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## **Intelligence at the Battalion Level – an S2’s Perspective**

**Word Count: 2,549**

Over the past several years much has been written regarding the need to “fix intel”<sup>1</sup> – unfortunately, these articles only tell part of the story. Intelligence does not exist for its own sake, yet many staff officers and commanders do not understand basic concepts of intelligence – rather, they are left to preconceived notions, previous experiences, or unfettered expectations about what intelligence is. This article will address some of these misconceptions by examining the commander’s role in intelligence, the intelligence-operations dynamic, and the notion of “actionable” intelligence. This article will discuss solutions to these issues through battlefield circulation and enhanced intelligence integration in unit training.

### **Intelligence, the Commander, and Requirements**

The objective of intelligence is to: “assist in protecting friendly forces...” and “to reduce uncertainty by providing accurate, timely, and relevant knowledge about the threat and the surrounding environment”<sup>2</sup>. More succinctly, FMFRP 12-16, *Front Line Intelligence*, says, “the primary object of combat intelligence is to enable the commander to issue a proper combat order”. While broad, this definition provides an opportunity to focus on the key aspect of intelligence – the commander. The commander drives the intelligence effort - it is an inherent and essential responsibility of command, which requires commanders to focus the intelligence effort, participate in the intelligence process, use intelligence in decision making, support the intelligence effort, and evaluate its results<sup>3</sup>. It is not a fire-and-forget process, especially in enduring, continuous operations such as counterinsurgency (COIN). To the commander, intelligence must be more than a function that delivers maps, gives the weather, and

disseminates a daily intelligence summary (INTSUM) – it must be a function that serves as the basis of decision making - its focus based on his guidance, intent, and requirements.

Intelligence is often viewed as enemy-centric and unrelated to other aspects of the environment. Unfortunately, in focusing the intelligence effort solely on the enemy the commander loses perspective of the bigger picture. Rather, intelligence must also be focused on the effects of operations, on what messages the Information Operations Cell is delivering, what projects Civil Affairs is working on, and where logistic convoys are traveling – amongst others. No other section casts as large a net as intelligence. In evaluating the operating environment, intelligence is able to see second and third order effects of operations. By expanding requirements beyond the enemy, intelligence can gain insight in the effectiveness of operations and actually see which ones are having their desired effect. For example, suppose civil affairs funds aimed at rebuilding damaged infrastructure are actually being funneled to the insurgency, or what if those funds were lining the pockets of an influential elder in the area but also leading to a sharp reduction in kinetic activity – do both of these situations create a decision point?

Intelligence is far too important to focus solely on the enemy; fusion into other functions is necessary, and requirements must be tied to accomplishing the commander's objectives. That said, it must be understood that not everything can be a priority – priorities must be established by the commander based on the current mission. For example, consider Operation Moshtarak, the clear-hold-build of Marjeh, Afghanistan in early 2010. Marjeh had minimal International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) presence prior to the February 2010 initial clear – a fact reflected in initial priority intelligence requirements (PIRs) focused on enemy size, strength, and disposition along MEB (Marine Expeditionary Brigade), RCT (Regimental Combat Team), and battalion objectives. This focus was logical, however, several weeks after the initial clear maintaining focus on these objectives would have been foolish. Thus, as operations became more distributed and the nature of the fight changed, the requirements and the intelligence

focus changed as well. The commander must be leading the charge on this endeavor by continuously providing guidance for the intelligence effort. If potentially everything could be of interest to intelligence, then priorities must be established such that the intelligence section does not become mired in a mountain of data. Hence, as operations shifted to “steady-state” COIN it was necessary to gather information regarding the populace – a task most commonly done via the collection of ASCOPE data (Areas, Structures, Capabilities, Organizations, People, Events). In this case, the commander’s requirements dictated that information about the population be collected – a broad requirement that needed specificity. Since our unit was the first on deck, the commander needed to prioritize what he considered essential information<sup>4</sup>. Simply saying that everything was important would relegate the intelligence section to becoming data entry clerks – but with guidance as to what he needed to make decisions, the section could provide context and meaningful intelligence to the commander.

Intelligence does not drive operations – requirements do. More precisely, through operations planning intelligence requirements are derived, which drives intelligence, which supports decision making, which drives operations. This dynamic is perhaps stated best by FM 3-24,

*Counterinsurgency:*

Intelligence and operations feed each other. Effective intelligence drives effective operations. Effective operations produce information, which generates more intelligence. Similarly, ineffective or inaccurate intelligence produces ineffective operations, which produce the opposite results.

Consider an example from the Spring 2010 poppy harvest in Marjeh where, per the commander’s requirements (to understand the population<sup>5</sup>), operations and intelligence discussed the best method of collecting data such that it could be both organized and easily analyzed. A FRAGO was issued and data began filtering in. After several weeks, a simple census overlay indicated that there were several locations missing census data. In one particular area census collection was nearly complete, it was clear from debriefs and the

number of local tips received that interaction with the populace was regular even though kinetic activity was a near daily occurrence. Contrasting this was an area 2km to the north where very little census data existed but also had near daily kinetic activity. Did this mean that the northern unit was not interacting with and engaging the locals? Perhaps they were, perhaps they even knew the locals by name, but by only looking at the data it was not readily apparent what the situation was. That is, the data provided little value in and of itself, but when taken in the greater context of available information it was revealed that the area lacked census data because the area was primarily home to seasonal squatters who came and went but were fearful of losing their land – further, there were several battalion level persons of interest (POIs) living in the area. In the southern area where census data was abundant the high rate of kinetic activity could be explained by safe havens created by boundary seams between the two battalions in Marjeh, as well as the presence of numerous “ratlines” running from points east and west of the AO. Ultimately, the operation and subsequent analysis of the information led to a greater overall understanding of the AO, initiated new requirements, and ultimately drove further operations. Thus, because the commander had specific requirements it allowed the intelligence section to focus analysis on those requirements rather than trying to guess what the commander wanted.

### **Actionable Intelligence**

In day to day COIN operations the buzz word “actionable intelligence” gets used frequently. For example, one might say “we don’t have actionable intelligence at this time” or “this piece of intelligence is actionable”. The issue with the term “actionable intelligence” is that it muddles understanding of what intelligence is. Take the definition of “actionable intelligence” listed in the December 2005 Gazette article, *Leveraging Actionable Intelligence*:

Specific, relevant, perishable intelligence generated for and/or by the decision maker that helps him/her gain a temporal,

psychological, positional, or physical advantage over the enemy. Actionable intelligence has qualitative essence, timeliness, and specificity that, when linked with the on scene decision maker's situational awareness, provides a level of knowledge that facilitates a decision which enables desired effects.

This is misleading and fundamentally inconsistent with the stated objectives of intelligence – that all intelligence is actionable – since all intelligence is potentially of use to a commander depending on context. Further, a term to describe intelligence that is of immediate value already exists – Priority Intelligence Requirement (PIR), which is similarly defined as “an intelligence requirement associated with a decision that will critically affect the overall success of the command’s mission”<sup>6</sup>. As the previous example highlighted, lots of information was collected – no one “piece” was of greater value than another, but taken together it directed future operations and targeting efforts, thus, it became “actionable”.

Consider the near-decade long hunt for Osama Bin Laden – the resultant operation was the culmination of years of collection and analysis on a single requirement. There was no single “actionable” piece of intelligence; information was analyzed, cumulative intelligence influenced decision makers and an operation was conducted. As long as the intelligence effort is based on the commander’s requirements, then all the resulting intelligence is potentially “actionable” in the appropriate context.

### **Understanding the Operating Environment through Battlefield Circulation**

As the above examples illustrate, intelligence is a process driven by requirements and the analysis of the information generated from those requirements. Similarly, depending on the requirements, certain pieces of intelligence may be of more value at a particular time than others, but fundamentally all intelligence is of value. That said - it’s relatively easy for an S2 to click through a few overlays and make broad assumptions that one unit is not providing sufficient detail or that another unit *should* be doing something. It is another thing entirely to step outside the S2 shop, walk the terrain and talk with Marines and experience the AO. Thus,

if intelligence is supposed to be as important to the commander as noted – does it make sense to keep intelligence personnel “holed” up in their shop making assessments about an AO they have never seen?

There is no better way for an intelligence officer and intelligence personnel to gain appreciation of the nuances of their AO than to experience it firsthand. Unfortunately, more often than not intelligence officers get buried under a mountain of requirements in which everything is priority and rarely leave their office. Sadly, this fails to optimize intelligence support to decision making. The solution lies in understanding the benefits of regularly bringing intelligence representation through the battlespace and its effects on subsequent analysis. Not only does it provide an excellent means to enhance understanding and appreciation for the AO, it also provides an opportunity to spot check Marines’ understanding of the situation. Many Marines at the tactical level are not informed of the big picture and do not see how intelligence is helping them. This is understandable and this is why the S2 needs to paint the big picture for them, to tell them what their efforts are providing him but also why the S2 doesn’t have a 10-digit grid for every IED in the AO. This is also an opportunity to check in with subordinate unit commanders and address concerns face to face, allowing the S2 to put the entire situation into perspective. Thus, through interaction expectations are managed and both sides gain an appreciation for each other by seeing the “why” behind the importance of such data and how it fits into the big picture, while also giving perspective to both sides.

### **The Way Ahead: Intelligence-Operations Integration Training**

The best way to address these issues is through training. Unfortunately, the topic of intelligence-operations integration training is beyond the scope of this article (though a topic of debate for quite some time<sup>6</sup>). Consider the following points to be a concise look at the issues and potential solutions.

Battalion training is not optimized to train intelligence personnel. Further, training programs available to intelligence Marines (via the Intelligence Enhancement and Training Program (ITEP) delivered at Regional Intelligence Training Centers (RITC)) are typically individual-skill focused. While these programs provide excellent training for the individual, it does not necessarily translate into successful intelligence-operation integration for a unit. There are few available means for a unit to train like it would fight in the intelligence arena. What commonly occurs is that the intelligence section (the intelligence officer in particular) becomes the “white cell”, creating fictional scenarios which are played out by the companies. What does not occur is any tie-in of intelligence into decision making. Enhanced Mojave Viper (EMV) and Marine Corps Tactics Operations Group (MCTOG) Spartan Resolve exercises provide the closest thing to a fully-integrated staff and an opportunity for the intelligence section to be independent of the scenario. Arguably, EMV is the closest thing to deployment that an intelligence section will see during its work-up, but unfortunately this does not fulfill section training requirements. Despite a scenario, role players, reporting, and intelligence requirements EMV is still a fire support exercise with intelligence sprinkled in. While beneficial, it falls short of staff integration and intelligence support to operations.

Potential solutions to this issue are numerous. The most effective one is parent unit integration into intelligence training – that is, a battalion’s higher, the regiment, is tied into intelligence training the same way its operations section is tied into a battalion’s training. This would allow the regimental S2 to evaluate its subordinate S2 shops and create independent scenarios for battalion field exercises. The benefit is that the battalion S2 can be more involved in decision making because it is not read-in to the scenario, further, this would also highlight intelligence deficiencies earlier in a unit’s workup, providing more time to take corrective action on them. Unfortunately, deployment rotations typically predicate that a regiment will not deploy with subordinate battalions, resulting in a mismatch where one regiment is left to cover down on

what is normally done by three regiments. As an example, consider that a regimental headquarters deploys as an RCT for yearlong deployments – as does division and MEF (Marine Expeditionary Force). So, depending on which battalion you are and where you are deploying (battalions do not necessarily deploy to AOs covered by their parent regiment), there may be a skeleton crew running the regiment, division, and MEF – severely limiting their ability to support subordinate units.

Despite these shortfalls there are still ways to get intelligence more involved in training. A simple, no cost fix is regular staff integration into sand table exercises or tactical decision games where requirements, reporting procedures, and capabilities and limitations can be discussed. Another possibility is to make the intelligence section bring all of its deployment essential gear to the field in order to demonstrate the foot-print of a forward deployed intelligence section (hint: it's bigger than many staff officers think). Involve the intelligence section in company training – allow it to discuss how it plays a role and how it supports the big picture. Finally, be creative, allow the intelligence section to flex its analytic muscle in training so that on deployment all sides know what to expect.

## **Conclusion**

This article aimed to look beyond an introspective view of intelligence by conveying the objectives of intelligence, the role of the commander and common misconceptions for non-intelligence personnel. By looking at intelligence as a collaborative, cross-functional effort one gains an understanding of the process, and in doing so, an appreciation of what one can expect should be gained. While basic in nature, this article is a stepping stone for more in depth discussions about the subject of tactical intelligence. Integrating intelligence into all facets of unit training, while challenging, will ensure the most pervasive view of intelligence and would address most of the issues highlighted above.

## Foot Notes:

<sup>1</sup> “Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan” is the best example, however, a quick search of Marine Corps Gazette archives indicate that most intelligence related articles are introspective in nature.

<sup>2</sup> MCWP 2-1, *Intelligence Operations*

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Operation Moshtarak was led by RCT-7, the two major ground units involved were 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines (Main Effort) and 3d Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines (Supporting Effort 1). Both units had separate AOs, the point being that in 3/6's AO, 3/6 was the first unit to operate there.

<sup>5</sup> This is a purposeful over generalization of the commander's requirements.

<sup>6</sup> MCRP 5-12C, *Marine Corps Supplement to the Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*

<sup>7</sup> Improved intelligence-operations integration training is an article worthy of being written. However, the idea is rather old, consider the September 1991 Gazette piece submitted by Maj C.E. Colvard “Unfortunately, We Fought Like We Trained”, which discusses many of the same issues highlighted in this article.

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