



Allied Joint Doctrine for the Planning of Operations

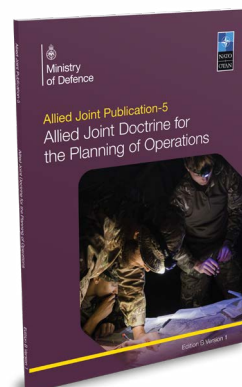


Allied Joint Publication (AJP)-5, *Allied Joint Doctrine for the Planning of Operations*, is NATO's keystone doctrine for planning joint operations. It provides the overarching framework of planning principles, considerations and processes used across the Alliance, connecting strategic direction to operational and tactical-level plans and ensuring coherence in multinational planning efforts.

Core philosophy and approach. The doctrine is built on the seven sequential planning activities that structure the operations planning process: planning initiation; mission analysis; course of action development; course of action analysis; course of action validation and comparison; the commander's course of action decision; and plan development. This sequence applies whether NATO is planning in advance of an anticipated situation or in response to one that is already unfolding, with the time available for planning being the only real variable. Operational art underpins the process throughout, combining the science of planning with the judgement, intuition and creativity of commanders and their staff to connect tactical actions to strategic objectives, and ensuring the commander remains personally engaged in validating the results at each stage.

Strategic context and campaign themes. NATO's planning activity sits within campaign themes that reflect the political context and strategic narrative guiding an operation. These themes – peacetime military engagement, peace support, security and warfighting – are interdependent rather than sequential, and support the Alliance's three core tasks of deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security across the continuum of competition. Planning can be conducted sequentially, in parallel or collaboratively between levels of command, with the chosen method depending on the time available and the complexity of the situation. Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe orchestrates planning throughout, with operational-level products reviewed and merged into the strategic plan once approved, before cascading down to inform tactical-level planning.

Strategic communications integration. Strategic communications is embedded throughout the planning process rather than treated as a separate activity. During mission analysis, the planning staff coordinate with higher-level strategic communications planners, including military public affairs, information and psychological operations specialists, to analyse the information environment and identify key audiences for the commander's approval. This develops into a commander's strategic communications narrative, which is carried through course of action development and reflected in the final concept of operations alongside the scheme of manoeuvre and main effort. Target audience analysis and understanding of



the information environment are considered essential throughout, since the perceptions created by any activity will vary from audience to audience and will only generate the intended behaviours if those audiences are properly understood.

Centre of gravity analysis and risk management. Centre of gravity analysis is a continuous, iterative activity that runs throughout planning and the conduct of an operation, helping commanders identify an actor's principal source of strength, the critical capabilities and requirements that sustain it, and the critical vulnerabilities through which it might be influenced or neutralised. This analysis directly informs objectives, decisive conditions and rules of engagement. Risk is treated as an inherent part of conflict and a major influence on the commander's choice of course of action, with risk management integrated into every planning stage, from initial evaluation of likelihood and impact through to the treatment of risk and continuous monitoring as the plan is executed. Techniques such as wargaming, red teaming and premortem analysis are used to test courses of action and challenge planning assumptions before a plan is finalised.

Human security and wider considerations. The doctrine integrates NATO's human security approach across all planning stages, requiring a people-centred perspective that accounts for the differentiated impacts of conflict on different parts of the population, including through continuous gender analysis. Legal considerations are treated as integral to planning, with international humanitarian law and the obligations of troop-contributing nations shaping the commander's freedom of action throughout. Multi-domain operations, covering the maritime, land, air, space and cyber domains, are introduced as a conceptual approach to synchronising activity at scale and speed in collaboration with other instruments of power, stakeholders and actors.

UK national context. AJP-5 is promulgated in the UK with national elements clearly marked, allowing UK forces to plan sovereign operations using a NATO doctrinal baseline while meeting national legal and policy obligations. The Permanent Joint Headquarters applies a UK-specific interpretation of the operations planning process, set out in UK Annexes F and G, and uses the audience-centric approach as standard operating procedure. UK forces operating under NATO command generally follow NATO rules of engagement, subject to any national caveats recorded in the transfer of authority, while directive authority for logistics remains a national responsibility.

Conclusion. AJP-5 provides the overarching framework for planning Allied joint operations. It emphasises the continuous, iterative and collaborative nature of planning, underpinned by rigorous analysis, audience understanding and strategic communications. By integrating centre of gravity analysis, risk management and human security considerations, it enables the development and narrative-led execution of coherent plans that connect strategic intent to desired effects and behavioural outcomes.

Want to read more?

The full edition of AJP-5 is written at the OFFICIAL classification to access the widest possible audience. The primary audience is commanders and their staff engaged in the planning of operations. It also provides a useful framework for planning by a coalition of NATO Allies, partner nations and non-NATO actors, and is a useful reference for NATO civilian and non-NATO civilian actors.



Find out more about joint operational-level doctrine at gov.uk. For UK Defence staff search for the Joint Doctrine homepage on defnet.