

## **TARGETING IMPLICATION IN A JOINT FORCE OPERATION FOR NATIONAL DEFENSE**

**LTC. Adrian MIREA**  
*mirea.adrian@yahoo.com*

***Abstract:** In this paper I wanted to highlight the importance of the targeting process in planning and conducting an eventual joint force operation for the purpose of armed national defense. Even though Romania is an active member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), for national defense purposes Romanian armed forces must be capable to plan and conduct operations with existent armed structures until allied forces would intervene in case of an armed aggression under article 5 specifications. Having participated with forces and structures in various multinational operations and exercises alongside current national contributions under NATO partnership, Romanian armed forces continuously improve their level of training and over time implemented in our standing doctrines and field manuals many of our partner's procedures. One such procedure is the target management process. National joint force headquarters including those functioning at component and division levels should permanently consider, plan and conduct target management training for responsible personnel, especially with those working in information and operation modules, as they will be part of targeting working committees, groups or cells that activate at their respective structures both in peacetime or combat operations. One other significant factor influencing the target management process in a national defense operation is the application of Laws of Armed Conflict and rules of engagement in an eventual armed aggression.*

***Keywords:** targeting process; joint targeting cycle; joint force operation.*

Analyzing recent confrontations from the past century, we can observe that the target management process appeared as a concept at the same time with the air power concept. Air power generated at the end of World War I, new target engagement possibilities and it also gave new meanings to basic military actions. Limited resources available and the desire to exploit new technologies determined higher challenges in selecting and engaging objectives with air forces. Subsequently, requirements for accurate determination of objective location increased in volume and importance. All of these considerations lead to creation of specialized reconnaissance squadrons with the mission to search and detect targets for strategic bombing purposes. The new method for using available air forces ultimately led to formation of mixed civilian military teams that interconnected reconnaissance, intelligence and planning. A new operational process was created - the target management process.

The targeting process is in a continuous evolution and it is correlated with recent discoveries and applications in military domain. Targeting has an essential role in managing limited resources for an operation while also mitigating futile loss of life or collateral damage generated through target engagement. Fighting enemy structures and capabilities from greater distances nowadays has a multidimensional character, requires precise information regarding enemy systems and relies on a just target and effect determination process which will ultimately destabilize and paralyze the enemy. The main purpose of joint targeting process is to generate, in a systematic manner, specific required effects that will enable mission success as fast as possible with minimal resources. Joint targeting process secures an integrated and optimized exploitation of joint force capabilities through its specific cycle and described methodologies applicable to every joint force component.

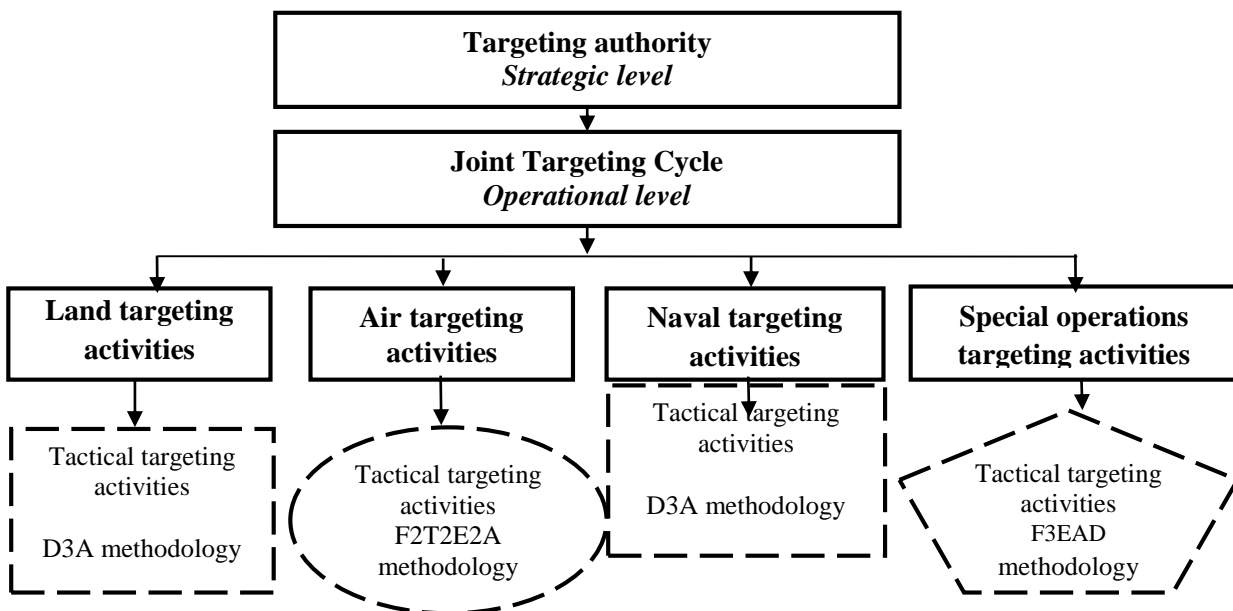
Objective determination and target selection alongside battle damage and effect assessment, are standard processes conducted during both conventional confrontations and crisis situations. Through target management a determined objective directs collecting target data and information in order to disseminate specific intelligence products used by target engagement

systems to generate desired effects. Ultimately, target management end state is about obtaining the planned effect and determining the opponent to give up fighting. (Stanciu 2016, 85)

### 1. The joint targeting process at the operational level of operations

A joint force operation with a national defense purpose is planned and conducted at the operational level. In NATO terminology “*The operational level is: the level at which campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted and sustained to achieve strategic objectives within theatres or areas of operations*”. (NATO Term – NATO Agreed) The operational level of operations is meant to link objectives established at the strategic level with tactical actions and activities. The operational level exploits tactical success over enemy forces and capabilities to create necessary conditions and desired effects for achieving strategic objectives or attaining the envisioned end state. These are made possible by proper understanding of operational environment and joint force objectives which lead to an effective application of combat power using instruments like the joint targeting process, to generate favorable results.

The targeting process is described in NATO fire support doctrine as a command responsibility requiring staff implication under the commander’s direct supervision. The commander directs his subordinate staff by providing targeting purpose, targeting priorities and by determining the level of effort responsible personnel commits to the target management process for the ongoing operation (NATO 2015, 1-4). In a joint force operation some components may conduct their own targeting process like the Land Targeting Process, the Air Targeting Process or the specific targeting process used by special operations forces, but they are all driven by the Joint Targeting Cycle because joint capabilities are involved. Target management process at the joint force level will include resources and capabilities from one or more force components in accordance with the general concept of operation. At joint force component level tactical actions and activities enable component commanders to comply and contribute to the joint targeting process.



**Legend:**

D3A – Decide, detect, deliver, assess

F2T2E2A - find, fix, track, target, engage, exploit and assess

F3EAD – Find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze, disseminate

**Figure no. 1.** The joint targeting process

The targeting process consists in selecting and prioritizing targets and, subsequently, associating specific engagement or striking systems, in accordance with commander's objectives, operational requirements, existing or available capabilities and limitations. Targeting is not a substitution for the planning process in an operation, it stands as a component element as it is a staff activity at every operational level and in every type of operation. The targeting process is conducted throughout the entire planning process and it offers a logical instrument to connect commander's objectives and desired end state with specific planning, execution and assessment of effects for friendly force actions and activities.

From another perspective *"The joint targeting cycle is a command function at both the operational and component level and assists with:*

- *determining the effects necessary to achieve the commander's objectives;*
- *identifying the actions necessary to create them based on the means available;*
- *selecting and prioritizing targets;*
- *synchronizing capabilities; and then*
- *assessing their cumulative effectiveness, taking remedial action if necessary."*

(NATO 2016, 1-1)

The main effort of targeting is identifying important resources for the enemy (targets) and their vulnerable components that can and should be engaged in order to achieve established objectives. The targeting process provides a logical connection between intelligence, plans and operations at every force structure level. Targeting purpose consists in integrating and synchronizing joint fires upon designated targets to generate specific lethal and nonlethal effects with available striking systems.

In a more general approach associating targeting process with target effects usually implies lethal actions and is perceived as the responsibility of fire support specialists. This is not the case as the target management process is the responsibility of the entire joint force staff under direct supervision and coordination of the commander because an efficient targeting process consists in engaging the most suitable targets, at the right time and using the right lethal or nonlethal systems to generate desired effects meeting operational requirements. From another perspective, the target management process coherently and constructively integrates maneuver elements actions with available informational and fire support systems in order to exploit joint force capabilities for optimal target related intelligence and target engagement.

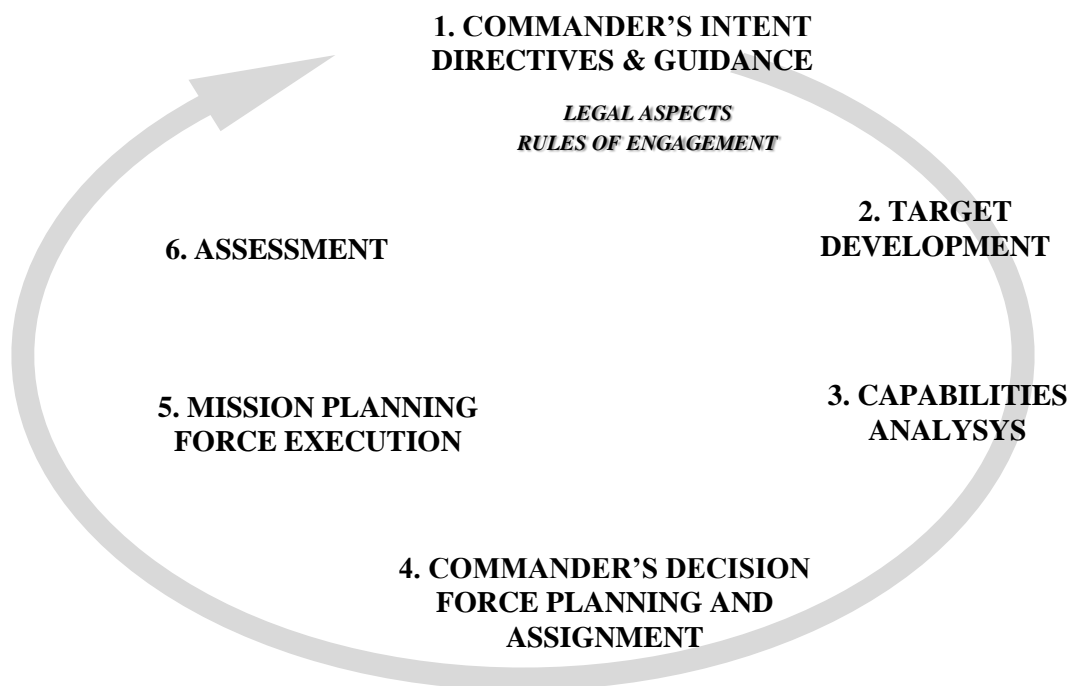
## **2. Targeting implication in a national defense operation**

The Supreme Council of National Defence is the highest targeting authority that is responsible with issuing national targeting guidance for a joint force operation. It approves target sets, time sensitive target list, restricted target list and other targeting products that a strategic commander submits and subsequently enforces on the joint force commander. One important responsibility relevant for a national defense operation is the creation of target related materials including target system analysis that probably fall under subordinate intelligence structures or other specialized structures specific tasks with a need-to-know directive. Accurate and detailed target related dossiers needed for conducting effective joint targeting process are created in advance during peacetime under strategic, political and NATO guidance. Existing national force structures can and should contribute to target material development as they will ultimately use them in multinational exercises and in an eventual joint force operation for national defense.

The strategic operation plan contains besides clear objectives, general intent and military operation guidelines, targeting related products in the form of target materials, approved target sets including time sensitive targets that the joint force commander is

authorized to engage. Strategic level target system analysis and target audience analysis products are also transmitted through the strategic operation plan. The targeting process in a joint force operation for national defense is issued under political and strategic guidance through the strategic operation plan that will initiate the six phases of the joint targeting cycle as shown below.

In accordance with NATO Joint targeting doctrine, our national Joint targeting doctrine (SMG 2016, 10) describes the Joint targeting cycle as a command function valid for every operational level that consists of determining required effects for achieving joint force commander`s objectives, identifying necessary actions to generate those effects with available resources and capabilities while considering target priorities, lethal and nonlethal engagement synchronization and thorough assessment of effectiveness for subsequent actions.



**Figure no. 2.** The joint targeting cycle

Target management cycle provides a joint force staff a useful methodology to develop, plan, execute and assess target engagement using available capabilities. Target management process determine coordinated steps for mitigation or elimination of unwanted effects, collateral casualties or damages in using target engagement systems. It also ensures maximal efficiency of military actions while applying well-known warfighting principles like mass, maneuver or economy of effort.

Target management process in a joint force operation for national defense purposes is designed to link directives and guidance from the highest strategic level with concrete tactical level activities within the targeting cycle in such a way to generate required effects for completing military objectives and attaining desired end states. Repelling an eventual aggressor implies engaging a multitude of enemy targets using available intelligence system, target acquisition and striking capabilities. By using a coherent target management process, the joint force staff and commander can evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of striking enemy targets in order to best answer questions like what, where, when or why (for what purpose or benefits) a target should be engaged for their concrete contribution to achieving joint force objectives or desired end state. A major purpose of conducting targeting at the joint

force level is to provide, for the ongoing operation, a logical and systematic methodology to deprive the enemy of his valuable combat capabilities and, thus, setting favorable conditions for friendly forces mission success. One of the most sensible problems posed to a joint force operation on national territory is eliminating or diminishing unwanted collateral casualties and damages that could hinder friendly forces operational progress and overall success of the defensive mission. Collateral casualties and damages occur when unintended noncombatant casualties and unwanted physical destruction of material are generated when a specific target is engaged.

Conducting a defensive operation that involves fighting within national boundaries is usually guided by preapproved or authorized levels of collateral casualty and damage, but, ultimately, it comes to the joint force commander to decide what collateral would be acceptable for him and his force structures, when engaging a valid military target and also if, the resulting gains or advantages, are worth the risk of provoking collateral casualties or damages.

One other important consideration when conducting joint force operations on national territory is the application of national and international law. Even though a lawful action can be performed to engage a target while considering standing Law of Armed Conflict and Rules of Engagement specified by higher echelons, the joint force commander and his subordinate commanders must determine if those specific lethal or nonlethal actions or a fully committed decisive use of force is the most suitable course of action in specific conditions that describe national defense operations. The legal advisors a joint force commander has in his staff fulfills an important part by providing specialized feedback for target prosecuting and target management products in order to validate operational actions that comply with national and international legal norms. Prosecuting targets on national territory through a joint targeting process is influenced by extensive legal considerations and general Law of Armed Conflict enforcement. Joint force operations are by nature very complex as the joint force staff is expected to manage at the same time combat actions in one area, humanitarian activities or stability tasks in other parts of the joint area of operations. Every action and activity of the joint force structures has specific legal implications in relation to the general context where it occurs. From a national defense point of view considering target engagement benefits versus collateral risks or establishing a clear distinction between military and civilian objectives, are of great importance for the joint force commander. From another perspective complex legal issues occur if we consider preemptive strikes or applying combat power on enemy forces that operate outside our national boundaries when international laws or specific rules of engagement must be considered. NATO and national target management doctrines highlight the great responsibility that target management personnel have in deciding necessary actions under concrete combat environment circumstances. As targeting doctrines highlight there is no excuse for unlawful target management due to negligence, recklessness and voluntary mishaps or blindness of responsible targeting staff at any level of command.

Considering targets nature and their specific action, the joint targeting process is conducted using two basic methods: deliberate targeting and dynamic targeting.

*Deliberate targeting* is the utilized method for engaging planned targets that are present or known to be in a joint area of operations, using lethal and/or nonlethal means in accordance with the concept of operations. Target engagement usually occurs upon a preplanned schedule or under specific situational development that requires it. This targeting method usually rely on certain or predictable target data and information regarding their characteristics or strike related parameters, and it is accomplished by matching assigned resources and capabilities available to the joint force commander for the given operation. Targets that fall under this method are *planned* targets – to be engaged at a specific planned

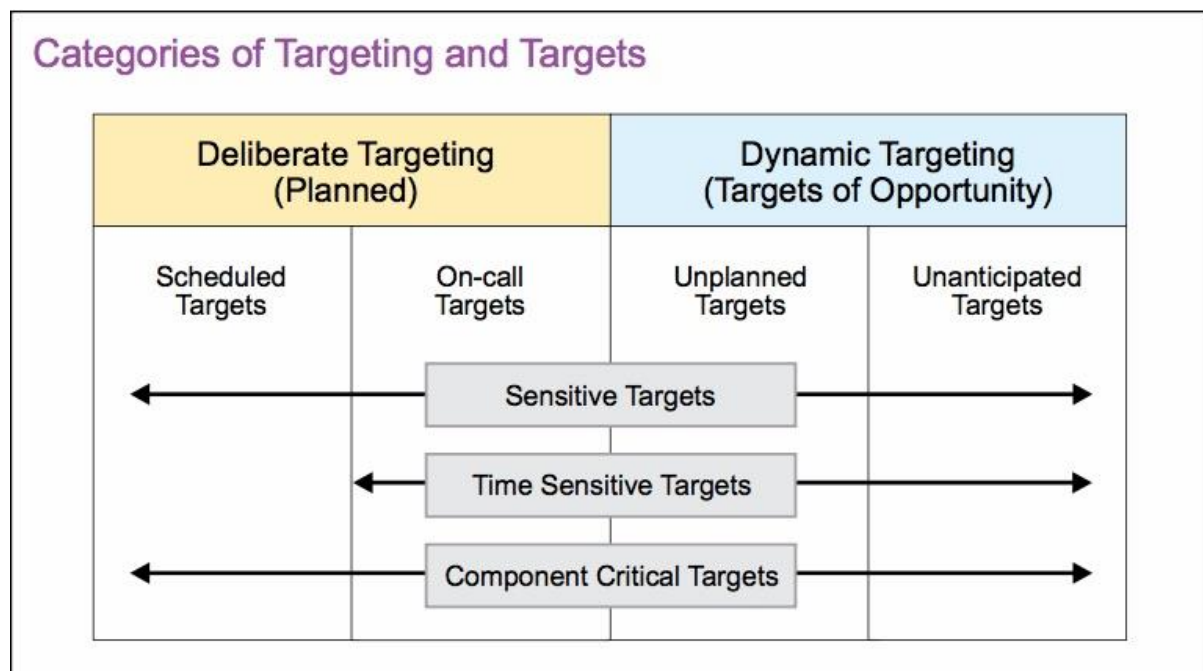
moment in space and time, or *on call* – the exact moment of engagement is not established as it depends on concrete operational development.

Considering this specific targeting method in a national defense joint force operation some plausible target data and information can be procured or produced from peacetime. Conducting a coherent target management process while fighting within national boundaries should rely, when possible, on previously determined target characteristics like physical details and functionality of critical infrastructure elements or general terrain and weather characteristics that apply to Romania.

*Dynamic targeting* is the method used to engage existent targets in a joint area of operations that were not previously selected or precisely determined as targets for specific actions directed against them as deliberate targeting method required it. The dynamic targeting method also applies to those targets that are unexpected or meet prosecuting conditions or criteria during operational development. Using this targeting method implies directing resources to complete target development and validation while, also, assigning available striking assets to perform effective engagement.

One interesting approach on these targeting methods is presented in Joint Targeting, Joint Publication 3-60, 2013 edition where “*Timing is the primary factor that determines whether deliberate or dynamic targeting will support the joint force commander’s targeting requirements.*” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2013, II-2)

Deliberate targeting supports future operations and future plans concentrating targeting efforts on the next phases of operations within a 24 to 72 hours’ time frame. Dynamic targeting usually supports current operations planning due to its required immediate application, usually within the next 24-hour time frame.



**Figure no. 3.** Categories of targeting and targets  
*Source: Joint Publication 3-60, Joint Targeting, 2013, p. II-2*

Considering multinational NATO entities in Romania like the recently created Headquarters Multinational Corps South-East (HQ MNC-SE) that was added to existent Multinational Division (HQ MND-SE) and Brigade headquarters (HQ MNBDE-SE) we have the general context to implement and exercise with NATO partners every aspect regarding the targeting process up to corps level and below. A Romanian joint force commander conducting

operations for national defense purposes can benefit from previously gained expertise of his staff members and, also, at the time will benefit from a coherent targeting doctrine and procedures that secures interoperability with allied forces if operations under article 5 emerge. Proper trained staff members in institutionalized targeting classes that practice and exercise targeting doctrines and procedures, preferably within a multinational training setup, should be the norm for every level of command, especially operational and tactical as force structures conduct their own target management process. (SMFT 2019, II-10)

## **Conclusions**

Confrontational environment characteristics are specific to current informational era and, alongside technological progress we see implemented at target engagement systems level, determine an increasing number of options that a joint force commander has at his disposal to generate required effects to complete assigned objectives. Implementing a coherent targeting process during operations and campaign considers aspects like an increasing number of existing precision weapons, ranging from cheap to very expensive, obtaining high credibility information from a multitude of sources and also artificial intelligence presence in target acquisition, validation or target engagement systems. From a national perspective, when compared to allied and modern armies, the target management process conducted in a joint force operation has some limitations regarding its application and specific methodology. These limitations come from our current armed forces organization as we are undergoing several national programs to better equip force structures with modern target acquisition and target engagement capabilities like those provided by M142 HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket System) or MIM-104 PATRIOT systems.

Implementing in our standing doctrines and field manuals procedures described in NATO and other allied army's specific doctrines on joint targeting process, provides a comprehensive procedural and regulatory framework to plan and conduct military operations with national force structures. Multinational headquarters created in recent years in Romania offer the possibility to implement these doctrines, to form and train specialized staff officers that can cover the joint targeting process and practice specific methodology during various exercises and other major training events. Therefore, an applied training is ensured for every organic joint targeting responsible staff member.

In my opinion, proper training for active and future targeting staff officers requires completion of dedicated institutionalized classes like those currently held in Oberammergau NATO School. These trained personnel will activate, in case of aggression, at every level of operation especially within a joint force or subsequent component headquarters. When considering Romanian armed forces operating in an eventual national defense operation it should be the concern of our active joint force headquarters to plan and conduct joint targeting training for every active or future responsible personnel. Also, national joint force components and divisions should consider, plan and conduct target management training for personnel within information and operation modules, including sending them to specified institutionalized classes. They will be part of targeting working committees, groups or cells that activate at their respective structures in peacetime or combat operations. According to our standing joint targeting doctrine working groups and cells are standard for planning and conducting specific targeting activities at headquarter levels. These entities must be activated and trained in dedicated exercises in order to consolidate specific information cycle and existing relationships with higher and subordinate echelons or with similar structures.

One other conclusion is about the need to create dedicated data bases that a joint targeting process will eventually utilize in a national defense operation. Active force structures should be involved in creating data bases by generating studies and specific

intelligence products containing data and information about national administrative, economical or cultural objectives, communication, terrain or other relevant characteristics regarding their current areas of responsibility. This is also a valid requirement for every structure possible area of responsibility or operation in case of external armed aggression on our national territory.

From a legal point of view, a national defense operation must be conducted under clear domestic and international rule of law. Considering the fact that some neighboring countries are NATO allies while others aren't, all legal aspects of a joint force operations on national territory should be covered no matter the origin of an eventual foreign aggression. Conducting a target management process that can and should prosecute eligible targets outside Romanian borders, respecting domestic and international laws, the laws of armed conflict and rules of engagement applicable to the entire joint area of influence will ultimately support mission success and our national defense cause.

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