The Task Force Targeting meeting: Operations Synchronization

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"The targeting process focuses operations and the use of limited assets and time."

— Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, p. 5-29

Understanding the Purpose of Targeting Meetings

It is important that leaders understand the central aspects of conducting effective task force targeting meetings to be successful in combat. Unlike the traditional mind-set where fire support officers (FSO) plan targets loosely tied to maneuver plans, the targeting process in today's contemporary operating environment involves operations synchronization of all warfighting functions. Leaders must avoid separate "stove pipe" meetings that can ultimately desynchronize plans. For example, failure to incorporate sphere of influence (SOI) engagements into patrol matrices or failure to link civil affairs (CA) projects to the maneuver goal of stabilizing the area can have critical consequences.

Based on recent observations of training rotations at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) based in Hohenfels, Germany, units are clearly striving to better understand the task, purpose, and end state of the targeting process and the products yielded using the decide, detect, deliver, and assess (D3A) framework. To provide a philosophical understanding and practical application of targeting, this article explores new doctrine and evolving tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) including the F3EAD (find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze, and disseminate) methodology recommended by the Army's Asymmetric Warfare Group.

Targeting meetings, termed operations synchronization for the purposes of this article, must not replace the military decision making process (MDMP). The targeting process is a system that provides focus as the mission evolves over time, but where the base order mission doesn't change. This means that if the mission changes, unit planners conduct the MDMP, not targeting meetings; when units receive time sensitive intelligence, planners conduct crisis planning sessions, not targeting meetings.

The purpose of targeting meetings is to develop and refine well synchronized plans driven by ***identified problem sets.*** Such plans are characterized by fused intelligence with attainable objectives and clear measures of effectiveness (MOE), and are focused by the commander's intent. Plans incorporate all combat multipliers to effectively defeat the enemy, providing a safe and secure environment. This process lends itself to steady state operations where commanders are given the mission to systematically improve their owned piece of terrain over time.

The operations synchronization meeting yields several key products including fragmentary orders (FRAGOs) consisting of numerous tasks associated with the D3A framework. These tasks include directed lethal and nonlethal operations, patrol matrices, reconnaissance and surveillance (R&S) plans, updated information operations (IO) themes/messages with directed delivery and assessment tasks, and focused CA/humanitarian assistance (HA) projects/missions. More importantly, all units leaving the wire on missions receive directed tasks, purposes and desired end states (or desired effects to be achieved) tied to the commander's intent.

Clarifying Targeting Meeting Duties and Responsibilities

Units may overcome significant obstacles by understanding what each staff member or attendee is expected to provide at the operations synchronization meetings in terms of products and recommendations.

Commanders provide focus to their units based on their experience and ability. In the updated MDMP, commanders are more direct and intricately involved. They provide the following:

* Commander's intent,
* Priorities for the time period, and
* Most importantly, the commander is there to make decisions!

S3/Assistant S3 provides:

* Combat power/troop to task,
* Adjacent unit operations,
* Taskings from higher headquarters (route security, VIP security, etc.),
* Host nation forces operations/training schedules,
* Route clearance schedules, and
* Special operations missions.

FSO/designated civil military officer (CMO)/IO provides:

* Target synchronization matrix,
* IO themes and messages,
* SOI engagement matrix,
* Rotary and fixed wing air tasking order cycle,
* Status of current and ongoing projects, and
* Religious/cultural schedules.

S2 provides:

* Updated assessments based on significant activities

(SIGACTs) including contact by named areas of interest (NAI)/ problem area, pattern analysis, link diagrams, historical trends for the upcoming period, etc;

* Predictive analyses to determine the most likely course of action;

* Recommended targeting packets based on strength of evidence from all intelligence disciplines, necessity, positive identifications (PID), etc;

* Recommended changes to priority intelligence requirements;

* Clear serious incident reports that correspond to specific "detect" tasks required to move targets from a "no-go" to a "go" status. These reports must be based on either a PID or sufficient evidence collected in packets; and

* Current plans for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) /recommended NAIs and changes to ISR plans.

The S2's list is the longest because intelligence drives operations. Historically, intelligence officers have been trained to analyze data and present the most likely and most dangerous courses of action, which by nature are recommendations. Well-fused intelligence recommendations are essential for successful targeting. It doesn't bode well if the S2 is no more useful than the local news report. Proper implementation of all-source intelligence and predictive analysis provides our Soldiers with synchronized plans and reasons and understandable explanations of why they are in harm's way.

The staff must come to operations synchronization meetings prepared to brief and discuss the items on the list and provide recommendations. FM 3-24 states, "Targeting in a COIN environment requires the creation of a targeting board or working group at all echelons." In most cases, units will need to use both. The targeting working group provides staff synchronization to prevent wasting the commander's time and the targeting board provides an approval brief ending with the production of FRAGOs and associated products.

Using the Target Synchronization Matrix

The functionality of the target synchronization matrix using the D3A framework can be confusing. Synchronization of effort takes more than simply projecting the Excel document and working across the chart, filling in the cells, and then adjourning to let the assistant S3 or plans officer develop the products and FRAGOs.

The D3A process seems simpler when applied to high intensity conflict (HIC) operations. For example, after receiving intelligence, a unit will **decide** where to target (AB1001). The unit emplaces an observer at OP1 to conduct a **detect** or **deliver** task. After the unit fires a battery 1 fire mission, it will **assess** the battle damage.

In COIN operations, FM 3-24 speaks directly to the four targeting activities of decide, detect, deliver, and assess. Aside from varying the sequences of activities somewhat, the process is cyclic with the challenge being placed on not only the S2, but on all staff sections to provide recommendations based on respective war fighting functions. For example, the S2 identifies the great threat from Abdul Rahman in Samarra, and the CMO identifies the mayor as the person having the most influence in Samarra.

Current steady state operations typically include conducting a relief in place where units receive initial assessments to drive operations. In other operations (such as the case in Shindand, Afghanistan) units take over new areas of operation (AO), systematically conducting village/area assessments to give commanders clear and focused recommendations of where to concentrate lethal and non-lethal troop efforts. These recommendations may include conducting initial assessments of battle space or conducting MDMP to determine required operations within new AOs. Using these staff **assessments** and recommendations, staffs can identify problem sets for their AOs, allowing commanders to **decide** on which problem sets to focus on. The next step is to array troops along areas of focus to **detect** and **deliver** effects against the identified problem sets. In a cyclic manner, the effects are again measured in follow up **assessments**.

The F3EAD Methodology

Recently, the F3EAD methodology, which has roots in U.S. Air Force and Joint manuals, has emerged as a process for targeting via the Asymmetric Warfare Group. This is an essential and effective lethal targeting process which truly excels at the operator level.

Examples Using the D3A Targeting Process

Detect Tasks:

* Locate improvised explosive device (IED) builder YYYYY (Target 5).

* Identify IED cell leader (NAI 3).

* Identify additional village/tribe X pressure points to exploit success or induce cooperation.

* Determine whether Imam (Target 2) can be influenced to cease negative mosque messages by HA/project ("carrot") or by increased coalition force presence/threat of direct action ("stick").

Deliver Tasks:

* Raid to kill or capture individual YYYYY (Target 5) upon PID.

* Clear NAI XX between 0500-0800 hours; Secure NAI XX from 0800-1500 hours; Ambush IED emplacers between 1500-1900 hours daily.

* Award a primary school to village/tribe X to influence them to report on IED activities at NAI XX.

Assess Tasks:

* Determine if the mayor of Samarra can be won over or co-opted.

* Assess the well project in Gardez.

* Assess the tensions of the village as a result of the previous night's raid.

This focus provides a clear task and purpose to all operations leaving the wire, which ultimately provides Soldiers confidence by answering the question, "*Why*?" In the assessment phase, commanders evaluate the feedback in terms of MOE based on the specified tasks provided to subordinate units, focusing on such points as:

** What feedback was gained from patrol debriefings?*

** What was discovered during direct actions (tactical site exploitation) to further develop the common operating picture?*

** What was learned during SOI engagements?*

** What intelligence was gained from detainees during tactical questioning?*

** What did the R&S plan yield?*

** What problems from identified problem sets were solved? Did the unit achieve the desired effects?*

COL Stefan J. Banach commanded the 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division from May 25, 2005, to August 27, 2007, and coined the term "persistent surveillance" to exemplify this process of developing actionable intelligence and hitting targets. The key steps are analyzing and exploiting ground intelligence to conduct immediate follow-on operations. This process is intended to maintain the initiative instead of simply having units return to the forward operating base.

Sample Agendas for Operations Synchronization Meetings

Targeting Working Group

1. Analyze and Exploit

■ Feedback from actioned problem sets (use previous targeting board's recommended tasking story board)

➢ Lethal back-brief/debrief assessment

➢ Non-lethal back-brief/debrief assessment

■ SIGACTS

➢ Lethal attacks

➢ Non-lethal events

o Critical changes to PMESII-PT [political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, information, physical, time] factors.

o IO fratricide and media events (plus or minus)

■ Updated pattern analysis (use of Pattern Analysis Plot "whiz" Wheel versus map build)

■ Staff recommendations for identified problem sets

➢ Identified problem sets (based on pattern analysis)

➢ Build/submit story boards ("*make the sausage*")

2. Decide

■ S3/Plans

➢ Troop to task (taskings from higher headquarters)

➢ Adjacent/other unit events within or influencing the AO

■ XO provides the commander's pulse on issues and draws the initial cut line (such as limits for unit taskings, for example)

3. Detect, Deliver and Assess

■ Assign a clear task and purpose to all combat units and multipliers (tasks to subordinate units, ISR plans, patrol matrices, SOI engagement schedules, and patrol IO talking points cards). This may be a detect or deliver task.

■ Clearly define what is considered success and/or mission completion; what is the desired effect or end state?

Targeting Board Sample Agenda

1. Roll-up/analysis of last period (S2/3/S9/7)

☐ Show last targeting board's recommendations (story boards) and talk from each warfighting function.

2. Intelligence updates (S2)

☐ Updated pattern analysis

☐ Specific intelligence for recommendations (problem sets)

3. Commander's decision on specific problem sets for action.

4. Story board recommendations (S3/XO) from "soup to nuts."

☐ XO/S3 briefs tasks to subordinate units

☐ S2 ISR

☐ S7 briefs IO message

☐ S5 HA or CA projects

☐ Joint terminal attack controller/FSO briefs close air support

☐ Liaison officers provide resources

5. Commander's approval/disapproval of FRAGO

Reaping the Yields from the Targeting Process

Although different staffs may have varying degrees of flexibility with regard to targeting processes, the end result must produce FRAGOs that specify deliberate tasks with corresponding purposes to units. Each FRAGO must yield the following products:

· R&S plans (locate, determine, observe, assess);

· ISR requests;

· Patrol matrices (clear, secure, kill or capture, detain, disrupt, deny, improve Iraqi security force);

· Directed action plans (raids, cordon and searches, long/mid term operations, ambushes);

· SOI engagement matrices (detect tasks, inform, influence, suppress, neutralize, co-opt);

· Updated IO themes and messages (Soldier patrol cards); and

· HA missions and directed CA projects and tasks (in the form of either assess/determine status of completion or deliver/provide a service to influence, separate, neutralize, etc.).

Successful task force commanders have learned the benefits of conducting effective targeting meetings which allow them to focus and synchronize their operations. With the goal of developing proactive units rather than reactive ones, these leaders strive to understand the purpose, characteristics, and key products generated by well synchronized plans. By understanding targeting duties and responsibilities, avoiding stove-piping of information, and embracing warfighting enablers, unit leaders may overcome significant obstacles. Through the practical application of various TTP and doctrinal targeting methodologies, commanders are able to develop and refine plans borne of well-conceived operations synchronization meetings and achieve progress and success on the modern battlefield.

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