

Joint Publication 1



Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States



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irregular threats will usually have the advantages derived from knowledge of the local area and ability to blend in with the local population.

d. To address these forms of warfare, joint doctrine is principally based on a combination of offensive, defensive, and stability operations. The predominant method or combination depends on a variety of factors, such as capabilities and the nature of the enemy.

5. Levels of Warfare

a. **General.** While the various forms and methods of warfare are ultimately expressed in concrete military action, the three levels of warfare—strategic, operational, and tactical—link tactical actions to achievement of national objectives (see Figure I-2). There are no finite limits or boundaries between these levels, but they help commanders design and synchronize operations, allocate resources, and assign tasks to the appropriate command. The strategic, operational, or tactical purpose of employment depends on the nature of the objective, mission, or task.

b. **Strategic Level.** Strategy is a prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater and multinational objectives. At the strategic level, a nation often determines the national (or multinational in the case of an alliance or coalition) guidance that addresses strategic objectives in support of strategic end states and develops and uses national resources to

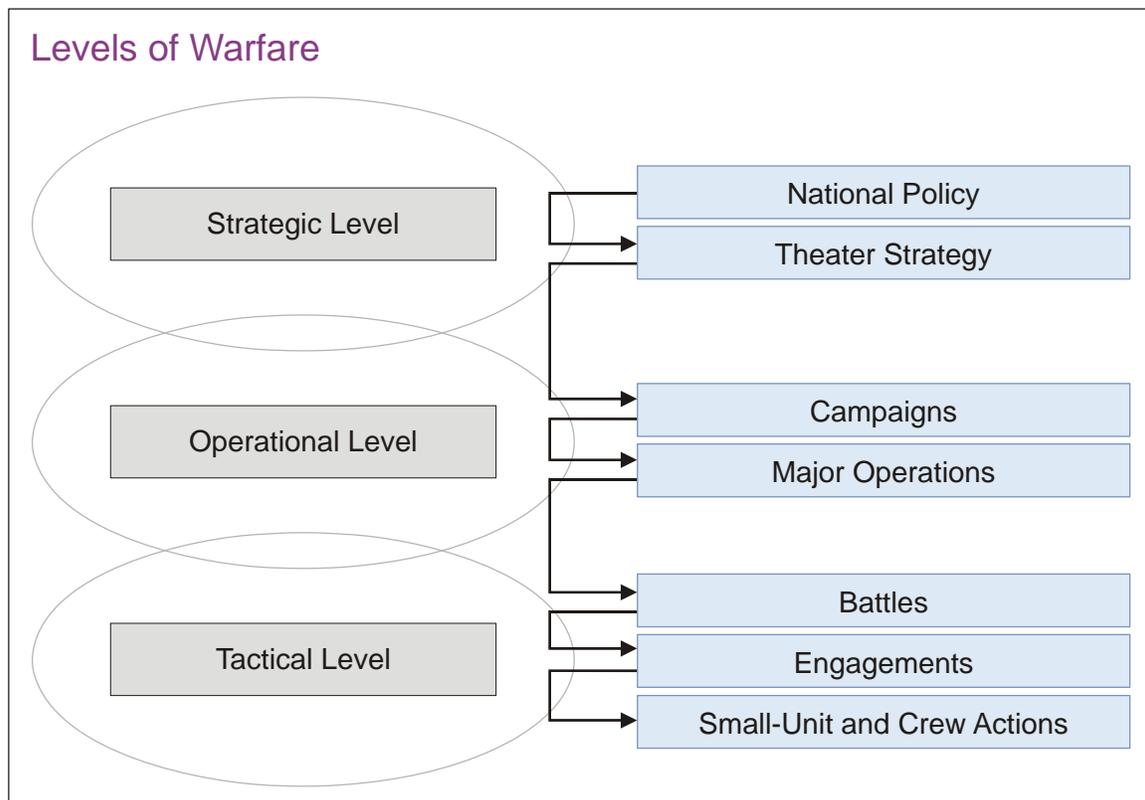


Figure I-2. Levels of Warfare

achieve them. The President, aided by the National Security Council (NSC) and Homeland Security Council (HSC) as the National Security Staff, establishes policy and national strategic objectives. The day-to-day work of the NSC and HSC is accomplished by the combined National Security Staff, the President's principal staff for national security issues. The Secretary of Defense (SecDef) translates these into strategic military objectives that facilitate identification of the military end state and theater strategic planning by the combatant commanders (CCDRs). CCDRs usually participate in strategic discussions with the President and SecDef through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) and with partner nations. The CCDR's strategy is an element that relates to both US national strategy and operational-level activities within the theater.

c. **Operational Level.** The operational level links strategy and tactics by establishing operational objectives needed to achieve the military end states and strategic objectives. It sequences tactical actions to achieve objectives. The focus at this level is on the planning and execution of operations using operational art: the cognitive approach by commanders and staffs—supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgment—to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, and means. JFCs and component commanders use operational art to determine when, where, and for what purpose major forces will be employed and to influence the adversary's disposition before combat. Operational art governs the deployment of those forces and the arrangement of battles and major operations to achieve operational and strategic objectives.

d. **Tactical Level.** Tactics is the employment and ordered arrangement of forces in relation to each other. The tactical level of war is where battles and engagements are planned and executed to achieve military objectives assigned to tactical units or joint task forces (JTFs). Activities at this level focus on the ordered arrangement and maneuver of combat elements in relation to each other and enemy to achieve combat objectives. An engagement can include a wide variety of activities between opposing forces normally in a short-duration action. A battle consists of a set of related engagements involving larger forces than used in engagements and normally affect the course of an operation or a campaign. Forces at the tactical level generally employ various tactics to achieve their military objectives.

e. While the traditional separate levels of war, as shown in Figure I-2, may help commanders visualize a logical arrangement of missions, allocate resources, and assign tasks to the appropriate command, campaigns and major operations then provide the framework within which the joint force accomplishes the mission; the actual execution is more complicated. With today's constant 24-hour media coverage and easy access to the Internet by our enemies for propaganda, a tactical-level plan and resulting action can have severe operational or strategic implications. For example, an action by one Soldier, Marine, Sailor, or Airman on the battlefield at the tactical level could potentially cause significant disruption to operational and strategic-level planning. Conversely, operations at all levels can be positively influenced by pervasive media coverage, which must be incorporated in plans at all levels. In this sense, during execution all three levels overlap. Commanders and their staffs at all levels must anticipate how their plans, operations, and actions may impact the other levels (those above and those below).