Organizing Intelligence for Counterinsurgency

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PHOTO: U.S. Army Soldiers provide security as their platoon leader gathers intelligence along the Syria/Iraq border near Forward Operating Base Nimur, Iraq, 13 August, 2006. The Soldiers are with 1st Squadron, 33d Cavalry Regiment, 3d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division. (U.S. Army)

The very essence of counterinsurgency is the collection of intelligence for the government.
—Lucian W. Pye [1]

EFFECTIVE, ACCURATE, AND TIMELY intelligence is essential to conducting any form of warfare, including counterinsurgency operations, because the ultimate success or failure of the mission depends on the effectiveness of the intelligence effort. The function of intelligence in counterinsurgency is to facilitate an understanding of the populace, the host nation, the operational environment, and the insurgents so that commanders may address the issues driving the insurgency.

Insurgencies, however, are notoriously difficult to evaluate. The organization of the standard military intelligence system, developed for major theater warfare rather than counterinsurgency, compounds the difficulty. Intelligence systems and personnel must adapt to the challenges of a counterinsurgency environment to provide commanders the intelligence they require. This is a "best practice" in counterinsurgency, without which counterinsurgency efforts will likely fail.[2]

Principles

Practical experience and research indicate six major factors make intelligence in counterinsurgency different than in other forms of warfare. First and foremost, intelligence in counterinsurgency is about people. Commanders must understand the host nation's people and government, the people involved in the insurgency, and the conditions driving the insurgency. They must have insight into the perceptions, values, beliefs, interests, and decisionmaking processes of individuals and groups. These requirements are the basis for collection and analysis efforts.

Second, counterinsurgency is an intelligence war. Both insurgents and counterinsurgents need effective intelligence capabilities to be successful. Insurgents and counterinsurgents therefore attempt to create and maintain intelligence networks and fight continuously to neutralize each other's intelligence capabilities.[3]

Third, a strong feedback relationship exists between operations and intelligence. This can be positive or negative. Effective intelligence drives effective operations, producing more intelligence. Ineffective or inaccurate

intelligence drives ineffective operations, reducing the availability of intelligence.[4]

Fourth, all operations have an intelligence component. All service members are potential intelligence collectors when interacting with the people. Therefore, operations should always include intelligence collection requirements.

Fifth, intelligence flows from the bottom up in counterinsurgency, and all echelons both produce and consume intelligence. This is because insurgencies are like a mosaic in that they are local and vary greatly in time and space.[5] The insurgency one battalion faces is often different from that faced by an adjacent battalion. Tactical units at brigade and below require a great deal of support for intelligence collection and analysis because their organic intelligence structure is often inadequate to deal with these realities.[6]

Finally, units at all echelons find themselves operating in a joint, combined environment. Commanders and staff personnel at all echelons must coordinate intelligence collection and analysis with coalition and host-nation militaries and intelligence services and with many different U.S. intelligence organizations.

Resourcing the Effort

We must understand the challenges posed by a counterinsurgency environment and the factors that differentiate counterinsurgency from major theater warfare, and then we must allocate intelligence personnel and equipment appropriately. Intelligence personnel are normally concentrated at echelons above brigade, with relatively few personnel at brigade and below. However, in counterinsurgency, requirements to collect, process, and analyze intelligence inundate units at brigade and below. The ability of these units to gather and analyze intelligence effectively is critically important in counterinsurgency. It has been cited as a key to the success of U.S. counterinsurgency operations in the Philippines in 1899-1902.[7]

New authorizations of intelligence personnel for Army brigade combat teams go a long way toward meeting these requirements, but in many cases they are still lacking.[8] The Marine Corps has doubled or tripled the size of its battalion intelligence sections in Iraq by pushing personnel down from the division and Marine Expeditionary Force level. The technique is effective and could potentially be expanded to Army units, although it would likely mean assigning or task-organizing intelligence personnel from echelons above division down to the battalions.[9]

Pushing intelligence collection assets down to tactical units benefits all echelons. Benefits include improving the collection capabilities of tactical units, ensuring reports go through appropriate channels to reach higher echelon audiences, and most important, positioning collectors closer to the insurgents. Human intelligence (HUMINT) collectors, counterintelligence (CI) agents, and signals intelligence (SIGINT) platforms and personnel will be particularly important to the intelligence effort at the tactical level, with HUMINT being the priority effort. In Iraq, however, the demand for these personnel often exceeds available forces because CI/HUMINT personnel are necessary to many mission-critical tasks, such as building and running CI/HUMINT networks, interrogating captured insurgents, and vetting local workers.[10]

Battalions also need more analysts. Current battalion intelligence sections lack the personnel to collect patrol debriefs, analyze incoming intelligence from multiple sources, produce finished intelligence products, and disseminate products to consumers. In many cases, brigade intelligence sections and military intelligence companies also require additional analysts.[11]

Analysts can be beneficial at the company level, too. This is the case when a maneuver company has a set area of operations (AO) and must collect a lot of information on its people and insurgents. An analyst can aid a company commander and his junior leaders in collecting and processing information and developing an operating picture of the AO.[12] Pushing analysts down to the tactical level would place them closer to collectors, would improve the overall intelligence picture, and would help higher echelon staffs get answers to their priority information requirements (PIRs). If no additional analysts are available, commanders may have to reallocate non-intelligence personnel to work in the intelligence section. Anecdotal evidence indicates that use of non-intelligence personnel in intelligence roles is common practice in units currently conducting counterinsurgency missions.

Even if additional collectors and analysts are given to tactical units, a lack of linguists can limit their effectiveness. Linguists are required to interact effectively with locals, translate open-source media

U.S. Marines with a psychological operations team attached to 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team Five, post antiterrorist handbills during an intelligence-driven cordon-and-search operation in Fallujah, Iraq, 20 August 2006.

and captured documents, and perform other tasks. An infantry battalion in Iraq might require 30 to 40 linguists who are fluent in Arabic.[13] Lack of linguists is a show-stopper for counterinsurgency operations and is often cited as a constraint on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.[14]

We should also consider creating a combined or joint intelligence operations cell for intelligence at the theater and national levels to ensure unity of intelligence effort at those levels. Ideally, such a cell would consist of two complementary sections, one in theater fulfilling the requirements of the theater commander and subordinate units, the other out of theater fulfilling the intelligence requirements of U.S. national leaders. For continuity and situational awareness, personnel would rotate between the two sections of the intelligence cell on a regular basis.

A final consideration involves the training of intelligence personnel. Effective counterinsurgency operations require intelligence personnel trained in their AO's sociocultural factors and able to evaluate cultures and social groups, so that commanders can better understand the nuances of the AO. Intelligence personnel must also—

● Be able to identify and evaluate networks to determine who the insurgents are and how they operate.

● Be trained to operate in a joint or combined environment.

● Be able to take thousands of pieces of information and combine them into an accurate, comprehensible picture that enables predictive analysis based on insurgent capabilities and intent.

Moreover, each unit in charge of an AO must have an adequate number of officers and enlisted personnel trained in HUMINT operations.

Organizing Collection Efforts

The purpose of intelligence collection in counterinsurgency is to determine what factors drive the insurgency and to provide commanders with information on those factors and ways to reverse or mitigate them. Obviously, intelligence collection should focus on those people in the AO who are involved in or support the insurgency.

The theater intelligence cell should coordinate the overall intelligence effort. However, because of the localized nature of insurgencies, tactical units must have flexibility in formulating and collecting their own intelligence requirements. The benefits of balancing intelligence requirements and tasks reach all echelons because accurate intelligence pictures at the tactical level facilitate a holistic, accurate picture at the theater level.

Personnel trained in various intelligence disciplines will perform much of the intelligence collection for counterinsurgency, but they are not necessarily the primary producers of intelligence reporting. As noted earlier, all service members are potential intelligence collectors. All day-to-day tactical operations should be a part of the collection plan. Every patrol or mission should receive intelligence collection requirements in addition to operations requirements; PIRs should be understood at the lowest level; and all units should write debriefs after conducting a mission. Debriefs and other operational reports are an important form of HUMINT in counterinsurgency.[15] In some cases, nonstandard HUMINT reporting, such as meeting and patrol debriefs, is the primary form of intelligence for an area.[16]

For collection to be effective, there must be a conduit for operations personnel and analysts to provide feedback to collectors. This is necessary to keep reporting relevant, to encourage the development of effective HUMINT networks, and to maintain an accurate understanding of the operating environment.

Feedback must go to all collectors, including personnel writing mission debriefs. Feedback may include a positive or negative assessment of an intelligence source, requests for additional information, or new collection requirements.

Organizing the Analytical Effort

The purpose of analysis is to convert raw reporting into intelligence products that support operations. Intelligence analysis in counterinsurgency is challenging. Analysts must understand a complex web spun from society and conflict, perceptions and culture, hundreds or even thousands of personalities, and relationships between and among key personalities. The local nature of insurgencies and their tendency to change over time add to the complexity of the analysis. In many ways, intelligence analysis in counterinsurgency has more in common with law enforcement than major theater warfare.[17]

Additional analysts must be allocated to battalion and brigade staffs to ensure tactical units have the analytical support they need. Tactical analysis at brigade and below is the basis for operational intelligence developed at higher echelons. The bottom-up flow of intelligence in counterinsurgency should shape prioritization of intelligence resources. Battalions and brigades develop the intelligence picture in their AOs, while higher echelons fuse the tactical pictures into a theater-wide assessment of the insurgency.

There are two basic analysis functions at all echelons: analysis of enemy actions and network analysis. Analysis of enemy actions is commonly called current operations analysis because it focuses on current enemy operations. Network analysis focuses on the people in an AO and develops an understanding of interrelationships and the ideas and beliefs driving insurgent actions. Current operations information helps determine threat warning conditions and the metrics of enemy capabilities, while network analysis provides intelligence for targeting, effects synchronization, and planning. Commanders tend to concentrate on current operations at the expense of network analysis. However, to ensure a thorough understanding of the insurgency and operational environment, it is critical that some analysts, particularly at brigade and above, perform network analysis.

The complexity of analyzing an insurgency means it often takes analysts months to fully understand the battlefield environment and the insurgency. In addition, insurgencies often span years, requiring analysts to take a similarly long-term view.[18] For these reasons, analysts should observe the insurgency for as long as possible by having intelligence and other staff sections alternately participate in the conflict and track the fight from their home stations.

Battle handover between units must not disrupt continuity. Processes must be in place to ensure analysts moving into a theater are able to understand the intelligence picture, the intelligence plan, and applicable intelligence databases. Without continuity, the intelligence picture will begin anew with every troop rotation, and there will be no consistent long-term analysis of the insurgency.

Organizing Information Flow

Insurgencies often vary in space and time, and insurgents often adapt rapidly to counterinsurgent operations. The flow of intelligence and information between units should reflect these realities. If not, it will be impossible for commanders to get inside the insurgents' decisionmaking cycle.

Units must be able to pass intelligence rapidly to track an enemy that regularly moves across unit boundaries. Traditionally, intelligence has been passed in a hierarchical manner that does not work well because it is often slow and cumbersome. For example, an insurgent might drive from Mosul to Ramadi in less than a day, but it might take much longer than a day to process a formal request for information about that insurgent through multiple

> *In many ways, intelligence analysis in counterinsurgency has more in common with law enforcement than major theater warfare.*

echelons and divisions. A simple way to overcome this is to maintain a list of contacts for intelligence sections and units throughout the theater. Such a list, or network, would enable personnel to rapidly find the person with whom they need to share intelligence. This ad hoc intelligence sharing may occur via email, chat rooms, secure phones, or other means. Regardless of method, the ability to share intelligence rapidly throughout a theater is important to getting inside the insurgents' planning cycle.

The requirement for ad hoc intelligence sharing means that information technology is especially important in counterinsurgency. To support counterinsurgency, companies should have tactical internet capabilities so that company commanders can rapidly share information on enemy tactics, techniques, and procedures in their AOs. Such information sharing demonstrably improves the effectiveness of units from squad to division level.[19] The availability of communications equipment is, however, a constraint for many units, indicating that the current communications equipment and architecture available at brigade and below might be inadequate for counterinsurgency operations.

A second way to leverage the power of information technology is to share information with units not yet in theater. Division- and brigade-level intelligence sections generally take 45 to 60 days in theater before they are ready to track and assess an insurgency effectively.[20] With adequate access to the tactical internet, units outside of theater can track the situation in theater, request information from units in theater, and train on an AO relevant to their future deployment. This would enable them to understand the threats and operating environment in theater and would flatten their learning curve during the initial phase of deployment. Unfortunately, a lack of communications equipment and architecture may constrain information sharing with units outside theater. Such constraints again indicate a need to improve communications abilities to enhance unit effectiveness.

Finally, the theater intelligence cell must establish a common database to track insurgents and manage intelligence reporting. Information about the insurgency comes in bits and pieces that require consolidation and analysis to form an overall picture.[21] A common database would enable this process. Without it, different organizations and units develop differing (and only partially complete) pictures, further muddling a complex operating environment. A common database must also be easily searchable, with a feature that standardizes names so that analysts can find the information they seek and not double-count insurgents due to spelling errors.

Intelligence Fusion and Coordination

Because of the joint and combined nature of counterinsurgency operations, stove-piping of intelligence by various agencies can be a problem. Additional problems include duplicating collection efforts and "circular reporting," which occurs when two collectors receive the same intelligence from the same source and report it independently.[22] To avoid these and other problems, commanders at each echelon should form an ad hoc, standing intelligence cell similar to a joint interagency task force, incorporating intelligence-community assets operating in their battlespace into their collection, analysis, and targeting efforts. The cell should con-

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Intelligence Principles for Counterinsurgency

1 Intelligence in counterinsurgency is about people.

2 Counterinsurgency is an intelligence war.

3 Operations and intelligence must feed each other.

4 All operations have an intelligence component.

5 Insurgencies are local, vary greatly in time and space, and are mosaic-like.

6 In a joint-combined environment, all echelons must work at intelligence.

duct regular meetings to share collection priorities, deconflict activities and operations, discuss target development, share results of operations, and establish and maintain joint situational awareness.

Such an intelligence cell would permit economy of force, and its meetings would build mutual trust among members and enhance understanding of each member's mission, capabilities, and limitations. If integrated with unit targeting meetings, targeting effects synchronization boards, and S2X/ G2X deconfliction meetings, the intelligence cell would further enhance the commander's knowledge of enemy activities, local atmospherics, and friendly forces operating in the AO. Incorporating host-nation intelligence services, military forces, and local government officials and coalition partners into the intelligence cell should also be considered to foster teamwork, gain insight into local customs and activities, and prepare the host

nation to assume the mission when coalition forces depart the area.

Once More

To be successful, counterinsurgent forces must be heavily weighted with intelligence support. Additionally, the counterinsurgent must continuously evaluate and prioritize his organization and allocation of intelligence resources to ensure that commanders get as complete an intelligence picture as possible. Speed, too, is important to intelligence in a counterinsurgency: the more rapidly intelligence personnel develop an understanding of the insurgency, the sooner they can deal with it and the greater the potential for reducing the length and intensity of the conflict. It's time we got the drop on our adversaries in Iraq and Afghanistan. One way to do it is with a better-organized, better-equipped, and quicker intelligence system. *MR*

NOTES

1. Lucian Pye, "The Roots of Insurgency," Harry Eckstein, ed., *Internal War* (New York: Free Press, 1964), 177.

2. Kalev Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* (May-June 2005): 10.

3. John A. Lynn, "Patterns of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* (July-August 2005): 25.

4. John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 4. In the preface to the paperback edition, LTC Nagl cites the intelligence-operations dynamic as one of his greatest challenges when he was a battalion operations officer in Iraq.

5. Conrad Crane, personal communication to the author, January-June 2006. Dr. Crane is directing the effort to produce the Army's new counterinsurgency manual, FM 3-24. He used the term "mosaic war" to describe insurgencies.

6. Pete Mathews and Jesamyn Liu, "Military Intelligence Transformation," 1-2. Cadets Mathews and Liu wrote this paper for MG Barbara Fast to evaluate Army intelligence's ability to support counterinsurgency operations. Mathews and Liu determined that military intelligence companies at brigade and below did not have the assets necessary to support operations in counterinsurgency adequately. They specifically cite inadequate numbers of HUMINT personnel, linguists, and analysts, and inadequate training capabilities.

7. Brian McAllister Linn, "Intelligence and Low-Intensity Conflict in the Philippine War, 1899–1902," *Intelligence and National Security 6* (January 1991): 96-109. Linn argues that ineffective intelligence at the theater level forced tactical units to conduct their own intelligence work. He concludes that this situation led to counterinsurgency success because the dearth of information from higher headquarters "virtually forced every commander to become his own intelligence officer and to establish a network designed for his own area." The Philippine experience highlights the importance of local intelligence, though it does not necessarily obviate the need for theater intelligence.

8. Mathews and Liu, 2.

9. Marine intelligence personnel have noted some negative aspects of pushing personnel down: it may cause problems with unit integrity and result in higher operations tempo for intelligence personnel than for other Marines. However, by expanding this program to the Army, involving echelons above corps, U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command, and possibly national intelligence agencies and defense contractors, ample personnel should be available to better support counterinsurgency efforts while maintaining other global mission requirements.

10. LTG David H. Petraeus, "Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq," *Military Review* (January-February 2006): 6. LTG Petraeus observes that his unit required significant HUMINT assets for collecting intelligence to target insurgents.

11. Mathews and Liu, 2.

12. David Kilcullen, "Twenty-eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-level

Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* (May-June 2006): 104. Kilcullen advocates the establishment of an intelligence section at the company level to enable the company's collection and evaluation of intelligence on its area of operations. This intelligence is then used to drive the company's operations. The intelligence section is particularly important at this level if the company is developing its own intelligence from interacting with the populace rather than receiving intelligence products from a higher headquarters.

13. This was the number of interpreters determined necessary for battalions in the 101st Airborne Division during its first deployment to Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Thirty to 40 interpreters per battalion reflect the unit's mission requirements in terms of the number and frequency of patrols and other operations that require interaction with the people in a given area of operations. This allows the battalion to have at least one interpreter per squad with additional interpreters available for leaders.

14. T.X. Hammes, "Interpreters for Iraq: Lost in Translation," *New York Times*, 26 August 2005, 14, <www.nytimes.com/2005/08/24/opinion/25xhammes.html?ex=1282 622400&en=4aa8328d2a8a985c&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss>.

15. Lester Grau, "Something Old, Something New: Guerrillas, Terrorists, and Intelligence Analysts," *Military Review* (July-August 2004): 47.

16. Derek Harvey, personal communication, June 2006. Colonel Harvey was an intelligence officer for Combined Joint Task Force 7 and heavily involved in negotiations with insurgents in Fallujah in spring 2004. Harvey said that much of the intelligence from the battle for Fallujah in spring 2004 was recorded by operations personnel in the form of meeting debriefs and emails. This non-standard HUMINT was neither stored nor transmitted effectively, thereby leading to a loss of valuable intelligence.

17. Grau, 44.

18. David W. Barno, "Challenges in Fighting Global Insurgency," *Parameters* (Summer 2006): 23.

19. MAJ Patrick Michaelis, personal communication with author, March 2005 and February 2006. MAJ Michaelis developed Cavnet information-sharing software for the 1st Cavalry Division while it was deployed to Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2004 and 2005. The system worked well enough for tactical information and intelligence sharing that it is still in use in Iraq and being further developed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).

20. MAJ Michael Marti, personal communication with author, June 2006. MAJ Marti performed an informal survey of brigade and division intelligence sections rotating in and out of Iraq between 2003 and 2005. Those surveyed provided the 45 to 60 day range as the amount of time required to establish effective intelligence architecture and to gain a thorough understanding of an AO.

21. Charles A. Russel and MAJ Robert E. Hildner, "Intelligence and Information Processing in Counterinsurgency," *Air University Review* (July-August 1973), <www. airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1973/jul-aug/russell.html>.

22. Grau, 49.