Division RDSP in LSCO: Observations and Methods

LTC Mitchell Payne

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Introduction

Famous German military strategist and Army General Helmuth von Moltke once offered the sentiment that, loosely translated, suggests, "No plan survives first contact with the enemy."[1] War is a human endeavor involving a contest of wills; compelling an opposing force is an inherently chaotic and unpredictable process.[2] Large scale combat operations (LSCO) only add further levels of complexity to an already chaotic endeavor.[3] To meet the rapidly changing operating environment in LSCO, organizations must establish systems to rapidly process information, make decisions, and synchronize operations. Organizations that cannot maintain operational agility, i.e. the ability to react quickly to a changing environment, will pay the price in human lives.

In Army doctrine, the rapid decision-making and synchronization process (RDSP) is a tool to assist organizations in making rapid decisions.[4] While the doctrine is helpful, it functions more to describe *what* RDSP is rather than *how* to execute it. This leaves military staffs with little guidance on how or when to implement this tool. By analyzing the LSCO environment and the current doctrine on RDSP, however, one may derive a method to guide the staff's execution of RDSP.

Division Decision Making in LSCO

LSCO define the training environment in today's combat training centers and division warfighter exercises (WFXs), which replicate a freethinking enemy whose capabilities match or exceed our own. This complexity, combined with a detailed scenario design typified by a well-entrenched enemy force, creates multiple challenges for the training audience. The training audience faces an enemy that is not pre-programmed and that has many different capabilities to achieve its military end. While it is possible to think like the enemy, one cannot predict with 100 percent accuracy what an unpredictable enemy will do in every situation.[5]

A freethinking enemy with a complex scenario design requires units to learn, adapt, and out-think the enemy to gain an edge of agility for both the division commanding general (CG) and the division staff. However, while CGs and subordinate brigade commanders may have a sound understanding and visualization of the battlefield, the division staff may not share that same level of understanding. Untrained staffs mean that the commander's visualization may not directly translate to synchronized and coherent orders for subordinates.

In addition to a freethinking enemy, the higher headquarters also adds a degree of complexity to LSCO. In recent WFXs, higher headquarters affected division planning by placing constraints on division operations. Typically, this was to allow for Corps shaping efforts in the Corps-level deep fight to ensure synchronization of maneuver efforts across the Corps or to rebuild combat power within the Corps. These competing complexities, the enemy vote and the higher HQ's guidance, drive the same action: division staffs must quickly reassess the situation to determine the viability of the original plan.

RDSP in Army Doctrine

The complexities of the LSCO environment drive divisions to execute the RDSP instead of the military decision making process (MDMP). Changes to plans occur in such a truncated timeframe that to fight and win at the pace of war, divisions must be able to plan and synchronize operations extremely rapidly. While Army doctrine notes that MDMP seeks the optimal solution, RDSP seeks a timely and effective solution.[6]

RDSP, as a planning process, assumes risk for the division staff. Doctrine describes RDSP as less detail oriented with much of the planning process taking place mentally rather than in writing.[7] RDSP omits time-consuming requirements like multiple courses of action (COAs), decision criteria, and many of the coordinating and synchronizing briefs that define MDMP. Instead, RDSP relies on leader experience and intuition, cutting directly to the preferred or directed course of action.[8] Army strategist Steve Leonard describes the process as "skipping straight to the solution and avoiding needless staff work."[9]

Doctrine describes RDSP in five steps, as described in figure 1:[10]

1. Determine that a decision is required.
2. Compare the current situation to the order.
3. Develop a Course of Action.
4. Refine and validate the course of action.
5. Implement.

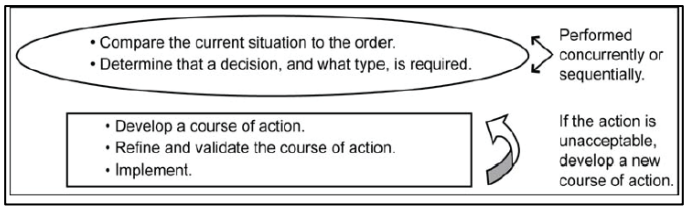

Figure 1: Rapid Decision-Making and Synchronization Process
Source: FM 6-0, Figure 14-1, page 14-3, and ATP 5-0.2-1 Figure 4-2, page 146.

While the current doctrine is helpful in describing *what* RDSP is as a process, it is less helpful in describing *how* to actually conduct the process. Statements such as "if the action is unacceptable, develop a new course of action" may not adequately describe the processes or systems that division staffs can use to execute RDSP effectively. [11] A further look at the existent doctrine on RDSP, however, reveals one interesting truth: *RDSP is simply MDMP in disguise.*

When one comparatively analyzes the five steps of RDSP with the seven steps of MDMP, one can see a high degree of similarity in the doctrine between the two processes. Table 1 highlights these similarities:

RDSP	MDMP
0. Gather the Staff (Implied)	1. Receive the Order
1. Compare Current Situation 2. Determine Required Decision	2. Mission Analysis (MA) (Enemy/Friendly Update)
3. Develop a COA	3. COA Development (COA DEV)
4. Refine/Validate COA	4. COA Analysis 5. COA Comparison
Determine Acceptability (Implied)	6. COA Approval
5. Implement	7. Orders Production

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of RDSP and MDMP

Executing RDSP: Methods and Considerations

Given the distinct similarities between RDSP and MDMP, one may wonder how the two processes are different. Aside from rapid vs. optimal COAs, RDSP differs from MDMP in one other critical aspect. Whether intentional or not, MDMP is a *brief-centric* process. Staffs achieve synchronization through the iterative briefs inherent to the process: MA Brief, COA DEV Brief, and COA Approval Brief.[12] RDSP, on the other hand, omits briefs as a *product-focused* process intent on developing synchronized products as rapidly and accurately as possible. The effort to synchronize the operation still exists; it simply takes a more tangible form in RDSP.

The identification of division fighting products is an area where multiple divisions struggle. Each organization must tailor its fighting products. Ultimately, these products exist to enable the commander to visualize and understand the battlefield, but they also exist as important synchronizing tools both for the division staff and for the subordinate brigades. Organizationally, both commanders and staffs must focus their RDSP efforts on developing the products that meet the needs of all three audiences: CGs, division staff elements, and subordinate brigades.

Create Products Not Briefs

To be effective, a staff must develop fighting products as tangible outputs within each iterative step of RSDP. While some units may differ on the specifics of their required fighting products, doctrine and WFX observations suggest that at a minimum the essential fighting products (at any echelon from battalion to division) should include the following:

1. Commander's Intent and Guidance
2. COA Statement and Sketch
3. Operational Graphics Overlay
4. Enemy SITTEMP and Intelligence Collection Overlay
5. Fires Overlay
6. Operational Sync Matrix
7. Decision Support Matrix (DSM)/Decision Support Template (DST)[13]

Certainly, as time applies, staffs should create additional products to better facilitate shared understanding. At the division level, additional products that help to synchronize the fight include an Intelligence Collection Sync Matrix, a Fires Sync Matrix, and an operational execution checklist (EXCHECK). While necessary to better synchronize the fight, those products are secondary products more specific to a single warfighting function (WfF). Planners can produce and nest these secondary products within the baseline fighting products.

The critical aspect to a product-centric RDSP is that all steps of RDSP must result in the development of a tangible output in the form of one of those essential products. Figure 2 offers a model that links RDSP to MDMP in time, highlighting the associated steps when various fighting products are developed or refined. While there is a suggested timeline, each planning timeline will differ based on a multitude of variables. The key to this model is to avoid a slavish adherence to a specified timeline while allocating the necessary time to create synchronized products.

RDSP – A Proposed Model

Hour 1		Hour 2		Hour 3	Hour 4	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Step	MDMP	Time	Tangible Output
1. Gather Tools		15 Min	Updated Running Estimates, Directed Guidance
2. Compare Situation (Enemy/Friendly Update)	MA	45 Min	Enemy SITTEMP, IC Overlay, PIR, CDR's Intent [**CUT INITIAL WARNO** (W/ Guidance, Intent, ENY)]
3. Develop a COA (Round Tabling)	COA DEV	30 Min	COA Sketch, Initial OPS & Fires Graphics
4. Develop a COA (Sync Mat Build)	COA DEV	30 Min	Initial Sync Matrix
5. Refine/Validate COA (Sync Mat Scrub)	COA Analysis	60 Min	Refined Sync Matrix, Refined OPS & Fires Graphics, DSM
6. Determine Acceptability (Brief Someone)	COA Approval	30 Min	Approved Fighting Products
7. Implement (Tell Someone)	Produce Orders	30 Min	Disseminated Fighting Products
Result:	RDSP	4 Hrs	7x Fighting Products

Figure 2: RDSP – A Proposed Model
Source: Author

The Proposed RSDP Model – By the Steps

The proposed model expands on the current doctrine, seeking to explain and clarify RDSP as a process. Using MDMP as a frame of reference, this model expands upon the specified and implied steps of RDSP, highlighting the distinct inputs and outputs of each step. The first step, *Gathering the Tools*, will typically begin either with a situation changing enemy assessment or upon receipt of new guidance from either the CG or higher headquarters. RDSP requires a degree of formal planning; successful staffs typically consider RDSP as a 4-6 hour process. *Gathering the tools* first means that the appropriate planners across all needed sections and WfFs meet in one place. Another tool to gather will be a common set of graphics; observations from recent WFXs suggest that an analog map is the most effective tool to enable shared understanding. This, however, also requires the appropriate overlays with current operational graphics. The Command Post Computing Environment (CPCE) is also a viable alternative; although, it is not as conducive to planning as a map board with icons. Additionally, planning staff should update their running estimates with the most up to date information from the Current Operations Integration Cell (COIC) floor. Lastly, any guidance should be disseminated to everyone on the planning staff. Ideally, the planning lead announces this step, e.g. the planning lead states, "We will conduct RDSP in 15 min. It will take about four hours. Start gathering your tools and update your running estimates." Step 1 in the model assumes that the decision to execute RDSP (doctrinal step 1) has already taken place.

The second step, *Comparing the Situation*, is most analogous to MDMP's mission analysis. Planning staffs must take their running estimates and brief one another to cross level information (akin to a COIC 7-minute drill). Comparing the enemy situation will more than likely consume most of this step with updates to the enemy situational template (SITTEMP) in terms of enemy

composition, disposition, and intent. ATP 5-0.2-1 offers a very thorough checklist of variance indicators that may drive a decision for RDSP.[14] This step is mainly verbal, but the intelligence planning lead must generate an updated enemy SITTEMP. Another TTP would be to include the intelligence collection (IC) overlay with the enemy SITTEMP. This would link enemy actions and tasks with updated NAIs that re-evaluate PIR for the organization. Staffs typically complete this most quickly on a physical overlay, but they must remember to transfer it to CPCE to communicate it quickly to subordinates. The other critical aspect to this step is to capture (in writing) the commander's specific intent and guidance for that specific planning effort. Staffs should not regurgitate broad overall intent; they should instead capture or recommend specific intent for that specific RDSP planning effort. To allow for parallel planning at lower echelons, planning staff should also cut a warning order containing updated enemy and IC overlays, commander's intent, and commander's planning guidance.

RDSP doctrine specifies the next step as *Develop a COA.* It stands to reason that developing a COA most directly corresponds to COA Development in MDMP. Here it is again helpful to sketch out a COA on a white board or map overlay. Planners should use existing operational control graphics, adjusting unit positions, objectives, and intent graphics as needed. Critical to this step is the integration of all other WfF planning elements. Planning staff personnel cannot go back to their "silos of excellence" to plan independently; they must plan concurrently in order to synchronize the operation. In the proposed model, this step generates the COA Statement as well as the initial operations and fires graphics.

The presented model suggests splitting the *Develop a COA* step into two separate steps (steps 3 and 4 in the model). This is primarily based on the two distinct processes necessary to create the two delineated products. It is important to gather everyone around a map table to collaboratively build or refine the directed COA through cross talk amongst WfF planning elements. The synchronization matrix (SYNCMAT) is the primary tool used by planning elements to synchronize efforts in time and across all the organizational assets. Observations from recent WFXs indicate that SYNCMATs are ineffective because planers fail to specify operations in time. Without a timeline, it becomes difficult to time the effects of division fires, rotary wing, CAS, and/or EW to shape the deep fight and support maneuver in the close fight. A helpful TTP at the division level is to break the SYNCMAT down into 2-hour intervals, focusing on broad brigade level tasks and more importantly on synchronizing the application of divisional assets in time.

Doctrinally speaking, the next step in RDSP is *Refine and Validate the COA* (step 5 in the model). This directly correlates to COA Analysis in MDMP. While multiple wargaming techniques are available in MDMP, the product-driven nature of RDSP implies that a simple SYNCMAT scrub is the most effective method. Again, the tangible outputs to this step of RDSP is a refined SYNCMAT alongside refined operational and fires graphics and a DSM. Decision points should be indicated on the SYNCMAT, providing a degree of predictability in the overall decision-making process. While this section of the model deviates from the current published doctrine, experience in recent warfighters suggests that this deviation is a necessary step.[15]

While not specified in the doctrine on RDSP, the sixth step of the proposed model (*COA Approval Brief*) is certainly implied in the graphic of the model itself (see figure 1). RDSP at the division level is most often relegated to the G35 (future operations) cell. Divisions must clearly specify, ideally through a published authorities matrix, who in the division staff has the authority to cut orders and re-task brigades. Typically, this will be held at the G3 or DCG-M level. If the authority resides at that level, then the planning staff owes a brief to that individual prior to publication. A

COA approval brief not only elicits the approval of the plan, but it also helps to resynchronize the plan with guidance from the appropriate approval authority.

The final step in both doctrine and the proposed model is to *Implement the Plan*. Staffs should focus on publishing the documents as a FRAGORD and conducting a distributed brief or map rehearsal.[16] The subordinate brigades may not need a formal brief, but skipping a rehearsal assumes a lot of operational risk for both the issuing (i.e. division) and subordinate (i.e. brigade) levels. A rapid and synchronized plan that can be rehearsed and violently executed will be far more effective than a detailed plan that omits a rehearsal.

Considerations to Improve RDSP Effectiveness

In addition to the application of a model, several other factors may affect a staff's ability to effectively use RDSP as a planning tool in LSCO. Based on observations across multiple WFXs, several considerations for both commanders and staffs can be applied to improve the overall effectiveness.

Commanders are central to the operations process, providing the necessary intent and guidance that allow both staffs and subordinate units to execute their respective planning. One other command responsibility, held only by commanders, is to underwrite risk. Commanders must understand and accept risk inherent in the RDSP. Planning can be either fast, detailed, or synchronized, but commanders can only pick two at any given time; RDSP must be fast and synchronized.

In addition to commanders balancing expectations and underwriting risk, staffs should make the following considerations during RDSP. First, the planning staff must focus their efforts on defining and synchronizing the overall division fight. Brigades have the capacity to execute their own detailed parallel planning efforts, so the majority of the planning effort at the division level must primarily focus on employing and synchronizing the division level assets to shape the deep fight and support the close fight.

Second, RDSP always takes place within the framework of existent products. This means that planning staffs already start with an overall understanding of the terrain, initial objectives, enemy, and graphic control measures. Use of the current operational, fires, and intelligence graphics with minor refinements allows for a more rapid COA development process. Planning staffs do not have to reinvent the entire wheel in order to be rapid and effective.

Lastly, personal feelings aside, the CPCE is the mission command system that we have as an Army. For the planning staff, CPCE is your weapons system as much as a M1 Abrams is the main weapon for a tank crew. Division staffs must use and master their weapon systems just like tank crews must boresight their tanks. Used properly, CPCE represents a powerful method to rapidly disseminate products and even conduct rehearsals in a distributed

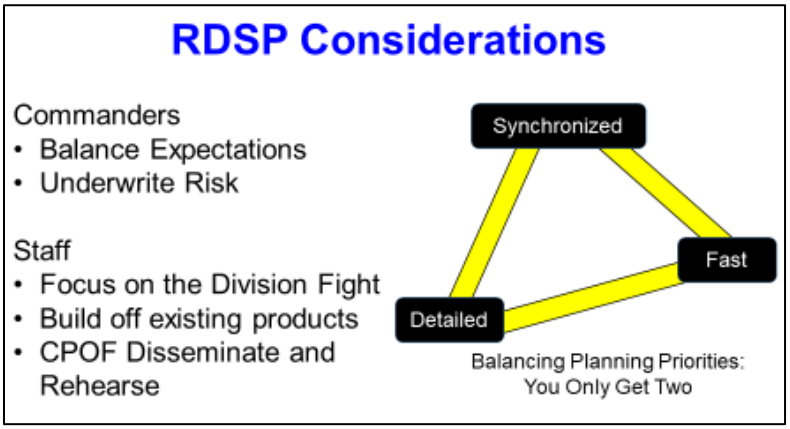

Figure 3: RDSP Considerations

manner. See figure 3 for RDSP considerations.

Conclusion

Today's operational environment requires organizations that can think and act at the speed of war. The ability to outthink an enemy who has capabilities equal to or that exceed the U.S. Army's current capabilities requires a trained and ready staff who is experienced at facilitating rapid decisionmaking. Despite the speed of war, such plans must also be synchronized to mass effects appropriately at the decisive point of the battle. While the doctrine exists that describes RDSP, many staffs at all levels still struggle with how to execute it. By focusing on products as opposed to briefs and by approaching RDSP in a more structured manner, planning staffs can rapidly produce a synchronized and coherent plan that their subordinate units can execute with violence of action.

Author Bio:

LTC Mitchell Payne is an OC/T with the U.S. Army Mission Command Training Program at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and a PhD candidate at the Regent University School of Business and Leadership. His research areas include human resource development, organizational behavior, ecclesial leadership, and organizational culture. He has previously served as a BN/TF Commander, 3ID; BDE and BN XO, 188th Infantry Brigade, First Army; and BN / SQDN XO, 1-25 Stryker Brigade Combat Team.

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[10] FM 6-0, paragraph 14-12.
[11] ADP 5-0, figure 4-3.
[12] FM 6-0, paragraphs 9-69, 9-119, 9-183, and 9-195.
[13] FM 6-0, figures 9-3, 9-6, and 9-14.
[14] ATP 5-0.2-1, table 4-6, pages 147-148.

[15] ATP 5-0.2-1, p. 151. The most recent publication on RDSP (ATP 5-0.2-1) suggests that written products should be completed at the conclusion of the implementation stage, if time is available (paragraph 4-51, p. 151). While the author agrees that maintaining a vocal RDSP process does increase the rapid nature of the process, producing a written fighting product such as a SYNCMAT or visualization matrix offers allows the staff and subordinates a better means of maintaining a synchronized effort. RDSP is not a brief-centric planning process, and must maintain a focus on product development.

[16] ATP 5-0.2-1, page 151.