Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper

Commander's Critical Information Requirements (CCIRs)

Third Edition

Deployable Training Division
Joint Staff J7

July 2013

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited

This is the Third Edition of the Commander's Critical Information Requirements (CCIRs) Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper, written by the Deployable Training Division (DTD) of the Joint Staff J7 and published by the Joint Staff J7.

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PREFACE

The Joint Staff J7 supports the CJCS and the Joint Warfighter through joint force development to advance the operational effectiveness of the current and future joint force. This paper, written by the Deployable Training Division (DTD), helps inform both the joint warfighters and key functions within the J7, notably lessons learned, doctrine, education, and future joint force development. In addition to this paper, the DTD has also developed an overarching Joint Operations Insights and Best Practices Paper and numerous other focus papers that share insights and best practices for various challenges observed at joint headquarters. All of these papers are unclassified for broad accessibility. I commend these papers for your reading.

The DTD gains insights on operational matters through regular contact and dialogue with combatant and joint task force commanders and their staffs as they plan, prepare for, and conduct operations. The DTD observer/trainers collect and compare practices among the different headquarters, draw out and refine "insights" and "best practices," and share them with the joint force.

We are fortunate to have several senior flag officers, active and retired, assist in development and vetting of these insights and best practice papers. Of note, General (Retired) Gary Luck, a Senior Fellow at the National Defense University, plays an active part. Their participation not only helps keep the DTD trainers at the theater-strategic and operational level, but also ensures that they retain a commander-centric perspective in these papers.

Please pass on your comments to DTD's POC Mr. Mike Findlay so that we can improve this paper. Email address is: js.dsc.j7.mbx.joint-training@mail.mil.

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY. CCIRs directly support mission command and commander-centric operations (see definition at right).[1] CCIRs, as a related derivative of guidance and intent, assist joint commanders in focusing support on their decision making requirements. We observe that CCIRs at most operational level headquarters are developed to support two major activities:

> **CCIR:** Information requirement identified by the commander as being critical to facilitating timely decision making.
>
> *- Joint Publication (JP) 1-02*

- Understanding the increasingly complex environment (e.g., supporting assessments that increase this understanding of the environment, defining and redefining of the problem, and informing planning guidance).
- Commander decision making, by linking CCIRs to the execution of branch and sequel plans.

This is a necessary and broader view than the more widely recognized role of CCIRs only supporting well-defined decision points. Commanders' direct involvement in guiding CCIR development provides the necessary focus for a broad range of collection, analysis, and information flow management to better support decision making.

CCIRs at the higher echelons must support understanding of the increasingly complex environment characterized by global interrelationships, massive information flow, non-traditional and less predictable adversaries, humanitarian considerations (e.g., disaster relief), and interdependence with our joint, interagency, and multinational partners. These CCIRs must support decisions on both lethal and nonlethal actions as we operate as part of a unified action and comprehensive, whole of government(s) approach.

> "I found that common understanding to be the essential enabler for fast-paced, decentralized operations. But the effort required to attain and maintain that level of shared understanding is remarkable - it takes changing how the entire command processes and shares information - and runs starkly against the grain of most layered command structures and processes - and challenges the desire of many individuals and organizations to control information."
>
> *- Senior Flag Officer 2013*

Insights:

- CCIRs support commanders' situational understanding and decision making at every echelon of command (tactical, operational, and theater-strategic). They support different decision sets, focus, and event horizons at each echelon.
- Commanders at higher echelons have found that a traditional, tactical view of CCIRs supporting time sensitive, prearranged decision requirements is often too narrow to be effective. This tactical view does not capture the necessity for better understanding the environment nor the key role of assessment at the operational level. Further, operational CCIRs, if focused at specific "tactical-level" events, have the potential to impede subordinate's decision making and agility.
- Consider the role of CCIRs on directing collection, analysis, and dissemination of information supporting assessment activities – a key role of operational headquarters in setting conditions.[2]

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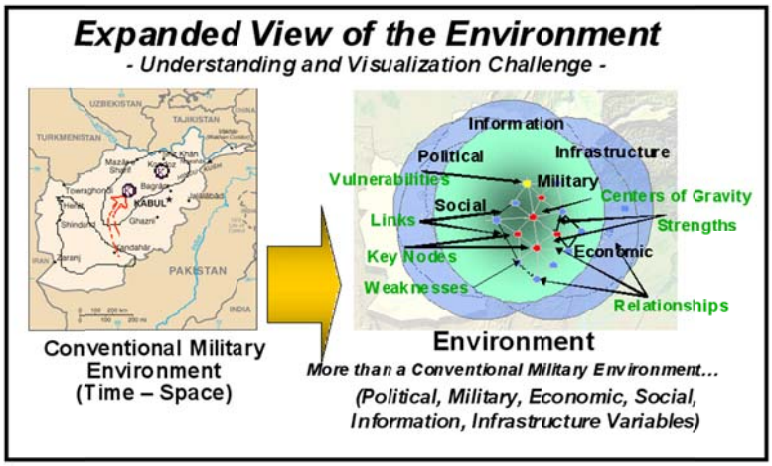
[1] Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Pub 1-02, (Washington, DC: 8 November 2010), p 52.
[2] See Assessment Focus paper (July 2013). URL on inside front cover.

- Develop CCIRs during design and planning, not “on the Joint Operations Center (JOC) floor” during execution.
- CCIRs help prioritize allocation of limited resources. CCIRs, coupled with operational priorities, guide and prioritize employment of collection assets and analysis resources, and assist in channeling the flow of information within, to, and from the headquarters.
- Information flow is essential to the success of the decision making process. Clear reporting procedures assist in timely answering of CCIRs.
- Differentiate between CCIRs and other important information requirements like “wake-up criteria.” Much of this other type of information is often of a tactical nature, not essential for key operational level decisions, and can pull the commander’s focus away from an operational role and associated decisions down to tactical issues.
- CCIR answers should provide understanding and knowledge, not simply data or isolated bits of information. Providing context is important.
- CCIRs change as the mission, priorities, and operating environment change. Have a process to periodically review and update CCIRs.

2.0 UNDERSTANDING TODAY'S COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT. Today's complex operational environment has changed how we view CCIRs. As noted, operational commanders spend much of their time working to better understand the environment and their progress in accomplishing their mission. We find that this understanding, deepened by assessment, drives design and planning.



Globalization directly affects the type and scope of our decisions and also dictates what kind of information is required to make those decisions. Today's more open economic system of interdependent global markets, readily-accessible communications, and ubiquitous media presence has broadened security responsibilities beyond a solely military concern. The environment is more than a military battlefield; it's a network of interrelated political, military, economic, social, informational, and infrastructure systems that impact on our decisions and are impacted by them. We regularly hear from the warfighters about the requirement to maintain a broader perspective of this environment.

The information revolution has clearly changed the way we operate and make decisions. We and our adversaries have unprecedented ability to transmit and receive data and it is growing exponentially, both in speed and volume. This has affected our information requirements in many ways. The sheer volume of information can camouflage the critical information we need. We are still working on our ability to sift through this information and find the relevant nuggets that will aid decision making. At the same time, we are recognizing the need for higher level headquarters to assist in answering subordinates' CCIRs, either directly or through tailored decentralization, federation and common database design of our collection and analysis assets.

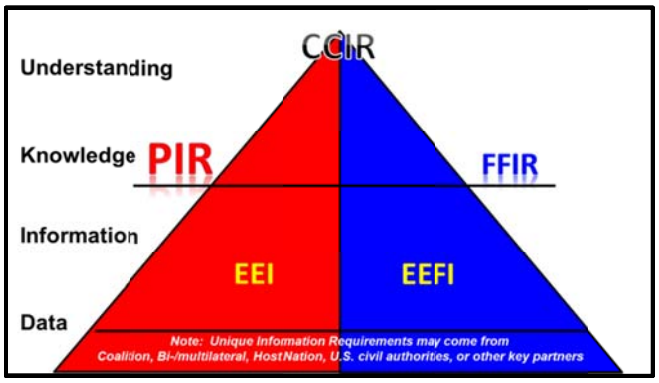
The lack of predictability of our adversaries complicates our decision requirements and supporting information requirements. Our adversaries are both nation states and non-state entities consisting of loosely organized networks with no discernible hierarchical structure. They may not be as predictable as were many of our former conventional adversaries. Decision support templates that may have worked against a predictable, more doctrinally-based adversary may not work as well against these adversaries. Lastly, our adversaries no longer can be defined solely in terms of their military capabilities; likewise, neither can our CCIRs be simply focused on the military aspects of the mission and environment.

Many of our decisions and information requirements are tied to our partners. We fight as one interdependent team with our joint, interagency, and multinational partners. We depend on each other to succeed in today's complex security environment. Likewise our decisions and information requirements are interdependent. We have seen the need for an inclusive versus exclusive mindset with our joint, interagency, and multinational partners in how we assess, plan, and make decisions.

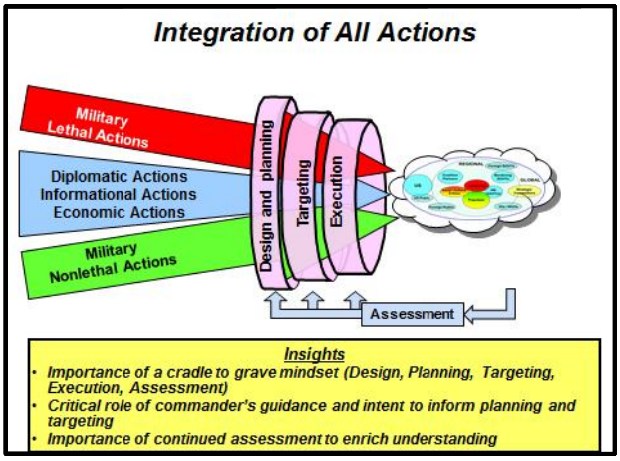
3.0 BROADER VIEW AND ROLE OF COMMANDER'S CRITICAL INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS (CCIRs). Many joint commanders are fully immersed in the unified action, whole of government(s) approach and have broadened their CCIRs to support the decision requirements of their operational level HQ role.[3] These decision requirements include both traditional, time sensitive execution requirements as well as the longer term assessment, situational understanding, and design and planning requirements. This broadening of their CCIRs has provided a deeper focus for the collection and analysis efforts supporting all three event horizons.[4]

> "It is important to have commanders think through what they "can" know and what they "need" to know, how they prepare themselves and their entire team to function in that environment, and how they must sort through what will likely drive events at higher levels and what is just noise to disregard. Not easy, exact or static by any means."
>
> *- Senior Flag Officer 2013*

CCIRs doctrinally contain two components: priority intelligence requirements (PIR), which are focused on the adversary and environment; and friendly force information requirements (FFIR) which are focused on friendly forces and supporting capabilities. We have seen some commands operating in the population-centric environment of COIN add a third component, Host Nation Information Requirements (HNIR) which we refer to here as Unique Information Requirements (Unique IRs), to better focus on information about the host nation. A Unique IR is information the commander needs from coalition, bi/multilateral, host nation, US civil authorities or other key stakeholders to effectively partner, develop plans, make decisions, and integrate with civilian activities. Depending on the circumstances, information may include the status of provincial, district or local governance, economic development, infrastructure, or security forces (see figure).[5]



Operational level commanders focus on attempting to understand the broader environment and how to develop and implement, in conjunction with their partners, the full complement of military and non-military actions to achieve operational and strategic objectives. They recognize that their decisions within this environment are interdependent with the decisions of other "stakeholders." These commanders have found it necessary to account for the many potential "lethal" and "nonlethal" activities of all the stakeholders as they pursue mission accomplishment and influence behavior in the operational environment (see figure).

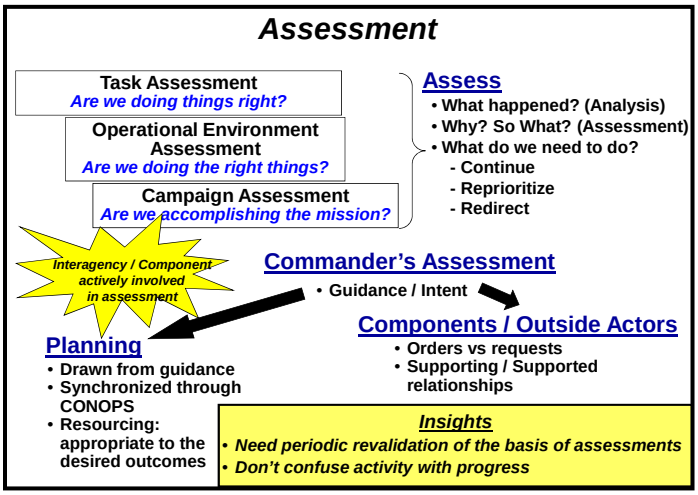


[3] See discussion on mission sets of a CCMD in Mar 2013 Joint Operations paper, pg 46. (URL on inside cover)
[4] The three event horizons are current operations, future operations, and future plans. See figure on page 7.
[5] ISAF Joint Command was the original source of the definition of Host Nation Information Requirements (HNIR).

The CCIRs associated with this broader comprehensive approach are different than those that support only traditional time sensitive, current operations-focused decisions. Commanders have expanded these types of CCIRs to include information required in assessments that better drive the far reaching planning decisions at the operational level.

We are also seeing the important role of CCIRs in prioritizing resources. This prioritization of both collection and analysis resources enhances the quality of understanding and assessments, and ultimately results in the commander gaining better situational understanding, leading to better guidance and intent, and resulting in a greater likelihood of mission success.

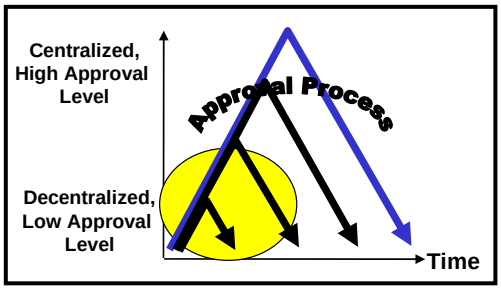
We have seen challenges faced by operational level commanders and staff that have singularly followed a more traditional "decision point-centric" approach in the use of CCIRs. Their CCIRs are focused on supporting decisions for predictable events or activities, and may often be time-sensitive. This current operations focus of their CCIRs often results in unclear prioritization of collection and analysis efforts supporting assessment and planning in the future operations and future plans event horizon. In such situations, collection and analysis efforts supporting assessment and planning become ad hoc and under-resourced.



As noted on the figure to the right, assessment is central to deepening the understanding of the environment. We are finding that many commanders identify their critical measures of effectiveness as CCIRs to ensure appropriate prioritization of resources. This prioritization of both collection and analysis resources enhances the quality of assessments, better situational understanding, and better guidance and intent.

Supporting Subordinates' Agility. CCIRs can support (or hinder) agility of action. CCIRs should address the appropriate commander-level information requirements given the associated decentralized / delegated authorities and approvals. Alignment of CCIRs supporting decentralized execution and authorities directly support empowerment of subordinates, while retention of CCIRs at the operational level for information supporting decentralized activities slow subordinates' agility, add unnecessary reporting requirements, and shift the operational level HQ's focus away from its roles and responsibilities in setting conditions.

The decentralization of both the decisions and alignment of associated CCIRs is key to agility and flexibility. Operational level commanders help set conditions for subordinates' success through mission-type orders, guidance and intent, and thought-out decentralization of decision/mission approval levels together with the appropriate decentralization of supporting assets. They recognize the value of decentralizing to the lowest level capable of integrating these assets (see figure). Operational commanders



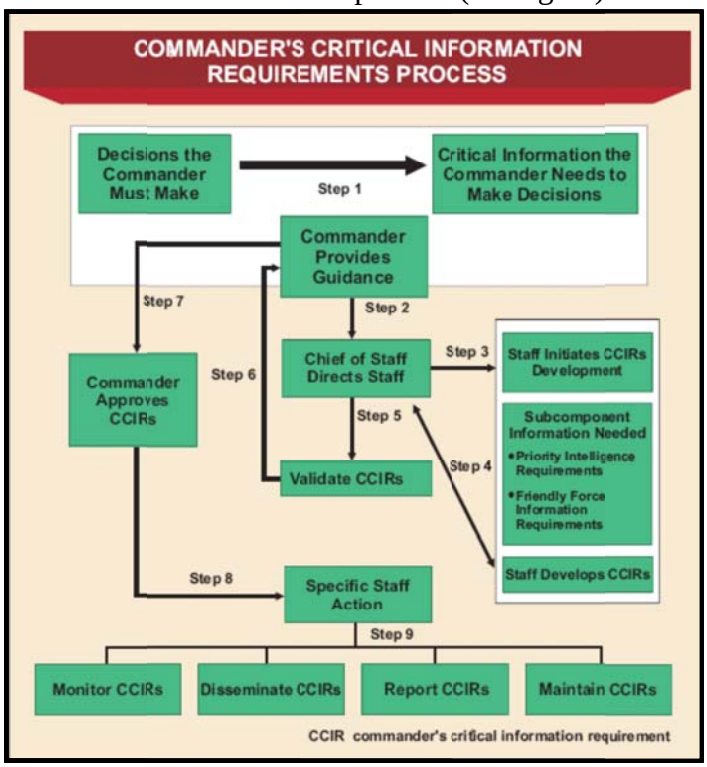
enable increased agility and flexibility by delegating the requisite tactical level decision authorities to their subordinates commensurate with their responsibilities. Decentralizing approval levels (and associated CCIRs) allows us to more rapidly take advantage of opportunities in today's operational environment as noted in the above figure. We see this as a best practice. It allows for more agility of the force while freeing the operational commander to focus on planning and decisions at the operational level.

Together with decentralization of authorities, operational commanders also assist their subordinates by helping answer the subordinates' CCIRs either directly or through tailored decentralization, federation, and common database design of collection and analysis assets.

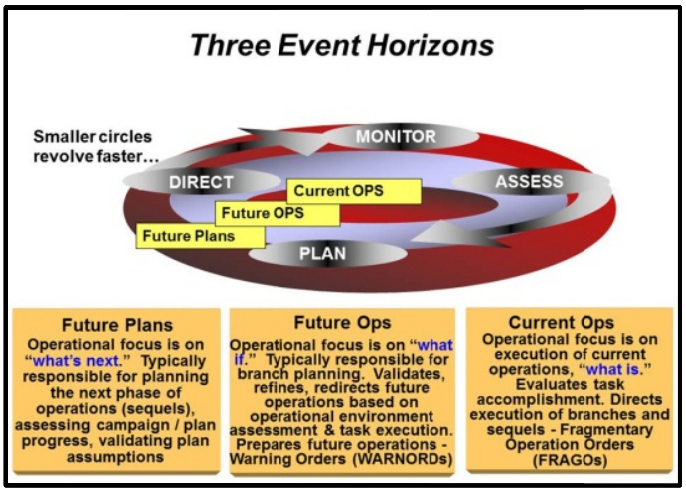
Insights:

- Broaden CCIRs at the operational level to support both traditional, time-sensitive execution requirements and longer term assessment, situational understanding, and design and planning requirements. Seek to provide knowledge and understanding, vice data or information.
- Use CCIRs in conjunction with operational priorities to focus and prioritize collection and analysis efforts supporting all three event horizons.
- Many of the operational level decisions are not 'snap' decisions made in the JOC and focused at the tactical level, but rather require detailed analysis and assessment of the broader environment tied to desired effects and stated objectives.
- Operational level commanders have learned that the delegation of tactical level decisions to their subordinates has allowed them to focus their efforts on the higher level, broader operational decisions.
- Support decentralized decision authorities by helping to answer their related CCIRs, not by retaining those CCIR (and associated reporting requirements) at the higher level. Retaining CCIR at higher level for decisions that have already been delegated to a subordinate adds unnecessary reporting requirements on those subordinates, slows their agility, and shifts higher HQ focus away from its more appropriate role of setting conditions.

4.0 CCIR DEVELOPMENT, APPROVAL, AND DISSEMINATION. Commanders drive development of CCIRs. We have seen very successful use of the CCIRs process (see figure). This process lays out specific responsibilities for development, validation, dissemination, monitoring, reporting, and maintenance (i.e., modifying CCIRs). While not in current doctrine, it still effectively captures an effective process.



Planners help develop CCIRs during the planning process across all three event horizons (see figure below). Typically, the J2 is responsible for developing proposed PIRs while the J5 and J35 are responsible for developing FFIRs; both are submitted to the commander for approval. These CCIRs support decisions across all three event horizons – both time sensitive information requirements supporting anticipated decisions in the current operations event horizon, and the broader set of assessment/analyzed information enabling more far-reaching decisions in future operations and future plans.

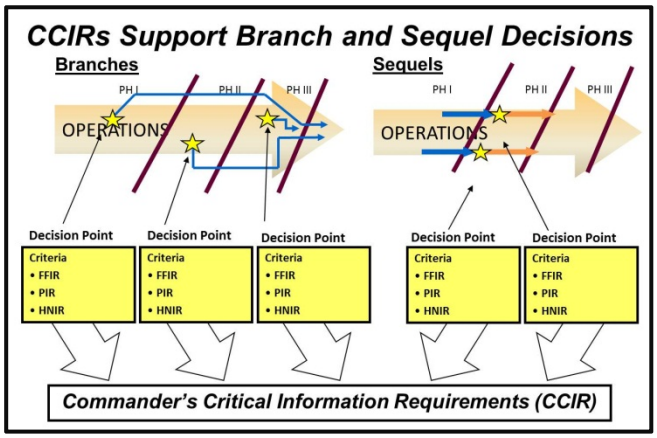


Operational level commands develop many of their CCIRs during design and the planning process. We normally see decision requirements transcending all three event horizons. Some decisions in the current operations event horizon may have very specific and time sensitive information requirements, while others are broader, assessment focused, and may be much more subjective. They may also include information requirements on DIME (Diplomatic, Informational, Military, Economic) partner actions and capabilities and environmental conditions.

Branch and Sequel Execution: While many CCIRs support branch[6] and sequel[7] plan decision requirements at all levels, the complexity of today's environment makes the predictive

[6] Branches are options built into the base plan. Such branches may include shifting priorities, changing unit organization and command relationships, or changing the very nature of the joint operations itself. Branches add flexibility to plans by anticipating situations that could alter the basic plan. Such situations could be a result of enemy action, availability of friendly capabilities or resources, or even a change in the weather of season within the operational area. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations*, Joint Pub 3-0, (Washington, DC: 11 August 2011).

development of all the potential specific decisions (and supporting CCIRs) that an operational commander may face difficult. However, this difficulty doesn't mean that we should stop conducting branch and sequel planning at the operational level – just the opposite. We must continue to focus on both the "why," "so what," "what if," and "what's next" at the operational level to drive collection and analysis and set conditions for the success of our subordinates. The complexity does suggest, though, that some of our branch and sequel planning at the operational level may not result in precise, predictive decision points with associated CCIRs that we may be accustomed to at the tactical level. Additionally, unlike the tactical level, much of the information precipitating operational commanders' major decisions will likely not come off the JOC floor, but rather through interaction with others and from the results of "thought-out" operational level assessments. Much of this information may not be in the precise form of answering a specifically worded and time sensitive PIR or FFIR, but rather as the result of a broader assessment answering whether we are accomplishing the campaign or operational objectives or attaining desired conditions for continued actions together with recommendations on the "so what."



Most CCIRs are developed during course of action (COA) development and analysis together with branch and sequel planning. We normally see decision points transcending all three event horizons with associated PIRs and FFIRs (and in some cases, unique IRs such as HNIRs) as depicted on the above figure. These PIRs and FFIRs may be directly associated with developed measures of effectiveness (MOE)[8]. Analysis of these MOEs helps depict how well friendly operations are achieving objectives, and may result in the decision to execute a branch or sequel plan.

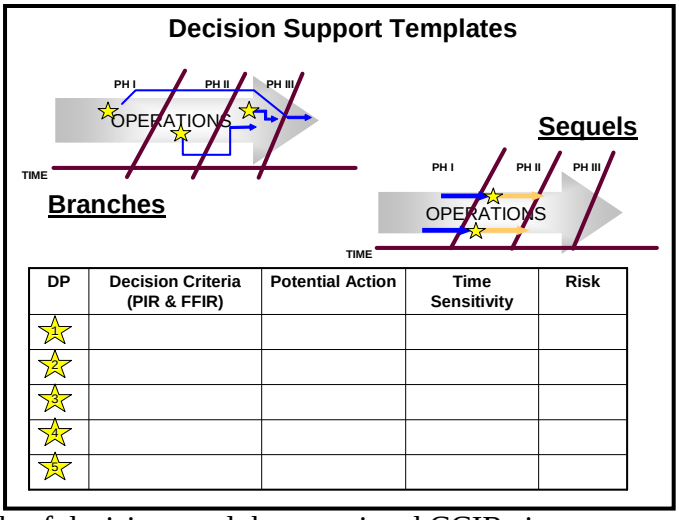
Some decision points in the current operations event horizon may have very specific and time sensitive information requirements, while those supporting branch and sequel execution are normally broader and may be much more subjective. They will also probably include information requirements on "DIME" partner actions/capabilities and adversary "PMESII" conditions. Some examples:

- Current operations decisions: These decisions will likely require time sensitive information on friendly, neutral, and adversary's actions and disposition. Examples of decisions include: personnel recovery actions; shifting of ISR assets; targeting of high value targets; and employment of the reserve.
- Branch plan decisions: These decisions will likely require information from assessment on areas like: the adversary's intent and changing 'PMESII' conditions, DIME partner, coalition, and host nation capabilities and requests, and target audience perceptions (using non-

[7] Sequels are subsequent operations based on the possible outcomes of the current operations – victory, defeat, or stalemate. In joint operations, phases can be viewed as the sequels to the basic plan. JP 3-0.
[8] MOE definition: "A criterion used to assess changes in system behavior, capability, or operational environment that is tied to measuring the attainment of an end state, achievement of an objective, or creation of an effect." JP 1-02.

traditional collection means such as polls). Examples of decisions include: shift of main effort; change in priority; refocusing information operations and public affairs messages; redistribution of forces; command relationship and task organization changes.

- Sequel plan decisions: These types of decisions will be based on broader campaign assessments providing geopolitical, social, and informational analysis and capabilities of partner stakeholders. Examples of decisions include: transitions in overall phasing such as moving to a support to civil authority phase; force rotations; or withdrawal.



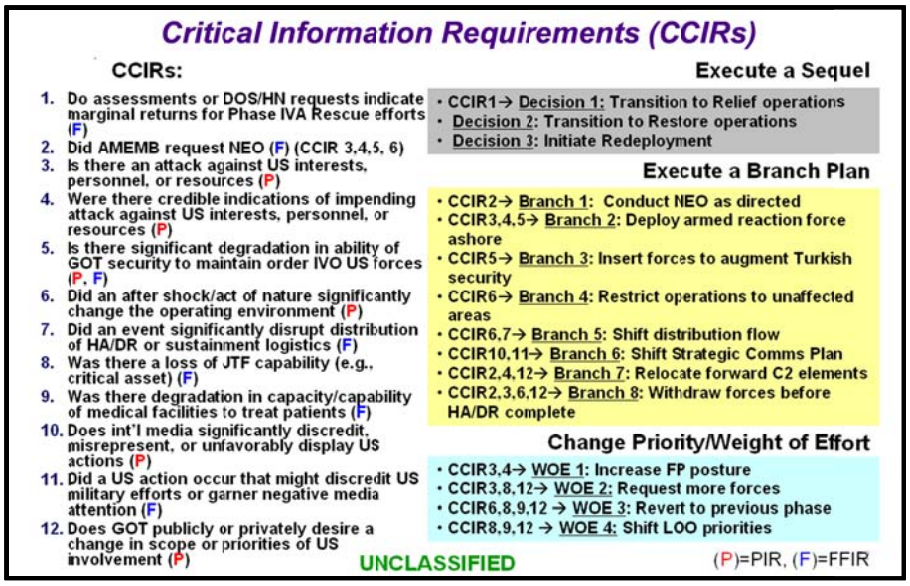
Planners normally develop decision support templates (DST) to lay out these kinds of decisions and the associated CCIRs in more detail (see figure). They help link CCIRs to the decisions they support. The adjacent figure depicts some of the information provided to the commander to gain his guidance and approval. These DSTs also help provide the clarity to collection and analysis resources to focus effort and information flow.

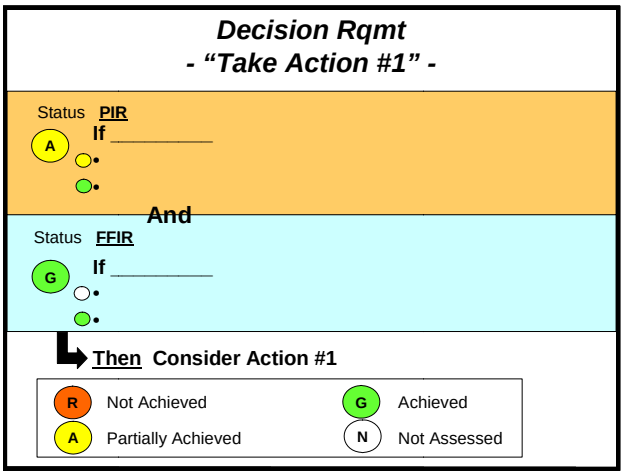
Insights:

- Commanders drive development of CCIRs.
- Planners help develop CCIR during the design and planning process across all three event horizons.
- CCIRs at the operational level will likely include information requirements on “DIME” partner actions and capabilities and environmental conditions.
- CCIRs change as the mission, priorities, and operating environment changes. Have a process to periodically review and update CCIRs to ensure relevance.

5.0 CCIR MONITORING AND REPORTING. Proactive attention to CCIRs is essential for JOC (and other staff) personnel to focus limited resources in support of commander's decision making. To promote awareness and attention to the commander's information requirements, we recommend prominent display of CCIRs within the JOC and other assessment areas.

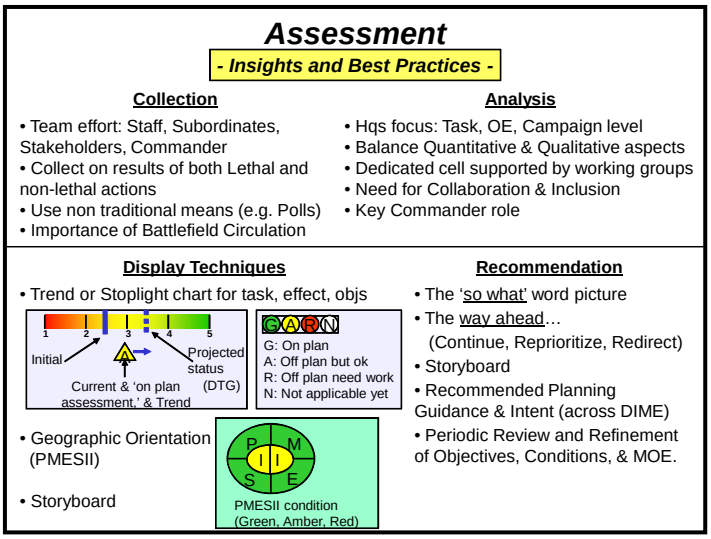
The figure on the right depicts a Combatant Command's display of CCIRs during a non-combatant evacuation exercise. It identified and linked CCIRs to decisions, with the decisions taking the form of branch plans, sequel plans, or changes to the priority or weight of effort. We also recommend posting current CCIRs and their status on the commander's dashboard and current operations section of the HQ portal to facilitate component and stakeholder awareness of CCIRs.





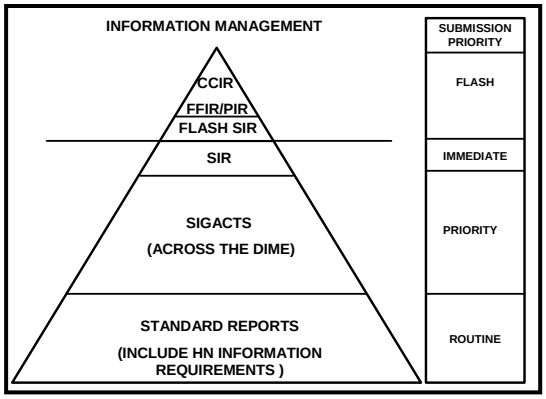
The senior leadership is provided answers to CCIRs in many venues to include operational update assessments, battlefield circulation, and interaction with stakeholders. This information may be provided in some form of presentation media that addresses the decision requirement, associated CCIRs, and status of those CCIRs as depicted in the figure above. We often see a JOC chart such as that portrayed in the adjacent figure for selected decision requirements. This "status" of CCIRs enables the commander to maintain situational awareness of the various criteria that the staff and stakeholders are monitoring and get a feel for the proximity and likelihood of the potential decision.

Many of the CCIRs precipitating operational commanders' major decisions will likely not come off the JOC floor but rather through interaction with others and from the results of operational level assessment. Much of this information may not be in the precise form of answering a specifically worded branch or sequel oriented CCIR, but rather as the result of a broader assessment answering whether we are accomplishing the campaign objectives together with recommendations on the "so what." The figure on the next page depicts some examples of how this broad assessment may be shared.



In many of the other longer term assessment venues, we see various other means of providing this information together with some form of recommendations. We captured several best practices in assessment venues on the adjacent figure. These recommendations are normally tied to an identified potential decision developed in the future plans or future operations event horizon.

Every command also identifies some form of CCIR reporting hierarchy, specifies the submission priority requirements, notification means (e.g., telephonically, in a designated briefing, etc.) and specific recipient (e.g., Commander, JOC Chief, CoS, etc.) of the information. We have seen the requirement to clearly specify: what constitutes notification, i.e., phone call or email; to whom, the aide, CoS, DCOM, or Commander; and how soon does it have to be done (i.e., at the next CUB, staff update, etc.). The figure to the right depicts how one operational headquarters has provided direction to its staff, subordinates, and stakeholders in reporting priorities for the various categories of information. Recognize that this example categorizes CCIRs as time sensitive information. Every command has to determine how to frame their CCIRs in terms of both time sensitive and other high priority information such as assessment results.



Insights:

- Prominently display CCIRs within the JOC, other assessment areas, and on the HQ portal to facilitate component and stakeholder awareness of CCIRs.
- Clearly specify what constitutes notification, to whom, how soon it has to be done, and how to provide status of notification efforts and results.

6.0 RELATED INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS. We see JOCs struggle to determine what constitutes a reportable event other than CCIR triggers. Many commands use "notification criteria" matrices (see figure) to clearly depict notification criteria for both CCIR and other events that spells out who needs to be notified of various events outside the rhythm of a scheduled update brief. Notification criteria and the reporting chain should be clearly understood to prevent stovepiping information or inadvertent failures in notification.

Wakeup / Notification Criteria (Extract)

Type of Event	CDR	DCO	COS	J3	JOC Chief	J-_	Other
FRAGO for action <24 hrs				X	X	J35	
Loss of Life	X	X	X	X	X	J1	Med/ Chap
Medevac	X	X		X	X	J1	Med/ Chap
Troops in Contact (minor)					X		PAO
Troops in Contact (major)	X	X		X	X		PAO
ROE/LOW Violation	X	X	X	X	X		PAO/ SJA

Significant events (SIGEVENTs) should be defined, tracked, reported, and monitored until all required staff action has been completed. We have seen some JOCs preemptively remove some SIGEVENTs from their "radar" before required follow-on actions have been accomplished. Once a SIGEVENT has been closed, it should be archived for record purposes and to assist the intelligence and assessment functions.

Operational commanders use several categories of information (e.g., significant activities (SIGACTs), and Serious Incident Reports (SIRs)) to address the reporting of other important information requirements such as "wake-up" criteria. This information, while not of the importance to be deemed CCIRs, is still important to the commander. As an example, SIR include incidents determined to be of immediate concern to the commander based on the threat, nature, gravity, potential consequences of the incident or potential for adverse publicity. Note that these SIR may not require a decision, but rather may simply precipitate a report to higher headquarters or a press release. Many times this necessary information has been incorrectly referred to as a CCIR. However, much of this information is clearly of a tactical nature, tends to pull the operational level commanders down to tactical issues, and is not essential for key operational level decisions.

Serious Incident Reports (SIR)

- **FLASH:**
  - **Death of coalition soldier in support of JTF.**
  - **Death or life threatening injury of a national level HN official.**
  - **Crash or hard landing of any coalition A/C due to maintenance or enemy fire.**
- **IMMEDIATE:**
  - **Death or serious injury to a detainee.**
  - **Unauthorized or unaccredited media in unit AO.**
  - **Violations of established ROE or Human Rights Violations.**
  - **Any conduct by a coalition soldier that could bring discredit upon JTF or US Government.**
  - **Any Accidental/Negligent Discharge.**
  - **Loss of communications (more than 2 hours) of any C2 node.**
  - **Injury/Death of local national due to coalition actions.**
  - **Any aircraft mishap, coalition or civilian.**
  - **Any incident that may create negative media.**
  - **Green on Green (HN) engagements.**
  - **WIA or serious injury to coalition soldier.**
  - **Breach of the perimeter of any coalition installation.**
  - **Any loss of airfield use.**
  - **Any reports of MIA for a coalition soldier in support of JTF**

Insights:

- Clarify between CCIR and other types of important information requirements.
- Develop and disseminate notification criteria for both CCIR and other events.

Glossary
Abbreviations and Acronyms

APAN – All Partners Access Network
CCIR – Commander's Critical Information Requirement
COA – Course of Action
COIN – Counterinsurgency
CONOPS – Concept of Operations
CoS – Chief of Staff
CUB – Commander’s Update Brief
DCOM – Deputy Commander
DIME – Diplomatic, Informational, Military, Economic
DST – Decision Support Template
DTD – Deployable Training Division
FFIR – Friendly Force Information Requirement
HNIR – Host Nation Information Requirements
HQ – Headquarters
ISAF – International Security Assistance Force
ISR – Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance
JDEIS – Joint Doctrine, Education, and Training Electronic Information System
JLLIS – Joint Lessons Learned Information System
JOC – Joint Operations Center
JP – Joint Publication
MOE – Measure of Effectiveness
OE – Operational Environment
PIR – Priority Intelligence Requirement
PMESII – Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, and Infrastructure
SIGACT – Significant Activity
SIGEVENT – Significant Event
SIR – Specific Information Requirement; Serious Incident Reports

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