



TARGET CHARACTERISTICS

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In general, there are five characteristics by which targets can be defined: *physical*, *functional*, *cognitive*, *environmental*, and *temporal*. The features of each category are briefly described below.¹

- ✦ Physical Characteristics. These are features that describe what a target *is*. These are discernible to one or more of the five senses or through sensor-derived signatures. These may greatly affect the type and number of weapons, the weapon systems, and the methods or tactics employed against the target.
- ✦ Functional Characteristics. These are features that describe what the target *does* and how it does it. They describe the target's function within the enemy system, how the target or system operates, its level of activity, the status of its functionality, and, in some cases, its importance to the enemy. Functional characteristics are often hard to discern because they most often cannot be directly observed. Reaching plausible conclusions can often entail speculation and much deductive and inductive reasoning.
- ✦ Cognitive Characteristics. Features that describe how some targets *think*, exercise control functions, or otherwise process information. These can be critical to how something is targeted and can be especially important from an effects-based perspective, where [information related capabilities](#) (IRC) are considered. These characteristics can also be critical to targeting an enemy system, since nearly every system possesses some central controlling function, and neutralizing this may be crucial to obtaining the desired behavior. As with functional characteristics, these are often difficult to discern or deduce.
- ✦ Environmental Characteristics. These are features that describe the effect of the environment on the target and its surroundings. These characteristics may also affect the types and numbers of weapons, weapon systems, and the methods or tactics employed against the target.
- ✦ Temporal Characteristics. The factor of time, as a characteristic of a target, describes the targets vulnerability to detection, attack, or other engagement in terms of time available. All potential targets and all targets nominated for attack continually

¹ For more information on target categories, see [JP 3-60, Joint Targeting](#).

change in priority due to the dynamic nature of the evolving operational environment. Many targets may be fleeting and some may be critical to friendly operations. Those that are both fleeting and critical present one of the biggest targeting challenges faced by the joint force. This time factor can help determine when and how to find or engage a target. By comparing this factor to information latency and knowledge of friendly capabilities, the staff can make better recommendations to the commander regarding possible actions.
