# Targeting the Complex Threat: The Art and Best Practices of Targeting during Reconnaissance Operations

**by MAJ Morrie J. Fanto**

The 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team's Decisive-Action Training Environment Rotation 12-01 at the Joint Multi-National Readiness Center demonstrated the tremendous challenges presented by the Army's complex-threat opposing forces. The 173rd ABCT's rotational training units faced an austere operational environment (without forward operating bases), an opposing near-peer conventional force, special-purpose forces and an insurgent "Southern Atropian People's Army." They also contended with criminal and civilian issues – all while building combat power under severe time constraints. Also, an adversarial threat of this size and complexity presented the brigade with an enemy that could often impose its will through initiative and mass.

Successfully targeting the complex threat requires commanders to use caution in blending the tactics, techniques and procedures learned during the last 10 years of fighting the war on terrorism in conjunction with conventional targeting practices of the "Fulda Gap" Cold War era. With the emergence of the near-peer adversary, units must attempt to understand the conventional enemy's capabilities, and predict and anticipate the enemy's doctrinal framework, while simultaneously defeating the most prominent threats posed by insurgent forces. Finding the right combination and balance of both old and current methodologies provides the prescription for success on the complex modern battlefield.

## Decisive and shaping operations

The cavalry squadron was highly successful during early airfield security operations and again while providing the screen line against the 306th Reconnaissance Brigade Tactical Group. However, while most reconnaissance and surveillance assets were directed against the impending conventional threat, special-purpose forces and SAPA forces maintained relative freedom of movement within the 173rd ABCT footprint. These small enemy forces, employing guerrilla techniques, were able to harass, interdict and, most damagingly, collect on friendly positions within the squadron's footprint, and pass that information back to the 306th BTG.

The 12-01 DATE complex threat demonstrated that time and resources are finite and precious. With multiple types of enemy forces within an operational environment, units must ensure a strict economy-of-force measurement against the right threat, at the right time, and balance in accordance with the brigade's operational timeline.

Both the brigade and squadron staffs should understand concise priority information requirements to best align brigade and squadron assets against lethal and nonlethal. Once PIR is identified, the information must be converted into R&S tasks, and those tasks must be carefully managed within the target-synchronization matrix. Due to the dynamic and fluid nature of the complex threat, the target-synchronization plan must constantly be developed and reassessed to allow the squadron commander to accurately detect the threats in the OE and target those threats in the right order (with regard to space and time).

"It is essential that all R&S assets be used effectively and efficiently," states Paragraph 2-57, Field Manual 3-60, ***The Targeting Process*** (Nov. 26, 2010). "Duplication of effort among available assets must be avoided unless it is required to confirm target information. … This allows timely combat information to be collected to answer the commander's intelligence requirements. This information

lets analysts develop the enemy situation and identify targets."

Effective management of the target-synchronization plan helps commanders to develop a more accurate situational template and a better understanding of the complete enemy situation. During the initial days of DATE Rotation 12-01, human intelligence gathered from communities within the OE could have provided much of the necessary information to disrupt and neutralize special-purpose forces and SAPA operations during shaping operations. Also, requesting help from and joining host-nation security forces could provide a source of cultural and historic background information needed to quickly root out these enemy elements and deny them safe haven.

Regarding non-lethal targeting, troop integration with small elements of HNSF could provide much greater fidelity regarding political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, information, physical environment and time considerations within the OE. Also, HNSF could assist with internally displaced personnel contingencies, information operations to protect and inform the indigenous population, and consequence-management plans (within the scope of culturally accepted norms) to contend with collateral-damage issues. HNSF, as both partnering units and ethnographic guides, allow for the quickest development, validation and confirmation of the enemy situational template.

Because of the complexity of the complex threat, the enemy can often influence and dictate operational tempo. This threat is exacerbated when additional problem sets are added to the equation; fatigue and austerity associated with airborne operations, along with unfamiliar territory, makes delineating essential priorities of work during the initial hours and days of the operation critical to the squadron's overall success.

## Squadron commander as chief of recon

During the initial hours of 173rd ABCT's defensive operation, a primary task of the brigade's R&S plan was to confirm the enemy event (doctrinal) template, which was important for the success of the brigade's shaping operation. Many squadron-dismounted observation posts were to observe and destroy enemy high-value targets identified as the enemy's fixing force. Once elements of the attack and exploitation forces were recognized as entering the battle area, Soldiers manning the OPs were to then move to a strongpoint without becoming decisively engaged.

The task of identifying the enemy order of battle was somewhat more ambiguous and challenging for the unit targeting the complex threat. Before the 21st Century, the opposing force at U.S. installations and combat-training centers could be expected to adhere to a single doctrine with a well-defined order of battle, and the threat model was therefore more easily predicted.

During the 12-01 DATE rotation, there was greater uncertainty how the OPFOR would organize for battle, which required a thinking S-2 able to place himself in the enemy's position. To maintain a firm grip on the situation, the squadron commander would rely on both organic squadron assets as well as integrated brigade R&S platforms.

The 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry intelligence section performed exceptionally well in developing an enemy doctrinal template and enemy order of battle. This analysis allowed the squadron S-3 operations officer to plan effective named areas of interest and ideal OP positions to observe the suspected maneuver corridors that 306th BTG would use during the attack. However, issues would later arise with intelligence management during the force-on-force battle.

The squadron commander is the brigade combat team's chief of recon but does not own all the R&S platforms that complement this position. The squadron staff does not have the organic analytical capability needed to process this amount of intelligence within the time constraints available, so the title authority for R&S information management and analysis is normally retained at brigade.

How squadron information requirements translate into acquisition criteria and indicators, and ultimately into brigade R&S tasks and integration, is accomplished through a system of continuous dialogue between the squadron and brigade staffs. This function of integration directly supports the squadron commander in his role as the chief of recon, and the missions inherent in that role.

Integration, as Paragraph 2-12, FM 3-20.96, ***Reconnaissance and Cavalry Squadron*** (March 12, 2010), is "the task of assigning and controlling a unit's intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets (in terms of space, time and purpose) to collect and report information as a concerted and integrated portion of operation plans and orders (FM 3-0). This task ensures assignment of the best intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets through a deliberate and coordinated effort of the entire staff across all warfighting functions by integrating surveillance and reconnaissance into the operation. In addition, R&S integration supports the targeting process by focusing the appropriate assets on the detection of targets."

While the enemy event template was accurate, the process of deliberate R&S integration became less effective as the battle evolved. The 306th BTG attacking force and exploitation forces were able to mass effective fires on the 173rd defensive formation and temporarily overwhelmed the brigade's capability to manage complete R&S integration. Additionally, bottom-up reporting from the OPs became disorganized over time, and this cascading effect caused the squadron to lose situational awareness. The result was that the brigade lost much of its reconnaissance capability earlier than anticipated, and the squadron withdrawal to the strongpoint was de-synchronized due to the overall loss of the current and complete operational SITTEMP.

This issue highlights the importance for the squadron and brigade staffs to create systems that allow collaboration and seamless integration during missions, regardless of the operation tempo. The number of NAIs, the length and depth of the screening operation, and the size and capability of the enemy must be considered when designing the R&S plan.

With limited analytical capability, the squadron will depend upon the quick and responsive passing of analysis from higher regarding the surveillance of NAIs and the detection of high-value targets by non-organic assets. For internal assets, the staff must provide a R&S collection plan with definitive indicators for squadron analysts to limit acquisitions to a manageable number that will not overwhelm intrinsic systems. During high-tempo operations, information collection must be limited to only what is essential to mission success, which is a departure from the reporting which has become commonplace during the war on terrorism.

The latest time information is of value is a paramount factor during force-on-force conflict due to the complex threat and the time constraints innate to this threat. The nature of the threat also validates the continued need of company/troop intelligence support teams. These teams function as hubs for passing critical information/updates to and from Soldiers on the screen line while targeting complex threats. Also, the company or troop intelligence-support team can assist in answering the squadron's specific information requirements through collecting, collating, analyzing and reporting troop

updates into a seamless and routine analog report to the squadron tactical-operations center and the tactical command posts.

## Attack guidance and triggers

The complex threat created a new set of leadership challenges for the brigade and to the cavalry reconnaissance squadron's mission. The 1-91 Cavalry screening operation during the brigade's defensive operation illustrated this challenge. Squadron OPs were at the "tip of the spear" and faced an enemy who could rapidly overmatch, overpower and overrun a non-mechanized OP.

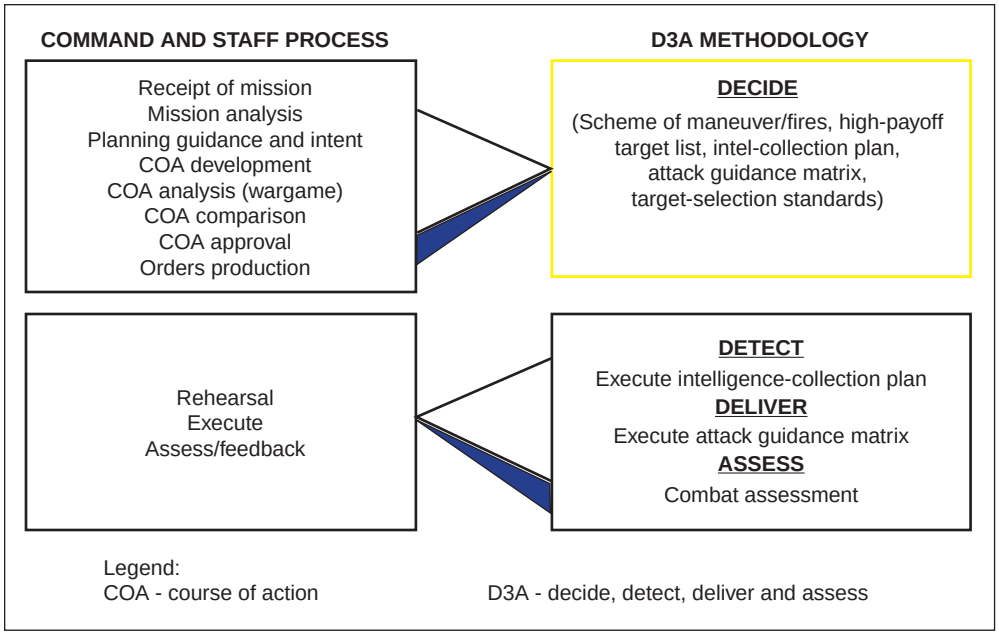


**Figure 1. Targeting methodology diagram from Paragraph 1-19, Field Manual 3-60.**

To enable the squadron to achieve a higher rate of mission success and afford an acceptable rate of OP survivability, it is vital that Soldiers at the lowest level understand what enemy elements meet bypass criteria as opposed to legitimate targets designated on the high-payoff target list and targets of opportunity. The squadron staff provides and routinely updates this information in the form of the HPTL, the target-selection standards and the attack guidance matrix, which can all be combined into a single document.

**"**Targeting methodology … organizes the commander's and staff's efforts to accomplish key targeting requirements," according to Paragraph 1-19, FM 3-60. "The targeting process supports the commander's decisions. It helps the targeting working group decide which targets must be acquired and attacked. It helps in the decision of which attack option to use to engage the targets. Options can be lethal or nonlethal and/or organic or supporting at all levels through the range of operations. …In addition, **the process helps in the decision of who will engage the target at the prescribed time**. It also helps targeting working groups determine requirements for combat assessment to assess targeting and attack effectiveness."

To synchronize efforts across the squadron, the combined AGM/TSS/HPTL answers what enemy composition(s) (within the construct of an assumed enemy doctrinal template), are legitimate targets and meet attack criteria (triggers). Also, the AGM/TSS/HPTL answers what weapon systems, ranked in order of priority, can be used to effectively engage and destroy specific target groups. The result of a limited understanding of the AGM/TSS/HPTL, especially at the squad and team level, will often result in acquired targets engaged as targets of opportunity. There are four problems associated with this action:

- Appropriate weapon systems might not be selected for the target.
- Targets might not meet the HPTL criteria.
- Calls for fire(s) might inundate fire direction control centers, making them unresponsive.
- Firing might present unnecessary friendly signature acquisition opportunities for enemy reconnaissance.

To create a unity of effort across the six warfighting functions of combat power**,** all sensor-to-shooter assets fight from the same combined HPTL/TSS/AGM. The creation of this product needs to be of the highest priority within the S-2, S-3 and fire-support element sections. Also, the fire-support rehearsal is absolutely essential in coordinating all fire-support assets against high-payoff targets with regard to the brigade's concept of the operation, as well as restrictions imposed by time, space or rules of engagement. An AGM that is well understood at all levels of leadership will also prevent the unit from overusing their organic assets.

During battle, the easiest and most responsive solution for commanders, subject to pre-established levels of release authority, is to choose weapon systems under their direct control. The AGM delineates what weapon systems are valid selections for the type of target to be engaged and helps prevent target or weapon mismatches. To maximize the effectiveness of the plan, fire-support rehearsals must take place prior to the combined-arms rehearsal. This practice affords the fire-support cell the additional time necessary to rehearse and validate fire-support plans and products to be disseminated to the leadership prior to the CAR.

## Building and maintaining a common operational picture

There is a leadership challenge presented by the digital/analog divide and the effects this schism has on the targeting process. Unlike the operational tempo of a small-wars conflict that takes place over years, the complex threat and an adversarial near-peer bring about violent conflict in which the winner and loser are determined within hours. For the squadron commander to make decisions, the staff must have processes in place to maintain situational awareness through a common operational picture. Furthermore, effective targeting will be hindered and employment of fires delayed if the SITTEMP is stale due to a lag in accurate and responsive reporting. Effective reporting begins with a tactical standing operating procedure.

The entire unit should report, track and update analog data in the same manner so that information can enter the Army Battle Command System at the battalion and squadron staff level. For the troop

level and below, this means either building graphics in the Blue Force Tracker or ABCS, or using maps with overlays or hand-drawn graphics. Unfortunately, hand-drawn graphic overlays are an art that has fallen into disuse over the course of counterinsurgency operations and has recently been eliminated from the Army's Battle Staff Course.

For overlays to be accurate and effective, the graphic, after the initial production, must be copied from the source document and reattached to different map boards. This requires backwards planning by the staff to ensure that after the CAR is complete, all subordinate elements have access to base documents and are given the time, materials and work area to create the reproductions. Also, the squadron needs a reporting plan in place – which begins immediately after initial movement begins to refresh icons – so that the COP does not become stale.

The CoIST/TrIST, in addition to passing along reconnaissance reporting and unmanned aircraft systems surveillance updates, can also be used in assisting troop commanders as well as the TOC with managing battle positions, acquisitions and other information-management issues. In the conventional fight, the CoIST/TrIST can be used to enhance overall command-post operations and aid in routine reporting.

In addition to providing an accurate COP for the squadron commander and staff, the second function is increasing fires' responsiveness. While the priorities of observers manning OPs are focused on the enemy, the squadron must be equally concerned with friendly positions to clear fires. This becomes increasingly important as small units rely on final protective fires and accurate and responsive fires from non-organic weapon systems to engage and destroy targets and to shape the near-term friendly and enemy scheme of maneuver. If the COP accuracy is allowed to deteriorate during high-tempo operations, the enemy undoubtedly gains the advantage in operations, as friendly units can no longer safely mass fires.

## Conclusion

Rotation 12-01 demonstrated the myriad of challenges associated with the complex threat. The 173rd ABCT answered this challenge, demonstrating their mastery of warcraft, tactical competence and unyielding tenacity to fight and win in combat. In the new era of the modular force, the squadron commander is the chief of recon for the brigade that the squadron supports. This demands that leadership at all levels in the squadron staff become proficient at the ever-growing list of available assets, how and when to request the asset, and how and what ABCS can receive reports from the asset – as well as how to best use those systems within the brigade/squadron combined-arms operation.

The brigade staff must ensure a functional system exists that will provide synergy between the ground units organic to the squadron and the aerial platforms that are retained at brigade and higher. Also, ground units observing, engaging and reporting at the Soldier/team level must result in a seamless COP for the squadron and brigade command that matches the tempo expected during the complex threat. This proves to be no easy task during an operation with severe time constraints, a capable enemy and a fluid battlefield. Effective systems for information management are a high priority across the entire spectrum of warfighting functions and ensure the best use of all fire-support assets through a responsive targeting process.

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### Acronym Quick-Scan

**ABCS –** Army Battle Command System
**ABCT –** airborne brigade combat team
**AGM –** attack guidance matrix
**BTG –** brigade tactical group
**CAR –** combined-arms rehearsal
**CoIST –** company intelligence-support team
**COP –** common operational picture
**DATE** – decisive-action training environment
**FM –** field manual
**HNSF –** host-nation security forces
**HPTL –** high-payoff target list
**NAI –** named area of interest
**OE –** operational environment
**OP –** observation post
**OPFOR –** opposing force
**PIR** – priority information requirements
**R&S** – reconnaissance and surveillance
**SAPA** – Southern Atropian People's Army
**SITTEMP** – situational template
**TOC** – tactical operations center
**TrIST** – troop intelligence-support team
**TSS** – target-selection standard