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What Cyber Command learned from ISIS operations

By: Mark Pomerleau (/author/mark-pomerleau) 📅 November 29, 2017

When Ash Carter, then the secretary of defense, tasked Cyber Command to turn its skill set against the Islamic State group, it was billed as the young command's first true test.

Since then, Cyber Command leaders learned how to better employ cyber capabilities, Brig. Gen. Timothy Haugh, director of intelligence at Cyber Command, said during a panel at CyberCon hosted by Federal Times in Arlington, Va., Nov. 28.

Chief among those lessons is "how we approach the intelligence problems, how we approach intelligence sharing, understanding the battlespace and also (ensuring) that traditional things like our targeting process were sound and repeatable within the cyber domain," Haugh said.

Many military leaders are careful to stress that cyber operations do not occur in a vacuum and must support the other functions and domains of warfare.

"AFCYBER, the way we look at this is that really cyberspace operations is just a part of an all domain plan," Col. Todd Stratton, director of Air Forces Cyber (forward), said during the panel. "You've got air, sea, land and space as well as the cognitive domain but those primary five warfighting domains, cyberspace is just a part of that."

Stratton said the Air Force's approach is providing full spectrum, all-domain-integrated effects. "What that means is cyber just doesn't stand alone. It's part of a holistic joint campaign plan and it has to be integrated in with a timing and tempo of supported commander," he said. "It isn't just cyber war on its own. It's part of an integrated set of gears ... rather than just cyber war standing on its own."

This mirrors comments from his boss, Maj. Gen. Christopher Weggeman, commander of 24th Air Force/AFCYBER, who told C4ISRNET in an interview last summer that the force doesn't do cyber for cyber's sake.

[*Air Force cyber boss sets early deadline for full operational capability* (<https://www.fifthdomain.com/dod/air-force/2017/09/01/air-force-cyber-boss-sets-early-deadline-for-full-operational-capability/>)]

Moreover, the teams being developed underneath Cyber Command, once delivered to their respective combatant commands, serve those joint force commanders' objectives.

"I try to do this with all the combatant commands, sit down face-to-face: 'Where are we? Are we meeting your requirements?' " CYBERCOM Commander Adm. Michael Rogers told Congress earlier this year. "Cyber Command, in many ways, what we do functions to support others. We exist to enable and support the success of others.

[*Cyber is being normalized with traditional military operations* (<https://www.fifthdomain.com/dod/2017/09/14/cyber-is-being-normalized-with-traditional-operations/>)]

While cyber isn't 100 percent analogous to the other physical domains, Haugh said key pillars are applicable.

"There are obvious differences in terms of the difference in geographic approach – cyber does not present the same clean lines in terms of geography but in terms of understanding how an adversary uses capabilities or vulnerabilities that presents those standard lessons that we've learned from all the other domains of warfare apply," he said.

Haugh noted that the stand up of Joint Task Force-Ares, used to fight the Islamic State, created an operational level headquarters that could bring a cohesive approach to Central Command and be able to be focused on speed, outcomes and integration of the multi-domain fight.

The previous commander of Army Cyber Command and JTF-Ares, Lt. Gen. Edward Cardon, told reporters in 2016 that the task force allows greater command and control for the overall global counter-ISIS collation.

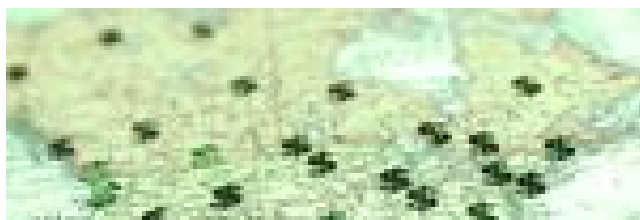
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The partnership between CENTCOM and CYBERCOM has continued to evolve through present, Haugh said, and leaders there have learned how to present options in the context of what Central Command's desired outcomes are.

Stratton's predecessor, Col. Robert "Chipper" Cole, has stated previously how within the JTF-Ares and counter-ISIS effort more broadly, CYBERCOM and CENTCOM have a say on potential targets with a CENTCOM targeting board and a JTF-Ares targeting board in which the cyber personnel have to link up with the CENTCOM personnel.

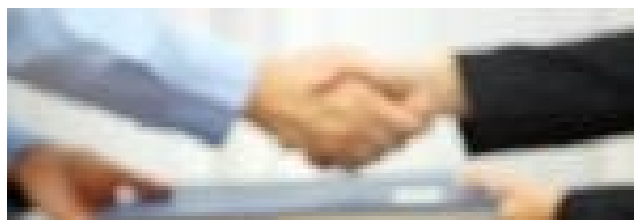
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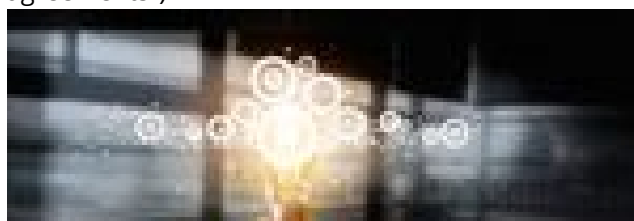
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