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FOR DOCTRINE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION



AIR FORCE DOCTRINE PUBLICATION (AFDP) 3-70 STRATEGIC ATTACK

FUNDAMENTALS OF STRATEGIC ATTACK

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Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 5100.1, [*Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components*](#), states that one of the functions of the Air Force is to “organize, train, equip, and provide forces to...conduct global precision attack, to include strategic attack... and prompt global strike.” Formerly, [strategic attack](#) was defined in terms of nuclear delivery systems or weapons. This is no longer true. Strategic attack is not defined in terms of weapons or delivery systems used—their type, range, speed, or destructiveness—but by its effective contribution to achieving strategic [objectives](#).

Historical Strategic Attack Examples

- ✦ Alexander the Great defeated the Persians at Issus (331 B.C.) by leading a cavalry assault at King Darius himself (a center of gravity), which removed Darius from the battlefield and resulted in the Persian Army leaving their positions in full rout.
- ✦ Charles Martel’s Frankish infantry at Tours in 732 isolated Emir Abd-er-Rahman and “pierced him through with many spears, so that he died; then all the host fled before the enemy”... thus saving Western Europe from invading forces.
- ✦ Allied bomber crews and commando teams destroyed the German heavy-water program—and Hitler’s hope for an atomic bomb with it—during WW II.
- ✦ Allied submarines destroyed Japanese merchant shipping in the Pacific during WW II, consciously avoiding engagement with Japanese naval forces while denying Japan crucial war-sustaining resources.
- ✦ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) strategic attack operations helped coerce Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic to submit to NATO demands (1999).

—Various Sources

Advances in information technology, precision weaponry, tactics, and warfighting doctrine have made strategic attack even more effective, giving [airpower](#) the potential to

achieve decisive [effects](#) more directly without the need to engage enemy fielded forces first. Operation DESERT STORM proved the efficacy of strategic attack; Operations DELIBERATE FORCE, ALLIED FORCE, ENDURING FREEDOM, and IRAQI FREEDOM further refined it. In these operations, air assets conducting strategic attack have proven able to deny the enemy access to critical resources and infrastructure, defeat enemy [strategies](#), and decisively influence the enemy to end hostilities on terms favorable to US interests. In addition to its ability to destroy enemy surface forces and support friendly surface forces, today's Air Force provides joint force commanders with lethal and non-lethal capabilities that can contribute **directly** to the achievement of strategic objectives.

Properly implemented, strategic attack achieves disproportionate results. It allows commanders to literally strike at the enemy's heart and thus shape a conflict in ways favorable to the US. This AFDP examines strategic attack and how to properly plan, execute, assess, and adapt it.
