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Targeting as an enabling factor in NATO military operations

Abstract

The conflicts of this new century are influenced by the complexity of the global socio-political scenario, rapid technological and doctrinal development or necessary compliance with international law. This changing scenario, among many other factors, greatly influences the planning of a military operation. Understanding the course of the last century's history provides a historical context that explains the reason –and the need– for NATO's 2010 organisational model; as well as the creation of the concept of targeting and its subsequent integration into the Alliance's organisational structure. This paper reviews targeting from a holistic perspective –doctrinal, legal and military innovation– in order to determine whether this concept fulfils an enabling role within NATO's military operation planning process.

Keywords

Targeting, military operation, capability, innovation, JFAC, NATO.

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Introduction

The complexity of the armed conflicts in which NATO has been involved over the past two decades has highlighted the importance of adapting its structure, doctrine and procedures to the demands of the international community and technological developments. Thanks to these processes of restructuring and innovation, the organisation seeks to intervene in conflicts more effectively and in accordance with international law.

In addition to technological development, NATO has advocated further in-depth research into which methods and techniques will give it an advantage in operations¹. One of them is the joint targeting process². This paper studies the concept as an enabler of military operations within the NATO framework. It considers the process from the point of view of innovation and international legality, and asks: is targeting an adequate method of assistance to the planning and implementation of these operations?

This study will be carried out in three fundamental stages, which serve to explain the most important concepts on the subject:

First of all, we will conduct a historical review of airpower, in which we examine the evolution of the concept and capabilities of the air force. Next, we will analyse NATO's organisational model³ created in 2010, given its importance for security-related organisations⁴, focusing on the Air Component Command⁵. Later, the concept of targeting will be defined, using the AJP 3.9 "Allied Joint Doctrine for Joint Targeting". Finally, with a view to reaching conclusions, we will examine the concept of targeting as an innovation, its relationship with the law and its application and suitability to the conduct of military operations.

The methodology used is fundamentally theoretical and descriptive, with a qualitative approach based on documentary analysis: on the one hand, specialised literature

1 Military advantage is the expected gain from the attack as a whole, not counting its particular actions. It refers more to the achievement of operational or strategic objectives than to tactical dividends.

2 A term that describes activities, operations and organisations involving elements of at least two armies. See: NATO STANDARDIZATION OFFICE. AAP-06 Edition 2018 NATO glossary of terms and conditions. Brussels: 2018, p. 70.

3 EZPELETA, José. A. «La reestructuración del Ejército del Aire». Monografía 138: Racionalización de las estructuras de la Fuerzas Armadas. Hacia una organización conjunta. Madrid: CESEDEN 2013, pp. 105-125.

4 AGUIRRE DE CÁRCER, Miguel. «La adaptación de la OTAN. 2014-2017». En Cuadernos de Estrategia 191. OTAN: presente y futuro. Madrid: Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos 2017, pp. 15-50.

5 The inherent characteristics of airpower make it suitable for dealing with all kinds of threats: speed of reaction, flexibility, precision, multi-response capability, mobility, concentration capacity, penetration capability, strength deployment capacity, adaptability, survival and scalability. See: LOMBO, Juan. A. «El poder aéreo, instrumento decisivo para la resolución de las crisis del siglo XXI». Revista Arbor. Madrid: 2002, pp. 231-257.

from/about NATO in general, its structure, capabilities and commitments in particular; on the other hand, scientific literature and academic publications by authors with sufficient experience and relevance in the field.

The relevance of the study of this concept and of the associated capability⁶ is justified, moreover, in terms of its impact on Spain's current military planning⁷. In 2014, the Defence Chief of Staff published the Joint Doctrine of Targeting⁸, as well as directives for its implementation and organisation⁹. In 2018, the Air Force certified the JFAC (Joint Force Air Component) capability as a NATO Response Force (NRF)¹⁰– including targeting activities¹¹– for effective execution for and during 2019.

Its influence due to diverse political and cultural factors, and the lessons learned from various military operations further indicate the need for study of the issue. The present analysis aims to contribute to a better understanding of present-day military capabilities, favouring the perception of targeting as a capability which, thanks to its procedures, legitimises military action. Targeting is a relatively recent concept, so it has certainly been difficult to find relevant academic publications. For this reason, most of the sources used come from the military sphere, particularly from NATO and the Spanish Armed Forces. Only freely accessible documentation has been used, so as to avoid the difficulties derived from classified documentation.

6 Capability is the «set of factors (weapons systems, infrastructure, personnel and logistical support means) based on doctrinal principles and procedures intended to achieve a given military effect at strategic, operational or tactical level, in order to fulfil assigned missions». See: GARCÍA, José. «Planeamiento por capacidades». *Revista Española de Defensa*. Madrid: 2006, pp. 38-43.

7 By definition, targeting has a dual nature. On the one hand, it is a capability, as described in the previous footnote, and at the same time it is understood as a command and control process that relates the different levels of command for the selection of targets.

8 JEMAD. PDC-3,9 Doctrina conjunta de Targeting. Madrid: Estado Mayor de la Defensa 2014.

9 JEMAD: Directiva 12/14 «Implantación de la capacidad de targeting conjunto en las Fuerzas Armadas». Madrid: Estado Mayor de la Defensa 2014; y JEMAD: Directiva 20/14 «Organización del targeting conjunto en las Fuerzas Armadas». Madrid: Defence Chief of Staff 2014.

10 The NRF was established in 2003 as a readily available, multi-domain force capable of rapid deployment. In 2014, in view of the new security challenges, a new structure was adopted for this Force, including the creation of the VJTF (Very High Readiness Joint Task Force): a multinational brigade that acts as a back-up in response to crises in a short period of time.

11 BONADAD, Pedro. «Capacidad del JFAC nacional». Monografía XVI CEMFAS. Madrid: Escuela Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas 2015, p. 1.

Considerations on Airpower

Since its creation, and during the first five years of the twentieth century, aviation and its application in the military arena were closely linked. In less than a decade, military aviation services were created in several countries, which began to operate effectively with unusual speed. Spain was the first country in the world to use airpower in the form of bombing¹², specifically during the conflict in the Protectorate of Morocco at the end of 1913¹³.

Its extensive use intensified during World War I, where both massive bombing campaigns and targeted actions in support of ground operations were carried out. Its effects were limited – both personal and material – although its psychological effects were extraordinary.

World War II served to demonstrate to the entire community of nations the superiority that airpower provided: its ability to break the political and military will of the adversary, as well as the undeniable advantage that aviation provided as a service separate from the ground element. As a result of campaigns in Europe and the Pacific, the concept of strategic bombing emerged¹⁴, since the effects of these actions fulfilled the objectives of the war as a whole, regardless of the particular terrain in question¹⁵.

From 1947 onwards, the use of airpower in the decades to come was the subject of much debate: the Korean, Vietnam and Gulf Wars were its playing field. Not only were lessons learned from the American conflicts, but Israeli tactics and results from the Six-Day War and Yom Kippur were studied. Airborne warfare took on the form and characteristics attributed to it today.

However, and very much in spite of the good results obtained and the avant-garde technological advances – laser guidance, cruise missiles, stealth technology – in the last decades of the 20th century, the relative importance of air interdiction¹⁶ with respect to the campaign as a whole remained overshadowed. An example of this was the famous final execution of Operation Desert Storm over Iraq in 1991, with a major

12 Bombing is the action of dropping bombs from planes or pieces of artillery over a specific location over a period of time.

13 SÁNCHEZ M., José. «La Aviación Militar española: una historia corta pero de gran intensidad». *Revista Arbor*. Madrid: 2002, pp. 187-216.

14 Strategic bombing is organised and executed to defeat the enemy and ensure his surrender by destroying his morale and his economic and industrial capacity. In the concept of the all-out war of the 1940s, these actions would include any human activity involved in these activities, which would make them legitimate targets See: ARMSTRONG, J. «The relevance of the concept of Strategic Bombing». *Airpower Development Centre Bulletin*. Canberra: 2015, p. 1.

15 JORDÁN, Javier. *El debate sobre la primacía del poder aéreo: un recorrido histórico*. Madrid: CESEDEN 2016, pp. 1-38.

16 An air operation conducted to «divert, disrupt, delay, degrade or destroy» the military potential of an enemy before it can effectively implement its defence, and at such a distance from friendly forces that it does not require the integration of gunfire and manoeuvres. See: NSO. *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

ground campaign, which disregarded others, such as those proposing an intensive bombing campaign to break the Iraqi resistance¹⁷.

In the Balkan War, specifically in Serbia and Bosnia, there were problems with the use of ground operations, due in part to the complexity of the conflict and the power of the Yugoslav armed forces. These experiences deterred the NATO High Command from using ground components during the Kosovo campaign¹⁸. As an alternative, an unprecedented air campaign was established over the region, resulting in a victory of historic importance for three reasons: the campaign was conducted solely by air, the conditions for peace were effectively imposed, and the coalition did not suffer any fatalities of its own¹⁹.

With the arrival of the new millennium came new conflicts. Following the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush declared war on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. He chose an innovative approach to the combat: a mix of airpower, special operations and support from local forces on the ground. In the jargon of the military community, this became known as “the Afghan model”. This ground-breaking decision left the US Army out of the operation, at least in its early days. Assisted by the JTAC (Joint Terminal Air Controller), the USAF carried out an effective bombing campaign over the provinces controlled by the Taliban, which was key to the subsequent fall of the regime. The results were “adequate” so the model was repeated during the first phases of the campaign in Iraq in the autumn of 2003²⁰.

During the Libyan War²¹, NATO had to reinvent its campaign to develop it solely through its air component with a maritime component in the waters of the Mediterranean for support tasks and implementing an embargo on materiel for the Libyan Army. This mission marked a turning point in NATO's recent history, due to its centralised focus – at Poggio Renatico's headquarters – and its decentralised execution – the air units distributed along the Mediterranean basin without land support. Although the 2011 campaign represented a milestone, it also revealed problems in terms of interpreting the strategic-military objectives to be achieved and raised questions with regard to leadership and the establishment of an appropriate design for the mission²². A number of lessons were drawn that were to be applied in the following decade²³.

17 JORDÁN. Op. cit., p. 22.

18 GRANT, Rebecca. «The Kosovo Campaign: Aerospace Power Made It Work». Air Force Magazine. Arlington: 1999, pp. 30-37.

19 LOMBO. Op. cit., p. 235.

20 LABORIE, Géraud. «The Afghan Model More Than 10 Years Late». Air and Space Power Journal. Montgomery: 2013, p. 50.

21 UN. Resolution 1973 (Vol. S/RES/1973). New York: 2011, p. 3.

22 ARTEAGA, Félix. La OTAN en Libia. Red Iberoamericana de Estudios Internacionales. Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano 2011, p. 4.

23 NATO. «Six Strategic Lessons learned from Libya: NATO Operation Unified Protector». NATO Defense College Research Report. Rome: 2012, pp. 1-6.

In addition, the introduction of certain elements related to targeting was deemed necessary. Parallel to the gradual development of technology, which led to an enhanced fine-tuning of bombing capabilities, voices were raised underlining the importance of abandoning the intensive use of this capability in order to redefine it, relating it to the classic concept of coercion²⁴: a “negotiation process” for the surrender of the adversary, – regardless of whether resistance is still possible – whereby further harm is avoided. Such coercion focused, preferably, on the selection of those centres of gravity important to the enemy: leadership (government and command and control systems), military power centres, communication lines, energy supply and logistical networks²⁵.

Among these elements of power, specific physical entities could be identified: the so-called objectives or targets²⁶. For a given operation, and using available information concerning the adversary, a defined plan would be created to analyse and prioritize the enemy’s most critical and important targets²⁷.

It was not until two or three decades ago that targeting began to be applied with a doctrine similar to the one we work with today. Leadership in the study and development of this capacity has been eminently American, and the lessons drawn have been transmitted to the framework of NATO.

Targeting has also led to negative episodes when not properly applied. An example of this was the bombing of Iraqi nuclear plants during Operation Desert Storm. Although it affected the adversary’s command and control capability, it also posed a problem of supply to the civil population and for the country’s water treatment supplies, which led to epidemics of gastroenteritis and cholera with high mortality rates in some local communities²⁸.

It was during the Kosovo conflict that NATO specialists developed a suitable system of targets for the air campaign, based on the experience of Operation Deliberate Force in Bosnia. In addition, the adequate implementation of what would eventually become the current JFAC, provided the capability to meet these objectives in a more accurate and adequate manner²⁹.

24 Related to the concept of coercion is the concept of brute force: the total imposition of one’s will on the adversary, without the possibility of resistance, leading to possible total extermination. See: SCHELLING, Thomas. *Arms and Influence*. New Haven: Yale University Press 1966.

25 JORDÁN. *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

26 A target is defined as an area, structure, object, person or group of people (including their mindset, thought processes, attitudes and behaviours) against which lethal/non-lethal capability can be employed to create specific psychological or physical effects. See: NSO. *Op. cit.*, p. 122.

27 DOUGHERTY, Kevin. *The Evolution of Air Assault*. Washington: National Defense University 1999, pp. 51-58.

28 RIZER, Kenneth. «Bombing Dual-Use Targets : Legal, Ethical, and Doctrinal Perspectives». *Air and Space Journal*. Montgomery: 2001, pp. 1-2.

29 GRANT. *Op. cit.*, p. 28.

During the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the strategic use of airpower enabled forces on the ground to gain sufficient advantage, achieving operational objectives³⁰ thanks in part to the judicious selection of adversary targets and the catalytic effect of troops on the ground. In Libya, this was done equally and efficiently, incorporating new doctrinal and procedural developments³¹.

Command in Military Operations

From the first concepts on modern military doctrine outlined by Clausewitz, war has always been designed at both strategic and tactical levels. However, the magnitude of the military conflict during the two World Wars created the need to establish an additional third level of command at operational level, to direct operations in a specific scenario, clearly differentiating them from those taking place in other venues, even though they all contributed to achieving the common strategic objectives³².

The operational level in NATO

The Strategic Concept of the Alliance was approved after the Lisbon summit in 2010. The Heads of State and Government of the Organisation agreed on a new vision for the Alliance³³, setting out three key tasks: (1) the collective defence of another member on the basis of Article V of the Washington Treaty³⁴; (2) crisis management for conflict prevention³⁵ —even if a military response is established, it must be done within a comprehensive approach that includes adequate collaboration between the political and military response; and (3) the promotion of cooperative security, to create political links with relevant countries and international organisations.

NATO contemplates the option of deploying military operations, which are designed at three levels of command: the political-strategic level, where the main objectives, the command structure, its means and the legal framework are determined; the

30 OTAN. Op. cit., pp. 1-6.

31 ASARTA, Alberto. «El nivel operacional». En Monografía 149: El nivel operacional. Madrid: CESEDEN 2016, p. 13.

32 *Ibíd*, p. 10.

33 NATO. Concepto Estratégico de la OTAN. Lisbon,; 2010. Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_56626.htm;

34 NATO. North Atlantic Treaty. Washington: 1949, p. 1.

35 In the case of the Libyan operation, this would fall into the second type. For these situations, the Alliance envisages a directive to conduct the process from crisis management to the establishment of the military operation. See: NATO. ACO «Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive» (COPD) Interim V2.0. Mons: 2013.

operational command level, where campaigns are “planned, conducted and sustained, in order to achieve strategic objectives³⁶ and synchronize actions in the Theatre of Operations³⁷; and the tactical level, where the operation is executed. On numerous occasions, the boundaries between them are difficult to distinguish, so it is necessary to ensure that they are well linked and synchronised³⁸.

The operational level carries out the tasks of C2, Command and Control³⁹, and must serve as a bridge between the strategic and tactical levels, and vice versa. To this end, it must apply specific procedures where the High Command’s top-level directives are translated into practical orders for the subordinate levels.

The Operational Command must act according to the principles of coherence – operating in synergy in pursuit of the same effect – and autonomy, avoiding interference from other actors. However, there is a differential factor in their planning: the scenario. No two operations will ever be the same, given all the important factors that characterise them: politics, religion, society, culture, history, geography, climate, etc.

The possibility should be considered of several components being involved –land, sea, air, special operations– in a single operation. In this context, it is precisely at operational level where “the joint action becomes an integrating element of the specific forms of action of each army”⁴⁰.

NATO’s organic structure

But, moving away from theory, where does this operational level actually fit into the Atlantic Alliance? NATO’s organic structure is designed in the form of a hierarchical tree, made up of various committees. The supreme body is the NAC (North Atlantic Council), an eminently political body, which is constantly assisted by other bodies, such as the IS (International Staff) from the civilian sector, as well as the MC (Military Committee) and its IMS (International Military Staff), heading up the political-military level. Subordinate to the NAC are two strategic commands: the ACT (Allied Command Transformation) and the ACO (Allied Command Operations).

36 Objective is that clearly defined and attainable goal for a military operation that will generate a desired outcome essential to a Commander’s plan and towards which the operation is directed. See: NSO. Op. cit., p. 90.

37 PÉREZ, Pedro; FERNANDÉZ, Jesús. «El nivel operacional. A modo de análisis». En Monografía 149: El nivel operacional. Madrid: CESEDEN 2016, pp. 203-215.

38 G. ARNAIZ, Francisco J. «La estructura de mando de la Alianza Atlántica». Cuadernos de Estrategia 191: OTAN: presente y futuro. Madrid: Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos 2017, pp. 51-82.

39 NSO. Op. cit., pp. 28-29 y 32.

40 ASARTA. Op. cit., p. 89.

This organisational structure has a dual nature, since it functions both in times of peace and in times of crisis⁴¹.

The ACO, with its headquarters in Mons, consists of two JFCs (Joint Force Command) - Brunssum and Naples - and three SSCs (Single Service Commands), one per domain - Izmir (LANDCOM), Northwood (MARCOM) and Ramstein (AIRCOM). There are other bodies under the ACO that carry out support tasks, including the IFC (Intelligence Fusion Centre)⁴².

When designing an operation – joint or not – the operational command of the NATO structure would be the COM JFC (Commander Joint Force Command), which would operate from either of the two JFCs. In this body, a headquarters (HQ) would be created for the JTF (Joint Task Force). Within a joint NATO operation⁴³, component commands can be created for each of the domains⁴⁴. According to their size, NATO operations can be SJO o MJO (Small/Major Joint Operations).

For all military operations, once the various Council directives have been published⁴⁵ – which would initiate the planning process – and the SPD⁴⁶ (Strategic Planning Directive) has been defined, an OPLAN⁴⁷ (Operational Plan) must be approved, with the requirements specific to the strategic and operational level. The indispensable elements of any OPLAN are as follows:

41 OTAN. NATO Command Structure. Mons: 2013. Available at Internet <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/structure.htm>;

42 The IFC stands out from other support bodies, because of its tasks related to military intelligence and its service to NATO targeting cells.

43 NATO operations can also be combined or multinational. Joint operations are considered to be any activity, operation or organisation in which more than one nation is involved. See: NSO. Op. cit., p. 84.

44 As far as NATO is concerned, only the traditional Land CC, Maritime CC and Air CC - or JFAC - are taken into account. However, the US army has already created the JSOC (Joint Special Operations Command) within the US Special Operations Command. See: RODRÍGUEZ, Raimundo; JORDÁN, Javier. «La importancia creciente de las fuerzas de operaciones especiales en Estados Unidos y su influencia en el resto de países de la OTAN». UNISCI Discussion Papers. Madrid: 2015, pp. 107-123.

45 The most important of these are the NAC Initiating Directive (NID) and the NAC Execution Directive (NED).

46 Together with the SPD, the NAC and the CM provide the essential direction and guidance; the COM JFC will use this to calculate an estimate of operational needs.

47 An OPLAN is a document that describes the basis of a joint operation, both at strategic and operational levels, serving as a framework for the deployment, employment, protection, support and sustainment of forces during the different phases of the operation. The difference between strategic and operational levels lies in the fact that the latter endeavours to translate the estimates of the former into a given scenario - in terms of the forces and capabilities to be implemented - by designing specific functions See: NSO. Op. cit., p. 91.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annex A: Concept of operations • Annex B: Task Organization and command relationships • Annex C: Forces and effects • Annex D: Intelligence • Annex E: Rules of engagement • Annex J: Force Protection • Annex P: Electronic Warfare • Annex R: Logistics • Annex S: Movements • Annex T: Environmental support • Annex AA: Legal • Annex GG: Non NATO force procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annex II: Joint Targeting • Annex JJ: NATO Crisis Response System • Annex OO: Operations Assessment • Annex QQ: Medical • Annex TT: Public Affairs • Annex UU: Information Operations • Annex VV: Psychological Operations • Annex XX: Record of change • Annex ZZ: Distribution
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Source: Prepared by the author

The air operational component of a NATO operation

The *air-minded* approach to targeting applied in this research focuses on Ramstein's AIRCOM, forcing a more detailed breakdown of its structure. The CAOCs (Combined Air Operations Center) of Torrejón and Uedem, as well as the CAOC-D (Deployable CAOC) of Poggio Renatico depend on AIRCOM. These Air Operations Centres are responsible for controlling Europe's airspace in peacetime, as well as providing the necessary personnel to JFC HQ in the event that a military operation with an air component or JFAC is established.

Within the current NATO structure, and in order to overcome issues of lack of preparation or time – as was the case in the planning of the OUP – a permanent Core JFAC has been put in place. The main mission of this group, consisting of indispensable personnel, is to establish the doctrine and procedures for the creation and establishment of the JFAC in peacetime. In the event of an escalation of tension, it would be constituted as the JFAC at the service of the Alliance, receiving reinforcement personnel from the CAOCs, as well as from the reactive NRF for the corresponding year.

The JFAC concept complies with the principles of centralised control and planning and decentralised execution, which enables a more efficient use of air assets⁴⁸. JFAC's mission⁴⁹

48 NEBOT, Antonio F. «El nivel operacional. OUP/OTAN». En Monografía 149: El nivel operacional. Madrid: CESEDEN 2016, pp. 129-130.

49 OTAN. Joint Force Air Component Command. Ramstein: 2019. Available at <https://ac.nato.int/page8031753>.

in a crisis or conflict situation would be to plan, task⁵⁰, direct and supervise the air operations of the assigned resources. These tasks are synchronised through the ATO (Air Tasking Order), a cyclical process that details general and specific instructions for the handling of the air campaign⁵¹. An operation with an air component would be commanded by the JFAC Commander, who would be directly subordinate to the JFC Commander.

The JFAC core would include a Deputy Commander, a Joint Staff, a special support section (Legal Advisor, Political Advisor and Public Affairs) and a liaison section (both with the LCC, MCC and SOCC, and with the authorities of each participating country⁵²). In order to exercise an effective C2 covering operations, a JFAC Director would be created, to whom the five divisions that would effectively train JFAC would report:

- *Strategy Division* (SD), which serves as a doctrinal link between the strategic and operational levels. It is responsible for producing the ODA (*Air Operations Directive*), marking the commencement of mission planning.
- *Combat Plans Division* (CPD), in charge of planning daily execution plans with a 72-hour perspective. It estimates capabilities and their assignment.
- *Combat Operations Division* (COD), whose main mission is to monitor activities in real time. It is the “soul” of the JFAC as far as operations are concerned.
- *ISR Division* (ISRD), in charge of providing the necessary intelligence to support decision making and coordinating the “tasking” of ISR aircraft to comply with intelligence-gathering processes.
- *Combat Support Division* (CSD), which assists the JFAC in the management of personnel, logistics, CIS resources and financial aspects.

It should be noted that all divisions work closely together through a number of mixed functional positions across the units. Within the structure of a JFAC, the targeting section belongs to the ISRD. Other elements integrated in other divisions with liaison functions depend on this section. All targeteers⁵³ working together carry out the targeting cycle and advise the head of the ISRD Division. Due to the highly spe-

50 Assignment of an aircraft to carry out a specific activity. See: NSO. Op. cit., p. 123.

51 In terms of the size of the air operations, an estimated 350 departures/day would be involved in an SJO and 1000 departures/day in an MJO.

52 Each participating country has a Senior LNO (Liaison National Officer) as part of an operation. This officer has the power to resolve, on a case-by-case basis, any discrepancies arising from the use of the assets assigned to NATO. Thus, if they find any problems regarding their use, violation of agreements or failure to comply with national or international regulations, they could exercise their right to veto the non-use of their resources. This power is known as the Red Card Holder. In order to justify these objections, each country must declare its restrictions or caveats in an additional document to the mission's OPLAN.

53 This is the word most commonly used to designate the intelligence officer responsible for planning and coordinating all tasks related to targeting.

cialised nature of these positions, the Alliance sets minimum standards for specialised training, which the members of the targeting teams should meet⁵⁴.

The concept of targeting

The international community increasingly demands a limited and lawful use of force while minimizing collateral damage⁵⁵. The concept of targeting incorporates these requirements without losing operational efficiency.

The term targeting is synonymous with “target selection”. But these cannot be just any targets: they have to be those whose engagement delivers an advantage in the military campaign. For this purpose, reliable intelligence must be obtained, which can be gathered from multiple sources, and the necessary elements and data for the analysis of such a target must be identified. Once determined, the appropriate resources can be assigned to its engagement⁵⁶.

The current concept of targeting

Given the wide variety of conflicts in which NATO may currently become involved, the organisation has developed its own concept for effective joint targeting, which is defined as “the process of selecting and prioritizing targets, and matching the appropriate response to them, taking account of operational requirements and capabilities⁵⁷”. This doctrine is set out in AJP 3.9 *Allied Joint Doctrine for Joint Targeting*⁵⁸.

In a contemporary context, it is understood as the process that aims to obtain the desired effects on targets, relying both on traditional kinetic actions and on activities of another nature⁵⁹. The purpose of joint targeting is to provide a methodology

54 DA SILVA, Helder. A. «Los nuevos desafíos del targeting». *Revista Ejército*. Madrid: 2014, p. 27.

55 TEJERA, Juan. «Conceptos emergentes en la OTAN». *Revista Española de Defensa*. Madrid: 2014, p. 44.

56 The most commonly used term is engage, defined as «a fire control order used to direct or authorize units and/or weapon systems to fire on a designated target». See: LOMBO. *Op. cit.*, p. 253. See also: NSO. *Op. cit.*, p. 47.

57 See: NSO. *Op. cit.*, p. 123.

58 Other publications of interest, directly related to targeting, are ACO Directive 80-70 Campaign Synchronization and Targeting in ACO; ACO Directive 65-8; ACO Manual 80-70 Tactics Techniques and Procedures to prosecute Time Sensitive Target; and various STANAGs.

59 EKELHOF, Merel. «Lifting the Fog of Targeting: «Autonomous Weapons» and human control through the lens of military targeting». *Naval War College Review*. Newport: 2018, p. 63. (*) It should be noted that, within the targeting community, this action is not only meant for lethal methods, but also contemplates non-lethal options. However, the author does not intend to expand on this distinction here.

to advise the JFC, seeking to bring together the concept of joint fires⁶⁰ with other operational functions – C2, intelligence⁶¹, force protection, information operations (*INFOOPS*), etc. – to improve coordination, optimise synchronization and avoid unnecessary effort⁶².

The process is particularly flexible and designed to select and prioritise targets - each with an appropriate action strategy - so as to assist the decision-making process, from strategic to tactical level, and to contribute to the achievement of the objectives set.

The targeting process is based on the following principles⁶³:

- *Objective-based*: its main function focuses on achieving the JFC's objectives, within the guidelines of political and strategic doctrine.
- *Effects-driven*: it focuses on creating physical and psychological effects on the targets while striving to avoid undesirable effects.
- *Multidisciplinary*: it requires the coordinated and integrated efforts of functional experts from many disciplines and capabilities.
- *Intelligence*: products and processes that will empower decision makers.
- *Centralised control and coordination, decentralised execution*.

The doctrine of joint targeting is subject to international legislation and to the particular legislation of each participating State⁶⁴. To ensure that legal requirements are met, the entire cycle is assisted by legal advisors. The ethical-legal principles on which their advice is based are:

60 It is defined as the coordinated use of multiple weapon systems of several component controls to create a desired physical or psychological effect.

See: ALSA. Multi-service tactics, techniques and procedures for Joint Application of Firepower. Hampton: 2016, p. 1.

61 Significantly, this capacity is becoming increasingly influential and important in decision processes.

See: OTERO, Juan Carlos. «Evolución y empleo de las capacidades ISR aéreas ante las nuevas amenazas del siglo XXI». Monografía XII CEMFAS. Madrid: Escuela Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas, 2016, p. 13.

62 Joint targeting does not extend to so-called tactical targeting. Surface to surface firing or interdiction on deeper targets are not considered within the joint scope. They will be developed through a specific process of tactical targeting, such as that of the Army in Spain. See: MADOC. Targeting terrestre. Concepto derivado 02/16. Granada: 2016, p. 3.

63 NATO. AJP 3.9 Allied Joint Doctrine for Joint Targeting. Brussels: 2016, pp. 1-5.

64 A specific member may place as many restrictions or caveats as it deems necessary in order to further restrict the process, but it will never be more permissive than that prescribed by international law.

- *Military necessity*: that an attack on the target provides a definite military advantage and that there is never a breach of international law.
- *Humanity*: prohibits the infliction of more damage than is strictly necessary to achieve the desired effects.
- *Distinction*: an attack can only be directed at military objectives⁶⁵, which must be clearly distinguished from civilian elements.
- *Proportionality*: no combat action may be taken against a target if the military advantage it provides is not expected to outweigh the collateral damage⁶⁶ anticipated in the planning phase.
- *Validity*⁶⁷: only those that meet the definition of a military target can be attacked.
- *Responsibility*: the obligation to comply with legal constraints at all levels of decision-making (planning, authorisation and implementation).

The targeting cycle

The JTC (Joint Targeting Cycle) is a process consisting of an iterative six-phase cycle that links strategic direction with tactical actions. Due to the considerable variability of these phases and the development of the campaign itself, the steps in the process can be carried out simultaneously⁶⁸.

PHASE I: Commander's Objectives, Targeting Guidance, and Intent.

The JFC must be subordinate to the highest political and strategic bodies. For a particular operation, a JCO and a JFC OPLAN are created⁶⁹ and one which defines the objectives to be achieved, the nature of the current circumstances and the parameters whereby the force will act. The objectives set must comply with the characteristics of being observable, measurable and achievable.

65 A «military objective» is a target which by its nature, purpose, location or use makes an effective contribution to the military action of the adversary and whose destruction, capture or neutralisation offers a military advantage. See: NS. Op. cit., p. 90.

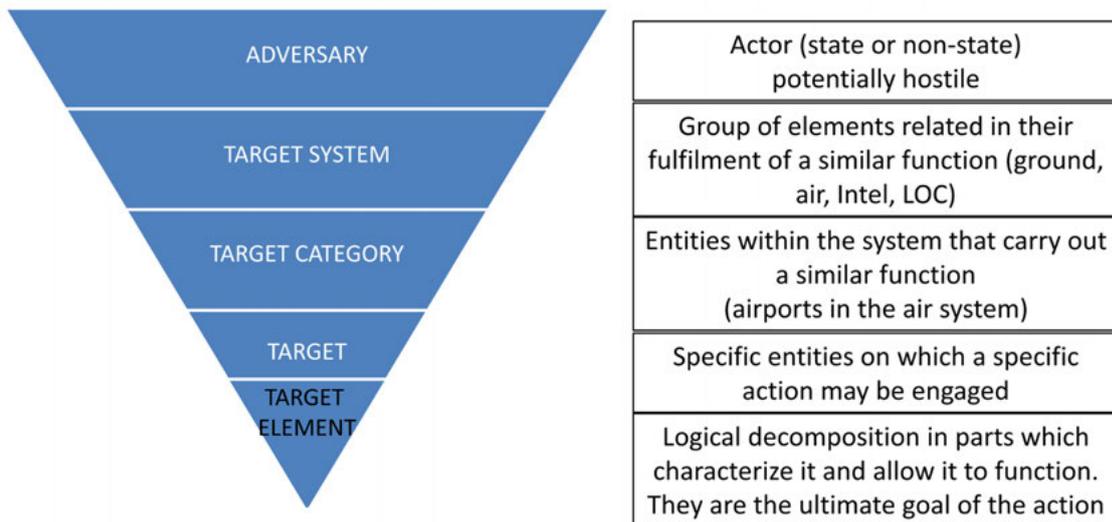
66 «Collateral damage» is accidental or unintentional damage to persons or objects that are not legally considered to be military objectives under the prevailing circumstances. See: JCS. No strike and the collateral damage estimation methodology. CJCSI 3160.01. Washington: 2009, p. B-7.

67 The author has decided to define it as such, while the AJP 3.9 Allied Joint Doctrine for Joint Targeting defines the heading as «determining military objectives».

68 BRAVO, Diego. Integración del proceso de selección y priorización de blancos en el planeamiento operacional. Trabajo Final Integrador. Buenos Aires: Escuela Superior de Guerra Conjunta de las Fuerzas Armadas 2013, p. 6.

69 The Joint Coordination Order provides the necessary direction and coordination for the subordinate commanders. .

At this point, the target system and the target category of the adversary (defined in phase 2) are selected. In addition, other important aspects for the subsequent phases are addressed, such as restricted targets⁷⁰, the no-strike entities⁷¹, time-sensitive targets⁷², target engagement authority⁷³ and the non-combatant casualty value⁷⁴.



Source: Prepared by the author

PHASE 2: Target Development and Prioritization.

An analysis of the adversary is conducted to determine which targets to attack and in order of priority, to ensure that the objectives of the JFC are achieved. To this end, an exhaustive study is carried out, based on multiple sources of intelligence, designing a taxonomy that consists of five stages, as shown in the following figure.

In this way, one begins to “unpeel” the adversary, getting a rough idea of its structures, organisation and vulnerabilities. The so-called systems, categories, targets and target elements

⁷⁰ Targets that are legally valid, but have temporary or permanent restrictions to be addressed.

⁷¹ Targets protected from the effects of military operations in breach of the Law of Armed Conflict, international law or campaign-specific ROE (Rules of Engagement).

⁷² Targets that require immediate action because: (1) they are, or will be, a threat to friendly forces; or (2) they are highly beneficial to the accomplishment of the target’s mission. They are ephemeral, so they are considered opportunity targets. See: CRESPO, Isaac M. «Time Sensitive Targeting». Monografía IX CEMFAS. Madrid: Escuela Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas 2008, p. 5.

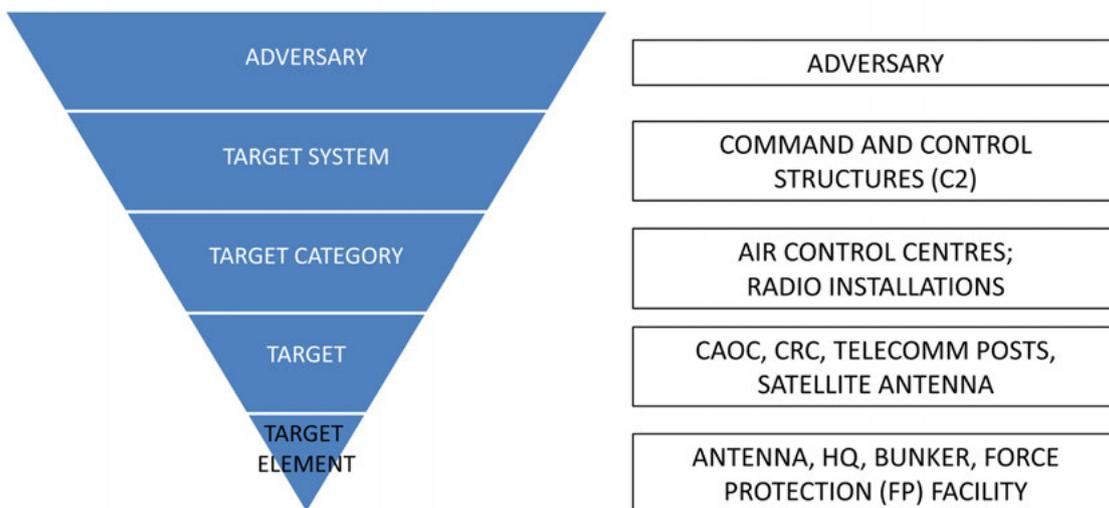
⁷³ The TEA will mark the level of authorization required for a particular engagement depending on the level of calculated collateral damage (may require authorization from SACEUR if it exceeds the NCV).

⁷⁴ The NCV (Non-Combatant Casualty Cut-off Value) is the numerical value established by SACEUR of acceptable deaths for an operation under given circumstances. As a rule, if the calculation of collateral damage exceeds the NCV, the target will not be undertaken. Anything below the NCV may be undertaken according to the relevant AER (Annual Emission Report).

are then defined. This analysis of its components enables one to determine an optimal target selection and carry out the appropriate attack on them, whether lethal or non-lethal⁷⁵.

Of all the possible targets, those that are legally valid must be selected⁷⁶. There will probably be a wide spectrum of targets that cannot be addressed for various reasons: legal, environmental considerations, dual use⁷⁷, etc.

Undoubtedly, the most comprehensive study is carried out at entity level (target and target elements), where a three-level analysis has to be carried out: basic, where an unequivocal physical identification of the target is undertaken; intermediate, where it is analysed with a sufficient degree of detail to be added to the list of valid targets; and advanced, where the characterisation process is completed and the method of engagement is designed.



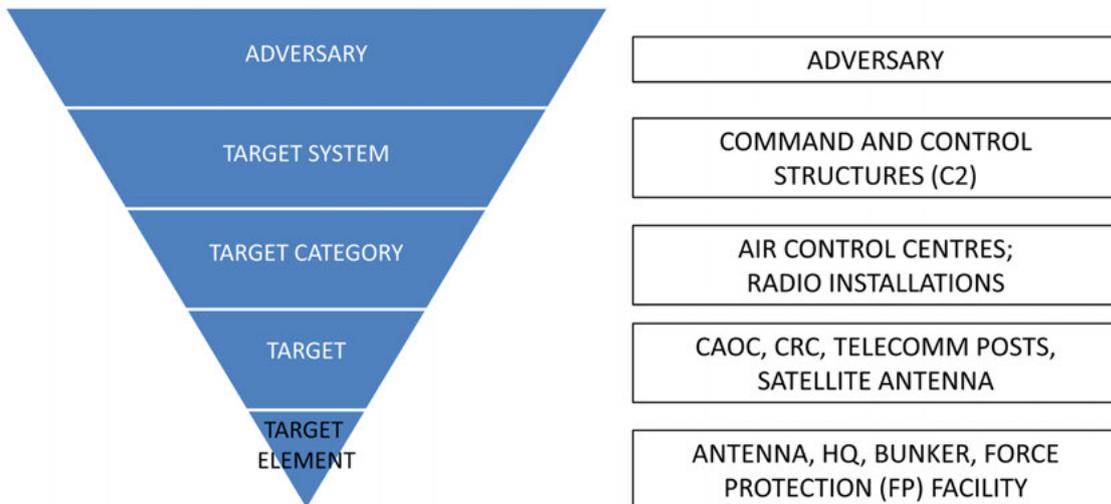
Source: Prepared by the author

With a view to better understanding this procedure, the process of determining the taxonomy in two case studies is presented here by way of example. On the one hand,

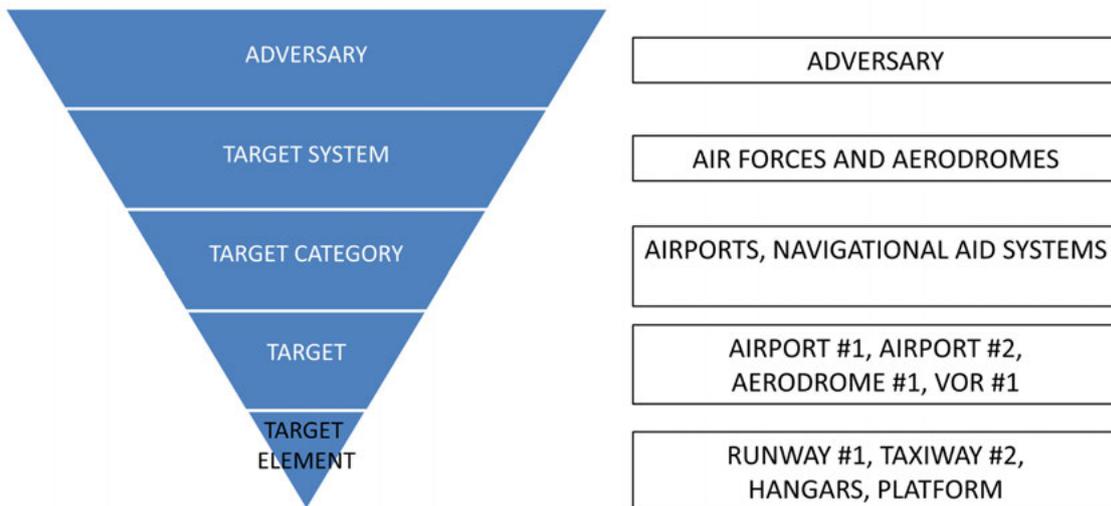
75 The term “lethal” refers to an action whose purpose is to destroy the target. However, the “non-lethal” option can also be considered, where the result will be the degradation, disruption or disabling of the target, or influence on it. See: DI MARZIO, Giulio. «The Targeting Process...This unknown process». NRDC-ITA Magazine. Solbiate Olona: p. 11.

76 A “valid” target is defined in legal terms as one against which an action can be lawfully carried out. This definition has generated discussions, when theoretically invalid targets (houses, schools, hospitals, etc.) have been processed because they have been used by enemy factions. In these cases, intelligence is critical in determining whether they can be accepted as valid. See: RODRÍGUEZ, Guillermo. «Dinámica de los blancos militares». Revista de la Escuela Superior de Guerra Aérea. Buenos Aires: 2013, p. 52.

77 Dual use is defined as a target that fulfils both a civil and a military function. During the target definition process, it is very important to define this field, because it will probably limit its possibility of being implemented. See: RIZER. Op. cit., p. 2.



Source: Prepared by the author



Source: Prepared by the author

is the analysis of the taxonomy of a Command and Control system structure, which is broken down into different target categories, and subsequently focuses on single targets and their elements. On the other hand, we have the study of the taxonomy of a target of the enemy's air force system. Its categories classify the objects and then define them as specific targets together with their main elements.

PHASE 3: Analysis of capabilities

In this JTC phase, one's own capabilities are evaluated with respect to the target, in order to provide senior staff with adequate information on the appropriate method(s) to achieve the desired effect in the given circumstances. To this end, a two-phase study is carried out: (1) weaponeering, where the type of lethal/non-lethal means to be used to achieve the desired effect is determined, and (2) a collateral damage estimate

(CDE)⁷⁸ of the target whereby the possible undesired damage is assessed in terms of the selected method – if a lethal method has been selected – in order to mitigate its accidental or unintended effects on civilian or non-combatant personnel, non-military property or the environment⁷⁹.

PHASE 4: Commander's Decision, Planning and Force Allocation

To improve decision-making, not only is it a matter of enhancing the processing capacity of military targets for the purpose of presenting proposals, but it is also essential for the JFAC Commander to have the best available information developed to the highest quality⁸⁰. At this point, the analysis of own capabilities and available forces is merged with the operational considerations at the time. Thus, each valid target is assigned to the appropriate component Command, which then undertakes it with the desired effect in mind.

PHASE 5: Mission planning and Execution:

This phase consists of direct action planning and monitoring. It is based on the process called F2T2E2A (Find, Fix, Track, Target, Engage, Exploit, Assess), which includes the necessary coordination to achieve all the necessary intelligence on the results obtained.

PHASE 6: Assessment

The purpose is to assess the effectiveness of the actions taken. It is a two-component process: the MoP and MoE (Measures of Performance and Measurements of Effectiveness), where the level of fulfilment of the mission and the level of effectiveness are studied; and the BDA (Battle Damage Assessment)⁸¹, a three-phase process where the effects resulting from the military action are assessed. An additional study may be conducted to determine the effects of INFOOPS activities on the behaviour of the population.

78 The CDE methodology contemplates five levels, from the lowest (1) to the highest (5), which give the target a level of «dangerousness», based on arithmetic calculations. At each level, an authority must be determined to authorize the attack. In most cases, the first three levels correspond to the authority of the head of air operations, the fourth to the COM JFAC and the fifth to the COM JFC.

79 MARTÍNEZ, Segundo. «Targeting en las operaciones COIN actuales». Monografía XII CEMFAS. Madrid: Escuela Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas 2010, pp. 22-23.

80 HALL, Nicholas. *Preparing for Contested War: Improving Command and Control of Dynamic Targeting*. Montgomery: Air Command and Staff College 2017, p. 3.

81 The BDA methodology assesses whether the intended effects on the target are achieved. The process is done through three phases: (1) quantitative estimate of the physical damage or the influence achieved; (2) estimate of the effects achieved in terms of the functionality of the target; (3) assessment of the effect with respect to the entire target system to which it belongs. Each of the levels requires further elaboration and assessment by experts, based on the gathering of intelligence.

The database and the targets list

- NATO has created an integrated database (IDB), where it centralises target intelligence files (descriptive information, images, geolocation, etc.). In peacetime, this activity is aimed at intelligence gathering and coordinated by the NATO IFC. Once compiled, the Alliance provides the necessary material to the requesting member countries, to other agencies that require it or to a specific NATO operation. From this database, several standardised lists are generated to group the targets:
- *No-strike list* (NSL): A list of entities not considered as targets and accordingly protected from the effects of military operations.
- *Joint Target List* (JTL): list of all valid and available targets to be selected for attack.
- *Target nomination list* (TNL): A prioritised list nominated by component commanders, which contains targets of greatest interest for the appropriate agencies.
- *Joint Prioritised Target List* (JPRTL): list of targets that have been validated and prioritised for attack.
- *Prioritised target list* (PTL): list pertaining to each component commander detailing the targets that have been assigned to them.
- *Restricted target list* (RTL): A list of valid but temporarily or permanently restricted targets.

Targeting as an enabling factor in NATO military operations

Wars are more than just a material and technological confrontation between two adversaries: doctrinal and organisational approaches also come into play⁸². This paper does not intend to enter into a discussion on treating targeting as an RMA (Revolution in Military Affairs), which in itself would be the subject of further research. However, it does consider its innovative character, its relationship with current legislation and its usefulness in the execution of operations.

Targeting as a military innovation

Within the academic community, there are various definitions of the concept of innovation as applied to the sphere of the armed forces. It is understood as referring to

82 BAQUÉS, Josep. *Revoluciones militares y revoluciones en asuntos militares. Manual de Estudios Estratégicos y Seguridad Internacional*. Madrid: Editorial Plaza y Valdés 2013, p. 121.

a change of relevant scope affecting the doctrinal apparatus, the design of techniques, tactics and procedures, as well as the organisational structure itself. Every innovation must lead to an increase in effectiveness⁸³.

Innovation processes occur thanks to a drive from the political sector, rivalry between organisations, countries, armies or even within services – which can lead to emulation between them – changes in the organisation's mentality, the results drawn from experiences, technological developments and various cultural factors⁸⁴.

Can targeting be considered as a military innovation? Targeting has become part of the military legacy due to the influence of various concurrent political and cultural factors of our time, and through the recognition of lessons learned from experience in operations of various kinds.

After its successful and effective deployment in the Kosovo war⁸⁵, it has acquired a high level of maturity over time consolidating its effectiveness⁸⁶, both in operations and in exercises, as well as its capacity to adapt to the new security challenges of the twenty-first century, such as asymmetric warfare or counter-insurgency⁸⁷.

Currently, the United States, France, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Turkey and Germany have available and certified JFAC capabilities for both domestic and NATO missions.

Targeting and its relationship with the law.

According to the concept of coercion, “it would be enough” to select the right targets to overcome the will of the adversary. Because the international community and societies demand a limited use of force from the armed forces, the concept of targeting is a useful tool to meet this requirement.

The ethical-legal principles of targeting create a legal framework that, if respected, legitimises military action. However, the targeting process uses other, much more tangible tools that make military action viable, such as (1) the international legal

83 GRISSOM, Adam. *The future of military innovation studies*. Cambridge: Journal of International Security 2018, p. 907.

84 JORDÁN, Javier. «Un modelo explicativo de los procesos de cambio en las organizaciones militares: la respuesta de Estados Unidos después del 11-S como caso de estudio». *Revista de Ciencia Política*. Madrid: 2017, pp. 205-209.

85 GRANT. *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

86 HOROWITZ, Michael. *The diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2010.

87 DARLING, Paul. «Joint Targeting and Air Support in Counterinsurgency». *Air and Space Power Journal*. Montgomery: 2012, p. 51.

framework (International Humanitarian Law, International Law of Armed Conflict, Geneva Conventions, United Nations Charter, etc.), common law, the operation's ROEs, national caveats or self-defence; mathematical methods such as collateral damage assessment; (2) legitimisation methods such as positive identification or behavioural patterns, and (3) approval methods such as the TEA. Under all this apparatus, targeting will always converge with legality, because actions may be more restrictive but never more permissive than what is established by law..

All these considerations have influenced the design of the process, and are taken into account when classifying targets, distinguishing between those classified as restricted or prohibited – those included in the NSL – those affected by property or environmental considerations – which do not delegitimise the action, but may restrict it – or dual use.

The close relationship between targeting and the legal system requires considerable involvement by legal advisors at all levels (planning, authorisation and management), where they must assess aspects such as the legitimacy of the target or the methods used to combat it⁸⁸.

In addition, the targeting process must be considered as a tool that provides legal coverage in the event that, through misfortune or manoeuvres of the adversary, the actions undertaken cause collateral damage⁸⁹. Similarly, the process is used to report on any action undertaken and guarantee to the media the legality and proportionality employed, thus counteracting the effects of the adversary's propaganda.

Targeting and the implementation of military operations

The broad spectrum of future challenges requires security organisations to be prepared for a diverse range of tasks. From humanitarian and stabilisation tasks to assignments involving the use of force, NATO is preparing to use its lethal and non-lethal capabilities against different adversaries.

In the 1990s, military operations were still designed in a “classic” way: no operation was contemplated without the existence of the ground component⁹⁰. However, following the experiences in Kosovo and the proven effectiveness of the “Afghan model”, innovations were introduced in the design of military operations, with greater emphasis on the air component in percentage terms.

88 JEMAD. Op. cit., p. 72.

89 ASENSIO, Pablo. «Targeting aéreo en COIN y la influencia de los daños colaterales». Monografía XII CEMFAS. Madrid: Escuela Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas 2010, p. 10.

90 JORDAN. Op. cit., p. 30.

The success of the OUP in Libya was particularly significant thanks to the preferential use of air capability⁹¹. The mission served to put into practice the doctrinal and procedural advances that were being conceived within NATO. Furthermore, the case of Libya is exemplary given the excellent results in terms of the cost-benefit ratio and the number of one's own and collateral casualties⁹². During the OUP, a total of 26,500 air operations were carried out, of which 9,700 were used in targeting tasks. In a seven-month air campaign, about 5,900 targets were engaged⁹³, adequately complying with CDE methodology.

According to the US Air Force, targeting shares certain common characteristics with the concept of airpower and related concepts, such as flexibility, precision, mobility, penetration capacity and adaptability. For all these reasons, the targeting process contributes to airpower since it seeks to generate the physical and psychological effects sought in an operation⁹⁴.

The joint targeting mindset is also ideal for helping to achieve the objectives set at political and strategic level, thanks to the possibility of synchronising fires, in conjunction with the tasks of C2, Intelligence or INFOOPS. The iterative nature of the targeting cycle allows for more coherent, effective and efficient work.

All levels of command are involved in the targeting process: strategic level, which issues the guidelines and limitations; operational level, which synchronises and coordinates them; and tactical level, which executes and assesses them within its possibilities. It is precisely the flexibility of the process that allows the component commands to act without having to constantly consult the JFC, thereby enhancing its agility.

Targeting relies on multiple tools, such as CDE, BDA, MoE, MoP, among others, which make use of many different sources of intelligence (MISREP, INFLIGHTREP, GEOINT, SIGINT, HUMINT, OSINT), and allows the different levels of command to understand how the mission is being planned and how it is being executed, in order to later evaluate its outcome, thus reinforcing synergies with the COM JFC decision-making process.

Conclusions

The atrocities committed in the great wars of the last century generated a trend of thought within the international community that advocated a more limited use of force, subject to the principles of international law. Consequently, the development of

91 ASARTA. *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

92 NEBOT. *Op. cit.*, pp. 95-138.

93 NATO. *Operation Unified Protector. Final Mission Stats. Mons: 2011*, pp. 1-2.

94 NATO. *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

technology and doctrine was gradually oriented towards research into more accurate, precise and effective techniques that would limit the suffering caused by war.

Changes in the international political panorama, the emergence of international organisations, and the status quo governed by the UN Security Council have limited the possibility of states taking part in conflicts unilaterally. The society of nations has methods to avoid this but, in the event of an “unavoidable” situation, it also has methods for dealing with armed conflicts.

The experiences acquired in international missions in the last part of the twentieth century, in addition to the results obtained in Afghanistan and Iraq in the first years of the new millennium – thanks to the greater use of airpower and special operations – paved the way for planning and directing military operations in a way that was different and innovative in comparison with what had been done in the past. The Libyan OUP mission was a historic milestone for the pre-eminent use of airpower and for the achievement of strategic and operational objectives through the Air Component Command. These results were achieved thanks to NATO’s organisational, technological and doctrinal superiority. One of the major advances at regulatory level was the use of targeting capabilities.

In order to be able to use all its capabilities, in 2010 NATO designed a permanent structure that allows it to carry out its tasks in times of both peace and war. Its dual structure, with a Transformation Command – or Doctrine, as it was understood in Spain – and an Operations Command, enables it to improve the Alliance’s forces and capabilities and to incorporate new doctrinal concepts, while at the same time conducting multi-dimensional military operations. These operations are carried out autonomously at an operational level, through its component Commands, but they are fully coherent and generate the appropriate synergies at a strategic-political level.

The creation of the JFAC has provided NATO with the necessary versatility to conduct air operations efficiently and effectively. Centralised control and coordination, together with decentralised execution, facilitates flexibility of execution. The divisions that make up the JFAC bring together the different functions and organisational levels, from strategic guidance to the actual operation, including and integrating the multiple support tasks.

The targeting section is part of the SRI Division – coherent because of its intrinsic relationship with intelligence – although it performs a multitude of tasks directly related to operations. The future feasibility of this capability will be underpinned by the continuous training of targeteers, who will also have to train in exercises before taking part in any real operations.

The drive demonstrated by the Chief of Defence Staff in Spain is but a prime example of the overriding importance of the model of the component commands – and their interoperability – for the years ahead. This model has modified the training of the forces and their level of enlistment.

The same analysis of its definition specifies the following aspects:

- *It is a multi-stage and iterative process:* linking political-strategic leadership with tactical actions, through operational command. The steps of the targeting cycle can be developed simultaneously, which speeds up the development of the operation itself;
- *In which targets are selected and prioritised:* thanks to previous intelligence tasks, it helps the decision-making process and better synchronises the campaign. Taking into account the operational requirements at the given time, and its own capabilities, an adequate C2 is provided to the operational command
- *certain resources are assigned:* from the most appropriate service, since these are arranged under Joint Command. In this way, the necessary capabilities can be optimally employed in order to obtain the best possible result
- *with lethal or non-lethal effects:* the versatility of the joint and combined means available – since not only the use of force is contemplated, but also influence tasks or INFOOPS – provide a wide range of options for the Command to select the appropriate method for use.
- *to obtain the desired effects:* The common characteristics of targeting and air-power make this possible. The desired results must be marked before attacking the target, since these were the main reason why the attack on the target was prioritised over others. Apart from the “classic” destruction, there are different effects – interruption, dissuasion, disturbance, refusal, among others – that can generate the expected result;
- *and fulfil the operational objectives:* the tactical action makes it possible to meet the operational objectives set for the operation, which are fully consistent with decisions at political and strategic level.

Joint targeting is an innovation in the military field since it has modified – or caused to evolve – the doctrine, techniques, tactics and procedures, together with the natural development of technology. Its over-riding focus on operational objectives generates enabling synergies for military action. Its multidisciplinary and joint approach assists in coordination, participation and integration, which in turn provides it with extensive knowledge. The ongoing design and execution of NATO exercises for the practice and use of these mechanisms suggests the importance that the organisation attaches to them for the years ahead.

Its mechanisms for compliance with international law are another of its main features. The ethical-legal principles under which it is protected provide it with validity before the international legal system and before modern society. Targeting carried out in an effective manner will “sufficiently coerce the adversary” so that operational objectives are met in the least harmful manner. The involvement of legal advisors – at all levels – allows the process to be constantly checked so that no crimes against international law are committed. The existence of the national liaison officers also serves to ensure that no military force employed contravenes its own legal system.

Joint targeting has generated –or is generating– a real revolution in the mechanisms for conducting military operations due to its inherent characteristics. It is a capability for the future.

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