U.S. Army photo by Joy Dulen

United States Army Soldiers from the 3rd Infantry Division line up to meet United States and Polish dignitaries during an event at Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area, Poland, in support of DEFENDER-Europe 20, March 11, 2020. The Pentagon ordered a halt to the deployment of forces and curtailed the exercise in early March over concerns about the coronavirus.

The USAREUR Intelligence Enterprise and Intelligence Support in a Pandemic Crisis

by Colonel Derrick S. Lee, Mr. James Scofield, and Lieutenant Colonel Christopher J. Heatherly

Introduction

This article outlines the experiences of an Army Service component command G-2 staff in responding to an operational environment (OE) ravaged by the nontraditional threat of a pandemic that completely shut down national borders, restricted movement, and changed the operational focus lines of effort overnight. We address a variety of challenges of the initial crisis period and share how the intelligence warfighting function overcame them while still maintaining vigilance over the OE and managing more traditional threats and intelligence activities. The authors recommend a further look into military intelligence readiness, as well as doctrine and tactics, techniques, and procedures, in meeting the analytical demands of a nontraditional OE once the pandemic crisis has ended, data is collected, and additional lessons learned are identified.

DEFENDER-Europe 20 and the Challenge of Unexpected Events

In late 2019 and early 2020, the U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) had its focus on preparing for DEFENDER-Europe 20, the largest training event in the European theater since the end of the Cold War. DEFENDER-Europe 20

was the heir to the series of annual REFORGER (Return of Forces to Germany) exercises that ended in 1993. Planning for this exercise demanded a significant portion of the command's attention because the event involved the deployment of more than 20,000 Soldiers from the United States, the movement of 9,000 USAREUR-assigned troops, and the contribution of 8,000 allied and partner forces from 18 nations—all conducting carefully orchestrated mobility operations and training across the theater. The USAREUR intelligence enterprise itself was consumed by the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) preparations for DEFENDER-Europe 20. These included conducting an ISR rehearsal of concept drill and executing initial ISR operations such as aerial collection. It also involved planning and coordinating multiple signals intelligence (SIGINT), geospatial intelligence, open-source intelligence (OSINT), human intelligence (HUMINT), and counterintelligence (CI) operations—both exercise and real-world threat support.

Going into 2020, intelligence professionals from the USAREUR G-2, 66th Military Intelligence Brigade, and the collective enterprise, including intelligence agencies and analysts from several European and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) partner nations, were maintaining focus on several areas, including—

- Collection and analytical efforts against the principal theater threat.
- Frozen conflicts in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and the Balkans.
- Instability in Lebanon.
- Conflict in Syria and Libya.
- Simmering tensions in the Levant.
- The ever-present specter of terrorism.

Then on 3 January, the strike against and killing of Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force, part of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, provided a new challenge that was to consume the USAREUR intelligence enterprise's attention.[1] The USAREUR G-2, in conjunction with U.S. Central Command and U.S. European Command (EUCOM), went into a full surge. It marked an abrupt end to the Christmas holiday period as the headquarters moved into a full, 24/7 battle rhythm effort to track and assess a likely response from Iran while continuing to focus on the Iranian-associated terrorist network and personnel in the European theater that posed a threat to United States forces.

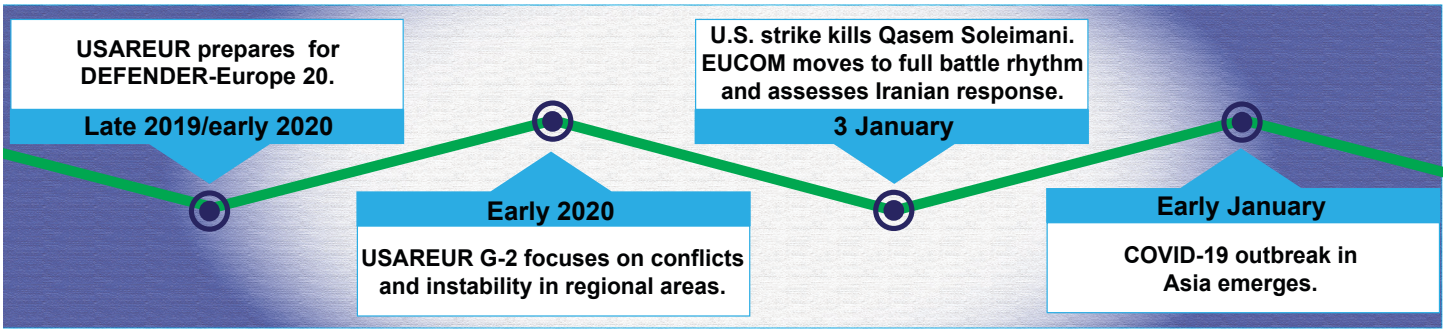
To further compound the challenges, far away in Asia, the nascent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak emerged as a concern when early estimates from medical experts and agencies warned of the potential global impacts from the spread of the disease. When the virus emerged in the European theater in late February, the USAREUR command and its intelligence enterprise had to pivot yet again, this time against a nontraditional threat in the form of a pandemic, unsure of how the OE would unfold in the face of an unprecedented global event.

Initial Detection and Evolution of an Unprecedented Threat

USAREUR's attention to the potential threat of the virus grew throughout February 2020 as COVID-19 made its first identified appearances in Europe on 24 January: two in Paris and one in Bordeaux, France.[2] At first, individual European governments were somewhat oblivious to the severity and velocity of the threat, and their reactions were slow and unsynchronized. Over the next several weeks, however, European nations began implementing a series of border closures and restriction of movements as COVID-19 quickly spread and new clusters of infection appeared in various locations: Munich, Germany (27 January), Rome, Italy (31 January), the Canary Islands, Spain (1 February), and Northern Italy in late February.[3] The virus eventually reached USAREUR when the first USAREUR member tested positive on 12 March.[4] By then, Office of the Secretary of Defense and Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) had largely curtailed DEFENDER-Europe 20 and stopped the flow of U.S. Army personnel and equipment into Europe.

The Command Pivots

By early March, USAREUR Headquarters, in Wiesbaden, Germany, was beginning its effort to understand and



confront the growing pandemic. The command's reaction was informed by the initial actions, lessons learned, and best practices at U.S. Army Africa Headquarters in Northern Italy where the COVID-19 outbreak had first rapidly spread in the European continent.

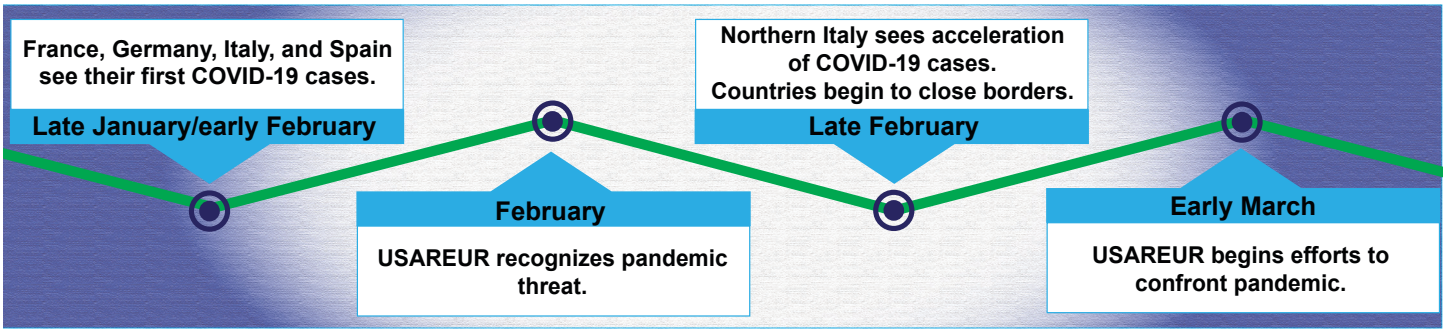
By 7 March, based on the virus's initial spread throughout Western Europe, the cancellation or downsizing of the strategically important DEFENDER-Europe 20 was a real risk. The USAREUR G-2 began to extrapolate the COVID-19 threat to the rest of the theater, based on trends that United States Army forces in Italy and South Korea had observed. The goal was to project the spreading pattern of the virus that could necessitate the command's and HQDA's decision to scale back or cancel DEFENDER-Europe 20. The USAREUR G-2 analysis and control element (ACE) began to develop a model to project the spread of the virus in Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, and Belgium (i.e., key reception, staging, onward movement, and integration nodes and port locations) in order to inform the command on likely OE conditions with regard to the COVID-19 infections. The USAREUR G-2 also commenced assessments of potential impacts, which it shared with the EUCOM J-2 and HQDA G-2, and developed contingency plans to turn off inbound ISR deployments.

U.S. Air Force photo by SSgt. Devin Nothstine

Airmen prepare to off-load COVID-19 patients during the first operational use of the Transport Isolation System (TIS) at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, April 10, 2020. The TIS is an infectious disease containment unit designed to minimize contamination risk to aircrew and medical attendants, while allowing in-flight medical care for patients afflicted by a disease—in this case, COVID-19.

By 10 March, the command battle rhythm transitioned to crisis battle rhythm and commenced daily commander's update briefs, up from one per week. Additionally, a daily operations and intelligence update was instituted to track the rapidly changing OE, both in Europe and in other key strategic locations throughout the globe. The update was provided to the commanding general, major subordinate command commanders, senior responsible officers, Director of the U.S. Army Installation Management Command–Europe, U.S. Army garrison commanders, and key USAREUR staff.

On 11 March, as the virus spread across Europe, EUCOM issued a press release announcing a scaling back of the scope of DEFENDER-Europe 20;[5] by 14 March, USAREUR Headquarters adopted significant movement and activity restrictions, mandated protection measures against the virus, and commenced shift and telework operations. Based on the developed contingency plans, the G-2 immediately acted to halt and reverse DEFENDER-Europe 20 ISR deployments and activities, cancelled all engagements with foreign partners—many at the host nations' request—and rebalanced standing analysis and production requirements against the rapidly growing need to address the new, nontraditional threat posed by COVID-19. USAREUR released a tasking order directing the G-2 to reorient its analytical capability in coordination with the USAREUR Office of the Surgeon, the EUCOM J-2 and Surgeon, and national-level



intelligence agencies, including the National Center for Medical Intelligence. The G-2, including the assigned 66th Military Intelligence Brigade ACE and 60th Engineer Detachment/Geospatial Planning Cell (60th GPC), began to reorganize and reorient its personnel. The tasking order also directed the G-2 to monitor the Defense Intelligence Agency's pandemic watch condition.

The G-33, Current Operations, initially led the staff hand-in-hand with the command surgeon (Office of the Surgeon), with direct support to the garrisons, in understanding and responding to COVID-19. The USAREUR Office of the Surgeon and G-2 played key roles on the assessment side of this effort by providing both expert knowledge and analytical capabilities. Progress in understanding and analyzing the pandemic was initially slow because of a lack of information about the virus and analysts' unfamiliarity with a pandemic threat. Yet the USAREUR intelligence enterprise undertook the mission with a positive, can-do attitude, driven by the need to adapt to the new, unique challenge.

The Intelligence Enterprise Challenge

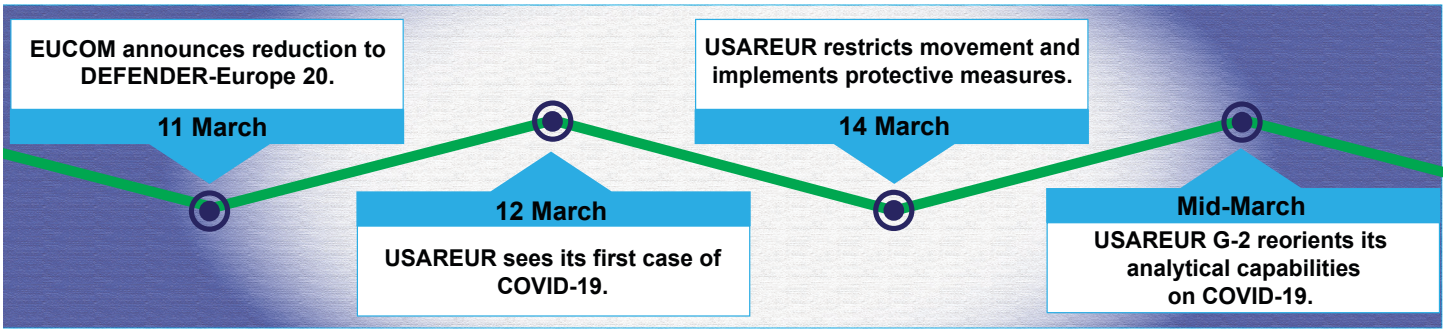
Initially, to drive the intelligence effort, the USAREUR Commanding General provided guidance to the G-2 to focus on—

- Indications of adversaries and near-peer threat opportunism in Europe to destabilize or threaten U.S. and NATO interests.
- Threat situations in other strategic locations (such as the Pacific and the Middle East) that could affect the Euro-Atlantic Alliance.
- Indications of non-state actors and violent extremist organizations attempting to exploit the environment to target U.S. personnel and interests in the USAREUR footprint.

This overarching guidance became the framework by which the USAREUR intelligence enterprise gathered, collected, coordinated, and synchronized intelligence to shape operations and intelligence and the commander's update brief products, as well as recurring intelligence assessments and summaries. The intelligence enterprise effort, based on this guidance and direction, would support USAREUR's two equally vital goals: to sustain wartime readiness by protecting Soldiers, personnel, and families from COVID-19; and to continue to maintain readiness and the operational posture.

A Two-Pronged Analytical Effort. As the pandemic unfolded and the command mobilized to respond, the G-2 shifted to a two-pronged analytical effort. The first was monitoring the "traditional" threat as outlined through the Commanding General's guidance. The second was monitoring the "non-traditional" threat, understanding the rapidly changing OE, especially the rate at which COVID-19 was spreading, and providing requisite analytical support to help mitigate the spread within the USAREUR garrison footprint. The G-2 team quickly conducted mission analysis with the rest of the USAREUR staff and began collecting information to provide the common intelligence picture related to the OE as shaped by the spread of the virus. In gathering the information to build a common OE picture, they considered several questions:

- What type of data did they need? Given the numerous sources of information related to COVID-19, which ones should they use? Possible options were U.S. medical research universities, worldwide pandemic trackers, U.S. Government health agencies, and various European nations' health agencies.
- How could they get data in an automated fashion to preclude manual-intensive data input?
- Who/what were the authorities, in particular with regard to intelligence oversight constraints, because tracking the virus's spread among U.S. installations and personnel involved accessing U.S. person information.
- What were the best manner and frequency to disseminate products to the command group and staff? Were visual products, such as a common intelligence picture/common operational picture, or text-based intelligence summaries more effective?
- How should they disseminate in order to standardize reporting and eliminate duplicative or conflicting reporting between different echelons and commands?



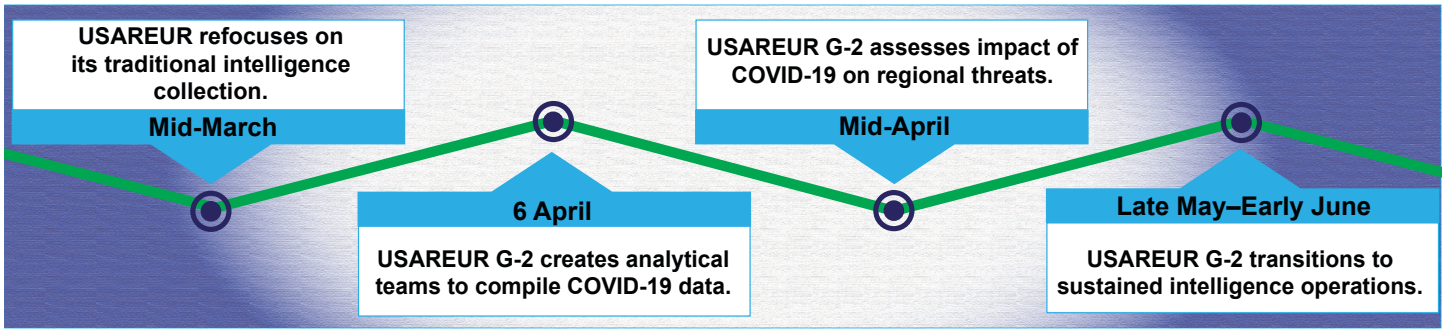
The G-2 was tracking new COVID-19 information streams and data for the European nations in order to understand the spread rate and its potential effect on U.S. installations in the region. We required this information to determine measures that each garrison and senior responsible officer would need to take to protect the U.S. population on those installations. However, we had to take care to avoid exceeding intelligence oversight authorities and to avoid the perception of "friends collecting on friends" as we considered allied or partner data. There was considerable discussion on synchronizing COVID-19 activities and information within the intelligence, operations, protection, and plans divisions and Office of the Surgeon because they all held a piece of the larger picture. Initial information requests focused primarily on COVID-19 statistics for individual nations, such as the number of people infected, the number of deaths, and the number of patients who had recovered from the virus, as well as the continued spread of the virus across Europe.

U.S. Army photo by CPT Ellen C. Brabo

These United States Army Soldiers were the first to arrive in Germany for exercise DEFENDER-Europe 20, which was intended to test the Army's ability to deploy a division-sized, combat-credible force from the United States to Europe.

Creation of Two Analytical Teams. On 6 April, the G-2 created two separate but complementary analytical teams dedicated to compiling COVID-19 data for all of Europe. One team worked on securing information to track spread rates and examine activities and restrictions. The other team's focus was on pattern and link analysis in order to identify potential patterns of spread among the U.S. population in the garrisons.

The first team worked to secure host nation and other unclassified information in order to develop 3-, 7-, and 14-day rolling averages and spread rates for host nation regions and to provide broader national assessments for multiple countries in theater. Then the team used that information to feed a COVID-19 common operational picture. Analysts in this team met with the USAREUR Office of the Surgeon and the medical command G-3 to gain a greater understanding of the pandemic as they examined political activities, social restrictions, and other related events. The team, which consisted of military personnel, Army civilians, and contract analysts encompassing all intelligence disciplines, made extensive use of data sets, including R-naught numbers (i.e., calculations to determine the average "spreadability" of an infectious disease) and infection rates per 100,000 individuals. The team also considered COVID-19 numbers for overall cases, new cases, new deaths, total deaths, newly recovered, total recovered, and infection doubling time. The team pulled information from various sources, including host nation authoritative data provisioned by each country's health ministries (when available), or data being tracked by country teams in each of the key nations. The team provided its analysis to NATO, U.S. Africa Command, the USAREUR staff, subordinate units, and garrison headquarters at the country, region, and state level. The team also worked in partnership with other U.S. European–based commands to develop a consistent



information flow to HQDA in Washington, DC. As of this writing, they continue collaboration with the 60th GPC, U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM), HQDA G-2, USAREUR Office of the Surgeon, and other commands to develop a COVID-19 predictive modeling chart.

The second team was the COVID-19 network analytical cell with responsibility for providing direct support to the G-34 (Protection) in partnership with the Office of the Surgeon and the Landstuhl Regional Health Command. The team focused on pattern and link analysis in an effort to complement contact tracing and identify potential patterns of spread within U.S. populations in garrison locations. The team devised a plan to detach the COVID-19 network analytical cell personnel from intelligence authorities and to subordinate them directly under the G-34's purview because of the sensitivity of working with U.S. person information. To create the plan, the USAREUR G-2 collaborated with the USAREUR G-3, HQDA G-2, and INSCOM intelligence oversight officers and staff judge advocate. This team brought skills to the G-34 team; however, it was not tied to the G-2 intelligence structure, nor did it use intelligence systems to conduct and provide its analysis. This ensured compliance with intelligence oversight guidelines. The COVID-19 network analytical cell primarily supported the U.S. Army garrisons in southern Germany. It also assisted the USAREUR-designated senior responsible officers across Europe. The cell identified key trends and patterns that allowed effective preventive measures for the command and garrisons.

Assessing Regional Adversaries and Threats. COVID-19 infection rates increased, and the virus spread to Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the rest of Asia. In mid-April, USAREUR undertook a subsequent analytical effort to begin assessing the impact of COVID-19 on some of the near-peer adversaries and other regional threats at national and economic levels, as well as their general military readiness. (Armed forces of various adversary and threat nations were continuing with training activities, readiness drills, and exercises, necessitating greater vigilance on our part.) Of particular importance to the command were adversary and threat nations' disinformation, misinformation, and influence campaigns that sought to exploit the COVID-19 situation in various parts of Europe, directed against U.S. and NATO equities and interests.

Before the pandemic, the USAREUR intelligence enterprise had made extensive use of OSINT in its daily work. Once re-tasked against the pandemic, the G-2 ACE found the best and most timely pandemic information from previously unfamiliar and unused sources. Analysts found particular value from various European Union nations' health department pandemic updates, as well as information reported by select European news organizations, European and U.S. health institutes, and several websites providing real-time statistics and updates on the ongoing pandemic. Host nation data proved to be the most reliable and timely, although not always packaged or visualized as well as some of the consolidated data websites.

Given the adversary's proclivity for disinformation operations that attempted to exploit the pandemic situation to bolster their information and influence operations, intelligence professionals routinely scrutinized OSINT in the course of their work. Moscow and Beijing, in particular, made extensive use of disinformation to downplay U.S., European Union, and NATO response efforts, redirect "blame" for the virus, and obscure the impact of the virus among their own citizenry. The OSINT effort became the indications and warning in the information domain, picking out adversary disinformation and misinformation efforts to better posture the command's strategic messaging and communications effort to counter these attempts by Moscow and Beijing.

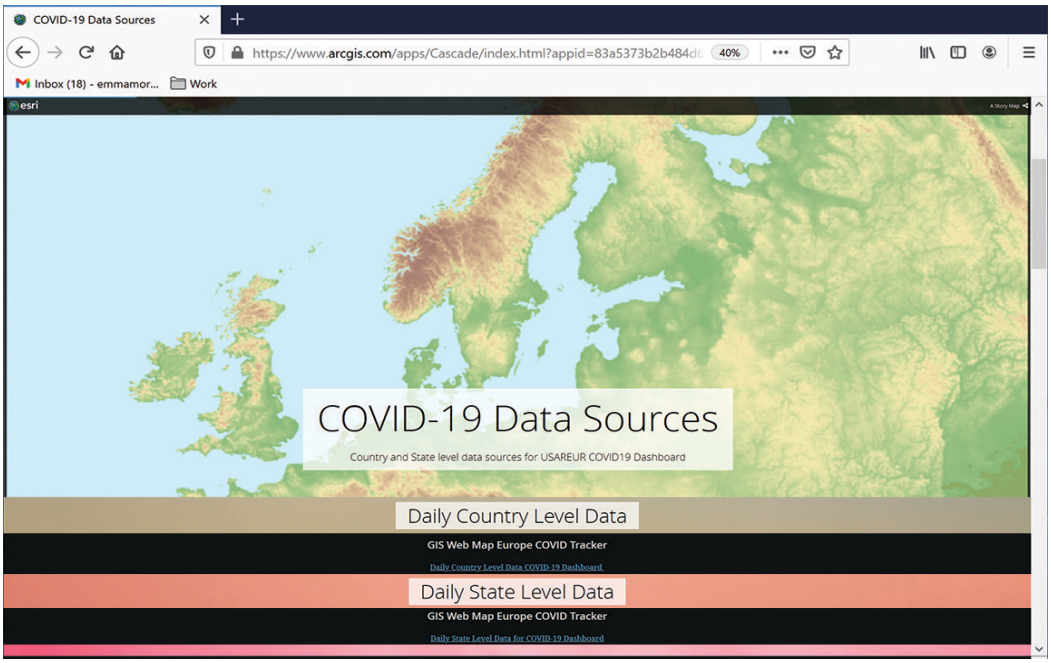
Working with In-Country Teams. Beyond web-based OSINT, there was another vital source of information on allied nation infections, management, and medical capabilities throughout the crisis—U.S. country teams and USAREUR

U.S. Army photo by Jason Johnston

An Army major tests COVID-19 samples at Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area, Poland, July 15, 2020, during Phase II of DEFENDER-Europe 20, an exercise used to build strategic readiness in support of the United States National Defense Strategy and NATO deterrence objectives.

military coordination offices working with host nation personnel across Europe. Their daily contact with local government and military and civilian leadership provided unfiltered information vital to the G-2's analysis. The early decision to maximize the use of unclassified communication systems eased the information flow with allies and partners as well as U.S. country teams. The G-2 used a variety of digital communication platforms, including secure video teleconferences, email, and teleconferences, as a means to uphold engagement commitments with vital partners in lieu of in-person meetings and to preserve operations security.

Dashboards and Real-Time Views. The G-2 identified a new requirement to display COVID-19 information within USAREUR's area of responsibility, allowing the command team to visualize the situation. In order to meet the requirement to generate the common intelligence picture, the 60th GPC repurposed Esri's ArcGIS dashboard using a borrowed infrastructure from the Army Geospatial Center. After identifying country-specific authoritative COVID-19 databases, the 60th GPC populated the ArcGIS dashboard with new cases, total cases, deaths, and recovery statistics. This dashboard used ArcGIS's configurable web applications to provide location-aware data visualization and analytics for a real-time view of hot spots to track the spread of the virus down to the state/region level on one map. This interface became interactive when the 60th GPC used the data to populate charts, graphs, lists, indicators, layers, and maps for user-specific requirements. The 60th GPC also worked with other staff sections to include 3- and 7-day rolling averages of newly reported cases for analytical purposes. As the dashboard became a "one-stop-shop" for the command and staff, the 60th GPC included a story map displaying virus-related health facts like symptoms and proper hygienic care. This added to the overall concept, and the dashboard effectively became the USAREUR common operational picture for COVID-19.



Screen capture courtesy of Esri

The homepage and data entry point for the U.S. Army Europe COVID-19 Dashboard created by repurposing Esri's ArcGIS platform.

Transition to Sustained Intelligence Operations in a COVID-19 Environment

As the COVID-19 threat situation across Europe improved in late May and early June, the G-2 settled into a more routine COVID-19 battle rhythm and rebalanced efforts against other theater priorities. The status of the OE became essential for risk assessment decisions associated with Department of Defense policies governing personnel movement. Visualized COVID-19 trends and forward-looking assessments facilitated exception-to-policy and conditions-based decisions on emergency leave, deployments, temporary duty, training, and permanent change of station moves.

While the USAREUR intelligence enterprise made a tremendous investment in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, it could not surrender its traditional mission of conducting collection operations, implementing and following through on initiatives to enhance theater collection capabilities, monitoring theater threats, and conducting partner engagement activities (when possible, in person or virtually) to enhance intelligence interoperability and combined collection capabilities. The USAREUR G-2 staff continued the planning, coordination, and execution of theater ISR activities and scaled-back support to DEFENDER-Europe 20, in coordination with the EUCOM J-2, HQDA G-2, and INSCOM.

From mid-March to the present, great strides have been made regarding the Guardrail Common Sensor aerial SIGINT collection and cross-cue collection operation with United States Air Forces in Europe, United States Naval Forces Europe, and United Kingdom collection assets; coordination and implementation of additional terrestrial collection capability in the Baltics and Poland; and implementation of bilateral HUMINT and CI collection operations throughout

the theater. In particular, efforts by USAREUR G-2X analysts, who were teleworking on unclassified systems and coordinating with other CI analytic elements in the USAREUR intelligence enterprise, conducted an analytical review of an Iran-associated threat network in Europe. Sharing this review with host nations paid great dividends in terms of neutralizing some of the financing networks in Germany.

Army Service Component Command G-2 Lessons Learned

With the COVID-19 crisis still unfolding, it may be premature to assess the alignment of doctrinal roles and responsibilities with the reality of a pandemic or to determine lessons from the conduct of response to the crisis. However, some initial observations and possible shortfalls are worth highlighting.

USAREUR's mission objectives were to protect the military community from the pandemic and ensure sustained Army operational readiness across the theater. For the USAREUR G-2, the crisis provided an opportunity to align tasks and organizational structure to prevent a duplication of effort, ensure compliance with regulation and policies (most importantly, intelligence oversight), and prioritize limited collection platforms and analytical capacity to meet the requirements.

Much of the expertise for understanding the virus threat lay in the Army medical community. The intelligence enterprise complemented the medical community with its analytical expertise and structured, collaborated method to collect data, forecast health threats to theater garrisons, and support medical and force protection operations. At the outset of the pandemic, virus-related data and metrics were not readily available from theater or national sources. Theater intelligence professionals demonstrated initiative and resourcefulness in uncovering valuable sources of data and health/medical knowledge at an unclassified level from host nations, nongovernmental organizations, and academic organizations. Analysts sought to collaborate with the Office of the Surgeon to understand disease characteristics, models, and tracking and forecast tools, but the operational response requirements levied against the Office of the Surgeon limited support to broader analytical efforts pursued by G-2.

As the crisis unfolded, it became increasingly apparent that many commands and theater organizations were doing similar work to understand and track the COVID-19 threat. In retrospect, we can see this was a duplication of effort as the G-2 team worked to ensure data assessments, processes, and visualizations provided timely, accurate, and standardized products. This further highlights the need for top-down driven data standards and processes, especially in support of a complex yet open, data-rich environment. Such a structured method for conducting analysis and disseminating and sharing information between echelons and commands is necessary to preclude duplication of effort.

Understanding and adhering to established operational authorities represents another difficult challenge for intelligence professionals to identify early and present to the command for decision. The theater enterprise worked within the scope of intelligence oversight regulations when assessing potential theater threats to U.S. garrisons and facilities. There are ways to get to a "yes," provided that the right staff sections, subject matter experts, and leadership come together to devise a solution within the limitations of regulations and policies.

Commanders and military intelligence professionals must also maintain a broad vision of the comprehensive threat picture and various requirements related to the assessment of the OE. Clear guidance from the USAREUR Commanding General provided the framework in which the intelligence enterprise was able to execute intelligence operations and analysis along multiple lines of effort. The G-2 could not place its entire effort against COVID-19 analysis at the expense of overlooking other threat streams, for example, major adversaries and terrorism, because the drastic change in the OE required constant vigilance against the various threats. In this crisis, the G-2 allocated additional personnel to supporting current operations in the command center while at the same time standing up four COVID-19–specific teams (including the two teams described earlier):

- Current threat analysis team centered in the ACE.
- Longer-term trend team centered on the G-2's operations and plans division.
- Training team to provide expertise to the G-34's COVID-19 contact tracing efforts.
- Analysis and inspection team to support the decision-making and control activities that the garrison and senior responsible officers were making with regard to COVID-19.

Conclusion

Providing routine, predictive analysis in an OE defined by a viral pandemic presented unique challenges. The USAREUR intelligence enterprise—its highly trained Soldiers and civilians—demonstrated tremendous flexibility, initiative, resourcefulness, energy, and a positive attitude in tackling this mission that extended beyond the traditional responsibilities and training. By early May, through the careful

alignment of priorities with theater intelligence resources and coordination between various echelons and commands, the G-2 was able to provide comprehensive intelligence support to the command.

Endnotes

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