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Reflection Paper 2

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36th Intelligence Squadron, United States Air Force

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Internship Reflection Paper

Second 50 Hours

Working as an intelligence analyst for another 50 hours with the 36th Intelligence Squadron (36 IS) has felt like a whirlwind of information and high stress activity. The main thing I've learned about during this time is the joint targeting cycle (JTC) and the process for getting a target vetted, validated, and nominated for action by a combatant command (COCOM). For operational security reasons I won't say specifically how I've implemented the joint targeting cycle to support the US military, but I will speak in broad terms available in Joint Publication 3-60 – Joint Targeting (JP 3-60) (Joint Staff, 2018).

According to JP 3-60, there are six phases or steps to the JTC (Joint Staff, 2018). Phase 1 starts with strategic guidance from the President, Secretary of War (SecWar), and the joint forces commander (JFC) on what the desired end state is for a conflict or major combat operation. This will include targeting priorities, critical targets, time sensitive targets, target acquisition and identification criteria, actions authorized against targets, and so on. These inputs provide a framework for how different components such as the Air Force will develop their own targeting priorities and operational planning for a campaign.

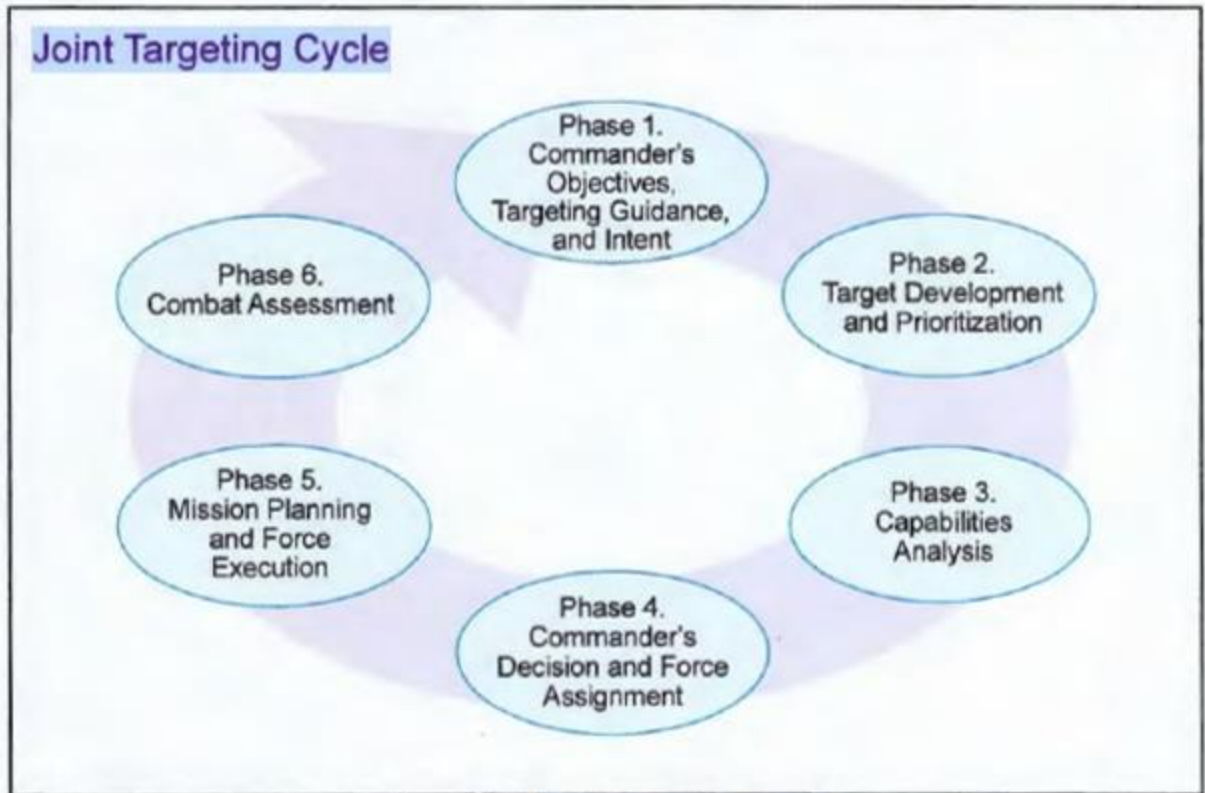


Figure II-2. Joint Targeting Cycle

In Phase 2, Target Development and Prioritization, my role as an intelligence analyst requires me to examine an adversary from a systematic perspective. Target systems analysis takes an adversary target system, such as their air defenses, and breaks it down into smaller parts (target elements) that delineate the critical requirements (things), critical capabilities (actions), and critical vulnerabilities (things or actions) of that target system. Using the example of an adversary's air defenses, there are several critical requirements and capabilities for the adversary to effectively defend their air space. They need sensors such as radar to detect, identify, and track aircraft. They also need command, control, and communications (C3) systems to relay that information between air defense units. Finally, the air defense units need to be able to engage aircraft, such as surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) or air defense artillery (ADA). Removing their sensors means the adversary can't

detect our aircraft. Removing their C3 means the sensors can't tell their shooters where aircraft are active. Removing their shooters means they can't affect our aircraft. My job as an intelligence analyst is to identify the best way to prioritize, develop, and nominate these different target elements to best affect the larger target system. Once we've identified the most important and efficient way to affect the system, we've identified their critical vulnerabilities.

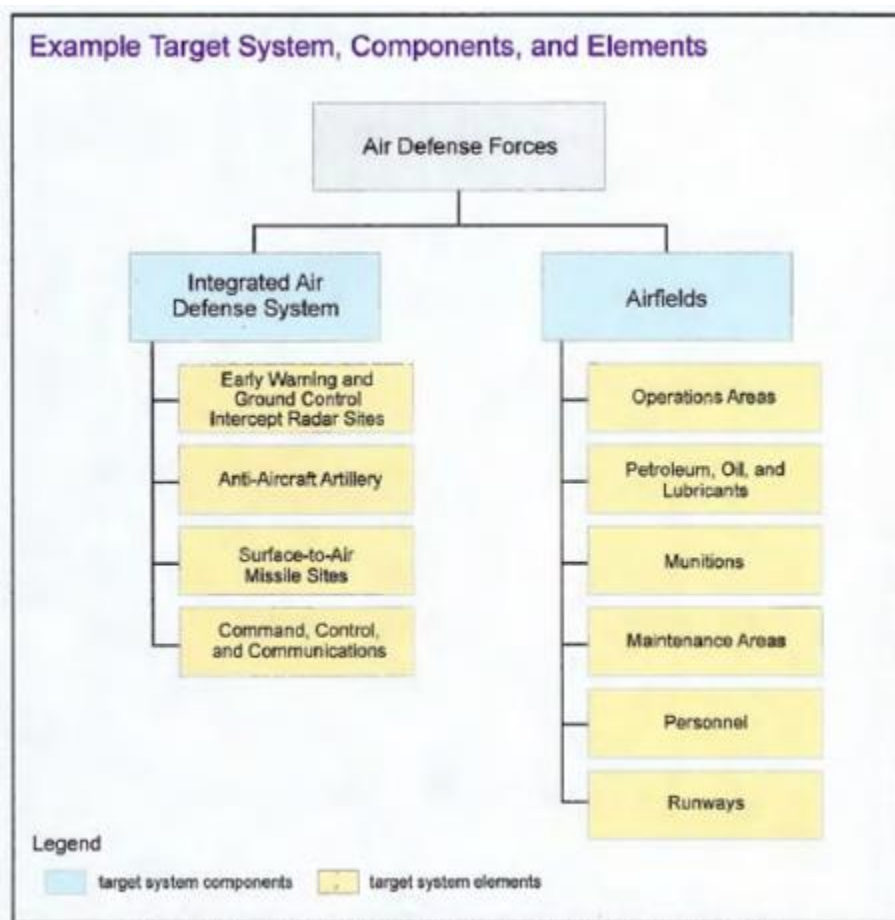


Figure II-4. Example Target System, Components, and Elements

Several strengths that I have brought to the Air Force in this role are my attention to detail and my ability to thoroughly research a target system quickly and efficiently using all source of information. There is a great deal of data out there on our adversaries, and

sometimes it can feel overwhelming to even know where to begin. Fortunately, Phase 1 of the JTC lays out where we need to prioritize our efforts. Phase 2 is where I can focus my talents. I'd be lying if I said this can't be a stressful environment, especially when warfighters' lives are on the line. Thankfully, I remind my self that I'm not alone in these efforts. I have an entire team behind me full of expertise and they're fully supportive of me and the mission.

During Phase 3, the components will conduct a capabilities analysis to determine how they can best affect the targets we've nominated. They can be through kinetic means such as through bombs and missiles. It could also be through non-kinetic means such as information operations, cyber operations, or psychological operations. It's up to the components operations cells to find the best capability to effect each target.

For Phase 4, the JFC will decide how the components will execute their missions and with what capabilities. This could be through an extended bombing campaign, blockade operations, or through sustained information operations targeting the adversary's will to fight.

In Phase 5, the component then take the guidance from the JFC to actually plan and execute the mission. Finally, in Phase 6, the components will conduct combat assessment to determine whether the mission had the desired effects or not. If the target was successfully engaged, then we as intelligence analysts will not this and move on to the next target. However, if the adversary's target system hasn't been completely destroyed and

affected enough, then we will renominate those targets for re-engagement, and the whole JTC starts over again.

Overall, my role in the JTC has been incredibly rewarding and I have a high level of job satisfaction from it. I see this becoming my long-term career and there are many opportunities for me to expand my expertise in multiple target systems.

References:

The Joint Staff. Joint Publication 3-60: Joint Targeting. U.S. Department of Defense, 28 Sept. 2018, www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Joint_Staff/21-F-0520_JP_3-60_9-28-2018.pdf, Accessed 8 Feb. 2026.

United States Air Force. Air Force Doctrine Publication 3-60: Targeting. U.S. Department of the Air Force, Nov. 2021, www.doctrine.af.mil/Portals/61/documents/AFDP_3-60/3-60-AFDP-TARGETING.pdf, Accessed 08 Feb. 2026.