Photo by SSG Alexander Henninger

United States Army Paratroopers assigned to the 173rd Airborne Brigade plan during Swift Response 17 in Hohenfels, Germany. Swift Response is an annual U.S. Army Europe-led exercise focused on allied airborne forces' ability to quickly and effectively respond to crisis situations as an interoperable multinational team.

Analytical Street Smarts:
What They Didn't Teach You in School

by Lieutenant Colonel James Reed (Retired), Captain Andrew Howerton, and Captain Phillip Johnson

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to share skills for leading intelligence analysis efforts, skills that come from the school of hard knocks and multiple overseas deployments. Army schools focus on teaching doctrinal techniques for conducting intelligence analysis, but through real-world experience military intelligence (MI) leaders gain the street smarts (the common sense and skills) necessary to operate successfully in any environment. These analytical street smarts are critical skills for MI leaders who supervise analysis activities within their units, including corps and division G-2s, brigade and battalion S-2s, and analysis and control element (ACE) chiefs.

Before discussing analytical street smarts, we must first define the term *intelligence analysis*. The Army's principal publication on the subject is ATP 2-33.4, *Intelligence Analysis.* A new version was published in January 2020. Rather than define the subject too narrowly, this publication does a good job cataloging all things related to intelligence analysis. It presents a myriad of related processes, concepts, skills, and techniques, and ultimately defines intelligence analysis as a four-step process (*Screen, Analyze,* and *Integrate* information using reasoning and analytical techniques in order to *Produce* intelligence) that is conducted primarily to answer a commander's priority intelligence requirements. These four steps also support other

staff processes, such as the military decision-making process and collection management, which all lead to the commander's situational understanding.[1] Knowledge of the following concepts (or street-smart skills) will enable personnel to lead analytical efforts within their units.

The Phases of the Intelligence Analysis Process

The phases of the intelligence analysis process are interdependent. Through time and experience, analysts become more aware of this interdependence. The phases of the intelligence analysis process are—

- Screen (collected information): Determining the relevance of the information collected.
- Analyze: Examining relevant information.
- Integrate: Combining new information with current intelligence holdings to begin the effort of developing a conclusion or assessment.
- Produce: Making a determination or assessment that can be disseminated to consumers.

Note. *Relevant information* is all information of importance to the commander and staff in the exercise of command and control.

—ATP 2-33.4, *Intelligence Analysis*[2]

Unit Training versus Institutional Education

There is a big difference between teaching and training. Army schools teach Soldiers individual skills, but the actual training of collective skills occurs at the unit. Unit leaders need to develop standard operating procedures for how they intend to conduct intelligence analysis within their operations and training. Even though new Soldiers learn numerous analytical techniques while at Army schools, they must still receive training on the unit's specific procedures and expectations. An example frequently seen in units is Soldiers who can develop a link diagram of an insurgent threat group but rarely go to the next level of analysis, which is to use the information from the link diagram to develop an order of battle (line and block chart) that depicts the actual structure of the threat group. The unit level training shows Soldiers how to apply the analytical techniques they learned in Army schools to products they develop for commanders and staffs. Teaching takes place in school, but Soldiers still require training once they arrive at the unit.

Analyst training and certification must be at the unit level. Good leaders train their personnel on analytical techniques. For instance, upon their arrival, Soldiers assigned to a corps ACE should read all standard operating procedures and then receive training on the specific analytical techniques used within the ACE. This normally requires implementation of some form of certification program within the unit with a noncommissioned officer, warrant officer, or officer assigned the additional duty of running the program. The goal of the program should be to build Soldier skills and confidence with the analytical techniques used by the organization. For example, a Soldier may have learned in school how to write a short one-paragraph assessment after receiving an intelligence report. Upon assignment to the corps ACE, the Soldier must research and write multipage assessments on various topics. The Soldier will need training on how to research and write these lengthy assessments before doing so on their own. A good certification program should also include familiarity with the unit's area of operations (AO) and the unit's target set.

Details and Homework Matter

Analysts must be willing to dig into the tiny details. Analysis is "the process of breaking down a complex topic [or problem] into smaller parts in order to gain a better understanding of it."[3] Following this, one must also be able to reconstruct those parts to discover what you have. Detailed knowledge about an adversary and its capabilities, and about how to exploit or mitigate them, is often the key element that drives mission success. Toward this end, sometimes a good level of fidelity (extremely detailed analysis) is required for the G-2/S-2 section to be of greatest value. Our military history has shown us the benefits of this approach. For example, during the Persian Gulf War, the G-2/S-2 section provided critical information about how the Iraqi T-72 tank's autoloader functioned, giving the M1A1 tank gunners the split-second advantage over T-72s during the Battle of 73 Easting. The intelligence sections did this by breaking down the information into smaller parts and then explaining the autoloader's step-by-step process and timing. In World War II, it was the detailed understanding of the time it would take the Japanese fleet to arm and launch aircraft that gave ADM Chester Nimitz the confidence to attack during the Battle of Midway. And it is the detailed breakdown of how enemy fighter pilots operate that gives American pilots of today the momentary advantage in their first engagement. At times, analysts must understand, and be able to explain, the nuanced advantages and disadvantages of enemy capabilities. They must also understand how to mitigate or exploit enemy capabilities through friendly force capabilities in order to best support the warfighter.

Often, we *think* we have dug into the details. An example of conducting detailed analysis by dividing a complex topic into smaller parts involves an S-2 section of an air defense artillery battalion. In order to understand the threat posed by enemy ballistic missiles, the S-2 section might begin by diving into the enemy's ranges, locations, and types of ballistic missiles. Yet this only provides composition and

Photo courtesy of the National Archives

United States military personnel gather near a demolished Iraqi T-72 main battle tank, destroyed by allied forces during the Gulf War, March 3, 1991. M-2 Bradley vehicles are parked near the tank.

disposition. Some might conduct further analysis, assessing how the enemy would employ its ballistic missiles. However, this only provides potential enemy courses of action. Yet a deeper level of analysis can still be done by identifying the step-by-step firing sequence for the missile, in-flight control mechanisms, time-distance analysis, and likely trajectories. With this more detailed analysis, air defenders can understand how much time (how many minutes) they have to make their decision (react). In this case, the S-2 section briefs personnel from the air defense artillery battalion that in a typical engagement they will have 12 seconds at most in which to decide whether to fire. Failure to do this detailed analysis may result in the air defense artillery unit being caught unprepared in their attempts to defeat enemy ballistic missile attacks.

Analysis requires you to constantly do your homework. In an Army filled with competing priorities, how do intelligence professionals remain proficient in their craft of intelligence analysis? They put in the effort and do the work. Professionals realize they must spend hours of their own time reading and staying attuned to current events. Study doctrine and constantly challenge your thinking by reading about foreign armies and cultures. Our ability to influence and enable our commanders comes primarily from our ability to analyze the operational environment. In order to do so, one must have a working knowledge of current and historical events, threat doctrine, and military capabilities. Intelligence analysts must be constantly reading and familiarizing themselves with anything that pertains to their AO or area of focus. Bottom line: Show up and put in the work.

Communicating with the Commander

You must be able to brief your analysis. As MI leaders, we can have the best analysis and assessments in the world, but if we fail to effectively articulate our products, all our efforts will go to waste. An analyst must both produce intelligence products and be able to brief them to the commander and staff. It helps if you know how to speak your commander's language, a skill that comes from knowing your commander's background and how he or she likes to receive information. If you do not have an understanding of how your commander likes to receive information, ask. It is that simple. Rehearsals are also key, so rehearse before every briefing you give. If possible, rehearse in front of your section or peers. Have your audience hit you with criticism, and be willing to accept and implement their feedback. Through these methods, you can strengthen your ability to communicate your analysis to your commander.

Your commander's priorities are your priorities. Analysts must stay oriented on their commander's priorities. It is our duty as intelligence professionals to know our commander's priorities to ensure we are best enabling them to make informed decisions. As intelligence professionals, we accomplish this through the commander's priority intelligence requirements—he needs to know these things to accomplish his vision and objectives. However, it goes much deeper than that. As intelligence professionals, we should also understand the "blue" picture—what our unit is trying to accomplish. Understanding what we are doing as a unit will help you know the key pieces of intelligence you need in order to enable your commander and unit to

Photo by LTC James Reed (retired)

Military Intelligence Captains Career Course students discuss their analytical assessment prior to the daily brigade operations and intelligence briefing, January 2020.

accomplish the mission. Do not be the stereotypical MI leader who disassociates themselves from the rest of the staff. Get involved in the planning process in order to develop this understanding. Always try to understand what effect the commander is trying to achieve, whether in the initial planning process or the operation's final execution phase. It is easy to be caught up in the many daily requirements and lose track of what is most important (lose the analytical bubble). Concentrate analytical efforts on the commander's priorities in order to help the commander achieve their objectives. Not only will this help focus your analysis, but it will also build your rapport with your commander.

Integrate the Information and Write the Assessment

"Analytical criteria" can be established to streamline the process. Step three of the four-step intelligence analysis process in ATP 2-33.4 is *Integrate*. It is "combining new information with current intelligence holdings to begin the effort of developing a conclusion or assessment."[4] This is one of the most important steps in conducting analysis. Normally, after receiving one or more intelligence reports on a topic, an analyst will attempt to write an assessment that explains the meaning or significance of the information. To do this, they will compare the new intelligence reports to current holdings (digital files in searchable databases) and ask themselves, How does what I know about the enemy or situation change with the information I just learned? This process applies at any level (tactical through strategic). However, searching through many digital files can be cumbersome. To simplify the process, leaders can create what we will call, for lack of a better term, "analytical criteria." These analytical criteria are simply a list of questions written for the analyst to use as a filter. The filtering of the new information through these analytical criteria assists analysts with forming and writing their assessment and streamlines how they conduct the analysis. When units do not have a list of analytical criteria, analysts are tempted to save time by not searching current holdings and instead simply do the process in their own mind based on their memory, which often leads to poor analysis.

Developing a list of analytical criteria is easy. As an example, in a wide area security situation such as Afghanistan, if the division ACE receives an intelligence report that a new type of under-vehicle improvised explosive device (UVIED) is in use on the battlefield against unidentified civilian targets, analysts can use the unit's written analytical criteria to lead them through the process of writing their assessment. The analytical criteria could include—

- Which threat group is most likely related to this incident: the Al Iksir Cartel, the Bilasuvar Freedom Brigade (BFB), or the Bocyowics Crime Family?
- Which threat groups have conducted similar types of attacks?
- Where have similar types of attacks taken place?
- How have civilians been targeted previously?

Given these four analytical criteria (four questions), the analyst is now able to easily and quickly write an assessment that might look like this: "This new UVIED is most likely being used by the BFB because this group has extensive experience with IEDs. Previous attacks against civilians have included roadside IEDs against commercial trucks operating in Atropia. The BFB is likely using this new UVIED as a more efficient way to target commercial trucking companies unwilling to pay extortion money."

Analysis must also be predictive. When writing an assessment, the analyst must end it with some form of predictive statement (prediction) concerning future events. The first part of the assessment should explain what happened and what the enemy looks like, or how they operated. It should then be predictive and tell what happens next. For instance, let us imagine your S-2 section receives a report from 1st Battalion that enemy drones were observed above their position. Given this report, your analyst could write a quick assessment, stating the likelihood of it being an Orlan-10 drone, describing the main capabilities of the Orlan-10, and indicating its role as a spotter aircraft for enemy indirect fire units. Then the analysts could finish with the following predictive statement: "Units observing an Orlan-10 overhead can expect an enemy indirect fire attack within 20 to 30 minutes." Assessments should always have a predictive component to them.

Writing styles and content of analysis changes at echelon. The focus of daily analytical products and assessments will

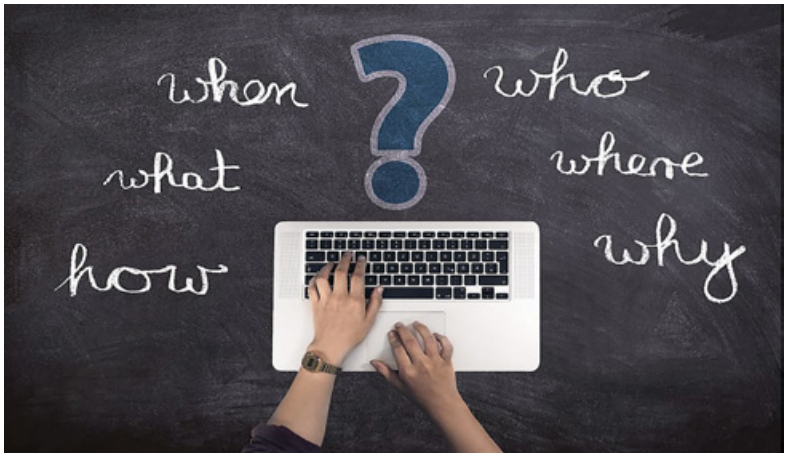

Photo courtesy of Pigsels

Analysts must be willing to question and challenge their thinking.

be different depending on whether your unit is conducting tactical, operational, or strategic level analysis.

- *Tactical intelligence* is typically of direct importance to your unit's AO. Threat forces may include enemy forces in or near your AO, such as local criminal threats, gangs operating in the AO, etc. This is like operating at the county level.
- *Operational intelligence* is the analysis level in which joint or combined actions and/or larger units have an effect. The movement of battalions and brigades is of intelligence value at this level. This is like operating at a state or regional level.
- *Strategic intelligence* usually focuses on a national or global level. It typically involves military and political objectives, and it may even deal with U.S. national security or foreign policy. It can also include cyberspace attacks, nuclear weapons, and/or financial or economic warfare.

Teamwork and Mentorship

Analysis often requires all intelligence disciplines to work together. Analyzing a complex problem often requires personnel from all intelligence disciplines (human intelligence [HUMINT], signals intelligence [SIGINT], geospatial intelligence, etc.) working together to analyze the problem independently and then coming together to present their analysis. This process relies on intelligence professionals from each intelligence discipline doing their job analytically. This means they cannot just do collection; they must also do analysis of the information collected. For instance, the HUMINT cell must produce a daily HUMINT summary (HUMSUM), and the SIGINT cell must produce a daily SIGINT summary (SIGSUM). The HUMSUM is not a one-to-end of all reporting in the past 24 hours but rather an initial cut separating the wheat from the chaff by the HUMINTers so that all analytical work is not on the shoulders of the all-source cell. The same applies to the SIGSUM. Complex problems, such as trying to locate an enemy operating in your AO that does not want to be located, can be solved, but only when each intelligence discipline contributes to the analytical effort and supports all-source analysis.

To develop your analysts, there is no replacement for mentorship. Soldiers put into analyst positions often have a difficult time learning how to write useful assessments. Many analysts are on night shift or swing shift, especially at higher echelons, which can result in unit leaders overlooking them. Many produce poorly written assessments, only to have day-shift personnel tasked with rewriting the assessments before they are good enough for publication. Mentorship is what these analysts need. Find a way to schedule time for regular mentorship of the analysts. One way to accomplish this is to assign someone the responsibility of going to the office early in the morning (in their Army physical fitness uniform) to spend time reviewing assessments and discussing with analysts better ways to write them. The mentor should then go to morning unit formation. Another way is for the mentor to go to the office late at night twice a week to help improve the writing styles of the night-shift analysts. If you want your analysts to write useful assessments, you must provide them good mentorship. This type of mentorship is also of value to analysts in temporary assignments as non-analysts, so consider including them as well.

Conclusion

This article shared a few analytical street smarts for those who lead analytical efforts in their units. MI leaders employing these concepts will be successful in any operational environment. Take these important ideas and add to them as you progress in your career and Army profession.

Endnotes

1. Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 2-33.4, *Intelligence Analysis* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 10 January 2020), xii, xiv.

2. Ibid., 2-1.

3. Wikipedia, s.v. "analysis," last modified 24 February 2014, 15:30, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Analysis.

4. Department of the Army, ATP 2-33.4, *Intelligence Analysis,* 2-1.

LTC James Reed (retired) serves as senior instructor at the Military Intelligence Captains Career Course (MICCC), Fort Huachuca, AZ. Former assignments include J-2 for Task Force 2010; G-2 operations chief and intelligence plans officer for U.S. Army South; 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team S-2, 25th Infantry Division; 18th Military Police Brigade S-2; 96th Civil Affairs Battalion S-2; and 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment assistant regiment S-2.

CPT Andrew Howerton serves as an instructor at the MICCC, Fort Huachuca, AZ. Former assignments include 1st Battalion, 62nd Air Defense Artillery Battalion S-2; 69th Air Defense Artillery Brigade assistant S-2; and Alpha Company Commander, 303rd Military Intelligence Battalion.

CPT Phillip Johnson serves as an instructor at the MICCC, Fort Huachuca, AZ. Former assignments include battalion S-3 and military intelligence observer coach/trainer team chief for 5th Armor Brigade, First Army; brigade Headquarters and Headquarters Company Commander, S-2 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, and brigade S-2X for 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division; brigade adjutant for 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division; and armor platoon leader for 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division.