This report assesses the political-military efficacy of U.S. operations to remove senior enemy leaders. Three forms of leadership attacks are assessed: (1) operations that aim to directly attack the leader's person, (2) operations that are designed to foment and facilitate the leader's overthrow by an internal coup or rebellion, and (3) operations that aim to secure the leader's ouster through takedown by external military forces. Among other issues, the report examines the prerequisites of the effective use of U.S. air power in direct attacks and in support of coups, rebellions, and takedowns.

The report analyzes some 24 cases of leadership attack conducted or planned by the United States and other powers during the past 50 years. These past cases provide important insights about both the policy and the operational dimensions of leadership attacks, including

- the assumptions underlying the employment of leadership attacks and the conditions under which they are most likely to be sanctioned
- the comparative efficacy and prerequisites for success of different forms of attacks
- the potential deterrent and coercive value of leadership attacks for shaping future enemy policy and behavior
- the reasons leadership attacks frequently fail to produce the outcomes intended by the attackers.

The report is intended for the use of military and civilian officials concerned with the management, planning, and conduct of U.S.

operations to deter and counter threats to U.S. interests from enemy regimes, terrorist groups, and other hostile actors. The research for the report was completed in March 2001, well before the events of September 11, 2001. The basic points made here remain accurate and relevant.

The report is part of a larger RAND study, conducted within the Strategy and Doctrine Program of Project AIR FORCE, of the uses of air and space power in future conflicts that was sponsored by the Air Force Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Air and Space Operations and by the Air Force Director of Strategic Planning.

The primary objective of the overall study was to explore the prospects for developing a construct for air and space power that capitalizes on forthcoming air and space technologies and associated concepts of operation; that is effective against adversaries with diverse economies, cultures, political institutions, and military capabilities; and that offers an expansive concept of air and space power across the entire spectrum of conflict. Comments are welcome and may be addressed to the author or to the Strategy and Doctrine Program director, Edward R. Harshberger.

PROJECT AIR FORCE

Project AIR FORCE, a division of RAND, is the Air Force federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) for studies and analyses. It provides the Air Force with independent analyses of policy alternatives affecting the development, employment, combat readiness, and support of current and future aerospace forces. Research is carried out in four programs: Aerospace Force Development; Manpower, Personnel, and Training; Resource Management; and Strategy and Doctrine.