



PLANNING FOR STRATEGIC ATTACK

Last Reviewed: 13 August 2014

Strategic attack (SA) planning requires understanding not only of the strategic level of warfare, where the effects of SA are manifested, but also of the operational level of war, because it is at this level the planning, conduct, control, and sustainment of SA occur. Hence, planning should take place within the overall context of campaign planning.

The commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR) should provide the joint force commander (JFC) with SA options early in the planning process. Even though SA is a function often carried out by Air Force forces, it is vital that it be understood and accepted at the JFC or combatant commander (CCDR) level during course of action (COA) development and before component planning starts and before COAs are developed. To be used effectively, SA should be integrated and sequenced with other instruments of national power (IOPs). For example, some forms of coercive diplomacy may require that political actions be carefully synchronized with military actions in order to credibly convey a threat of force or an appropriate sense of urgency. SA during LINEBACKER II in Vietnam was carefully orchestrated with diplomatic overtures to North Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and China, which combined to coerce a peace settlement with terms acceptable to the US. Other situations may require the careful integration of informational or economic efforts as well.

Once planning for an operation is initiated, the JFC's strategic estimate constitutes the "first look" at military objectives, the strategic environment, the threat, and possible alternative COAs. This is when a COA featuring SA, whether stand-alone or in a complementary role, should be introduced. The COMAFFOR, as the component commander possessing the preponderance of capability, should recommend SA as an option at this stage, even though taskings to the components have not yet been formalized.

Analysis usually contained in the strategic estimate can be vital for effective SA operations. The estimate should include an evaluation of enemy leadership (in particular its underlying psychology and motivations), governing mechanisms, bureaucratic politics, and political vulnerabilities. Enemy leadership is usually the "target audience" (if not the outright target) for SA and so it is vital to understand how the leadership thinks, gathers or disseminates information and what underlies its choice

of COAs. The estimate may also be the only place where strategic [centers of gravity](#) (COG), the focus of SA, are defined. Analysis of leadership in the estimate is critical because some aspect of the leadership most often comprises a strategic COG. Even if leadership is not the sole COG, its connectivity and relationship to others shape how other COGs are affected. Proper strategic-level causal linkage analysis is a critical part of strategic attack planning.
