GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STRATEGY

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Strategy is a major focus of this document. The very broad joint definition of strategy[1] suffices for the most expansive military meanings (such as described in national-level strategy documents), but in its more commonly understood sense, strategy is a means of arranging and managing ways, means, and risk to achieve an end or set of ends. It produces a set of options an actor can choose from to achieve objectives. Strategy, in its military sense, is the art of creating military courses of action that encompasses the processes of operational design, planning, execution, and assessment.

Strategy is More Art than Science

Strategy depends upon operational art, the creative means through which commanders and staffs develop strategies to organize and employ military forces.[2] As such, there is more art than science to the military commander's craft. There are many aspects of operations that yield to scientific scrutiny. For instance, direct, immediate weapon effects can be accurately anticipated. The further one gets from immediate effects, however, the harder it becomes to predict indirect outcomes. Science can greatly aid strategy formulation, but the utility of science often does not extend beyond immediate effects—assessment and adaptation require judgment and intuition on the part of commanders and strategists.

Strategy should never be deterministic and prescriptive,[3] no matter how advanced intelligence analysis technology becomes. Even "perfect" knowledge of the operational environment does not impart perfect or predictive knowledge of adversaries and their intentions, because the results of contact between living systems are interactively complex and non-linear. They lead to emergent behaviors that often cannot be anticipated before interaction begins. **Strategy should be *estimative* and *anticipatory*, rather than predictive or deterministic.**

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[1] "A prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives." (Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations*)

[2] "Operational art is the use of creative thinking by commanders and staff to design strategies, campaigns, and major operations and organize and employ military forces" (JP 3-0).

[3] Deterministic and prescriptive systems obey fixed laws and have no randomness involved in development of future system states, thus always yielding the same outcomes given the same inputs. This is not true of strategy or warfare in general.

Commanders and strategists should avoid "numbers traps." They should not trust quantified or seemingly empirical solutions to problems only because they appear more "objective," more "scientific," or better able to produce quantifiable (but nonetheless often deceptive) **measures of success.** Many times numbers are used to give the illusion of objectivity, but they obscure the fact that many quantifiable evaluation criteria are as subjective as qualitative (non-numerical) criteria.

Effective Strategy Seeks to Gain *Continuing Advantage*

Any plan encompasses a finite period of time. From a strategic perspective, the methods used to achieve objectives and reach the end state(s) may carry implications well beyond the conclusion of an operation. The purpose of military strategy is not just to "win" or conquer, it is to *resolve the conflict* by creating conditions that are at least better for friendly interests, and are often better for all parties involved, and do so in a way that endures for as long as possible. Thus, a strategic perspective recognizes that **strategy's ultimate purpose is the attainment and maintenance of an end state that leads to *continuing advantage* for friendly interests.** As operations unfold, strategy should remain attuned to an end state that imparts continuing advantage to friendly interests as long as possible (and often also to neutral and formerly hostile interests), even if the end state changes from original conditions. This should include envisioning the after-effects of military operations on the operational environment. What should conditions be like several years down the road? Strategists should seek to answer this question and the answer should guide military operations in order to produce a better peace.

Strategy Encompasses Ends, Ways, Means, and Risk

Strategy is an aspect of operational art that should integrate the reasons an operation is being conducted—the objectives and end state(s) (*ends*); the methods by which the nds are achieved—military concepts of operations (CONOPS) and courses of action (COAs) (*ways*); the tools and resources needed to execute the strategy, such as military forces and supplies (*means*); and the amount of cost, uncertainty, and vulnerability the commander and national leadership are willing to accept in executing the strategy, as well as the potential consequences of taking the entailed risks.

Strategy is Adaptive, Not Static

Strategy evolves over time in a continuous, iterative process; there is no static, single, or "final" strategy or plan. Commanders and strategists should never assume the plans they create will remain static or be executed as conceived, but should create strategy with the assumption that strategy will need to evolve.

Strategy should adjust as the adversary reacts to friendly moves and as circumstances change. Therefore, strategy creation should be cyclic and iterative. Chance and the enemy always "have a vote," and the operational environment changes as the antagonists and other parties react and adapt to actions taken. Objectives, desired

effects, and tasks often change as the operational environment changes. Strategists should adjust to such changes and adapt to enemy choices and actions. Mental preparation and anticipation is the best defense against surprise.

Strategy and Planning Involve Different Types of Thinking

Operational design is "the conception and construction of a framework that underpins a campaign or major operation plan and its subsequent execution" (Joint Publication [JP] *5-0, Joint Operation Planning*). In operational design, commanders' and strategists' thought and discourse resembles the interplay between architects and their clients at the start of a building project. They should determine a broad framework for the problem[4] (are they building a hospital or a highway?) Planners should try to break the larger problem down into less complex elements that can be engineered, while the commander and strategists should continue to regard the problem in "holistic" terms. Maintaining a "holistic" perspective is necessary, since solving a problem's simpler constituent elements does not guarantee solving a larger complex problem as a whole. In other words, winning a battle (complex element) does not guarantee winning the war (holistic view). Strategists should determine how broadly and deeply differing aspects of the operational environment must be researched during mission analysis in order to create a proper framework. Design also requires fairly open discussion up and down the chain of command—in which "clients" (national leadership), the "architect" (joint force commander [JFC]), and the "engineers" (strategy and planning staff) should converse frankly and feel free to openly disagree about concepts that underpin planning for campaigns and major operations. Design involves a great deal more operational art than science, especially for the commander.

Ultimately, design results in mission and intent statements that reflect the commander's vision for the overall operation (including end states that lead to continuing advantage). With this guidance clearly given, strategists and planners can concentrate on discrete problems that can be solved through the military's more formalized planning processes. This is akin to engineers taking the architect's sketches or models and turning them into blueprints and schematics that can then be used by foremen and craftsmen (the equivalent of tactical-level planners) to flesh out detail and implement the plan. The type of thinking involved in planning is thus more formalized and structured, is more concerned with matching resources to requirements, and involves more "operational science" than does design (although operational art is also required during planning).

[4] "Operational design is a process of iterative understanding and problem framing that supports commanders and staffs in their application of operational art…. The essence of problem framing is to examine the "problem" from multiple perspectives and set conditions for "learning" about the "problem" throughout…planning and execution…" (JP 5-0; emphasis in original). "Problem framing" is widely regarded as the central, most crucial element of design, in both military and civilian applications.

Strategy Should Integrate Military Power at All Levels with Other Instruments of National and Multinational Power

It is usually beyond the scope of authority for commanders, Air Force forces (COMAFFORs) to direct the integration of elements of national power beyond the military forces for which they are directly responsible. In fact, this is often beyond the authority of the JFC or even the combatant commander (CCDR) in whose area of responsibility (AOR) an operation is taking place. Nonetheless, all commanders are usually constrained to operate with other agencies of the United States government, within international coalitions, and with international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Sometimes these relationships can restrain commanders' freedom of action, but just as often they open opportunities for integrating diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments of power (IOPs) with military efforts and thus give commanders a wider range of options with which to create intended effects. COMAFFORs, especially when acting as joint force air component commanders (JFACCs), should be prepared to operate as part of a multi-agency and multinational team and, in some cases, to direct personnel from non-Department of Defense (DOD) agencies and multinational partners in support of JFC objectives. **Effective military operations require careful integration of the efforts of all appropriate "actors" within the operational environment.**

All the IOPs that actors (state or non-state) may wield are inextricably interrelated. Political considerations are critical, but so are economic, cultural, informational, and other considerations. Strategy should seek to integrate all relevant IOPs in order to deliver an end state that is, itself, a combination of conditions reflecting all aspects of power.

Military strategy at the theater level is normally derived from strategy guidance given by US leadership and multinational partners. At the same time, theater strategy (and all efforts down to tactical tasks) seeks to attain an end state that will enhance national strategic interests, and often those of an alliance, coalition, community of interested states or multinational organizations, embodying the doctrinal concept of unity of effort.[5] JFCs, component commanders, and their staffs should incorporate members of other governmental agencies, representatives of other governments (especially their militaries), NGOs, and intergovernmental organizations (like the United Nations [UN]), as appropriate, in their strategy deliberations. It is often very important for JFACCs and their staffs to have such connectivity, since their forces can be called upon to create strategic effects directly aimed at achieving the strategic-level objectives of these organizations. The JFC and component commanders may also have a significant influence on the COA chosen by higher authorities and so component commanders' strategists should normally assist with operational design. Operational-level planning

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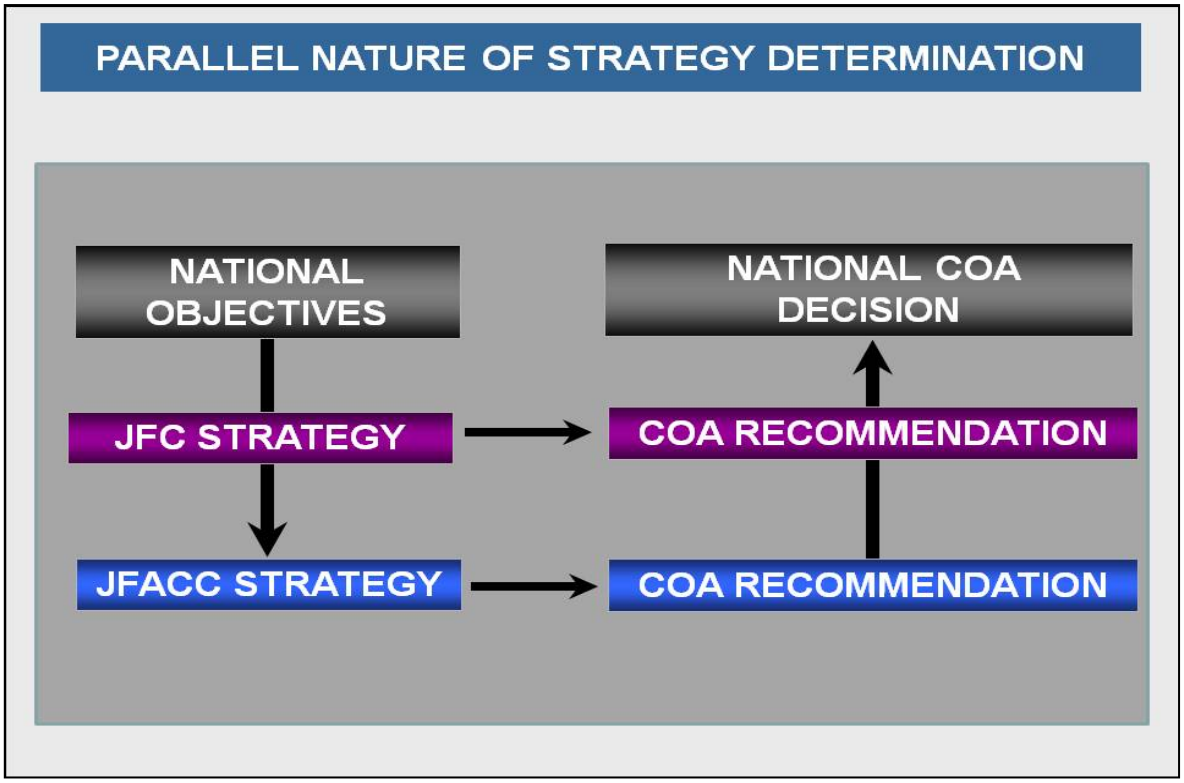
[5] "Coordination and cooperation toward common objectives, even if the participants are not necessarily part of the same command or organization – the product of successful unified action" (JP-1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*).

may also be conducted in parallel at the JFC and component levels (See figure, “The Parallel Nature of Strategy Determination”).



The Parallel Nature of Strategy Determination

Moreover, operational-level air planners should recognize that during both deliberate and crisis action planning[6] COAs will be developed by CCDR or subordinate JFC staffs and will likely lack the detailed airpower planning expertise or perspective of their subordinate air component staffs. Therefore, operational air planners on air component staffs should develop relationships with the CCDR’s Operational Planning Team (OPT) leads and develop processes to integrate planning efforts. This will generally require the air component planners to have “flyaway” teams with cross-functional expertise (strategy, logistics, mobility, etc.) in key areas, dictated by the nature of the operation, that can rapidly deploy and integrate with CCDR OPT staffs and may have to remain in place at the CCDR or joint task force (JTF) staff location for the duration of the crisis or operation. Of course, parallel planning efforts will have to occur at the air component level, so sufficient expertise to conduct both forms of planning must be present on operational staffs.

Strategy Seeks to Influence Adversaries and Other Actors

Operations are conducted to affect the perceptions and behaviors of adversaries, allies, non-combatants, and neutral parties—in this sense, then, all military operations are

[6] See JP 5-0 for a detailed discussion of these processes.

"influence operations." All capabilities employed by Air Force forces can contribute to effects and objectives that influence and should be integrated, coordinated, and synchronized to achieve a unified effort. Even strategies based on pure attrition of military forces seek to modify the enemy's behavior. Combat operations should always attempt to confuse, dislocate, and misdirect the enemy whenever practical. Specialized types of information operations (IO), such as military deception and military information support operations (MISO), can help commanders prepare and shape the operational environment by conveying selected information and indicators to specific target audiences. Influencing all adversaries and informing the decisions of neutral and friendly actors should be foremost in the minds of commanders and strategists.

Historically, commanders have built kinetically-focused operation plans (OPLANs) and then relegated "influence" considerations to an IO annex. Influence, however, spans the ROMO and all phases of conflict. Non-lethal means, such as IO, present the COMAFFOR with capabilities to achieve objectives when lethal actions may not be the best option. When integrated with other means, IO may allow a commander's objective to resonate more deeply with target audiences, profoundly affecting adversary behavior rather than just denying the adversary military capability. Plans and orders should be built around the influence commanders are attempting to create and then incorporate lethal and non-lethal missions, as well as kinetic and non-kinetic actions into the appropriate parts of the plan or order to attain the desired effects.

For example, during a humanitarian assistance operation, the JFC and component commanders may strategically influence host nation and even regional cooperation through IO integration of public affairs (PA) broadcasts and MISO messaging designed to facilitate safe and orderly humanitarian assistance among the local populace. During a major combat operation, a commander may strive to influence the adversary commander's ability to communicate using direct air strikes and cyberspace attacks.

Strategy Should be Integrated, Synchronized, and Coordinated

In addition to integrating all relevant IOPs, strategy should encompass all aspects of military power—put them together in space and time, in accordance with the doctrinal precept of unified action.[7] Failure to do so may lead to less effective operations (at best), or failure of operations outright (at worst). Historically, there has sometimes been a tendency to plan overall strategy from the ground perspective only and add the other components to strategy as something of an afterthought. In order to achieve unified action, the modern, interdependent joint force should be fully integrated at all levels to be most effective.

[7] "The synchronization, coordination, and/or integration of the activities of governmental and nongovernmental entities with military operations to achieve unity of effort" (JP 1).

Strategy Extends Beyond "*The Plan*"

Strategists should pay close attention to the planning, execution, and assessment processes once execution begins. One reason is to ensure that strategic and operational-level guidance continues to be translated into effects and tasks at lower levels. In a larger sense, though, the commander and strategists should remain keenly aware that the purpose of strategy is to anticipate, adapt, and affect future planning in order to gain continuing friendly advantage. Operational designs and plans codify strategy only for particular contexts and for specific periods of time. The commander and strategists should take the current operational environment as it evolves and try to establish a context in which continuing advantage is possible, which may sometimes entail completely reframing the problem(s) faced.

Assessment is Crucial—Strategists Should Analyze the Opportunities and Risks that Changing Conditions Create

Strategists should weigh for the commander the costs of adjusting (or not adjusting) the selected COA. Determining how this course may unfold requires strategists to ascertain the operation's past and current state through assessment that relies on accurate and continually refined joint intelligence preparation of the operational environment (JIPOE). Assessing the effects of yesterday's and today's operations is an inherent part of envisioning how future operations may unfold. Planning for assessment should begin as early in the operational design process as possible.

Since the outcome of war often does not consist of Clausewitz's "single short blow," there is often considerable value in *persistence*—in staying with a particular COA until its effects have time to work their way through an adversary's system. In many cases, there may be little external indication that a state change in the adversary's system is about to take place, even if it is. Commanders and strategists should have "operational patience," i.e., allow *time* for certain changes to take place and COAs to have desired effects. How *much* time, however, is often a matter of operational art rather than science and underscores the importance of JIPOE—understanding the operational environment and its impact, and evaluating the adversary to determine their intent, systems, culture, and probable COAs in a holistic sense.

Strategy has Limitations

Strategy options are almost always limited by policy, resources, the requirements of the joint force and multinational partners, constraints and restraints placed on commanders, and other factors. Additionally, strategists operate in the realms of uncertainty, friction, and the fog of war. Even the most advanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities cannot convey situational awareness that eliminates uncertainty, friction, and the fog of war. Even if it was possible to determine and gather all relevant information on a given situation, it would still be nearly impossible to turn all the data into useful information – into situational understanding. Once a strategy is set

in motion, Clamilusewitz' saying that "everything in war is simple, but the simplest thing is difficult" comes into play. Every element in a strategy has potential for generating friction that makes execution and assessment difficult.