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FOR DOCTRINE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION



ANNEX 3-70 STRATEGIC ATTACK

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS

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Strategic attack (SA) seizes upon the unique capability of air, space, and cyberspace to achieve objectives by striking at the heart of the enemy, disrupting critical leadership functions, infrastructure, and strategy, while at the same time avoiding a sequential fight through layers of forces.

Unless the enemy's military forces are deemed to be a strategic centers of gravity (COG), they are not useful as SA targets. In fact, the goal of SA operations is to bypass the fielded forces to the maximum extent possible. A way to illustrate this concept is to think of the military as a tool being used by a person, nation, or organization to enforce its will. It very often makes more sense to attack the person, nation, or organization using the tool rather than the tool itself. SA's goal is to exert influence on the decision-maker rather than the tool being used by the decision-maker.

Next, SA conducted against an enemy system in a deliberate, systematic way generates strategic-level effects without first having to fight the enemy's fielded forces. SA seeks to prevent an enemy from achieving goals (reactive) or enabling us to achieve our goals (proactive). By affecting strategic-level COGs, the results should be greater than those generated by a similar effort against peripheral systems or targets.

SA can also act on the psychology of the enemy leadership by changing the political climate or denying options or choices. These attacks could indirectly affect the adversary's will to fight.

During the combined bomber offensive (CBO) in Europe in WW II, Allied air attacks against the German rail and inland waterway systems fatally disrupted the German economy. Even though the productive capacity of individual factories increased through most of 1944, the disruption of transportation nearly immobilized the economy as a whole, almost stripped Germany of electrical power (due to disruption of coal shipments), and greatly hampered the movement of Germany's armies. These efforts might have ended the war in Europe by themselves had Germany's resistance in the field not been collapsing simultaneously.



"The attack on transportation was the decisive blow that completely disorganized the German economy. It reduced war production in all categories and made it difficult to move what was produced to the front. The attack also limited the tactical mobility of the German army."

— United States Strategic Bombing Survey Summary Report (European War)
