GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STRATEGY

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STRATEGY

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 method of arranging and managing ways, means, and risks to achieve an end or set of ends. It produces a coordinated set of options an actor can choose from to achieve continuing advantage. Strategy, in its military sense, is the art of creating military courses of action and encompasses the processes of operational design, planning, execution, and assessment.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Effective Strategy Seeks to Gain *Enduring Advantage*

From a strategic perspective, the methods used to achieve objectives and reach the end state(s) generally carry implications beyond the conclusion of an operation. The purpose of military strategy is not just to "win" or conquer, it is to *resolve the conflict* on favorable terms for the US, and do so in a way that endures for as long as possible. Such resolution is sought by creating conditions that are at least better for friendly interests, and are often better for all parties involved. Thus, a **strategy's ultimate purpose is the attainment and maintenance of a set of future conditions – an end state** (or states) **– that leads to *continuing and enduring advantage* for friendly interests**, for as long as possible and that will often create advantage for neutral and formerly hostile interests as well. This should include envisioning the after-effects of military operations on the operational environment. Strategists should ask: What should conditions be like several years down the road, as well as what conditions will most likely prevail? Strategists should seek to answer these questions and the answers should guide operations in order to produce a better peace.

Strategy Encompasses Ends, Ways, Means, and Risks

Strategy should illuminate the reasons an operation is being conducted—its purpose—state the objectives and end state(s) (*ends*); prescribe the methods by which the ends

[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*)

are achieved—military courses of action (COAs) (*ways*); determine the tools and resources needed to execute the strategy, such as military forces and supplies (*means*); and clarify the amount of cost, uncertainty, and vulnerability the commander and national leadership are willing to accept and will need to commit in order to execute the strategy, (*costs and risks*).

Desired Future Conditions and Commander's Intent Should Drive Strategy

Desirable future conditions are achieved by accomplishing **objectives**. The principle of the objective is to "direct military operations toward a defined and attainable objective that contributes to strategic, operational, and tactical aims" (Volume 1, *Basic Doctrine*).

The accomplishment of all military objectives should lead to a desired set of future conditions, the military *end state.*[2] **The attainment of military aims, however, is subordinate to attainment of a set of conditions that must be achieved to resolve the situation or conflict on satisfactory terms and gain enduring advantage, as defined by appropriate civilian authority** (such as the President or Secretary of Defense [SecDef] at the national strategic level). **This set of conditions is the national strategic *end state*,** and it involves political, cultural, economic, informational, and other considerations in addition to desired military conditions.

Military objectives should flow naturally and logically from the commander's intent, which includes the military end state. The military end state, in turn, should flow logically from the national strategic end state. Again, always looking to the end state, there should be a COA identifying what should be accomplished in addition to attainment of military objectives. The latter is the focus of military commanders, but commanders should also be familiar with the larger context in which their military actions take place.

Strategy is Adaptive, Not Static

Strategy should adjust as the adversary reacts to friendly moves and as circumstances change. Therefore, strategy creation should be cyclic and iterative. Unforeseen circumstances 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 via the design and planning processes, as well as anticipation, are the best defenses against surprise.

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[2] In joint doctrine the "end state" is, "The set of required conditions that defines achievement of the commander's objectives." Note that the text above is *not* intended as an alternate definition, only to explain the concept in a wider context. In joint doctrine, the "military end state" typically refers to a point in time and circumstances when objectives have been achieved and the military instrument of national power can "disengage" from the operation. It is also described as," the way the commander wants the operational environment to look at the conclusion of operations." (Joint Publication [JP] 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*).

Strategy and Planning Are Not the Same and Benefit from Discourse

Strategy formulation begins with the process of operational design, which helps frame the problem the joint force is tasked to solve and design a basic construct for solving it that can be further refined in subsequent planning. Operational design is defined as "the conception and construction of a framework that underpins a campaign or major operation plan and its subsequent execution" (JP *5-0, Joint Operation Planning*). In operational design, commanders' and strategists' thoughts and discourse resemble the interplay between architects and their clients at the start of a building project. They should determine a broad framework for the problem[3] (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 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.

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 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).

Strategy is Art and Science

Executing military strategy depends upon operational art, the creative means through which commanders and staffs develop strategies to organize and employ military forces.[4] As such, there is as much art as 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.

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[3] "Operational design is a process of iterative understanding and problem framing that supports commanders and staffs in their application of operational art…. "Problem framing" is widely regarded as a crucial element of design, in both military and civilian applications.

[4] "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).

Strategy should not be deterministic or prescriptive,[5] 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 adaptive systems such as military forces and political actors, which, like living systems, are interactively complex and non-linear.[6] They lead to emergent behaviors that often cannot be anticipated before interaction begins. **Strategy should be *estimative* and *anticipatory*, rather than prescriptive or deterministic.**

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. 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.

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

Effective military operations require careful integration of the efforts of all appropriate "actors" within the operational environment. All the instruments of power (IOPs) that actors (state or non-state) may wield are 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. 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 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Sometimes these relationships can restrain commanders' freedom of action, but just as often they open opportunities for integrating diplomatic, informational, and economic IOPs with military efforts and thus give commanders a wider range of options with which to create intended effects. COMAFFORs, who are normally designated as joint force air component commanders (JFACCs) and may also be joint task force (JTF) commanders, 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.

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

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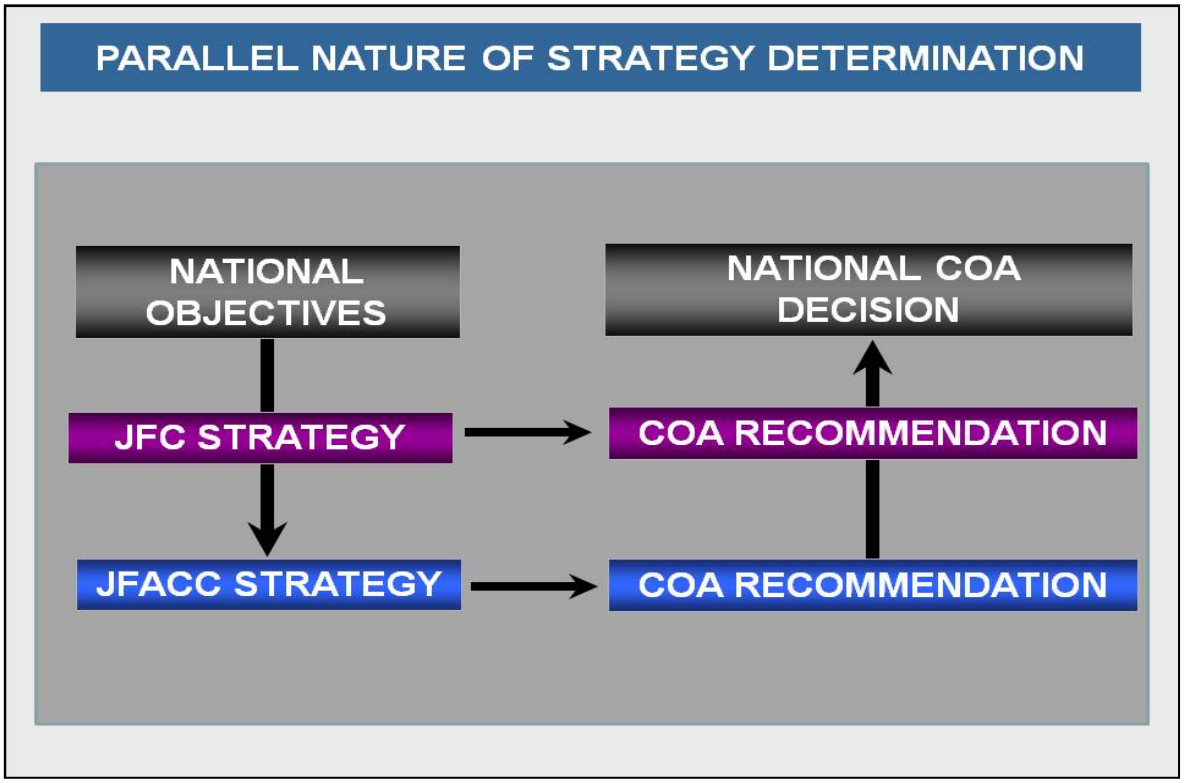
[5] Deterministic and prescriptive systems obey fixed laws and have no randomness involved in development of future system states, thus always yielding the same outcomes given the same inputs. This is not true of strategy or warfare in general.

[6] This implies that new behaviors often emerge as a result of interaction with other systems, that it may not be possible to predict these new behaviors before-hand, and that many different possible outcomes from system behaviors –even relatively simple ones—are likely. For more on the implications of complexity and nonlinearity, see "The Effects-Based Approach to Operations"

states or multinational organizations, embodying the doctrinal concept of unity of effort. 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 COMAFFORs, 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 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

JFCs may task the joint force components to develop concept plans to accomplish strategic objectives or achieve elements of the military end state. Components may be charged to plan in concert or separately. Separate planning is usually done to gather a variety of COAs from different perspectives. Due to the speed, range, flexibility, and versatility of airpower, the JFC may depend on air component planning to set initial conditions, whether through operations directly against an adversary or through persistence and deterrent effects.

Operational-level Air Force planners (both Service and functional joint air components) should recognize that during theater campaign planning as well as planning for contingencies, the CCDR or subordinate JFC and staffs will develop COAs, and will likely lack the detailed airpower planning expertise or perspective of their subordinate Air Force component staffs. Therefore, operational planners on Air Force component staffs should develop relationships with the CCDR's joint planning group (JPG) leads

and develop processes to integrate planning efforts. This will generally require the Air Force 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 JPG staffs and may have to remain in place at the CCDR or JTF staff location for the duration of the crisis or operation. Parallel planning efforts will occur at the Air Force component level, so sufficient expertise to conduct both forms of planning should be present on operational staffs.

Strategists Should Realize that Tactical and Operational "Victory" Do Not Guarantee Strategic Success

Success at the tactical and operational levels should contribute to strategic success, but this is by no means guaranteed. Many times in history, one side has "won all the battles, but lost the war." This implies that failure at lower levels does not guarantee strategic failure. (If this were so, for instance, the American colonies might never have won their revolutionary war.) It is possible—even easy—for commanders and strategists to become so enamored of success at lower levels that they lose sight of larger strategic trends, exaggerate the influence of lower-level assessment "markers," engage in "wishful thinking" when analyzing the effects of ongoing operations, or incline toward strategic overreach.

This applies to operations during steady-state and peacetime conditions as during war, albeit the temptation to do these things may be greater in wartime due to the pressures of higher operational tempo and level of effort.

The lower the level of the military commanders involved, the more likely they will remain focused on tactical aspects of a conflict. It is also tempting for leadership at the operational and strategic levels to focus too much on tactical events. However, there are indirect effects and strategic end state considerations that all leaders, from the lowest level through the JFC, should keep in mind. National civilian leadership can also make this mistake and focus on the military instrument and the tactical aspects of operations, at the cost of losing sight of the larger cultural and political context, as some critics maintain happened in Vietnam.

Victory in Battle Does Not Equal Strategic Victory

Napoleon's armies won a string of spectacular military victories against their Spanish and British opponents in 1808; yet Napoleon lost the Peninsular War. Napoleon invaded Russia with an army of 600,000 men and won all of the major battles en route to capturing Moscow; yet he was compelled to retreat and his 1812 campaign ended in utter defeat. Hitler's armies crushed France in 1940 and inflicted millions of casualties on the Russian army in the summer and fall of 1941; yet Nazi Germany was totally defeated in World War II. Japanese forces initiated World War II in the Pacific with a series of impressive feats of arms from Pearl Harbor to Singapore; yet Japan shared the fate of Nazi Germany. During the Chinese Civil War, which continued after the end of World War II, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist armies at first greatly outnumbered and were better equipped than their Communist foes; yet in three years Chiang and his armies were utterly defeated. The United States never lost a major battle during the Vietnam War; yet in 1972 a dispirited America withdrew from the frustrating Asian war, and three years later did nothing when North Vietnam drove all the way to Saigon.

— Dr. Joseph Strange, *Capital "W" War*

Strategy Seeks to Influence Adversaries and Other Actors

Operations affect the perceptions and behaviors of adversaries, allies, noncombatants, and neutral parties. It is important that commanders and planners deliberately consider the effects of operations to the information environment. 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 attempt to confuse, dislocate, and misdirect the enemy whenever practical. Specialized information-related capabilities within information operations (IO), such as military deception, military information support operations (MISO), and operations security 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 a principal consideration in the minds of commanders and strategists.

Historically, commanders have built kinetically-focused operation plans (OPLANs)while relegating IO and "influence" considerations to an annex. Influence, however, spans the ROMO and all phases of conflict. Nonlethal 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 nonlethal missions, as well as kinetic and nonkinetic actions into the appropriate parts of the plan or order to attain the desired effects.

An example of IO integration during a humanitarian assistance operation might include the JFC and component commanders strategically messaging the host nation, emphasizing regional cooperation through integration of truthful public affairs (PA) broadcasts and MISO messaging designed to shape the operational environment 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 lethal and nonlethal attacks across all domains.

Strategy should be Integrated, Synchronized, and Coordinated

In addition to integrating all relevant IOPs, strategy should take all aspects of military power into consideration—put them together in space and time, arranging and integrating those that bear on the military task, in accordance with the doctrinal principle of unity of effort.[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 an afterthought. In order to achieve unity of effort, the modern, interdependent joint force should be fully integrated, to the extent possible, at all levels to be most effective. Unity of effort facilitates unified action[8] among all the IOPs, helping coordinate the military's actions with interagency partners and the interorganizational community.

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. The commander and strategists should remain keenly aware that they should anticipate, adapt, and affect future planning in order to gain enduring friendly

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[7] Coordination and cooperation toward common objectives, even if the participants are not necessarily part of the same command or organization, which is the product of successful unified action. (JP 1)

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

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 problems 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, as Carl von Clausewitz explains, the outcome of war often does not consist of a "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 frequently 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 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, Clausewitz' 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.