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Defeating Global Networks

The Need for a Strategic Targeting Organization

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Adversaries threaten the United States throughout a complex battlespace . . . spanning the global commons. . . . Within these areas rogue states provide sanctuary to terrorists, protecting them from surveillance and attack. Other adversaries take advantage of ungoverned space and under-governed territories from which they prepare plans, train forces and launch attacks. These ungoverned areas often coincide with locations of illicit activities: such coincidence creates opportunities for hostile coalitions of criminal elements and ideological extremists.

—*The National Military Strategy of the United States of America, 2004*

The National Military Strategy clearly articulates the diverse global threats that face the United States, but the Department of Defense (DOD) has not implemented a process to deal with these adversaries effectively. Current threats involving transnational and nonstate actors operate across the areas of responsibility (AOR) of multiple combatant commands. In order to deal with these threats, there must be a single DOD entity empowered to globally integrate and prioritize targeting.

Combatant commanders are assigned a wide range of missions, such as conducting Global Strike, waging the war on terror, supporting counternarcotics operations, and countering weapons proliferation. In some of these mission areas, the combatant commander's geographic boundaries are insufficient to

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delineate where one commander's responsibilities end and another's begin. Therefore, it is imperative that DOD adapts to cover the seams created where global networks form that can threaten U.S. interests. Current doctrine is insufficient to address these complex networks, which link adversary states, terrorists, narcotics dealers, international criminal organizations, financiers, weapons proliferators, and individual nonstate actors.

Although the Armed Forces have the capability to find, fix, and track many of these threats, DOD frequently lacks the *legal* authorities to target and engage them. Often the threats exist in sovereign nations outside of designated combat zones and are *criminal* as opposed to *military* in nature. An interagency process must be an integral part of resolving this targeting issue, but DOD first needs to establish a body to function as the global targeting synchronizer within itself.

Establishing a global strategic targeting organization within DOD to address transnational threats is critical. A history of how and why the current doctrine and structure have evolved is vital to understanding the deficiencies of the military's current organization. It is important to recognize that future targeting organizations must be created with the necessary authorities to carry out missions across the globe, unrestricted by geographic boundaries. By implementing a global strategic targeting system, based on joint targeting doctrine, DOD would better synchronize targeting among the unified commands and streamline the decision loop.

Background

Joint targeting doctrine was created for operational level commands and their subordinate components to plan, coordinate, and execute targeting successfully.¹ Regardless of the level for which the doctrine was written, targeting fundamentals are applicable at all levels of command from an infantry squad up to the National Security Council. Additionally, it is crucial to disassociate the idea of targeting from its air-centric roots founded in second- and third-generation warfare. Targeting at the global-strategic level must be viewed from a fourth-generation warfare perspective where objectives are rarely achieved by putting bombs on target.²

To begin, what constitutes a *target* and *targeting*? Joint doctrine provides the following definitions:

A target is an entity or object considered for possible engagement or action. It may be an area, complex, installation, force, equipment, capability, function, individual, group, system, entity, or behavior identified for possible action to support the commander's objectives, guidance, and intent.

*... Targeting is the process of selecting and prioritizing targets and matching the appropriate response to them, considering operational requirements and capabilities.*³

Moreover, targeting helps a commander synchronize operations and supports the process of assigning targets to a subordinate commander for engagement or action.

Targeting is a commander's responsibility. Combatant commanders and joint force commanders (JFCs) normally assign targeting responsibilities to a Joint Targeting and Coordination Board (JTCB), whose primary participants are operations, plans, and intelligence personnel from the JFC staff and representatives from all components and functional commands, supporting commands, and supporting agencies. The JFC normally appoints the deputy JFC or a component commander to chair the JTCB. The JTCB integrates and synchronizes target planning, execution, and assessment. It also validates all target nominations and provides the commander a joint integrated prioritized target list for approval.⁴

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The JTCB maintains the joint target list, which is a consolidated list of all targets upon which no restrictions are placed; the no-strike list, showing targets for which no targeting authorities exist and are protected under international law and/or rules of engagement; and the restricted target list, showing targets upon which certain targeting restrictions apply. By coordinating these functions and maintaining these lists, the JTCB assures proper deconfliction, prioritizes allocation of resources, identifies shortfalls, and applies appropriate restraints to the targeting system. This provides centralized command and facilitates decentralized execution while preventing duplicative efforts.⁵

Targets should be developed from the lowest levels of the chain of command based on their assigned objectives. Subordinate commanders must be able to nominate targets in

their AOR, which they do not have the resources or authority to prosecute. To prevent fratricide and unintended consequences, one final tenet is required: in order to engage targets in another command's AOR, actions must be coordinated through the command that owns the area.⁶

In one way or another, albeit less formally, joint targeting has taken place in every war that the United States has fought. It was first addressed at the DOD level during the 1950s to synchronize all the Services' strategic nuclear capabilities into one integrated operational plan. From 1954 until the Secretary of Defense establishment of a Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff (JSTPS) in 1960, attempts to resolve targeting conflicts and achieve mutual support or unity of strategic effort between the Service chiefs and operational commanders were unsuccessful. The Secretary of Defense at the time considered forming the JSTPS as the most important decision of his tenure.⁷

According to Strategic Air Command history, "In 1954, the [Joint Chiefs of Staff] asked each appropriate commander to submit . . . a target list to his war plan and to coordinate it with theater commanders and CINCSAC [commander in chief, Strategic Air Command]."⁸ This was not effective and led to annual World Wide Coordination Conferences, which also failed to solve targeting conflicts. These conferences in 1957 and 1958 revealed that duplication and triplication had

not been significantly reduced. Although the Joint Chiefs could not agree on a policy, there was consensus that a targeting policy and a national target list were needed.⁹

Ultimately, in keeping with current doctrine, the Secretary of Defense decided to create a Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff (a *strategic* Joint Targeting and Coordination Board) to solve this issue. He then designated the commander in chief of Strategic Air Command (a component commander) as director. The biggest debate among the Services appears to have centered on where the staff should reside; not wanting to cede control to a single commander, the Navy and Marines favored leaving responsibility with the Joint Chiefs of Staff.¹⁰

The Services pursued their own targeting and fire support coordination initiatives until

1986, when Congress passed the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act, which imposed joint operations on the Armed Forces and empowered the combatant commanders. Ironically, the first authoritative joint targeting publication was not released until after the events of September 11, 2001.¹¹ Fortunately, the publication was grounded in experience from real world operations and not “merely” theory. Operations in the first Gulf War and Balkans served as the test bed for joint targeting and provided solutions to the contentious issues among the Services.

The first Gulf War provided several targeting lessons, both good and bad. First, it demonstrated that modern communications offered a means to centralize targeting despite the separation of forces. Reachback, the ability for a deployed unit to leverage network technology to access all-source intelligence supplied by nondeployed units, obviates the need to centralize collection and analysis sources.¹² Technology and experiences since 9/11 have improved significantly on this capability.

Second, execution of the Gulf War air campaign raised animosity among the Services when the JFC delegated responsibility for targeting to a joint force air component commander (JFACC) who disregarded targets submitted by the other component commanders. In this instance, the JFC delegated responsibility of a command function to a component commander who proved to be less than impartial. Ultimately, the Army and Marine component commanders argued that the JFACC was not shifting priority to Iraqi forces in Kuwait as the ground war approached. This friction between component commanders forced the JFC to appoint his deputy as the JTCB lead.¹³

Third, the Gulf War showed the necessity to translate objectives and commander's guidance into a complementary targeting strategy that accounted for second- and third-order effects. Despite guidance from the President to minimize casualties among Iraqi noncombatants and to prevent excessive damage in order to accelerate postwar recovery, the JFACC targeted oil refineries and electrical power systems at the expense of this guidance. Although effective militarily, this method disrupted water purification and sewage treatment plants, causing major health problems for the civilian population.¹⁴

Lastly, difficulty attaining all-source intelligence during the Gulf War demonstrated a need for access to coordinated interagency target intelligence. As a result, the Joint Staff

Intelligence Directorate (JS-J2) established a National Military Joint Intelligence Center (NMJIC) to support the combatant commander's Intelligence Directorate (J2) in attaining national-level targeting intelligence from the Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, and National Security Agency. The NMJIC proved effective at providing all-source targeting intelligence and was able to leverage modern communications to share it with the JFACC. Although valuable, this initiative caused friction and disrupted operations when the NMJIC and JFACC bypassed the combatant commander's J2.¹⁵

Based on lessons learned from the first Gulf War, Operation Southern Watch, and the Somalia crisis, the JS-J2 formed a permanent targeting intelligence support section in August 1993. Its responsibilities expanded further after a 1994 Defense Intelligence Agency study that also resulted in aligning the Joint Warfare Analysis Center and Joint Electronic Warfare Center to support national-level targeting. In addition to coordinating targeting and combat assessment for combatant commanders, the target intelligence support section supported Theater Missile Defense (TMD) targeting of mobile missile systems, special programs for the Joint Staff Operations Directorate (J3), and Special Technical Operations (STO).¹⁶

From an intelligence perspective, these adjustments made a significant impact in subsequent crises in Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, and North Korea.¹⁷ But as identified in *Air & Space Power Journal* prior to 9/11, the “establishment of JS-J2 Directorate of Targets and the intelligence community's realignment . . . are only a ‘band-aid fix’ to a deeper problem—

a void in the operations-intelligence interface.”¹⁸ The authors proposed building on the Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff model discussed earlier to develop a national-level joint targeting organization.

The principle of centralized command and decentralized execution is essential to accelerate the decision cycle especially when conducting dynamic targeting.¹⁹ Since the first Gulf War, technological advances have vastly shortened the kill chain, the time between identifying a target and then engaging it. Subsequent conflicts, namely Operations Allied Force in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, demonstrate that leaders with access to real-time targeting information take more time to decide; it was the only step in the kill chain to expand. Strategic and operational leaders have not sufficiently delegated authority to their subordinates, resulting in slower execution and decreased efficiency. For example, during Operation Allied Force, President Bill Clinton and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) strategic political and military leaders controlled the aerial bombing campaign. This interference hamstrung the air component commander's targeting efforts, creating frustration at the operational-tactical level and lengthening the decision loop.²⁰

Difficulties of Global Targeting

Since 9/11, DOD has attempted to synchronize global operations by designating a combatant commander as the global synchronizer for certain mission sets. U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is the global synchronizer for operations



OH-58 fires rocket on test target before entering Mosul to provide security for ground troops

115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment (John Crosby)

against terrorist networks, and U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) is the DOD synchronizer for combating weapons of mass destruction (WMD). At first glance, assigning these tasks to a capable combatant commander appears logical. Both USSOCOM and USSTRATCOM have the expertise and capability to provide global command and control of forces conducting those missions.

A problem arises, however, when one takes into account the regional combatant commanders who have authority and responsibility for all operations within their respective AORs. Those responsibilities are clearly defined in the Unified Command Plan. Similar to the situation normally encountered by a JFACC, neither USSOCOM nor USSTRATCOM owns the battlespace where their intended target is to be engaged. Adding to the problem, the term *synchronizer* is not a clearly defined or recognized command relationship.²¹ Ultimately, the idea of placing a functional combatant commander as a “global synchronizer” leads to friction and defeats the intent. It certainly is not as clear as operational control (OPCON) or supported/supporting command relationships.

Putting aside the above complications, even if the global synchronizer relationship worked perfectly, there would still be gaps created by overlap in combatant commander responsibilities. Clearly, denying terrorists WMD is of primary concern; the possibility of Saddam Hussein’s supplying WMD to terrorists was one of the justifications for the war in Iraq. Under this premise, USSOCOM and USSTRATCOM have shared interests and have probably identified some of the same targets.

Who is responsible for synchronizing and prioritizing these separate target lists? This is not clear. Each command has a JTCB of some form, but there is not a higher-level command JTCB to synchronize both target lists and set priorities for intelligence collection. This problem is compounded when the regional combatant commanders’ missions are added into the mix.

USSTRATCOM could divert targeting resources away from a supported combatant commander to conduct its own missions, even if U.S. Strategic Command is attempting to act impartially. Due to the missions and forces assigned to it, USSTRATCOM is the de facto prioritization authority for numerous national targeting resources. In addition to its role as DOD synchronizer for combating WMD, it controls national-level resources for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance;

network warfare; and information operations. USSTRATCOM’s implied authority for apportioning these assets could upset a regional combatant commander. This friction would mirror how Army and Marine commanders felt about the JFACC during the first Gulf War. Arguably, DOD did not intend to put USSTRATCOM in this position of authority.

However, USCENTCOM does have OPCON of forces supporting the United Kingdom–led counternarcotic operations in Afghanistan, not SACEUR. Recently, the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007* reported that the Taliban is funding operations with opium and that a major responsibility lies with the opiate consuming countries, namely the

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Another major area of concern is cross-boundary operations. In a 2000 *Joint Force Quarterly* article, Richard Lechowich from U.S. Central Command’s Directorate of Plans and Policy captured the challenges combatant commanders are presented with:

*Drugs originating in the CENTCOM [U.S. Central Command] area of responsibility could be detected by SPACECOM [U.S. Space Command], survive crop eradication, and be tracked across the AOR in transit to EUCOM [U.S. European Command] for transshipment. EUCOM would then monitor the movement while alerting friendly law enforcement agencies. Finally, either SOUTHCOM [U.S. Southern Command] or U.S. Joint Forces Command could help domestic law enforcement agencies interdict the shipment and arrest the perpetrators. . . . Crossing the invisible boundaries that separate CINC [commander in chief] responsibilities is perhaps even more difficult today than when Clausewitz first formalized the concept of friction. Such battlefield seams as cross-boundary situations are a weak point for enemy exploitation. Commanders on all levels will still have to spend additional effort to ensure that these seams are covered.*²²

Cross-boundary and interagency operations in a post-9/11 world are just as complicated. An excellent example is Afghanistan, which falls in USCENTCOM’s AOR, but NATO forces conducting stability and reconstruction operations in support of the United Nations Assistance Mission there are under the OPCON of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), who *also* happens to be double-hatted as commander of U.S. European Command. NATO forces are not under the operational control of USCENTCOM, but they do operate in its AOR.

European Union (EU) members and China.²³ USCENTCOM has a keen interest in targeting narcotics networks operating in China and the EU, but both are outside its AOR. The supported commander for targeting these Taliban narcotics networks is not clear. It is not in USSOCOM’s purview because the U.S. Government has not declared the Taliban as a terrorist organization, and USCENTCOM is neither designated as the global synchronizer for counternarcotics nor does it have authority to capture Taliban outside the designated combat zone.

The issues highlighted here provide some of the many reasons why a DOD-level entity is needed to integrate and prioritize targeting globally. The experience gained developing the Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff in the 1950s and lessons learned fighting wars since the Goldwater-Nichols Act was enacted should be combined to better conduct targeting in the post-9/11 world. The nature of the Nation’s adversaries requires DOD to face reality and make adjustments.

Regardless of the name of this new organization, it should combine the intelligence and operations targeting functions performed by a JTCB. For simplicity, this organization should be referred to as the Strategic JTCB (S-JTCB). In addition to traditional kinetic targeting, the S-JTCB needs to leverage all instruments of national power to include information operations, network warfare, strategic communications, law enforcement, financial warfare, and special access programs. Because transnational threats blur the line between combatant and criminal, close coordination with the Staff Judge Advocate is necessary to ensure legal boundaries are not violated and proper authorities exist. If legal authorities exist in other government agencies, the S-JTCB should have unfettered access to those agencies. If no authorities exist, this organization should have access to appropriate principles that may grant them.

Recommendations

Three arrangements stand out as possible solutions to the problem. First, because of its experience dealing with strategic targeting, current assigned missions, and resources at its disposal, the Secretary of Defense could designate USSTRATCOM to host and chair the S-JTCB. This would most closely mirror the JSTPS endorsed in 1960 and still align with doctrine. USSTRATCOM's geographic location makes it difficult to create and maintain day-to-day contacts with decisionmakers from other government agencies. As expressed earlier and in keeping with the dissenting opinions of the Navy and the Marines in the 1950s, delegating this responsibility to peer combatant commanders could lead to friction between commands.

Second, the most obvious possibility would be to place the S-JTCB within the Joint Staff, which would elevate the board above the combatant commanders. Doing so would silence any claims of impartiality. As intelligence targeting functions are already being carried out by the JS-J2, placing the S-JTCB in the Joint Staff would only require tying the JS-J3 into the process. Being located within the Beltway would allow it to create and maintain close contact with decisionmakers and afford interagency representatives the opportunity to attend the S-JTCB. This would significantly shorten the decision loop by placing it closer (in both time and location) to Federal decisionmakers who have or can attain targeting authorities. In this arrangement, the S-JTCB could be chaired by the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff or perhaps the Director of the Joint Staff.

One major problem with this arrangement is that by law, the Joint Staff has no executive authority over combat forces.²⁴ However, a third option exists: the S-JTCB could be placed within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and chaired by an Assistant Secretary of Defense. This would generate the same benefits described above and would shorten the decision loop even more. The JS-J2/J3 would form the backbone of the Joint Targeting Working Group, which could consolidate input from the combatant commanders and perform the administrative legwork. This arrangement would ensure that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff maintained oversight in his role as senior military advisor to the Secretary of Defense and President. OSD also has access and tasking authority of unique capabilities resident in special access programs that could be leveraged for targeting purposes. An added benefit to this option is that OSD could form

a cadre of permanently assigned civilian targeting professionals who could maintain corporate knowledge and develop long-lasting ties with other government agencies that would span Presidential administrations and tenures of military leaders.²⁵

For a strategic targeting process to work and not just create another unnecessary layer of bureaucracy, several initial conditions must be met. Foremost, strategic leaders must understand and conform to the principle of centralized command–decentralized execution. Targeting planners must move past the “warheads on foreheads” mentality and understand how to incorporate all instruments of national power. To accomplish this, a Strategic Joint Targeting and Coordination Board must include representatives from all Federal agencies. Finally, to produce synchronized target lists, the combatant commands need to adopt a common targeting database.

The Department of Defense would see many benefits if a Strategic Joint Targeting and Coordination Board were established. Strategic targeting would be better matched to government objectives, and high-demand/low-density national-level targeting resources would be better managed. There would be improved synchronization and deconfliction of operations among combatant commanders. Combatant command access to all-source intelligence and resources of other government agencies would be enhanced, ultimately leading to an accelerated decision loop and authorities approval process. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Joint Publication (JP) 3–60, *Joint Targeting* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, April 13, 2007), i.

² William S. Lind et al., “The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 1989, 22–26. *Fourth-generation warfare* encompasses dispersed entities that blur the line between war and peace. Boundaries are often undefined, and effectiveness is dependent on inter-agency unity of effort as lines between responsibility and mission cross.

³ JP 3–60, vii, I–1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, x.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II–8, II–9.

⁶ JP 3–09, *Joint Fire Support* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, November 13, 2006), viii.

⁷ U.S. Strategic Air Command, “History of the Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff: Background and

Preparation of SIOP–62,” (Offutt Air Force Base, NE: History and Research Division Headquarters Strategic Air Command, declassified 1980), 1, available at <www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/reading_room/16.pdf>.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4, 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹ Thomas J. Murphy and Bernd L. Ingram, “Joint Targeting Doctrine,” *Field Artillery* (September–October 2001), 36–38. JP 3–60 was first released in January 2002. In July 1997, however, the Air Land Sea Application Center released Field Manual 90–36, *The Joint Targeting Process and Procedures for Targeting Time-Critical Targets*, which served as the foundation for JP 3–60.

¹² Edward B. Schmidt, “Targeting Organizations: Centralized or Decentralized?” (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Air University, 1993), 54–55.

¹³ Eliot A. Cohen et al., *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, Summary (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), 154–155.

¹⁴ Matt McKeon, “Joint Targeting: What’s Still Broke?” (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Air University, 1999), 29.

¹⁵ Mark C. Christian and James E. Dillard, “Why We Need a National Joint Targeting Center,” *Air & Space Power Journal*, January 6, 2000, 3, available at <www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/cc/Dillard.html>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Dynamic targeting prosecutes targets of opportunity and changes to planned targets or objectives. Dynamic targeting steps consist of find, fix, track, target, engage, and access. It is commonly referred to as the *kill chain*.

²⁰ Richard M. Gomez, “Centralized Command–Decentralized Execution: Implications of Operating in a Network Centric Warfare Environment” (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air War College, 2004), 11–12.

²¹ See JP 3–0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, September 17, 2006), for recognized command relationships.

²² Richard A. Lechowich, “Cross Boundaries: Commanders in Chiefs and Areas of Interest,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 24 (Spring 2000), 37–38, available at <www.ndu.edu/inss/Press/jfq_pages/0924.pdf>.

²³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007*, Executive Summary, v–vii, available at <www.unodc.org/pdf/research/AFG07_ExSum_web.pdf>.

²⁴ Since its establishment in 1947, statute has prohibited the Joint Staff from operating or organizing as an overall armed forces general staff; therefore, the Joint Staff has no executive authority over combatant forces.

²⁵ Schmidt, 55.