Most Dangerous Course of Action (MDCOA) | **Student Companion Guide**
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COMPANION GUIDE TO ONLINE TRAINING

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INT-06: MOST DANGEROUS COURSE OF ACTION (MDCOA) STUDENT COMPANION GUIDE

The Analyst's Worst-Case Planning Reference

Capability & Intent Inputs, Course-of-Action Construction, the FACES Feasibility Test, and the OAKOC → MDCOA → ACH Pipeline

Five Lessons · COA Comparison Matrix · FACES Feasibility Worksheet · MDCOA/MLCOA Development Worksheet

Edition v1.0 · 2026

Semper Paratus, Semper Gumby

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INT-06: MOST DANGEROUS COURSE OF ACTION (MDCOA) — STUDENT COMPANION GUIDE

Companion Guide to Online Training

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This companion guide is designed to be used alongside the INT-06 Most Dangerous Course of Action online training series — the online lessons are the instruction. This guide contains reference tables, worksheets, and the MDCOA/MLCOA Development Worksheet plus COA Comparison Matrix only. It cannot be used as a standalone document.

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What this guide contains

For each of the five online lessons: a condensed reference summary covering only the key terms, tables, and standards — not the instruction. The MLCOA/MDCOA distinction table, the FACES feasibility test, the five-element COA structure, and the OAKOC → MDCOA → ACH pipeline diagram are included as working references. The MDCOA/MLCOA Development Worksheet and COA Comparison Matrix are in Part II. The instruction is delivered online — this guide is what you use in the field and when documenting your group's threat planning.

Required workflow — online lessons BEFORE using this guide

ORDER MATTERS

Do not open any section of this guide until the corresponding online lesson has been completed. The condensed summaries here are reference material, not instruction. The sequence below is required, not suggested.

Step 1 — Support the development and availability of these courses by subscribing to my Patreon: patreon.com/fortunefavorstheprepared

Step 2 — Access the online lessons at fortunefavorstheprepared.com/int-06-landing/

Step 3 — Complete all five lessons including knowledge checks, in sequence — Lesson 5 assumes Lessons 1–4 are complete

Step 4 — Use this guide in the field as a reference and to complete your group's MDCOA/MLCOA Development Worksheet and COA Comparison Matrix

THIS GUIDE IS NOT STANDALONE

The instruction for each lesson is delivered through the online training series. This guide contains condensed reference tables and blank worksheets only. If you have not completed the online lessons, this guide will not teach you the material — it will give you tables whose meaning you do not yet understand.

Guide Map — What to Reference When

When you need...	Turn to...
The core MLCOA vs. MDCOA distinction and why conflating them is dangerous	Part I, Chapter 1
A refresher on capability and intent as MDCOA inputs, and the OAKOC tie-in	Part I, Chapter 2
The five-element structure for writing any course of action (what/when/where/how/why)	Part I, Chapter 3
The FACES feasibility test and a comparative damage/plausibility scoring approach	Part I, Chapter 4
The OAKOC → MDCOA → ACH pipeline and how MDCOA/MLCOA become ACH hypotheses	Part I, Chapter 5
A blank worksheet to draft your own MLCOA and MDCOA for a real threat	Part II, Worksheet A
A blank matrix to compare multiple candidate COAs side by side	Part II, Worksheet B
Definitions for every acronym and term used across the course	Part III, Glossary
A single-page pull-everything-together summary card	Part III, Quick Reference Card

PART I — QUICK REFERENCE

Condensed summaries for Lessons 1–5. Complete each online lesson before reading its chapter here.

Chapter 1 — MDCOA vs. MLCOA: Two Different Questions

Reference for Lesson 1. Covers the core vocabulary and the reason these two judgments are not interchangeable.

Core definitions

Term	Definition
MLCOA	Most Likely Course of Action — what the threat is probably going to do, based on current indicators, pattern of behavior, and doctrine/habit.
MDCOA	Most Dangerous Course of Action — the realistic course of action that would cause the greatest harm to your mission, safety, or resources if the threat chose it, even though it is not the probable choice.
Threat	Any adversary — human, environmental, or situational — whose action could work against you. MDCOA applies beyond hostile people; it applies to any actor or force with a range of possible behaviors.
Branch plan	A pre-built contingency triggered when a specific indicator shows the MDCOA (not the MLCOA) is unfolding.

Why the distinction matters

Planning only against the MLCOA leaves a gap: if the threat takes a lower-probability but higher-damage path, there is no branch plan ready. Planning only against the MDCOA wastes resources on a worst case that rarely materializes and neglects the everyday posture the MLCOA calls for. The two judgments serve different jobs and both are required.

Aspect	MLCOA drives…	MDCOA drives…
Primary use	Day-to-day posture and routine planning	Contingencies, branch plans, and early-warning indicators
Basis	Current pattern, habit, doctrine	Feasible worst case given known capability and intent
Risk if ignored	Being mildly surprised — usually recoverable	Being caught with no contingency for the scenario that actually hurts the most

Reference note — MDCOA/MLCOA as ACH hypotheses

Both judgments can be run as explicit, competing hypotheses inside an Analysis of Competing Hypotheses (ACH) matrix rather than left as a single narrative choice. See Chapter 5 and INT-01.

Chapter 2 — Adversary Capability and Intent as Inputs

Reference for Lesson 2. No credible MDCOA can be built without first establishing capability (what the threat can do) and intent (what the threat wants).

The two inputs

Input	Working question	Where it comes from
Capability	What means, numbers, equipment, knowledge, and access does the threat actually have?	Direct observation, pattern-of-life data, terrain analysis (OAKOC), known history
Intent	What does the threat ultimately want — resources, territory, elimination of a witness, survival?	Stated goals, past behavior, situational pressure, group dynamics

OAKOC cross-reference (INT-07)

Terrain shapes what a threat is capable of. If INT-07 (OAKOC) has already been completed, pull the relevant terrain factors directly into the capability side of this worksheet rather than re-deriving them from scratch.

OAKOC factor	Feeds into…
Observation & Fields of Fire	Whether the threat can see/target you from a given position — a capability input
Avenues of Approach	The routes a threat could realistically use — shapes what COAs are even feasible
Key Terrain	Ground worth controlling — tells you what a resource-motivated threat may move toward
Obstacles	What slows or channels the threat — a capability constraint
Cover & Concealment	Whether a threat can approach undetected — shapes stealth-dependent COAs

If INT-07 has not been taken yet

Lesson 2 online includes a condensed recap of the five OAKOC factors above so this course can stand on its own until INT-07 is live. Take INT-07 when available for the full treatment.

Chapter 3 — Building a Course of Action: Structure and Elements

Reference for Lesson 3. A course of action (COA) is not a vague worry — it is a specific, testable statement built from five elements.

The five elements of a COA

Element	Question it answers
What	What specific action does the threat take?
When	At what point in the timeline, or under what triggering condition?
Where	At what location, route, or terrain feature?
How	By what method, using what means?
Why	In service of what intent or end state?

Worked scenario categories used in Lesson 3

- A burglary or opportunistic-theft crew probing a residence or MAG cache
- A hostile individual or small group testing a community's perimeter or response time
- A resource-scarcity scenario where a larger, organized group considers a coordinated approach

Each online scenario has the student draft the five elements for both an MLCOA and an MDCOA version of the same threat, so the contrast in Chapter 1 becomes a concrete habit rather than an abstraction.

Chapter 4 — Stress-Testing: Is This COA Actually the Most Dangerous?

Reference for Lesson 4. The most common failure mode in MDCOA work is writing 'the scariest story imaginable' instead of a credible worst case. This chapter's tools guard against that.

The FACES feasibility test

Letter	Stands for	Litmus-test question
F	Feasible	Does the threat have the means and the time to execute this?
A	Acceptable	Is the risk to the threat itself worth it, given what they stand to gain?
C	Complete	Does executing this COA actually achieve the threat's stated intent?
E	Exclusive	Is this genuinely a distinct course of action, not a minor variation of another one already listed?
S	Suitable	Does this align with the threat's known doctrine, habits, or pattern of behavior — or does it require them to act wildly out of character?

A candidate COA that fails FACES on even one letter is not a valid MDCOA — it is speculation. Reject it or revise it until it passes all five.

Comparative scoring: damage potential vs. plausibility

When more than one COA survives FACES, compare them directly rather than picking by gut feeling. Score each candidate on two axes — Low / Medium / High — for damage potential (how badly it would hurt you if it happened) and plausibility (how likely the threat is to actually choose it, given intent and capability). The MDCOA is the highest-damage COA that still clears a credible plausibility bar — not simply the single most damaging scenario a student can imagine.

Candidate COA	Damage potential	Plausibility	Passes FACES?
(example) Roadblock ambush at sole bridge crossing	High	Medium	Yes
(example) Feigned-compliance return raid at night	High	Medium	Yes
(example) Frontal daylight assault on a hardened position	High	Low — fails Acceptable/Suitable	No

Chapter 5 — Capstone: From OAKOC to MDCOA to ACH

Reference for Lesson 5. This chapter ties INT-07, INT-06, and INT-01 together as one working system rather than three isolated tools.

The three-stage pipeline

Stage	Course	Output feeding the next stage
1. Terrain & capability analysis	INT-07 (OAKOC)	What the terrain makes possible for a given threat
2. Course-of-action construction	INT-06 (MDCOA/MLCOA)	A drafted MLCOA and a FACES-tested MDCOA, each as a five-element statement
3. Structured hypothesis testing	INT-01 (ACH)	MLCOA and MDCOA entered as competing hypotheses in an ACH matrix, weighed against the same evidence

Why run MDCOA through ACH at all?

A COA is a judgment, not a fact. Running the MLCOA and MDCOA as explicit, side-by-side hypotheses against the same evidence in an ACH matrix keeps the analyst honest — it exposes whether the MDCOA is actually earning its evidentiary keep or is just the loudest story in the room.

PART II — WORKSHEETS

Photocopy blank, or reproduce digitally, before filling in — keep a clean master.

Worksheet A — MDCOA/MLCOA Development Worksheet

Use after completing Lessons 1–4. Draft one MLCOA and one MDCOA for a single real or exercise threat facing your household, homestead, or MAG.

1. Threat identification

Threat description	Notes

2. Capability & intent inputs

Capability (what can they do?)	Intent (what do they want?)

3. Draft MLCOA — five elements

What	When	Where	How	Why

4. Draft MDCOA — five elements

What	When	Where	How	Why

5. FACES check on the draft MDCOA

F	A	C	E	S	Passes overall? (Y/N)

6. Indicators / signposts and mitigations

Indicator that MDCOA (not MLCOA) is unfolding	Mitigation / branch plan

Worksheet B — COA Comparison Matrix

Use in Lesson 4 when more than one candidate course of action survives the FACES test. Score each candidate before selecting which one is treated as the working MDCOA.

Candidate COA (brief label)	Damage potential (L/M/H)	Plausibility (L/M/H)	Passes FACES (Y/N)	Selected as MDCOA? (Y/N)

PART III — APPENDIX

Glossary

Term	Definition
MDCOA	Most Dangerous Course of Action — the feasible course of action that would cause the greatest harm if the threat chose it.
MLCOA	Most Likely Course of Action — the course of action the threat is probably going to take.
COA	Course of Action — a specific, testable statement of what a threat could do, built from the five elements (what/when/where/how/why).
FACES	Feasibility test for a candidate COA: Feasible, Acceptable, Complete, Exclusive, Suitable.
Branch plan	A pre-built contingency triggered by a specific indicator that the MDCOA, not the MLCOA, is unfolding.
Indicator / signpost	An observable event or condition that would warn an analyst a given COA is being executed.
OAKOC	Terrain analysis framework (Observation & Fields of Fire, Avenues of Approach, Key Terrain, Obstacles, Cover & Concealment) — see INT-07.
ACH	Analysis of Competing Hypotheses — a structured technique for weighing multiple hypotheses against the same evidence set. See INT-01.
METT-TC	Mission, Enemy, Terrain, Troops, Time, Civilian considerations — the broader analysis frame MDCOA/MLCOA sit inside.

Quick Reference Card

One-page pull-together summary

1. Establish capability and intent before drafting any COA (Ch. 2).

2. Draft the MLCOA first — it sets your baseline posture (Ch. 1).

3. Draft at least one MDCOA using the five-element structure: what/when/where/how/why (Ch. 3).

4. Run every candidate MDCOA through FACES before accepting it. A COA that fails FACES is not a valid worst case — revise or discard it (Ch. 4).

5. When multiple candidates pass FACES, score damage potential and plausibility side by side; the MDCOA is the highest-damage candidate that still clears a credible plausibility bar (Ch. 4).

6. Where possible, run the MLCOA and MDCOA as explicit competing hypotheses in an ACH matrix rather than relying on narrative judgment alone (Ch. 5, INT-01).