

Intelligence Warfighting

Rethinking MAGTF intel structure and support concepts
by Capt Matthew T. Perry, Johnathon J. Rice & John Shin

Our purpose in life as Marine intelligence professionals is to support the commander on the deck and to win in combat against our Nation's enemies, or, in intel-speak, "provide intelligence at the tactical edge to maintain a qualitative advantage over adversaries on the modern battlefield." If what we do as a community does not directly or indirectly support our Marines' ability to "locate, close with, and destroy the enemy by fire and maneuver, or repel the enemy assault by fire and close combat," then our collective efforts are self-serving. National-tactical integration, emerging and sophisticated technology, career-broadening assignments—all goodness provided via the Marine Corps Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Enterprise (MCISRE)—are worthless if they ultimately yield little to our organization's main effort, Marine infantry. As the infantry adapts to overcome the demands of the current and future anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) operating environment, so too must the intelligence apparatus that supports it. Therefore, we must examine how to best support the GCE through a deliberate reorganization of intelligence structure and capabilities within the MAGTF.

Birds of a Feather

The MAGTF structure, perhaps by design, corresponds closely to respective warfighting functions: command element (CE) to command and control, GCE and ACE to fires and maneuver, and LCE to logistics. (See Figure 1.) *Where is the equivalent for intelligence within the MAGTF?* (Note: Force protection is omitted, as it is a collective re-

>Capt Perry is an Infantry Officer serving as an Inspector-Instructor with 4th Reconnaissance Battalion, 4th MarDiv. He has previously served as Company Commander, III MEF and Operations Officer, 2d Reconnaissance Battalion, 2d MarDiv. He has deployed in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM—Afghanistan with 3dBn, 7th Marines.

>>Capt Rice is an Intelligence Officer serving with Force Reconnaissance Company, III MEF. He has served with 3d Radio Battalion and deployed with Joint Special Operations Task Force—Philippines. As an enlisted intelligence specialist, he served with 1st MarDiv, and he deployed in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM with 5th Marine Regiment and 2dBn, 5th Marines.

>>>Capt Shin was an Intelligence Officer who served with 3d Reconnaissance Battalion. He deployed in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE as part of the Commander's Initiative Group, CJTF-OIR, and served at 3d Radio Battalion, deploying with the 31st MEU. He is currently a Student at Expeditionary Warfare School.

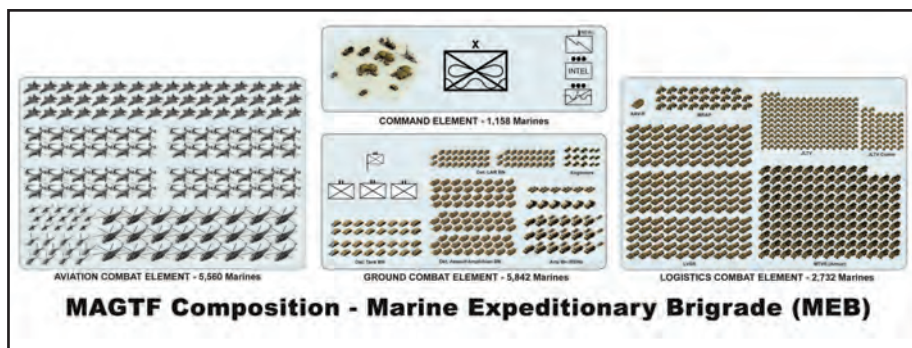


Figure 1.

quirement across the MAGTF.) Intelligence, as a critical warfighting function, must be organized in a similar fashion within the MAGTF to yield maximum gain and synergy across complementary and mutually supporting intelligence disciplines, especially with respect to intelligence collection. If we pride ourselves on combined arms doctrine, should we not apply a similar approach

to our ground-based ISR capabilities and assets?

*"To find something new,
just look to the past."*

The concept of a modern-day ISR regiment was introduced by Gen Alfred M. Gray in the 1980s as the Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Intelligence Group (SRIG). Signals intelligence/electronic warfare (SIGINT/EW), counterintelligence/human intelligence (CI/HUMINT), ground sensors, force reconnaissance (collector types), and meteorological and oceanographic (METOC), imagery, topographic, and all-source analysts were under the purview of a single colonel commander. (Note: communications battalions and unmanned aerial vehicle companies were also original components. However, technological advancements have since leavened these capabilities across the MAGTF.)^{1 2} The SRIG was disbanded in the late 1990s because of a myriad of issues, most notably, uncodified command relationships across the Service between MEF G-2s and SRIG commanders and mixed results from Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM.³ Force reconnaissance companies were eventually administratively chopped to the reconnaissance battalions with the Marine division post-creation of Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC), and the other collectors were chopped to the MEF Headquarters Group. The SRIG concept was, according to many, “ahead of its time.” Fast-forward twenty-plus years, post-Operations IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) and ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), and the days of “stovepiped” collections and intelligence are long gone. The post-9/11 mantra was no longer “need-to-know,” but “need-to-share,” and our fellow maneuverers have been proselytized to the importance of operations—intelligence integration. They witnessed the multi-intelligence discipline, “find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze, disseminate” (F3EAD), targeting of our skilled military and intelligence community collectors and analysts. They saw lives saved on patrol from timely indications and warnings. Conversely, they also raided dry holes, kicked down the wrong doors, and destroyed the wrong targets. Our Marines learned firsthand that it doesn’t take a lot to know what “good” and “bad” intelligence looks like.

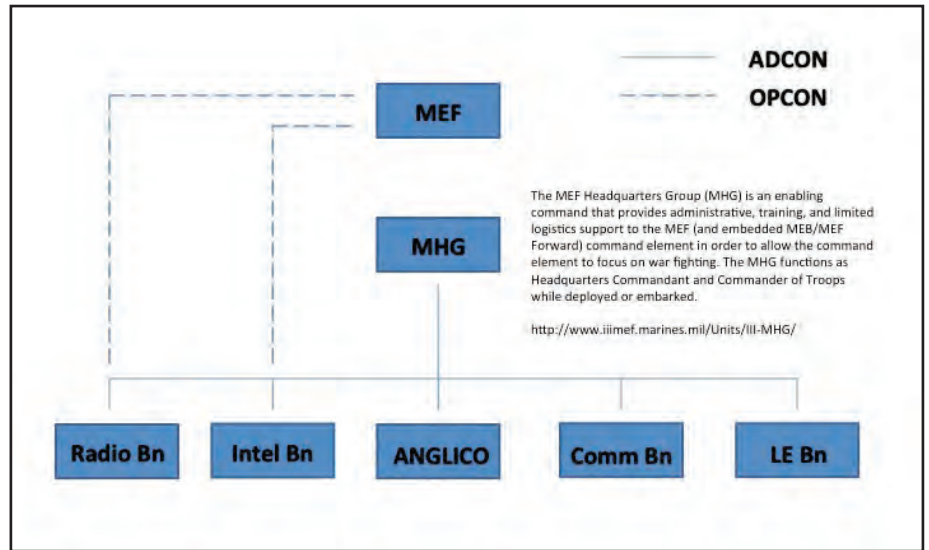


Figure 2.

Back to the Future

In 2013, LtCol James W. Eagan highlighted the need for a revisited SRIG concept in his thesis, *The ISR Regiment: The New Eyes and Ears for Shaping the MAGTF Commander’s Battlespace*, and notably placed a heavy emphasis on the reconnaissance community’s proposed role within the command element.⁴ With the Marine Corps Intelligence Department, C4 Department, Office of USMC Communications; the organize, train, and equip parts of the Marine Corps Information Operations Center; and some of the space, offensive cyber, electronic warfare, and operational security organizations proposed to fall under the purview of a three-star Deputy Commandant for Information (DCI),⁵ the ISR regiment may soon become reality and fulfill Gen Gray’s vision. The MEF Headquarters Group, largely an *administrative* headquarters for assorted capabilities within the CE, has been re-branded as the Marine Information Group (MIG). (See Figure 2.)

The MCISRE has a window of opportunity to get this as close to right as possible and set the necessary conditions to exponentially optimize its ability to “sense and make sense” of the current and future operating environment. A MIG colonel-level command in each of the MEFs should ideally serve as an *operational* headquarters to a foundational backbone consisting of a radio battalion, intelligence battalion, and

reconnaissance battalion—a reorganization that concentrates ground-based ISR capabilities to hyper-focus the MAGTF collection effort via deliberate, cogent, and integrated intelligence operations and, more importantly, to enable a decisive, functional, and cognitive advantage over our adversaries. The organic capabilities of these respective lieutenant colonel commands coalesce extremely well and play to respective units’ strengths and weaknesses, capabilities and limitations, and excesses and shortfalls.

- Leveraging reconnaissance teams’ special insert and extract capabilities and/or unique placement and access to emplace unattended ground sensors, “mule,” or deliver (witting or unwitting) other technical payloads can significantly enable front-end collection at the MAGTF, theater, or national level. A reconnaissance team’s reach, endurance, and “ground-truth” contextual understanding of and within the deep battlespace has tremendous potential to facilitate automated and non-automated cross-cueing and tipping. Unfortunately, the reconnaissance battalions do not possess organic or dedicated geospatial and imagery support to precisely fine-tune critical tactical considerations and control measures that would enhance ground-tethered “soak.”
- The SIGINT and HUMINT communities, regardless of professional

and healthy rivalry, are extremely harmonious, and their cross-discipline value was thoroughly put on display throughout OIF and OEF. Sound application of these disciplines provides the required and well-established “ISR start points” for effective F3EAD⁶ and decide, detect, deliver, and assess targeting processes. However, the radio and intelligence battalions lack sufficient special insert and extract equipment, infrastructure, and supervisory capabilities (e.g., jumpmasters, dive supervisors, helicopter rope suspension techniques, masters, parafoists, dive and boat lockers, coxswains, etc., and joint terminal attack controllers, joint forward observers, and scout snipers) possessed by the reconnaissance battalions to facilitate a team’s ability to penetrate and preemptively/kinetically shape the A2/AD bubble and/or deliver lethal effects against a targeted network.

- Intelligence battalions possess the analytical manpower and capabilities to process, exploit, and disseminate (PED) the increased “take” of fused collect and provide customized pre-mission and in-stride multi-intelligence support and dedicated personnel who are inorganic to their counterpart battalions (geospatial, imagery, METOC, CI/HUMINT, etc.).

- The radio and intelligence battalions are also postured well to contribute to the DCI joint PED (JPED) initiative⁷ to PED theater lines of ISR, provided they are adequately manned and resourced. Coupled with a refined and flattened request for an information management system, the MIG would serve as a natural connecting file to MAGTF intelligence centers, PED hubs, and “MAGTF-2s.”

It is extremely salient that all these units have well-established in-roads with the national intelligence and special operations communities that can be leveraged to “raise all boats,” especially through Gen Neller and Gen Thomas’ USMC–USSOCOM *Concept for Integration, Interdependence, and Interoperability*. Under this proposed MIG construct, delegation of already-established authorities via the national intelligence community remain largely

unchanged. The MIG would also be well positioned and postured to explore and exploit the cross-organizational “man-machine teaming” concepts of the DOD’s third offset strategy.⁸ Especially important is the fact that the MIG commander will now have the ability to task-organize tailored multi-intelligence discipline forces based on mission requirements throughout the battlespace to support the SPMAGTF, MEU, MEB, MEF, and joint force commander. What remains, however, is the age-old question of “force provider” versus “battlefield commander” that plagued the SRIG and brought upon its demise. Under a proposed force provider concept, the MIG commander retains man, train, and equip responsibilities while the supported MAGTF or joint force commander retains primacy for the MAGTF collection strategy and collections management (to include collections requirements management and collections operations management) via the MEU S-2/G-2/J-2 and to execute authority via the MEU S-3/G-3/J-3. (See Figure 3.)

Key Definitions

- *Collection strategy.* An analytical approach used by collection managers to determine which intelligence

disciplines can be applied to satisfy information requirements. (See *Joint Publication 2-0 (JP 2-0)*, *Joint Intelligence*, (Washington, DC: Joint Staff, 2013.)

- *Collection requirements management.* The authoritative development and control of collection, processing, exploitation, and/or reporting requirements that normally result in either the direct tasking of requirements to units over which the commander has authority or the generation of tasking requests to collection management authorities at a higher, lower, or lateral echelon to accomplish the collection mission. (See *JP 2-0*.)

- *Collection operations management.* The authoritative direction, scheduling, and control of specific collection operations and associated processing, exploitation, and reporting resources. (See *JP 2-0*.)

The common counter to this particular MIG construct is that it comes at the cost of division commanders “losing” an organic asset in the form of reconnaissance battalions. However, the division commander ultimately gains a much more robust, coordinated, and innervated set of “eyes and ears” than if he were to exclusively employ this organic, single-discipline asset current-

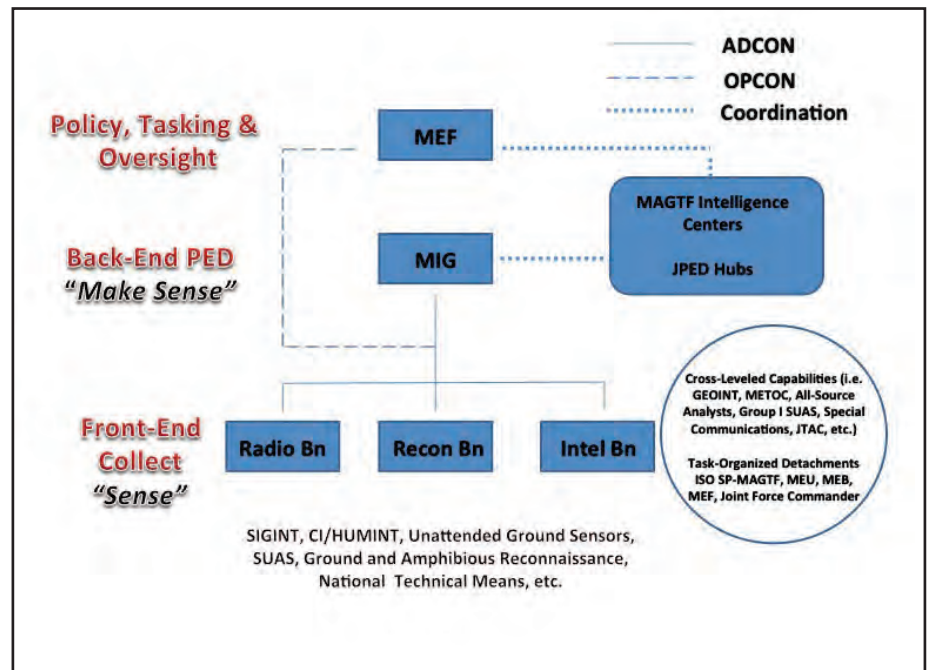


Figure 3.

ly limited to visual line-of-sight with little to no organic PED capacity. As a promising return on investment, the division commander receives a similar special reconnaissance capability regularly enjoyed by his special operations forces counterparts when ground and amphibious reconnaissance teams are coupled with tactical HUMINT, SIGINT, small unmanned aircraft systems, national technical means, etc. Special reconnaissance is defined in *Joint Publication 1-02, DOD Military Dictionary and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: 2009), and *Joint Publication 3-05, Special Operations* (Washington, DC: 2011), as:

Reconnaissance and surveillance actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or diplomatically and/or politically sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance, employing military capabilities not normally found in conventional forces. These actions provide an additive capability for commanders and supplement other conventional reconnaissance and surveillance actions.

(Note: This is not an argument to create additional SOF or GCE special operations.) What the division commander initially loses in organic capacity, he gains considerably in long-term capability. (Note: The U.S. Army's decision to deactivate its long-range surveillance companies in January 2017 is an excellent case study and argument for proposed transformative change.⁹ Army long-range surveillance units have been deactivated and reactivated on numerous occasions throughout their history.)

Though a division commander's angst regarding promised support is indeed warranted, he can be assuaged by the long-standing precedent of MEF HUMINT and SIGINT assets directly supporting and, in many cases, attaching to GCE elements. Although not a perfect analogy, just as Marine air supports the GCE, the MIG would inherently support the Marine division. Not to cast *schadenfreude*, but imagine the quality of aircraft maintenance, pilot and air crew proficiency, and impact to flying hours if the GCE possessed



Developing man-unmanned teaming concepts has excellent potential to enhance intelligence collection, facilitate economy of force, significantly mitigate risk to forces and mission, and produce asymmetric effects throughout the battlespace. An Iver3-580 Autonomous Underwater Vehicle (AUV) is put on display during an informational brief aboard Marine Corps Base HI, 6 September 2017. The AUV was demonstrated by the Naval Research Laboratory and 3d Reconnaissance Battalion for senior leaders with Marine Corps Forces, Pacific. The system is a state-of-the-art autonomous device that could help provide amphibious units with quick and accurate underwater survey data. (Photo by Cpl Jesus Sepulveda Torres.)

organic air assets. Conversely, imagine the increased quality of intelligence that would result from like collections-focused teams and analysts consistently practicing and operating together to tackle problem sets, increase battlespace awareness, and satisfy the commander's priority intelligence requirements to drive and steer the ground scheme of maneuver. Pragmatically speaking, with enduring and recurring personnel contribution from the reconnaissance battalions to the East Coast, West Coast, and Okinawa's MEUs, there is already reduced capacity available for division tasking, most of which is tied to required specialized skills training and MEU deployment work-ups, valuable time that could be maximized to forge advanced collection methodologies, applications, and tactical interoperability (e.g., special reconnaissance, support to targeting, battlespace shaping, etc.).

An excellent example of such integration was a 31st MEU field exercise in 2016 dubbed "INTELEX." The concept and execution of this field event resulted from the combined grassroots efforts

and initiative of key players across multiple intelligence disciplines and different sourcing units. The event had force reconnaissance, ground sensors, radio reconnaissance/SIGINT support teams, CI/HUMINT, and the MEU S-2's production and analysis section come together and truly tackle the workflow that is the intelligence cycle; notably, this was aside from regular MEU exercises (e.g., Certification Exercise, Realistic Urban Training Exercise, etc.). What naturally started as professional skepticism and hesitation amongst involved parties, particularly the collectors, resulted in increased trust and confidence in each other's capabilities and, more importantly, a deeper understanding of each other's limitations. Because of INTELEX's success, it has become a recurring event.¹⁰ This synergy must be regularly replicated outside of the MEU and must occur pre-crisis (i.e., operations plan/concept plans), or we invite extremely grave miscalculations and failures that easily could have been avoided through a MIG commander's leadership and foresight. Such examples include:

- Radio battalions' on-scene ability to prosecute various target sets throughout a given area of operations.
- Reconnaissance battalions' ability and capacity to conduct the tandem offset resupply delivery system personnel to insert crucial battlefield enablers.
- Communication limitations of program of record ground sensors.
- Intelligence battalions' limited inventory of 0211s and other high-demand/low-density assets.
- Zero-sum competition for intelligence enablers (collectors, analysts, special communicators, etc.) between MARSOC and the conventional forces.

As a community, we must anticipate operational shortfalls and retain the ability to affect organizational and institutional change through unified command channels. It would be in the MIG commander's best interest, and that of the end-users, to ultimately do so. The archaic use of the Automatic



A student with the Reconnaissance Team Leader Course gathers information during the final exercise, 31 October 2017, at Bellows Air Force Base, HI. (Photo by Senior Airman Ryan Conroy.)

“Now the general who wins a battle makes many calculations in his temple ere the battle is fought. The general who loses a battle makes but few calculations beforehand. Thus do many calculations lead to victory, and few calculations to defeat: how much more no calculation at all! It is by attention to this point that I can foresee who is likely to win or lose.”

—Sun Tzu

Message Handling System to request forces and support from different major subordinate commands and elements within the same MEF (i.e., radio battalion/intelligence battalion to MIG/MEF to division to recon battalion and vice versa) to train to game-day standards for any particular operations plan must turn into a painful and distant memory. As we are well aware, it is nearly a Sisyphian task to achieve unity of effort without unity of command.

Trade Secrets

In conjunction with a deliberate reorganization, the MCISRE can adapt the best practices of its parts to its greater whole. Quite frankly, the MCISRE is the model for fleet and support establishment integration, specifically highlighting communities of practice (CoPs), well-known MCISRE secrets of radio battalion modernization and concept exploration (RADBN MODS), systems integration management officers (SIMO), and the Marine Cryptologic Office (MCO).

CoPs are sounding boards and opportunities for fleet engagement and are conducted mostly via video teleconference on a regular and recurring basis

between unit-designated representatives and HQMC. CoPs provide HQMC “ground-truth” feedback on various initiatives and facilitate key dialogue across various ranks, mostly within respective intelligence disciplines. CoPs should continue to open the aperture of discussion to adjacent communities as much as possible to foster creativity and innovation and mitigate groupthink and praetorian protectionism.

As for RADBN MODS, SIMOs, and the MCO, they are instrumental reasons why the radio battalion continues to remain successful in its line of work despite leaping and evolving technology advancements and a relatively regular moving problem set. RADBN MODS in the Supporting Establishment and the respective radio battalion SIMOs, normally senior chief warrant officers, serve as requisite middlemen between Operating Force requirements and emerging commercial off-the-shelf and program of record equipment and software. Each radio battalion has SIMOs who regularly communicate with RADBN MODS, the greater intelligence community, and industry representatives to ensure the tactical units remain relevant with advance-

ments in technology. Meanwhile, the MCO serves as a critical interlocutor between tactical-, operational-, and strategic-level stakeholders to enable and ensure that the community is successful in the execution of its mission and in accordance with governing policy. The MCO does tremendous work on behalf of the radio battalions and MARSOC and is arguably the critical enabler for the Marine Corps' stellar reputation in tactical SIGINT. The MCISRE should look to replicate the RADBN MODS-SIMO-MCO symbiosis for other intelligence disciplines (e.g., unmanned underwater vehicles and littoral data collection for METOC and amphibious reconnaissance, non-program of record unattended ground sensors with greater DOD and national intelligence community entities, etc.) and/or invest additional resources and manpower into equities such as the Tactical Exploitation of National Capabilities (TENCAP) Program, Office of Naval Research, and fleet-integrated/solicited science and technology initiatives.^{11 12}

As a note of caution, we cannot grow over-enamored by expensive toys, considering a 3D-printed drone, costing less than \$300 to build at home with YouTube instructions, can easily produce asymmetric effects and quickly throw a force into a conundrum. We should heed the words of Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis that “the most important six inches on the battlefield is between [our] ears.” If we fail to *think deeply* and rely too heavily on whiz-bang gadgets to solve tactical, operational, and strategic problems (material and non-material, kinetic and non-kinetic, hard and soft power, etc.), then we risk being out-maneuvered by our state/non-state adversaries and being of marginalized utility for national decision makers.

Conclusion

With the DCI's plan in motion, the MCISRE can truly capitalize on the “wasta”* built off the backs and brains of its Marines and build three judiciously structured MIGs for its

*Wasta is an Arabic term with a meaning similar to “clout” or “influence.”

corresponding MEFs as means to best support our MAGTF commanders. A colonel-level command with a radio battalion, intelligence battalion, and reconnaissance battalion backbone would ensure the recurrence and sustainability of integrating complementary intelligence capabilities that are structurally disparate, disjointed, and stovepiped as “silos of excellence” and would optimize the MCISRE's ability to “sense and make sense” of the current and fu-

We should heed the words of Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis that “the most important six inches on the battlefield is between [our] ears.”

ture operating environment. A re-brand from MHG to MIG without deliberate and dynamic mission-based structural change will not yield the necessary effects to win against observing, calculating, adapting, and technologically advancing belligerents. Additionally, the MCISRE should replicate best practices such as RADBN MODS-SIMOs-MCO and invest in additional TENCAP or science and technology integration opportunities for other intelligence collectives as an enabling, supplemental means to re-establish functional and cognitive dominance in numerous domains. After all, we do not train and fight to simply survive contact in the A2/AD space. We train and fight to thrive, dominate, and win.

Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *The Marine Corps Force Structure Plan*, (Washington, DC: 1991).
2. Headquarters Marine Corps, *FMFM 3-21, MAGTF Intelligence Operations*, (Washington, DC: 1991).

3. Charlene J. Quilter II, *U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990–1991 With the I Marine Expeditionary Force in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*, (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, 1993).
4. LtCol James W. Eagan, *The ISR Regiment: The New Eyes and Ears for Shaping the MAGTF Commander's Battlespace*, (Quantico, VA: USMC Command and Staff College, 2013).
5. HQMC Information Paper, “Establishment of Deputy Commandant for Information Warfare Progress Report,” (Washington, DC: December 2016).
6. Michael T. Flynn, Rich Juergens, and Thomas L. Cantrell, “Employing ISR: SOF Best Practices,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, (Online: 2008), available at <http://www.dtic.mil>.
7. “Establishment of Deputy Commandant for Information Warfare Progress Report.”
8. Deputy Secretary of Defense, “Deputy Secretary: Third Offset Strategy Bolsters America's Military Deterrence,” (Washington, DC: 2016), available at <https://www.defense.gov>.
9. Alex Horton, “Army Quietly Deactivates its Small Team Reconnaissance Units,” *Stars and Stripes*, (Washington, DC: 23 January 2017), available at <https://www.stripes.com>.
10. Eli Morales and Joshua Chambers, *Intelligence Exercise 16.2 After-Action Report, 31st MEU*, (2016).
11. Headquarters Marine Corps, “Tactical Exploitation of National Capability,” (Washington, DC: 2018), available at <http://www.hqmc.marines.mil>.
12. Chief of Naval Operations, *United States Navy Program Guide 2017*, (Washington, DC: 2017), available at <http://www.navy.mil>.

