



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### LEADING CONSIDERATIONS IN THE PLANNING OF INFORMATION OPERATIONS.

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#### Abstract

In contemporary conflicts, the achievement of operational objectives by joint operational forces is directly related to the degree of information impact. This necessitates the full integration of information activities in the planning and conduct of operations by the Joint Forces. The article presents the main considerations in planning and conducting information operations and their implementation in the activities of the Information Operation Coordination Board.

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#### Introduction:-

The purpose of the planning of operations is to timely and effectively prepare multinational joint operational forces for conducting or participating in operations in response to current, evolving, probable or potential crises. This is an analytical process of consecutive logical activities distributed in phases to help elucidate the operational problem, the mission, develop and compare action options, select a variant, and prepare an operation plan. The planning process combines planning of military and non-military means to achieve success in operations. In this process, the responsibilities of staff elements and leading considerations in planning and conducting information operations (IO) are key.

In order to achieve their objectives, information operations need to be integrated and coordinated with all activities of multinational joint operational forces. One of the mandatory conditions for success is the overall coordination in the achievement of information objectives at the strategic, operational and tactical level, and therefore the body responsible for the information operations performs the following main activities:

1. Analysis of the Information Environment;
2. Providing advice on planning and conducting operations in the information environment;
3. Assessment of the contribution of information operations;
4. Coordination of the planning, implementation and evaluation of activities in the information environment and the resulting effects.

These activities are carried out within the headquarters of the multinational Joint Operational Forces by a specially formed Information Operation Coordination Board.

The Joint Force is directly involved in the planning and conduct of information operations at the operational level. It is essential to have representatives in charge of information operations in the Joint Operation Planning Group, as they could make a substantial contribution to the overall process. This responsibility is usually assigned to an Information Operation Coordination Board at the headquarters of the Joint Forces.

The Information Operation Coordination Board<sup>1</sup> is the main body for planning and coordinating information operations when planning and conducting joint operations. Its main role is to assist the commander in planning, coordinating and implementing information activities to support the objectives of the operation. Chief Officers with responsibilities for information operations are advised to be involved in the planning and conduct of joint operations. Their responsibilities are determined by the command level and allocated according to the assigned mission. At the operational level, for the needs of information operations, a team of specialists is formed to plan and conduct operations, providing comprehensive operational environment preparation, co-determination and targeting, and assessment of operations. At the tactical level, the specific responsibilities for information operations focus on specific specialists conducting specific impact activities for certain purposes.

The operation of the Information Coordination Group is integrated into the rhythm of the headquarters, meeting regularly with the involvement of all interested staff elements and, where appropriate, external representatives, planning, coordinating and synchronizing military intelligence activities. The group may also function as a permanent one due to the daily significance of the effects of information operations. Given the potentially broad impact of military information activities, a coordinated approach is needed at all command levels, including political institutions. The Information Coordination Group is responsible for:

1. Development, review and evaluation of plans and information activities based on approved goals;
2. Providing guidelines for the development of information operations;
3. Consideration of activities affecting the information environment;
4. Identification of the necessary and available resources and requirements;
5. Forming recommendations on the implementation and coordination of information activities;
6. Review the relevance of information operations to joint operations;
7. Developing the objectives for impact of information operations;
8. Formulate the feasibility of information operations to the plan of the operation;
9. Coordination with external agencies, if necessary.

Generally, it can be argued that the consideration of information operations as an integrated element of joint operations allows for the maximum desired effect on the will, understanding and ability of the opposing forces, which requires a coordinated approach from the main structural units in the headquarters to a common understanding of the nature of information operations is achieved. Planning of information operations is an integral part of the overall planning process, but it should be based on certain baseline data, principled and mandatory conditions, which are leading planning considerations<sup>2</sup>.

It is appropriate that the main considerations relating to information operations at the various stages of the planning process, regardless of their form, should be integrated into the overall activity of the planning group at the operational level. This activity, as a recurring process, contributes to overall situational awareness. As **leading planning considerations** are determined<sup>3</sup>:

1. Participating civil organizations and military units;
2. Obligatory planning of sensitive issues;
3. Taking account of the political and strategic issues relating to information operations;
4. Assessment of the information environment as a system;
5. Self-information activities carried out until the beginning of the operation;
6. Information activities of opposing forces;
7. Possible effects in the information environment.

The planning of activities to create the desired effects in the information environment is carried out to achieve the objectives of the joint operation. This planning can be carried out simultaneously at all command levels, depending on the nature of the activity and the scope of the plan being developed. There are important links that are good to be established with the planning group at the operational level in the overall planning and conduct of the operation, as well as with other groups involved in the planning process. It is imperative that this integration takes place in planning from the outset, while critical points and centers of gravity are identified as key aspects.

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<sup>1</sup>. AJP-3.10 Allied Joint Doctrine, for Information Operations, 2009, p. 47-52.

<sup>2</sup>. NATO Bi-SC, Information Operations Reference Book Version 1, 2010, p. 12-21.

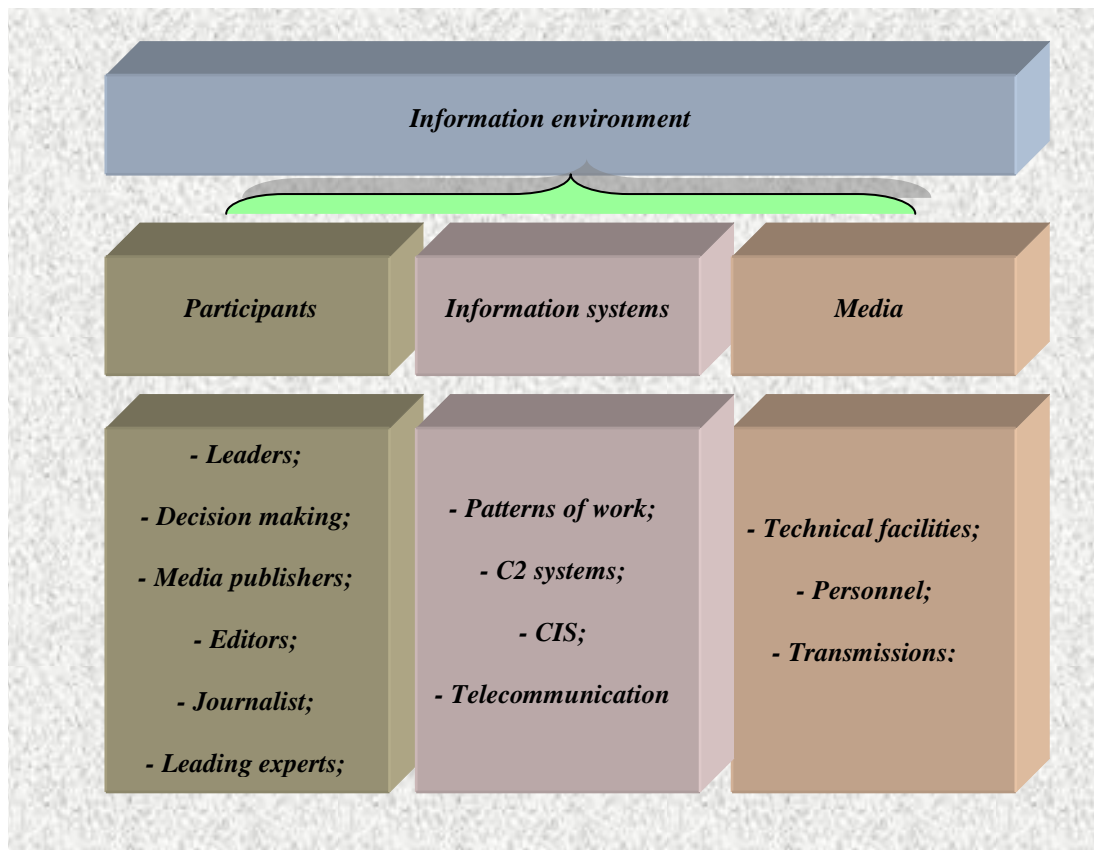
<sup>3</sup>. AD 95-2, ACO Strategic Communications, 2012, p. 12-14.

Clarity about the commander's intentions and influence can affect planned activities in the information environment to ensure their conflict-free integration with other elements and functions in the overall plan. This means that the planning of information operations should maintain a perspective on how it can affect other operations over a longer period of time.

Some information activities can be considered "sensitive" due to their nature or purposes. These activities may need to be carried out within a subgroup of the planning group at the operational level. The staff working on these issues should be limited. Plans should always be considered sensitive if they involve military misconduct, use of special information technology, politically sensitive, or if plans involve the use of special operations forces.

The continuous review of the strategic and policy directions of the information activities is carried out in order to confirm their compliance with the information objectives, the planned desired effects in the information environment and the information activities undertaken. The evaluation of the information operations should contain an updated comparison of the strategic guidelines, the information objectives, the topics and the communications with the information activities, intentions and plans of the multinational joint operational forces. Such assessments are conducted as feedback and advice to senior staffs.

The assessment of the information environment (figure 1) as a system<sup>4</sup> requires the analysis of the activities and impact of even the least involved participants, specific information systems and the media, which is essential for the adequate planning of information operations. This description and evaluation cannot be done in isolation from the Information Coordination Group, but should be combined with functional expertise, without duplicating other analyzes. The resulting product should be considered as a summary of a collective analysis of the situation and including a description of the participants, the information systems and the media.



**Figure 1:-** Evaluation of the information environment as a system.

<sup>4</sup>. AJP-3.10 Allied Joint Doctrine, for Information Operations, 2009, p. 59-62.

Participants can be decision-makers, leaders, editors, media publishers, journalists, leading experts in the information environment, population-specific groups, governmental organizations (GO) and non-governmental organizations (NGO)<sup>5</sup>. It is recommended that these descriptions be based on their psychological profile, culture, motives, interests, values, beliefs, attitudes, positions, and risk appetite. It is precisely the key actors with their behavior, commitment and trust that they enjoy in society, partners and organizations they are members of, and so on. These characteristics of the participants directly or indirectly influence the information flow and the processes of formation of public opinion. The main sources of information and the opportunities for conducting information activities have a direct relation to the state of power, the balance between the different authorities and the role of the military and the media in society.

The state of security, its stability and sustainability, a possible political strategic, operational and tactical environment, and long-term goals, as well as their hierarchical schemes, are a direct reflection of the relationships and interdependencies between the participants. Their attitudes to overcome psychological, technical and physical needs and demands are directly related to their ability to perceive information, confessed values and sensitive topics.

The existent information systems are a direct reflection of the command and management vision, the decision-making processes, the organization of the communication-information systems and the accepted patterns of work. Looking at the information system, as a complex system, we can conclude that the communication-information system and the command and control system are its subsystems<sup>6</sup>. These two subsystems include technical equipment, organization of work and functionality that are characterized by capacity and level of interoperability, stability and reliability. Subsystems can also be represented as a set of system components and components of human and technical sensors and weapon systems. Civilian infrastructure, including commercial facilities and installations related to telecommunication companies and networks, postal services, broadcasting facilities, etc., also indicate importance for forming a common picture of available information systems.

The media would have a role to play in defining information systems with their technical facilities and staff, releases to determine content, their impact on society and the formation of public trust.

Considerations should include an assessment of available capabilities, tools and techniques for conducting military intelligence activities, including their current state of readiness to participate in ongoing operations and constraints in principle. This part of the assessment should contribute to improving the work of the functionalists and determining the necessary capabilities.

The evaluation of information operations includes a review of the capabilities of opposing forces, tools and techniques for conducting military information activities, intentions and objectives, state of readiness, participation in ongoing operations, constraints and vulnerabilities. This part of the assessment is submitted by the Intelligence Planning Group in coordination with the functional advisers.

Possible desired effects are formulated in a way that describes the state of the physical and behavioral parts of the information environment and results from a purposeful action or set of actions. Determination of the effects can be characterized as planned and not planned, but taking into account the possible trends for their development, which may occur over time.

When planning operations at the operational level, one of the main tasks is the integration of information operations into joint operations<sup>7</sup>. This necessitates the need for in-depth cooperation in the activities of the comprehensive assessment of the operational environment, the joint identification and termination of objectives and decision-making. Representatives of the Intelligence Planning Group, the Joint Destruction and Destruction Group participate in the meetings of the Information Coordination Group in order to synchronize them with their activities and the overall planning and conduct of the operation.

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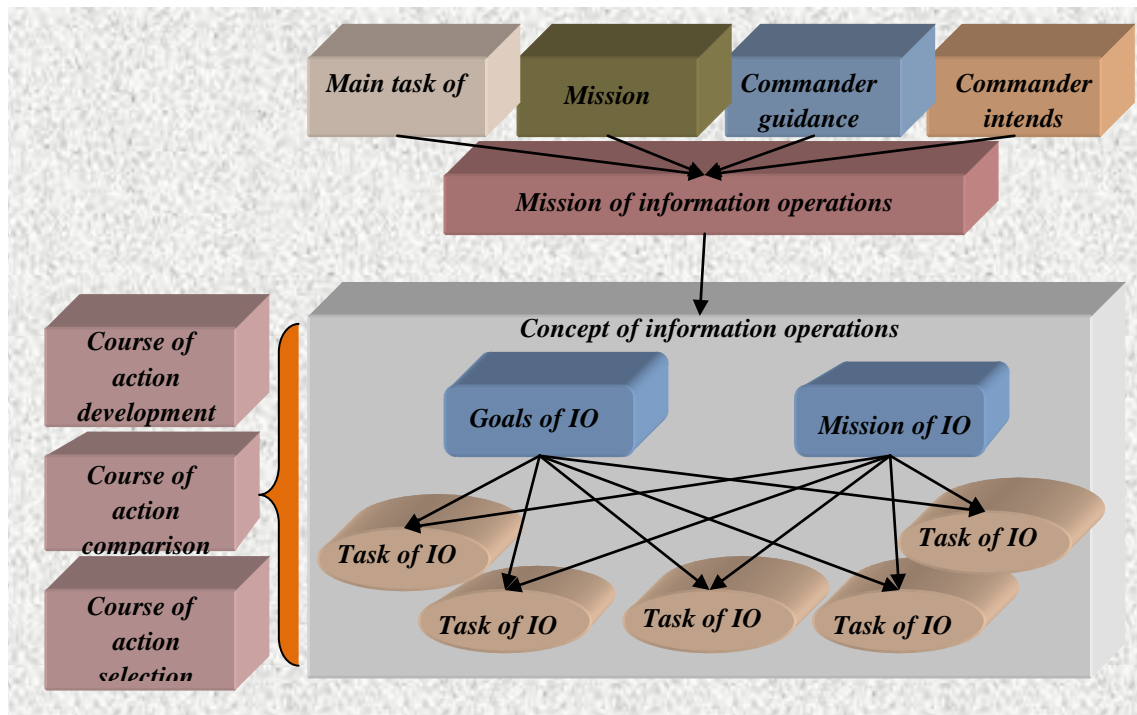
<sup>5</sup> NP-1, Doktrina za informacionni i psihologicheski operacii, MO, Sofia, 2013 , p. 27-28.

<sup>6</sup> Stoichev St., Sposobnosti na NATO i ES za odgovor i upravljenje na krizi, Sofia, 2014, p. 22-24

<sup>7</sup> Marine Air-Ground Task Force Information Operations, U.S. Marine Corps, 2003, p. 16-19.

The Head of the Information Operation Coordination Board has the primary responsibility to clarify the mission, concept, objectives and direction for the development of information operations by coordinating their interconnections (figure 2).

**The mission** of information operations is a brief description of what is required of information operations in the interest of the mission of the multinational joint operational forces. The specificity of this type of operation is that the Information Coordination Group defines, on the basis of the joint mission and the mission of information operations, the main tasks and planning instructions.



**Figure 2:-**Interrelations between mission, concept, goals and direction for the development of information operations.

Particularly in the development of the **Concept of information operations** is that it should be a brief and clear statement of where, when and how, the commander intends to focus the main effort of information operations as a component of combat power in the interest of the mission. Through the action option, the Information Coordination Group develops a separate concept for each action option that will include not only the tools and techniques of information operations but also the activities related to them.

**The objectives of the information operations** are determined on the basis of the commander's intentions to use the main tools and techniques. Accurate understanding of the situation is the key to setting objectives. Operational and tactical goals are more immediate than strategic goals. The Information Operations Coordination Group sets goals together with the concept of information operations in the development of the action option. However, some objectives may be set during a mission analysis. These are objectives to prevent compromise of the operation, as well as protection of the command and control system. Others may be related to tasks assigned by the senior management. All these goals become part of a mission of information operations and are used to define tasks with regard to the desired effects.

**Tasks of information operations** are being developed to meet one or more purposes. What is particular about the case is that they deal separately with each of the tools, techniques or activities related to information operations and are defined in the development of the action option.

Therefore, integrating these missions, objectives and tasks requires creativity and flexibility, due to the different nature and purpose of the tools and techniques of information operations. This is possible with a clear understanding

of the nature and impact of the leading considerations in planning and conducting information operations. It is also necessary to focus efforts on analyzing the effectiveness of information operations. Obtaining new intelligence data with permission from senior management is tied to a significant amount of time until their receipt and use. These factors increase the challenges faced by headquarters and reduce the time available for preparation.

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