

Information

The seventh warfighting function

by Majs Paul Keeley & Eric Harley

But how does information integrate with the other warfighting functions? The establishment of information as the seventh warfighting function was a welcome step forward in the evolution of the Marine Corps' practice of war.¹ However, the authors have observed a certain amount of confusion, both in the Fleet Marine Forces (FMF) and at Headquarters Marine Corps, when relating information to the other six functions—specifically, the command and control (C2) and intelligence warfighting functions. This results in a tendency to identify C2 and intelligence in terms of the various tasks that make up the information function.

Moreover, questions remain as to who is responsible for each of the seven tasks within the information function, as well as for appropriately integrating the information function across the other six warfighting functions. At the FMF staff level, these responsibilities are held by members of the MEF Information Group (MIG); however, at lower echelons, while clearly a commander's business, the staff responsibilities are poorly defined.

Answers to these questions are still evolving. We offer a view of the information warfighting function that is informed by the existing doctrine relating to the other warfighting functions. This discussion consists of three parts. First, we give a brief outline of the enduring differences between the three functions of C2, intelligence, and information. Second, we examine the seven tasks of information as touchpoints to the other six doctrinal warfighting functions. Finally, we make a few proposals to address the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTMLPF-P) implications of integration, with a focus on organization, training, leadership, and personnel.

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Information is the commander's business. (Photo by SSgt Jordan Gilbert/DVIDS.)

C2, Intelligence, and Information: Common Currency, Different Functions

While the information function is properly considered to have subsumed the legacy integrating function of information operations,² it has not likewise absorbed the warfighting functions of intelligence and C2. Part of the confusion noted above stems from the fact that information (as a noun) is a common currency within these three warfighting functions. Adding to that confusion

is the inherent overlap of these three functions, which permeate and affect all friendly force actions. Intelligence drives operations. Decisions based on intelligence are made and communicated through the processes and systems of C2. The information function supports the commander's decisions and protects friendly C2 processes overall, while also carrying out actions focused on other relevant actors. All these functions rely on information to serve as a critical link between the physical and the cognitive

aspects of the operating environment. However, there are key differences between the purpose and tasks of each of these warfighting functions, which must be kept in sight.

The information warfighting function focuses on the generation of informational power (a form of combat power), which is applied through operations in the information environment (OIE).³ Seven subordinate functions or tasks are defined, including: assure enterprise C2 and critical systems; provide information environment (IE) battlespace awareness; attack and exploit networks, systems and information; inform domestic and international audiences; influence foreign target audiences; deceive foreign target audiences; and control OIE capabilities, resources and activities.⁴ Confusion arises from the overlap of “assure enterprise C2” with the C2 warfighting function, and the overlap of “provide IE battlespace awareness” with the intelligence function.

However, information and C2 perform uniquely different tasks. *MCDP 6, Command and Control*, identifies “command as the exercise of authority and control as feedback about the effects of the action taken” (emphasis added).⁵ These deeply intertwined functions are further viewed as a system—made up of people, information, and the C2 support structure—and as a process which “helps generate swift, appropriate, decisive, harmonious, and secure action.”⁶ While the procurement, configuration, and routine operation of secure C2 systems is certainly a key area of overlap, the information task of “Assure enterprise C2 and network systems” is not equivalent to either of these views. Rather, it refers to actions taken to protect the networks and C2 systems—such as electronic warfare (EW), defensive cyber operations-intrusion defense measures, and other measures. This is reinforced by the Joint Staff in *JP 3-0, Joint Operations*, which clearly identifies “Protecting Friendly Information, Information Networks, and Systems” as the equivalent sub-function.⁷

Likewise, there are clear distinctions between the intelligence warfighting

function and the information function. At its core, intelligence is focused on the probability and feasibility of threats and the surrounding conditions in the environment. Per *MCDP 2, Intelligence*, Marine Corps intelligence has six functions: support the formulation of the commander’s estimate of the situation, aid in situation development, provide indications and warnings, provide support to force protection, support targeting, and support combat assessment.⁸ These are not all subsumed within “provide IE battlespace awareness.” Rather, this information task overlaps with the commander’s estimate and situation development functions of intelligence. The key difference is that information about friendly forces and domestic audiences, by definition and law, does not

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enter the intelligence estimate. Thus, the IE battlespace awareness provided by non-intelligence entities focuses on those aspects of the environment on which the intelligence community cannot collect—e.g., monitoring of own-force signatures or analysis of publicly available information not eligible to be fused into open-source intelligence.

Returning to the doctrinal views of the warfighting functions is a needed step to institutionalize the function of information. Rather than attempting to swallow up the sister warfighting functions of intelligence and C2, information should be seen as a complementary function that similarly touches all aspects of warfighting. The common currency is information, but each function is oriented on different competencies and outcomes. While some overlap in efforts is good—by providing diverse perspectives and eliminating gaps or seams—the tendency toward treating intelligence and C2 as components of the information function leads to confusion, duplication of effort, and loss of capability in the other two functions.

The Seven Tasks of Information as Touchpoints

Having highlighted the enduring differences, we now turn to identify the key touchpoints between the information function and the remaining six doctrinal warfighting functions. We phrase this discussion in terms of the seven tasks of Information.

Assure enterprise C2 and critical systems. This task is strongly connected with the C2 warfighting function—especially when dealing with the information technology comprising the enterprise C2 structure. However, in both tactical and garrison environments, this task includes threat-informed actions taken to both passively and actively secure the network. Thus, clear touchpoints also exist with both the intelligence and the force protection warfighting functions.

Provide IE battlespace awareness. The function of “Provide IE battlespace awareness” is complementary to the intelligence warfighting function, and similarly serves to increase the overall situational understanding of the commander—thus tying closely to effective C2 as well as the maneuver and force protection warfighting functions.

Attack and exploit networks, systems, and information. Electromagnetic spectrum operations and cyberspace operations enable this task, which is a clear touchpoint between information effects generators (e.g., offensive cyber-operations teams, EW support teams or airborne EW platforms) and fire support or targeting. Intelligence support to targeting (enabling attack/exploit) is also a key touchpoint, and the attacks themselves may support maneuver. A unique aspect of cyber operations is the fact that the same offensive cyber-operations team may simultaneously provide targeting, effects delivery, and exploitation—supporting both fires and intelligence through the information function.

Inform, influence, and deceive. While traditionally coordinated within the fires and effects coordination center, the inform, influence, and deceive tasks should be reconsidered in terms of the joint concept for integrated campaigning. This concept treats the applica-

tion of military force in a much broader fashion than through the traditional conflict elements of defeat, deny, and degrade. Rather, the integrated application of total military force may include mechanisms such as inform, strengthen, persuade, and weaken.⁹

To support these goals, the tasks of inform, influence, and deceive must be deeply integrated within the overall commander's intent (C2 function) as well as with maneuver—not just the fires function. Psychological operations forces conducting military information support operations through broadcast or other media may fit well with other lethal and non-lethal fires. However, civil affairs, key leader engagements, and other forms of influence are better coordinated through the lens of operations. At the heart of these three tasks is an assessment of the “say/see-do” gaps. Inform operations seek to close these gaps relative to domestic audiences. Deceive and influence operations seek to exploit or mask such gaps through the amplification, manipulation, or concealment of observables. All require whole-of-force management for success and thus are better served when integrated with the operations staff and are not simply represented by an action officer in the fires cell.

Command and control of OIE resources, capabilities, and activities. Fi-

nally, this task obviously implies a level of coordination across all warfighting functions necessary to direct, inform, support, and protect the employment of information-related forces and capabilities across the battlespace.

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Organization, Training, and Personnel

The intent of establishing the information warfighting function, according to *Marine Corps Bulletin 5400*, was “to help commanders and staffs understand and leverage the pervasive nature of information, its military uses, and its application across all operational phases and across the Range of Military Operations.”¹⁰ Having examined the various tasks that make up the function as currently conceptualized, the question becomes who on the staff should be responsible for which information tasks in order to conduct OIE, and how should staffs organize and train these personnel to most effectively accomplish these tasks?

Marine formations are not currently organized or trained to effectively support OIE. A few billets currently exist for (legacy) IO planners, but only at higher-level echelons (Marine Forces Commands, FMF staffs, and infantry regiments). The Basic IO Staff Officer and Advanced IO Planner MOSs (0510 and 0550) serve as a training pipeline for these practitioners to learn how to employ and integrate the various information related capabilities. However, the logic that dictated the establishment of information as a warfighting function clearly indicates that lower echelons must be able to carry out some or all of the tasks of the function. Recognizing that additional structure is not likely forthcoming, especially outside of the MIG formations; we propose a modification in audience, scope, and purpose of these courses to fulfill this need.

As highlighted above, the tasks that make up the information function touch on all the other warfighting functions with a particular emphasis on fires, intelligence, C2, and maneuver. We believe that at regimental echelons and below, key players in the fires, intelligence, communications, and operations sections should receive training similar to the 0510 MOS. To accomplish this, we recommend that a (renamed) Intermediate MAGTF Information Planner Course should be shortened significantly, and should focus on how these key S-shops (S-2, S-3/fires, S-6) leverage information to achieve commander's intent, as well as how enabling detachments from the MIGs (psychological operations, Radio Battalion, etc.) could be best employed.

At the FMF level, billets should be retained for Advanced MAGTF Information Planners (0550 MOS), produced by a revised course which would focus on planning, coordination, and integrated employment of the resident information capabilities within the MIG as well as leveraging assets which are not organic to the Marine Corps. Key factors would include an overview of the integration with naval and combatant command processes and authorities necessary to conduct these operations, especially those employing cyberspace, EMSO,



Key players in the fires, intelligence, communications, and operations sections should receive information training. (Photo by 1stLt Colin Kennard/DVIDS.)



Integration of OIE at The Basic School, Expeditionary Warfighting School, and Command and Staff College should continue. (Photo by Kathy Reese/DVIDS.)

influence, and deception capabilities. Over time, key players within the operations, fires, communications, and intelligence sections will have already received the 0510 MOS during previous tours in their primary MOS along with experience in executing OIE.

In addition to dedicated courses on information planning, we also recommend that both introductory and advanced courses in warfighting functions closely related to the information function (for example, the Basic and Advanced Communications Officer Courses, the Ground Intelligence Officer Course, and the Fire Support Coordination Course) receive greater emphasis on the appropriate information tasks. This will allow for the shortened 0510 course, since the majority of the target audience will already be familiar with the information tasks. This will allow the course to fill in gaps and enable greater integration on the staff. Similarly, the efforts toward including OIE at The Basic School, Expeditionary Warfighting School, and Command and Staff College should continue. The Tactical MAGTF Integration Course, Ground Combat Element Commanders Course, and the Capstone Commandership Course are other venues for truly making information the commander's business.

At the FMF level, training and readiness events are being created for the MIGs. A step toward further institutionalizing the information function will be to integrate similar coded events for echelons below and across the MAGTF—focusing on the operations, fires, communications, and intelligence

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staffs. Training and evaluation of these events at Service-level exercises such as Integrated Training Exercises will reinforce the need for staffs to work together to integrate information and its effects at all echelons.

Conclusion: An Institutionalized Warfighting Function

Having established an information warfighting function, the Marine Corps needs to institutionalize this function to successfully conduct OIE. For this transformation to succeed, the Marine Corps must address the required ca-

pabilities and their implications across DOTMLPF-P. Multiple warfighting functions hold significant stakes within the OIE functions—yet the information warfighting function is additive, not subtractive. This article informs future discussion of the DOTMLPF-P required by offering an alternative construct for integrating the information tasks across all warfighting functions, and by providing recommendations for several aspects of organization, training, leadership, and personnel.

Notes

1. Commandant of the Marine Corps, *MCBul 5400, Establishment of Information as the Seventh Marine Corps Warfighting Function*, (Washington, DC: 2019).
2. Loretta E. Reynolds, Eric M. Smith, "Definitions for Information Related Terms," (official memorandum, Washington, DC, HQMC, 2019).
3. *Ibid.*
4. Deputy Commandant, Combat Development & Integration, *Marine Air Ground Task Force Information Environment Operations*, (Washington, DC: 2017).
5. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 6, Command and Control*, change 1 (Washington, DC: 2018).
6. *Ibid.*
7. Joint Staff, *JP 3-0, Joint Operations*, w/ change 1, (Washington, DC: 2018).
8. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 2, Intelligence*, w/ change 1, (Washington, DC: 2018).
9. Joint Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning*, (Washington, DC: 2018).
10. *MCBul 5400.*

