



CURTIS E. LEMAY CENTER

FOR DOCTRINE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION



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

COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS

Last Updated: 12 July 2019

Strategic attack (SA) is employed in a joint construct in a unified command structure under the authority of a combatant commander (CCDR) tasked at the direction of the President and Secretary of Defense (SecDef). In this context, air forces organize, train, equip, and plan as an integral element of a joint or multinational force. However, the air component can be employed independently of the surface components in a joint force to help a joint force commander (JFC) achieve objectives. This is particularly true for operations with strategic objectives that require direct attack. The criteria to attack using airpower independent of surface components of the joint force depend on the expected effectiveness and availability of capabilities appropriate to creating the desired effects. In most instances, deep-ranging Air Force forces would be employed in conjunction with other component air elements of the joint force.

The command relations described in Joint Publication (JP) 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States, and AFDP 3-30, Command and Control, apply when conducting SA. If air, space, and cyberspace forces comprise the preponderance of SA capability, the commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR) should be the supported commander for SA operations. The COMAFFOR is normally also the joint force air component commander (JFACC). In the rare case that the COMAFFOR is not the JFACC, the appropriate COMAFFOR will present Air Force forces to the JFACC. In other instances, the CCDR or other JFC may wish to retain direct control of SA operations in order to integrate the efforts of all participating components and agencies.

US Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) may be tasked to conduct SA as part of its global strike mission. USSTRATCOM creates global attack plans (both nuclear and non-nuclear) based on guidance from the President and SecDef and designates appropriate assets to achieve desired effects. Under these circumstances, the CCDR (theater or USSTRATCOM) may opt to form a single-Service task force. This task force maintains a command and control (C2) system designed to quickly disseminate posturing and execution orders from the President and SecDef to the forces in the field. During operations in support of a geographic CCDR, USSTRATCOM will coordinate strikes with the affected CCDR. However, USSTRATCOM may relinquish operational control (OPCON) or tactical control (TACON) of these forces to the supported commander if directed by the President or SecDef.

Some assets critical to effective SA may operate from other combatant commanders' [areas of responsibility](#) (AORs). OPCON or TACON of SA assets operating from the continental US (CONUS) or stationed in another AOR outside the [theater of operations](#), may transfer to the supported JFC. For instance, in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, B-2s launching from CONUS and B-52s launching from Europe were employed in US Central Command's (USCENTCOM's) AOR. These forces were attached with specification of OPCON to Commander, USCENTCOM who, in turn, delegated OPCON to the COMAFFOR, Commander, US Air Forces Central Command (AFCENT). Circumstances may require other arrangements. For example, Commander USSTRATCOM typically retains OPCON of US nuclear forces. In any event, these arrangements should be worked out as far in advance and in as much detail as possible to avoid confusion. See AFDP 3-30, [Command and Control](#), for more specific guidance on command relationships. See AFDP 3-72, [Nuclear Operations](#), for more specific guidance on command relationships for nuclear forces.

[Special operations forces](#) (SOF) offer a unique set of capabilities that may be leveraged to support SA. SOF may conduct SA unilaterally, or in support of other components' forces, such as the air component. SOF airpower assets may require air component support to conduct their missions and in some instances SOF surface assets may require air component [close air support](#) or [air interdiction](#). SOF may also enable other components to perform SA on high-value targets through [special reconnaissance](#) (SR) or other special operations core activities. As an example, during Operation DESERT STORM, SOF directed coalition aircraft to targets as part of SCUD-hunting efforts. During Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM, similar operations were conducted to target Taliban, al Qaeda, and Iraqi leadership, as well as other high-value targets.

When air operations constitute the bulk of SA capability, the JFC will normally task the JFACC, as a supported commander, to conduct such operations. Acting in this capacity, the JFACC can assess the effects required; define the objectives to be achieved; designate targets to be attacked; integrate air operations and allocate air assets and coordinate space and cyberspace resources to achieve the desired effects and objectives. [Centralized control and decentralized execution](#) maximizes the synergy between SA and other forms of military power in achieving national and theater objectives.
