

STAFF PROCESSES IN LSCO Pt. 2:  
**RUNNING ESTIMATES**  
(CRAWLING WHEN WE NEED TO RUN)



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## INTRODUCTION

In Army headquarters, commanders frequently leave a meeting without the knowledge they need to know to make decisions. This is mostly the result of insufficient or incomplete running estimates. Staffs often present raw, unrefined data without analysis and are unable to provide the knowledge commanders need to make decisions. Staffs across the Army need to better facilitate commanders' decision-making during large-scale combat operations by focusing running estimates on assessments, conclusions, and recommendations along with associated risk and opportunities.

Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 5-0 *The Operations Process* (2019) defines a running estimate as “the continuous assessment of the current situation used to determine if the current operation is proceeding according to the commander’s intent and if planned future operations are supportable.”<sup>1</sup> Field Manual (FM) 6-0 *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations* (2022) warns, “Failure to maintain running estimates may lead to errors or omissions that result in flawed plans or bad decisions.”<sup>2</sup> Doctrinal publications emphasize the fact that running estimates must be current and relevant, must include analyzed information that is of value to the commander, and must provide recommendations for future decision. Most important, by providing accurate, relevant, and timely running estimates, a staff can assist their commander in identifying opportunities for exploitation which will be crucial to success in large-scale combat.

## REFOCUSING RUNNING ESTIMATES

Staffs frequently present raw data, such as a combat power percentage, vehicle slant, or quantities of a class of supply, and believe that they are providing the commander what is needed to make a decision. Such items are merely data points often detached from current or future operations. Inadequate running estimates are likely the result of a variety of factors, such as:

- Staff members (especially junior members) not knowing the context for an operation. This prevents full understanding of required information by the commander.
- Commanders' being unable or unwilling to articulate information they need for decisions.
- A failure of commanders and staffs to understand what information is needed now and what will be needed in the future.
- Running estimate formats which drive a focus on data when it should focus on the assessments, conclusions, and recommendations.

Observers during multiple warfighter exercises note that commanders often have little to no involvement in operations on the floor of their current operations integration cell (COIC). The running estimates presented in the COIC do not provide the commander enough information needed to understand and visualize the current and future fight to make decisions. While greater senior leader involvement in executing tactical operations will certainly facilitate better understanding and efficiency (similar to naval commanders who are never far away from their vessels' helms) staffs can better support commander involvement in the COIC by providing and displaying relevant running estimates.

The following list from FM 5-0 *Planning and Orders Production* (2022) is information/considerations typically derived from sub-steps of Mission Analysis that should be included in running estimates<sup>3</sup>:

- Facts
- Assumptions
- Friendly force status, including location, activity, and combat power of subordinate units from two echelons down
- Enemy activities and capabilities
- Civil considerations
- Conclusions and recommendations with associated risk

The most important from above are the conclusions and recommendations provided in the context of current and future operations. These items drive a commander's decisions. Much of the integrated, collaborative staff planning and synchronization must occur to conduct effective operations. Staff sections with clear recommendations created a situation where commanders and other staff can clearly see themselves and the enemy, draw appropriate conclusions to drive planning and execution, and continually assess progress towards the commander's desired end state. While the other items listed above are certainly important for informing conclusions and recommendations, this information must always drive towards clear conclusions and recommendations. If they do not, then the staff is tracking a large amount of data and information which will serve little purpose in tracking progress to the commander's desired end state.

### **REFOCUSING STAFF TOOLS**

One of the reasons that staffs and individual staff members do not focus on determining clear conclusions and recommendations is that current tools do not emphasize a focus on such items. Units commonly use a running estimate format which forms quad charts listing facts, assumptions, constraints, limitations, etc. Conclusions and recommendations (seen as the results of the listed facts, assumptions, etc.) are typically listed at the end of this running estimate.

**Running Estimate**

Facts:

Assumptions:

Constraints:

Limitations:

**Running Estimate**

Friendly Status:

Enemy Activities and Capabilities:

Civil Considerations:

Conclusions and Recommendations; Risk:

**Figure 1. Legacy Running Estimates Templates<sup>4</sup>**



Figure 2 has another running estimate template that uses a format like that of an operations order. This format attempts to account for all the mission variables to drive the military decision-making process (MDMP) and allows a staff member to account for multiple factors and create an in-depth running estimate. While a very comprehensive tool in and of itself, this running estimate format is not easily digestible for a commander or other staff sections outside of the section that produced it. Similar to Figure 1, it also lists conclusions and recommendations at the end.

1. SITUATION AND CONSIDERATIONS
  - a. Area of Interest. Identify and describe those factors of the area of interest that affect functional area considerations.
  - b. Characteristics of the area of operations.
    - (1) Terrain. State how terrain affects a functional area’s capabilities.
    - (2) Weather. State how weather affects a functional area’s capabilities.
    - (3) Enemy Forces. Describe enemy disposition, composition, strength, and systems within a functional area. Describe enemy capabilities and possible courses of action (COAs) and their effects on a functional area.
    - (4) Friendly Forces. List current functional area resources in terms of equipment, personnel, and systems. Identify additional resources available for the functional area located at higher echelon, adjacent, or other units. List those capabilities from other military and civilian partners that may be available to provide support in the functional area. Compare requirements to current capabilities and suggest solutions for satisfying discrepancies.
    - (5) Civilian Considerations. Describe civil considerations that may affect the functional area, including possible support needed by civil authorities from the functional area and possible interference from civil aspects.
  - c. Facts and Assumptions. List all facts and assumptions that affect the functional area.
2. MISSION. Show the restated mission resulting from mission analysis.
3. COURSES OF ACTION.
  - a. List friendly COAs that were war-gamed.
  - b. List enemy actions or COAs that were templated that impact the functional area.
  - c. List the evaluation criteria identified during COA analysis. All staffs use the same criteria.
4. ANALYSIS. Analyze each COA using the evaluation criteria from COA analysis. Review enemy actions that impact the functional area as they relate to COAs. Identify issues, risks, and deficiencies these enemy actions may create with respect to the functional area.
5. COMPARISON. Compare COAs. Rank order COAs for each key consideration. Use a decision matrix to aid the comparison process.
6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.
  - a. Recommend the most supportable COAs from the functional area perspective.
  - b. Prioritize and list issues, deficiencies, and risks and provide recommendations on how to mitigate them.

**Figure 2. Running Estimate Template<sup>5</sup>**

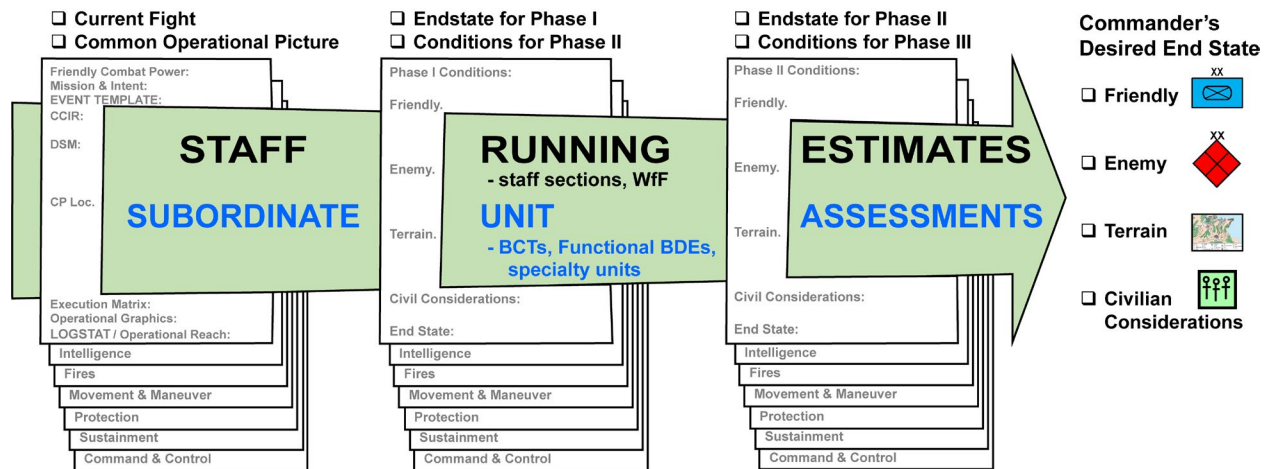
Both templates list the most important part last. This means that the most important part of the running estimate is often relegated to being an afterthought. Instead, this article proposes the use of the tools below or similar tools to refocus the running estimate on conclusions and recommendations. Additionally, the running estimate should serve as a holistic assessment of operations by phase/critical event as opposed to a simple presentation of raw data and information.

**Consolidated Staff Running Estimate, Phase I**

	Critical Event 1	Critical Event 2	End State, PH1
Key Tasks			<u>Friendly:</u>  <u>Enemy:</u>  <u>Terrain:</u>  <u>Civil Considerations:</u>
<b>Overall Staff Conclusion and Recommendation</b>			
Command and Control	Assessment: Conclusions & Recommendations:	A: C&R:	
Movement and Maneuver [to include BCT/CAB LNOs; Mobility/Counter mobility]	A: C&R:	A: C&R:	
Intelligence	A: C&R:	A: C&R:	
Fires [to include DIVARTY LNO]	A: C&R:	A: C&R:	
Protection	A: C&R:	A: C&R:	
Sustainment [to include DSB LNO]	A: C&R:	A: C&R:	

**Figure 3. Consolidated Staff Running Estimate Example<sup>6</sup>**

This template, which can be used for both the common operational picture (COP) and in staff meetings, helps solve several problems with current running estimate formats and briefing products. It presents assessments, conclusions, and recommendations that drive decisions first. It forces staff sections, to include subordinate unit liaison officer (LNOs), to look closely at specific requirements for critical events and phases and their inputs to the feasibility of actions during those phases/events. This helps focus the running estimate and prevents running estimates from becoming compilations of unrelated facts. It also forces staffs to anticipate future requirements and assess progress towards them as opposed to maintaining a myopic focus on current operations. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this running estimate tool ties the current state to the planned end state and assesses progress toward the end state.



**Figure 4. Running Estimates as Assessments toward a Desired End State<sup>7</sup>**

This updated product does not ignore the importance of facts, assumptions, constraints, etc., nor does it make current formats irrelevant, as those formats can still be used to create assessments, conclusions, and recommendations. It instead shifts the focus away from raw data and forces staffs to turn such data into information and knowledge. This data represents the homework necessary to provide the crux of the running estimate: conclusions/recommendations and associated risk. To use a mathematical equation as a metaphor, if  $2+4+3=9$ , with two, four, and three representing facts and nine representing a conclusion, the staff needs to focus on providing the commander the “answer,” nine, and not two, four, or three. However, when prompted, staff members need to be able to provide their data or show their work so their analysis and calculations can be verified.

A focused, consolidated running estimate, like in Figure 5, can be used to begin any staff meeting or sync. This allows the staff and senior leaders to better understand the current situation and progress to the desired end state. A way to use this product during a COIC synchronization meeting, for example, would be displaying two screens in the COIC, one with the common operational picture (COP) on the left and the other with the running estimates on the right, and warfighting function representatives would cycle through to brief in turn. In the assessments working group, a unit could brief the synchronization matrix up front and then display this product to drive conversations on resources/conditions for current and upcoming operations and determine if the unit is on or off plan. This product can also drive any portion of the operations process to inform future plans at any point in the MDMP or any point in the course of an operation. Running estimates must always assess progress toward the designed end state and inform commander decisions in achieving that end state. Additionally, as discussed in ADP 5-0, they must be continuously updated to inform decisions at any time of day.

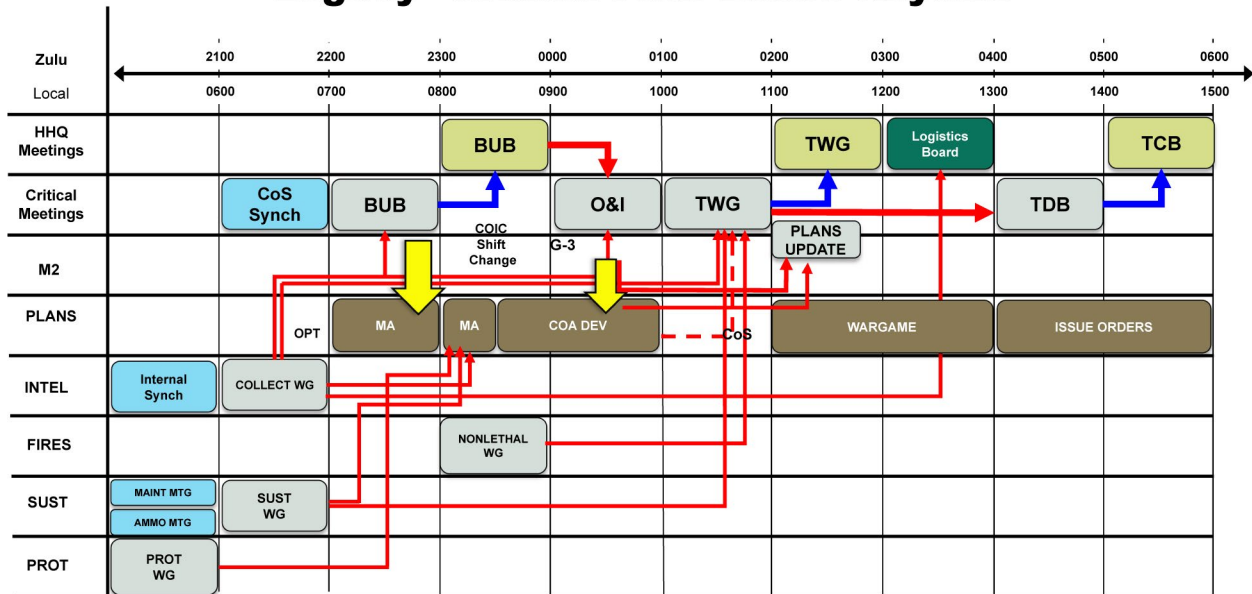
**Example Consolidated Staff Running Estimate, Phase I**

	Critical Event 1: FPOL	Critical Event 2: WGX	End State, PH I
Key Tasks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Destroy enemy reconnaissance BN in disruption zone</li> <li>2. Clear passage lanes for 1 BCT</li> <li>3. Secure Aswan Dam</li> <li>4. Secure GLOCs</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Neutralize ENY Fires Complex</li> <li>2. Emplace 2x Bridging sites</li> <li>3. Seize OBJs Jets and Bills</li> </ol>	<p><u>Friendly:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 1/52 BCT retains minimum 80% Combat Power</li> <li>2. 2/52 BCT postured to pass through 1 BCT</li> <li>3. 3/52 BCT postured to conduct lone-range air assault</li> </ol> <p><u>Enemy:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enemy Integrated Fires Complex at 30% strength and unable to affect WGX sites</li> <li>2. Enemy reserve BTG reduced to 50% strength</li> </ol> <p><u>Terrain:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. OBJs Jets and Bills seized</li> <li>2. 2x Crossing Sites across Nile River secured</li> </ol> <p><u>Civil Considerations:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Aswan Dam secured and intact</li> </ol>
<u>Overall Staff Conclusion and Recommendation</u>	Conditions are set for FPOL, units have sufficient combat power to complete assigned tasks. Recommend FPOL proceed as planned.	ISR and ATK AVN assets will be unable to support the WGX as currently scheduled due to poor weather. <b>With out those assets, there is increased risk to mission due to inability to detect and destroy enemy reserve elements affecting the WGX.</b> Loss of 1x ribbon bridge means insufficient assets are available for WGX; bridge can be replaced in 24 hours. Recommend Delay WGX 24 hours.	
Command and Control	<p><u>Assessment (A):</u> RCP is unable to conduct C2 of Rear Area due to recent IDF strike. MCP and TAC are FMC.</p> <p><u>Conclusions &amp; Recommendations (C&amp;R):</u> Have DSB CP assume temporary role as RCP. Sufficient C2 assets remain to conduct FPOL, execute as planned.</p>	<p><u>A:</u> DSB CP will be FMC and able to conduct C2 of rear area by the time of the WGX.</p> <p><u>C&amp;R:</u> WGX is still viable with MCP and TAC and DSB MCP as RCP.</p>	
Movement and Maneuver [to include BCT/CAB LNOs; Mobility/Counter mobility]	<p><u>A:</u> Route clearance assets have removed obstacles from passage lanes.</p> <p><u>C&amp;R:</u> Passage lanes will be clear for FPOL, remain on planned timeline.</p>	<p><u>A:</u> Loss of 1x ribbon bridge leaves insufficient assets for WGX, but a replacement can be received from Corps within 24 hrs.</p> <p><u>C&amp;R:</u> Request 1x ribbon bridge from Corps; Delay WGX 24 hours.</p>	
Intelligence	<p><u>A:</u> ENY reconnaissance BN in disruption zone destroyed. ENY reserve remains 12 hours from FLOT.</p> <p><u>C&amp;R:</u> ENY unable to affect FPOL with direct fires and can only affect it with 1x ARTY BTY. Execute FPOL as planned.</p>	<p><u>A:</u> Forecasted weather for time period of planned WGX will degrade ISR capabilities. ENY will have ATK aviation elements in place able to affect WGX approx. 48 hours after planned WGX begins.</p> <p><u>C&amp;R:</u> Delay WGX 24 hours. Request Corps and CFACC assets to destroy ENY AVN in Deep Area.</p>	
Fires [to include DIVARTY LNO]	<p><u>A:</u> ENY IDF were able to target RCP due to increased EM signature. ENY IDF assets able to range DIV CPs have retrograded due to fires in Corps Deep Area.</p> <p><u>C&amp;R:</u> Monitor and reduce EM emissions from CPs; Sufficient Friendly IDF assets remain to support FPOL; execute as planned.</p>	<p><u>A:</u> Current expenditure of 155mm ammunition means sufficient ammunition will be on hand to conduct WGX, but units will be unable to have enough O/H to begin next phase.</p> <p><u>C&amp;R:</u> Continue current expenditure of 155mm ammunition, but request resupply NLT 4 hours after the start of the WGX.</p>	
Protection	<p><u>A:</u> 3x ENY SPF elements are able to influence MSR Iron and interfere with sustainment assets in Rear Area, but this will not affect the FPOL itself.</p> <p><u>C&amp;R:</u> Reallocate 1x IN CO from 3 BCT to neutralize SPF along MSR Iron. Execute FPOL as planned.</p>	<p><u>A:</u> Current ADA assets will be insufficient to protect WGX and Aswan Dam against ENY ATK aviation.</p> <p><u>C&amp;R:</u> Request additional ADA CO from Corps. Prioritize O/H ADA assets for Aswan Dam now but shift to WGX once crossing sites are established.</p>	
Sustainment [to include DSB LNO]	<p><u>A:</u> Sufficient classes of supply remain on hand to conduct FPOL. Supporting Role 3 has reached IOC and is able to support the operation. DSB MCP prepared to assume RCP role.</p> <p><u>C&amp;R:</u> Execute FPOL as planned.</p>	<p><u>A:</u> Aerial resupply is unavailable for WGX as currently planned due to weather.</p> <p><u>C&amp;R:</u> Develop and prioritize a FLE for movement to the far side of the WGX within 24 hours of establishment of crossing sites to provide sustainment that was to be delivered by air.</p>	

**Figure 5. Completed Consolidated Staff Running Estimate Example<sup>8</sup>**

A focused running estimate also needs to account for current unit knowledge management processes. Regardless of where and how it is stored and accessed, the estimate must be updated constantly irrespective of the meeting schedule and must always be accessible to the commander and across the staff. If a unit keeps this product updated and accessible, it can be used in any meeting and drive planning regardless of the planning horizon. Accessibility challenges will manifest themselves for units which do not possess upper-tactical internet systems, or which do not possess such systems on the move, in which case units must be prepared to distribute these running estimates in an analog manner. If it is accessible and updated, the running estimate can provide the information the commander needs at any time during the [rhythm of the battle](#) referenced in an earlier white paper. Refocusing unit running estimates in this manner will allow staff sections to update running estimates in the absence of a robust battle rhythm like that depicted below, a battle rhythm which never survives first contact during large-scale combat operations.

## “Legacy” Critical Path Battle Rhythm



**Figure 6. Robust battle rhythm showing information flowing in “critical paths” between meetings.<sup>9</sup>**

This structure is too inflexible for large-scale combat as running estimates are only updated once or twice daily in support of follow-on meetings. Continuously updated running estimates presenting clear conclusions and recommendations will allow commanders and staffs to identify opportunities to exploit around the clock.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR RUNNING ESTIMATES

Having provided an updated focus and conceptual framework for running estimates, the following list of considerations will provide more specific items which need to be in an individual staff section’s running estimate as they create their conclusions and recommendations. While not an exhaustive list, these items provide a starting point from which to build a running estimate and start the background analysis required to give cogent conclusions and recommendations to a commander and keep the entire staff informed.

- The combat power, location, and status of a particular capability or function, often low-density, overseen by a given staff section. Examples include bridging assets; chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) decontamination equipment; or counter-battery radar. Staff sections serving as the subject matter experts (SME) on these items need to be prepared to provide clear recommendations on task organization and employment of these assets and availability of such assets in adjacent and higher headquarters units.
- Commander’s critical information requirements (CCIR) or essential elements of friendly information (EEFI) for which a staff section provides subject matter expertise.
- The process and planned time requirements for an asset or capability external to the unit in question.
- Benefits or conflicts stemming from effects used by adjacent or higher echelons which a staff section provides subject matter expertise.

- Actions or capabilities on the delegated authorities matrix which a staff section provides subject matter expertise.
- Mandated sections of the unit common operational picture which a staff section provides subject matter expertise.
- Relevant portions of the unit assessment and assessments working group which a staff section provides subject matter expertise.
- Coordination for an item in the rules of engagement.
- Latest subordinate, adjacent, and higher headquarters reports within a staff section's area of expertise.

All of these processes or key items of information, along with the processes for developing that information, must be codified in a unit/staff section standard operating procedure (SOP). As stated previously, not all of the items listed above need to be briefed to the commander or across the staff. However, these items are important pieces of data and information which should inform a staff section's conclusions and recommendations briefed to a commander. Analysis of these items allows a staff section to conduct the homework which informs the commander and rest of the staff of important considerations as they monitor and plan operations.

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, staff running estimates need to pivot their focus to conclusions/recommendations and associated risk as well as opportunities to exploit. They can do this if units re-prioritize what the focus of meetings and the associated products need to be. Staffs must brief commanders their conclusions and recommendations for each part of an upcoming operation while being prepared to go over the homework that drove those conclusions/recommendations, but they should not brief the homework by default. Ultimately, if staff running estimates provide the conclusions and recommendations a commander needs for decision making and assessing progress toward an end state, they achieve their purpose, regardless of the actual format.

## END NOTES

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7. Villaneuva, James MAJ. Running Estimates as Assessments toward a Desired End State. Operations Group B, Mission Command Training Program. 13 February 2024.
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