PLANNING OPERATIONS:
AIR FORCE PLANNING IN THE CONTEXT OF JOINT PLANNING

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Joint operation planning employs an integrated process for orderly and coordinated problem solving and decision-making. In its peacetime application, the process allows the thorough and fully coordinated development of plans. During crises, the process is shortened as needed to support the dynamic requirements of changing events. During execution, the process adapts to accommodate changing factors in the operational environment and maximize the flexibility of operations. For today's commanders, plans are not useless—they are necessary points of departure—but planning as a process is still the most important.

Joint operation planning is conducted at every echelon of command, during peacetime as well as conflict, and across the range of military operations (ROMO). Joint operation planning is accomplished through the adaptive planning and execution (APEX) system, which is "the DOD-level system of joint policies, processes, procedures, and reporting structures, supported by communications and information technology, that is used by the joint planning and execution community to monitor, plan, and execute mobilization, deployment, employment, sustainment, redeployment, and demobilization activities associated with joint operations" (JP 5-0, Joint Operation Planning). The APEX system facilitates iterative dialog and collaborative planning between the many echelons of command, including between the joint force air component commander (JFACC) and the joint force commander (JFC) and other components. This helps ensure that the military instrument of national power (IOP) is employed in accordance with national priorities, and that plans are continuously reviewed and adapted to accommodate changes in strategic guidance, resources, the actions of adversaries and other actors, and the operational environment. Joint operation planning also identifies capabilities outside the Department of Defense (DOD), and provides the means of integrating military actions with those of other IOPs and multinational partners in time, space, and purpose to create all effects necessary to achieve objectives required to attain the desired end state.

Deliberate and Crisis Action Planning

The APEX System formally integrates the activities of the entire joint planning and execution community (JPEC), which facilitates seamless transition from operational design and planning efforts to execution in times of crisis. APEX–and the joint operation planning and execution system (JOPES) technology that underpins it–provides for planning that is integrated from the national level down to theater and component levels. Under the larger APEX "umbrella," joint operation planning is divided into deliberate and crisis action planning (CAP). Deliberate planning in the context of APEX is a process that is used to develop global and theater campaign plans, which operationalize a combatant commander's (CCDR's) ongoing theater or functional strategies in peacetime, as well as joint operation plans for contingencies identified in joint strategic planning documents. "Traditional" contingency plans (the type that have been developed by the JPEC for decades) are now often considered branches of ongoing CCDR theater or functional strategies. During deliberate planning, the Secretary of Defense (SecDef), CCDRs, or joint force commanders (JFCs) determine the level of detail required and provide in-progress review of planning processes. This process prepares for possible contingencies based on the best available information and using forces and resources apportioned in strategic planning documents. It relies heavily on design assumptions about political and military circumstances that may prevail when the plan is implemented. Plan production generally takes six or more months and involves the entire JPEC. The Air Force Service component (the commander, Air Force forces' [COMAFFOR's] staff) usually develops supporting plans following the same process used by the JFC.

CAP procedures are used in time-limited situations to adjust previously prepared operation plans (OPLANs) or otherwise conduct design and planning for military action. Here, the crisis may occur with little or no warning, the situation will be dynamic, and time for planning may be very limited. Operational design and planning should resolve the majority of the assumptions made during deliberate planning, if accomplished. In some cases, however, commanders and their strategists must start the process with a "blank slate," accomplishing design and planning based on assumptions made in the absence of facts or the products of previous deliberate planning. An adequate and appropriate military response in

NOTE: The joint operation planning process for air (JOPPA) described in this annex is consistent with overarching joint planning processes described in JP 5-0, Joint Operation Planning, *and* ***supersedes*** *the "joint air and space estimate process" described in previous doctrine documents.* Airmen should conduct effects-based operational design and planning using the JOPPA process outlined in this publication, in JP 3-30, Command and Control for Joint Air Operations, and more fully detailed in Air Force Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures Document (AFTTP) 3-3.AOC, Operational Employment–Air Operations Center and its annexes.

a crisis demands flexible procedures keyed to the time available, rapid and effective communications, and use previous planning and detailed databases and region analyses whenever possible. CAP often entails the positioning of forces, or at least the start of that process. CAP generally produces joint OPORDs and other orders associated with the time-sene execution of operations.

JOPES technology and processes are still a vital, necessary part of Air Force planning, even though the JOPP and JOPPA are often accomplished separately from APEX system processes. JOPES helps planners focus on the identification and flow of resources and sequencing required to support a given course of action (COA) determined by APEX processes. Once a COA is selected, JOPES helps create detailed time-phased force and deployment data (TPFDD) to support the JFC's plan of operations. This entails reconciliation of the TPFDD with the requirements of the operation's major tasks and phasing. The areas in which the joint operation planning and JOPES processes overlap are shown in the shaded area in the figure entitled, "The Cyclical Nature of Strategy, Design, and Planning."

There are no separate joint or Air Force procedures for deliberate and crisis action planning beyond some internal coordination and staffing procedures at the various component headquarters. When developing supporting plans, some of the steps may not be as in-depth, as they may reiterate work already done by the JFC and staff. The contribution of JOPES processes extend beyond the TPFDD and other deployment considerations. These processes also provide a whole series of staff estimates and coordination steps, conducted by national-level agencies down through Air Force major command staffs, which provide support to commanders and their staffs performing the JOPP and JOPPA to support COA selection and execution. Further, only JFC and Service component (e.g., the COMAFFOR's) staffs possess the information technology infrastructure to interface with many JOPES processes, thus the air operations center's (AOC's) contribution to JOPES is dependent upon the COMAFFOR's staff.[1] Specifics concerning the products of the deliberate and crisis action planning processes can be found in the JOPES/APEX manuals.[2]

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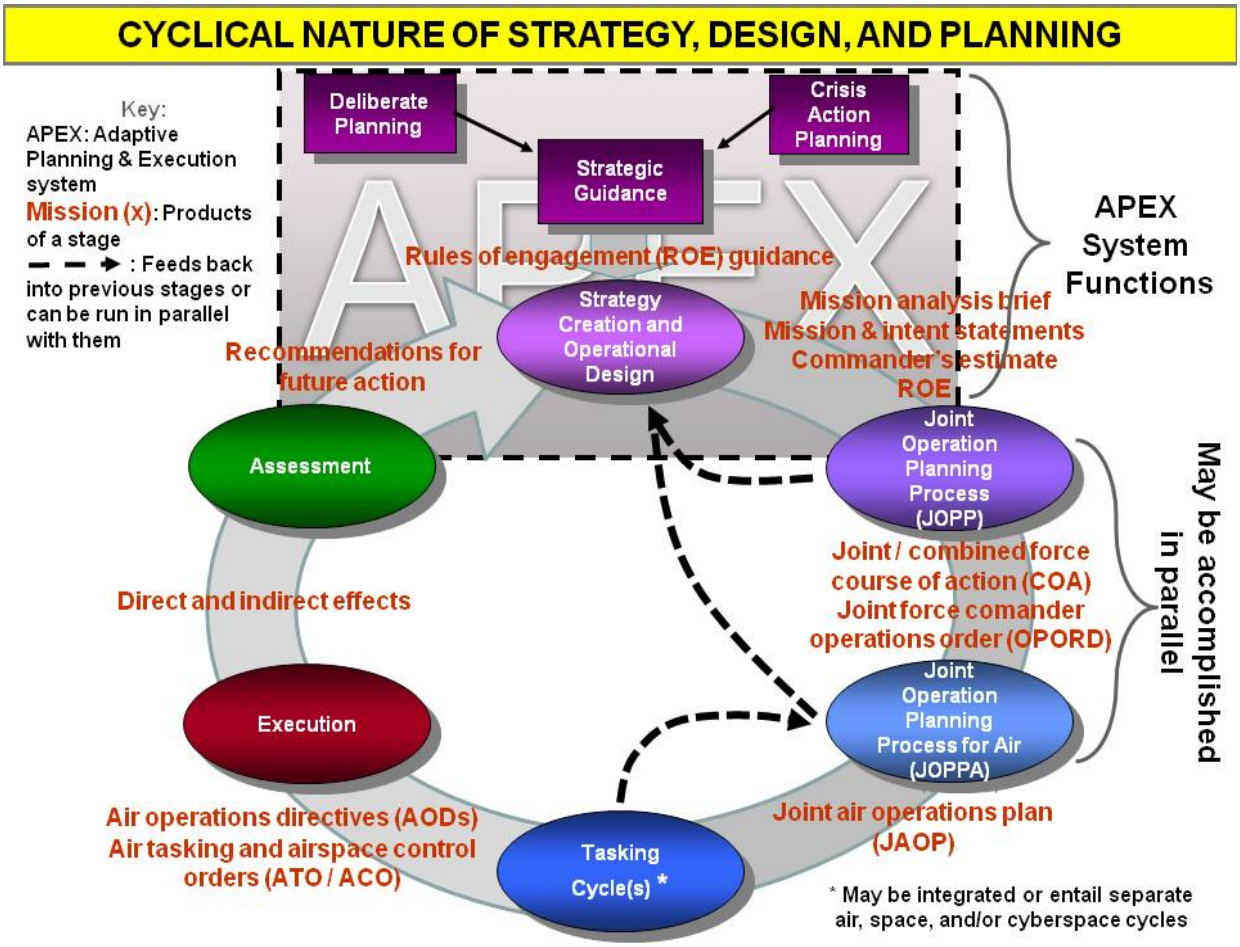
[1] That is, those elements of the COMAFFOR's staff that do not directly support the COMAFFOR's operational responsibilities as JFACC; these elements remain explicitly under the COMAFFOR (as the "A Staff") to help accomplish his or her responsibilities as Air Force Service component commander (and often remain in the AOC). See Volume 1, *Basic Doctrine*, for a delineation of the COMAFFOR's responsibilities.

[2] Further information on these (and other forms of planning) can be found in Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manuals (CJCSMs) 3122.01-03, *JOPES*, Volumes I through III. These manuals are currently being revised, re-designated, and supplemented as the "APEX family of documents." See CJCS Guide 3130, *APEX Overview and Policy Framework*, for more information. See also JP 3-30 for the general joint perspective on the JOPPA.



Cyclical Nature of Strategy, Design, and Planning

Absorbing lessons learned and adapting to them appropriately is critical to operational success. Observations should be captured after every operation in the form of lessons learned. Events should be documented in detail to provide information that improves planning and execution of future actions. Planners should review after-action reports and other lessons-learned analysis during the planning process to ensure they benefit from past experience.

The Relationship Between Operational Design and Planning

In many respects, operational design constitutes a necessary "front end" of planning, since the commander should frame the problem he or she seeks to solve and determine its scope and parameters. It logically forms the first steps of deliberate, crisis action, and other operational planning. It makes sense to determine an operation's overall end state before detailed employment planning begins (or, for that matter, before many aspects of deployment and force planning begin). In other respects, design and planning are complementary and even overlap: Design may begin before initiation of the JOPP or JOPPA, but some portions of the mission analysis stage of the JOPP and JOPPA may provide insights needed to properly frame an operational problem. Design

often begins with step 1 of the JOPP ("Initiation"), but certain formal products of deliberate and crisis action planning (such as warning and planning orders) may be issued after design efforts have begun but before more detailed planning has started. Design may also continue after completion of initial JOPP and JOPPA planning. There is no clear demarcation between when design ends and planning begins (or vice versa), especially during the "first round" of design and planning. Strategists often also identify possible branches and sequels at various points based on planning assumptions. In doing so, they must often make assumptions in the absence of facts in order to allow planning to continue. The need for many assumptions is typical of designing and planning for ill-structured problems.

Later, during plan execution and assessment, operational design may be conducted in concert with planning to adapt to emerging situations or behaviors. In this part of the process, commanders and strategists determine whether to implement pre-planned branches or sequels, or even initiate complete re-design of an operation.