

Developing a Common Operational Picture for Sustainment

■ By Maj. Aaron M. Cornett and Maj. Justin M. Redfern

The Mission Command Training Program based at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, is the Army's only worldwide deployable combat training center. Its Operations Group Sierra provides observer-coach trainers to instruct expeditionary sustainment commands (ESCs) and sustainment brigades during warfighter exercises.

During a warfighter exercise, the decisive action training environment replicates phase III of joint operations against a near-peer competitor. The sustainment community's challenge is to sustain the other warfighting functions throughout the operation by increasing operational reach, providing freedom of action, and prolonging endurance.

A sustainment common operational picture (COP) provides a clear picture of the sustainment situation at any given time and is critical to increasing operational reach, freedom of action, and prolonged endurance. Over the course of several warfighter exercises, Operations Group Sierra identified that developing a sustainment COP is a common challenge.

What Is a Sustainment COP?

The sustainment COP is how sustainment forces visualize and assess the effects of sustainment on the battlefield. The sustainment COP also provides context that commanders can use to describe and direct future operations.

The sustainment COP synchronizes requirements with capabilities over time and provides a single framework that represents the current situation. It is used to identify future gaps, shortfalls, or excess capacity within the sustainment network.

How Does Time Affect the COP?

To be effective, a sustainment COP must focus on efforts and commodities over time. A unit commander requires time to make decisions and deliver support or commodities to the end user. For an ESC, lead times typically range from 96 to 120 hours, while sustainment brigades require 48 to 96 hours to get supplies to customers.

A way to decipher the time factor on a COP is to map the time it takes for a commodity or service to travel from start to finish. This time starts prior to the commodity entering the theater of operations, continues as it transits the supply chain, and concludes with its delivery to the end user.

Essentially, a commander and staff must understand how long it will take to influence operations. Is the ESC or sustainment brigade able to deliver a commodity or service in time to maintain momentum or extend operational reach? Is the lead time associated with a particular commodity or service going to slow the pace of operations? If the sustainment commander and staff understand that time factor, they can more easily plan and manage expectations.

Identify Sustainment Elements

The first criterion for a relevant COP is a terrain-oriented visual depiction of sustainment entities in the area of operations (AO). Important red (enemy) and blue (friendly) activities also should be depicted. For an ESC, the sustainment COP should include regional hubs and distribution nodes such as logistics support areas, central receiving and shipping point yards, and aerial ports and seaports of debarkation across the AO, with special focus on the joint support area.

For a sustainment brigade, the depiction should be more focused and pay special attention to the sustainment forces within the division AO, including nondivisional units in the division support area.

Once sustainment elements are identified, operation orders should provide criteria such as stockage objectives or daily requirements in order to assess the capabilities and critical commodities employed or distributed through the AO. This assessment can be color-coded. If colors are used, it is important to provide a clear definition of what each color represents.

A staff's understanding of how the commander visualizes information can go a long way in making the sustainment COP effective. If there is not enough information to make inclusive and relevant assessments, the sustainment community in theater should establish internal measurements. These measurements should be communicated and nested in operation orders to help inform the commander and enable timely decisions. This visual representation should be the baseline from which the rest of the COP is built and can be based on the output from the intelligence functional cell during mission analysis.

The second criterion for developing a sustainment COP is depicting operations in the AO that affect sustainment operations. Sustainment units cannot just focus on sustainment without regard for maneuver force or enemy force activities.

Activities that influence sustainment and sustainment staffs must be depicted on the sustainment COP to show the commander how both friendly and enemy activities affect or could possibly affect sustainment. It

is also important for the sustainment COP to clearly show lines of communication, such as main and alternate supply routes, as well as supported unit boundaries.

The third criterion revolves around the sustainment headquarters support operations section's commodities. The data provided by each commodity section informs decision-making and problem-solving.

Most of this data will be kept internal to each section. It is impossible for a single sustainment COP to show every piece of information from every commodity. Therefore, it is imperative that the sections responsible for each commodity develop their own COPs or running estimates to complement the overall sustainment COP.

Detailed commodity-specific COPs provide the background information to round out the much broader and less detailed sustainment COP. When the commander has a question about specifics not displayed on the sustainment COP, his or her staff should reference the commodity COPs in order to find a detailed answer.

Five Sustainment COP Essentials

Operations Group Sierra has identified five areas that should be represented in every sustainment COP:

- Key and essential movements in the first 24, 48, 72, and 96 hours.
- Bulk fuel nodes and distribution plans.
- Critical munitions status and dis-

tribution plans.

- Internal and external combat power (the combat slant).
- Medical nodes, locations, capacity, and bed status.

While Operations Group Sierra considers these five areas the most critical to a sustainment COP, the team acknowledges that each organization must decide what information is most important and what information the commander needs to make effective decisions.

Additionally, the S-4s and G-4 should provide a combat slant that explains what the sustainment brigade's functional companies can accomplish with the combat power they have. This additional information helps to paint

PLANS Long-range Planning	FUTURE OPERATIONS Mid-range Planning	CURRENT OPERATIONS Short-range Planning and Execution
Plan movement and maneuver.	Lead support operations distribution, plans, and integration.	Lead movement and maneuver.
Includes representatives from all warfighting function cells and special staff as mission dictates. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Develops initial operation plans (OPLANs) and operation orders (OPORDs). <input type="checkbox"/> Plans for follow-on sequels. <input type="checkbox"/> Assesses long-range progress of operations. 	Includes representatives from all warfighting function cells and special staff as mission dictates. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Refines and modifies OPLANs and OPORDs, and issues fragmentary orders (FRAGORDs). <input type="checkbox"/> Develops branch plans. <input type="checkbox"/> Assesses mid-range progress of operations. 	Includes representatives from all warfighting function cells and special staff as mission dictates. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Monitors, evaluates, directs, and controls execution of orders. <input type="checkbox"/> Provides operations update and assessment brief.
Examples: Intermediate staging base operations, deployment, and new site	Examples: Convoy planning, central receiving and shipping point operations, and task organization modifications	Examples: Monitor convoys and battlespace management
"What next?"	"What if?"	"What is."

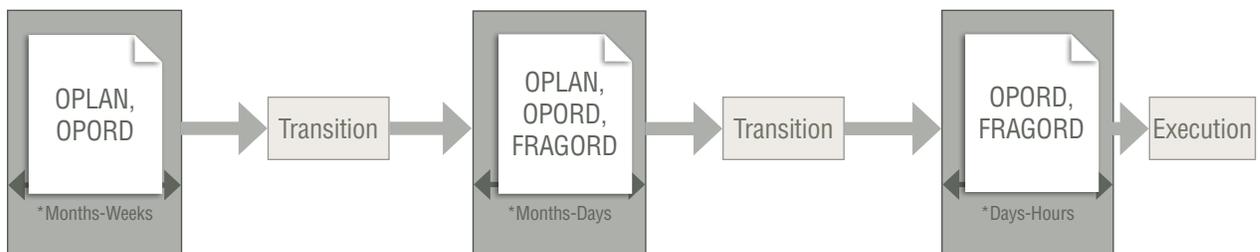


Figure 1. This flowchart demonstrates how time horizons for the operations process vary depending on the level of command and mission variables.

a clear picture for the commander.

Other information that may prove critical in certain circumstances includes class I (subsistence) nodes and distribution plans, mortuary affairs and replacement movements, and information relating to the fielding and distribution of critical class VII (major end items).

Future activities, such as the transition of unit boundaries or the establishment of logistics support areas, require additional planning and should have space allocated on the sustainment COP. It is important for the commander to see what is on the horizon in order to understand how current operations will affect future plans. A small block that shows a sliding scale of current planning efforts and their level of completion can help to create much needed dialogue between the commander and staff.

An Analog Sustainment COP

The 21st century Army greatly benefits from technology and digital advances. The ability to produce and share information electronically has significantly improved shared understanding during operations. Of course, too much reliance on technology can be a downfall when a system fails or power is lost.

Using analog products to back-up digital products is absolutely critical to the continued success of a sustainment organization in the event a system goes down. When it comes to the sustainment COP, sustainment organizations should develop an analog product that mirrors the digital product.

A large scale map with acetate works incredibly well and allows graphics and other information to be updated regularly. If the analog product is updated regularly and mirrors the digital product, then the commander will not struggle to see the environment or make decisions in the event of a system failure.

The sustainment COP provides sustainment commanders with a clear picture of the sustainment situation at



Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Samuel Massey points to a map during Saber Guardian 17 at Novo Selo Training Area, Bulgaria. (Photo by Spc. Rafael Garibay)

any given time. It also enhances the ability of sustainment organizations to increase operational reach, provide freedom of action, and prolong the endurance of maneuver forces.

High functioning staffs create a sustainment COP by including similar internal and external sight pictures, a snapshot of critical commodities nested with current and future operations, and transitions. By integrating all warfighting functions, the staff also includes the priorities of support and the decision support matrix.

A standard operating procedure that sets the conditions for these mission command tools sets a staff on the right path to meeting intent at the speed of trust.

Great units are able to use all of the information in the COP to anticipate requirements, remain responsive, and provide uninterrupted sustainment. In essence, the sustainment COP is the best way for sustainment organi-

zations to develop shared understanding, solve problems, and synchronize sustainment operations.

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