Institutionalizing Information Operations

A doctrinally recognized area of operations

by Capt Luke F. Mannion

>Capt Mannion is a Field Artillery Officer (0802) and is also trained as an Intermediate MAGTF Information Operations Officer (0510) and Civil Affairs Officer (0530). As an 0802, Capt Mannion deployed with Battery L, 3d Bn, 10th Marines in support of the Unit Deployment Program from 2014–2015. He was then assigned to the III MEF Civil Affairs Detachment as a civil affairs team leader, responsible for civil affairs/civil military operations in support of III MEF theater security cooperation and crisis response operations. Currently, he is assigned to 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion as the fire support coordinator.

Over the past several years, the concept of information operations has matured from an abstract, embryotic concept into a fledgling mainstream community of professional practitioners. There have been several well-written articles exploring the adoption of information operations by the force writ large and its direct necessity to current and future operations. The idea of using information as a weapon in warfare is not a revolutionary one. The oft-quoted Sun Tzu said,

> All warfare is based on deception … victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win … the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.[1]

This quote illustrates in poignant detail what Clausewitz referred to as the "zweikampf," or the attempt to impose one's will upon the enemy and vice versa.[2] What Sun Tzu captured ahead of his time was how all of warfare begins in what we now conceptualize as the *information environment*. Yet even with this understanding, it has only been within the past two decades that strategists and military professionals have begun to discuss information in terms of doctrine and operations. So, what has changed that information has now been elevated to a doctrinally recognized line of operations? One has to look no further than the palm of his hand or the top of his desk to find the answer.

Since the end of the 20th century, both the propagation and consumption of information has become unprecedentedly accessible. The complexity and pervasiveness of the information environment have increased in such a way that more actors than ever before are able to affect it. Smartphones and computers connected to the Internet constitute both sources of intelligence collection and delivery methods for information-related operations. These developments also increase the speed and dynamism of the information environment, requiring those who wish to manipulate or exploit it to adapt or react at a rapid pace. State and non-state actors worldwide have identified the information environment as the new battleground to be dominated and have already taken innovative measures toward these ends.[3] In response, the U.S. military has taken several progressive steps toward maintaining our domination of the information environment.

Information operations cannot continue to be an amalgamation of stove-piped information-related capabilities that are, at best, loosely coordinated through information operations planning cells at inconsistent levels of command. In order to be effective in supporting the main effort of Marine Corps operations, information operations must become a truly congealed and cohesive community to produce the experts necessary to proficiently weave these capabilities into MAGTF operations.

In the following paragraphs, I will argue that the Marine Corps can no longer afford—operationally, strategically, or fiscally—to treat the information operations community as an afterthought. I will also propose several courses that the Corps may consider for the establishment of a standing information operations capability, from practitioner to staff officer, and career opportunities in the information operations community for both enlisted Marines and officers in conjunction with the advances that the Future Force 2025 has already made.

Information Operations Community Concept/Paradigm

It is undeniable that information touches every aspect of life because of its pervasiveness; it is an intractable aspect of the modern battlefield. It transcends the time-honored battlespace frame-

work of *MDCP 1-0, Marine Corps Operations,* (Washington, DC: 2011), as a method of organizing the battlefield and requires a level of mental agility the current planning paradigms do not adequately address. Information operations can be described as an orchestra in which each information-related capability represents a different instrument section: the percussion of physical attack, the strings of public affairs, the woodwinds of civil affairs, the brass of electronic warfare, etc. The proper information operations staff officer/planner is Amadeus Mozart or Johann Sebastian Bach, composing the notes of the music and leading each section together in a glorious opera or symphony. One does not become a Mozart or Bach after a simple two-week course on music theory and a brief foray into playing the clarinet.

This still broadly misunderstood area of operations cannot be relegated to an afterthought by operational planning teams during the planning process, much in the way civil considerations were when they were first introduced into the mission analysis framework. Even with the redesignation of the MEF Headquarters Group to the MEF Information Group, there is still little understanding within the force of how information operations should be incorporated into MAGTF operations below the MEF level. In order to bring the information environment to the forefront of the minds of operational planners, commanders, and subordinates, the Marine Corps is in need of a cadre of professional practitioners and true subject-matter experts (SMEs). Such a group cannot be derived from ad hoc assignments into B-Billet tours for military information support operations (MISO) and civil affairs Marines or temporary staff planners who try their best to harmonize rogue information-related capabilities in a loosely defined operational framework. Such subject-matter experts must be trained from early in their careers to fully embrace and understand the implications, applications, and opportunities of the information environment. Not only must they be able to conceptualize and validate the information environ-

ment's influence on a given operation, they must also be familiar with the tactics, techniques, and procedures of other information-related capabilities to synthesize actions within the information operations framework.

If the Marine Corps is to truly embrace the information operations community, it must invest in the practitioners to produce experts who can tackle the enigma of information operations and make it as real for the commander as the physical environment. The best approach to creating this capability is to establish primary MOS designators and career tracks for officers and enlisted Marines within a new information warfare community.

Information Operations Officer Career Progression

As a true believer in the merits of the Marine Corps Planning Process and doctrine, I offer two possible courses of action for the construct of this new information warfare community. Both call for the creation of an information warfare officer primary MOS. Readers from Quantico and Henderson Hall will undoubtedly be curious about the DOTMLPF (doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, and facilities) implications of such a proposal. For the purposes of this exploration, I have developed a proposal within already-established doctrine, current and anticipated institutional organization, and training capabilities and pipelines, which has low impact on materiel and facilities. The primary critical vulnerabilities of this proposal are the personnel and organizational aspects of the DOTMLPF analysis. This proposal maximizes the effectiveness of upcoming changes to force structure and currently established capabilities and concepts.

This proposal is predicated on the Marine Corps revisiting past proposals for establishing an information operations-specific battalion within the MEF Information Group, which would include companies focused on specific information-related capabilities. Such a battalion would be a single focal point for capabilities and resources for the incorporation of information opera-

tions into MAGTF operations. Having an established unit within a career field will allow the Marine Corps to retain institutional knowledge, refine and improve training available to information operations practitioners, and solidify the place of information operations in the MAGTF construct.

In conjunction with the establishment of an information operation battalion, establishing a PMOS would create staff officers and subordinate commanders to serve as advisors to their commanders in all matters of information operations. To be successful, they must be well-versed in as many information-related capabilities as possible. Both courses of action for this plan aim to expose the proposed information warfare officers to a spectrum of information-related capabilities during their career. The courses of action rely on the civil affairs and MISO communities to provide a baseline for the information warfare officers' exposure to information operations/information warfare. Civil affairs and MISO would best support the new information warfare community in that they 1) offer dynamic and small unit leadership opportunities, 2) provide direct access to target audiences and immersion in the effects on the information environment, and 3) are closely related and mutually supporting, providing a framework for career progression.

The first proposed course of action in the development of an information warfare officer primary MOS is a direct accession/full career progression model. An example of this career progression is shown in Figure 1. The benefits of this course of action include greater exposure for the officers to leadership opportunities within their MOS, greater time to gain more operational experience and attend additional schools, the availability of talented first-tour officers for the MOS, and the ability to develop competent information warfare officers from the first days of their careers. Drawbacks include a possible stovepiping of the community; however, to avoid this, officers should be rotated through different billets within the information resource center to become well-rounded MAGTF information

Figure 1. Direct Accession Layout

Row: 1stLt/2ndLt | Captain | Major | Lieutenant Colonel

TBS | JFKSWCS/IMIOPC | MISO Tour | MCCMOS | CA Tour | IO Bn Staff Tour | EWS/PME | Advanced IO/CMO Course | IO Company Commander | Staff Tour/Cyber Tour | IO Bn XO/OpsO | Advanced Level School | Staff Tour | Joint IO Tour | IO Bn Commander | MAGTF Staff Tour

Figure 2. Second Tour (Fleet) Accession Layout

Row: Captain | Major | Lieutenant Colonel

JFKSWCS/IMIOPC | MCCMOS | MISO Tour | CA Tour | IO Bn Staff Tour | EWS/PME | Advanced IO/CMO Course | IW Company Commander | Staff Tour/Cyber Tour | IO Battalion XO/OpsO | Advanced Level School | Staff Tour | Joint IO Tour | IO Bn Commander | MAGTF Staff Tour

warfare officers, much in the way the artillery community aims to create well-rounded MAGTF fires officers.

The second course of action (see Figure 2) is a fleet accession model, similar to that currently used by the Marine Raiders. In this model, interested officers of any MOS will apply and be screened for a lateral move to the information warfare primary MOS. This will allow the information warfare community to select the most suitable officers while also leveraging their rich and varied backgrounds. The diversity of feeder MOSs would enrich the community with various perspectives and would inherently create the mindset of

being a MAGTF officer. By making it a permanent move, it would allow new information warfare officers to fully immerse themselves in the concepts of information operations, free of the burden of maintaining proficiency in two different occupational fields. Although there would be less time available for new information warfare officers to gain operational experience in the information-related capabilities before becoming staff officers, their presumed higher level of maturity will likely mitigate this risk.

Both courses of action place the MISO/psychological operations tour before the civil affairs tour because of

an analysis of the difference between the two communities. Both capabilities are similar in form and concept and are certainly mutually supportive to the point of operational symbiosis. Civil affairs, however, is much less quantitative and structured in objectives when compared to its MISO counterparts. It is because of this more amorphous nature of civil affairs that the risk of less experienced officers in the MISO/psychological operations field is assumed in order to get the more experienced and mature officers into the civil affairs billets. This risk is mitigated by the already existing structure of the MISO/PSYOP community, the implementation of appropriate

Information touches every aspect of our lives. (Photo by LCpl Tojyea Matally.)

layers of command and control, and the use of well-developed mission tactics within the IW/IO community.

Most information-related capabilities already have a primary associated MOS (signals intelligence, electronic warfare, combat camera/public affairs office, physical destruction, etc.). The practitioners of these information-related capabilities are highly professional, and their ranks are filled with subject-matter experts. Their relationship with information operations is fairly clear; however, the key executioners of the more unclear and complex information-related capabilities do not currently have a primary MOS. These information-related capabilities include civil affairs and MISO/psychological operations. In order to succeed, these two disciplines require a set of skills, specific training, and a keen understanding of information operations. Currently, these billets are filled by Marine officers during their B-billets who receive the free MOS respective to their positions. A free MOS (FMOS) is a non-PMOS that can be filled by any Marine regardless of primary MOS. A free MOS requires skill sets unrelated to primary skills. The serious drawback to this paradigm is that these officers receive sufficient formal and on-the-job training to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful in their particular discipline

and as information-operations practitioners, but they are then returned to their primary MOS. When they return to their primary MOS, they may not fill any information operations-related billets for the remainder of their career. With this institutionalized atrophy of talented and experienced officers from the information-operations community, the Marine Corps is tying one hand behind its back while trying to develop an effective and coherent information warfare capability.

Information-Related Capability Career Opportunities for Enlisted Marines

In his February 2016 *Marine Corps Gazette* article, LtCol Rob McGrath argued in favor of a "Marine Military Information Support Operations PMOS."[4] Here, I co-opt his recommendations with one caveat. There should be a primary MOS for civil affairs specialists in the Active Component much like there is in the Reserve Component (primary MOS 0532). Currently, active duty Marines serve in civil affairs billets with the MOS 0531; however, once their tour in civil affairs is complete, they return to their primary MOS with little prospect of ever returning to the civil affairs community—unless they transition to the Reserve Component and join a civil affairs group. The same issues from the DOTMLPF analysis in

the previous section, as well as those from LtCol McGrath's article, remain; however, the number of Marines within the force with the 0531 MOS is reaching the threshold of being able to sustain an 0531 primary MOS. LtCol McGrath's arguments in support of the establishment of a MISO primary MOS are equally applicable to the creation of a civil affairs primary MOS within the Active Component. In both cases, the retention of highly skilled, expertly trained, and experienced practitioners of both MISO and civil affairs will only increase the capability of the Marine Corps to operate within the information environment.

Conclusion

This proposal is not designed or intended to be a radical departure from currently established doctrine or concepts on how the Marine Corps conducts information operations; it is intended to enhance current practices and capitalize on future changes to the Marine Corps' force structure and concepts. The Marine Corps is continuing to accept and improve on its capability to influence and leverage the information environment in MAGTF operations. In order to fully capitalize on the already-existing and growing information operations community within the Marine Corps, it must become professionalized and cultivated to reach its full potential.

Notes

1. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*. Translated by Samuel B. Griffith. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963).

2. Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited by Michael Howard, Peter Paret, and Bernard Brodie, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

3. Liang Qiao and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999).

4. LtCol Rob McGrath, "Psychological-Based Information Warfare," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: February 2016).

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