Intelligence Support to Targeting in Multidomain Operations: A Doctrinal Approach from Competition to Crisis to Armed Conflict

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The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.
—Sun Tzu

Introduction

For the last two decades, our competitors observed as we engaged in counterterrorism and irregular warfare, aided humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and supported steady-state operations around the globe. They invested in and employed capabilities to challenge our superiority. To meet the challenge imposed by our adversaries, the Army has taken lessons from recent conflicts such as the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict to shape the new war-fighting concept—multidomain operations. Multidomain operations establishes an operational framework, bridging five domains and three dimensions, to help leaders visualize the conditions that impact the conduct of operations. The complexity of the operational environment highlights the significance of intelligence support across all domains, and intelligence support to targeting in particular.

Currently, the Army faces a significant challenge with its understanding of what targeting means for both current and future operational environments, and how targeting varies in its generation of complementary and reinforcing effects at each echelon. At the tactical level, intelligence Soldiers prepare for large-scale ground combat operations by developing high-payoff target lists for collection and targeting operations that will achieve the commander's objectives. For special operations forces in Africa, targeting focuses on the human dimension, such as insurgent cell leaders and financiers or winning the hearts and minds of the local population. The joint targeting team for a combatant command develops electronic target folders to support nomination and validation of targets on the joint target list. To better understand the intelligence warfighting function's responsibilities when supporting targeting, we should take a closer look at those actions undertaken during each of the strategic contexts in which Army forces conduct operations.

FM 3-0, *Operations*, defines *multidomain operations* as "the combined arms employment of joint and Army capabilities to create and exploit relative advantages that achieve objectives, defeat enemy forces, and consolidate gains on behalf of joint force commanders."[1] This transformation in the way we think and contend with peer threats enables Army forces to employ the four tenets of operations–agility, convergence, endurance, and depth[2]–to provide the joint force commander with options for achieving objectives. While the recently published FM 3-0 remains rooted in the traditional principles of war, it also highlights significant changes that allow U.S. forces to remain decisive against our peer and near-peer adversaries.

Some of the more noticeable changes help with visualization of the complex operational environment, including its relationship to the physical, information, and human dimensions. Most importantly, FM 3-0 codifies a modern perspective and expands the scope of military operations in competition below armed conflict, crisis, and armed conflict–the Army's strategic contexts.

The Army Strategic Contexts

FM 3-0 describes *competition below armed conflict* as a general state "when two or more state or non-state adversaries have incompatible interests, but neither seeks armed conflict."[3] Our adversaries view competition as a normal state of affairs across all aspects of national power. They have been mostly successful in achieving their strategic objectives below the threshold of armed conflict and in ways contrary to our national interests. Correspondingly, "Army forces are successful during competition when they deter adversary malign action, enable the attainment of other national objectives, and maintain the ability to swiftly and effectively transition to armed conflict when deterrence fails."[4]

Wisconsin Army National Guardsmen secure and prepare an M119 howitzer for sling-load operations during Northern Strike at Grayling Army Airfield, MI, Jan. 24, 2023. (Photo by Air Force MSgt Scott Thompson National Guard)

we plan for effects with artillery, air support, or close combat—warheads on foreheads. Similarly, we have introduced cyberspace actions within the physical dimension, but seldom have we considered the information and human dimensions. Targeting must now converge effects against adversaries from the land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace domains, to exploit relative advantage across the physical, informational, and human dimensions to compel the enemy to do our will. We must change how we conduct intelligence support to succeed in the new paradigm.

Each strategic relationship, competition, crisis, and armed conflict, offers a distinct perspective for the United States to engage with the adversary. The Army's current targeting process uses the decide, detect, deliver, and assess (D3A) methodology. This method can easily support each strategic context.

Targeting in Multidomain Operations

Competition. The United States is constantly competing with its global adversaries. Therefore, the Army needs to establish targeting procedures to set conditions for possible engagements. Activities in competition focus on achieving two end states: deterring adversary malign action, and when deterrence fails, setting the requirements for the effective transition to crisis or armed conflict.

Targeting to support deterrence centers on the information and human dimensions of the operational environment; nonlethal effects are the key to success. These efforts may include policy changes, key leader engagements, information operations, and even military exercises and demonstrations to influence the adversary's decision-making process. While this does not reflect targeting in the conventional sense, these activities are only achievable with targeting guiding the process. Fundamental intelligence support to targeting functions such as nominating targets, creating prioritized target lists, and synchronizing effects with the desired end states are some examples of intelligence support actions required during competition.

A *crisis* is "an emerging incident or situation involving a possible threat to the United States, its citizens, military forces, or vital interests that develops rapidly and creates a condition of such diplomatic, economic, or military importance that commitment of military forces and resources is contemplated to achieve national and/or strategic objectives."[5] "Success during a crisis, is a return to a state of competition in which the United States, its allies, and partners are in a position of increased relative advantage or—should deterrence fail—positioned to defeat the adversary during armed conflict."[6] Army forces provide that range of flexible deterrent options or flexible response options to the joint force commander.

Armed conflict encompasses the conditions of a strategic relationship in which opponents use lethal force as the primary means for achieving objectives and imposing their will on the other.[7] Lethal force impacts the physical, information, and human dimensions by reducing the enemy's capabilities and capacity while influencing their behaviors and decision making. Armed conflict is usually a combination of conventional and irregular warfare. For Army forces to be successful in armed conflict, they must create advantages, preserve combat power, and exploit opportunities as they arise.[8]

How does the Army conduct targeting within the framework of the competition continuum's strategic relationships, and what does targeting look like for the intelligence professional? Historically, the Army campaigns within the physical dimension; a target is identified, and to achieve the desired outcome,

Likewise, a simultaneous effort must also exist to set the conditions for a transition to crisis and armed conflict. The targeting process includes target development and establishment of priorities within the physical dimension. Target development is a systematic examination of potential target systems and their components, individual targets, and elements of targets to determine the type and duration of action that must be exerted to create an effect consistent with the commander's objectives.[9] The intelligence staff plays a critical role in leading or supporting functions such as target research, nomination, and target materials production. Target development results in four products: target development nominations, target folders, collection and exploitation requirements, and target briefs.[10]

All intelligence disciplines support target development by identifying targets, target signatures, and activities. Personnel from each intelligence discipline compile data and include it in target development nominations, which gets the targets registered on the appropriate target list. From this point, validation and prioritization occur for future placement on the high-payoff target list. This process of validation and prioritization prepares for timely engagement if operations transition to crisis or armed conflict. Target development is a comprehensive process that requires input from the entire intelligence enterprise. It is not something to undertake without forethought.

Crisis. The transition from competition to crisis occurs when interactions with an adversary become tense due to a perception of escalation or rapid changes in the environment that indicate imminent military action. While lethal effects are not the primary means for achieving objectives during this stage, increasing force posture may be necessary—escalate to deescalate. Intelligence collection can help identify observable actions indicating a change to crisis, specifically collection by geospatial intelligence, signals intelligence, and human intelligence reporting. These indicators may be overlooked if proper target development did not occur during competition.

Additionally, targeting efforts during crisis can vary significantly for each echelon. At the tactical level, this primarily mirrors the targeting activities undertaken during the military decision-making process. Specifically, those executed through the D3A methodology and the creation of products such as high-value and high-payoff targets, target selection standards, and attack guidance matrix. With the likelihood of hostilities being greater, completing these products facilitates a smoother transition to conflict, should the need arise.

At the operational and strategic levels, the focus is on updating, refining, and revalidating targets previously identified during competition and nominating new targets to account for adversary activity. Overall, the process stays primarily the same—use the ongoing situation and current intelligence to support target nomination and validation to ensure the friendly forces' ability to shape the environment when entering armed conflict.

During crisis, both friendly and adversary forces conduct nonlethal targeting through the information and human dimensions to sway opinions of the foreign civilian populace and government leaders. If the environment continues to shift toward armed conflict, both sides want the backing of the people. Targeting is essential for identifying the needs and wants of the foreign population, and then using that information to achieve positive results.

Armed Conflict. Intelligence support to targeting activities within armed conflict is continuous and follows the D3A methodology. For the intelligence staff, the *decide* and *detect* functions of the targeting process focus on information collection. During the military decision-making process, the staff creates and refines the information collection plan ensuring alignment with the commander's desired course of action. A portion of this process is confirming that targeting priorities have adequate coverage so the threat targets are detectable and ready for engagement. Coordination with higher echelons and subordinate elements is necessary to ensure consideration of enemy activities in the deep and close area.

Depending on the target type and engagement criteria, positive identification from multiple sources may be required prior to engagement. To satisfy this, the intelligence staff should balance mixing assets and using redundancy and cueing for collection of targeting intelligence requirements. This strategy will ensure synchronization of target detection with the target selection standards.

The intelligence staff has minimal responsibility during the *deliver* function; however, their role in the *assess* portion of D3A is vital. Having an in-depth understanding of the targets, an understanding of what constitutes achievement of the desired effects, and an understanding of the criteria for target reengagement or follow-on actions is critical to mission success. Combat assessment is the process of determining the effectiveness of force employment and consists of three components:

✦ Battle damage assessment (BDA) is the estimate of target damage or effect resulting from lethal and nonlethal engagements on targets designated by the commander.[11] The article *Fusing Data into a Battle Damage Assessment for the Commander*, by MAJ Jared Cohen and CW3 Joshua Ryker, also in this special edition, provides an in-depth look into BDA.

✦ Munitions effectiveness assessment is an assessment of the military force in terms of the weapon system and munitions effectiveness.[12]

✦ Reengagement recommendation occurs when failure to achieve BDA, or failure to achieve necessary effects as a result of BDA, results in a decision from the commander as to whether to continue as planned or to reengage the target.[13]

The information collection plan is also the means for intelligence support to BDA. Post-strike collection and analysis, led by geospatial intelligence personnel with support from signals intelligence and human intelligence, provides the intelligence and operations staff with an assessment of the effectiveness of an attack. This collection requires a level of flexibility built into the information collection synchronization matrix. The

timing of lethal effects cannot always be predicted. They occur if or when the target is identified. The result is that collection in support of BDA will likely be an ad hoc requirement, requiring "white space" in the information collection synchronization matrix to ensure adequate resources are available.

Conclusion

We must now conceptualize effects across the five domains and three dimensions, as intelligence support to targeting is vital for the Army of 2030 and beyond. Targeteers and intelligence professionals need to broaden their foundation from focusing on lethal targeting as the primary method of engagement to integrating nonlethal means across the strategic contexts. If not, then adopting a "figure it out as we go" approach will incur harsh repercussions during armed conflict. Establishing the appropriate processes and procedures during competition prepares the intelligence enterprise to successfully support engaging the enemy in armed conflict. Army leaders must seek out opportunities to incorporate rigorous targeting training into their operations and ensure its conduct is in accordance with the targeting process. The intelligence profession must critically deliberate to achieve an end state where all military intelligence professionals can support the targeting process regardless of echelon or operational domain. �

Epigraph

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (London, UK: Chartwell Books, 2011).

Endnotes

1. Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 1 October 2022), 1-2.

2. Ibid., 3-2.

3. Ibid., 1-14.

4. Ibid., 4-1.

5. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 18 June 2022), GL-9.

6. Department of the Army, FM 3-0, *Operations*, 5-1.

7. Ibid., 6-1.

8. Ibid., 6-1–6-2.

9. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*, II-5.

10. Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 3-60, *Targeting* (Washington, DC: GPO, 7 May 2015), 2-8.

11. Ibid., 2-14.

12. Ibid., 2-16.

13. Ibid.

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