered planning considerations. As Operation *Iraqi Freedom* demonstrated, off-the-shelf plans were static, difficult to adapt, and often based on outdated assumptions, assessments, forces, and circumstances. Since no formal mechanisms existed to ensure early and frequent consultation between civilian and military leadership during plan development, political leaders entering the cycle at the end were presented with a *fait accompli*—a single

Figure 1.



The Schlieffen Plan

- Single option
- Great plan for original assumptions
- Detailed movement tables and mobilization timelines built to support single option
- Not adaptive to changing circumstances and strategic decision dynamics
- Mobilization and movement timelines backed policymakers into strategic corner

"The outbreak of war in 1914 is the most tragic example of government's helpless dependence on the planning of strategists that history has ever seen."

—Gerhard Ritter, author of *The Schlieffen Plan: Critique of a Myth*

Figure 2.



- Defensive option
- Original assumptions, assessments, forces not relevant to actual situation
- Policymakers wanted multiple options, to include offensive option
- Planning process and technology made it difficult to modify plan and put into execution quickly
- Required extraordinary effort to adapt plan successfully to rapidly changing strategic circumstances
- The 1003V planning effort provides the conceptual baseline for the Adaptive Planning initiative

"Today's environment demands a system that quickly produces high-quality plans that are adaptive to changing circumstances."

—Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, AP Roadmap, December 13, 2005

and its codification in joint doctrine, policies, and instructions by the mid-1990s. Despite these and other institutional improvements (in areas such as mobilization and transportation planning), modern planners failed to address the dilemmas that had plagued all contingency plans since the inception of the Schlieffen Plan. Most critically, contingency planning remained a flawed, time-consuming process, bound by the original assumptions and largely unresponsive to the demands of political decisionmakers who required more options. This reality was never more evident than in the events leading up to the invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

On November 26, 2001, Secretary Rumsfeld flew to Tampa to see General Tommy Franks, commander, U.S. Central Command. In a private session (Rumsfeld insisted that they be alone), General Franks

on December 4, Rumsfeld demanded alternatives and out-of-the-box thinking. How would the plan be executed on short notice versus an extended timeline? What was the shortest period required to deliver enough forces to accomplish the mission? What if the President was willing to accept more risk? Despite obvious flaws, OPLAN 1003 was the only one on the shelf if the President decided to go to war with Iraq immediately. A complete rewrite of a contingency plan would take months.⁴

The Mandate

From the months-long planning prior to Operation *Iraqi Freedom*, it became evident that a complete overhaul would be required to transform the DOD industrial age planning

military option that bound political decisionmaking in time-constrained situations.

This setting was disturbingly similar to what happened with the Schlieffen Plan in 1914 (see figures 1 and 2). Clearly, contingency plans needed to incorporate more and better options and sufficient branches and sequels that readily lent themselves to rapid and regular updating to support crisis planning and execution.⁵

Compounding the problem, joint planning has been largely sequential, requiring iterative collocation of planners from senior and subordinate organizations. Because authoritative data have been compartmented

and are not readily accessible for planning, course of action development remains a prolonged process, necessitating requirements identification and feasibility analyses (operational, logistic, and transportation) late in the planning process, causing time-consuming adjustments and extending development timelines even further.

Also, interagency involvement generally occurs late in plan development. Operation Plans Annex V, which addresses interagency coordination, is typically written *after* approval of the base plan. Despite advances in information technology, joint planners remained stuck in the 20th century, having few tools to enable work in parallel across echelons in a virtual environment with access to key planning data.

At the direction of the Secretary of Defense, the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy tasked the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Resources and Plans in August 2003 to work with the Joint Staff to create a successor to current planning processes. Specifically, he sought an approach that would considerably shorten the time it takes to produce plans and to create plans that can be adapted to a constantly changing strategic landscape.⁶ The result was Adaptive Planning.

Adaptive Planning Vision

The 2005 Contingency Planning Guidance directed combatant commanders to develop designated, priority contingency plans using the AP approach. Transforming contingency planning requires modernizing the way DOD thinks about and develops its processes, products, people, and technology for planning.⁷ This transformation does not entail complete elimination of current processes. Rather, it requires a mixture of new and existing capabilities. The Department of Defense must preserve the best characteristics of current processes and systems and apply them in unprecedented ways.

AP allows combatant commanders to produce plans more quickly and adaptively and of higher quality. Rapid planning and greater efficiency are achieved through combining multiple stovepiped processes into one common AP process that includes:

- clear strategic guidance and iterative dialogue
- integrated interagency and coalition planning

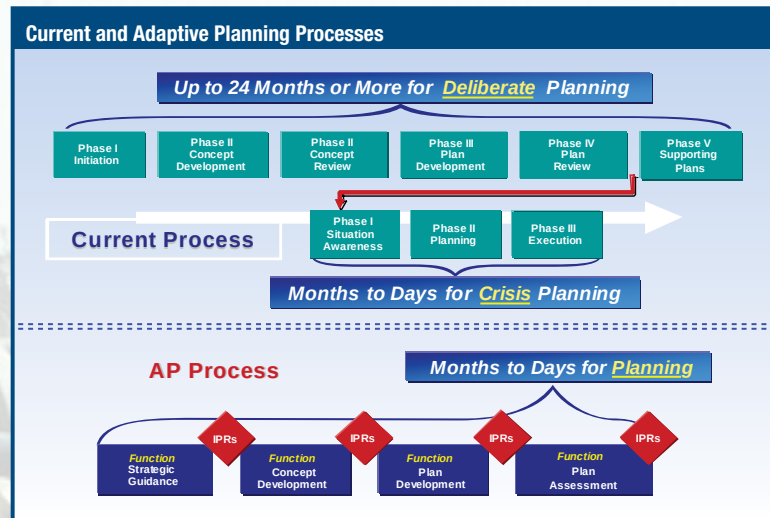


Figure 3.

- integrated intelligence planning
- embedded options
- living plans
- parallel planning in a network-centric, collaborative environment.

The end result is that Adaptive Planning for any single strategy implies that resource requirements are dynamically allocated and risk is continuously balanced against other plans and operations.

Clear Strategic Guidance and Iterative Dialogue. AP combines the best characteristics of contingency, crisis action planning, and execution into a single integrated process. Strategic guidance is the first step in the four-stage planning process, which also includes concept development, plan development, and plan assessment. Each step includes as many in-progress reviews (IPRs) by the Secretary as necessary to complete the plan. Although these steps are generally sequential, they may overlap in the interest of accelerating the overall process.

AP speeds the procedure by providing more detailed and focused initial guidance in the DOD planning documents: contingency planning guidance, joint strategic capabilities plan, and strategic guidance statements. Strategic guidance also includes interagency guidance, intelligence assessments, and other direction from the Secretary during IPRs. At the combatant command level, planning begins with the receipt of strategic guidance and lasts through final plan approval into a continuous plan-assessment cycle. Ultimately, AP envisions streamlined strategic guidance that feeds war planning through regular updates over a network-centric, collaborative environment.

Adaptive Planning reviews represent a departure from the previous planning processes, both in frequency and form. The intent is senior leader involvement throughout the process, including periodic reviews once the plan is complete. The initial IPRs focus largely on solidifying guidance, agreeing on the framework assumptions and planning factors, establishing a common understanding of the adversary and his intention, and producing an approved combatant commander mission statement.

Subsequent IPRs may revisit, refine, modify, or amend these outcomes as required. Additionally, they will address risks, courses of action, implementing actions, and other key factors. Timely reviews and IPRs ensure that the plan remains relevant to the situation and the Secretary's intent as plans are rapidly modified throughout development and execution. Figure 3 illustrates how IPRs are integrated throughout the AP process.

Under AP, planning will be expedited by guidance that specifies the level of detail required for each situation. The amount of detail needed is tied to the plan's importance and likelihood of execution. This helps combatant commanders manage planning in the near term. There are four levels of plans under AP. Level 1 requires the least detail, level 4 the most. Strategic guidance in the contingency planning guidance and the joint strategic capabilities plan will identify the level to produce. However, the Secretary may increase or decrease the level of detail required in response to changed circumstances, changes in a plan's assumptions, or a combatant commander's recommendation. The Secretary and the combatant commander confer during IPRs on the nature and

detail of planning needed, including branches and options to be developed.

Integrated Interagency and Coalition Planning. The past decade of complex operations, from Somalia to Iraq, has demonstrated that strategic success requires unity of effort not only from the military but also from the U.S. Government and coalition partners. Time and again, the United States and its partners have come short of fully integrating the diplomatic, informational, military, economic, and other dimensions of power into a coherent strategy. One factor that has contributed to this poor performance is lack of a unified approach to planning. AP recognizes that interagency and coalition considerations are intrinsic rather than optional and need to be integrated early in the process rather than as an afterthought once the military plan is complete.

To this end, the combatant commander may seek approval and guidance from the Secretary to conduct interagency and coalition planning and coordination. The goal is to ensure that interagency and coalition capabilities, objectives, and endstates are considered up front in the process. This holistic *effects-based approach to planning* ensures that correct national or coalition instruments are employed to match the desired ends. As part of the planning process, and with approval of the Secretary, the combatant commander may present his plan's Annex V (Interagency Coordination) to the Office of the Secretary of Defense/Joint Staff Annex V Working Group for transmittal to the National Security Council for managed interagency staffing and plan development. In advance of authorization for formal transmittal of Annex V, the commander may request interagency consultation on approved Annex V elements by the Office of the Secretary of Defense/Joint Staff Working Group. Concurrently, the combatant commander may present his plan for multinational involvement.

Integrated Intelligence Planning. Intelligence campaign planning provides a methodology for synchronizing, integrating, and managing all available combatant command and national intelligence capabilities with combatant command planning and operations. Throughout the planning process, the combatant command J2, in coordination with the Joint Staff J2 and U.S. Strategic Command, will continue leading DOD through the intelligence campaign planning process, which develops the intelligence tasks required to

achieve the combatant commander's desired effects of the operational objectives. Additionally, the process will focus on developing the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance strategy and synchronize the requisite intelligence support. Because the intelligence campaign plan is directly linked to contingency planning, changes in the global strategic environment continually feed plan development and assessment.

Embedded Options. AP features an increased number of options, as well as branches and sequels (along with associated decision points and decision criteria), in order to provide the President, Secretary, and combatant commanders with increased execution flexibility that anticipates and rapidly adapts. Such embedded options make plans more dynamic.

The term *embedded options* conveys the idea that branches and sequels, in at least outline fashion, are identified and developed as an integral part of the base plan courses of action. Branches and sequels traditionally have been developed toward the end of the process, often after the base plan is completed. Under AP, embedded branches and sequels will form an integral part of base plan design and development. As AP matures, technology will enable combatant command planners to develop an extensive menu of such branches and options rapidly, well beyond what has previously been practicable. Base plans may eventually become a "menu of options" to execute based on exigent circumstances.

Living Plans. What distinguishes current planning from AP is that the latter does not allow ideas to sit on the shelf. The final step, plan assessment, represents a "living" environment in which plans are refined, adapted, terminated, or executed (referred to as RATE-ing a plan). At full maturity, AP will produce network-centric living plans. A *living plan* is maintained within a collaborative, virtual environment and is updated routinely to reflect changes in intelligence assessments, readiness, Global Force Management, transportation availability, guidance, assumptions, and the strategic environment. Both automatic and manually evaluated triggers linked to real-time sources will alert leaders and planners to changes in critical conditions that warrant a reevaluation of a plan's relevancy, feasibility, and risk. Top-priority plans and ideas designated in the contingency planning guidance

require review at least every 6 months. As a result, living plans provide a solid foundation for transition to crisis planning. Additionally, military and political leaders are better able to gauge and mitigate risk across multiple plans and better comprehend the collateral impacts of execution and changed circumstances.

Parallel Planning in a Network-Centric, Collaborative Environment. The development of a network-centric information architecture provides an opportunity to modernize the contingency planning process. Plans, planning tools, and pertinent databases will be linked in a network-centric environment, whose architecture will enable collaboration among widely separated planners at all command echelons, promoting a better grasp of the operational environment and more effective parallel planning. Authoritative internal and external databases will be linked to promote the timely exchange of information based on appropriate access rules. New planning tools will be developed to allow this.

Adaptive Planning for any single plan implies a mission-based readiness system and dynamic force management and logistic systems integrated by a common suite of automated planning tools. This requires that the defense readiness and Global Force Management processes operate across multiple plans and operations to allocate resources and balance risk.

Both identifying and sourcing requirements are necessary to determine force, transportation, and logistic feasibility. Approved courses of action must often be adapted to render them feasible, causing delays in the process. Automated collaborative tools will allow planners to develop these options, determine their feasibility, and incorporate them into the concept of the operation, rather than developing them after the base plan and select annexes are completed. Analysis includes wargaming, operational modeling, and initial feasibility assessments. Joint wargaming tools will allow planners to visualize the plan to analyze the operational feasibility, risk, and sustainability of courses of action. In AP, feasibility analysis occurs much earlier in the process than previously possible. The capabilities to conduct detailed assessments

both identifying and sourcing requirements are necessary to determine force, transportation, and logistic feasibility

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in a matter of days rather than months are a significant leap forward.

By leveraging emerging technologies and developing initiatives, DOD can create an integrated planning architecture in which data is shared seamlessly among users, applications, and platforms. At present, the combatant commands and Services use a variety of tools for planning that have near-term utility in supporting AP. Tools that could be rapidly developed and acquired constitute an area of special interest. The result will be a compressed decisionmaking cycle with an enhanced understanding of how decisions affect campaigns.

As part of spiral development, combatant commands are currently using the AP process to build several of the Nation's highest priority war plans. Nevertheless, at full maturity, Adaptive Planning envisions transparency between contingency and crisis action planning enabled by integrating readiness with Global Force Management processes that dynamically allocate resources and balance risks across multiple plans and operations. The implementation of Adaptive Planning requires spiral development through three stages: initiation, implementation, and integration. This approach will enable the Department of Defense to begin Adaptive Planning immediately for selected priority plans, learn from that, and evolve to a mature process. Requirements for every successive stage—each providing planners with a more sophisticated capability—will depend on stakeholder feedback and technology maturation.

For a relatively modest investment, Adaptive Planning may have a significant strategic impact, creating situations in which the President, Secretary of Defense, and other senior leaders play a central role by selecting

from multiple, viable options adaptable to a variety of circumstances. Gone are the days of outdated, single option, off-the-shelf plans of the Schlieffen and OPLAN 1003 variety. As the fluid strategic situation unfolds, emplaced triggers will alert planners to the need for modifications or revisions to keep plans relevant based on further strategic guidance, continuous intelligence assessment of threat assumptions, rapid force/logistic management processes, and mission-based readiness systems. The confluence of these capabilities represents a quantum leap that will finally allow the planning community to break the bounds of the Schlieffen Plan and enter the 21st century. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ This article borrows heavily from the *Adaptive Planning Roadmap* (December 13, 2005).

² See Adam Gropnik, "The Big One," *The New Yorker* (August 23, 2004), available at www.newyorker.com/printables/critics/040823crat_atlarge.

³ See Henry G. Gole, *The Road to Rainbow: Army Planning for Global War, 1934–1940* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2002).

⁴ Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 35–44.

⁵ *Branches and sequels* provide the commander with alternatives and follow-on options beyond the basic plan and should similarly have entry and exit criteria.

⁶ Ryan Henry, Adaptive Planning memorandum, August 26, 2003.

⁷ Adaptive Planning has combined seven categories—doctrine, organization, training, material, leadership, personnel, and facilities—into four: processes, products, people, and technology.



Marine uses large sand table to brief troops on war plans and positions during Operation Enduring Freedom

DOD (Andrew P. Routs)