



INTRODUCTION TO TARGETING

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Targeting is the process of selecting and prioritizing targets and matching the appropriate response to them, taking account of command objectives, operational requirements and capabilities.¹ This process is systematic, comprehensive, and continuous. Combined with a clear understanding of operational requirements, capabilities, and limitations, the targeting process identifies, selects, and exploits critical vulnerabilities of target systems and their associated targets to achieve the commanders' objectives and desired end state. Targeting is a command function requiring commander oversight and involvement to ensure proper execution. It is not the exclusive province of one type of specialty or division, such as intelligence or operations, but blends the expertise of many disciplines.

Targeting helps translate [strategy](#) into discrete actions against targets by linking ends, ways, means, and risks. It is a central component of Air Force [operational art](#) and design in the application of [airpower](#) to create lethal and nonlethal effects. Strategy allows commanders to choose the best ways to attain desired outcomes. Strategy forms the plans and guidance that can be used to task specific airpower capabilities through the [tasking process](#). The processes of planning, tasking, targeting, and assessing effects provide a logical progression that forms the basis of decision-making and ensures consistency with the commander's objectives and the end state.

Too often targeting is tied just to the delivery of kinetic capabilities and the tasking cycle. However, achieving joint force commander's (JFC's) objectives can be accomplished by creating lethal and nonlethal effects, using a variety of kinetic and non-kinetic capabilities. To optimize military action, targeting should integrate the full spectrum of capabilities beginning at the onset of planning. In addition, targeting should occur in peacetime well before hostilities and continue through post-hostilities. Targeting occurs at all [levels of war](#) (strategic, operational, and tactical), for all phases of operations, across all domains and environments, and across the [range of military operations](#). Airmen tie the targeting process to creating specific desired effects that achieve the joint JFC's objectives. Additionally, Airmen recognize that targeting is a systematic process of analyzing adversaries and enemies to determine [critical vulnerabilities](#) against which

¹ Joint Publication 3-0, [Joint Operations](#)

national capabilities can be applied to create specific desired effects that achieve [objectives](#), taking into account operational requirements and capabilities.

A [target](#) is an entity or object considered for possible engagement or other actions.² Joint doctrine

describes entities as facilities, individuals, virtual (nontangible) things, equipment, or organizations. Targets are identified for possible action to support the commander's objectives, guidance, and intent. It is a fundamental tenet of targeting that no potential target derives its importance or criticality merely by virtue of the fact that it exists, or even that it is a crucial element within a target system and other interdependent target systems. Any potential target derives importance, and thus criticality, only by virtue of the extent to which it enables adversary capabilities and actions that must be affected in order to achieve the commander's objectives. Military actions employed may produce lethal or nonlethal effects. Multiple actions may be taken against a single target, and actions may often be taken against multiple targets to achieve a single effect.

Targeting and the Instruments of Power

There are times when targeteers may recommend the combatant commander (CCDR) request support from another government department or agency to achieve the desired objective. For example, CCDRs may want to conceal the deployment and disposition of their forces from an enemy. During combat operations, the enemy's terrestrial downlinks may be targeted for destruction. However, if combat operations have not yet started, how can CCDRs target their enemy's ability to receive satellite imagery? Perhaps they could select the diplomatic instrument of power (IOP) to get a third party country not to sell the imagery, or they could use the economic IOP to buy up the bandwidth or purchase the imagery at a much higher price. Personnel doing targeting need to consider all the possibilities when thinking about how to deny an adversary a certain capability.

There are two [categories of targeting](#): [deliberate](#) and [dynamic](#). It is a mistake to associate deliberate targeting with fixed targets and dynamic targeting with mobile targets. Deliberate targeting applies when there is sufficient time to add the target to an [air tasking order](#) or other plan. Deliberate targeting includes targets planned for attack by on-call resources. The [air tasking cycle](#) is sufficiently flexible to allow for most mobile targets to be planned and attacked with deliberate targeting.

Dynamic targeting includes targets that are either identified too late or not selected in time to be included in deliberate targeting, but when detected or located, meet criteria specific to achieving objectives. When plans change and planned targets must be adjusted, dynamic targeting can also manage those changes.

Two subsets of targets that require special consideration are sensitive and time-sensitive. Sensitive targets are targets where the commander has estimated the

² Joint Publication 3-60, [Joint Targeting](#)

physical and collateral effects on civilian and/or noncombatant persons, property, and environments occurring incidental to military operations, exceed established national-level notification thresholds.³ Sensitive targets are not always associated with collateral damage. They may also include those targets that exceed national-level [rules of engagement](#) thresholds, or where the combatant commander determines the effects from striking the target may have adverse political ramifications. The other target category requiring special consideration, time-sensitive targets⁴, are joint force commander validated targets or sets of targets requiring immediate response because they are highly lucrative, fleeting targets of opportunity or they pose (or will soon pose) a danger to friendly forces.⁵ These targets present one of the biggest targeting challenges. Additional information on time-sensitive targeting is provided in AFTTP 3-2.3, [Multi-Service Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Dynamic Targeting](#).

Additional information on the categories of targeting is provided in Joint Publication 3-60, [Joint Targeting](#).

³ See Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 3122.06, *Sensitive Target Approval and Review (STAR) Process* (classified publication), for more information on sensitive targets.

⁴ Some Airmen believe the term “time-critical target” better describes this subset of targets. Many targets are time-sensitive. Some targets have a specific window of opportunity for synchronization or achievement of effect, while other targets require *immediate* response because they are highly lucrative, fleeting targets of opportunity or they poses (or will soon pose) a danger to friendly forces. For example, the ground component may want a bridge destroyed at a specific time to create a trap. This would be a preplanned target, which is also time-sensitive. If the enemy ground forces moved more quickly than anticipated and were about to use the bridge to facilitate an attack on friendly forces, the ground component commander may want the target status changed so a mission being executed could be diverted to drop the bridge. In both cases, the bridge is a time-sensitive target, but in only one is it time critical.

⁵ Joint Publication 3-60, [Joint Targeting](#)