



INFORMATION DIMENSION

by Mr. Chet Brown, Chief, Lessons Learned Branch

Introduction

If the pen is mightier than the sword,¹ what does that mean for the relationship between Twitter and the M-4? The sword and the rifle are only able to affect, persuade, or force compliance at the time and place where they are wielded. An individual brandishing either weapon can only influence a direct response from an actual or potential subject, whereas the written or transmitted word (print or electronic) may induce the desired behavior from a distance, asynchronously over time, and without physical risk to the protagonist.

Information is Key

Information is the lifeblood of our profession. Information is the key component that enables us to complete the task for the commander for which no other warfighting function is responsible—to answer intelligence requirements. Any other warfighting function has the capability to answer the intelligence requirements, but we bear the responsibility for estimating an enemy’s future activities. We must develop and ensure effective strategies to identify an enemy’s current and potential actions and answer the intelligence requirements and other information requirements before the latest time information is of value (LTIOV).

This does not mean we only operate in the information dimension. FM 3-0, *Operations*, states, “To an ever-increasing degree, activities in the information environment are inseparable from ground operations.”² This appears in the same paragraph that begins with “Large-scale combat operations are intense, lethal, and brutal.”³

Information is also lethal. The combat experiences of the light infantry brigade commander (directly responsible for developing me to be an S-2) would ensure subordinate commanders and staff officers understood the value of intelligence preparation of the battlefield products and estimated enemy courses of action by declaring, “I killed more enemy as an infantry battalion S-2 than I did as a rifle company commander.” The clearly understood inference was the commander did not personally action every target; the intelligence information he provided enabled the battalion’s success. Information may not be kinetic, but it can definitely be lethal. The absence of information—failing to answer an information requirement before the LTIOV—can also be lethal to our own force.

Current events clearly demonstrate that those who seek to damage, destroy, or dis-integrate segments of our society and/or physical infrastructure are already

operating in the information dimension. Information is being weaponized.

Information is METT–TC Dependent⁴

Providing context sets the stage for the recipient to receive the information in the most appropriate manner. A former boss implemented an information management labeling protocol to help him triage emails from a large number of direct subordinates. When an email subject line started with the appropriate category—such as action, information, for decision, need guidance, or CCIR (commander’s critical information requirement)—the immediately recognizable context allowed him to quickly assign a work priority. The first line in the body of the email provided additional context to the category alert in the subject line.

Subject: FOR DECISION: Tomorrow’s Commanders Update Briefing (CUB)

(Body) Need commander’s decision to hold the CUB in person or online.

Subject: INFORMATION: Tomorrow’s Commanders Update Briefing (CUB)

(Body) Sandwiches and soft drinks will be available at the CUB as we promote 1LT Windscreen to CPT.

Observations from combat training center rotations identify the failure to highlight or categorize the importance of intelligence/information reports or products. This includes available information that answers the intelligence requirements but is left unread, languishing in a message queue indistinguishable from a myriad of other intelligence reports. These are missed opportunities. Providing context to intelligence information or reports results in the rapid recognition and application of critical information.

The additional context provided in the body of the email examples also enables faster comprehension of the report’s significance—answering the why before the recipient has to ask. This technique is also useful when reporting intelligence information. Telling the commander “We’ve received a report of two enemy infantry fighting vehicles and a tank spotted at grid HG108246 at 09:00AM” is not as useful as saying, “Enemy’s lead reconnaissance element observed in NAI 7 moving west.”

Information that two BMP-3s and a T-72—part of the reconnaissance element and perhaps a higher echelon’s reconnaissance detachment—are moving ahead of the battalion tactical group (BTG) is useful; the resulting analysis may lead to the higher priority conclusion that “Within 15



Two people are looking at the same object and interpreting it differently because of a different point of view.

Adapted from photo illustration by Mushki Brichia CC BY-SA 4.0

minutes we expect the BTG advance party to enter Kill Box Carol.”

Perspective

The commander and intelligence analyst may view the importance of the preceding intelligence reporting differently. The commander’s requirement may have been answered by identifying where and when the enemy’s lead reconnaissance element would enter the area of operations. The intelligence analyst’s focus (beyond answering the intelligence requirement) may be on learning the composition of the enemy force to determine if the unit spotted the enemy’s fixing or exploitation force.

When people ask us to provide information, and if we fail to understand their various perspectives, do not assume common understanding. Allow me to provide a personal example involving Cinco de Mayo.

So who was this “Cinco de Mayo” guy I kept hearing about on the radio and television commercials? In elementary school, I vaguely remember learning about an explorer named Vasco de Gama, but I could not recall learning about Cinco de Mayo. The resulting humiliation from posing my question aloud, upon my arrival at a California duty station, remains with me to this day. Having studied French for a year and being ignorant of the Spanish language and Mexican history gave me a different perspective from those to whom I posed my question. In my mind, it was Vasco de Gama, Cinco de Mayo, same letter count, same capitalization style, and all non-English words. I knew one was definitely a seafaring explorer. It made sense that Cinco de Mayo was an explorer too, right? I was a No-Go at the analytical conclusion station that day. I also exemplified the “assume” adage.

We’ve seen the same challenges in military intelligence (MI) units when integrating U.S. personnel or augmentation

elements into operations. Some assumptions are necessary in order to plan operations. Valid assumptions take the place of expected future conditions. In the absence of lessons learned collection, I assume we rarely take into account the education, cultural awareness, language proficiency, or experiences of external personnel when task-organized to operate together. Challenges in common understanding and expectations exist when bringing dissimilar U.S. Army units together to operate as a single force. We must address, train, or clarify differing techniques and procedures to enable each force to operate at its optimal level. Heavy-light rotations at the National Training Center were always an opportunity to achieve the benefits of synergy through discovery learning. The effects are multiplied when U.S. and multinational partner elements join together to perform combined operations. Much discovery learning was evident each time the aforementioned light infantry brigade trained with a multinational partner mechanized infantry company. The good news is that several best practices are available to address these challenges:

- ◆ Doctrine as a starting point.
- ◆ Standard operating procedures (SOPs).
- ◆ Terms of reference (ToR).
- ◆ Liaison officer exchange.
- ◆ Knowledge management.

Doctrine as a Starting Point. As in any military endeavor, doctrine provides a foundation on which to build greater understanding and increased interoperability. An airborne infantry ranger officer with multiple tours in Afghanistan confirmed this lesson when receiving orders to a Stryker-equipped cavalry troop in an armored division. Doctrinal understanding provided the initial context that enabled continued self-development and collaboration with subject matter experts (noncommissioned and commissioned officers) after arriving at his unit. Doctrine—it's only useful if you read it.

Standard Operating Procedures. Lessons learned collectors often comment on the superior performance of intelligence elements led by professionals who establish the conditions for success for their subordinates and successors by creating and updating SOPs. The most frequent requests the

U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence Lessons Learned Branch receives from operational force personnel are for SOPs. You should not be surprised when I inform you that Army SOP doctrine is available in ATP 3-90.90, *Army Tactical Standard Operating Procedures*.⁵ This publication's 32 pages provide useful tips, considerations, and techniques to develop and implement an SOP. It lacks the specific information needed to serve as a guide to newcomers or those who assume the duties of an absent (killed in action, wounded in action, or vacant) position. An effective SOP describes the roles, missions, functions, processes, procedures, and positional responsibilities to provide intelligence support to the commander. To obtain this level of detail, one needs to employ the most sincere form of flattery—plagiarism. Excuse me, I meant to say, collaborate with other MI professionals to incorporate components of a successful unit's SOP into your own. Continually updating the SOP during and after operations inherently results in containing best practices informed by lessons learned.



An intelligence analyst assigned to D Company, 326th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), plots named areas of interest on a map, April 14, 2021, during MITS II certification at Johnson Field at Fort Campbell, KY.

U.S. Army photo by MAJ Vonnie Wright

Terms of Reference. One of the most useful features we've seen incorporated in a tactical SOP was a ToR that an infantry division G-2 established in order to clarify the roles and responsibilities of individuals within the brigade intelligence support element (BISE) for the division brigade combat teams (BCTs). The ToR clarified what BISE members should learn, train, rehearse, or study before being task-organized to the BISE or working in their respective BCT S-2 intelligence cell or MI company units.

The G-2 mentored subordinate BCT S-2s by directing them to develop the ToR tailored to their respective BCT's personnel knowledge, skills and abilities, task organization, concept of operations, and SOPs. The BCT S-2 and MI company commanders refined the ToR to—

- ◆ Establish internal production task/supervision hierarchy among BISE members.
- ◆ Assign scope of responsibility or authority in providing intelligence support.
- ◆ Identify positions responsible for supporting specific events/products.
- ◆ Establish expectations of performance.

The ToR also mitigates duplication of effort and unintended redundancy in intelligence support to operations.

Liaison Officer Exchange. Maneuver units frequently exchange liaison officers to ensure common understanding and expectations. U.S. MI elements of differing (infantry, Stryker, armor) BCT or other unit types infrequently exchange intelligence liaison officers. Exchanging intelligence liaison officers with dissimilar U.S. units may not be viable because of the conditions of the mission variables. The unit's non-MI liaison officers may be capable of performing the requirement for intelligence liaison officers in U.S.-only formations.

Lessons learned observations indicate exchanging intelligence liaison officers in combined operations or multinational partner environments is a best practice. The legal, regulatory, policy, and enabling considerations of differing nations' intelligence operations benefit from clear, accurate, and precise shared understanding. Intelligence liaison officers are able to ensure the increased level of understanding of written or electronic products achieved by personal interaction and elimination of ambiguity.

Knowledge Management. Effective knowledge management techniques that we have observed at the tactical level build upon the synergy achieved by each of the preceding lessons and best practices. We are noticing a reversal of the trend in which BCTs lack a knowledge management officer. More often, tactical units are either assigning an officer as the unit's knowledge management officer or appointing an officer to serve as the knowledge management officer during operations. This is a good first step. Some units continue

to struggle in this area. Here are a few of the challenges we are seeing less of, to help inform your SOP development:

- ◆ The BCT did not implement their knowledge management procedures.
- ◆ Knowledge management procedures delineated in the BCT SOP were not followed.
- ◆ Soldiers did not know they could change, or suggest revisions to, the SOP.
- ◆ The SOP did not specify an electronic file structure or naming convention to facilitate timely collaboration, information dissemination, information retrieval, or exploitation.
- ◆ BCT personnel did not know when intelligence products were available or posted.
- ◆ BCT had no means of tracking the dissemination of intelligence products.
- ◆ Intelligence products were disseminated only on the upper tactical internet.

Conclusion

Developing effective strategies to answer intelligence requirements, and to improve the processes that support them, is an important part of our profession. We look forward to helping you address the challenges in improving your processes as much as we look forward to learning of your successes so that we may share them with others. 🌟

Endnotes

1. Edward Bulwer-Lytton wrote "The pen is mightier than the sword" in 1839 in his historical play about Cardinal Richelieu, chief minister to King Louis XIII. Alison Gee, "Who first said 'The pen is mightier than the sword'?" BBC News, 9 January 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30729480>.
2. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 6 October 2017), 1-2. Change 1 was issued on 6 December 2017.
3. Ibid.
4. METT-TC: mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations.
5. Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 3-90.90, *Army Tactical Standard Operating Procedures* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 1 November 2011).