

A Time to Iterate

The MEF intelligence brigade

by LtCols Ben Hodgins & Marc Caldwell

Marines innovate, iterate, change course, make steady improvements, and execute bold adjustments when required. We follow doctrine; however, we do not blindly adhere to doctrine and are willing to change our paradigm when warranted. Now is the time to iterate and change the paradigm again.

Over the last 25 years, MEF-level intelligence has undergone many phases.¹ In the mid- and late-90s, the Surveillance and Reconnaissance Intelligence Groups led the MEF intelligence, radio, and reconnaissance battalions. For a time, after the SRIG dissolved, the radio and intelligence battalions operated as independent battalions under the cognizance of the MEF Assistant Chief of Staff (AC/S) G-2 and alongside the new MEF headquarters group (MHG). The reconnaissance battalion and force reconnaissance company split with the former falling under division and the latter staying as a MEF-level asset. Eventually, MHG assumed administrative control of radio battalion, intelligence battalion, and the force reconnaissance companies. With the advent of Marine Corps Special Operations Command, force reconnaissance company returned to the division reconnaissance battalion for care and feeding while remaining, in theory, a MEF asset. In its final form prior to its dissolution in 2017, the MHG consisted of the radio, intelligence, communications, and law enforcement battalions while in conjunction with the air-naval gunfire liaison company.

The MIG

This leads us to recent history: the *Marine Operating Concept* (MOC) (Washington, DC: HQMC, 2016), the emphasis on command control in the

>LtCol Hodgins is an 0202 MAGTF Intelligence Officer. He recently served as the II MEF G2 Operations Officer and is currently stationed in the National Capitol Region.

>>LtCol Caldwell is an 0202 MAGTF Intelligence Officer. He is currently serving as the II MEF Deputy AC/S G2.

MOC,² and the emergence of information as a warfighting function.³ At the tactical end of this information spear are the two-year-old MEF information groups (MIGs). These organization superseded the MHGs and retained command of the MHG's battalions while adding a MEF support battalion and an information coordination center (ICC) falling under the MIG S-3 or MIG CO, depending on the MIG. The II MIG Mission Statement is to

coordinate, integrate and employ Information Environment Operations (IE Ops) capabilities in order to ensure the MAGTF Commander's ability

to facilitate friendly forces maneuver and deny the enemy freedom of action in the information environment. Provide communications, intelligence, supporting arms liaison, and law enforcement capabilities ISO [in support of] MAGTF Operations.⁴

The MIG organization did indeed, on paper, provide the MEF's commanding generals a colonel commander responsible for executing information environment operations (through the ICC) while creating the necessary structure to address MEF command element administrative and logistical support (through the MEF Support



Marines with 2d Intelligence Battalion setting up a Joint Mobile Intelligence Communication System. (Photo by Cpl Justin Updegraff.)

Battalion). However, this structure also generated serious negative concerns for the intelligence community. The MHG functioned strictly in an administrative and logistical support capacity which allowed each intelligence command to operate under the direction of the MEF AC/S G-2. Yet, in this newly designated formation, the MIG commander is a battlespace owner (the information domain) and has demands of his intelligence apparatus to feed the ICC which consequently informs and responds to the fire and effects coordination center (FECC) in the G-3. At the same time, the MEF AC/S G-2 has the responsibility to provide intelligence to the MEF CG and staff, direct intelligence operations in the MEF area of responsibility, and coordinate intelligence operations executed by the MIG commander's intelligence elements and the division's force reconnaissance company.

Beyond the now complicated direction and execution of intelligence operations, there are concerns regarding the processing, exploitation, and dissemination of that collected information. A case in point is the key product produced by the ICC, the "running estimate" of the information environment; this product is heavily reliant upon intelligence information gathered from the MIG's intelligence and radio battalions which ostensibly are operating under the direction of the MEF AC/S G-2. In garrison, this is

the MAGTF intelligence center and is staffed largely by the intelligence battalion. However, in a deployed environment, it is the intelligence operations center (IOC) formed from the intelligence battalion operations company. This presents a potentially significant problem. While the G-2 is responsible

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for providing the MEF CG with an accurate and up-to-date intelligence estimate to drive future operations (using the MIG intelligence apparatus), the MIG commander simultaneously has the requirement to brief the CG the running estimate of the information environment using much of the same information *from the same MEF intelligence apparatus* but with potentially different or competing analysis. While differing analysis or alternative theories are absolutely valuable for a commander and are a requirement to prevent group think or to address specific biases, this scenario is presenting the MEF CG with repackaged information further removed from the source and the analysts closest to the problem.

Much like the potential conflicts

between the MEF G-2 and MIG commander, the FECC and the ICC have a similar problem where the ICC is informing the FECC using the information the G3 is already receiving from the G2. In short, these organizational structures do not allow for unity of effort (if not unity of command); the structure generates the unnecessary question "Who owns intelligence?" Furthermore, it causes significant confusion amongst the MEF command element, staff principals, and intelligence unit commanders regarding responsibilities surrounding the production and dissemination of intelligence.⁵

Extrapolated further, in a deployed environment, for whom does the IOC work? Per *MCWP 2-10, Intelligence Operations*, published in May 2016, the intelligence battalion commander dual-hats as the intelligence support coordinator and establishes and supervises the MEF IOC under the direct staff cognizance of the MEF AC/S G-2.⁶ How will this structure work when the intelligence battalion commander is also being tasked, through a separate chain of command, to provide direct support to the MIG's ICC and potentially offer different or competing analysis *from the same intelligence unit*? This situation becomes even more complicated when a non-intelligence entity (the ICC) asks the radio battalion operational control and analysis center for direct support (or it is directed to support by the MIG commander). More colorfully, the MEF CG might be tempted to ask "Who's on First" or "Who does #2 work for?"

MEF Intelligence Brigade

In a resource (manpower) constrained environment, the last thing the Marine Corps needs to do is create confusion among its echeloned units and commanders, and spread itself thinner than it already has. To address this problem, we offer a new (though not that dissimilar to the creation of the MIG) concept. Conditions are now perfect for the Marine Corps to transform the MIG ideal into a MEF intelligence brigade. This proposal will deliberately coalesce MEF-level intelligence tasking, collection, processing, exploitation, and dissemination under a single entity. A



Up-to-date intelligence is necessary to support an accurate intelligence estimate that supports future operations. (Photo by Cpl Patrick Osino.)



Marines with 2d Reconnaissance Battalion land at Onslow Beach during a training exercise.
(Photo by Cpl James Smith.)

MEF intelligence brigade will remove false or unneeded barriers to effective command and control of intelligence activities and organizations. Decision-making cycles will shorten and required coordination will drastically be reduced leading to a more responsive, effective, and efficient MEF intelligence apparatus.

The MEF intelligence brigade will bring together all the MEF-level intelligence collection and analysis assets under a single command in a colonel-level brigade. This brigade will be comprised of the intelligence battalion, radio battalion, the force reconnaissance company, and the marine unmanned air vehicle squadron. The MEF AC/S G-2 will dual-hat as the G-2 and as the MEF intelligence brigade commander; this will be a board-selected command billet. The AC/S G-2 will have a civilian deputy, while the intelligence brigade would have a colonel deputy commander to provide depth to both entities.

The remaining assets of the former MIG/MHG will be distributed throughout the MEF and provide much needed relief to the already exacerbated manning shortfalls we currently feel. The communications battalion will fall under the AC/S G-6 and could likely be part of a MEF communications bri-

gade given the size of the communications battalions and the growth in their mission (the defensive cyber operations company). The ICC moves to its logical home in the FECC and could be reduced in size given the overlap between the responsibilities of the FECC and ICC today and the support the G3 already receives from the G2 (not to mention the FECC and ICC tables of organization already look remarkably similar). Additionally, ANGLICO becomes subordinate to the MEF's artillery regiment where many have said for years it should be.⁷ The law enforcement battalion returns to the MEF logistics group where it existed for many years. Finally, the MSB operates as an independent battalion responsible to the MEF chief of staff.

While this will upend recent changes (the MIGs are only two-years-old), we argue that these are sunk costs and should not prevent the Marine Corps from making a bold adjustment. The MIG concept has attempted to address the Marine Corps' concerns regarding information environment operations but has consistently had the negative effect of diluting the role of the MEF AC/S G-2 and significantly complicating the operational control of MEF-level intelligence operations. While creating a MEF intelligence brigade will entail

a very bold correction and upend some paradigms, these recommendations will generate better intelligence for MEF commanders and greatly simplify chains of command, insuring both unity of effort and command without compromising the MEF's ability to execute information environment operations.

Notes

1. This is written from the perspective of a II MEF Marine, but the general concept and timeline remains the same across the Corps.
2. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Strategy for Assured Command and Control: Enabling C2 for Tomorrow's Marine Corps, Today*, (Washington, DC: March 2017).
3. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MARADMIN 235/19, Availability of MCDP 1-0, Change 2, Marine Corps Operations*, (Washington, DC: April 2019).
4. Staff, "II MEF Information Group," *Marines*, (Online), available at <https://www.iimef.marines.mil>.
5. The authors have examples too numerous to count where MEF, Division, Wing, MLG, and MIG staff officers have referenced the MIG's intelligence brief during the CG's O&I or referred to the MIG and the MIC (the MEF's MAGTF intelligence center) as the same entity or have gone straight to the ICC to request an intelligence update on a certain situation.

6. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCRP 2-10, Intelligence Operations*, (Washington, DC: May 2016).

7. ANGLICO to the artillery regiment is another subject for another, better versed author but anecdotally this has been a long-term debate in the fires community. An argument could be made for ANGLICO, as a MEF-level asset, to fall under the G-3 as well. These authors would point out that force reconnaissance company currently operates as a MEF asset under a division headquarters structure.

