

## Who's Driving the Train: Observations and Recommendations for Targeting in the Counterinsurgency Fight

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“It is your attitude, and the suspicion that you are maturing the boldest designs against him, that imposes on your enemy.”

—Frederick the Great, 1747

Since the beginning of the Overseas Contingency Operation, leaders across all services have been discussing and applying fresh looks at what could be considered paradigms of full spectrum operations. Those topics include center of gravity analysis, effects-based operations, and focusing collection efforts across all lines of operations (LOOs). Most of these topics are not paradigms but evolution or reassessments of lessons learned forgotten until recently or an attempt to apply doctrine for a high-intensity conflict on a counterinsurgency (COIN) fight.

From my perspective, targeting is the lever with which we can shape the battlefield using knowledge of the environment gained through an accurate center of gravity analysis and collection along all LOOs under the auspices of effects-based operations. With complete visibility of the dynamics within his operating environment, a commander can target specific attitudes, people, locations, and events that are in the way of achieving his desired end state. Aside from being arduous, complex, and time consuming, accurate targeting ultimately can be the difference between achieving dominance on the COIN battlefield or getting caught in a protracted, resource-consuming fight.

Tactical commanders must constantly assess their unit's impact on the operating environment and the progress of their operations toward achieving their initial intent.<sup>1</sup> The glaring question most commanders are likely to ask themselves is, “Are we winning the fight?” Success in a COIN fight is hard to measure. It has been said that “bean counting” is not the best method for measuring success. For example, the number of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) detonated or discovered in an area of responsibility may be an applicable metric that security is increasing. However, the effectiveness of those fewer IEDs and their lethality may be increasing. Furthermore, in full spectrum operations, security is only one LOO. Some might consider security to be the most important LOO in a COIN campaign; however, in effects-based operations, it is only one measure for determining the impact a friendly commander is having on the environment. Targeting that is based on thorough analysis of the environment and synchronized with desired effects will provide measurable successes in the COIN fight.

Currently at the tactical level, targeting and effects coordination is primarily the responsibility of the senior field artillery (FA) officer.<sup>2</sup> Historically, the FA officer has been the subject matter expert on the decide, detect, deliver, and assess targeting methodology. In high-intensity conflicts, targeting is almost always lethal and the effects are actually measurable because battle damage assessments are easily quantified. However, in the joint contemporary operating environment, which is a low-intensity conflict, it is the find, fix, finish, exploit, assess, and disseminate (F3EAD) targeting cycle adhered to. I would argue that “find” implies the obvious conclusion that intelligence is the key enabler to the entire process. Also, intelligence drives operations. This may be common sense to some, an error in semantics to others, but ultimately, if

tactical commanders do not know where to apply combat power to achieve the decisive advantage from accurate targeting, how can they expect to be successful?

Below are several observations I made over the course of 2 deployments and 26 months targeting insurgents in Iraq. Along with each observation are recommendations for altering current methods for targeting in the COIN fight.

### **Observation: Target Determination**

During a replicated COIN practical exercise at the Intelligence Captains' Career Course, an instructor asked me, "How are you going to determine whom to target?" My initial response was that targets just present themselves. Rarely if ever from my past experiences have I had to seek out lethal targets for kill or capture. Of course, that's a simplistic answer to a complicated question. Furthermore, the question of who determines what to target, when to target, and how to target is also difficult to answer. The common response is the commander always makes that decision.

It is the job of diligent S-2s to provide the necessary targeting input and recommendation to the commander. The method for prioritizing and recommending targets is the high-value target (HVT) list. It is necessary that standardized procedures be in place for updating the HVT lists and that those procedures are responsive and based on quantifiable metrics for determining a target's value.<sup>3</sup> Commanders approve the HVT or high-value individual (HVI) list depending on the S-2's application of doctrine, but the S-2 creates the list.

Unfortunately, most S-2 sections have fluid metrics for determining target prioritization. Currently the U.S. Army Intelligence Center teaches the use of the CARVER (criticality, accessibility, recuperability, vulnerability, effect, and recognizability) method for ranking target priorities. CARVER assigns weighted values for a target's criticality to his insurgent cell, accessibility for capture, lack of recuperability within the insurgent network if captured, vulnerability to capture, positive effect on the environment if captured, and recognizability for positive identification after capture. With a weighted metric such as CARVER, a target not as critical or without much of an effect on the environment if captured could move up on the HVI list and replace a target that was not accessible for priority of asset support. In regards to low-density assets and collection platforms above division control, the HVI list number is a key determinant for whether a unit will receive asset support requests.

The availability and application of intelligence assets is vital to conducting deliberate or dynamic targeting. Without the necessary assets, staff S-2s cannot complete the F3EAD targeting cycle. I have observed S-2s altering their HVI list to garner asset support for a target; suddenly the HVI ranked number ten became number one overnight. Granted, the S-2 was able to get support for the target, but soon HVI numbers became less of a criterion for getting asset support. Asset managers began reading target packets instead and making their own decisions on priority. Ideally, higher headquarters such as corps would establish a tier system or prioritization categories so a subordinate unit's targets could be nested and ranked according to the corps commander's intent. By doing so, asset requests for targeting could be easily deconflicted.

Another common problem is establishing standardized criteria for lethal targeting. Units attempt to kill or capture a target without a complete target picture. Week after week targets would be captured without any measurable effect on the environment. After one target was captured, the insurgent cell the target belonged to would take a couple of days to reorganize and change its methods so it would not get caught as easily the next time. During this process, the insurgent cell is likely to do its own analysis and attempt to figure out the source of information that led to the

capture of the cell member. Targeting in this manner—not knowing the potential outcome of a capture—can lead to a possible loss of a valuable source of information. Sometimes tactical patience is a viable method to reduce the likelihood of source information disclosure while developing an accurate target picture of the insurgent network and putting Soldiers' lives unnecessarily in danger.

### Recommendation

Establish a metric for determining a target's value and the effects of capture. The CARVER method is a simplistic approach for making that determination so you can prioritize your efforts accordingly. Ensure that target prioritization metrics and all targets are nested with the higher headquarters and with neighboring units. Develop an accurate target picture on each insurgent network and cell in your area of operations (AO) before attempting to capture a member of that cell. Go beyond the couched answer that by capturing an HVI there will be less attacks and the environment will be more secure. Force the analysts to consider who will fill the void created by capturing a target.

Work with the commander and other staff sections to establish when a target is developed well enough to engage. In other words, determine "action" criteria.<sup>4</sup> At any given time an S-2 section will be working on gathering information on multiple targets. Most commanders thirst for targets within their operating environment. They turn to the S-2 for potential targets rather than offering up any target that can be captured. Action criteria can be applied to all targets. Ask your S-3 these questions before an operation to engage a target is triggered:

- How clear does the target picture need to be?
- Can we risk conducting simultaneous operations to capture multiple targets at one time if they are in the same cell?

Ultimately establish a disciplined targeting cycle that considers methods for minimizing the potential for undesired effects such as collateral damage and misallocation of resources before conducting operations to capture a target and maximizing desired effects.<sup>5</sup> Once this level is achieved, you can determine which targets should be engaged by comparing the CARVER score and the risk versus desired effect incurred during capture (see Figure 1).

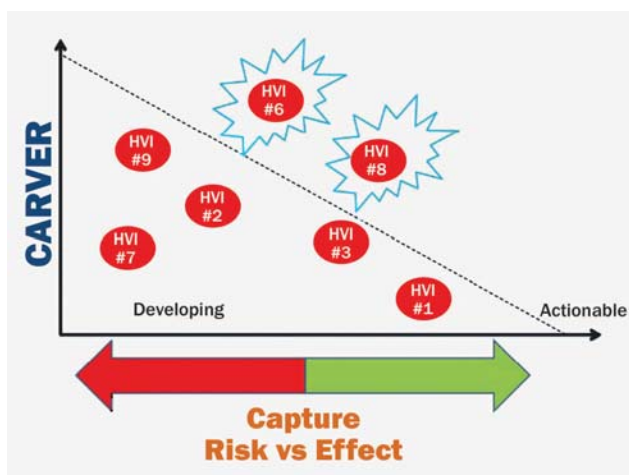


Figure 1

## Observation: Connecting Lethal and Nonlethal Targets

I recently observed a training exercise for intelligence analysts. The analysts were participating in an exercise that replicated being an S-2 section in a unit in Iraq. They had two top-ten lethal and nonlethal target lists. Over the course of several days, the analysts continued to capture lethal targets. The lethal target list would change and be updated, but the nonlethal list did not change and was not updated. Clearly the analysts were not using nonlethal targeting.

During my most recent deployment to Iraq, brigades were using nonlethal targeting more than lethal targeting. Many of today's officers have wholeheartedly accepted the concept of nonlethal targeting. Currently units throughout Iraq are rebuilding schools, roads, and essential services. This is no longer a paradigm shift; it is not an afterthought in the COIN fight. However, when conducting intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB), many S-2 sections do not connect lethal and nonlethal targets. Many intelligence officers are likely to see nonlethal targeting as a function of civil affairs, the fires and effects coordination cell (FECC), or the reconstruction team. I would argue that the push to reconcile disenfranchised Sunni Iraqis during the "surge" of 2007 by creating the Sons of Iraq program is a prime example of how effective nonlethal targeting is used as a means to reduce the need for lethal targeting.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to what seems to be an accepted, antiquated way of thinking, Iraqis do not randomly decide to become insurgents; there is a motivation behind their decision. At least in the context of operations in Iraq, with every insurgent killed or captured, there is the potential to grow more insurgents unless cultural mitigating factors are considered.<sup>7</sup>

## Recommendation

Warfare will continue to be an act of force compelling your adversary to concede to your requirements.<sup>8</sup> The same effect can be gained by linking lethal targets to nonlethal targets.<sup>9</sup> If we understand a lethal target's motivation, we can force him to concede to our will using nonlethal means. While conducting IPB in a COIN fight, analyze the identified insurgent networks in comparison to the environment. Attempt to determine what about the environment is generating motivation for the insurgent cells. Some examples are poverty, disenfranchisement from the local governance, and ethnic tensions; or with regards to groups such as Al Qaeda, the motivation may be a religion-based endgame that equates to a death wish. Therefore, rather than telling the commander who the recommended HVIs are and where they live, instead provide information that can lead to a nonlethal approach to marginalizing the enemy along multiple LOOs (see Figure 2). The effect is still the same—secure the populace and reduce attacks on friendly forces—but the means for causing the same effect is approached from a different angle.

As previously mentioned, targets such as members of Al Qaeda and members of external terrorist networks who are only visitors to the operating environment will be harder to affect by nonlethal means. Over time, however, if the environment is secured and the local populace accepts your unit's presence, the populace will deny sanctuary to Al Qaeda or any members of external terrorist networks. I would argue the true test of a unit in a COIN environment is its ability to secure its AO through nonlethal targeting.

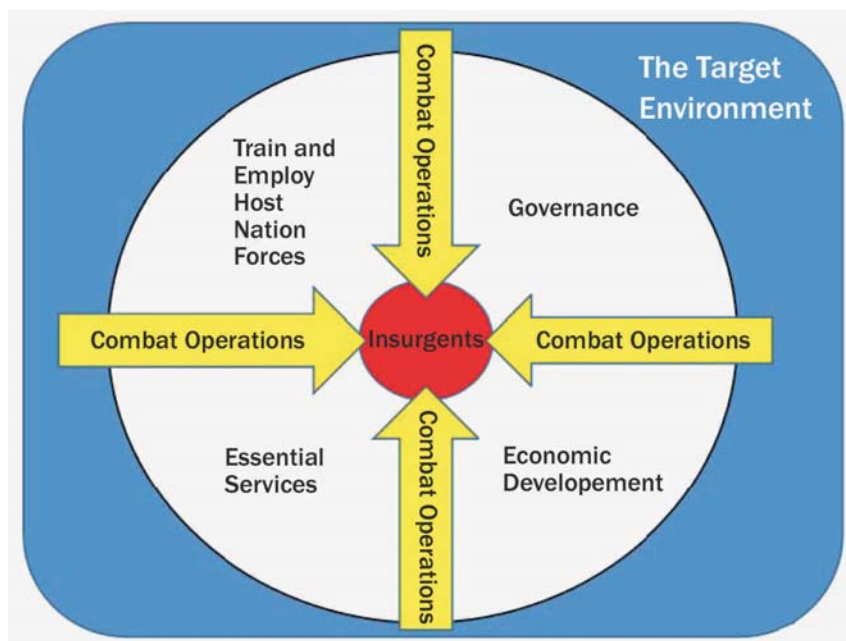


Figure 2

### Observation: Quality Versus Quantity Approach to Targeting

The analogy of comparing targeting methodologies to fishing or hunting seems apt in this case. Most units during the surge of forces to Iraq in 2007 found it necessary to frontload their targeting efforts by conducting a majority of analysis on a target and their insurgent network prior to capture. After weeks and months of collecting information about a target, eventually a raid would be conducted when the unit felt it had enough information to detain an individual.

In general, most units apply targeting criteria that includes the comparison of risk versus gain, effect of capture, and the likelihood the individual will not be released. A few units geared their targeting process towards exploitation in the F3EAD cycle. After the units had met their necessary capture criteria before conducting a raid on an individual, they would also seek out members of the same insurgent cell for possible action. Simultaneously, they were able to conduct raids on multiple targets within one cell that could potentially lead to the dismemberment of the cell. Often these raids were launched having only a name and location and the knowledge the target was part of a particular insurgent network. A well-thought-out exploitation plan requires a detailed understanding of social networks, insurgent networks, insurgent actions, and the community's attitude toward counterinsurgents.<sup>10</sup>

This approach increases the risk of having to release a captured individual, which no unit likes to do. However, the units were careful to ensure that each individual detained was viably linked to the cell and there was enough information available on the individual that exploitation could be conducted post capture. Perhaps the phrase "quality versus quantity" is not applicable because both methodologies require at least one quality target. In the quantity approach with one or two well-developed, "quality" targets, units would have several less-than-developed targets. With at least one quality target, they were able to exploit other targets within the same insurgent cell by applying knowledge gained on the cell from each detainee—each detainee provided a piece of the puzzle. Through thorough exploitation, the units were able to complete the picture and gain the information necessary to send all the detained cell members to prison as well as generate



future targets. The risk of having a detained individual released is the greatest challenge to the quantity approach.

### **Recommendation**

Both methodologies have their place in the COIN fight. The ability to capture multiple members of one cell in one night is awe inspiring to both friendly and enemy commanders. Unfortunately, most brigade intelligence efforts are not capable of conducting the necessary footwork involved in the exploitation of several targets post capture. For this reason alone, I would recommend S-2s ask themselves the following questions before attempting to conduct actions against networks versus one HVI at a time:

- Do we have an accurate picture that puts each person we want to detain in the insurgent cell?
- Do we know which events each individual was involved in and to what degree?
- Do my intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and collection efforts allow for accurate monitoring of reflections post capture?
- Do we have the ability to positively identify a target once we capture him?
- Are my interrogators capable of handling the necessary workload of exploiting multiple detainees?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” then I would not recommend attempting the quantity methodology. The idea of having to release a detainee after a successful capture is often a hard concept to swallow, which is why it is imperative to have the ability to exploit a target post capture. If a detainee is released, he may have done the mental math and surmised how he was captured, which is never good, or it may harden his and his friends’ dislike of your unit being in the area. In effects-based operations, conducting raids in the middle of the night that result in the release of detained individuals results in a negative effect. Therefore, capturing one big fish (to use the fishing analogy) is better for the environment, but remember you are going to have to sit in the boat a long time before you catch the fish. In Iraq, sitting in the boat equates roughly to allowing the insurgents freedom of maneuver, which invites attack.

### **Observation: Target Packet Development**

Over time target packets have a tendency to collect unanalyzed data. When the opportunity finally comes for a selected target to be maneuvered on, there is a last-minute rush by analysts to create a succinct packet for the tasked maneuver element and its commander. As they develop target packets, fusion analysts often become vested in the packet much like an artist would his art. This relationship has positive and negative effects. The creator of a target packet wants to be creating informative, thorough, and actionable targets; however, the analyst may not want to exclude any information he has gathered. Also, analysts often develop biases regarding target information and choose to exclude information they feel is not in line with their own beliefs regarding the target. Therefore, the target packet may become too large for consumption by the maneuver commander and his Soldiers. As a target packet grows, it becomes too large to send by e-mail without using an optimizing tool that flattens the data. Flattening the data is sometimes not enough, so the slideshow has to be parsed into sections and sent in several e-mails.

## Recommendation

Microsoft PowerPoint seems to be the preferred medium for target packet development among intelligence analysts. It has proved to be the best means for collecting, analyzing, and briefing target information. However, analysts do not use this medium for their target packets; instead, data is collected and analyzed in Word format. Both methods for target information development and dissemination have positive and negative results. PowerPoint target packets are easily briefed, but analysts tend to avoid updating them as often. The information is usually spread throughout a number of slides in a target packet on PowerPoint. In order to mitigate this situation, analysts create a one-slide overview that has the “bottom line up front” (BLUF) for anyone who reads the packet. However, by doing this, useful information gets placed in a box in the lower corner of a slide in the smallest font readable. On the BLUF slide, analysts often paste large pieces of imagery containing possible bed-down locations.

During most time-sensitive target (TST) missions I have observed, the analyst’s imagery rarely lined up with the actual target location. If you have ever had to take a BLUF slide onto an objective at midnight and tried reading it with a red-lens flashlight, you know how this good idea has failed. The slide is meant to be easily understood, and it is normally accompanied with another slide covering exploitation procedures upon capture, such as recommended tactical questions. The intended information is necessary for tactical planning before a mission, but unfortunately, in the haze of battle, I would argue that these slides do not typically leave the cargo pockets of their intended audience on an objective. It can be said that Word documents would endure the same fate on an objective, yet Word documents are smaller and easier to share by e-mail. Because of this, I recommend keeping PowerPoint target packets for in-house targeting meetings, and have analysts use Word documents to collect and analyze target-specific information. You must ensure the analysts are updating the Word version. Rather than cut and paste data into a slideshow, have the analysts rewrite the Word version every time new information is available.

With TST missions, which are the current trend in Iraq, the mission commander needs succinct information regarding the target and some micro IPB on the target location for his planning prior to conducting an operation. Time is wasted by analysts doing last-minute scrubs on PowerPoint target packets while they are trying to figure out which slides they should print and hand to the TST commander to prepare him for a mission. At the very least, if the mission commander prefers BLUF slides, analysts should separate target packets for operations and the larger versions for briefing at targeting meetings. Hasty IPB cannot be avoided prior to a TST mission; an elaborate target packet alone is not enough. Ultimately, the mission commander and adjacent units need relevant, concise, and updated target information to conduct mission planning.

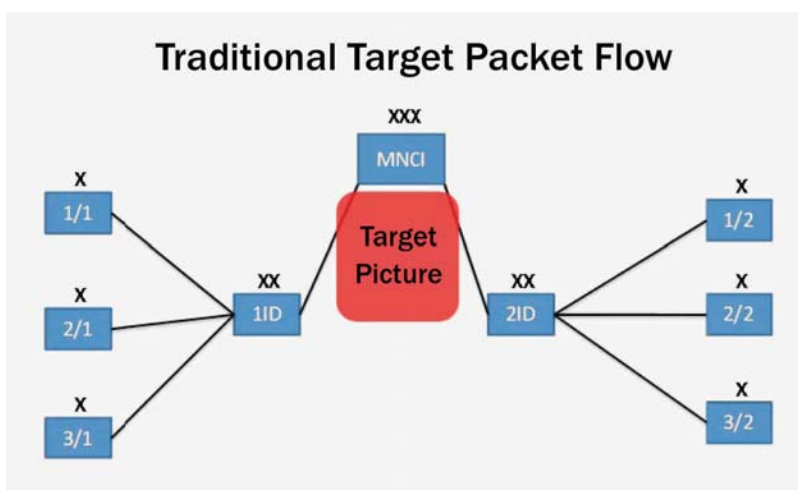
On a side note, high-side packets should also be consolidated into as few slides as possible for the same reasons above. Since these packets do not leave sensitive compartmented information facilities (SCIFs), PowerPoint is the preferred medium. Signals intelligence (SIGINT) analysts, like all-source analysts, gravitate towards making target packets into large slide shows of unanalyzed data that is hard to transmit by e-mail without parsing it into multiple e-mails.

## Observation: Flattening Target Information Sharing

Often targeted individuals will leave their home and travel to visit friends and family. Sometimes targets leave because they fear capture. Perhaps your unit conducted an unsuccessful raid and the target got spooked, subsequently leaving your AO or perhaps even your division’s AO. When this occurs, there may be a proactive attempt for a member of your S-2 section or your FECC to pass the relevant target packet to the land-owning unit where your target has fled. Even in

situations where it is not a HVI but just a known associate of your HVI that resides in another unit's operational environment, the desire to pass the relevant information along to the land-owning unit still arises.

Presently there exists an archaic method to passing that target data (see Figure 3). The data must first go up to your division, your division then sends it to corps, and corps sends it to the land-owning unit's division, who sends it to its brigade. Ultimately the target information is passed to the intended audience. At any time in that information flow an intended recipient or facilitator of the information may not check his e-mail or answer his phone. Also, the relevance of that target may get lost in the transmission. This hierarchical flow of target information can at any point be slowed or completely halted along its path to the intended recipient.



**Figure 3**

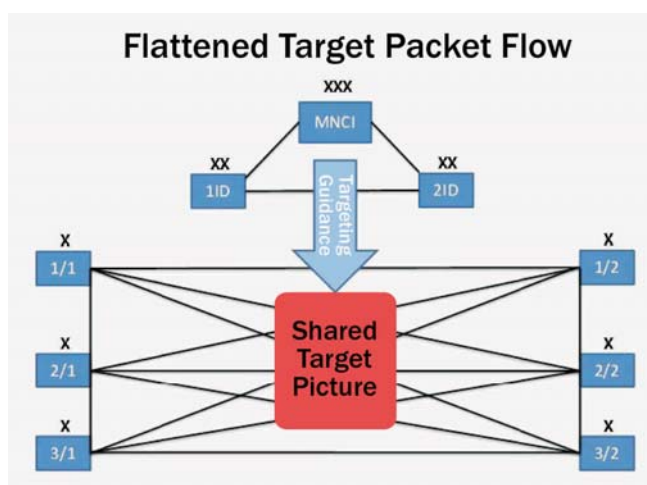
### Recommendation

The Distributed Common Ground System–Army will help flatten that information flow; however, every deployed brigade cannot afford to hang all its HVIs or developing/emerging target packets there. Nothing is faster than calling the land-owning unit or e-mailing the necessary target information to the unit. Of course, be prepared to explain why this target information is relevant to the recipient, even if the target is not actionable. Providing another unit the target may help it build situational awareness and possibly fill an information gap or further confirm known information.

In the SCIF this information flow is possible because it generally has contact information for analysts in other SCIFs throughout the theatre and beyond. The same ability should be transferred to the S-2 section or the FECC. If every brigade targeting officer had the phone number and e-mail address for every other brigade targeting officer in theatre, target information could be easily shared, units would not have to rely on the hierarchical flow through the various division and corps staff sections (see Figure 4), and there would be one point of contact for all targeting matters at each brigade. This does not relinquish the necessity for keeping the division and corps staffs in the information flow, but it would keep from inundating their staffs with being the sole conduits of target sharing.



Sharing target data even inside the division between sister brigades should not be done during weekly or biweekly targeting meetings. Targetable information tends to have a shelf life, especially in the SIGINT community. If the information is not shared in a timely manner, it cannot be leveraged. Close coordination, cooperation, and communication among the participants are essential for the best use of available resources and to mitigate the targeted individual's ability to use unit boundaries as an advantage.<sup>11</sup> Some would argue this purpose is already served by having liaison officers (LNOs) from each brigade at a division and division LNOs at a corps. The brigade LNOs at a division help facilitate target sharing, but this process still relies on a hierarchical information flow and leads to the impediment of rapidly passing target information, which can be done much faster by calling one person at the land-owning unit's targeting cell. Visibility of targeting efforts across the country and the movement of targets across division boundaries should not be limited to echelons above division. The ability to track and share a dynamic target's data should be flattened because the shortest distance between two points will always be a straight line.



**Figure 4**

## Conclusion

Targeting in the COIN environment is the sole mechanism for determining where and when to apply combat power to achieve success. Targeting requires thorough analysis to develop an accurate picture of the operating environment. With complete visibility of the environment, an S-2 can recommend targets that will result in the desired effect. Finding appropriate targets; fixing the insurgent networks, cells, and members; finishing the targets; exploiting all further information gained; assessing the changes in the operating environment; and disseminating target information constantly across the entire theatre to other units operating in unison is imperative to winning the COIN fight.

## Endnotes

1. Joint Publication (JP) 3-60, *Joint Doctrine for Targeting*, 13 April 2007.
2. United States Joint Forces Command, *Joint Fires and Targeting Handbook*, 2007.
3. JP 3-60.

4. Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, December 2006.
5. JP 3-60.
6. Bruno, Gary. "The Role of the Sons of Iraq in Improving Security," *Washington Post*, 17 April 2009, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/28/AR2008042801120.html>>.
7. Chiarelli, Peter W. and Patrick R. Michaelis. "Winning the Peace: The Requirement for Full-Spectrum Operations," *Military Review* 85, 4 (Jul–Aug 2005).
8. JP 3-60.
9. FM 3-24.
10. Ibid.
11. JP 3-60.