



ASSESSMENT: GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Last Updated: 04 November 2016

Assessment is a continuous process that measures the overall effectiveness of employing joint force capabilities during military operations. It is also the determination of the progress toward accomplishing a task, creating an effect, or achieving an objective (Joint Publication [JP] 3-0, [Joint Operations](#)). The purpose of assessment is to support the commander's decision-making process by providing insight into the effectiveness of the strategy and accompanying plans. Many types of assessment exist, and may be used in support of operations, but assessment in this document refers to activities that support the commander's decision-making process. In an [effects-based approach](#), assessment should provide the commander with the answers to these basic questions:

- ✦ Are we doing things right?
- ✦ Are we doing the right things?
- ✦ Are we measuring the right things?

The first question addresses the *performance* of planned airpower operations by assessing the completion of [tasks](#). The second question addresses the level at which the commander's desired *effects* are being observed in the [operational area](#) and prompts examination of the *links* between performance and effects. The third question addresses the process of assessment itself and the importance of understanding how one chooses to measure the links between performance, cause, and effect. When determined properly, the answers to these questions should provide the commander with valid information upon which to base decisions about strategy.

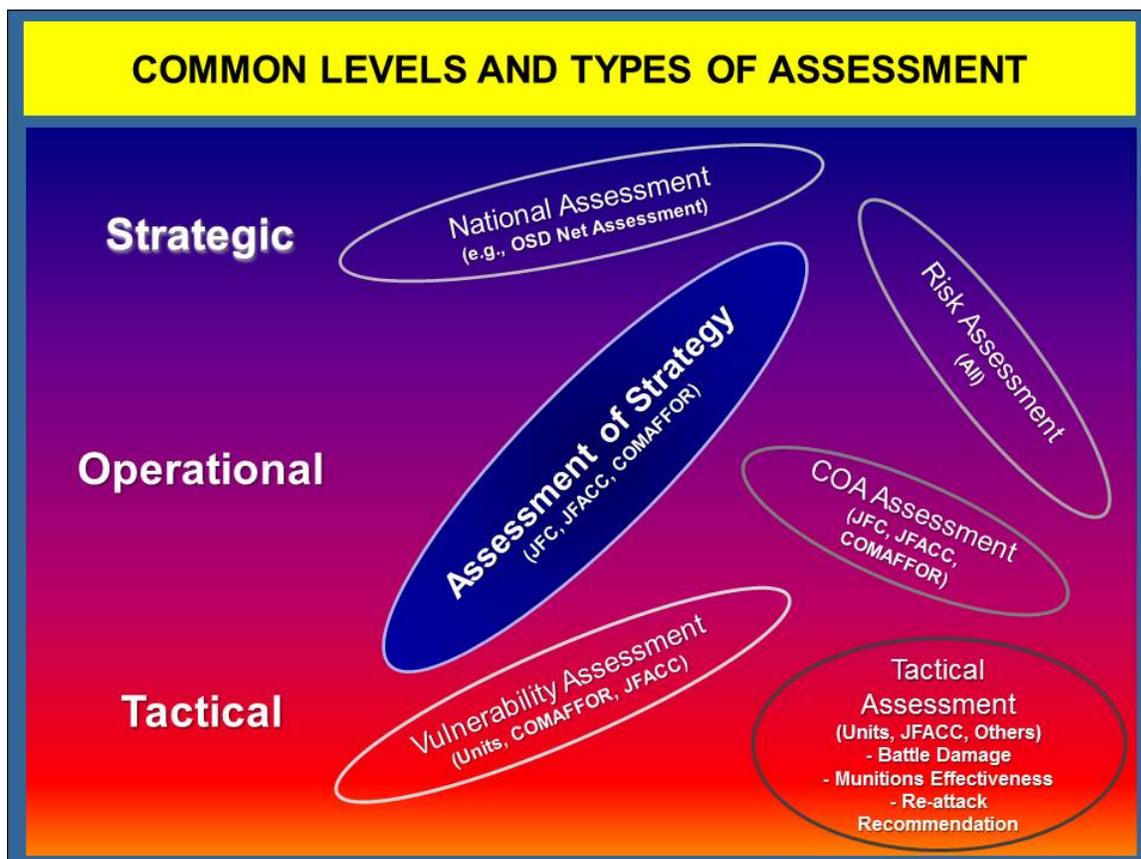
While often depicted as a separate "stage" of the [tasking cycle](#) for conceptual clarity, assessment is actually interwoven throughout [operational design](#), planning, and execution. The assessment process should begin as the broad [strategy](#) is laid out (including development of assessment criteria), continue through detailed planning (with the development of metrics and data sources), and extend to evaluation of measures during and after execution. This process is iterative as assessment results influence future strategy and planning.

Assessment consolidates data from many sources and summarizes that data clearly, concisely, and in context. It should follow a rigorous, defensible analytical process that provides commanders and planners the ability to view details of methods used and results produced. It communicates relevant uncertainty in the data and the associated

risks. In short, assessment provides analytically supportable judgments on a commander's strategy.

LEVELS OF ASSESSMENT

Assessors perform many types of [assessment](#) across the [strategic](#), [operational](#), and [tactical levels](#) to inform a wide array of decisions. The figure, "Common Levels and Types of Assessment" displays some common types of assessment and, broadly, the levels where each would most likely be applied (the depiction is not all-inclusive). The figure also shows the level of commander who commonly directs a given type of assessment (e.g., the [joint force commander](#) [JFC] and [joint force air component commander](#) [JFACC]). At all levels—but especially at the operational level—the commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR), JFACC, and respective staffs should observe how the JFC takes information "on board" and craft assessment products that convey the Airman's perspective without seeming "air-centric" or presenting a biased view. All these types of assessment, with certain combat-related exceptions in the realm of tactical assessment, apply across the range of military operations, in steady-state as well as contingency conditions.



Common Levels and Types of Assessment

Tactical-level assessment is generally performed at the unit or joint force component level and typically measures physical, empirical achievement of direct [effects](#). Combat assessment (CA) is an umbrella term covering [battle damage assessment](#) (BDA), [munitions effectiveness assessment](#) (MEA), and recommendations for re-attack (RR).

BDA is the estimate composed of physical and functional damage assessment, as well as target system assessment, resulting from the application of lethal or nonlethal

military force. BDA consists of three phases. Phase I BDA consists of reporting physical damage (kinetic) or other changes (nonkinetic) to the target and, if possible, evaluating the physical damage or change to the target quantitatively or qualitatively. Phase II BDA measures what effect the weapon had on that individual target and to what extent it can perform its intended function. Phase III BDA then measures the effect of striking a particular target on the overall target system (e.g., what effect does taking out a [command and control](#) [C2] node have on the overall combat capability of an [integrated air defense system](#)? This might relate to the overall effect of gaining and maintaining [air superiority](#)). MEA evaluates whether the selected weapon or munition functioned as intended. MEA is fed back into the planning process to validate or adjust weaponeering and platform selections. RR and future targeting recommendations merge the picture of what was done (BDA) with how it was done (MEA), comparing the result with predetermined measures of effectiveness, to determine the degree of success in achieving objectives and to formulate required follow-on actions, or indicate readiness to move on to new tasks.

Another assessment consideration at the tactical level is estimated damage assessment (EDA). EDA is a type of physical damage assessment; it anticipates damage using the probability of weapon effectiveness to support estimated assessments and allows commanders to accept risk in the absence of other information. Often in execution, it is not possible to wait on verification of strike results without inordinately delaying the presentation of assessments to decision makers. EDA uses a host of data to estimate weapons effectiveness on targets and target systems prior to BDA confirmation. This is made possible by the precision and reliability of modern weapon systems. In general, EDA is appropriate for all but high-priority targets, but consideration for schemes of maneuver and the strategic implications should always be considered. Normally, the COMAFFOR (as such, or in his role as JFACC) provides guidance as to which targets and target sets he is willing to accept risk for when authorizing assessments based on EDA.

Tactical-level assessment should also be accomplished following tactical employment of [nonkinetic actions](#) and non-offensive capabilities. Examples include [military information support operations](#) (MISO; e.g., Commando Solo missions), [public affairs](#) (PA; e.g., media engagements), [cyberspace](#) operations (e.g., temporary utility outages), [operations security](#) (OPSEC; e.g., signature management), etc. Tactical-level assessment is described in greater detail in Annex 3-60, [Targeting](#).

Operational-level assessment is the component's evaluation of whether its objectives—at the tactical and operational levels—are being achieved. Operational assessment addresses effects, operational execution, environmental influences, and attainment of success indicators for the objectives to help the COMAFFOR/JFACC decide how to adapt the component's portion of the joint force strategy. Assessment at this level begins to evaluate complex [indirect effects](#), track progress toward operational and strategic [objectives](#), and make recommendations for [strategy](#) adjustments and future action extending beyond tactical re-attack. Assessment at this level often entails evaluation of [course of action](#) (COA) success, assessment of the progress of overall strategy, and joint force vulnerability assessment. Operational assessment should also include evaluation of changes to key parameters of adversary force performance, changes in adversary capabilities, and what the adversary is doing to limit the effects of friendly actions and to overcome friendly strategy. These are commonly performed by joint force component commanders and the JFC and their staffs.

Operational-level assessment evaluates a wide range of data: Quantitative and qualitative, objective and subjective, observed and inferred. Some measures can be expressed empirically (with quantitative measures); others, like [psychological effects](#), may have to be expressed in qualitative or subjective terms. Both rely on extensive data and analysis from [federated](#) intelligence partners, including other US government agencies and multinational partners.

Strategic-level assessment addresses issues at the joint force (“theater strategic,” as in bringing a particular conflict to a favorable conclusion) and national levels (enduring security concerns and interests). It involves a wide array of methodologies, participants, and inputs. The President and [Secretary of Defense](#) rely on progress reports produced by the [combatant commander](#) or other relevant JFC, so assessment at their levels often shapes the nation’s, or even the world’s, perception of progress in an operation. This places a unique burden on assessors, planners, strategists, and commanders to be accurate, meaningful, and to complete their analysis and communicate results clearly and logically.

The time frames considered by the various assessment types may vary widely, from rather short intervals at the tactical level to longer time horizons at the strategic level, even reaching well beyond the end of an operation, as lessons learned are determined and absorbed. The relationship among the various assessment types is not linear, with outputs from one type often feeding multiple other types and levels.
