

**WHO SHOULD CALL THE SHOTS?
RESOLVING FRICTION IN THE TARGETING PROCESS**

BY
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Abstract

This study seeks to determine sources of friction between military and civilian leaders during a target nomination and approval process. The author first develops a theoretical foundation for understanding the factors influencing the target selection and approval. The factors identified are used as a lens to examine the following case studies: the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, and Operation Allied Force. These case studies revealed several factors that contributed to friction between the various participants. The study identified that the primary factor influencing friction is the expectations of the players involved that are not fulfilled. The most influential cause of friction in the targeting process was the lack of a coherent strategy that properly applied force to obtain the desired objectives. Moreover, when there were limitations with the strategy, and the role of targeting within that strategy, the players involved were not advised of the fact before the strategy was selected. They were not able to adjust their expectations, thus resulting in friction. The study also revealed that the inherent differences in strategic interests between military and civilian leaders contribute to friction. Finally, the examination of the processes used for each case indicated that an ad hoc process was probably the best method. However, cases with significant friction had processes that failed to account for relevant factors that could have been avoided.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

And therefore it is said that enlightened rulers deliberate upon the plans, and good generals execute them.¹

Sun Tzu

The philosopher Sun Tzu established a clear delineation of duties for civilian and military leaders. His writings imply that civilian rulers are responsible for considering and approving strategic plans, and that generals are the implementers of those plans. This paradigm still holds true in the United States today, though the present division of labor is not as harmonious as Sun Tzu's ideal. During Operation Allied Force, significant friction developed between military leaders and the National Command Authority (NCA) during the target nomination and approval process.² Although military and political leaders subscribed to common objectives, friction developed, which, in the opinion of some, required resolution.³

Richard Newman, a military correspondent for *US News and World Report*, summarized his view of civil-military relations during Allied Force as follows: "there was always...friction between what the political people wanted done and what the

¹ Sun Tzu, *Art of War*, ed. Ralph D. Sawyer (USA: Westview Press, 1994), 43.

² General Wesley Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001), xx. Also collaborating this claim was Col Mark Matthews, USAF, Pentagon Staff, J-38, telephone interview 13 February 2001, concerning Joint Chiefs of Staff directed codified procedures for target nomination and selection. Col Mathews submitted a research topic with the USAF Air University research division requesting research on frictions in the target nomination and approval process.

³ House of Commons, *Defence – Fourteenth Report: Lessons of Kosovo*, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 13 March 2001, available from <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm1999900/cmselect/cdmfence/34723.htm>. Paragraph 129 states: "NATO needs to have an improved and standardized target approval methodology in the future." Paragraph 96 states: "That political and legal concern with targeting decisions is a fact of life with which the military are going to have to learn to live in operations of this kind."

military people felt they could accomplish.”⁴ This thesis examines the relationship between senior political and military leaders during the target nomination and approval process. It seeks to answer the following question: How should friction between the U.S. National Command Authority and senior military commanders that arises during the target nomination and approval process be effectively reconciled?

Samuel Huntington, Morris Janowitz, and others have written about the intricacies of civil-military relations.⁵ Yet, specific issues that develop during modern-day target selection and approval are not covered in the best-known works. The Joint Staff has written extensive doctrine on the targeting process and implemented a battle-tested Joint Targeting Coordination Board (JCTB) to resolve friction in the targeting process within and among the services.⁶ However, these documents fail to address the interface between military leaders and the NCA concerning the approval of recommended targets. The goal of this paper is to discover and suggest ways in which military-political friction in the targeting process can be productively attenuated.

Significance of the Problem

Over the years, military commanders and political authorities have experienced many differences of opinion concerning employment of military force to achieve political objectives. Decisions involving the choice of enemy targets are no exception. Contention between political and military leaders about targets is expected. However, during the execution of Allied Force from 24 March 1999 to 10 June 1999, such disagreements became particularly acute.⁷ Operation Allied Force was a mid-sized

⁴ Richard J. Newman, Transcript, “Lessons of Kosovo: The Limits of Air Power,” n.p.; on-line, available at <http://www.cdi.org/adm/1248/transcript.html>, 13 March 2001.

⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (London: Harvard University Press, 1979). Also see Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960), 32.

⁶ Michael Moeller, “The Sum of Their Fears: The Relationship Between the Joint Targeting Coordination Board and the Joint Force Commander,” (master’s thesis, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, June 1994). Also see Joint Universal Lessons Learned System Long Report #51827-79098, *Exercise Cobra Gold 93 Targeting Coordination Board*, 14 May 1993.

⁷ LtGen Michael C. Short, transcript of Frontline interview, PBS Online and WGBH/Frontline 2000, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 5 March 2001, available from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/interviews/short.html> LtGen Short stated: “There were still military and political targets in Belgrade I’d like to have

conflict, with no direct threat to U.S. sovereign territory. This lower risk threat allowed political leaders latitude to manipulate military operations in a somewhat inefficient manner to avoid negative public sentiment. However, improved efficiency in targeting will be imperative in a larger conflict when the stakes may be greater. But one can also argue that military operations dealing with tangential interests are likely to be the norm for the short and mid-term future. Due to the increasing political nature of these conflicts, it is important to reduce friction in smaller conflicts as well.

Elements of the Problem

A preliminary literature review indicates there are three significant factors influencing the target approval process: the selected strategy and objectives, the limitations in expected technology performance, and the personal involvement of political leaders in lieu of delegated responsibility with appropriate strategic guidance. The review also indicates that the processes used in recent conflicts were ad hoc in nature and may not have been derived and implemented properly to account for the three factors listed above.

Roadmap of the Argument

The goal of this study is to develop insights that will help political and military leaders resolve their conflicting perspectives concerning targeting selection. To reach that goal, the thesis will first list and describe the major factors influencing the target selection process. This categorization will constitute a framework of major issues that must be addressed in the target nomination and approval process. The framework will then be applied to three historical instances of target selection in order to determine the relative ability of various approaches to friction resolution within each category. The thesis will then synthesize appropriate insights from the cases, which will produce the conclusions of the study. Finally, the thesis suggests several implications that flow from the conclusions.

gone after. Air war, as I understand it, and as we wanted to practice it, is designed to go after that target set, as rapidly and as violently and with as much lethality as possible.”

Significance of the Selected Case Studies

The cases that involved civilian and military leadership interaction in target approval are the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and Operation Allied Force. These cases have three important factors in common. First, they are the most recent significant conflicts in which military and civilian interaction took place in the targeting process. Second, the use of force was under similar conditions: conventional war, limited aims, and political sensitivity. Third, all three cases involved the use of precision-guided munitions (PGM). The first extensive use of PGMs occurred during the Vietnam War, with their use increasing in both numbers and significance during subsequent conflicts.⁸ The detrimental effects caused by inefficiencies such as missed or inappropriate targets are a far greater factor in more recent conflicts than the days of the Army Air Force bomb raids over Germany in World War II.⁹ Thus, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and Operation Allied Force are likely to provide a variety of useful and relevant insights concerning the target nomination and selection process.

Limitations to the Research

Any study such as this has inherent limitations. The most significant is the difficulty of establishing cause and effect relationships. The present study attempts to overcome this limitation through detailed re-creations of prior target nomination and selection decisions using primary and secondary sources. Nevertheless, such re-creations may not be definitive because some data is still classified. Second, the study of civilian-military interaction is a sub-set of the study of human interaction in general. And here one must not only sketch the dominant intellectual and psychological capacities of different actors, but also describe and analyze what happens when the various capacities of diverse individuals come into contact with one another. Again, this study will attempt to obtain and evaluate the best available information on these complex intentions; but one must always allow room for divergent interpretations. The final limitation of the study is its confinement to three cases. A net cast more widely

⁸ Gen Michael Dugan, "The Air War," *U.S. News & World Report*, 11 February 1991, 27. Laser-guided bombs were used extensively in early 1972 during the Vietnam War.

⁹ Col Phillip S. Meilinger, *10 Propositions Regarding Air Power* (Washington D.C.:

could arguably provide more trustworthy conclusions. However, within the limitations of available time and space, the selection of the three cases mentioned above seemed to the author to provide the optimal mix of breadth, depth, and relevance. In sum, despite the limitations mentioned above, this thesis seeks to shed meaningful light on an important topic: how military and civilian leaders should seek to resolve their conflicting perspectives concerning target selection.

Air Force History and Museums Program, 1995), 27. Meilinger points out that because precision is possible it is expected, and that has politicized air delivered weapons.

CHAPTER 2

FACTORS INFLUENCING

TARGET NOMINATION AND APPROVAL

*In essence, airpower is targeting, targeting is intelligence, and intelligence is analyzing the effects of air operations.*¹⁰

Phillip S. Meilinger

If only the targeting process was as simple as Colonel Meilinger opines! Indeed, the method for approving targets involves influences that revolve around three key concerns: the desired effect of attacking each target, which is a function of strategy; the players involved in selecting and approving targets; and the process by which targets are nominated and approved. Each topic of concern is complex in isolation and even more complex in practice, because the three issues are interdependent. Despite this complexity, this chapter will examine them and attempt to identify sources of friction among them. The outline used to discuss each of the concepts will also provide a framework of sub-categories to use in each of the following cases.

Targeting Factors

One of the first concerns for leaders involved in the target approval process is the question: What effect will striking the target(s) have that contributes to ultimate accomplishment of the political goal? Typically, the act of striking a target or targets has a particular goal in mind, such as the coercion of opposing leaders in order to change their policies and/or actions. In warfare, like any other art form, there are many ways to accomplish such results and many variables to consider. There are three substantive issues for leaders making decisions to address. First, is it desirable to strike the target? Second, is striking the target feasible and, if so, at an acceptable level of risk? And third, is the target suitable? Each of these questions has considerations that highlight areas of potential friction.

¹⁰ Col Phillip S. Meilinger, *10 Propositions Regarding Airpower*, (Washington D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1995).

Desirability

The question “Is it desirable to strike the target?” requires a statement of rationale that demonstrates a logical connection between target destruction/neutralization and victory. Moreover, decision-makers must make value judgements about which targets are more valuable than others at a particular time. There is ample room in this venue to spark disagreement and friction.

Debates concerning the desirability of particular targets are also plentiful. From the inception of airpower, its theorists have differentiated their ideas with varying evaluations about what type of target is *proper*, often without sufficient thought devoted to the second and third-order effects of striking them.¹¹ Moreover, most airpower theorists have tended to focus on a single, optimal answer with little consideration given to differing situations.¹² This trend continues today. Indeed, forecasting higher order effects caused by effective targeting is more an art than a science. Nevertheless, some basic consideration, help leaders decide which targets to strike and the blueprint that guide’s individual targeting decisions is essentially a strategy.

As noted, the most important question to be answered about any target is how its destruction or neutralization contributes to victory. This consideration places target nomination and selection clearly in the realm of strategy. Because this process inherently involves prognosis, it is subject to the judgment of the participants. Because judgments on these matters can differ radically, there is inherent friction in the process.

Judgement of both military and civilian leaders is required at the first step of defining airpower’s role in a conflict: strategy selection. As the cases will indicate, even this overarching determinant of the desired effects of striking targets is highly contested. In his book *Bombing to Win*, Robert Pape ties together bombing theories from notable theorists and categorizes them into particular strategies. He argues that airpower employs three broad strategic options: punishment,

¹¹ David R. Mets, *The Air Campaign: John Warden and the Classical Airpower Theorists*, Maxwell AFB, Al.: Air University Press, 1999), 22; also see J.C. Slessor, *Air Power and Armies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 93. Hugh Trenchard, first Marshal of the Royal Air Force, argued that victory could be achieved by bombing enemy vital centers such as industrial targets and thus break the civilian’s will. Giulio Douhet supported bombing cities in an attempt to break the fighting spirit of the adversary population. Jack Slessor of the RAF emphasized the vulnerability of a country’s transportation structure and emphasized the important role of interdiction for achieving objectives.

¹² Meilinger, 14. Note 20.

risk, and denial.¹³ A punishment strategy attempts to inflict “suffering on civilians, either directly or indirectly by damaging the target state’s economy.”¹⁴ By design, punishment campaigns are meant to compel the opposing government to concede or to convince the population to revolt.¹⁵ A risk strategy is essentially a punishment strategy that affects targets gradually over time instead of hitting the entire target set at once.¹⁶ Denial strategies “target the opponent’s military ability to achieve its territorial or other political objectives, thereby compelling concession in order to avoid futile expenditure of further resources.”¹⁷

Selecting a particular strategy defines the types of targets and frequency appropriate for attack. A punishment strategy will attack targets such as transportation nodes, electrical generation facilities, and fuel depots. The idea is to make conditions for the enemy’s population sufficiently unpleasant, within the bounds of international law, to provoke a particular reaction. A denial strategy will attack pertinent military targets such as fielded forces or command and control facilities. Some strategies focus on a particular form of denial called decapitation. The goal of decapitation is to neutralize command and control capabilities in order to paralyze military operations. Regardless of the selected strategy, the basic idea is to break the adversary’s will, or to incapacitate the adversary’s physical capability to continue. It is possible to conduct both denial and punishment strategies simultaneously--as was the case in World War II. However, authorities nominating and approving targets will likely lose focus if not directly linking a target with a particular mechanism designed to accomplish their strategy.

Ideally, most debates and decisions about airpower strategy will be resolved before actual combat. Establishing a clearly defined strategy should reduce friction in the decisionmaking process, particularly in the realm of desirability of a specific target. Strategy is not all

¹³ Robert Pape, *Bombing to Win: Airpower and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, Ny.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 19.

¹⁵ Lt Col Paul Strickland, “USAF Aerospace-Power Doctrine: Decisive or Coercive?” *Airpower Journal*, Fall 2000, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 5 March 2001, 3, on-line, available from <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj00/fall00/strickland.htm>.

¹⁶ Pape, 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, x.

encompassing; adopting a strategy is simply the first step shaping targeting decisions. Objectives will complement the selected strategy and further guide targeting efforts.¹⁸

Meilinger points out, “Being able to strike anything does not mean one should strike everything. Selecting objectives to strike or influence is the essence of air strategy.”¹⁹ Political and military objectives should complement each other and focus military efforts, to include targeting decisions. Leaders developing objectives must answer the following question: “Are the proposed objectives appropriate for accomplishing the desired outcome of the conflict and properly guiding military efforts?” Objectives are milestones and/or measures of success that offer clarity of purpose and action if properly coordinated. Military commanders build their targeting plans based on the stated objectives. Ineffectiveness or subsequent inefficiency may be a source of friction and can originate from conflicting objectives.

Feasibility

Questions concerning the ability of airpower to strike a target are still relevant, even with the advent of the precision-guided bomb. The current U.S. Air Force Historian, Dr. Richard Hallion noted that precision is a relative term.²⁰ Authorities must consider numerous factors when approving targets such as the delivery platform, type of bomb, and the delivery altitude to determine the feasibility.²¹ These factors will help leaders determine the level of risk associated with striking a particular target. Determination of feasibility thus involves asking not only the question “Can the target be struck?” but also the question “Can it be struck at an acceptable level of risk?” Therefore, determining feasibility requires discussions that depend on both analysis and speculation. Thus, there is considerable room for disagreement in this aspect of decisionmaking.

¹⁸ Air Force Pamphlet (AFPAM) 14-210, *USAF Intelligence Targeting Guide*, 1 February 1998, 9. Also see Air Force Instruction (AFI) 14-117, *Air Force Targeting*, 1 July 1998, 4.

¹⁹ Meilinger, 13.

²⁰ Richard P. Hallion, “Precision Weapons, Power Projection, and the Revolution in Military Affairs,” lecture, USAF Air Armament Summit, Eglin AFB, FL, 26 May 1999. During the Gulf War, operations from medium altitudes (15,000 feet and higher) at longer slant ranges severely complicated bombing accuracy, particularly against targets that required essentially a direct hit to be destroyed, such as hangars, bunkers, tanks, and artillery.

²¹ Ibid. Hallion analyzed reports from the Gulf War regarding precision and found the following statement: “Medium and high-altitude bombing with unguided munitions posed problems, even with digital ‘smart platforms.’ Using ‘smart platforms’ to deliver ‘dumb’ bombs against point targets smaller than the circular error probable may well require redundant targeting.”

Suitability

The suitability of a target can be the most difficult factor to determine in the approval process. Differing perspectives of political and military leaders represent only the tip of an iceberg when considering target suitability. There are many concerns to be addressed. Are there any moral or legal conditions influencing attack of a particular target? How will various international players react? Will striking the target complicate alliance solidarity? Is there a risk of inappropriate damage? Most of these issues are concerned with the influence of public opinion and the repercussions of such reaction. Desirability and feasibility focus more on military effectiveness. Balancing military necessity with public opinion and political sensibility requires judgment, and, as observed above, when participants exercise judgment, friction is inevitable.

The above issues can be boiled down to a single question: Are there unwanted or unacceptable side effects associated with the attack of the target? Both military and civilian leaders are obligated to evaluate and mitigate potential problems with targets. However, the NCA has historically taken the responsibility of considering adverse effects in the political realm and placing restrictions upon military operations. There is a great deal of cost-benefit analysis required before placing restraints. Moreover, military officers will likely perform more efficiently if they understand the restrictions. Although each conflict is different, an examination of the cases may indicate trends in the area of suitability that can be articulated for future enlightenment.

In summary, determining the desirability, suitability, and feasibility of striking any target is not a simple task. It is even more difficult to determine how these factors should be weighed each against the other. The above discussion indicates that there are many questions that must be addressed, and each requires judgment. Determining the desirability, feasibility, and suitability of each target generates inherent, inescapable tensions.

The Players

*The criteria of military efficiency are limited, concrete, and relatively objective; the criteria of political wisdom are indefinite, ambiguous, and highly subjective. Politics is an art, military science a profession.*²²

Samuel Huntington

The second key ingredient influencing the target approval process is the decisionmakers themselves. Huntington's observation illuminates the differing outlooks of political and military leaders involved in this process. The politician typically seeks flexibility and ambiguity while relying upon his own knowledge, intellect, communication skills, and psychological traits. Efficiency in warfare is not always paramount to the politician—broader goals may be more important. Richard Kohn in his 1997 work, "An Essay on Civilian Control of the Military" noted:

Democracy is a disorderly form of government, often inefficient, always frustrating. Maintaining liberty and security, governing in such a manner as to achieve desirable political outcomes and at the same time military effectiveness, is among the most difficult dilemmas of human governance.²³

The military leader is often frustrated because he prefers decisiveness and clarity of objectives and is uncomfortable with the ambiguity preferred by political leaders. Efficiency of effort is essential to accomplishing military objectives. Thus, the clash between political art and military science is a potential source of friction. Examining the divergent perspectives of each type of participant involved in the target approval process will help the reader to understand the individual actions taken by leaders.

Military leaders attempt to mitigate ambiguity with doctrine, something the civilian leader does not have or want. Military leaders rely upon doctrine because it establishes the techniques that forces will use while both training and fighting. Although military leaders can deviate from doctrine, such deviations are generally not desired, nor are they often included in training. Attempting unprepared or untested combat operations will increase risk. Friction seems to develop when civilian leadership creates constraints that prevent military leaders from fighting the way they train. While there is clear political justification for direct civilian participation in the targeting process, such participation does not normally, nor is it required to, proceed from a doctrinally aware basis.²⁴

²² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 76.

²³ Richard Kohn, "An Essay on Civilian Control of the Military," 1997, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 5 March 2001, available from http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/amdipl_3/kohn.html

²⁴ AFP 14-210, *USAF Intelligence Targeting Guide* (U), 1 February 1998, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 3 March 2001, available from <http://www.fas.org/irp/dodir/usaf/afpam14-210/part03.htm>. Air Force Instruction 14-117 (Air Force Targeting) defines Air Force targeting responsibilities and

George Clemenceau once stated that “war was too important to be left to generals.”²⁵ That may be true; however, war may also be too complicated to be effectively run by civilians. This observation highlights the problem that political leaders are ultimately responsible for results, but lack detailed military knowledge. Military leaders, presumably, have the requisite knowledge, but they normally lack political instincts or insight. And in a democratic society, they always lack ultimate authority. Who exercises the authority? According to the *Air Force Intelligence Targeting Guide*, the Joint Force Commander has target approval authority.²⁶ There is nothing in existing targeting doctrine that requires NCA approval for conventional bombing. But, clearly, if members of NCA decide they should approve all sensitive targets, they will do so.

In his book *The Professional Soldier*, Morris Janowitz makes two key observations that highlight the philosophical differences between military and civilian leaders. First, Janowitz states “a large portion of military leaders, in the belief that they have sufficient political education and experience to justify their judgments, continuously scrutinize the behavior of civilian political leaders.”²⁷ Second, Janowitz quoted an unnamed Navy Captain who made the following statement on a questionnaire: “Civilian authorities are subject to too many influences—elections, pressure groups, party policy, empire building, etc. It is my firm belief that, in spite of misconceptions to the contrary, the military is objective and to a greater extent dedicated to serving interests of country rather than self or own service.”²⁸ The case studies that follow will be scrutinized for similar sentiments that may include friction in the target nomination and approval process.

The examination of friction between military and civilian leaders is, at its core, a civil-military relations issue. At the heart of the civil-military discussion are the conflicting interests and perspectives of the parties involved. This is not to say that both civilians and military leaders do not want to win a conflict—they certainly do. However, defining the concept of

terms and is supposed to be used in conjunction with Air Force Pamphlet (AFP) 14-210 (USAF Intelligence Targeting Guide). Chapter 3 of AFP 14-210 provides a detailed list of steps to be followed during the targeting process – only there is no direction for the approval process. It does, however, state: “Target development includes validation of the target and nomination to the appropriate authority.”

²⁵ Cited in “Key Figures,” n.p.; on-line, Internet, 8 June 2001, available from <http://www.historyteacher.net/EuroProjects/people.htm>.

²⁶ Air Force Pamphlet (AFPAM) 14-210, *USAF Intelligence Targeting Guide*, 1 February 1998.

²⁷ Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier* (USA: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960), 252.

“winning” is a different story; and how one goes about winning is another story altogether. In his work *An Essay on Civilian Control of the Military*, Richard Kohn contends that “civilian control is simple.”²⁹ The central theme of this claim is the fact that all choices concerning national security come directly from the democratically elected leader.³⁰ However, there were different levels of autonomy for military commanders in the cases examined in this thesis that may have a bearing on friction in the target approval process. The issue of who is in charge or the validity of civilian control is not the issue—how the process of interaction should work is the issue.

Thus, there is a need for delineation between political and military influences during the military planning process. However, decisions made by political leaders may not be the most efficient or proper for military operations. Huntington noted, “It is readily apparent that the military function requires a high order of expertise,” suggesting that military advice is paramount.³¹ However, purely military decisions and subsequent actions may negatively affect the ability of political leaders to govern effectively.

Reasons for political leaders to get involved in the targeting process are numerous. One could be as simple as trying to keep a neutral nation from entering the conflict. Another could be the fact that Americans can watch military strikes live on television, giving civilian leaders little time to deal with politically damaging information. The accuracy of precision weapons has created expectations that military effect and collateral political effects can be finely calibrated. The potential strategic effects of targeting influence civilian leaders to get involved in the discrete decisions of the targeting process. In his book *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought*, Michael Handel provides another reason for civilian leaders to get involved in the targeting process: “If the NCA cannot properly define objectives, policy, and intent—if the process is intangible—then they must get involved real-time.”³² Here we find civilian leadership’s involvement in the details of target selection flowing from its inability or lack of desire to provide broad strategic guidance and allow military subordinates to implement the details.

²⁸ Ibid, 253.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 12.

³² Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought* (Portland, Or.: Frank Cass, 2001), 65-75.

The Process

The heading “The Process” would lead one to believe that there existed a standardized, pre-determined process for target nomination and approval in every conflict. This study will reveal that the exact opposite is true. Nevertheless, there are sources of friction that arise from the processes themselves.

The history of the target nomination process for conventional weapons delivery indicates that no procedure has withstood the test of time.³³ From the first efforts of World War I to the present day, various procedural methods have been adopted and changed due to necessity.³⁴ One of the primary factors driving changes in the targeting process has been the increased precision and capability of available weapons. The ever-improving weapons required greater amounts of information to permit proper employment, leading to calls for more prognoses about both intended and unintended consequences.³⁵ Interwar periods routinely saw lapses in targeting doctrine, which required significant revamping efforts by targeteers during each new conflict.

At this point in the analysis, rather than attempting to describe the specific steps of a targeting process, it is more helpful to discuss its ideal characteristics. Ideally, the process would be comprehensive, accurate, and timely.

For the process to be comprehensive, it should take into account all relevant considerations and perspectives. In its simplest form, both political and military considerations should be considered. However, there are likely several perspectives within the political and military groups. For example, on the political side, the situation may call for advice from the State Department, coalition governments, alliance partners, and the NCA. Similarly, on the military side, the Army, Air Force, Navy, and coalition counterparts might require participation. While total comprehensiveness is impossible, a properly applied process will not omit relevant considerations.

The process should also be accurate, that is, the information obtained should be objectively correct. This is a simple concept, but it takes time, money and manpower to ensure accuracy. Because total accuracy is unattainable, judgment is again required to determine the risk associated with inexact information. Will each target require additional scrutiny, and will

³³ Capt John Glock, “The Evolution of Targeting,” *AirPower Journal*, Fall 1994, 14-28.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

the pursuit of additional information cause friction? Americans tout information superiority, but this a relative concept. During Operation Allied Force, the Central Intelligence Agency incorrectly identified the Chinese Embassy as the Yugoslav Federal directorate of Supply and Procurement. The “fog of war” is real and mistakes happen; however, a thorough targeting process would limit obvious errors of this type.

Finally, the process should be timely, i.e., it should allow targets to be attacked while the desired effects are still attainable. For example, the failure of President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara to allow airpower assets to target surface to air missiles (SAMs) during their assembly increased the threat to American airmen during the Vietnam War. The desired effect sought was to destroy the sites before they became a threat that was costly to overcome. Approval to strike SAMs did not occur until after they were completely operational and actively destroying U.S. aircraft. There are a host of unknowns associated with the determination of target viability. The ideal of timeliness is also difficult to obtain. Desires for flexibility and ambiguity may be completely dichotomous with timeliness.

There are obvious tensions among the three attributes listed above. The pursuit of comprehensiveness and accuracy is in direct conflict with the objective of timeliness. Giulio Douhet summarized the difficulties associated with a targeting process when he wrote: “It is impossible even to outline general standards, because the choice of enemy targets will depend upon a number of circumstances, material, morale, and psychological, the importance of which, though real, is not easily estimated.”³⁶ The resolution of conflicts between the desired attributes in the targeting process will always require compromise. The various players involved in the decision-making process will have different opinions on which attribute is most critical. Again, judgment is required with differing perspectives making more tensions likely.

Target nomination and approval is anything but simple. The interface between civilian and military leaders involves determination of the desired effect, which is a product of strategy, the players, each with their differing perspectives, and some form of a process. Each of these concerns is difficult to resolve in isolation, let alone in concert with each other. There are conflicts within all three aspects and conflicts among all three. Therefore, any rational observer

³⁶ Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air, USAF Warrior Studies*, eds. Richard H Kohn and Joseph P. Harahan (new imprint, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 59-60.

who approaches the issue of targeting will understand that it is inherently complex and susceptible to friction.

CHAPTER 3

THE VIETNAM WAR

Most of the pilots flying the missions believed that our targets were virtually worthless. We had long believed that our attacks, more often than not limited to trucks, trains, and barges, were not just failing to break the enemy's resolve but actually having the opposite effect by boosting Vietnam's confidence that it could withstand the full measure of American airpower.”³⁷

John McCain

Controversy and frustration surrounded targeting efforts during the Vietnam War. Senator McCain echoes the sentiments of many military officers, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), involved with targeting efforts during the war. The National Command Authority (NCA) elected to impose tight control over target selection and nomination that resulted in numerous iterations in the target selection process.³⁸ A brief historical overview of the war and the way bombing was implemented will set the stage for deeper analysis of the desired effects, the players involved, and the approval process itself. These all contributed to friction in target nomination and approval efforts.

Historical Overview

United States involvement in Vietnam started down a slippery slope after the Geneva Accords, aiming to unify North and South, stipulated that free elections be held throughout Vietnam in 1956. The Communist North expected to win the election and the South, with the support of the United States, refused to participate. The response from North Vietnam was to reunify the country using military force.

³⁷ John McCain with Mark Salther, *Faith of My Fathers* (New York: The Easton Press, Random House Inc., 1999), 186-87.

³⁸ Michael R. Moeller, “The Sum of Their Fears: The Relationship Between the Joint Targeting Coordination Board and the Joint Force Commander,” (master’s thesis, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Air University, 1994). Johnson feared U.S. attacks on North Vietnam could provoke the involvement of the Soviet Union or China.

Secretary of State John Dulles feared the spread of communism throughout Indochina if South Vietnam fell under communist control. He persuaded the United States government to provide additional economic and military aid to South Vietnam. Guerrilla warfare began as local rebels (Viet Cong) were organized in the south. The United States sent troops to South Vietnam to serve as advisors. U.S. troop levels rose from approximately 900 in 1960 to an estimated 11,000 in 1962.³⁹ President Kennedy authorized them to fight if they were fired upon.

On 2 August 1964, North Vietnamese patrol boats fired on the destroyer Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin. The U.S. retaliated for the incident by conducting air strikes against North Vietnam. Following this attack, Congress endorsed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution authorizing the president to take “all necessary measures to repel any armed attacks against American forces and to prevent further aggression.”⁴⁰

In 1965 American involvement in the war escalated rapidly in response to the growing combined strength of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese infiltrators and South Vietnamese forces’ inability to contain the threat. In early February 1965, the Viet Cong attacked a U.S. base at Pleiku killing eight soldiers, wounding over a hundred, and damaging 20 aircraft on the ground.⁴¹ McGeorge Bundy, President Johnson’s National Security Advisor, urged the United States to respond with reprisal air strikes. The United States responded as urged, with an attack in the southern part of North Vietnam against four training barracks, though with very limited success due to weather and the loss of fighter aircraft.⁴² Three days later, the Viet Cong attacked again, this time at Qui Nhon, killing 23 and wounding 22.⁴³ Johnson’s reply was similar to the first reprisal: a strike against two barracks in the south of North Vietnam. Again the attack was disappointing, causing very little damage and losing more aircraft.

The United States started Operation Rolling Thunder in March 1965 and continued it until October 1968. The design of the operation called for gradually escalating bombing attacks designed to coerce North Vietnam to abandon efforts to overturn the South Vietnamese government. The operation began primarily as a diplomatic signal to impress Hanoi with

³⁹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Vietnam War,” n.p.; on-line, Internet, 2 May 2001, available from <http://www.britannica.com>

⁴⁰ *Gulf of Tonkin Resolution*, Joint Resolution of Congress, 90th Congress, 1st sess., H.J. 1145.

⁴¹ H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 215.

⁴² *Ibid*, 216.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 221.

America's determination and future resolve to do more. A secondary objective was to bolster the morale of the South Vietnamese. The Johnson administration imposed strict limits on the targets that could be attacked in order to obviate Chinese or Russian involvement in the conflict.

On 6 March 1965, the president "escalated American involvement to a new level" by introducing Marines into the conflict.⁴⁴ By June 1965, the United States had over fifty thousand troops in the country.⁴⁵ The North Vietnamese regular army used the Ho Chi Minh Trail, through Laos and Cambodia, to enter the South and operate in conjunction with the Viet Cong. President Johnson's response was to pledge the United States to defend South Vietnam and to send more troops, over 180,000 by the end of 1965, under the command of General William Westmoreland.⁴⁶

After mid-1966 the United States and South Vietnamese forces intensified their counterinsurgency efforts, but were only partly successful. American troops depended heavily on superior firepower and on helicopters for rapid deployment into rural areas. The Viet Cong depended on stealth, concealment, surprise attacks, and ambushes. Increases in United States troop strength in South Vietnam met with additional support from the North bolstering the Viet Cong in the South. In 1967 American troop strength reached over 389,000; but those soldiers could not, despite their sophisticated weapons, eradicate the insurgents.

On 30 January 1968, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong launched a massive surprise attack (known as the Tet Offensive) against 36 major South Vietnamese cities and towns. Fighting during the Tet Offensive decimated Viet Cong troops and, after 1968, the majority of the enemy forces were not Viet Cong but North Vietnamese soldiers who had infiltrated into the South.⁴⁷ Although the Tet Offensive failed tactically, it had an important strategic effect: it convinced a number of Americans that, contrary to their government's claims, the insurgency in South Vietnam could not be easily crushed, and the war would likely continue for years.

In the United States, sentiment against participation in the war mounted steadily from 1967 and expressed itself in peace marches, demonstrations, and acts of civil disobedience. Growing numbers of politicians and ordinary citizens began to question whether the American

⁴⁴ Ibid, 217.

⁴⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

war effort could succeed and even whether it was morally justifiable in a conflict that some interpreted as a Vietnamese civil war.

General Westmoreland requested more troops in order to widen the war after the Tet Offensive, but the shifting balance of American public opinion now favored de-escalation of the conflict. On 31 March 1968, President Johnson announced in a television address that bombing north of the 20th parallel would be stopped, and that he would not seek reelection. Hanoi responded to the decreased bombing by scaling down its combat operations, and in October 1968, Johnson ordered a total bombing halt. During the interim, the United States and Hanoi agreed to begin preliminary peace talks in Paris.

During 1969, fighting in South Vietnam tended to be scattered and limited, and the infiltration of North Vietnamese decreased markedly until late fall. In June, President Nixon announced the first withdrawal of 25,000 troops (of the 540,000 total) from South Vietnam. The United States instituted a program of “Vietnamization,” whereby the South Vietnamese would gradually assume all military responsibilities for their defense while the United States copiously supplied them with arms, equipment, air support, and economic aid. United States commanders in the field were instructed to keep casualties to “an absolute minimum,” and losses decreased appreciably.⁴⁸

The war in Southeast Asia expanded during the spring of 1970 when the United States and South Vietnamese troops invaded border sectors of Cambodia in order to destroy North Vietnamese sanctuaries and staging areas. U.S. planes bombed northern Laos and the Ho Chi Minh Trail in an attempt to interdict supplies. The expansion of the fighting into Cambodia sparked a new wave of antiwar demonstrations and protests in the United States. By late 1970, the United States had reduced the number of military personnel in South Vietnam to approximately 335,000.

The gradual withdrawal of United States troops from Vietnam proceeded as announced, but the peace talks remained stalemated. By the end of 1971, the South Vietnamese had accepted responsibility for all fighting on the ground, although they still depended on U.S. air support. The number of American military personnel in South Vietnam dropped to 160,000.

In March 1972 the North Vietnamese invaded across the Demilitarized Zone and captured Quang Tri province. President Nixon responded with Operation Freedom Train,

designed around an intense bombing of fuel storage tanks in Haiphong and a warehouse complex in Hanoi, to force an end to North Vietnamese offensive invasions. This bombing, however, failed to stop the North Vietnamese invasion. Therefore, the president ordered the mining of Haiphong and other North Vietnamese ports and expanded Freedom Train to include all of North Vietnam--calling it Operation Linebacker I. Peace talks resumed in July, but the talks broke down in mid-December with each side accusing the other of bargaining in bad faith. Hanoi and other North Vietnamese cities were then subjected to eleven days of intensive United States bombing.

This operation, known as Linebacker II, began 18 December 1972. The primary objective of the bombing was to coerce the North Vietnamese government into purposeful negotiations for a cease-fire agreement. Unlike previous bombing campaigns, Linebacker II provided airpower forces with specific objectives and removed many of the restrictions that had previously caused frustration within the Pentagon. United States Air Force and Navy units commenced round-the-clock targeting of radio stations, railroads, power plants, and airfields located in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas.⁴⁹ By 29 December 1972, the seven hundred nighttime sorties flown by B-52s and 650 daytime strikes by fighter and attack aircraft persuaded the North Vietnamese government to return to the conference table.

On 27 January 1973, talks that resumed again in Paris resulted in an agreement between the Viet Cong, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the United States: a cease-fire would go into effect the following morning throughout North and South Vietnam, all United States forces would be withdrawn and its bases dismantled, all prisoners of war would be released, the South Vietnamese would have the right to determine their own future, and North Vietnamese troops could remain in the South but would not be reinforced, an international force would monitor the agreement. In August, the United States Congress proscribed any further United States military activity in Indochina. By the end of 1973, there were few United States military personnel left in South Vietnam. Fighting continued in spite of the cease-fire agreements, and North and South Vietnam saw military and civilian casualties as high as they had ever been.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "Subjects of Interest: Operation Linebacker II," n.p.; on-line, Internet, 2 May 2001, available from <http://www.airforcehistory.hq.af.mil/soi/index.htm#thunder>.

In December 1974, the North Vietnamese attacked about 60 miles north of Saigon. Their success during this attack convinced the North Vietnamese that a full-scale invasion of the South was now practical. Accordingly, in early March, North Vietnamese forces began a large-scale offensive in the central highlands. Consequently, South Vietnamese forces were compelled to withdraw not only from the central highlands, but from the northernmost two provinces of the country as well. General panic ensued, and the South Vietnamese armed forces fell apart. On 30 April 1975, the government of South Vietnam surrendered unconditionally, and North Vietnamese tank columns occupied Saigon without a struggle. On 2 July 1976, the country was officially united as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam with its capital in Hanoi. Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

Targeting Issues

The fact that the United States lost the war is relevant for placing blame on the leaders responsible and practically vindicates the arguments of authorities frustrated by targeting decisions. Nevertheless, friction occurred during the target nomination and selection process between the military and civilian leaders before the outcome of the war was known. Determining the contribution of targeting issues--desirability, feasibility, and suitability—requires some focus, but it would be impractical to analyze these factors for individual targets. Therefore, this study will examine three significant bombing efforts for sources of friction. These efforts are: President Johnson's Flaming Dart Campaigns (1965) and Rolling Thunder Campaigns (1965-1968), which failed to accomplish stated objectives; and President Nixon's Linebacker Campaigns (1972), which succeeded.

Flaming Dart I/II

Chapter Two discussed targeting factors and argued that strategy was a key factor in the targeting process. Prior to Flaming Dart operations in February 1965, United States military and civilian leaders had many communications regarding strategy and targeting. General Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the JCS during much of the Vietnam War, stated that the strategy in Vietnam was to offer the enemy an "incentive to stop the conflict at the lowest level of

violence,” and described the bombing campaign as “one of many interrelated elements in our total strategy.”⁵⁰

Friction concerning the nomination and approval of targets began during the initial planning of Flaming Dart. The principal cause was the conflicting prognoses for a suitable strategy. Political authorities frequently rejected professional military recommendations made by the JCS for the deployment and use of forces. Political rationale, not military reasoning, guided their decisions.⁵¹ In early 1964, McNamara asked the JCS to develop a target set that would “most immediately ...affect North Vietnam’s capability to support insurgents in other countries.”⁵² The JCS replied with a comprehensive approach that advocated overt air strikes against three different categories of targets.⁵³ After further clarification from the JCS to the NCA, McNamara rejected the recommendations. The president then approved National Security Action Memorandum No. 288 directing a program that focused on South Vietnam and denied any air strikes against the north. The JCS responded (with a split decision) that the selected strategy would not obtain the stated objectives.⁵⁴ Rather than interpreting the split decision as an indication of the complicated nature of applying military force, the president took the JCS’s lack of consensus as an excuse to disregard advice outside his inner circle and imposed his own personal solutions.

Military planning continued, despite the NCA’s continuing rejection of JCS recommendations. By 21 May 1964, the JCS developed a proposed list of ninety-nine targets (later reduced to ninety-four) and asked McNamara to provide a clarification of the objectives for Vietnam and air strikes.⁵⁵ Moreover, the JCS recommended that the NCA drop plans for a punishment strategy of retaliation and focus on a denial campaign that would physically incapacitate North Vietnam’s ability to support insurgency operations. The evidence indicates

⁵⁰ Gen Earle G. Wheeler, “Vietnam: A Year-End Appraisal,” address to the Economic Club of Detroit, Detroit, Mi., 18 December 1967, as quoted in *Air Force Policy Letter for Commanders*, Supplement No. 1-1968, January 1968, 4-6.

⁵¹ Hall, 7.

⁵² *Ibid*, 9.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 10. Category I detailed line of communication targets directly supporting insurgency in Laos and South Vietnam. Category II included military targets directly supporting Viet Cong, Pathet Lao, and Viet Minh (including fourteen airfields). Category III contained petroleum, broadcasting, and industrial base targets.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 14.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 15.

that failure to reach consensus between military and civilian leaders concerning the strategy for coercion was at the root of most of the friction concerning target selection, because it had a direct bearing upon the desirability, feasibility and suitability of particular target sets.⁵⁶

Flaming Dart bombing campaigns occurred in February 1965 in response to numerous attacks and provocations by North Vietnamese forces. Admiral Sharp issued a CINCPAC Operations Order (Flaming Dart) which specified three attack reprisal options of increasing severity.⁵⁷ Admiral Sharp recommended Option Two; the NCA selected Option One. Two days later, following the Viet Cong bombing of an enlisted billet at Qui Nhon, Admiral Sharp recommended Option Three. Again, the NCA selected the weakest attack option available, that is, “the combination of targets selected and the amount of force employed that would have the least impact on the enemy.”⁵⁸ Even this early in the war, it was apparent that political restraints on military judgment concerning air operations was pronounced.

Determining the desirability of the target sets for Flaming Dart also contributed to friction between civilian and military leaders. There were two main causes for the friction: lack of a coherent strategy and differing opinions concerning the ability to achieve objectives. Although ultimate victory was dependent on achieving military objectives, how these were to be achieved was in question. In his book *Dereliction of Duty*, H.R. McMaster argued the point coherently: “Graduated pressure, an intentionally ambiguous strategy, permitted different interpretations of how the air campaign ought to be conducted and what it should achieve.”⁵⁹ Moreover, the rationale of the NCA and JCS differed on the contribution that striking targets make to the overall objectives. President Johnson stated: “I thought that perhaps a sudden and effective air strike would convince the leaders in Hanoi that we were serious in our purpose, and also that the North could not count on continued immunity if they persisted in aggression in the

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Lt Col Samuel S. Palmer, “A Study of the Influence of Political and Military Considerations on Target Selection in North Vietnam, February 1965 through 1968,” Report No. 3664 (Air War College, Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University), 8. The targets included five barracks, a bridge, and Quang Khe Naval Base.

⁵⁸ Adm U.S.G Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (Navato, Ca.: Presidio Press, 1998), 57.

⁵⁹ McMaster, 234.

South.”⁶⁰ But from the JCS perspective, the Flaming Dart strikes were neither sudden nor effective.

The feasibility of the targets was also in question. Reprisal attacks conducted against Chanh Hoa barracks were very disappointing. The attacks conducted on February 7, 8, and 11 were made by 267 aircraft sorties targeting 491 buildings, 47 of which were destroyed. Furthermore, operations at the North Vietnamese barracks continued unimpaired.⁶¹ The reasons for the poor bombing accuracy were unsuitable aircraft systems which were incapable of effectively operating with clouds in the target area, as well as heavy enemy defenses whose effects were not properly anticipated by senior leadership directing the strikes.⁶²

The lack of feasibility of conducting adequate bombing created friction between the civilian and military leadership. McNamara sent a memo to Wheeler that indicated his higher expectations for damage during the Flaming Dart attacks. He further stated: “Surely we cannot continue for months accomplishing no more with 267 sorties than we did on these missions.”⁶³ Clearly McNamara was not pleased with the bombing results and his expectations for success were higher than the actual outcome. What led McNamara to expect better? Perhaps military leaders failed to adequately advise McNamara of the limitations of airpower operating in cloudy conditions with heavy enemy defenses. Or, perhaps his failure to heed the advice of senior military advisors was ironically indicating inefficiencies in his strategy.

Determining the suitability of the targets requires a great amount of subjective expertise and judgement, and this is certainly the case if a punishment strategy is adopted. In his book *Bombing To Win*, Robert Pape argues that punishment strategies do not work.⁶⁴ Although his

⁶⁰ Quoted in Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Airpower* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 58.

⁶¹ Edward J. Marolda, and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict*, Vol. 2, *From Military Assistance to Combat*, 1959-1965 (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, 1986), 498-500.

⁶² Ibid, 501. “Addressing the cause behind the loss of seven naval aircraft from June 1964 to the end of February 1965, the Pacific Fleet commander stated that air operations in Southeast Asia ‘have been oriented directly toward the accomplishment of political objectives [while] operational considerations have been secondary.’” Also see Wayne Thompson, *To Hanoi and Back: the United States Air Force and North Vietnam, 1966-1973* (London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), xii, 23.

⁶³ McMaster, 222.

⁶⁴ Pape, *Bombing to Win*.

argument is somewhat biased, it does indicate a degree of difficulty implementing the punishment strategy.⁶⁵

Historical evidence concerning punishment-oriented bombing campaigns suggests there are some previous wars where adversaries may have capitulated because of an effective punishment strategy. Some scholars believe Japan capitulated at the end of World War II because of a successful punishment bombing strategy. The campaign required firebombing Tokyo and dropping two atomic bombs, killing approximately 330,000 civilians.⁶⁶ Operation Allied Force in 1999 may have been the impetus for Slobadan Milosevic's capitulation after 78 days of bombing targets, some of which were punishment oriented. Linebacker II has also been lauded as successful in coercing the North Vietnamese to the bargaining table. These three examples are easily contested by Pape and others, because proof of their effectiveness is intangible and difficult to illustrate.

The strategy directly influences the suitability of targets selected because of the judgment required by participants. A punishment strategy is strenuous because of the difficulty in determining suitable targets, and during Flaming Dart targets selected had little positive influence toward achieving objectives. In fact, there were at least three unintended consequences caused by the selection of unsuitable targets. First, limited United States' results and loss of forces hurt morale and created friction between the military and civilian leaders. Second, the North Vietnamese population tended to "rally around the flag" and express stronger desire to support their government's cause.⁶⁷ Third, the American public eventually failed to support the bombing, thus weakening the resolve of America's leadership.

Rolling Thunder

Operation Rolling Thunder was essentially a continuation of Flaming Dart that continued the punishment strategy using escalating force. The goals of the operation were modified slightly and became a subject of many debates among Johnson's advisors. McNamara

⁶⁵ In his book *Arms and Influence*, Thomas Schelling failed to account for cultural aspects of the adversary, and how responses to bombing might differ among different people. Determining the effect of a punishment strategy requires a subjective assessment of enemy will. This can be extremely difficult and frustrating.

⁶⁶ *The United States Strategic Bombing Surveys* (Maxwell AFB, Al.: Air University Press, 1987), 92.

⁶⁷ Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 391.

communicated the consensus in a memorandum to Johnson stating the principle goals were 1) to pressure Hanoi to negotiate a settlement and to interdict infiltration, and 2) to reduce the flow of men and supplies from North Vietnam to the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong. Subsidiary goals included the signaling to Hanoi of America's resolve to defend South Vietnam against communist infiltration and the boosting of South Vietnamese morale.⁶⁸

Here, too, there was friction between civilian and military leaders acting in advisory roles for the president.⁶⁹ The strategy advocated by Johnson's civilian advisors for accomplishing the goals of Rolling Thunder followed a gradually escalating punishment model. This strategy closely resembled the influential ideas of Thomas Schelling, who advocated deliberately escalating violence so that a targeted nation would recognize and fearfully anticipate the next punishment.⁷⁰ This concept failed to account for the determination of the North Vietnamese.

Friction occurred when military advisors advocated a different strategy to achieve the objectives. Military advisors advocated two variations of a denial strategy that coerced by means of strategic interdiction of men and supplies. Their mechanism was to destroy military installations, harbors, transportation, bridges, and logistic systems, in short, to paralyze the NVA. The theory was that once the Hanoi government realized that its territorial and political ambitions were unattainable, it would negotiate a settlement. Thus, differences between the strategic mechanisms envisioned by civilian and military leaders were a major source of friction.⁷¹

Determining the desired effect and the desirability of particular targets was extremely difficult for the leaders involved with the Vietnam War. Civilian leaders were completely wrong

⁶⁸ United States Department of Defense, "Memorandum to the President from Robert McNamara," Declassified Documents Reference System (DDRS), series 1987, no. 1344, 30 July 1965, 1.

⁶⁹ Sharp, 33, 57. Adm Sharp and the JCS expressed frustration with the NCA over strategy and targeting policy.

⁷⁰ Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), v.

⁷¹ LtCol James H. Hall, "United States Target Selection Policy for Out-Country Operations in Southeast Asia, January 1964 through June 1967," Research Report no. AWC-68-TS-0058 (Maxwell AFB, Al.: Air War College, 1967), 51. During 1965, "civilian authority disapproved fourteen major recommendations by the JCS to increase the military pressure on North Vietnam by Rolling Thunder operations. Many recommended targets were rejected in nearly every Rolling Thunder program recommendation, and other targets were added without regard for a coherent, integrated military program." The fact is that interdiction did not interdict sufficiently to be effective.

about the ability of gradual, limited air strikes to contribute toward victory in the Vietnam War.⁷² This was despite George Ball's stated evaluation that the objectives of Rolling Thunder were tantamount to demanding "unconditional surrender."⁷³ The views of the JCS and CINCPAC indicated that bombing efforts of Rolling Thunder were ineffectual and improper.⁷⁴ Civilian authorities appeared to cross an important line, by making tactical-level decisions on matters that required military expertise they lacked. This generated significant friction. Would the strategies advocated by the JCS and CINCPAC have worked? It is impossible to determine because they were never adopted. In the post-war opinion of Wallace Thies: "Rolling Thunder would never convince Hanoi it faced the choice between surrender and doom; bombing would never seriously impede the Vietcong in the South or infiltration from the North."⁷⁵

The feasibility of targeting during Rolling Thunder was also a source of friction that developed before the use of high-precision weapons and all-weather bombing. However, the sheer number of sorties required tested the concept of feasibility. On 5 January 1966, McNamara cited intelligence reports that showed the Hanoi-Lao Cai rail line was open to traffic. He expressed surprise that the line was open because Rolling Thunder had tasked six hundred sorties per week in that area. The JCS responded that authorization existed for only one of the three bridges on that line and that it had been destroyed and rebuilt twice within a month. Weather had prevented further strikes; therefore, the line was open. The JCS stated that closure of the line would require dropping all three bridges and that an additional four hundred sorties per month would have to be dedicated to the line to keep it closed. There were not sufficient sorties authorized.⁷⁶

Operations that override the military's necessity for results, for political realities, can be extremely difficult and often ineffective. Rolling Thunder was many things, but it was not

⁷² McMaster, 235. McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, and Taylor agreed that bombing North Vietnam would not only decrease infiltration from the North but actually coerce Hanoi to "call off the insurgency in the South and withdraw those elements infiltrated in the past."

⁷³ George W. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1982), 390-392.

⁷⁴ Hall, 56. On 12 January 1966, CINCPAC forwarded his review of Rolling Thunder operations with a reminder to the JCS that destruction of capital resources would not cause North Vietnam to negotiate.

⁷⁵ Wallace J. Thies, *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict 1964-1968* (Los Angeles, Ca.: University of California Press, 1980), 270.

⁷⁶ Hall, 54.

effective. The myriad of concerns that make up suitable targeting left significant room for disagreement, and this was exacerbated by NCA failure to heed JCS advice. Moreover, the rules of engagement coupled with untimely frequency of bombing made the suitability of targeting for Rolling Thunder a key source of friction.

The rules of engagement during Rolling Thunder placed many restrictions on airpower that became a significant source of friction. Bombing was prohibited within 25 miles of the Chinese border, within 10 miles of Hanoi and within four miles of Haiphong. By placing Hanoi, Haiphong and surrounding areas off limits, political leaders prevented airpower from attacking significant military targets crucial to the enemy's war effort. Additionally, much to the annoyance of Air Force generals, no enemy air bases could be attacked for fear of killing Soviet technicians. This allowed MiG fighters a safe haven for operations. Johnson could have used political negotiations to facilitate relaxed rules and more effective airpower. Nixon successfully negotiated the removal of Soviet technicians at North Vietnamese air bases and gained assurances that reduced political risk.

During the early part of Rolling Thunder, even the NVA surface-to-air missile sites could not be attacked until they were operational and firing at U.S. planes. The JCS wanted desperately to attack those sites while they were under construction. The military imperative of force protection was in conflict with the NCA's concern for Soviet and Chinese intervention. "The NCA feared that casualties among advisors from the Communist superpowers might trigger intervention."⁷⁷ Disagreement over the SAM sites was clearly another source of friction. The web of MiG fighters and surface-to-air missiles created what Colonel Jack Broughton called "the center of hell with Hanoi as its hub."⁷⁸ The most difficult aspect for the military professionals was that their hands were tied. From their perspective, many of the roughly 670 aircraft losses from 1965 to 1967 were unnecessary and avoidable.⁷⁹

The repeated decisions to suspend bombing operations also brought into question the suitability of targeting. On 24 December 1965, President Johnson declared a bombing halt over North Vietnam in an effort to persuade Hanoi to discuss a political settlement. It lasted until 30 January 1966. This halt was the second one since May 1965. Hanoi responded positively to

⁷⁷ Clodfelter, 85.

⁷⁸ Jack Broughton, *Thud Ridge* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), 24.

⁷⁹ Clodfelter, 131.

neither; it used the time to rebuild its strength, repair previous damage, and send more troops and supplies southward. Thus, Rolling Thunder began again. Aircrews not only had to attack the new targets, but also those they had already destroyed, which had been rebuilt or repaired.

Linebacker I and II

New political leadership in Washington D.C. executed the Linebacker bombing campaigns with some important differences in *modus operandi*. First, Nixon had a different strategy in mind for Vietnam: to stop North Vietnamese offensive operations and compel them to come to the peace table, which would allow the United States to withdraw from the conflict. Second, Nixon directed the military to execute the plan and then got out of the way. There was no micro-management of military details. Third, improved weapons reduced uncertainty and friction. In most respects, targeting operations during Linebacker were remarkably different from earlier efforts, much like a different war. The Nixon administration created a more harmonious atmosphere simply by improving the targeting and nomination process.

Linebacker contributed greatly toward the coercion of North Vietnamese leaders. Nixon's change in strategy for the Vietnam War created a positive goal for both political and military efforts. This simplified problem solving and reduced friction between civilian and military leaders. Furthermore, Nixon's diplomatic initiatives with Peking and Moscow allowed him to increase attacks without fear of a reprisal by the two major communist powers.⁸⁰

The distinct change in war conduct led to increased cooperation between military and civilian leaders. The JCS planned Linebacker I in a similar manner to Rolling Thunder, but this time they were permitted to attack the enemy air defenses.⁸¹ An Air Force report noted that "the prevailing authority to strike almost any valid military target during LINEBACKER was in sharp contrast to the extensive and vacillating restrictions in existence during ROLLING THUNDER."⁸² Seventh Air Force commander General John W. Vogt, Jr. later stated that he had adequate authority to direct the Air Force portion of Linebacker effectively.⁸³ President Nixon told Admiral Thomas Moorer (CJCS), "This is your chance to use military power effectively to

⁸⁰ Ibid, 172.

⁸¹ Ibid, 158.

⁸² Ibid, 164.

⁸³ General John W. Vogt, Jr., transcript of oral history interview by Lieutenant Colonel Arthur W. McCants, Jr., and Dr. James C. Hasdorff, 8-9 August 1978, AFHRA, file number K239.0512-1093, 64.

win this war and if you don't I'll consider you personally responsible.”⁸⁴ This type of delegated leadership gave military professionals latitude to apply their expertise and reduced the friction noted during the Johnson administration.

Improved weapons mitigated residual friction caused by the inability of the aircraft to hit their targets. Nixon's statements indicate a small amount of friction stating: “I fear that...in the past...our political objectives have not been achieved because of too much caution on the military side.” He told Moorer: “I don't want any more of this crap about the fact we couldn't hit this target or that one.”⁸⁵ The use of smart bombs during Linebacker increased the number of feasible and suitable targets by ensuring reasonable risk to pilots and reduction of damage to nearby “collateral property.” In short, improved weapons aided both feasibility and suitability. Thus, wider latitude from civilian authorities and improved munitions both served to reduce friction.

The Players

The characteristics of various individuals involved in the execution of the Vietnam War contributed to friction between civilian and military leaders. There were personal biases that combined with institutional imbalances to create a contentious working environment. On the civilian side of the nomination and approval process were President Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. The key players for the military included the JCS and military commanders in the theater.

Events before the Vietnam War influenced the interface of civilian and military leaders. The National Security Act of 1947 delineated responsibilities of the decisionmaking leaders. The Act gave a preponderance of decisionmaking responsibility and power to the Secretary of Defense by allowing him to filter and reject JCS advice, something later rectified by the Goldwater-Nichols Act. Although, this bordered upon a process issue, great power in the hands of a particular individual, who was determined to impose his own version of civilian control, created a detrimental combination. The second pre-war event was the NCA's efforts to place

⁸⁴ Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 2 vols. (New York: Warner Books, 1978), II: 245.

⁸⁵ Cited in Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power*, 190.

“yes-men” into the JCS in an effort to ensure that micro-management of military affairs was accepted.⁸⁶

The Cuban Missile Crisis illustrates McNamara’s efforts to control the military. In *Dereliction of Duty*, H.R. McMaster portrays McNamara as an overbearing micro-manager who exuded contentious personal traits, poor inter-personal skills, and an insensitive management style. McMaster noted that during the Cuban Missile Crisis, “He [McNamara] literally lived at the Pentagon between October 16 and 27 because he ‘feared that [the military] might not understand that this [blockade] was a communications exercise, not a military operation.’”⁸⁷ Rather than give the military the mission to enforce the blockade, McNamara and the president orchestrated the specific activities of the United States’ ships.⁸⁸ This behavior demonstrates micro-management that became a source of friction for professional officers.

One might suggest that any rational person in the same position of the Secretary of Defense would have acted in a similar manner. As noted in Chapter Two, civilian leaders experience pressures derived by responsibility and a desire to maintain political options. These pressures do not require, however, the actions taken by McNamara. In fact, by McNamara’s own admission he lacked the expertise to impose his military directions upon the military.⁸⁹

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, McNamara became emphatic about the way the Navy was conducting its blockade of Cuba, with one exchange clearly indicating his leadership style. Admiral George Anderson, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), considered McNamara’s instructions an intrusion and told McNamara that the Navy had been conducting blockades since the days of John Paul Jones, and suggested that he return to his office and let the Navy run the operation.⁹⁰ It was certainly legal for McNamara to intervene and direct minute details, and his belief that nuclear war was imminent perhaps justified his actions. Nevertheless, his behavior resulted in two adverse effects. First, it poisoned the relations between him and the JCS.

⁸⁶ McMaster, 30-31. McMaster describes how Kennedy and McNamara removed Admiral George Anderson and plotted the removal of General Curtis LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff, because of their uncooperative attitudes.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 30.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 31.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 30. In a 1987 interview, McNamara admitted that he had been a novice in the area of strategy when he took over as Secretary of Defense.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Second, it led him to believe incorrectly that such micro-management would be necessary, appropriate, and effective in Vietnam. It turned out to be neither.

McNamara later dealt with Adm Anderson by having him replaced, along with the other Chiefs of Staff. McMasters sums up the overbearing control sought by McNamara:

To control military operations in times of crisis, the president and the defense secretary would need men on the JCS who would permit civilian oversight in areas that had been previously regarded as sacrosanct and free from civilian “interference.” Kennedy had effected the early replacement of the JCS chairman, the Army Chief of Staff, and the Chief of Naval Operations. He wanted to sack LeMay at the same time as Anderson, but McNamara warned that two simultaneous removals would be one too many.⁹¹

The discussion about McNamara’s role in the Cuban Missile Crisis sought to illustrate the type of civilian control demanded before the Vietnam War began. The earlier discussion of targeting factors detailed many of the restrictions placed upon the military and covered the repeated rejections of the JCS’s advice. Legally, the NCA’s conduct was perfectly acceptable. The moral and ethical influence of the NCA exerted over the military was, however, misguided and was a major cause of friction in target nomination and approval during the Vietnam War. The apparent lack of friction during Linebacker, under the direction of new leadership, only serves to highlight the validity of this conclusion.

The Process

Description

This examination of the target nomination and approval process for the Vietnam War focuses on three factors described in Chapter Two: the comprehensiveness, accuracy, and timeliness of the process. There are inherent frictions associated with achieving appropriate balance among these factors. This study does not discuss the considerable friction that occurred internal to the military process, except where it had a direct bearing upon civil-military relations.

Comprehensiveness

A totally comprehensive target nomination and approval process is an obvious impossibility. Nevertheless, within the limits of possibility, friction can be reduced. Reduced

⁹¹ Ibid, 31.

friction in the targeting process during the Vietnam War was possible as demonstrated by the Nixon administration during the Linebacker campaigns. During Rolling Thunder, the target nomination and approval process was not comprehensive based on the evidence. It lacked relevant considerations in the form of intelligence and perspectives from experts. Moreover, incompetent people injected themselves into the nomination and approval process without the requisite knowledge and judgment to make appropriate decisions.⁹²

The National Security Act of 1947 and the amendments in 1949, 1953, and 1958 were partly to blame for the lack of comprehensiveness. The study has already described the role of the players in this process. The National Security Act gradually shifted the balance of power over from the military to the Secretary of Defense, which made him responsible for strategic planning and operational direction of forces.⁹³ The resulting command structure marginalized the judgment of senior officers.⁹⁴ The Joint Chiefs disagreed with many operational directions from the NCA; but the National Security Act, as amended, provided few checks against a strong-willed Secretary ignoring or suppressing their advice.⁹⁵ The result was a lack of comprehensiveness that resulted in friction.

Although the United States had experience as early as World War I with military and civilian personnel compiling target lists for strategic bombing, previous American bombing efforts were of little assistance to the Vietnam War targeting process.⁹⁶ The targets selected in earlier wars required little detail because of the accuracy or inaccuracy of aerial bombs; the identification of installations was sufficient.⁹⁷ As the accuracy of weapons increased, the demand for intelligence increased dramatically. Kennedy and McNamara made significant changes to the Department of Defense to attempt to make it more efficient and flexible, but their

⁹² Ibid, 30. “In a 1987 interview McNamara admitted that he had been a novice in the area of strategy when he took over as Secretary of Defense.”

⁹³ Christopher M. Bourne, “Unintended Consequences of the Goldwater-Nichols Act,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Spring 1998, 102.

⁹⁴ David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972), 488-89. In 1965, for example, before the critical decision to send ground forces to Vietnam, the JCS met with the President only twice.

⁹⁵ McMaster, 21. McNamara often suppressed JCS advice in favor of the views of his civilian analysts. On several defense issues, McNamara either failed to consult the JCS or did not forward their views to the White House.

⁹⁶ John Glock, “The Evolution of Targeting,” Air Force Pamphlet 14-210, *USAF Intelligence Targeting Guide*, Attachment 2.

initiatives had some unfortunate side effects. One effort was to consolidate intelligence functions. In 1962, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) took over much of the intelligence work previously done by the services. One of these areas was the maintenance of the targeting database. Unfortunately, DIA largely ignored conventional targeting applications, because the United States had come to rely largely upon nuclear weapons. The application of American airpower was thus degraded both by the centralization of intelligence and by the neglect of conventional operations.⁹⁸ These shortfalls contributed to friction between leaders when actual bombing results were less than expected.⁹⁹

The military had a significant infrastructure developed to produce target lists, which despite intelligence and training shortfalls, made an effort to comply with the ideal of a comprehensive process. The shortfall was at the approval end of the process, with the President approving targets over lunch with little or no military advice.¹⁰⁰

The targeting process began in the Pacific Theater, with the Rolling Thunder Coordinating Committee (RTCC). The commander of Allied forces in Vietnam, General William C. Westmoreland, in concert with Admiral U. S. Sharp, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command, established the RTCC in March 1965 to resolve inter-service issues and produce a monthly target list. Admiral Sharp then used the monthly target list as a basis for providing recommendations to the CJCS, General Wheeler. Each week, Wheeler provided the Targeting Team with PACOM's recommendations as well as his specific guidance and rules of engagement. The team then built the target list for General Wheeler. Although the target list presented in Washington did not have to include Sharp's nominations, it usually incorporated his target requests. Wheeler took the RTCC target list and presented it to McNamara for the

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Maj Gen George Keegan, the Seventh Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for intelligence in 1968-69, said, "Years ago, the mission of targeting was taken away from the Department of the Air Force and passed to the Defense Intelligence Agency, where it simply died."

⁹⁹ Ibid. At the beginning of our involvement in Vietnam, the Air Force did not have an adequate targeting organization to support our combat operations. As one lesson learned states: "The targeting function is an essential element in the effective employment of fighting forces. The intelligence organizations could not provide adequate planning and execution support to the rapidly escalating air operations."

¹⁰⁰ McMaster, 88. "According to Walt Rostow, Tuesday lunches were the 'heart' of the national security process, and 'the only men present were those whose advice the president most wanted

President's Tuesday luncheon. (After October 1967, Wheeler attended the Tuesday luncheons and presented the target list himself.) When no Tuesday lunch was scheduled, McNamara would approve the target list.¹⁰¹

Accuracy

The process for approval and nomination was not as accurate as it should have been and was a source of avoidable friction. Accuracy in the process requires information that will never be 100% complete. Therefore, human judgment is an essential part of the process. There were two problems with the accuracy of the process during Rolling Thunder that directly contributed to friction. First, the method for receiving and processing military and political advice was inappropriate. Second, leaders attempted to strike targets that were difficult to hit, and many strikes were poorly executed, in large part due to service parochialism.

The conduit of information between the military and civilians was not conducive to reducing friction. The NCA received information concerning targeting efforts from multiple sources, and at times the information conflicted. The Joint Chiefs were rarely unanimous in recommending objectives, military actions, or resources required. In addition, field commanders such as the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) and Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV) had direct access to the Secretary of Defense and were not directly subordinate to the JCS. Therefore, a variety of conflicting military proposals were received by the NCA. Rather than seeing the conflicting advice as a sign that military operations were going to be difficult, the NCA took this as a sign of incompetence and a “green light” for implementing its own plans.

Inter-service rivalry generated friction among the services. Command and control differences between the services played a major role in how each set airpower priorities and struck targets. In March 1965, the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet contended that, "Naval airpower was an inherent part of the fleet, and its mission could not be separated." Lack of internal military coordination resulted in bombing errors and inefficiencies that would have

to hear.’ The agenda often included [issues about] Vietnam and [nominated] targets with no military officer as a regular member of this select group.”

¹⁰¹ Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Airpower*, 88.

otherwise been avoidable.¹⁰² Moreover, errors contributed to increased aircraft losses and poor target destruction performance. Both of these factors increased domestic political pressure on civilian leadership and hindered Johnson's ability to lead.

Timeliness

The timeliness of the process had vast room for improvement. The timeliest process would be for the President to provide political guidance and for the military to execute under those guidelines. As outlined above, the entire process from the Vietnam Theater to the lunchroom and back was completely uncalled for and should have been avoided. In addition, a punishment strategy requires careful timing to work properly.

Conclusion

Civilian and military leaders experienced considerable friction during the conduct of the Vietnam War. Multiple factors relevant to the target nomination and approval process contributed to this friction. The inability of the civilian leaders and military commanders to agree upon a proper strategy caused friction throughout the Johnson administration.

Friction identified through the examination of desirability, feasibility, and suitability of targeting can be simplified to two root causes: failed strategy and inept civilian leadership. The subsequent negative consequences and additional friction outlined throughout the chapter could have been avoided with proper strategic vision that related military strategy to national strategy in a coherent manner. The complicated nature of the war required a group effort to resolve the issues, not the guidance of a few intellectuals. The NCA should have solicited additional advice from the JCS then produced broad guidance and allowed the military to implement its strategy.

The inability of leaders to reach consensus about strategic methodology and to develop coherent strategy that tied ends to means caused most of the friction between leaders during target nomination and approval. Military theorist Antoine Jomini said the following about the development of strategy: "We will suppose an army taking the field: the first care of its commander should be to agree with the head of state upon the character of the war."¹⁰³ This did

¹⁰² Moeller, 15. "Coordination difficulties...meant, sometimes they hit the same target while other targets went untended."

¹⁰³ Baron Antoine-Henri Jomini, *The Art of War*, (Philadelphia, Pa.: J.B. Lippincott, 1862), 66.

not occur.¹⁰⁴ General Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and key advisor to the NCA, described the war in Southeast Asia in these words: “The Vietnam War is the foggiest war in my own personal experience. Moreover, it is the first war I know of wherein the fog of war is thicker away from the scene of conflict than on the battlefield.”¹⁰⁵

The targeting process was complicated by a patchwork of responsibility and ineptitude. Targets were selected in Washington by a small team on the joint staff and approved only at the presidential level. The result was a major misuse of airpower. Airpower application came to be merely the servicing of targets, with little regard for whether or not they were the “right” targets, and without an air campaign plan. According to General Mike Ryan who flew F-4s in the Vietnam War, “It was a very frustrating war for a lot of us.” He was exposed to North Vietnamese MiG fighters flying from air bases that American pilots were forbidden to bomb. Gen. Ryan’s lessons learned from Vietnam: “Establish clear objectives, give military leaders broad authority, and do not micro-manage the war from Washington.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Phillip B. Davidson’s essay “The American Military’s Assessment of Vietnam, 1964-1992,” in *An American Dilemma: Vietnam, 1964-1973*, ed. Dennis E. Showalter and John G. Albert (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1993), 53. “American leaders,” Davidson said, “could never arrive at a general agreement as to the character of the war.”

¹⁰⁵ Cited in “Of Chiefs and Chairman: General Earle Gilmore Wheeler,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Autumn/Winter 1997-98, 135.

¹⁰⁶ Richard J. Newman, “The Forgotten Lessons from the Vietnam War,” *US News and World Report*, 5 January 2000, cover article.

CHAPTER 4

THE GULF WAR

*By God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all.*¹⁰⁷

George H. W. Bush

The United States initiated the Gulf War with many lessons learned from Vietnam and applied them to a successful end. These lessons applied to both military and civilian spheres of influence. However, the U.S. military leaders of the Gulf War were participants in the Vietnam War and were armed with what Richard Hallion called a “never-again” attitude.¹⁰⁸ These leaders were determined to ensure that “the procedural, organizational, doctrinal, and equipment shortcomings of the Vietnam era were redressed.”¹⁰⁹ These improvements in military training and equipment reduced uncertainty in force application.¹¹⁰ This, coupled with a better understanding of how political influence affects military success, created a much-improved environment for conducting the war. In fact, the examination of this case found little friction between military and civilian leaders, making execution methods during the Gulf War useful for modeling friction avoidance.

The leadership methods of President George H. W. Bush were essential to smooth operations between civilian and military leaders with respect to targeting. He set clear military objectives for the coalition and allowed diplomacy sufficient time to work before launching the war. While unequivocally establishing the primacy of political considerations over military requirements, he delegated appropriate freedom of action to

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Stanley W. Cloud, “Exorcising an Old Demon,” *Newsweek*, March 11, 1991, 52.

¹⁰⁸ Richard P. Hallion, *Storm over Iraq: Air Power and the Gulf War* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 56. Generals noted were William W. Momyer, Robert J. Dixon, and Wilbur L. Creech.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Benjamin S. Lambeth, *The Transformation of American Air Power* (Ithaca, Ny.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 59-81. Lambeth describes most of the improvements in

military leaders. He allowed military men to prepare and implement plans according to their best professional judgment and resisted the temptation to impose political directions in the lower-level details of war fighting. Michael Handel characterized President Bush's efforts as follows: "The achievements of this delicate balance between political control on the one hand, and sufficient freedom of action for the military on the other is a rare feat for any statesman or political system."¹¹¹

Historical Overview

The Gulf War was an international conflict triggered by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990.¹¹² Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, ordered the invasion and occupation of Kuwait with the aim of acquiring that nation's large oil reserves. On 3 August, the United Nations Security Council called for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, and on 6 August the Council imposed a worldwide ban on trade with Iraq. Iraq's invasion and the potential threat it posed to Saudi Arabia prompted the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies to rush troops to Saudi Arabia to deter a possible attack. Egypt and several other Arab nations joined the anti-Iraq coalition and contributed forces to the military buildup, known as Operation Desert Shield. Hussein meanwhile built up his occupying army in Kuwait to about 300,000 troops.

On 29 November, the United Nations Security Council authorized the use of force against Iraq unless it withdrew from Kuwait by 15 January 1991. By the deadline, Allied coalition forces against Hussein had reached strength of 700,000 troops, including 540,000 American personnel. Hussein, however, steadfastly refused to withdraw his forces from Kuwait, which he maintained would remain a province of Iraq.

The Persian Gulf War began on 17 January 1991 with a United States-led air offensive against Iraq that continued throughout the war. Over the next few weeks, this sustained aerial bombardment destroyed Iraq's air defenses before attacking its

airpower equipment, doctrine, and training that were a direct result of the shortfalls identified post-Vietnam War.

¹¹¹ Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought*, Third, Revised and Expanded edition (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 12-13.

¹¹² Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf Conflict: An Interim Report to Congress*, July 1991, 4-5. The flowing summary of the Gulf War is based on data contained in this report.

communications networks, government buildings, weapons plants, oil refineries, bridges, and roads. By mid-February, the Allies shifted air attacks to Iraq's forward ground forces in Kuwait and southern Iraq.¹¹³

The Allied ground offensive was launched from northeastern Saudi Arabia into Kuwait on 24 February, and within three days Arab and U.S. forces had retaken Kuwait City. Meanwhile, the main U.S. armored thrust drove into Iraq some 120 miles west of Kuwait and attacked Iraq's armored reserves from the rear. By 27 February these forces had destroyed roughly half of Iraq's elite Republican Guard units, though the latter had attempted to make a stand south of Basra in southeastern Iraq. By the time that President George Bush declared a cease-fire for 28 February, Iraqi resistance had completely collapsed.

Targeting Issues

There was very little friction over targeting issues due mostly to the players involved and the process adopted. Determining the desired effects, feasibility, and suitability of targets was the purview of the military, and senior military leaders worked hard to keep it that way.¹¹⁴ Some might attribute the lack of friction to the enormous advantages that resulted from unilateral technological superiority. They would be incorrect. Results from the Vietnam War clearly indicated that superior technology and economic might are not sufficient to eliminate friction. There was, however, a value to having appropriate weapons.

Unlike Vietnam, weapons and platforms used in the Gulf War were well suited for executing specific missions with accuracy and survivability. The introduction of space assets and intelligence platforms such as the Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) helped to reduce uncertainty. These systems reduced friction because they allowed strikes on a very timely schedule and with minimal collateral damage. In

¹¹³ Ibid. Coalition air forces flew approximately 120,000 sorties during the 43 day war, 60 percent of which were combat missions.

¹¹⁴ There were times when General Colin Powell and General Norman Schwarzkopf directed targeting constraints and/or restraints to preempt political involvement in tactical level execution that might hinder strategic level military operations. Limitations on bombing around Baghdad after the Al Firdos bunker incident and direction to attack Iraqi Scud missile capabilities are two examples of self-imposed conditions.

short, the Armed Forces incorporated technology that reduced some of the reasons why politicians might need to impose constraints.

As is usually the case, there were exceptions to the overwhelming successes in the area of targeting caused by the F-117 bombing of civilians in the Al Firdos bunker and Iraqi Scud missile attacks. General Colin Powell, Chairman of the JCS, was politically adept and intervened to avoid friction for politically sensitive military operations—an important aspect of the way military leaders operated.¹¹⁵ There was significant potential for friction because of the killing of over a hundred civilians in the Al Firdos bunker, but Powell intervened to prevent that from happening.¹¹⁶ General Norman Schwarzkopf, Commander-in-Chief of Central Command (CENTCOM), yielded to Powell's guidance to stop bombing Baghdad and agreed that Powell would have target approval authority in the downtown area.¹¹⁷ Bombing in Baghdad ceased for about two weeks; and even after the bombing resumed, bunkers and bridges remained off-limits for the rest of the war.¹¹⁸ The Scud missile problem however, festered to the point that politicians actually became frustrated.

Benjamin Lambeth noted: "Once the war was over, the Scud hunt was widely acknowledged to have been the most frustrating and least effective aspect of the air war."¹¹⁹ Initially, Schwarzkopf saw no need to expend additional effort to target Scuds.¹²⁰ Because the missiles were conventionally tipped, and inaccurately guided, Schwarzkopf considered Scuds an insignificant threat. But the CENTCOM commander underestimated the political impact of the Scuds.

Two distinct issues made targeting Scuds a source of friction. First, the coalition had no doctrine, tactics, or equipment with which to deal with the threat. Large targets such as cities and logistics installations in Saudi Arabia and Israel were vulnerable

¹¹⁵ Both Powell and Schwarzkopf mitigated coalition friction by carefully assigning airpower tasks among the nations. Some coalition member nations did not want their aircraft to participate in particular tasks.

¹¹⁶ Michael R. Gordon and Gen. Bernard E. Trainor, *The General's War* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 326-27.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 327.

¹¹⁸ Wayne Thompson, "After Al Firdos: The Last Two Weeks of Strategic Bombing in Desert Storm," *Air Power History*, Summer 1996, 52.

¹¹⁹ Lambeth, 145.

despite the Scud's inaccuracies. In fact, a Scud strike on barracks on 25 February 1991 inflicted more American casualties than any single engagement.¹²¹ Defending against a Scud launch was difficult. The initial defensive strategy against Scud missiles relied solely upon Patriot missiles that were retrofitted in 1985-86 to add an anti-ballistic missile capability. They had only marginal effectiveness in their new role.¹²² Preemption of Scud launches through search and destroy missions was likewise very ineffective. As happened in the Vietnam War, military inability to neutralize a threat led to frustration and friction among political leaders.

The second factor that introduced friction over Scud targeting was the lack of military effort allocated to targeting the missiles when Iraq started launching them at Israel. Secretary of Defense Cheney asked a military briefer how many sorties were dedicated to the Scud search and destroy missions. The answer caused a very reserved Cheney to unload: "Goddamn it, I want some coverage out there. If I have to talk to Schwarzkopf, I'll do it." General Powell immediately acted to alleviate friction by calling General Schwarzkopf and explaining to him the significance and importance of Scud targeting. Schwarzkopf responded by increasing the number of aircraft targeting Scuds but indicated that he was not pleased with the tasking.¹²³

Thus, it was politically and strategically necessary to strike the Scuds to keep Israel out of the war and maintain coalition unity. However, the coalition's inability to strike the mobile targets set up a classic use of military feasibility not matching political necessity. Eventually the problem was mitigated by a multi-faceted approach that

¹²⁰ Gordon and Trainor, 229.

¹²¹ Jonathan Jacky, "An Analysis of the Gulf War One Year Later," *CPSR News Volume 9*, no. 4 (Fall 1991), n.p.; on-line, Internet, 10 June 2001, available from <http://www.cpsr.org/publications/newsletters/issues/1991/jacky.html>. The largest single incident of American casualties in the war occurred when a Scud struck a barracks in Dhahran and killed 28.

¹²² *Ibid.* The Patriot missile began development in 1967. The original design called for capability against the Scud, but was later dropped as a requirement. The Patriot intercepted approximately 90 percent of the Scuds launched into Saudi Arabia and still proved to be ineffective at protecting civilians. It appears that Patriot intercepts did nothing more than spread the wreckage over a larger area because damage to areas targeted by Scuds increase roughly 50 percent after Patriot missiles were used to intercept Scuds.

¹²³ Gordon and Trainor, 237.

combined provision of Patriot units to defend Israeli cities, special operations forces to find Scud launchers, space-based notification of launches, and aircraft on patrol over likely launch sites.¹²⁴ In retrospect, the missile attacks demonstrated that friction was possible when military and civilian leaders arrive at differing estimates about the same enemy capability.

The Players

Key leaders involved in decision-making for the Gulf War executed their jobs with minimum friction in the target nomination and approval process. Players adjusted the way they performed for two reasons. First, there were structural changes in the relationships of the players due to the Goldwater-Nichols Act. Second, personal experience or knowledge of historical events during the Vietnam War influenced the decision-makers to avoid similar results of that war. The structural changes, combined with a fearful memory of Vietnam, contributed to smoother civil-military interaction during the Gulf War.

Morris Janowitz noted: “It is commonplace that increased destructiveness of military technology tends to weaken the distinction between military and civilian roles.”¹²⁵ His insights are important and suggest that the lethality of precision weapons is increasingly political. Could this influence political leaders to want to control some or all of the targeting? There is clearly a great deal of latitude available to political leaders concerning the amount of influence they choose to invoke upon military leaders. It appears that during the Gulf War ordinary wisdom prevailed. The NCA provided general yet adequate guidance on the prosecution of the war and delegated the planning and execution of wartime operations to military professionals, stepping in only when they felt military leaders were insufficiently sensitive to political reality.

The Role of the Goldwater-Nichols Act

In 1986, Senator Barry Goldwater succeeded in having changes in civil-military relations incorporated into law known as the Goldwater-Nichols Act. He stated his views

¹²⁴ Ibid, 227-47.

¹²⁵ Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960), 32.

as follows during a Senate hearing:

... can we any longer afford to allow the expertise of [the professional military]...to be set aside for the decisions of the civilians whose decisions have not been wrapped in war? We lost in Korea, no question about that, because we did not let the military leadership exercise military judgment. We lost in Vietnam...If that is the way we are going to do it in the future, I think we are in trouble.¹²⁶

In his CJCS award winning article *The Unintended Consequences of the Goldwater-Nichols Act*, Major Christopher Bourne argues that reforms in civil-military relations have “reversed our long national tradition of civilian control over the military.”¹²⁷ He further argues that theater commanders (CINCs) have a great deal more influence in decision-making than before Goldwater-Nichols. A significant result of the legislation is that the presentation of advice to the President has changed to increase the importance of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and somewhat limited the role of the Secretary of Defense. The Goldwater-Nichols Act essentially eliminated the service chiefs from the strategic decision-making process. Now only the Chairman serves as the principal military advisor to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense.

These changes were designed to eliminate conflicting advice similar to that, which was offered by the Joint Chiefs during the Vietnam War. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, was well suited to act in the powerful capacity created by the Goldwater-Nichols Act. “Powell used the powers granted him by the Goldwater-Nichols Act to the hilt, wielding power and influence beyond that exercised by any previous chairman. Throughout the Gulf War, his fellow members of the Joint Chiefs were relegated to the status of observers who simply provided forces for the conflict. While Powell kept them informed, he did not need their approval.”¹²⁸ The president did not seem to have any objection to the capable Powell exercising such influence.

¹²⁶ Barry M. Goldwater, hearings before the Senate Armed Services Committee, 28 July, 1983.

¹²⁷ Christopher M. Bourne, “Unintended Consequences of the Goldwater-Nichols Act,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Spring 1998, 102.

¹²⁸ Gordon and Trainor, viii.

President Bush stated during the Gulf War: “I have not second-guessed; I have not told them what targets to hit; I have not told them how much ordinance to use or how much not to use, or what weapons to use and not to use. I have learned from Vietnam, and I think the Army and the other services are doing a superb job.”¹²⁹ His idea of leadership prevailed throughout the civilian chain of command as evident in an incident early in the war. After the war, General Charles Horner, USAF Commander of the coalition air forces, described in a *Frontline* television interview an incident in which an F-15 pilot shot down two Iraqi aircraft in Iranian airspace. Schwarzkopf notified Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney about the incident. Horner expected to receive a directive from the Pentagon issued by “some assistant Secretary of Defense...or urban affairs and housing [official]” that would create a buffer of area adjacent to the Iranian border. Horner actually wrote a letter of resignation during the height of the air battle should such restrictions be imposed. Fortunately, he never heard a word about such restrictions—making his letter unnecessary. Washington did not interfere.¹³⁰

As a general rule during the Gulf War, Horner made the targeting decisions and Schwarzkopf approved them. Later Horner said: “They let the military make the decisions the military should make, they were fully informed on everything, it wasn’t a case of the political leadership letting go, the political leadership was always in charge, but they delegated.”¹³¹ Admiral Sharp, who was the commander-in-chief of Pacific Command during much of the Vietnam War, was asked if he had desired the kind of command autonomy that General Schwarzkopf enjoyed. He replied: “If I had had the same sort of freedom that General Schwarzkopf [had], the Vietnam War would have been over in about 1966.”¹³² That may or may not have been the case, but it appears he would have welcomed that autonomy. The real issue, of course, is not how fast a war can be brought to an end, but how civilian and military leaders can interact to achieve results

¹²⁹ George H. W. Bush, *All The Best: My Life in Letters and Other Writings* (New York: Scribner, 1999), 511.

¹³⁰ General Charles Horner, transcript of interview by *Frontline* “The Gulf War: Charles Horner,” 12 December, 2000, n.p.; on-line, Internet, available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/horner/1.html>.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Cited in Tom Shales, “Stormin’ Norman, in High Command,” *Washington Post*, 28 February 1991, D2.

that meet both political and military needs.

The Process

The target nomination and approval process for the Gulf War was characterized by delegation of responsibility to military commanders; it thus mitigated friction.¹³³ To enable a hands-off approach, President Bush enjoyed a favorable political environment domestically, internationally, and adversarially. On the domestic front, the president enjoyed strong public support, including the backing of an initially reluctant United States Congress. A firm United Nations Security Council mandate in the form of Resolution 678 authorized coalition forces to use “all means necessary” to eject enemies from Kuwait. A broad-based, multi-national coalition that Bush assembled added to his strategic advantage. To complete the “hat-trick” the enemy was more than cooperative, allowing the coalition an “unsurpassed advantage that comes from having a strategically and tactically inept opponent.”¹³⁴

Comprehensiveness

Planning and execution of the bombing campaign for the Gulf War was comprehensive with minor deviations requiring improvement. Schwarzkopf’s poor interpretation of the adverse political effects caused by Iraqi Scud missile attacks was the primary weakness in the comprehensiveness of the targeting process. However, once identified as an important target set, Schwarzkopf did accept the input and modified targeting efforts. Although not a factor influencing civil-military friction, Army commanders during Desert Storm were frustrated by the perceived lack of support from airpower to strike targets they believed were significant to their impending ground offensive. Their inputs went to Schwarzkopf, and he placed assets as he deemed necessary; his decisions were not always popular with ground commanders.

Accuracy

Problems with the accuracy of information input into the targeting process did cause friction. However, the limited nature of the friction could have been because the

¹³³ Lambeth, 132. “Schwarzkopf...approved all of the JFACC’s target choices.”

¹³⁴ Ibid, 140.

expectations of leaders, before the start of the war, were incorrect. Estimates for casualties and aircraft losses were high compared to what actually occurred. Moreover, the accuracy and effectiveness of actual weapons systems perhaps exceeded expectations. The root cause of friction is the failure to meet an expectation of performance. The better-than-expected casualty rate, combined with exceptional weapons performance, likely precluded more friction.¹³⁵

Three shortfalls in the intelligence inputs for the targeting process caused some friction. First was the failure to identify the use of the Al Firdos bunker as a civilian shelter. Targets involving collateral damage to Iraqi civilians were politically sensitive and could have had strategic level effects if not corrected. The solution for this intelligence mistake was no more bombing in Baghdad. Second, and not determined until after the war, was the limited damage to nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) targets, which were some of the primary objectives of the bombing campaign.¹³⁶ Poor battle damage assessments and limited information about the importance of certain sites left Iraq with considerable capability in the NBC realm. Third, was the inability to produce usable data for targeting mobile Scud missiles. This caused the greatest friction because of the military's inability to cope with the threat.

Timeliness

Chapter Two stressed the complicated nature of the targeting process and how each of the criteria for determining friction in the targeting process was interrelated. The lack of accuracy and comprehensiveness in the targeting process had a direct negative influence on the timeliness of Scud hunting and NBC targeting. Schwarzkopf's efforts to target mobile Scud missiles were delayed because of his perception that they were an insignificant military target, and his decision delayed a timely response. A more timely response could have mitigated friction between Israel and the U.S. This ultimately placed stress on the entire coalition. Also related to timeliness, was the abruptness of the

¹³⁵ Jacob Weisberg, "Gulfballs: How the Experts Blew It, Big-Time," *The New Republic*, 25 March 1991, 18. Computer models determined that American casualties would range between 3,344 and 16,059.

¹³⁶ Wayne Thompson, "After Al Firdos: The Last Two Weeks of Strategic Bombing in Desert Storm." In this article the author details several instances of poor bombing assessment and intelligence shortfalls.

war termination. The quick decision to end the war caught many targeteers by surprise because they believed they had more time to target NBC facilities.¹³⁷

All of the issues address concerning the process for the Gulf War are relatively minor. Friction between military and civilian leaders was negligible compared to the other two cases in this study. There was certainly room for improvement and a possibility that any one of the topics discussed could have produced much more friction with even a small change in the way events unfolded.

Conclusion

There was very little friction in the target nomination and approval process primarily because of strong convictions among the essential United States leaders resulting from events during the Vietnam War. The Goldwater-Nichols Act laid the foundation for a more efficient interface between military and civilian leaders and gave General Powell considerable influence over the targeting process.¹³⁸ General Powell used his influence to engage targeting issues such as the Al Firdos bunker and perceptions of a “Turkey Shoot” specifically to avoid friction with civilian leaders. Nevertheless, civilian leaders did become active in the targeting process over the military’s role in targeting Scud missiles. There were political requirements for military action because of the Scud missile threat that the military did not deem necessary. Mobile Scud launchers presented military targeting problems that could not be solved to the level of satisfaction required by politicians. Iraqi Scud missile attacks demonstrated that friction was possible when military and civilian leaders arrive at differing estimates about the actual or potential influence of the same enemy capability. With that exception, the Gulf War was a model for reducing friction in the targeting process.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 55-56.

¹³⁸ A single voice of advice will provide efficiency, however, the president may not hear all the opinions necessary to make the best choice. Difficult situations may require additional advice from several military leaders to create an optimum solution.

CHAPTER 5

OPERATION ALLIED FORCE

*Destruction of targets at will does not add up to a clear or coherent strategy; nor does crippling the enemy's military and economic infrastructure automatically bring political and strategic success. This will only get worse as technology improves.*¹³⁹

Michael Handel

There was considerable friction in the target nomination and approval process associated with Operation Allied Force, to which a lack of a coherent strategy contributed significantly. Some friction was internal to the military structure, but that which developed between U.S. military and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) civilian leadership is the focus of this study. Military commanders having to work with nineteen different members of the alliance and two command structures added to the complexity of civil-military relations. Moreover, the NATO Alliance during the conduct of Allied Force was paradoxically less cohesive than the coalition assembled for Desert Storm, and the lack of alliance consensus significantly complicated the target nomination and approval process.

Historical Overview

Kosovo lies in southern Serbia and has a mixed population with the overwhelming majority being ethnic Albanians. Until 1989, the region enjoyed a high degree of autonomy within the former Yugoslavia. That changed when Serbian leader Slobadan Milosevic rescinded Kosovo's autonomy. Kosovar Albanians strenuously opposed the direct control of Belgrade, the Serbian and Yugoslav capital.

During 1998, open conflict between Serbian forces and Kosovar Albanian forces resulted in the deaths of over 1,500 Kosovar Albanians and forced roughly 400,000 people from their homes.¹⁴⁰ Diplomatic efforts by the international community had little positive effect. Further

¹³⁹ Michael Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought* (Portland, Or.; Frank Cass, 2001), 358.

¹⁴⁰ "NATO's Role in Relation to the Conflict in Kosovo," n.p.; on-line, Internet, 25 May 2001, available from <http://www.nato.int/kosovo/history.htm>.

Serbian atrocities led to the authorization and planning of air strikes by the NATO Council.¹⁴¹ Milosevic responded to the threat of air strikes by agreeing to remove his forces from Kosovo.

After a flurry of diplomatic activity and attempts to monitor Serbian compliance, the situation in Kosovo worsened again. Serbian military and police forces stepped up the intensity of their operations against the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo by moving extra troops and modern tanks into the region. This was a clear breach of the October 1998 agreement. Thousands of people began to flee their homes in the face of the Serbian offensive. On 20 March 1999, U.S. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke flew to Belgrade to deliver an ultimatum: stop the attacks on Kosovar Albanians or face imminent NATO air strikes.¹⁴² Operation Allied Force began immediately after Milosevic's refusal.

NATO air strikes against Serbia began 24 March 1999 and continued, with several interruptions for weather, for seventy-seven days. The overall military commander was General Wesley Clark who served two roles as the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and the commander of U.S. European Command. His subordinate commanders were Admiral James Ellis, Commander-in-Chief Allied Forces Southern Europe, and Lt. General Michael Short, Commander 16th Air Force. Short fulfilled the role of the Combined Forces Air Component Commander (CFACC) for Allied Force flying operations.

Targeting Factors

¹⁴¹ Ibid. This occurred on 13 October 1989.

¹⁴² Ibid.

The desired effects of military operations were clearly outlined in Holbrooke's ultimatum before Operation Allied Force began: cease oppressing Kosovar Albanians, withdraw Serbian forces from Kosovo, and allow NATO military forces into Kosovo to ensure future stability. These aims looked simple enough on paper; however, the effort to achieve these objectives was fraught with complex political and procedural issues that resulted in a poor strategy and that, in turn, adversely affected targeting decisions. Before discussing the desirability, feasibility, and suitability of targets for sources of friction, an examination of the selected strategy will highlight several causes for friction in the targeting process.

The Strategy

Selecting airpower as the "force of choice" for Operation Allied Force highlights a growing trend toward the use of air and missile forces when military force is required. The Gulf War entailed a more traditional approach to military employment than was used in Kosovo by relying heavily upon air power to prepare the battle space and subsequently transitioning to ground operations to accomplish the military objectives. Increasingly, though, in Bosnia, Iraq no-fly zones, and Yugoslavia, air and missile weapons were used independent of ground forces to accomplish strategic objectives. This trend of using airpower to solve wide-ranging political problems places a spotlight on the applicability of various strategies.

John Warden contends that the U.S. no longer faces a win or lose military situation as it did during the Cold War.¹⁴³ He further argues that with the exception of a North Korean invasion, the U.S. is in a position to choose which wars it will enter.¹⁴⁴ The ramification of selecting conflicts that are not "clearly" vital to U.S. national interests and may lack popular support places military leaders in a quandary as to how best to apply military force. The fact that protecting the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo was not a vital U.S. interest led to significant political restrictions designed to limit both U.S. military casualties and collateral damage from air operations. The political requirement to maintain public and international support for military operations limited military options.

¹⁴³ Col John A. Warden, "Employing Air Power in the Twenty-first Century," Reprinted publication from *The Future of Air Power in the Aftermath of the Gulf War*, Translated by Richard H. Shultz, and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff (Air University Press, Maxwell AFB, Alabama), 59.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Retired Air Force General Matthew Higgins offered his opinion of NATO's strategy roughly half way through the operation: "The U.S. and NATO entered this conflict without a sound strategy and now they're paying for it."¹⁴⁵ In fact, significant friction developed in the targeting process because of a failure to develop a coherent strategy to accomplish the objectives for Operation Allied Force. Despite lessons available from the strategic failure in Vietnam, Operation Allied Force was built around a plan that, like the Vietnam War, had a fundamental contradiction between the means desired and the ends selected to accomplish them.

An examination of the objectives for Allied Force indicates a contradiction between the means for applying force and the type of force required to accomplish the objectives. NATO's strategic goals for Kosovo were to prevent ethnic cleansing, achieve a durable peace that would prevent further repression, and provide for democratic self-government for the Kosovar people.¹⁴⁶ The problem with the selected strategy was that it was unsuitable to accomplish the objectives. To stop the killing would be impossible with airpower only, unless a brute force campaign of carnage was attempted, and even then, desired results are questionable. The fundamental contradiction between the use of airpower and its lack of ability to control armed forces among civilians may have been the only option, given political realities. Even if airpower was the only option, that would not change the fact that the strategy was inappropriate for the task. Personnel assigned to the targeting process struggled with the failure to match appropriately the means to an end, and it caused friction.¹⁴⁷

How did the U.S. get involved, and how was an air only option selected? The military strategy used for Operation Allied Force appears to have been primarily the work of General Clark. Before a military solution was tabled, diplomats were attempting to develop peaceful options to coerce Milosevic as conditions deteriorated in Kosovo. After a meeting dealing with the Kosovo situation, Robin Cook, the British Foreign Minister, asked General Clark if Milosevic's policy of increasing repression could be halted by the threat of airpower. General

¹⁴⁵ Doug Thompson, "Military Strategists Admit Failure in 'Unwinnable' Kosovo Air War," 2-3; on-line, Internet, 6 January 2000, available from <http://www.capitolhillblue.com/March1999/0331199/cruisemissiles033199.htm>.

¹⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, "US and NATO Objectives and Interests in Kosovo," 26 March 1999, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 7 February 2000, available from http://www.state.gov/www/regions/eur/fs_990326_ksvobjectives.html.

¹⁴⁷ Lt. Col. Paul Strickland, "USAF Aerospace Doctrine: Decisive or Coercive?" *Air Power Journal*, Fall 2000, 1.

Clark responded “yes.”¹⁴⁸ From there, General Clark actively pursued a “carrot and stick” plan to coerce Milosevic.¹⁴⁹ General Clark worked hard to sell this plan in Europe and in the U.S.¹⁵⁰ Clark’s belief was that Milosevic would not negotiate without pressure.¹⁵¹ As Clark presented his ideas of threatening with airpower, he repeatedly advised political leaders that the threat of airpower would work. Clark was sorely mistaken in several of his advisory statements and failed to plan for the “what-ifs.” What if the threat of air strikes does not work? What if actual air strikes do not work? General Joseph Ralston, Vice Chairman of the JCS, put these questions to him and he replied, “I know Milosevic; he doesn’t want to get bombed.”¹⁵²

In his book *Waging Modern War*, General Clark claims that his strategy was clear and unambiguous. He argues that one of the strategy’s strengths was the capability to implement “escalatory options.”¹⁵³ This sounds like a clever way of saying “gradual escalation”—the bane of military airpower in Vietnam. General Clark failed to articulate a specific linkage between potential targets and their coercive value to Milosevic. General Clark claims that his intent was that “the air strikes would be coercive in nature, providing a strong incentive for Milosevic to halt operations,” but that is not specific enough.¹⁵⁴ Clark articulated to the NATO planning staff early on that he wanted Serb forces on the ground struck, but again, this is not a mechanism to coerce.¹⁵⁵ Planners that included airpower experts related to Clark that finding and striking Serbian troops in Kosovo would be very difficult, if not impossible. Nevertheless, Clark persisted in this targeting desire.

General Clark was in a difficult position when NATO leadership insisted that initial strikes be limited. He could salute smartly and execute as directed or exercise his advisory role and ensure that the political leaders understood that their approach might not be the most advisable. Clark admits, “it didn’t seem a wise way to proceed. On the other hand, such a strategy wasn’t illegal or unethical. If nations wanted to fire a few cruise missiles to make a

¹⁴⁸ General Wesley Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001), 112.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 117-30. General Clark actively worked on approval for diplomacy backed by the threat of airpower. He offered unsolicited advice to both NATO civilian and military leaders.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 117.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 119.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 121.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 123.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

political statement, did I have the right to say they couldn't? I might argue against it, but there was no reasonable argument against just looking at a limited option."¹⁵⁶ General Clark was in a tough position because he previously advised the same civilian leaders that Milosevic would yield to the threat of air strikes, and he did not. Based on his previous behavior of active promotion for airpower options, it was out of character for General Clark not to advise NATO leaders that the plan they sought to execute was contrary to sound military doctrine and judgment. In the end, General Clark supported gradual escalation, the use of air strikes to send a message, and no precise linkages to ensure that this was a viable strategy. Despite his claims of avoiding Vietnam, the commander proposed, supported, and then failed to properly advise against a similar air strategy.

The threat of air strikes was made to Milosevic in hopes that he would back down, but he did not. After Serb forces concentrated in Kosovo, Clark's advice to Secretary of State Madeline Albright was: "We put NATO's credibility on the line. We have to follow through and make it work. There's no real alternative now."¹⁵⁷ This statement supports the idea that the unspoken objective for Allied Force was to justify the existence and solidarity of NATO. The international consensus opinion was that Milosevic's behavior was unacceptable, and a military option was the most likely solution. The only military vehicle available was that of NATO, if the U.S. was to play a role. There was a moral imperative to intervene, however, long-term European stability with U.S. influence was the larger strategic goal. These convoluted objectives over Kosovo fueled a questionable military strategy. Personnel assigned to select targets experienced friction because they were unsure how to make airpower defend NATO's credibility or how to get bombs to stop ethnic cleansing in Albanian villages.

The strategy of punitive bombing was made worse by announcing the plan to the enemy. The announced plan entailed a couple of days of air strikes to show NATO resolve with no use of ground troops.¹⁵⁸ That was the plan. There was no other plan. The desired effect was that Milosevic would "come to his senses" and the war would end.¹⁵⁹ Unfortunately, NATO planned

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 125.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 171.

¹⁵⁸ Clark, 208.

¹⁵⁹ Senate, *Statement of General Klaus Naumann German Army, Former Chairman NATO Military Committee before the Armed Services Committee*, 3 November 1999, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 7 February 2000, available from <http://www.usia.gov/admin/013/nea406.htm>. The

a two-day operation and Milosevic had a war plan to resist NATO air strikes while completing ethnic cleansing under the cover of weather, forest, and close proximity to the Albanians.¹⁶⁰

Thus, one can argue that those responsible for selecting targets did not have a coherent strategy with which to form their deliberations and recommendations.¹⁶¹ On the 55th day of the war, General Michael Short, the Joint Force Air Component Commander, stated: “I don’t think we are getting paid to fight an air campaign. I think we are getting paid to provide the appearance of an air campaign. I just hope there are negotiations going on somewhere, but if there are I don’t know about them.”¹⁶² Short’s statement illustrates that the air component had limited insight, if any, into the political and diplomatic effects of his operations. But perhaps that was to be expected because General Clark also was asking questions of his political superior’s about objectives and the desired end state, just several days into the bombing campaign.¹⁶³

Desirability

To answer the question “Is it desirable to strike the target?” requires a logical connection between target destruction and victory. This was very difficult to determine for Operation Allied force because there was no coherent strategy, there were no clearly defined objectives focusing military efforts, and there was no clear authority making final decisions on what was actually

OPLANs for OAF had been developed in the fall of 1998. Both ingredients, the Limited Air Response and the Phased Air Operation, had been designated to meet the objective to bring Milosevic back to the negotiation table. When we began the air strikes, however, we faced an opponent who had accepted war whereas the NATO nations had accepted an operation.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Maj Michael V. Smith, interviewed by the author, 28 May 2001. Smith worked in the Combined Air Operations Center, Vicenza AB, Italy during Operation Allied Force and participated in strategy and targeting. He stated that on Day 41 the targeting cell did not know what the military objectives were for the bombing. The targeting cell was reduced to formulating objectives by transcribing verbal statements made by President Clinton during a news conference.

¹⁶² Ibid. Smith noted Lt Gen Short’s comment during a briefing about an Information Attack plan briefing at Vicenza AB, Italy on the 55th day of the operation.

¹⁶³ Clark, 216-18. NATO Secretary General Solana asked several questions of Gen Clark a couple of days into the bombing. “What can you do to stop the humanitarian outrage on the ground? Clark answered: “Nothing more than we are doing now.” Solana: “You must do more.” Also see 224 for a statement from Clark on 29 March 1999: “No consensus had emerged on the ultimate objective of NATO’s efforts, or the extent of our resolve to prevail.”

desirable. NATO's strategy to send a signal with minimum force did not conform to a dedicated strategy and was contrary to established Air Force doctrine.

It was impossible to determine the desirability of individual targets without a clear strategy. Politicians unfamiliar with specifics of the bombing strategy were approving targets. General Clark was the only one who knew the plan, and weeks into the bombing campaign, he was still articulating his desires.¹⁶⁴ The result was random targeting guided by the few targets that were suitable to the consensus of NATO politicians. Targeting planners in the CAOC at Vicenza called the operation "a nuisance bombing campaign."¹⁶⁵ Phillip Meilinger argues that "selecting objectives to strike or influence is the essence of air strategy."¹⁶⁶ If so, The North Atlantic Council lacked "essence" since it did not state the political objectives for Operation Allied Force until 12 April 1999, nineteen days into the campaign.

The lack of a strategy and objectives to focus military efforts was evident on the third day of the operation when Javier Solana, Secretary-General of NATO tried to calm public concerns over the length of the bombing campaign. He feared that killing Serbian troops would enrage the Serbians into stiffer resistance thereby lengthening the conflict. Therefore, NATO spokesman Jamie Shea stated: "We are not going to systematically target troops but we are going to systematically target the heavy artillery and tanks and the equipment without which the troops would not be able to carry out their brutal repression."¹⁶⁷ Since when does a soldier need a tank to rape or kill? A Serbian soldier with a gun and a match could operate with precision among the Albanians.

The military desire to strike Serbian forces to stop ethnic cleansing was in conflict with three influences. First, NATO civilian leaders did not want to provoke Serbians into a prolonged conflict. Second, NATO civilian leaders wanted to avoid collateral damage to maintain political support. Third, it was not feasible for airpower to stop Serb forces in close proximity to Albanians and maintain a favorable international opinion or alliance solidarity. Targeteers were very frustrated.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Clark, 252.

¹⁶⁵ Maj Smith, interview.

¹⁶⁶ Phillip S. Meilinger, Colonel USAF, *10 Propositions Regarding Air Power* (Washington D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1995), 13.

¹⁶⁷ Clark, 208.

¹⁶⁸ Maj Smith, interview.

The desirability of targets was determined by consensus, which added to friction in the process.¹⁶⁹ Ideally, the military commander, General Clark, would have the authority to resolve problems. That was not the case and this lack of authority made determining the desirability of targets a consensus-seeking event. Although this is a process issue, lack of a central authority figure affected the determination of desirable targets and that created friction.

Feasibility

Airpower lacked the capability to strike particular targets during Operation Allied Force because of technical shortfalls, weather, and international law. Airpower advocates have claimed airpower can touch any target anytime, anywhere.¹⁷⁰ In contrast, air operations in Kosovo proved that predictions of pinpoint destruction can be overrated and such misperceptions contributed to friction in the target nomination and approval process.

Technical shortfalls inhibited airpower from striking targets deemed desirable by both military and civilian leaders. Moreover, airpower seeking to limit collateral damage requires a great deal of information to be effective. The most glaring problem was a lack of adequate information to strike Serbian troops in Kosovo. Airpower was unable to target hidden troops in the tree-covered mountains and was hindered by the effects of camouflage, concealment, and deception. General Clark claimed shortly after the cease-fire that NATO had destroyed or damaged 93 tanks, 153 armored personnel carriers, 339 military vehicles, and 389 artillery pieces.¹⁷¹ These numbers appear to have been significantly inflated, but the larger point is that these were largely irrelevant to stopping ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.¹⁷² General Clark believed that targeting ground troops was feasible despite contrary advice from Lt. General Short and General John Jumper, the commander of U.S. Air Forces Europe.¹⁷³ General Clark's contrary

¹⁶⁹ Clark, 249.

¹⁷⁰ Meilinger, 13. Col Meilinger asserts: "Airpower can be directed against almost anything. The Gulf War showed that digging deeply and using tons of steel and concrete will not guarantee protection from precision penetration bombs.

¹⁷¹ Dana Priest, "United NATO Front Was Divided Within," *Washington Post*, 21 September 1999, A1.

¹⁷² Timothy L. Thomas, "Kosovo and the Current Myth of Information Superiority," *Parameters*, Spring 2000, 13-29. Reviews in *Aviation Week and Space Technology* and *U.S. News and World Report* showed significantly lower numbers of tanks destroyed and was likely as low as thirteen.

¹⁷³ Clark, 243. General Clark recounts a discussion with Lt. General Short concerning obvious difficulty striking ground forces. Short stated: "Boss, you show me the targets, and we'll strike 'em." Clark notes that he was relying upon the Air Force to find the targets. At various times

expectations that troops could be targeted led to his providing poor advice to NATO leaders and subsequent friction as the conflict continued.¹⁷⁴

The inability to assess accurately damage also caused friction in the targeting nomination and approval process. Even if a bomb hit its target, there was a delay of several hours or even days to confirm that it had been functionally destroyed. It was therefore difficult to convey to Allied political leaders a clear sense of the battle damage results.¹⁷⁵ This influenced the targeting process when targets were listed for repeat strikes, or if leaders were trying to articulate the influence of bombing results. The delay in accurate battle damage assessments should have been comprehended and briefed to political leaders before the first bomb was dropped. Because General Clark advocated a punishment strategy against Milosevic, he should have understood the inherent uncertainties and ambiguities of such an approach.

Weather adversely influenced bombing efforts on thirty-nine days of Operation Allied Force, causing the cancellation of more than fifty percent of the strike sorties.¹⁷⁶ The cancellation of strikes that prolonged the conflict, combined with the ineffectiveness of airpower to stop ethnic cleansing, resulted in repeated calls from political officials frustrated by the lack of progress in the bombing campaign.¹⁷⁷ Cloud cover created opportunities for Serbians to conduct ethnic cleansing, as well as military operations. To avoid friction between leaders required better planning and advice by Clark. April has typically been a month of rain in the Balkans. When political leaders asked Clark for a recommendation as to when to bring diplomatic action to a head and potentially have to execute an air campaign, they probably should have gotten a recommendation to wait until early May when the skies are typically clear.

Accepted rules of international law and just war can be very difficult to adhere to when attempting to execute a punishment strategy. Many desirable targets simply were not feasible. The frustrating aspect of this targeting issue is that the feasibility constraints were not fully

during the pre-planning and actual execution, Lt. General Short and General Jumper (p. 123) both explained to General Clark that striking camouflaged troops and tanks was difficult if not impossible.

¹⁷⁴ Clark, 218.

¹⁷⁵ Clark, 225.

¹⁷⁶ General Wesley Clark, "General Clark on Kosovo: Lessons for the Future," lecture, Brookings Institution, 8 June 2000. Cloud cover in the region was greater than fifty percent for more than seventy percent of the time.

evaluated prior to embarking upon the use of force. The situation was made worse by clever Serbians who parked tanks between Kosovar apartment complexes and houses to shield themselves from air attack. They clearly understood the fragile nature of the alliance and its goal of avoiding collateral damage.

The result of technical limitations in battlefield awareness, a cloudy environment, and the constraints of international law inhibited airpower from striking Yugoslav ground forces that were conducting the ethnic cleansing.¹⁷⁸ Roughly 800,000 Kosovars were displaced into surrounding mountains and forests while Serbian forces were basically unscathed.¹⁷⁹

Suitability

Efforts to predict unwanted or unacceptable consequences for nominated targets during Allied Force were contentious because of the urgency required to stop ethnic cleansing, the close proximity of civilians to desired targets, and the many differing opinions involved in the approval process. The fact that the military leaders failed to advise their civilian superiors of these factors added to the difficulty and friction.¹⁸⁰

Decisions concerning the suitability of targets caused military leaders to modify airpower doctrine. This caused friction between military and political leaders. U.S. Air Force doctrine prescribes destroying air defenses to provide for air superiority. However, in Kosovo there was not enough time to do this.¹⁸¹ The IADS targets were not as suitable because of the time constraints driven by ethnic cleansing. This caused pilots to drop bombs from higher altitudes than desired, which made identification more difficult and collateral damage more likely. Pilots

¹⁷⁷ Clark, 218. Secretary General Solana indicated that he was receiving pressure from NATO leaders and he passed that on to General Clark.

¹⁷⁸ General Clark, transcript of interview with Bret Hume, Fox News Sunday, 27 May 2001.

¹⁷⁹ Clark, 267.

¹⁸⁰ Clark, 424.

¹⁸¹ Hunter Keeter, "Precision Capability may Spur Revision in Airpower Doctrine," *Defense Daily 204*, Potomac, 21 October 1999, 1. Adm Murphy is quoted as saying: "You can't do everything with standoff weapons...We never neutralized the Integrated Air Defense System (IADS); we weren't any safer on day 78 than we were on day one," he said. "The doctrine calls for neutralizing the IADS before taking on the targets that count (such as roads, bridges and headquarters structures). If we followed that doctrine to the letter we would have pounded nothing but IADS for 78 days."

were placed at increased risk of having to avoid IADS and/or defend against them in order to hit the targets that might generate the quickest positive results.¹⁸²

To complicate matters, Serbians placed heavy equipment near the civilian infrastructure and counted on moral and legal traditions for protection.¹⁸³ This tactic caused approval authorities to ascertain the suitability of target destruction given a predicted risk to civilians. The Geneva Conventions prohibit the bombing of civilian buildings or even dual civilian/military sites if the “incidental loss of civilian life...would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage of the attack.” Citing those rules, human rights groups questioned the legality of attacking party buildings, television studios, and power stations.¹⁸⁴ In addition to avoiding a war crimes indictment or just massive political criticism, leaders had to concern themselves with the court of public opinion in NATO countries. This concern influenced decisions about the suitability of individual targets.

Some questioned NATO leaders about the intended effect of the bombing.¹⁸⁵ Comments by some military leaders hinted that Serbian civilians and their quality of life were the unstated target.¹⁸⁶ Lt. General Short stated in an interview during the war:

“If you wake up in the morning and you have no power to your house and no gas to your stove and the bridge you take to work is down and will be lying in the Danube for the next twenty years, then you begin to ask, ‘Hey, Sloba, what’s this all about? How much more of this do we have to withstand?’ And at some point you make the transition from applauding Serb machismo against the world to thinking what your country is going to look like if this continues.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Senate, *Lessons Learned From Military Operations and Relief Efforts in Kosovo*. Statement by Lt Gen Short before the Committee on Armed Services, 106th Congress, 1st sess., 21 Oct 1999..

¹⁸³ Clark, 276.

¹⁸⁴ “Bombing by Committee,” *Balkan Crisis News*, 20 September 1999, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 1 January 2001, available from <http://www.refugees.new/en/daily/pr990920.html>.

¹⁸⁵ “U.N. Court Examines NATO’s Yugoslavia War,” *New York Times*, 29 Dec 1999, A5. The chief war crimes prosecutor for the United Nations reviewed the conduct of NATO pilots and their commanders during the bombing campaign against Yugoslavia. The staff of the prosecutor Carla Del Ponte, compiled a report on the air strikes at the urging of several “interested parties,” including a group of Russian lawmakers and a Canadian law professor.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ William Drozdiak, “Commander of Air War Says Kosovo Victory Near,” *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs News Release*, 25 May 1999, 2, on-line, Internet, 1 December 1999, available from <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupb/bbl/archive/1999/05/254051999-01.htm>.

As a general rule, military commanders should avoid such statements, particularly when a punishment strategy is being employed, in order to limit misinterpretation of proper military behavior. Accidental collateral damage may be interpreted as purposeful thus undermining legitimacy. Misperception could bring into question the suitability of targets, and this may influence civilian leaders to disapprove desirable and feasible targets to ensure that public opinion does not completely undermine their legitimacy.

If civilian leaders are going to approve targets, then pre-arranged standards would help to reduce friction in the target approval process. Planners would then know what to expect before the campaign begins and provide better pre-hostility assessments to civilian leaders. There are different ideas about the application of airpower and, as part of the strategy, should have been pre-decided. Standards will likely change after the war starts, but at least there is a baseline from which to operate.

The Players

The relationships between the key players for Operation Allied Force were complicated and definitely a source of friction in the targeting process. General Clark was the linchpin throughout the entire process. He had to deal with the nineteen governments of NATO. In addition, the United States and France often opposed each other on political issues. He also dealt with NATO military leaders as he sought to strike high-value targets closer to Belgrade, “while a number of foreign ministries urged a different strategy of cautious and carefully measured escalation.”¹⁸⁸ The war was in the hands of the politicians and the process of target approval required a consensus. Although consensus is endemic to coalition warfare, it was a difficult situation.

General Clark was the senior ranking military official for Operation Allied Force. As SACEUR he had both military and political responsibilities. This blurred the classic distinctions described by Samuel Huntington between politicians and military leaders. Arguably, Clark was given responsibility to ensure that political leaders understood their proper roles in a NATO-sponsored air campaign against Serbia, but he could not make his view of propriety prevail. In fact, General Clark expressed dismay when he found out two days into the campaign that

¹⁸⁸ Clark, xx.

President Clinton was going to personally approve every target.¹⁸⁹ The situation got worse from there as other governments entered the approval process.

The NATO leadership structure was notoriously difficult to work with but General Clark expected more autonomy than he was actually granted. Clark's memoirs reveals the "secret of NATO operations: NATO commanders were like puppets, with two or six or sometimes dozens of strings being pulled from behind the scenes by the nations themselves, regardless of the formalistic commitment of forces."¹⁹⁰ Clark thus had two problems. First, he was the leader of a coalition of nineteen sovereign forces. Second, those forces were conducting the most political of all types of warfare: limited war for tangential interests.

General Clark was not the only military member frustrated with the players involved. Lt. General Short and General Hugh Shelton, CJCS, both spoke of the frustrations of clearing targets with the other NATO governments, particularly over striking electrical power grids.¹⁹¹ The French government in particular proved recalcitrant in approving sensitive targets.¹⁹² Adding to the tension, General Clark believed that his command "was not receiving the support it should."¹⁹³

For the military to get target approval required a great deal of behind the scenes political maneuvering among the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Department of Defense, and other NATO governments. General Clark stated that there were personal tensions between himself and Secretary of Defense William Cohen.¹⁹⁴ In an interview with Bret Hume, General Clark noted that there were inherent professional tensions because of differing "important" perspectives. However, he also believes that the tensions between himself and Secretary Cohen were personal.¹⁹⁵ Clark argues that he did not receive the total support from his superior he felt he required to do his job.

¹⁸⁹ Clark, 202.

¹⁹⁰ Clark, 399.

¹⁹¹ Clark, 240.

¹⁹² Clark, 236.

¹⁹³ Clark, 267.

¹⁹⁴ Clark, 113, 335.

¹⁹⁵ General Clark, transcript of interview with Brit Hume, *Fox News Sunday*, 27 May 2001, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 13 June 2001, available from <http://fn.emediamillworks.com>. See *Fox News Sunday*, 27 May 2001.

The combination of a poor strategy and the complex agenda of multiple players made for a less than ideal situation for target nomination and approval. Moreover, the ad hoc process of interaction failed to reduce friction.

The Process

With NATO or other type of coalition warfare likely in the future, command channels and approval processes can add additional friction to the approval process. Since friction during OAF was the impetus for this research, it is important to note that Allied Force commanders dealt with a complicated parallel command structure that inhibited unity of command. General Clark reported through two chains of command. On the NATO side, he reported through the military committee to the North Atlantic Council headed by Javier Solana. General Clark reported to the Chairman of the JCS and the Secretary of Defense for the U.S. aspects of his command. General Clark stated: “This is about as complex a command structure as anyone would ever fear to see. But we had it and worked it.”¹⁹⁶

Description

The process adopted for Operation Allied Force was also a significant source of friction. The fact that the process was ad hoc is not necessarily bad, however, it did not take into account all of the relevant factors and was not adequate. Paul Strickland, a participant in the Allied Force targeting process, argues that the root cause for friction was a lack of a doctrinally based process:

From the start of Allied Force, the CAOC was unable to produce a timely and accurate air tasking order. The primary cause was the absence of a doctrinally based joint/combined targeting guidance and approval process. For the first forty days of the air campaign, target lists, instead of target sets based on desired effects against Serbian forces, were approved and disapproved daily. This procedure was anathema to the ideal envisioned in U. S. doctrine.¹⁹⁷

His point is well taken from a U.S. perspective. But, this was a NATO operation and not subject to U.S. Air Force doctrine. Nevertheless, there appears to have been a lack of NATO doctrine on

¹⁹⁶ General Wesley Clark, “General Clark on Kosovo: Lessons for the Future,” lecture, Brookings Institution, 8 June 2000.

¹⁹⁷ Strickland, 23.

the subject. In this regard, it seems odd that the commander of NATO, General Clark, did not know that presidential review of targets would be required until two nights into the war.¹⁹⁸

There were fifty-three approved targets for the beginning of the war. After some unfortunate Albanian civilian deaths due to collateral damage and subsequent international outcry, the leaders of France, Britain, and the United States demanded target veto authority.¹⁹⁹ Air Force doctrine does not specify political approval as a requirement but does state: “target development includes validation of the target and nomination to the appropriate authority.”²⁰⁰ Because NATO has no formalized procedures for target selection, the U.S. Air Force generated ninety-nine percent of all targets.²⁰¹

Comprehensiveness

A comprehensive process that considered all relevant inputs would not meet the requirement for timeliness, particularly when there is mass murder taking place that requires action to inhibit. With that imperative considered, the process adopted by NATO attempted to achieve comprehensiveness, but failed. The process was inhibited because the strategy was flawed--it could not accomplish the goal of stopping ethnic cleansing. Nevertheless, even assuming the strategy had been appropriate, there were two major process issues that contributed to friction.

The first issue was a distinct lack of airpower expertise among any player in the approval process. The U.S. channel required a complete analysis of each individual target—location, military impact, possible personnel casualties, possible collateral damages, risks if the weapons missed the target, and so forth. This analysis had to be conducted for different types of weapons until the specific weapon and warhead size were discovered that would destroy with the least adverse impact. After the military review accomplished by General Clark and the Joint Staff in the Pentagon, the nominated target was forwarded to President Clinton for his approval. No one in this approval chain had any particular expertise in airpower. Major General Charles Link, USAF, Retired, has suggested that one of the lessons of Allied Force was the need to:

¹⁹⁸ Clark, 203.

¹⁹⁹ “Bombing by Committee,” *Balkan Crisis News*, 20 September 1999, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 1 January 2001, available from <http://www.refugees.new/en/daily/pr990920.html>.

²⁰⁰ AFP 14-210, *USAF Intelligence Targeting Guide* (U), 1 February 1998, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 3 March 2001, available from <http://www.fas.org/irp/dodir/usaf/afpam14-210/part03.htm>.

²⁰¹ Clark, 427.

place air campaigns in the hands of an ‘Airman’ commander. Put that commander in direct dialogue with the political authorities so that his specialized competence can be brought to bear in the planning phase as well as the execution. Under this process, military means are appropriately subordinate to political ends, but political leaders deserve expert advice—direct from the airman’s mouth.²⁰²

The second issue is concerned with timeliness and consensus. The inclusion of political perspectives from Britain, France, and the United States took too much time.²⁰³ This clearly represented a case where the pursuit of comprehensiveness was the enemy of timeliness. Political deliberations between the Secretaries of State and Defense left very few targets to strike. The political gauntlet through which targets had to pass was comprehensive. However, the final product was so watered-down that lacked the effectiveness possible if a single approval authority made the decisions. Handel notes that:

Jomini comes very close to discussing the pitfalls of war waged by committees or complex bureaucracies – that is, by ponderous organizations in search of consensus. To their detriment, the actions taken by such organizations often represent the lowest common denominator acceptable to all involved in the decision-making process and, as a result, seldom entail much risk – an element essential for success in war.”²⁰⁴

Accuracy

The U.S. Air Force advertises “information superiority” over one’s adversary as a core capability. The effort to achieve such superiority played havoc with the requirement for timeliness. Moreover, there were so many people and agencies inputting information that it hampered the ability of participants to monitor the correctness of information. The accidental bombing of the Chinese Embassy was a glaring example of poor accuracy in the process. This happened despite monumental efforts to get accurate information to preclude collateral damage.

“Minimizing collateral damage seems now to be the norm since U.S. military forces are so adept at destroying selected targets while avoiding others in the vicinity.”²⁰⁵ To accomplish this, the President required precision photography and sophisticated modeling of the explosive

²⁰² Major General Charles D. Link, USAF, Retired, “Airpower?—Why Not?” *Daedalus Flyer* 39, no. 2, Summer 1999, 10.

²⁰³ “Bombing by Committee,” *Balkan Crisis News*, 20 September 1999, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 1 January 2001, available from <http://www.refugees.new/en/daily/pr990920.html>.

²⁰⁴ Handel, 257.

patterns for each weapon on each target to project damage to structures, windows, and even eardrums. To avoid significant risk to civilians, the President directed adjusted delivery angles and weapons loads on approved targets, and for others, he simply denied strike approval.²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, even he could not eliminate mistakes. Even the eyeballs of pilots caused errors. Collateral damage occurred when pilots bombed a convoy of tractors believing them to be soldiers only to find out later that they hit innocent civilians. Many would write this off to the “fog of war;” however, at the root it reflected an inaccuracy in the target information process.

Timeliness

Timeliness is often diametrically opposed to accuracy and comprehensiveness. General Clark noted that this aspect of targeting contributed to friction: “We were still suffering from a shortage of approved targets [on day four] and had to press Washington and NATO for more.”²⁰⁷ In an effort to improve the timeliness of striking targets, Clark ordered his air component commander to launch missions against targets that had not yet been approved. These missions would be recalled if the targets were not approved in time.²⁰⁸ This added risk to pilots and aircraft causing avoidable friction.

NATO had more airplanes than it did targets. Because sortie counts were similar to body counts from Vietnam, unnecessary sorties were launched and were often tasked with different parts of the same target, i.e. both ends of a building.²⁰⁹ Lt. Col. Paul Strickland, a participant in the targeting process, noted: “for the initial forty days of the campaign, numerous insignificant targets were repeatedly bombed into rubble due to a lack of freshly approved targets.”²¹⁰

Conclusion

Several items contributed to friction in the target nomination and approval process for Operation Allied Force. The problems facing NATO were very complex. Attempting to solve the unique political and military issues associated with Kosovo using an airpower-only campaign

²⁰⁵ Col H.D. Polumbo, “Effects-based Air Campaign Planning: The Diplomatic Way to Solve Airpower’s Role in the 21st Century,” (Research Report Abstract Number 6.4 Tier 1, Colorado Springs, Co.: USAF Academy, April 2000), 52.

²⁰⁶ Clark, 239.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, xxi, 215-216, 225.

²⁰⁸ Priest, A1.

²⁰⁹ Smith, interview.

represented a flawed strategy. Moreover, the selected strategy was poorly prepared and poorly communicated to people trying to implement it. When the airpower-only punishment strategy was directed, several problems developed in the targeting process that had not been predicted. Perhaps more well established procedures would have reduced friction, but this was not the whole problem. The key issue is how to achieve timely effectiveness and reduce friction. In his article, *Kosovo and the Current Myth of Information Superiority*, Timothy Thomas noted:

“There should be a serious effort at the State Department and in the National Security Council to right some apparent wrongs in our decision-making process. Wouldn’t it be wise to study why we failed to develop a campaign plan beyond the first five days? And shouldn’t we study why we put our operational art in the hands of politicians who tried to dictate the pace, scope, and rules of engagement, and perhaps even the target selection process? Wouldn’t this be better than simply developing new technological solutions?”²¹¹

John Warden summarized the Kosovo air campaign thusly:

“The war probably went on much longer than it had to. There were probably thirty or forty good targets in Belgrade. The whole war could reasonably have been done in less than ten days—with fewer sorties, fewer attacks, fewer targets. The refugee flow never would have happened. There is a feeling that the humane way to conduct military operation is gradually, but you end up with the opposite effects. You end up killing more people.”²¹²

He identifies many of the causes of friction in a short summary. If friction occurs because of differing ideas that are resolved properly, that may be healthy. However, if friction occurs because of a poor strategy that does not account for weak technology, adverse weather, or the true nature of the conflict, then dysfunctional execution is sure to follow.

²¹⁰ Strickland, 26.

²¹¹ Timothy Thomas, “Kosovo and the Current Myth of Information Superiority,” *Parameters*, Spring 2000, 13-29.

²¹² Richard J. Newman, “Vietnam’s Forgotten Lessons,” *U.S. News Online*, cover story; on-line, Internet, 1 May 2000, available from <http://www.usnews.com/usnews./issue/000501/military.htm>.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined the relationship between senior political and military leaders during the target nomination and approval process. It has sought to answer the question: “How should friction between the U.S. National Command Authority and senior military commanders, that arises during the target nomination and approval process, be effectively reconciled?” In pursuit of that answer, the study described the major factors influencing target nomination and approval and examined them in three historical cases to determine sources of friction.

The process of nominating and approving targets requires interaction between civilian and military leaders in the form of advice and approval that starts with a comprehensive strategy and continues with operations down to the level of tactical execution. This study evaluated three essential areas of decision-making vital to the targeting process for their contribution and propensity to cause friction. The three factors are: the desired effect of attacking each target (which is a function of strategy), the players involved in selecting and approving targets, and the formal process by which targets are nominated and approved. Each factor is complex in isolation and even more complex in practice because the three factors are interdependent.

The first essential factor facing decision-makers is to determine the desired effect of attacking each target and what effect striking the target(s) will have that contributes to ultimate accomplishment of the political goal. Typically, the act of striking a target or targets is made with a specific goal in mind designed to provide a particular effect. Linking the means available to the outcome desired is the essence of strategy. Therefore, this study evaluated the desired effect of destroying or neutralizing targets and how that effect contributed to accomplishing the objectives designed to achieve victory. To delve further into the intricacies of target nomination and approval, the study addressed three substantive issues that leaders making decisions should address. First, is it desirable to

strike the target? Second, is striking the target feasible and, if so, at an acceptable level of risk? And third, is the target suitable? The answers to each of these questions highlighted areas of potential friction.

Targeting Factors

The single most significant factor causing friction in the targeting process was the overall strategy with its commensurate mechanisms designed to obtain the stated objectives. The failure of military and civilian leaders to develop and agree upon a coherent strategy led to contradictions that caused friction in the target nomination and approval process. The Vietnam case shows that the strategy of gradually escalatory punitive strikes directed by the NCA did not achieve the stated objectives. The strategy was implemented despite contrary advice from the JCS. Targets that Johnson and McNamara considered desirable for political reasons proved to be ineffectual and militarily insignificant. The strategy selected for Operation Allied Force also failed to establish a clear linkage between the military means available and the political ends desired, again causing much friction between civilian and military leaders. In contrast, the strategies and linked objectives for Linebackers I/II and the Gulf War were clear and coherent. There was negligible friction between civilian and military leaders during the planning and execution of all. It is perhaps noteworthy that punishment strategies applied in a gradual fashion tend to produce the greatest friction. This is perhaps true because of the inherent ambiguities of coercion.

Contention over the selected strategy was not the only factor causing friction. Many targets that were desirable could not be struck because they were not feasible. Most of this friction developed when airpower could not deliver what military leaders seemingly promised or political leaders expected. In all three cases, poor weather caused the greatest friction because it inhibited aerial platforms from delivering their weapons. Although some platforms have a true all-weather capability, most do not. During Operation Allied Force, the influence of weather on targeting effectiveness was made more acute by the time sensitivity of the objectives. The Gulf War had similar problems with weather canceling missions; however, because the ground forces were still building-up, the overall effect did not cause significant friction.

Shortfalls in technology also caused problems when the weather was acceptable. Some desirable and suitable targets were not feasible because of poor intelligence information, and lack of delivery accuracy. Despite previous claims of “information superiority,” Operation Allied Force participants were unable to target Serbian ground forces camouflaged or hidden in forested areas, which seriously degraded airpower’s effectiveness. In this respect, both Vietnam and Kosovo presented difficult targeting environments in that both had adverse weather, jungle, and collateral damage concerns compounded by the enemy intermixing with the general population. The Gulf War, on the other hand, demonstrated the utility of airpower in an environment much more conducive to its application. This benign setting reduced friction.

Technical limitations adversely affected targeting efforts in all three conflicts. Early bombing efforts in Vietnam did not have laser-guided precision munitions available. Friction was prevalent because of poor effectiveness resulting in significant losses. This was due both to the numbers of aircraft required to strike a single target and to the additional missions that had to be re-flown against the same target. Later efforts in Vietnam included precision-guided weapons leading to improved results, which enabled pilots to strike targets that were militarily significant but had been previously restricted due to collateral damage concerns. The early problems with bombing during the Vietnam War presaged airpower’s difficulties with targeting Scud missiles during the Gulf War. In both cases, airpower was neither equipped nor trained to deal adequately with the threat that political leaders required to be neutralized.

The Players

The second key ingredient influencing the target approval process is the decisionmakers themselves. The politician typically seeks flexibility and ambiguity, while the military leader often prefers decisiveness and clarity of objectives and is uncomfortable with the ambiguity preferred by political leaders. Military leaders strive for efficiency and consider it essential to accomplishing military operations.

The root cause of friction is expectations that are not fulfilled. This can perhaps be mitigated by preparation and education. Clausewitz noted:

Only if statesmen look to certain military moves and actions to produce effects that are foreign to their nature do political decisions influence

operations for the worse...Time and again that has happened, which demonstrates that a certain grasp of military affairs is vital for those in charge of general policy.²¹³

Given Clausewitz's advice, Johnson and McNamara should have listened to their military experts during the Vietnam War. Similarly, General Clark should have listened to his airpower experts about airpower's limitations and not have told civilian leaders that airpower could solve the problems in Kosovo with a two-day bombing campaign. Moreover, he should have designed and implemented a NATO target approval process, agreed to and practiced, before the strategy was adopted. A coherent, agreed upon strategy can focus efforts and reduce differences in opinion. A clear strategy may also free political leaders to delegate targeting responsibilities, with appropriate guidance, to competent military leaders. A military leader should be trained along with political leaders to balance military and political necessities to get the most efficient effort during a conflict. This clearly occurred during the Gulf War with General Powell's actions regarding the Al Firdos bunker incident and efforts to attack Scud missile launchers.

The problem of targeting Scuds during the Gulf War was indicative of a classic civil-military divergence of perspective. Schwarzkopf viewed Scuds as militarily insignificant as long as they were conventionally tipped, while the NCA considered targeting Scuds a political imperative to prevent the break-up of the coalition.

The study of Operation Allied Force indicated the complex relationship of coalition warfare within NATO. General Clark expected greater autonomy in making targeting decisions, which he did not receive. Clark's memoirs reveal the "secret of NATO operations: NATO commanders were like puppets, with two or six or sometimes dozens of strings being pulled from behind the scenes by the nations themselves, regardless of the formalistic commitment of forces."²¹⁴ For the military to get target approval required a great deal of behind the scenes political maneuvering among the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Department of Defense, and other NATO governments. The complex agenda of the different NATO members, combined with poor strategy, caused

²¹³ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, Nj.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 608.

²¹⁴ General Wesley Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001), 399.

the target nomination and approval process to be more difficult than expected. Moreover, the ad hoc process of interaction failed to reduce friction.

The Process

The processes used in all three cases were ad hoc, that is, they were developed and implemented extemporaneously with little or no doctrine used to guide them. The processes used during Vietnam and Kosovo involved having politicians make tactical level military decisions that led directly to friction due to the inefficient use of time and resources, according to the military. During Linebackers I/II and the Gulf War, politicians avoided the minute military details of targeting and chose to delegate responsibility with appropriate guidance. There was little to no friction in these situations.

Failure to get and use proper advice on the employment of airpower was a cause for friction in the targeting process. Both Johnson and McNamara disregarded expert military advice concerning targeting issues. The process for Operation Allied Force likewise failed to provide expert airpower advice to the president for his approval decisions. Allied Force also had to endure a multitude of approval authorities with veto power. The resulting target list was a consensus product consisting of least-risk targets. This was not an efficient way to operate, and it led to friction.

The fact that an ad hoc process was used is not a condemnation of the practice. To the contrary, an ad hoc process is probably best suited to deal with the unique complexities of each conflict. However, the processes used in Vietnam and Kosovo failed to account for all of the relevant factors, which caused friction in the targeting process.

Reconciling Friction

Strategy

The path to reduced friction in targeting begins with a coherent strategy that links the desired end-state with the means available. Expectations for the conduct of that strategy should be realistic and understood by decisionmakers. Experts on the subject of airpower are probably best suited to ensure that both the strategy and expectations are

proper. The players can also mitigate friction in the formulation of strategy by understanding the particular limitations of airpower in that conflict.

Players

The ambiguity and flexibility sought by political leaders should not prevent implementation of a sound, detailed, and structured strategy. Military leaders must likewise be prepared to yield some military effectiveness in order to accommodate political realities and requirements. Military doctrine tends to focus on words like “decisiveness” without properly considering real-world applications. This is not to say that military leaders should not pursue the ideal; however, they should also be prepared to deal with reality. Communications containing information relevant to each player’s perspective must be related before the decision to use force is made. This will mitigate friction.

Process

An ad hoc process is probably the best way to conduct military operations to enable leaders to tailor efforts for the unique characteristics of each conflict. However, this process method tends to lack comprehensiveness and normally leads to a problem with approving targets in a timely manner. To mitigate this problem, there should be a generic procedural framework available to every CINC and political leader that is capable of efficiently identifying the major considerations for a given conflict, even if the NCA chooses to be involved in the approval process.

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