A way to execute the brigade targeting process

By Lt. Col. Jonathan Shine

Every brigade combat team (BCT) arrives at the National Training Center with a plan to execute targeting and a battle rhythm of working groups and decision boards developed at home station. More often than not, however, BCTs conduct a process that is not valuable enough to survive the time constrained environment of an NTC rotation. The result is a lack of synchronization at the brigade level and very limited effects on the enemy prior to direct fire engagement with the BCT’s main body. When executed effectively, targeting at the tactical level has the potential to focus the entire staff on the enemy’s fight (as distinct from maneuvering companies and combined arms battalions onto their objectives) and to truly synchronize brigade and echelon above brigade (EAB) level assets to shape the enemy outside of direct fire range of maneuver elements.

Why it does not work: Starts with targeting working group

BCT targeting processes fail at the NTC for a combination of factors. Typically the first cycle is executed during reception, staging, onward movement and integration. The targeting working group (TWG) is led by the BCT targeting officer (TARGO) and attended by one or two of the critical members of the staff (BCT executive officer, operations officer, intelligence officer, fire support coordinator, fire support officer, air liaison officer and electronic warfare officer) plus junior representatives of the various staff and special staff sections. The TARGO presents a series of slides describing the battle tasking order cycles and what they intend to request for close air support. This is followed by a description by the S2 (intelligence) representative of the enemy’s general scheme of maneuver. In better units this is done over a map with the situational template or SITTEMP posted, but this is not common early in the rotation. Then the information collection manager (ICM) describes what EAB assets have or will be requested for the next day. The team then engages in discussion of which elements of the enemy order of battle should have which priority. At the end of the hour, the senior officer makes a decision on what the draft high payoff target list (HPTL) will be for presentation to the BCT commander in a deskside discussion later in the day. The targeting team then return to their sections in the main command post.

Following this meeting, the TARGO begins to produce a combined HPTL-target selection standards-attack guidance matrix (TSS-AGM) as an appendix to the operational order. No one in the headquarters refers to this product in execution and few members of the current operations (CUOPS) team understand how to utilize this tool. This combined product may be useful at EAB levels, but for the tactical level these four items need to be broken apart as stand-alone tools for common staff understanding. The ICM submits requests for collection for the same assets he or she was going to request prior to the meeting. The TARGO creates a DD Form 1972 to request close air support (CAS) to come on-station for as long as possible and “shape operations for the brigade at decisive points” by destroying anything the pilot can find between the coordinated fire line and fire support coordination line. This request is later denied by higher for lack of specificity. The fire support officer (FSO) huddles with the S3 to better understand the details of the close fight and begins to plan and rehearse priority targets to support it. If any high payoff targets (HPT) are identified during the day, Fires are slow to respond as they are unprepared for the trigger and the CUOPS team struggles to dynamically clear ground and airspace.

The following day (or the day after), no senior members of the BCT staff are present for the meeting. They have made the very reasonable decision that their limited time is more valuable spent elsewhere. The targeting process has collapsed on itself because it has failed to provide any value. The only output is a well-discussed HPTL that is really just a re-writing of the enemy order of battle in order of importance to the BCT. Nothing about the BCT’s plan has been changed and no assets have been allocated (or re-allocated) as a result of the meeting. No information has been generated either to focus BCT and EAB enablers or to analyze and communicate information to the commander to help him make decisions in the fight. By the end of Phase I, the TARGO has grown increas-
Synchronizing the Processes – Not just the FSE Responsibility; Involves a **Focused** Staff Effort

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**S2** – where will the enemy be in time and space and what IC platforms do we have looking for him when we expect him to be there?

**S3** – does the commander want fires to effect the enemy on the battlefield to allow the DO to accomplish its mission?

**FSO** – where do our tubes or launchers need to be in order to effect the enemy, and are our targets and triggers nested with the IC plan?

**S4** – when will we have generated enough combat power (manning, fixing, fueling, feeding, arming) to accomplish the mission?

**S6** – is there rehearsed redundancy in the fires PACE plan; placement of retrans to extend operation reach?

**BAO** – have we de-conflicted airspace corridors with PAAEs to facilitate the timely delivery of fires?

**JTAC** – are ATO sortie timelines nested with the S2’s SITEMP and order of battle to maximize assets available to deliver effects?

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ingly frustrated that no one will attend the meeting and eventually develops the HPTL-TSS-AGM-targeting support matrix and DD 1972s on their own; the BCT’s targeting cycle is no more.

**A way – D3A**

There are several different targeting methodologies current in joint and Army doctrine, but for the tactical level fight the simplest and most effective remains decide, detect, deliver and assess (D3A). If the brigade staff can develop a disciplined staff process to deliberately and efficiently perform each step, D3A has significant potential to truly focus assets, shape the fight (beyond direct fire range of the maneuver battalions), and generate options for the BCT commander.

The targeting working group cannot be effectively run on slides. Soldiers brief on PowerPoint, but targeting is conducted on a 1:50,000 map, with notes captured on a white board. The TWG is a working group, not a briefing. Because of their expertise and span of control, the fire support coordinator (FSCOORD) chairs the TWG, the TARGO facilitates, and the BCT S3 and/or executive officer, the S2, FSO and the information collection manager (ICM) all participate, along with the air liaison officer, brigade aviation officer, electronic warfare officer, brigade staff judge advocate and the cyber electromagnetic activities chief. They come not because the meeting is on the battle rhythm, but because it is a proven process for increasing shared understanding and synchronizing assets. It is worth their time.

The TWG begins with a discussion of the proposed HPTL, but this is not truly very complex and does not require more than 10 minutes of discussion. The HPTL identifies three-to-eight specific enemy formations or systems whose loss to the enemy will significantly contribute to the success of the friendly course of action. HPTs must be acquired and successfully attacked for the success of the friendly commander’s mission (Joint Publication 1-02). These are then listed on the white board.

The decide step is now complete. In draft form, decide is the BCT commander’s responsibility. The balance of the TWG is spent addressing each of the HPTs in turn to define who, when, where and how the staff will “contribute to the success of the friendly course of action.”

The detect step is the BCT S3 responsibility. Unlike the S2, the BCT S3 uniquely has the authority to task all BCT assets and the responsibility to ensure they are synchronized to accomplish the commander’s end state. For each HPT, the group determines a primary and alternate asset that will be tasked to detect it. The first question should always be, “Why can’t our organic, ground-based scouts detect it?” If they can, the S3 tasks them. The next question is, “What other organic assets can detect it?” Only when the staff determines they cannot detect HPT’s should the ICM begin to request EAB assets to fill gaps in coverage. The discussion in the TWG helps to determine specifically when and where detection assets are required, based on the enemy situation template and event template.

Deliver is the FSCOORD’s responsibility. Like the detect phase, the team identifies a primary and alternate delivery asset to strike each HPT as it is detected. If the answer is CAS, the TWG analyzes the detection plan, and then has enough de-
tail for the DD Form 1972 to get the CAS request approved. Whether the delivery asset is artillery, CAS, aviation, electronic warfare or some other asset, the staff knows what to strike, when and where to find it (the trigger), and what effect to achieve. Individual sections then complete detailed planning required by their specific warfighting function. For example, the fire support element coordinates with the BAE and field artillery battalion to pre-clear airspace to enable responsive Fires.

The desired effect leads to the assess step, which is the BCT S2’s responsibility. By definition, the destruction of an HPT is important to the commander’s plan. Assessment implies reporting if, and when we are successful, which supports a decision from the commander (i.e. We have destroyed 80 percent of the enemy’s air defense assets. Commit the aviation exploitation force). If not, the target should be removed from the HPTL. As with previous phases, in this step the staff adds as much specificity as possible to synchronize.

The outputs of the TWG are the HPTL, information collection synchronization matrix and target synchronization matrix. Based on the TWG, during the military decision making process (MDMP) the staff can further (and more efficiently) develop the decision support template or matrix, fire support execution matrix, attack guidance matrix (AGM), target selection standards (TSS), and airspace coordination order. All of which will be combined into the BCT’s execution matrix/checklist (EXMAT, EXCHECK, SYNCMAT, etc., whatever the brigade uses to synchronize the fight) for the CUOPS staff to fight from.

Targeting, MDMP

One reason the targeting process collapses is that it contrasts with or duplicates staff work accomplished during the MDMP. To be effective, the two processes have to complement each other and should result in greater efficiency and better synchronization. The high value target list, TSS and AGM are tools that should be developed during the initial steps of the MDMP (specifically intelligence preparation of the battlefield and mission analysis). These products decrease extemporaneous discussion in the TWG. During the MDMP the commander and staff make the rules for how the BCT will operate. The staff follows those rules to get to the specifics of the situation during targeting. In the TWG, the BCT S2 has to identify the HVTs from the list that will affect operations or that can be removed from the battlefield during the identified timeline (24/48/72 hours). These items become the HPTL. The course of action decision brief is where the MDMP and the targeting process come together. This not only creates efficiency amongst the staff but also synchronizes the brigade plan (deep and close).

Target decision board

As the staff completes the various additional work from the TWG, the TARGO prepares the target decision board (TDB) for the BCT commander only if there is a decision to be made. In many cases, all necessary decisions will have been made during the MDMP. If a TDB is required, slides and charts often effective, because this event is a decision briefing not a working group. There is better staff understanding and less duplication of work effort if provided over a map with all overlays utilized during the BCT planning process. The TDB reviews the results of the TWG and gains approval for the plan the staff has developed for the deep fight. The commander approves the HPTL and the concept for targeting each HPT, including asset allocation or provides additional guidance to refine the plan.

A disciplined and efficient targeting process has the potential to complement the MDMP, to better synchronize the staff, and especially the allocation of EAB resources to shape the battle as envisioned and described by the commander. This will only happen if targeting produces more than a cluttered HPTL and generic requests for Air Force support. Effective targeting requires ownership by the FCOORD, BCT S3 and BCT S2 of their portion of the D3A methodology (and the BCT XO if he or she is responsible for the deep fight). Done right, targeting supports commander’s decisions in the fight with well-planned and synchronized assets that provide maximum flexibility and options to react to and overwhelm the enemy.

Lt. Col. Jonathan Shine is currently a student at the U.S. Army War College. Shine formerly served as a National Training Center senior fire support trainer.