

Jeffrey Thomas

Professor Mark Wegge

Module 3: Operational Art

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Session 3.3 DBF: COG/Functions

Response Part I

Are the operational functions applicable to every major operation/campaign? Why or why not—explain your answer. (250 words)

Primary Post (*by September 1, 2025*)

Operational functions apply universally because they are the indispensable structure of campaigns and major operations. Ignoring them leads to failure.

Operational functions form the foundation of joint doctrine. JP 3-0 identified them as critical groupings of capabilities and activities required for commanders to synchronize, integrate, and direct the joint force in every type of operation (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS], 2022, p. III-1).

This universality explains why they apply across the competition continuum, from cooperation to large-scale combat.

Each function addresses an essential aspect of combat power. Command and control provide unity of effort. Intelligence orients the force toward enemy centers of gravity. Fires, movement and maneuver, and protection generate advantage in time and space. Sustainment ensures

endurance. JP 5-0 warned planners that failure to integrate these functions undermines the efficiency and effectiveness at the campaign level (JCS, 2020, pp. xxv, III-75).

Their application is never uniform. JP 3-0 emphasized they are applied “to different degrees, conditions, and standards” depending on the nature of the operation (JCS, 2022, p. III-1). In a counterinsurgency, information and protection dominate. In an amphibious assault, movement, fires, and sustainment weigh heavier. However, in each case, all seven remain present, and they shape how commanders design operational approaches, whether by striking directly or indirectly through decisive points. Commanders who overweight kinetic functions and neglect sustainment or information risk creating blind spots that can undo even sound designs.

Critics view operational functions as rigid constructs that constrain creativity. Yet doctrine left space for adaptation. Vego argued that the commander must sequence and synchronize them as part of operational art, rather than treating them as a checklist (Vego, 2009, p. VIII-3). Properly understood, they enable flexibility by providing structure without prescribing method.

In summary, operational functions are not optional. They are constants across campaigns and operations, linking tactical action to strategic aims. Their form changes, their weight shifts, but their presence is unavoidable. Commanders who ignore them risk incoherence and failure in campaign design.

References

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. (2020, December 1). Joint planning (Joint Publication 5-0).

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. (2022, June 18). Joint campaigns and operations (Joint Publication 3-0).

Vego, M. (2009). Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice. U.S. Naval War College Press.

Secondary Post I #1 (*by September 3, 2025*)

SECONDARY POST RESPONSE

Drew, I agree with your take that operational functions apply everywhere but shift in importance depending on the fight. The missing piece is the operational objective. That is what decides which function carries the most weight. At Leyte, for example, the operational objective was to seize the island in order to provide basing for follow-on operations in the Philippines and to interdict Japanese sea lines of communication. That meant sustainment and protection had to be weighted alongside fires. If the carriers lost sea control, the objective would have failed no matter how well fires were sequenced.

You are right to flag culmination. The real danger is misweighting or pouring effort into the wrong function for the objective. JP 5-0 warned that failing to integrate the functions undermines effectiveness. That means commanders cannot treat them all as equal, or as a checklist. The OPO must drive priorities, and risk lies in getting that balance wrong.

So yes, the functions are always there, but the objective tells you which matter most, and when.

References

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. (2020, December 1). Joint planning (Joint Publication 5-0).

Secondary Post I #2 (*by September 3, 2025*)

SECONDARY POST RESPONSE

Rob, strong post. I like how you tied each function back to how campaigns are designed and executed. You are right to note that not all are applied equally. The key is what you said at the end, where commanders balance them based on the objective. That is the decisive factor. JP 5-0 warned that failure to integrate these functions undermines effectiveness, which means commanders cannot treat them as a checklist. At Leyte, the objective was to cut Japanese lines of communication through seizure of Leyte, so sustainment and protection were weighted as heavily as fires. The art of operational design lies in sequencing and weighting functions against the OPO, not treating them as constants. That weighting also drives how commanders protect their own COGs while threatening the adversary's. Overall, your framing is solid. Sharpening the tie between objective, functions, and COGs makes it even stronger.

References

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. (2020, December 1). Joint planning (Joint Publication 5-0).

Professor Feedback

Jeff,

Meets expectations. Excellent that you tied the Op Functions to OPO in your responses. All Op functions can apply in varying degrees, based on the OPO and therefore need to be included in planning. Good work. Press on FA12!

Response Part II

What is a Center of Gravity (your own words) and how does a planner (or, Red Team) go about determining an adversary's COG? Attacking it? (250 words)

Primary Post (*by September 1, 2025*)

A Center of Gravity (COG) is the primary source of strength, physical or moral, that allows an adversary to pursue its objectives. Its destruction or degradation has the most decisive effect on their ability to achieve a political or military aim (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS], 2020, p. GL-6; U.S. Naval War College [NWC], 2022, p. D-2). Because campaigns are designed to link tactical actions to strategic ends, identifying the correct COG is central to operational design.

Planners and Red Teams determine a COG through critical factors analysis. This involves identifying the adversary's objectives, locating its critical strengths, assessing capabilities that make those strengths effective, identifying requirements that sustain them, and isolating vulnerabilities that can be targeted (JCS, 2020, p. IV-24; NWC, 2022, pp. C-18). Red Teams add value by challenging assumptions, assessing vulnerabilities from the adversary's perspective, and helping prevent mirror-imaging (JCS, 2020, p. J-1; NWC, 2022, p. C-24). A misidentified COG risks wasted effort, loss of tempo, and operational failure. The greater challenge is often achieving consensus across staff on what the true COG is, since different perspectives can drive competing plans.

To attack a COG, commanders design courses of action (COAs) that either strike it directly with overwhelming force or indirectly by exploiting critical vulnerabilities and decisive points (JCS, 2020, p. IV-33; NWC, 2022, pp. C-18). Deconstruction distills critical vulnerabilities into decisive points, which then guide the selection of direct or indirect approaches. Because COGs

shift as the situation evolves, assessment is continuous, and commanders must protect their own COGs while threatening the adversary's.

References

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. (2020, December 1). Joint planning (Joint Publication 5-0).

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. (2022, June 18). Joint campaigns and operations (Joint Publication 3-0).

U.S. Naval War College, Joint Military Operations Department. (2022, January 10). The joint planning process workbook (NWC 4111K).

Secondary Post II #1 (*by September 3, 2025*)

SECONDARY POST RESPONSE

Suzy, strong post and good job focusing on the objective first, followed by clearly defined critical factors. Where I would push back on is the COG itself. A true COG must come from enemy strength, never weakness or vulnerabilities. Weaknesses are entry points, not the hub. Once you identify the hub, break it down into critical capabilities, requirements, and vulnerabilities. This gives planners direct and indirect attack options linked back to the aim. Then test it. If striking the proposed COG does not alter the enemy's ability to keep pursuing the objective, it was not the COG. Reset and start again. I would also use a Red Team to test assumptions, detail branches, and look for potential blind spots. They also help map risk across time, space, and force. One last point. People sometimes call morale or will the COG. That only works if you can tie it to something real, like a capability the force depends on or a requirement it must have to fight. The connection is needed to defend or attack in a plan.

References

N/A

Secondary Post II #2 (*by September 3, 2025*)

SECONDARY POST RESPONSE

Warren, good post. I thought you did well showing the COG as the main source of strength and tying it straight back to the objective right away. That was the right call. I also liked how you stressed critical strengths as the right place to look, since those are what hold the enemy system together. One area to refine is the role of weaknesses. They matter, but they are not the COG. They are entry points that planners can exploit only if they trace back to a critical capability or requirement. I would also stress your point on vulnerabilities. Hitting a CV should usually be an indirect attack, a way to degrade the COG's function without running head-on into its strongest part. That is where Red Teams help, testing whether the chosen COG, once pressured, really blocks the adversary from achieving the objective.

References

N/A

Professor Feedback

Jeff,

Meets Expectations. You nailed all three parts in your response to Suzy: COG definition, identification (Vego's CS-CW-CV), deconstruction (JP's CC-CR-CV) and tied it to OPO. Good work!