Back to Basics: Focus on the Fundamentals for Intelligence Pre-deployment Training

Subject Area Training

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Back to Basics:
Focus on the Fundamentals for
Intelligence Pre-deployment Training

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The Marine Corps' technological and cultural capabilities will always lag behind the requirements of the current conflict. While the Marine Corps consistently tries to field equipment and training to bridge this gap, these last minute initiatives are of little help to Intelligence Chiefs, S-2s, and Intelligence Watch Officers preparing to deploy. By looking for technological and cultural solutions to the intelligence challenges in a counterinsurgency, the Marine Corps is failing to train analysts in intelligence fundamentals. Marine junior officers and Staff NCOs within the intelligence field must focus on training Marine intelligence analysts in five basic intelligence fundamentals to have a significant impact on the current battlefield and prepare the Marine Corps Intelligence community for future conflicts.

Background: The asymmetric nature of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) coupled with the Marine Corps' immersion in Middle Eastern societies has resulted in new challenges for the Marine Corps intelligence. The Marine Corp's missions in Iraq and Afghanistan are causing the Corps to apply conventional intelligence assets and procedures to unconventional threats while also seeking new training and equipment to solve counterinsurgency related problems. The intelligence community's attempts to acquire the latest intelligence databases and hardware as well as cultural, linguistic, and SASO training will provide long-term benefits to Marine Corps intelligence; however, in a time and resource constrained pre-deployment environment, the Marine Corps intelligence community can not afford to

sacrifice its analytical capability in order to chase new programs and equipment.

Mastering the Fundamentals: Intelligence fundamentals are those skills that enable Marines to transform raw data into useable intelligence.[1] These basic skills enable Marines to use the systems that they have, find the data they need, analyze and process the information, put the new information into context, and then successfully present the intelligence in the appropriate format. While these skills appear to be simple, they require training and practice to gain and maintain proficiency. Fortunately, unlike the latest commercial software program or country specific training, these analytical fundamentals transcend technology and international borders; they are effective regardless of the Marine Corps' mission or area of operations. In addition, unlike programs such as Analyst Notebook[2] or large-scale hardware acquisitions such as the Information Dominance Center Extension[3], Marines can be trained in analysis fundamentals on sight or forward deployed, and with minimal funding and equipment.

Maximizing What You Have: The old adage of "Work smarter, not harder." is alive and well within the Marine Corps. Many Marines constantly strive to find the new system or program that will improve efficiency or cut the workload in half. While this

[1] The Intelligence Cycle is defined in Joint Pub 2-01.3 as Planning and Direction, Collection, Processing and Exploitation, Analysis and Production, Dissemination and Integration.
[2] Analyst Notebook is a commercially produced software application used by several intelligence agencies and commands to graphically depict criminal, terrorist, and insurgent networks.
[3] The Information Dominance Center Extension is an INSCOM initiative to forward deploy all-source analysis databases and fusion systems.

tendency is often positive and may lead to innovation, it can also lead Marines to look for solutions in new technology rather than master the systems they already possess. C2PC is an excellent example of a very capable yet underutilized system. The following quotation by Major Flowers, the Information Management Officer at EWTG-PAC, highlights this problem.

> "Unfortunately, this… digital dereliction of duty… happens every day with combat systems that happen to have a keyboard, mouse and monitor as their main components. We've allowed the advances in technology to turn many of our officers and staff noncommissioned officers into figureheads."

Maximizing what you have goes well beyond just C2PC skills. It involves the full spectrum of systems proficiency, data management, and organizational flow within the intelligence architecture. Systems proficiency within the Marine Corps Intelligence community at a minimum includes: C2PC, IOW/IOS, MIDB, MS Office, and Internet Explorer. These programs of record and commercial off-the-shelf programs are common to every deploying Marine unit and training is available through Marine Corps and base resources. A common saying among Camp Pendleton deploying intelligence leadership was "I don't need more gear, I need Marines who know how to use the gear we already have." The second aspect of maximizing your assets involves the organized flow of intelligence. This flow of information, often referred to as process flow, involves getting the right information to the right person at the right time without overwhelming them or the

system. Gregory Trevorton from the Rand Corporation accurately identifies an example of this problem in the quotation below.

> A better balance is needed between investments in the emerging collection systems and enhanced forms of analytical capability. The latter means a greatly expanded investment in quality personnel and new technologies that assist analysts, instead of overwhelming them. Put simply, huge amounts of data collected but unprocessed and unanalyzed are useless.

The final aspect of maximizing your assets is data management. Advances in technology are contributing to an information overload at the tactical level while also allowing intelligence to become more graphics intensive. This trend is highlighting the importance of data management as web pages lock up, servers crash, and email accounts overflow due to bandwidth and storage shortfalls. Today more than ever, there is a need for data discipline within the intelligence community. Maximizing your assets through systems proficiency, organizational flow, and data management serve as the cornerstone for sound intelligence analysis.

Research Skills: Strong research skills enable the all-source analyst to rapidly gather information within an increasingly complex system of web pages, databases, and distribution lists. It is essential that intelligence personnel fully understand what information is available, how to obtain access, and how to successfully navigate through complex databases and intelligence systems. Resources Available: For the intelligence analyst, understanding where to find what information can be the most daunting task for an intelligence

analyst. Unit rotations, lack of intelligence standardization among the services, and lack of naming conventions in theater all lead to a revolving door of unit home pages, changing distribution lists, dead links, and outdated phone numbers. Access to information: Finding the correct source of information often does not ensure/equate to access. Access to information involves early determination of access requirements, forwarding clearance information to the correct agency, intelligence center, or information manager. Some access will only be granted in theater and on a need to know basis. Command Authorization letters may also be required. Public Key Infrastructure certifications/authorization may also be an issue. Some information may not be posted, relying instead on distribution lists to limit access. Points of contact lists, liaison officers, and Video-Teleconferencing may be the best method to resolve these access considerations. Data mining skills: Once resources have been identified and access granted, Marine Corps intelligence personnel still need the skills to successfully navigate through complex and non-standardized web pages and databases. Understanding Boolean Logic, web page file structure, database origins and intent (i.e. what reports are archived on which databases, who created it, what it is designed to do, who has access, and how often is the information updated/verified?) enables analysts to obtain necessary information in a timely and efficient manner. While intelligence research is continuous, it is critical that intelligence officers and Staff NCOs establish

points of contact early in the planning process to help resolve technical impasses, clearance requirements, and need to know issues.

All-source analysis and fusion: Once data has been collected, the analysis process can begin in earnest. Intelligence analysis can be a complex process and varies greatly depending on the situation, but two skills are universal to the analysis process; an all-source approach and critical thinking. All source approach: This requires intelligence analysts to understand capabilities and limitations of intelligence collection assets and reporting. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of intelligence disciplines and collection assets enables the analyst to accurately weigh the importance and credibility of each report. Using multiple sources during intelligence analysis reduces uncertainty and helps solve problems that could not be resolved via a single source. All source analysis involves several techniques often associated with intelligence collection such as cuing, integration, and redundancy but the end result involves increasing the probability of success by making decisions based on multiple sources. Critical thinking: Critical thinking concepts and definitions vary but usually involve problem solving skills, identifying and minimizing bias, pattern recognition, and other techniques for breaking down complex issues and identifying those critical and relevant problems that need to be resolved. The intent behind critical thinking is to increase intelligence accuracy via a

thorough and organized process. The following definition by Daniel Kurland is consistent with critical thinking goals within the intelligence field.

> "Critical thinking involves following evidence where it leads; considering all possibilities; relying on reason rather than emotion; being precise; considering a variety of possible viewpoints and explanations; weighing the effects of motives and biases; being concerned more with finding the truth than with being right; being aware of one's own prejudices and biases, and not allowing them to sway one's judgment."

Within the intelligence community, all-source analysis and critical thinking are absolutely essential because they enable intelligence analysts to make informed, unbiased conclusions with the greatest possible accuracy based on available information.

Understanding the larger picture: The ability to put information and events into the correct context is usually the most challenging aspect of intelligence analysis. This involves the ability to understand how rapidly unfolding events relate to local culture or history and how these events will impact the unit’s mission. Understanding the larger picture is essential to focus the intelligence effort on the commander’s priorities while identifying emerging threats in a dynamic operating environment. Although fictional, the following quotation from MCDP-6 emphasizes the importance of putting intelligence into context fro the commander.

> “Listen S-2,” the colonel said, “I don’t care about how many inches of rainfall to expect. I don’t care about the percentage of lunar illumination. I don’t want lots of facts and figures. Number one, I do not have time, and number two, they don’t do me any good. What I need to know is what it all means?”

Mission and intent: Understanding the overall mission and intent may range from a specific tactical mission or local commander's intent to understanding the greater Global War on Terrorism and the National Security Strategy of the United States. The scale of mission intent will vary greatly depending on the level of analysis being conducted (usually tactical but often with operational implications) as well as the rank and experience of the analyst. Understanding the mission is essential because it provides the analyst with the context above and beyond what Priority Intelligence Requirements (PIRs) provide. In addition to mission and intent, local History, Culture, and Religion may provide the background information essential to situational awareness and accurate intelligence assessments. Understanding the history, culture, and religion of an area is an essential building block for understanding an environment although the depth of cultural understanding will also vary depending on the mission and situation. Understanding the history provides and intelligence analyst with a baseline for placing current events in context. The past is the foundation for the present. Finally, armed with a better understanding of the mission and local culture, intelligence analysts are able to begin to understand the Current Environment: Since every intelligence requirement is different due to a rapidly changing operating environment, it is not enough to base assessments on previous activity or history. The anticipatory or preemptive nature of the intelligence field means that each report must be scrutinized for indicators of

emerging threats. Since forward deployed intelligence analysts will have the best access and tactical understanding of their local AO, forward deployed analysts are the most likely to identify the changing operating environment or emerging threats. This is only possible if current reporting is viewed within the context of the mission, intent, culture, and history.

Effective communication: Once information has been collected, processed, and put into context, it must be delivered in a concise, coherent, and convincing manner. The ability to communicate effectively to senior decision makers is the lynchpin that transforms intelligence into action. This communication requirement is increasingly difficult in the current operating environment due to the complexity and subtleties of a counterinsurgency fight. Conventional conflict involves blue forces, red forces, and non-combatants while in an unconventional conflict, there are many shades of grey among the populace - terrorists, insurgents, opportunists, survivalists. Understanding and being able to articulate these subtle differences is essential to accurately identify the threat. This requirement transcends Graphic, Written, and Verbal intelligence related communication. Graphic Communication: Graphic communication is rapidly becoming the medium of choice due to improving technology that enables the operating forces to transmit large files down to the regimental and often the Bn level. This capability has increased the importance of imagery, topographic products, power point presentations, excel

graphs/charts and other forms of intelligence that convey large amounts of information within a single product. This shift has created a need to "package" graphic intelligence in a clear, concise, and aesthetically pleasing format. As a result, the credibility of the product is often, at least partially, judged by the level of graphic "attention to detail." Therefore, graphic communication skills need to be emphasized early on to ensure valuable intelligence information isn't lost due to poor presentation. While these briefing tools are essential, they are, as previously mentioned, data and bandwidth intensive. Therefore it is equally important to be able to communicate in the written form as well. Written Communication: Written communication is still the most common form of intelligence reporting and communication. Intelligence Summaries, Spot Reports, and numerous other intelligence reports are the primary means of disseminating intelligence information within the Marine Corps and also throughout the greater intelligence community. Email prevalence and unit web pages have flattened the intelligence reporting chain and created a situation where intelligence analysts and decision makers within Washington D.C. can read tactical intelligence reporting at the click of a button. The merits of this access are up for debate but the situation remains; tactical intelligence reporting is not only read throughout the AO, it is read throughout the Department of Defense. Verbal Communication: Clear and concise written reports coupled with accurate and relevant graphics are important aspects

of the intelligence production cycle but all-source analysts must be capable of verbally conveying intelligence information. Verbal communication is the fastest, most direct, and hopefully the most convincing form of communication. Face to face communication with senior leaders is what enables the all source analyst to influence decisions on the battlefield.

Conclusion: Since the next Marine Corps operating area is unknown, the Marine Corps will likely face intelligence challenges similar to those encountered in the Middle East. While technological and cultural initiatives will likely be one step behind, it is important that the Marine Corps intelligence community remain focused on the fundamentals of analysis. Today, more than ever, the MAGTF needs all-source analysts, capable of applying Marine Corps intelligence assets and sound intelligence fundamentals against emerging problems. By marinating focus on analytical fundamentals, Marine junior officers and Staff NCOs within the intelligence community can create a cadre well trained, experienced Marine intelligence analysts capable of succeeding in any clime and place.

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