

Humans Are More Important Than Hardware

Putting “OIE Truth #1” into action

by LtCol Jeff Starr & Maj Jacob Showalter

Proficimus more irrenti: we make progress unhindered by custom. This is the Air Corps Tactical School’s motto in the 1930s when strategic bombing doctrine was only theory and considered radical because it was contrary to established doctrine. Such is the nature of operations in the information environment (OIE), which continues to evolve as the seventh joint function. As the *Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment* concludes, “Information is changing the character of modern warfare”¹ in the era of conflict and great power competition. Planning and executing support to OIE, while intriguing, is a challenging endeavor. There is perhaps no more significant example of this than the ongoing effort to define the interconnection between information and intelligence and their respective roles in warfighting. This work serves as the first in a series of articles intended to chart a path to understanding the information-intelligence relationship at the tactical level and will be followed by works on multi-intelligence support to MEF operations and information, intelligence, and fires fusion.

After the 2d Intelligence Battalion (2d Intel) change of command in June 2020, our first operationally focused task was presented in a two-part question. How does intelligence support OIE in MEF operations, and which section or unit in II MEF is best suited to research the problem? The II MEF Information Group (MIG) S-2, under-resourced and heavily engaged in day-to-day opera-



OIE spotter (intelligence) and shooter (information related capabilities) collaboration is essential to creating the nonlethal effects necessary to achieve a commander’s objective. (Photo by SSgt Jacob Osborne.)

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tions, had little time for discovery learning. *In the throes of perpetual competition*, the MIG Information Command Center (ICC) was no better postured to do so. Perhaps 2d Intel, a unit whose primary mission is to man, train, equip

and provide intelligence support to the MAGTF? Why not? We had the bandwidth and, by proxy, a vested interest to explore solutions.

Over the course of two weeks, a 2d Intel working group reviewed OIE doc-

trine, spoke with members of II MIG and the greater intelligence community, and discussed ways and means before coming to a glaring conclusion: there is no existing model of intelligence support to OIE, at least not at the MEF level. In the absence of precedent, we determined the best immediate solution to meet mission demand was to bring spotters (intelligence) and shooters (information related capabilities) together in an immersive, real-world learning environment. As identified in the Five OIE Truths, the training and educating of intelligence professionals supporting OIE, coupled with an understanding of the adversary's human domain, is more important than legacy intelligence support.² Simply put, there is no substitute for experiential learning.

In the fall of 2020, 2d Intel assembled a multi-discipline intelligence direct support team (DST), aligned to the ICC, to inform and educate intelligence professionals on OIE processes and procedures and increase understanding between the intelligence and information warfighting functions. The following is an initial assessment composed by one component of this DST, the CI/HUMINT Detachment (CHD). It is, in effect, a summarized narrative of observations and lessons learned focused on challenges in establishing tactical HUMINT in cyber, manpower constraints, and C2. To be clear, none of these observations are meant to cast aspersions but rather to inform, and wherever possible, to advance the operational posture of CI/HUMINT Marines serving either with or in support of the MIG mission. Further, this article does not seek to provide an all-inclusive model to answer each operational shortfall gleaned from the CHD's experience. Instead, it primarily serves to outline considerations identified thus far as 2d Intel continues to refine the ICC DST model.

Early Days and Hard Truths

Upon assignment to the ICC, the CHD's first order of business was to understand the II MIG Commander's vision and intent, including efforts to enable HUMINT in cyber, similar to

several activities conducted at U.S. Cyber Command. CI/HUMINT Marines build relationships with sources to collect information of intelligence value in the physical domain and, given the necessary training and permissions, can employ their craft in cyberspace where activities are practicable, agnostic of time and space.

While conducting research, the CHD established numerous valuable contacts with U.S. Cyber Command, Marine Corps Forces Cyberspace Command, Marine Corps Forces Command, and various components of interagency organizations. As they deepened conversations with these stakeholders, shortfalls in all facets of the ICC CHD's knowledge in offensive and defensive cyberspace operations became apparent. At the MEF level, HUMINT in cyberspace is uncharted territory that requires Service direction and guidance. Further, a tour rotation of approximately six to nine months in the ICC may not be the best use of resources because of a required thirteen-month tailored training pipeline to meet operational requirements. Lastly and most informative was the frequent reminder that the tools, funds, and authorities and permissions needed to operate within the MIG commander's intent are difficult to obtain—both monetarily and temporally.

Talent Management

A frequent topic of conversation (or consternation) across the Marine Corps Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Enterprise is the low density, high demand nature of the CI/HUMINT community, further complicated by a significant shortfall in CI/HUMINT Marines with cyber-related and sensitive support requirements. This shortfall proved consequential because the CHD could not organically satisfy specific ICC requirements. For example, while conducting threat assessments on various ICC information-related capabilities and evaluating emerging technology fielded across elements of II MEF, the CHD leaned heavily on Marines with technical surveillance countermeasures and electronic warfare backgrounds. The absence of organic cyber and technical surveillance countermeasures subject matter experts required the CHD to outsource to gather even basic knowledge on the problem, thereby slowing the response time.

Another concern was 2d Intel's struggle to identify and retain experienced cyber personnel to support the MIG mission. Of the few CI/HUMINT Marines with extensive cyber-focused training and operational experience, 2d Intel was fortunate to have one within its ranks until he executed orders to fill

The current manpower model ... forces Marines to move out of skills they excel at in the name of developing them, and cuts careers off near the 20-year mark when workers have decades of productivity left in them. These policies drive increased PCS costs, throw away talent at the point it is most productive and highly trained, and discourage performers who would like to continue serving, but may be less interested in promotion or constant disruptive moves of questionable personal and professional value.³

**—Gen Berger,
Commandant's Planning Guidance, 2019**

a traditional role in PACOM, despite several attempts to retain his services. With the reemergence of great power competition and investment in niche, technical competencies to support activities in the grey zone, we must, where appropriate, adjust the assignment process to place highly trained, technically proficient Marines at the point of friction. Enforcing traditional manpower assignment models on these Marines is antithetical to emergent operating concepts.

Command Relationships and Effective Communication

II MIG, the ICC, and 2d Intel reside within the same compound, a unique situation that supports continuous communication, collaboration, and decision making. By virtue, the ICC CHD is at the forefront of communication between key members of the II MIG and 2d Intel staffs. This model works, in large part, because the ICC

“[Information Operations] is not about ownership of individual capabilities but rather the use of those capabilities as force multipliers to create a desired effect.”⁴

—Joint Publication 3-13, Information Operations, 2014

CHD has the luxury of proximity to MIG and 2d Intel staffs. Furthermore, the MIG commander promotes a risk-tolerant environment, encourages inter-organizational cooperation, and values the insights and considerations of his subordinate commanders and subject matter experts. The rapid pace of operations in the ICC and limited time for subordinate commanders and staffs to engage the MIG commander outside battle rhythm events means the ICC CHD regularly carries operational

the training, material, manpower, and funding lines to produce a permanent solution. Understanding the threat in the information environment is essential to disrupting adversaries, protecting the force, and ensuring command and control. The ubiquity, rapid growth, and highly interconnected nature of the cyber domain as an operational environment is something we must fully commit to if we hope to compete now. Our adversaries are persistently engaged in the information environment and reaping the benefits of their investments across the full spectrum of OIE. It is imperative that we do the same.

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updates between the two units. Given their job description, observing and reporting on key-leader engagements is a common practice for CI/HUMINT Marines. Relying on the CHD to bridge communication requires establishing relationships and gaining the trust of key staff in both commands, a situation alleviated by physical collocation.

Conclusion

CI/HUMINT support to OIE in MEF level operations is a work in progress that requires a deliberate DOTMLPF-C analysis. Still, lessons learned through immersion and experience will help build a pathway to long-term support models. 2d Intel established the current model to answer the immediate demand, but the Service must compose the doctrine and identify

Notes

1. Brian E. Russell, “The Five OIE Truths: What It Takes To Be Successful In The Information Environment,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: April 2021).
2. Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment*, (Washington, DC: July 2018).
3. Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: July 2019).
4. Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *JP 3-13: Information Operations*, (Washington, DC: November 2014).



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