

Rethinking Military Planning for Modern Warfare

Transitioning Towards Agile Decision-Making

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Resumé

Artikeln avhandlar det kritiska behovet av anpassningsbar militär planering och beslutsfattande i den föränderliga dynamik som präglar modern krigföring. Den betonar vikten av flexibilitet och intuition och tar upp begränsningarna i nuvarande omfattande planeringsmodeller, vilka visserligen är effektiva i fredsframtvingande och -bevarande operationer, men som inte håller måttet i de snabba förlopp som initialt präglar väpnade konflikter mellan jämbördiga aktörer. Artikeln föreslår tre huvudsakliga åtgärder för att utveckla ett högre operations-tempo och förbättrad reaktionsförmåga relativt motståndaren: att öka hastigheten i beslutsfattning i strid genom att stärka militära chefers roll, att tillämpning av uppdragstaktik ska genomsyra alla ledningsnivåer, samt att vidareutveckla den svenska modellen för planering under tidspress (PUT) för bredare taktisk och operativ användning. Förslagen ligger i linje med Sveriges starka tradition av uppdragstaktik och snabbt beslutsfattande, och kan positionera Sverige som en potentiell föregångsnation i utvecklingen av militära planeringsmetoder anpassade för utmaningarna i dagens och framtidens krigföring.

AS A MILITARY planner at operational and tactical levels in various nations, the imperative for adaptability in military planning and decision-making processes has consistently emerged as a critical element. This need is particularly acute in state-to-state or alliance-to-state conflicts where the operational tempo and the agility to seize the initiative quickly are paramount.¹ This text argues for a transformative approach towards more agile and intuitive decision-making in modern warfare, addressing the limitations of current planning models in meeting the demands of high-stakes, fast-paced conflicts.

The Challenge of Current Military Planning Models

Current planning models, such as NATO's Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive (COPD), Sweden's "Svensk planerings- och ledningsmetod (SPL)", and Tactical Planning For Land Forces (APP-28), can be well-suited for peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations in complex environments.² Although thorough, these models, emphasizing elaborate planning and extensive coordination, fall short in the face of conventional warfare's fast-paced dynamics

among peer or near-peer adversaries. In such scenarios, the necessity for rapid decision-making becomes paramount, driven by clear yet demanding challenges, resource scarcity, and the urgency of immediate action. This situation highlights the shortcomings of existing models in adapting to operations where maintaining a higher operational tempo than the adversary is critical.

Distinguishing between planning for war and command in battle is crucial. Analytical planning lays the strategic groundwork, preparing for various scenarios.³ Yet, in high-intensity conflicts, command must pivot to an intuitive mode, driven by the rapid succession of events and decisions. This shift is imperative; unlike in low-intensity conflicts, high-intensity warfare demands immediate, decisive action, leaving little room for developing new plans. Military leaders must be adept at intuitively commanding within the existing framework, adjusting on the fly, and responding with agility and insight to avoid risking orders that are too late and too long.⁴

Proposing Transformative Solutions

I propose three initial ways to adapt our approach to address this challenge.

Our first step should be transitioning back to a decision-making process in battle that places commanders at the forefront, leveraging their experience and intuition to make critical decisions swiftly. This can involve commanders actively leading the planning process by verbalizing their thought processes, analyses, and tentative decisions in a collaborative war council setting. This 'thinking out loud' approach utilizes trusted advisors and key staff members, encouraging open dialogue, diverse perspectives, and collective

problem-solving.⁵ It allows for immediate feedback, insights sharing, and expertise pooling, facilitating quicker information synthesis and prompt action through developing clear statements of intent. Complementing this shift, a reduction in headquarters size becomes essential. Smaller and more streamlined headquarters would expedite communication and decision-making and significantly reduce bureaucratic delays.⁶ Consequently, this restructuring would also pave the way for greater autonomy for lower command levels, thereby nurturing a more dynamic and responsive command structure.

Second, the practice of mission command is essential across the organization.⁷ The military's overall agility and effectiveness are enhanced by embedding a culture where decisions are not just top-down directives but are informed by a comprehensive understanding at every level. This fosters initiative and flexibility at all echelons and emphasizes a narrative-led execution, guiding the mission through a cohesive story that communicates purpose and context. It involves creating a unified sense of direction and fostering a shared understanding and initiative among all levels of command. Clear communication of intent and end-states from higher echelons empowers subordinates to make informed, proactive decisions aligned with the mission objectives without awaiting direct authorization. Such a culture of mission command, integral in peacetime and wartime operations, entrusts individuals with the responsibility to fully apply their judgment and creativity. Instilling this philosophy throughout the military structure ensures preparedness for swift, effective responses in dynamic situations, maintaining alignment with strategic goals and operational coherence.

Third, the Swedish Planning Under Time-pressure (PUT) model, predominantly uti-

lized at lower tactical levels, offers a highly intuitive and quick decision-making process.⁸ Research has shown that intuition in decision-making is the ability to rapidly recognize patterns based on past experiences, facilitating practical and sensible decisions.⁹ This is more than instinct; it is an informed, rapid synthesis of situational awareness built upon extensive knowledge and experience. We can leverage its speed and intuitiveness by enriching the PUT model to cater to higher tactical and operational levels and integrating parallel planning to enable mission command. Training officers through scenario-based exercises and simulations enables them to make swift yet well-informed decisions under pressure, effectively utilizing intuition as a powerful, experience-informed decision-making tool.

These acknowledgments do not diminish the value of more systematic planning processes in specific contexts. It is important to note that reality in military operations is often a spectrum of shades of gray rather than stark black and white. The complexity of multi-domain operations calls for analytical planning to facilitate efficient joint effects. In sustained operations, where resource allocation and logistics are critical, a flexible approach to planning is essential to adaptively conducting operations. Furthermore, in a protracted conflict where a stalemate has been reached, these detailed methods can aid in identifying nuanced opportunities or vulnerabilities within an adversary's approach or the operational environment. Yet, amidst these varied hues of planning, the essence of swift and decisive decision-making remains a constant necessity, pivotal in turning the tide of battle and ensuring operational success.

Toward Agile and Intuitive Military Command

In conclusion, while comprehensive planning models like COPD, SPL, and APP-28 might offer valuable frameworks for certain military operations, they may not be the best fit for the dynamic nature of conventional state-to-state conflicts. This text's proposal for a paradigm shift toward more intuitive and flexible command methodologies aims to address this gap, ensuring our forces can maintain the initiative and effectively respond to changes in these fast-paced environments. By revitalizing the decision-making process, expanding mission command, and adapting the PUT model for complex scenarios, we can better meet the demands for swift action and responsiveness on the contemporary battlefield.

The time has come to reassess and possibly streamline our planning and decision-making models to better suit modern conventional warfare's realities. Sweden's strong mission command and rapid decision-making tradition uniquely position us to lead this transformation. As we align our military practices with those of NATO, it is crucial to leverage these inherent strengths rather than sacrifice them at the altar of interoperability. We should aim to contribute our unique capabilities to the collective, enhancing responsiveness and effectiveness. By doing so, Sweden can play a crucial part in shaping future military doctrines and strategies, leading the development of agile and effective military planning and decision-making models suited to the challenges of the 21st century.

The author is a lieutenant colonel and serves on the Swedish army staff.

Notes

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