**Identify key targets for cognitive domain operations**

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**Introduction** Cognitive domain combat targets refer to the specific role of cognitive domain combat. In cognitive domain combat, compared with combat targets, combat targets solve the problem of precise aiming, that is, to let commanders understand and grasp the precise coordinates of what to hit, where to hit, and to what extent. Only by deeply understanding the connotation and characteristics of cognitive domain combat targets can we accurately find key targets through appearances and thus seize the initiative in future combat.

**The cognitive focus that influences behavioral choices**

The cognitive focus is the "convergence point" of the cognitive subject's multi-dimensional thinking cognition in war activities. As a dynamic factor, it affects the cognitive process and behavioral results. Generally speaking, the cognitive factors that affect individual behavioral choices in war activities mainly include political attribute cognition, interest-related cognition, group belonging cognition, risk loss cognition, emotional orientation cognition, war morality cognition, etc. For war activities and groups or individuals who pay attention to war activities, the cognitive focus that affects their attitudes, tendencies and behaviors is not the same. Judging from the local wars and regional conflicts in the world in recent years, there are obvious differences in the cognitive focus of different groups or individuals. Politicians pay more attention to political attribute cognition and interest-related cognition, those who may intervene in the war pay more attention to risk loss cognition and interest-related cognition, ordinary people pay more attention to interest-related cognition and emotional orientation cognition, and people in other countries outside the region generally pay more attention to war morality cognition and group belonging cognition because their own interests will not be directly lost. In combat practice, foreign militaries are good at targeting the cognitive focus of different objects, accurately planning topics, and pushing related information to induce specific behavioral choices. For example, before the Gulf War, the Hill Norton public relations company fabricated the non-existent "incubator incident" by using Naira, the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the United States, as a "witness" to show the "inhumanity" of the Iraqi army, induce the American people's ethical and moral cognition, and then support the US government to send troops to participate in the Gulf War.

**Style preferences that constrain command decisions**

Cognitive style directly affects decision-making behavior preferences. Cognitive style refers to the typical way of individual cognition, memory, thinking, and problem solving. According to the preference of command decision-making style, commanders can be divided into calm cognitive style and impulsive cognitive style. Commanders with calm cognitive style pay attention to accuracy but not speed in the decision-making process. The quality of the decisions they make is high, but they are prone to fall into the comparison and analysis of various intelligence information sources and overemphasize the accuracy and objectivity of information analysis. Commanders with calm cognitive style are often easily disturbed by the diverse and diverse information stimulation in battlefield cognitive offensive and defensive operations, and their mental energy is easily disturbed and dissipated, which may lead to missed opportunities. Commanders with impulsive cognitive style pay attention to speed but not accuracy. The decision-making reaction speed is fast, but the quality is not high. They are easily emotional and prone to conflict with team members. Commanders with impulsive cognitive style are also prone to over-interpret the ambiguous external security environment, and constantly look for "evidence" to strengthen and verify individual erroneous thinking, narrowing individual attention and leading to command decision-making deviations. In combat practice, foreign armies pay more attention to analyzing the decision-making style of commanders of combat opponents, and then select specific information to influence them psychologically. For example, during the U.S. invasion of Panama, when besieging the hiding place of Panamanian President Noriega, the U.S. military repeatedly played rock and heavy metal music, and used language that stimulated and humiliated Noriega to carry out cognitive and psychological attacks on him, causing Noriega to gradually collapse physically and mentally.

**Backdoor channel to control thinking and cognition**

Once a computer is infected with a "Trojan" virus, it will send a connection request to the hacker control terminal at a specific time. Once the connection is successful, a backdoor channel will be formed, allowing the hacker to control the computer at will. Similarly, the human brain also has a cognitive "backdoor" and may be controlled by others. Cognitive psychologists have found that by sending information to the target object's audio-visual perception channel, carefully pushing information content that the target object recognizes and accepts, catering to the target object's existing experience memory, conforming to the target object's thinking habits, and stimulating the target object's emotional pain points, it is possible to control and interfere with the target object's cognition and promote its instinctive emotional and behavioral reactions. With the support of cutting-edge cognitive science and technology, using the two modes of automatic start and control processing of brain information processing, the target object can easily fall into a "cognitive cocoon". In cognitive domain operations, by immersing individuals in massive amounts of artificially constructed information, and continuously providing them with "evidence" to prove that their judgments and cognitions are "correct". Over time, the individual's cognitive vision becomes smaller and smaller, and the ability to perceive the external environment gradually decreases. Eventually, they will not be able to see the truth of the matter and will be immersed in the "cognitive cocoon" and unable to extricate themselves. When foreign militaries conduct operations in the cognitive domain, they often target their opponents’ cognitive biases on a certain issue and continuously push situational information and intelligence information through various channels to support their opponents’ so-called “correct cognition,” causing errors and deviations in their opponents’ command decisions.

**Sensory stimuli that induce attention**

Effective perceptual stimulation is the first prerequisite for attracting the attention of the target object. The human brain will perceive and react to stimuli within the perceptual range. Cognitive psychology experimental research has found that information such as dynamic, dangerous, relevant, survival safety, and contrast between before and after is more likely to attract the attention of the human brain. In the era of intelligence, the psychological cognitive process of the target object often follows the law of "attracting attention, cultivating interest, actively searching, strengthening memory, actively sharing, and influencing others". In combat, foreign troops often use exclusive revelations, intelligence leaks, authoritative disclosures, on-site connections, and other methods, and cleverly use exaggeration, contrast, association, metaphor, suspense, and contrast to push information that subverts common sense, has cognitive conflicts, and has strong contrasts to attract the attention of the target object. For example, the "Lin Qi rescue incident" created by the US military in the Iraq War and the "Gaddafi Golden Toilet" in the Libyan War mostly choose stories familiar to the audience as the blueprint, hiding the purpose and embedding the viewpoint in the story plot, which attracted the attention of the general public. In addition, the human brain will also process stimuli outside the perceptual range. In recent years, the military of Western countries has attached great importance to the research of subthreshold information stimulation technology, and has developed subthreshold visual information implantation technology, subthreshold auditory information implantation technology, subthreshold information activation technology, subconscious sound manipulation technology of the nervous system, etc., continuously expanding the application scope of neurocognitive science and technology in the military field.

**Meta-value concepts that give rise to cognitive resonance**

In cognitive theory, cognitive resonance refers to information that can cross the cognitive gap between the two parties and trigger the ideological and psychological resonance and cognitive empathy of both parties, thereby achieving the deconstruction and reconstruction of the other party's cognitive system. In cognitive domain warfare, this cognitive energy-gathering effect is not a simple concentration of power, but an internal accumulation of system synergy. Under the diffusion and dissemination of modern information media, this cognitive resonance effect can spread rapidly to all parts of the world in a short period of time, and produce secondary indirect psychological effects or more levels of derivative psychological effects, presenting a state of cumulative iteration. Once it exceeds the psychological critical point, it will present a state of psychological energy explosion, thereby changing the direction or outcome of the event. The targets that can induce this cognitive resonance are mainly value beliefs, moral ethics, common interests, etc. In war, if one party touches or violates human meta-values, common emotional orientation, etc., it is very easy to induce collective condemnation, bear the accusation of violating human morality, and fall into a moral trough. For example, a photo during the Vietnam War shows a group of Vietnamese children, especially a 9-year-old girl, running naked on the road because of burns after being attacked by US military napalm bombs. In 1972, this photo caused a huge sensation after it was published, setting off an anti-war wave in the United States and even the world, and accelerating the end of the Vietnam War.

**Cognitive gaps in a split cognitive system**

In daily life, seemingly hard steel is very easy to break due to the brittleness of the material due to factors such as low temperature environment, material defects, and stress concentration. The same is true for the cognitive system. Cognitive gaps refer to the cracks, pain points, weaknesses, and sensitive points in the cognitive thinking of the target object, which are mainly manifested as the individual's worry that he is unable to cope with or adapt to the environment, and under the influence of anxiety, cognitive vulnerability is formed. The experience of security threats, the looseness of group structure, the confusion of beliefs and ideals, and the loss of voice of authoritative media will all cause cognitive conflicts and tearing of the target object. In cognitive domain operations, sometimes seemingly powerful combat opponents hide a large number of thinking cracks and psychological weaknesses behind them. Often a news event can shake the cognitive framework of the combat opponent and puncture the cognitive bubble. In addition, this cognitive psychological conflict will also cause moral damage and psychological trauma to individuals. In recent years, the U.S. and Western countries' troops carrying out overseas missions have faced "enemies disguised as civilians" that appear anytime and anywhere, and their uncertainty about the battlefield environment has continued to increase. They generally lack the perception of the significance of combat, and are filled with guilt and sin. A large number of soldiers developed post-traumatic stress disorder, the number of self-harm on the battlefield, post-war suicides and crimes increased sharply, and the number of suicides among veterans of the war even exceeded the number of deaths on the battlefield.

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