



TACTICAL CONCEPTS

By Sid Heal

Three types of tactical plans

Shortly after Napoleon Bonaparte established himself as Emperor of the French, he wrote a letter to his brother Joseph stating, "Everything that is not soundly planned in its details yields no result." (Napoleon, 18 September 1806, to Joseph, Correspondence, No. 10809, Vol. XIII, 1858-1870.) So it was then and so it remains to this day. The most indispensable part of any successful tactical operation is the operational plan. The business community describes it as a "blueprint for success." In tactical operations, the command and control architecture may provide the support for decisions, but it is the operational plan that binds them into a cohesive whole. Plans not only ensure that each decision is supportive of the next, but that the aggregate will eventually lead to a satisfactory resolution. It is hard to imagine any significant human undertaking that does not involve some sort of a plan, and plans are the pivotal factor for a successful tactical intervention. Generally, there are three types of tactical plans. These are deliberate plans, hasty plans and contingency plans.

The most commonly recognized plan is a "deliberate plan." This is because deliberate plans are the most comprehensive of the three types and are often prepared weeks or months, and sometimes even years, before being implemented. In order to provide an organized and thoughtful approach when the unthinkable happens, every disaster management agency worthy of the name has "standing plans" for flood inundation, fire evacuation, earthquake recovery, hurricanes, tornadoes, riots, and so forth. A deliberate plan is most often authored collectively, ("Collectively" means that the plan is authored by a number of people acting as a group. For more information see "Tactical Planning Process," *The Tactical Edge*, Winter, 2003, pp. 52-54) over time, and incorporates the knowledge and experience of all participants. It is as comprehensive as time will per-

mit, and is frequently referred to as the "master plan," since it serves as a baseline for all related plans and operations and describes the preferred course of action.

A "hasty plan" is used to provide an organized response for spontaneous or unintentional events, and which are so impromptu that detailed planning is not possible, or so remote that comprehensive planning is not justified. In simpler terms, hasty plans provide an organized response to surprise. They are used when timeliness and a quick response are paramount. Examples include the killing or escape of a hostage, the unexpected surrender of a suspect, the sighting of a tornado, or a change in direction of a fire.

Response to immediate concerns

A hasty plan provides a tailored response to immediate concerns and allows the much more detailed and time-consuming deliberate plan to continue to be developed. In this manner, hasty plans perform the duties of a "sentry" while continuing development of the deliberate plan. Sometimes a hasty plan is necessary even when a deliberate plan has been completed. This occurs when some critical factor is preventing the deliberate plan from being immediately implemented, such as shortage of logistical support, lack of transportation, or while awaiting the arrival of personnel. When used in this manner, hasty plans act as a "fail safe" to ensure that efforts to resolve an emergency are not deferred while waiting for conditions to improve. In either case, hasty plans may be considered a substitute for deliberate plans, which although describe the preferred course of action, take longer to prepare and implement. They provide a temporary solution by adhering to the tactical adage, "A good plan implemented now, is better than a perfect plan executed later." (This adage is one of the many "Murphy's Laws of Combat," but is

paraphrased from Gen. George S. Patton, Jr.'s book, "War As I Knew It." The verbatim passage reads, "A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week.")

A "contingency plan" is an alternate plan that focuses thought and effort on anticipated problems that may arise during the conduct of an operation. Because a contingency plan is a "branch" (for more information on branches, see "Branches, Sequels and Couplings," *The Tactical Edge*, Fall, 1999, pp. 69-70) from the deliberate plan, it is often referred to as "Plan B." Contingency plans allow for operational deviation while maintaining continuity with the preferred course of action and guard against operations being stymied by confusion caused by a sudden change in the situation. Contingency plans differ from hasty plans because they are generally authored in advance of an operation, often as part of the deliberate plan, to prepare for a potential deviation from the expected. In fact, hasty plans are sometimes viewed as a subset of contingency plans rather than a separate type altogether. Like hasty plans, however, contingency plans never describe the preferred course of action and are intended to provide guidance for deviations from the more probable chain of events.

Every tactical plan will conform to one of these three types. Knowing what type of plan is required provides a critical first step in designing a methodical approach to resolving a situation. As one World War I general explained, "The main thing is to have a plan; if it is not the best plan, it is at least better than no plan at all." (From General Sir John Monash in a 1918 letter.) ■

Editor's note: Much of this article has been excerpted from Sid Heal's book, "Sound Doctrine: A Tactical Primer," available from the NTOA Bookstore.