# LEVELS OF ASSESSMENT

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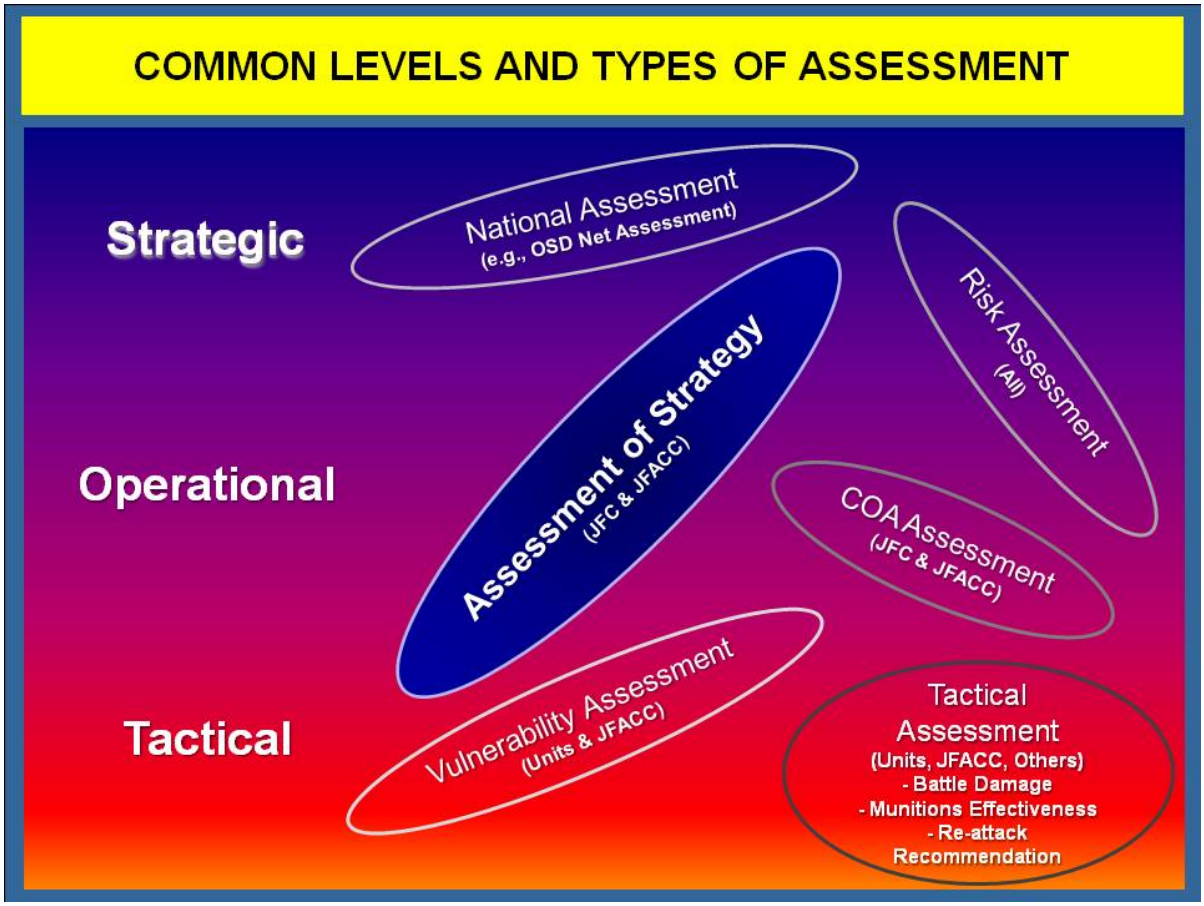
Assessors perform many types of assessment across the strategic, operational, and tactical levels to inform a wide array of decisions. The figure, "Common Levels and Types of Assessment" displays some common types of assessment and, broadly, the levels where each would most likely be applied (the depiction is not all-inclusive). The figure also shows the level of commander who commonly directs a given type of assessment (e.g., the joint force commander [JFC] and joint force air component commander [JFACC]). At all levels–but especially at the operational level–the JFACC and staff should observe how the JFC takes information "on board" and craft assessment products that convey the Airman's perspective without seeming "air-centric" or presenting a biased view.

**Tactical assessment** (TA) is generally performed at the unit or joint force component level and typically measures physical, empirical achievement of direct effects. TA is an umbrella term covering battle damage assessment (BDA), munitions effectiveness assessment (MEA), and recommendations for re-attack (and often referred to in joint doctrine as "combat assessment" [CA]).[1] These forms of assessment focus on offensive and kinetic actions. BDA consists of three phases. Phase I BDA (which helps answer the question, "we doing things right?") measures whether or not the weapon impacted the target and functioned as designed. Phase II BDA measures what effect the weapon had on that individual target. Phase III BDA then measures the effect of striking a particular target on the overall target system (as in, what effect does taking out a command and control [C2] node have on the overall combat capability of an integrated air defense system [IADS]?, all of which might relate to the overall effect of gaining and maintaining air superiority). TA should also be accomplished following tactical employment of non-kinetic actions and non-offensive capabilities. Examples include military information support operations (MISO; e.g., Commando Solo missions), public affairs (PA; e.g., media engagements), cyberspace operations (e.g., temporary utility outages), operations security (OPSEC; effectiveness of encryption), etc. TA is described in greater detail in Annex 3-60, *Targeting*.

[1] The Air Force has chosen "TA" over "CA" because it is more broadly applicable and descriptively accurate: Not all operations (and hence not all assessments at the tactical level) involve combat. The name should apply to tactical-level evaluation across the range of military operations (ROMO). The terms, however, are functionally equivalent for most purposes.

**Operational Assessment**. Assessment at the operational level begins to evaluate complex indirect effects, track progress toward operational and strategic objectives, and make recommendations for strategy adjustments and future action extending beyond tactical re-attack. Assessment at this level often entails evaluation of course of action (COA) success, assessment of the progress of overall strategy, and joint force vulnerability assessment. These are commonly performed by joint force component commanders and the JFC and their staffs.




**Common Levels and Types of Assessment**

Operational assessment evaluates a wide range of data: Quantitative and qualitative, objective and subjective, observed and inferred. Some measures can be expressed empirically (with quantitative measures); others, like psychological effects, may have to be expressed in qualitative and/or subjective terms. Both rely on extensive data and analysis from federated intelligence partners, including other US government (USG) agencies and multinational partners.

**Strategic assessment** addresses issues at the joint force ("theater strategic," as in bringing a particular conflict to a favorable conclusion) and national levels (enduring security concerns and interests). It involves a wide array of methodologies, participants, and inputs. The President and Secretary of Defense (SecDef) rely on progress reports

produced by the combatant commander (CCDR) or other relevant JFC, so assessment at their levels often shapes the nation's, or even the world's, perception of progress in an operation. This places a unique burden upon assessors, planners, strategists, and commanders to be accurate, meaningful, and complete in their analysis and communicate results clearly and logically.

The time frames considered by the various assessment types may vary widely, from rather short intervals at the tactical level to longer time horizons at the strategic level, even reaching well beyond the end of an operation, as lessons learned are determined and absorbed. The relationship among the various assessment types is not linear, with outputs from one type often feeding multiple other types and levels.

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