

RATIONAL DECISION AND INTUITIVE DECISION¹

The author analyzes methods of rational and intuitive decision as intellectual tools that an operational or tactical commandant may use when reaching the culminating point of the offense, making it necessary to make an unavoidable decision of changing his attitude or maintaining it. Moreover, the author points out the advantages of the intuitive method at tactical level and its relation with the “Commandant Intention” and the acquisition and preservation of the OODA loop (Observe- Orient- Decide- Act).

KEY WORDS: COMMANDANT/ CULMINATING POINT OF THE OFFENSE/ DECISION/ RATIONAL/ INTUITIVE

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INTRODUCTION

When a commandant that conducts an offense (at operational or tactical level) must decide whether they keep it or stop it, there are factors at stake, among which we can highlight the following:

- › The situation in which this commandant is with respect to the purpose pursued and his Culminating Point of the Offense (CPO)²
- › The alternative that doctrine establishes as reasonable (to continue or stop) for the case in question
- › The method for planning and decision used by the commandant
- › The commandant’s personality

It is worth mentioning the concept expressed in journal *Visión Conjunta* in which the relation between the decision of the commandant and his CPO (valid for attack and defense): The importance of the Culminating Point lies in the fact that, when the military leader acknowledges to have reached it, this makes it necessary for him to make a decision, whether to change an attitude in order to avoid a likely failure, or to preserve what was maintained being aware of the risk implied³.

Moreover, in order to analyze the situation, prepare alternatives, compare them and, finally decide, the commandant has two possible methods: a **rational** one and an **intuitive** one.

The Rational Method⁴ (which we can also call analytical) is based upon the Linear or Mechanic Method. This is the

methodology that is traditionally used in the Argentine Armed Forces and is taught at specific and joint level institutions, where it is used for the resolution of war games that colleges carry out.

The Joint Publication, Manual of Strategy and Planning for Joint Military Action, MC 20-01, describes this method as follows:

At tactical and operational levels, in general, the planning cyclical process is divided into seven stages that vary according to the didactic preciosity:

- 1) *Analysis of the mission*
- 2) *Development of modes of action*
- 3) *Confrontation*
- 4) *Comparison of modes of action*
- 5) *Resolution and concept of operation*
- 6) *Fulfilling of plans*
- 7) *Supervision*

Moreover, the Intuitive Method⁵ consists in acknowledging the key factors of the situation faced, associate them with similar factors of an equivalent situation in the past and to solve the present situation based on experience (military professional) of the past taken as reference. Also, this professional experience of the one making the decision comes from three possible sources:

- a) War experience (ideal but less frequent)
- b) Military training (war games with great reality and high requirements)



- c) Critical studies of Military History⁶ (imposed by the teaching system or self-imposed).

Besides this, we need to take into consideration that *the process of intuitive decision-making occurs in the subconscious, where the decision maker may not realize that this is happening and, therefore, leaders (commandants), must get experience so as to have a solid database in their subconscious*⁷.

Professional experience is key to make intuitive decisions but it is also necessary for the decision-maker to have some inherent *cup d'oeil*, improved by training in decision-making with this method.

With respect to the *cup d'oeil*, the document mentioned before, *Developing Intuitive Decision-Making in Modern Military Leadership*, describes it as: *the capacity to view and quickly understand the battlefield, find out "the truth" and from*

there, determine a proper mode of action and have the moral strength to carry it out to the end. Considering time restrictions, uncertainty and chaos of combat situations, the development of the cup d'oeil in commandants becomes an obligation.

RATIONAL DECISION IN THE ATTACK CAMPAIGN

When the Operational Commandant considers that the Attack Culminating Point has been reached⁸, it will be easy for him (from his military psychology) to decide to change his attack operational attitude for a defensive one given that "Clausewitz's theory" supports⁹ this as it considers it a right decision to preserve his declining power of combat and to keep what has been gained up to that moment.

This concept is also supported by the fact that in the Culminating Point of the Attack, the power of combat of the

1. Author's note: For extension purposes, this will be developed only from the side of the attacker limited to operational and tactical level.
 2. Ministry of Defense; Joint Staff of the Armed Forces; Argentine Republic, Manual de Estrategia y Planeamiento para la Acción Militar Conjunta, Nivel Operacional – La Campaña, MC 20-01, 2013 revision, Chapter III, section 3.004.3
 3. Barrales, Jorge, "Culminating Point and End Desired State", Visión Conjunta, year 5, No. 9, Joint Staff College, Buenos Aires, 2013.
 4. Ministry of Defense; Joint Staff of the Armed Forces; Argentine Republic, op. cit., Chapter VI, sections 4.02 and 4.03
 5. Mc Cown, Neil R.: *Developing Intuitive Decision-Making In Modern Military Leadership*, Naval War College, 2010.

6. Gen Charles C. Kulak (USMC): "Mere reading of history is not enough to form a basis of experience to support the intuitive decision-making method, leaders must critically examine relevant decisions that were made in fact".
 7. Mc Cown, Neil R.: op. cit.
 8. Barrales, Jorge, op.cit. The Attack Culminating Point is the time and space situation in which the actor/s that had an attack operational attitude within the theater of operations must, at least, adopt an "operational pause" or change to a defense operational attitude in order to maintain the capacity to comply with end criteria corresponding to the Operational Desired End State.
 9. Clausewitz, Carl Von, On War, Book VII, Chapter 1, "The Attack", Editorial Labor, Barcelona.

attacker, even if it is greater than the opponent, it is not so in the extent necessary so as to achieve the Operational Desired End State with some reasonable expectation of success¹⁰.

Before making this decision, the Joint Staff would have advised the Commandant regarding the situation of his remaining power of combat considering the concurrent effect of the enemy action, the characteristics of the theater and “friction”¹¹ of their own system. Also, the balance between power of combat to be recovered by means of an operational pause¹² and the tempo¹³ to be given up because of it would have considered, as well as the implications this has on the initiative, which should be in the hands of the one who is on the attack side. Moreover, the Intelligence area of his Joint Staff would have considered the likely situation of the defender with respect to his Culminating Point of the Defense, trying to reduce the “fog”¹⁴ surrounding this aspect.

Apart from this, when the Operational Commandant considers that he has not reached his Culminating Point of the Attack, it will be easier for him to keep an attack operational attitude because whatever theory has prescribed as correct for this case is happening.

Last, it is also possible to consider that the decision of the attacker to keep their attack operational attitude when they went through their Culminating Point of the Attack without noticing it is rational, regardless of the fact that subsequent events show the mistake.

This possibility is supported by this concept given by Milan Vego: At Operational Strategic level, it is extremely difficult to determine in advance when the Culminating Point is going to be reached as there are many factors that determine them. At this level, which is different from the tactical one, this is only perceived in retrospect, that is, after it has occurred¹⁵.

RATIONAL DECISION IN THE TACTICAL ATTACK

For tactical commandants that, in the context of an offensive operational campaign, conduct battles and combats, it is simpler to know how they are located with respect to their Culminating Point of the Attack given that indicators to determine this situation are more concrete and evident than at operational level, and it is, therefore, more difficult for these commandants to go through their Culminating Point of the Attack without noticing it.

To analyze the situation, prepare alternatives, compare them and, finally decide, the commandant has two possible methods: a rational one and an intuitive one.

It is worth mentioning that battles are given within campaigns and combats within battles. Moreover, the difference between both of these is seen in the definitions of the Argentine Army doctrine and the Glossary of Joint Terminology¹⁶:

- › *Battle: tactical act consisting in the violent confrontation between two enemies of great magnitude, through which at least one of them will aim at substantially modifying the operational situation. Normally, this will be the most important episode of a campaign which may be solved.*
- › *Combat: violent tactical action between two forces of relative importance, the results of which may or may not be decisive for the resolution of the battle.*

Moreover, as from the comparison between “operational pauses” that take place between battles with “combat pauses” that occur within battles and combats, we can deduct that:

- › Logistical nature is a priority in operational pause and tactical nature is a priority in combat.
- › Operational pause affect “operational tempo” and combat pauses affect “tactical tempo”.
- › Combat pauses within combats are shorter than operational pauses within a campaign.
- › Combat pauses within combats are shorter than those that occur within battles (between two subsequent combats) and may result in the irreversible loss of tactical initiative in said combat.

When the Tactical Commandant that conducts a battle (or a combat within a battle) has reached their Culminating Point of the Attack after having used the “combat pause”, the doctrine will support their decision to adopt a defense tactical device in any possible way (mobile defense, area or mixed)¹⁷, given the low chances of success that theory assigns in case the attack continues.

10. Ministry of Defense, Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, Argentine Republic, op.cit., Chapter III; section 3.03.1. Operational Desired End State: “Situation of events desired at the end of military actions in the theater of operations”.

11. Pertusio, Roberto, Operational Strategy, Navy Staff College, third edition, Chapter 9, 2005. Friction: negative effects over one’s own manoeuvre produced by mistakes caused in one’s own system.

12. Ministry of Defense, Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, Argentine Republic, op.cit., MC 20-01, Chapter III. Operational pause: temporary pause of certain activities during a Campaign or in one of the Lines of Operations of its operational design.

13. Ministry of Defense, Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, Argentine Republic, op.cit., MC 20-01. Tempo: Pace of one’s own operation with respect to the adversary which, when favourable, it contributes

to the keeping of the initiative, Chapter III.

14. Pertusio, Roberto, op.cit., Fog: Uncertainty caused as from what is unknown about the enemy.

15. Pertusio, Roberto, op.cit., Quoting Milan Vego.

16. Argentine Army, Rules of Conduction for Land Military Instrument, ROB -00-01, Chapter I, Section IV and Chapter V, Section II. Joint Staff of the Armed Forces; Glossary of Terms of Military Use for Joint Military Action; PC-00-02; Project (2010).

17. Argentine Army, op.cit., ROB-00-01, Chapter VI, Section II, “Defense Operations- Defense Dynamic”, counter- attack, dismantling attack, limited- target attack, delay action and other attack procedures (such as ambush, coup de force, incursion, 1992).

As regards the Staff, they will follow the guidelines mentioned for the operational level and their advice is of particular relevance as regards the use of means that are part of the defense dynamics¹⁸ once the decision to go to defense has been made.

Moreover, when the Tactical Commandant considers that they did not go through their Culminating Point of the Attack, as in the case of the Operational Commandant, the doctrine decision will be to continue their tactical attack in light of the possibility of “exploitation” and willing to make a “pursuit” if there are no restrictions for that imposed by Operational level (possibly caused at Military Strategic level).

INTUITIVE DECISION IN BATTLE AND COMBAT

Given that at tactical level, events occur faster than at operational level (and combat pauses are shorter than operational pauses), there will be more occasions for “intuitive decision” (*Coup d’oeil*) to replace the detailed analysis that takes place before a rational decision.

Intuitive decision-makers are those capable of “seeing through war mist”, which can never totally disappear in spite of good means available to attempt to do so. Outstanding characteristics of these decision-makers are:

- › High self-confidence (including confidence in their luck)
- › Confidence in their subordinates
- › Capacity to recognize essential elements of a problem
- › Capacity to decide intuitively under stress and high uncertainty developed with practice (among others, exercises, simulation, war games) and supported by experience, doctrine and procedures.
- › Capacity to recognize when conditions to apply doctrine stopped existing and decide to leave them aside being aware of their implications.

Moreover, the intuitive decision-maker will be willing to solve when they find their opponent lacks some or all of these characteristics.

On the other hand, this decision-maker must be aware of the fact that: The mode of action selected intuitively may not be the best as they will have to be willing to adjust it when necessary²⁰.

The three following cases may be examples of situations in which the tactical commandant involved must decide intuitively:

Cup d’oeil, is described as the capacity to view and quickly understand the battlefield, find out “the truth” and from there, determine a proper mode of action and have the moral strength to carry it out to the end.

- › The Commandant recognized to have gone through their Culminating Point of the Attack but they know that if they stop their attack, the impact on the troops morale will be negative and they will have to choose between preserving the material or moral component of their power (which is encouraged by both of them in a proportion the commandant knows or presumes)²¹.

As a result of prior combat actions, the attacker and defender reached their respective Culminating Points, and there is a simultaneous combat pause (which would leave initiative in their hands), and which may be broken by the attacker resuming attack with some limitations; or the defender may do the same through defense dynamics with the likely exception of counter-attack force which, in this situation, may be reconstructed. If both of them apply the Intuitive Decision method, the one with greater experience will need less time to find in their professional memory the proper mode of action, winning the OODA loop against their opponent²².

- › In the context of a Decisive Point²³, a minor group of the attacking force must choose to immediately attack a greater group of the enemy defense system and surprise it or wait for a great part of the force and change the principle of surprise for the mass principle. Although the Commandant of this group is not at the beginning of a Culminating Point of the Attack, the fact that they must decide “within a Decisive Point” makes its resolution be relevant and difficult as they have to choose between two principles of war which, in this case, are mutually excluding each other.

18. Argentine Army, op.cit., ROB-00-01, Chapter VI, section II.

19. Argentine Army, op.cit., ROB-00-01, Chapter VI, section I, Attack Operations. Exploitation: Attack Operation aimed at fully using a favorable situation (as a result of a successful combat or a vulnerability found in the enemy device) and change local success into one of greater proportions// Pursuit: attack operation the purpose of which is to destroy an enemy force that aims at withdrawing.

20. Mc Cown, Neil R., op. cit.

21. Barrales, Jorge, op.cit., Despite the fact that “disobeying” the Culminating Point usually leads to failure, circumstances such as good fortune, a brilliant feeling, physical or mental impossibility to

change or simply not realizing that this point has been reached may lead a conductor to go through it and get success illegally.

22. Ministry of Defense, Joint Staff of the Armed Forces; Argentine Republic, op.cit., MC 20-01, Annex 5, article 2, OODA loop: Observe- Orient- Decide- Act.

23. Ministry of Defense, Joint Staff of the Armed Forces; Argentine Republic, op.cit., MC 20-01, Chapter III, Decisive Point: Condition that, once reached, allows to get a significant advantage against the opponent and strongly influence on the result of an operational maneuver or the Campaign. Each Decisive Point is a milestone in the way to the enemy’s Center of Gravity.

CONCLUSIONS

With reference to the rational method

- 1) This is the most proper one to develop the design of the campaign, allowing for the correct distribution in it of the elements of the operational design that support it²⁴. The reason for this is that it is the one that best fits the structure of military thinking despite the fact that two other more recent methods challenge its supremacy (Effect-based Operations and Systemic Operational Design) at operational level.
- 2) The main weakness of the Rational Method, particularly at tactical level, lies in its rigidity and slowness to face unforeseen situations of this level during the development of battles and combats²⁵. This will be shown when the tactical commandant has to solve “in the surroundings” of their Culminating Point. Additionally, and given the importance that analysis of information has in this method, when there is a huge amount in little time, it is difficult to distinguish what is important from what it is not²⁶.
- 3) The Culminating Point of the Attack is a very important part of the operational design of the campaign which imposes the making of a decision for the (undesired) case of being reached in advance before reaching the objective. Moreover, the operational design has other points called “Decision Points” which represent a time-space circumstance which appeared during stage 3 Confrontation and which show that only the need to make a decision (without determining its characteristics)²⁷.

On the other hand, “Decision Points” marked with a star must not be confused with “Decisive Points” marked with a triangle defined as stated by doctrine²⁸.

With reference to the Intuitive Method

- 4) At tactical level, according to what has been stated in 2), where uncertainty is high and times to decide are short, the Intuitive Method fits better than the rational one. If both methods are confronted in the context of a battle or combat, the “intuitive decision-maker” will normally lead the OODA loop.
- 5) For the making of decisions by tactical commandants, whether near the Culminating Point or in similar situations, the ideal combination will probably be: decide intuitively within the “Intention of the operational Commandant” which designed the campaign that involves

them. The “Intention of the Commandant” was formally included in our doctrine as a link between the Mission and the Concept of Operation.

With reference to the training of Officers

- 6) **Military History:** studies should be extended to have critical sense (situation, decisions and their consequences) in order to give officers a proper professional database which to resort to when they decide intuitively.
- 7) **Intention of the Commandant:** this concept is already part of the planning guidelines that are given to student officers at training schools and of contributing guidelines they also give. However, there is still the need to train early in the use of resources given by the Commandant.
- 8) **Intuitive decision:** the capacity to decide soon with little information and high stress as to important aspects for the success of operations, must be developed, especially, at tactical level.
- 9) **Tactical training:** tactical exercises (at office and on the field) to be carried out at specific colleges and operational units are the most proper tool to cover aspects mentioned in conclusions 7) and 8). For the case of intuitive decision “counterpart” exercises are particularly useful. Additionally, this will represent a benefit for Higher Officers that conduct these exercises at the units, giving rise to a professional culture which, in light of the lack of resources, has suffered a “withdrawal under pressure”, which trainers of officers must not allow to become a withdrawal.

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24. Ministerio de Defensa, Estado Mayor Conjunto de las Fuerzas Armadas, República Argentina, op. cit. MC 20-01, capítulo IV, artículo 4.02.

25. Ministerio de Defensa, Estado Mayor Conjunto de las Fuerzas Armadas, República Argentina, op. cit. MC 20-01, capítulo IV, artículo 4.02.

26. Mc Cown, Neil R.: op. cit.

27. ADP 5-0 “The Operations Process- Army Doctrine Publication”, *Headquarters- Department of the Army*, Section II, Terms “Decision Point”: “A point in space or time the commander or staff anticipate making a key decision concerning a specific course of action”, JP 5-0 Joint Operation Planning, 2011.

28. Ejército Argentino, op. cit., ROB-00-01, capítulo VI, sección I.

29. Ministerio de Defensa, Estado Mayor Conjunto de las Fuerzas Armadas, República Argentina, op. cit. MC 20-01, capítulo III, artículo 3.03.1.