

Planning



U.S. Marine Corps

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DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
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FOREWORD

This publication describes the theory and philosophy of military planning as practiced by the U.S. Marine Corps. The intent is to describe how we can prepare effectively for future action when the future is uncertain and unpredictable. In so doing, this publication provides all Marines a conceptual framework for planning in peace, in crisis, or in war. This approach to planning is based on our common understanding of the nature of war and on our warfighting philosophy of maneuver warfare as described in Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, *Warfighting*.

Our doctrine for planning establishes planning as an essential component of the broader field of command and control. The object of both is to recognize what needs to be done in any given situation and see to it that appropriate actions are taken. This publication should be read in conjunction with MCDP 6, *Command and Control*. The concepts described therein also generally apply to planning.

The approach to planning presented herein applies across the full spectrum of military actions, ranging from humanitarian assistance on one extreme to war on the other. It applies also to planning for institutional activities such as acquisition, education, and manning. However, the focus here is on operation planning, especially at the tactical level.

As used in this publication, the term “planner” refers not only to members of a designated planning staff but to any person involved in laying out actions in advance. This includes commanders. One of the themes of this publication is that planning is a fundamental responsibility of command. *Commanders must be centrally involved in planning.*

This publication establishes the authority for the subsequent development of planning doctrine, education, training, procedures, and organization. It provides no specific techniques or procedures for planning; rather, it provides broad guidance, that requires judgment in application. Other publications in the planning series will address specific techniques and procedures for various planning activities.

Chapter 1 is based upon the assumption that in order to develop an effective planning philosophy, we must first develop a realistic appreciation for the nature of the process and an understanding of its related requirements. Based on this understanding, chapter 2 discusses theories about planning and plans. Building on the conclusions of the preceding chapters, chapter 3 describes the Marine Corps’ approach to planning.

The doctrine discussed herein applies equally to small-unit leaders and senior commanders. This publication is meant to guide Marines at all levels of command and staff in both the operating forces and the supporting establishment.

C. C. KRULAK
General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps

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Planning

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Chapter 1

The Nature of Planning

“Nothing succeeds in war except in consequence of a well prepared plan.”¹

—Napoleon Bonaparte

“I engage, and after that I see what to do.”²

—Napoleon Bonaparte

To plan effectively, we must first appreciate the fundamental nature of planning and plans. We must understand the purpose, environment, and characteristics of the process as well as the object and traits of its product. This understanding will become the basis for developing a theory and practical philosophy of planning.

PLANNING AND PLANS DEFINED

Planning is the art and science of envisioning a desired future and laying out effective ways of bringing it about.³ It is a preparation process. Here we draw an important distinction between a process (a dynamic system of related activities) and a procedure (a prescribed sequence of steps for accomplishing some specified task). The planning process may often involve the use of procedures to perform certain tasks, but planning overall is too complex and situation-dependent to be treated as a routine procedure.

Planning is also distinctly a process rather than merely an act because it involves a number of ongoing, iterative, and interdependent activities. Since situations (or the information available about them) continuously change, we must continue to adapt our plans as time allows. Planning is a process that should build upon itself—each step should create a new understanding of the situation which becomes the point of departure