THE FIGHT FOR INTELLIGENCE

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INTRODUCTION: Accepting the Challenge

Boxers can quickly tire themselves out in a fight. In minutes, months' worth of training can go down the drain. In the summer of 2023, the Task Force (TF) Guardian (2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division [Light Infantry]) S-2 team stepped into the ring like a boxer and fought for intelligence during its nine-month deployment in support of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve. In an ever-evolving environment, the Guardian S-2 team fought through multiple threats, the commander's priorities, and dozens of external organizations vying for immediate situational updates within the combined joint area of operations. The team boxed its way through a successful deployment by focusing its collection efforts (having a game plan), understanding its capabilities (knowing the rules), and staying determined to gain information (getting into a brawl). While the team made its share of mistakes and occasionally got "punched in the face," its fight for intelligence advanced force protection for over 3,000 U.S. and coalition force personnel across Syria, Iraq, and Kuwait. The intelligence produced by the Guardian S-2 team consistently reached the highest levels of U.S. Central Command, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and even the desk of the President of the United States.

THE GAMEPLAN: Focusing Collection Efforts

Fighters don't win just by showing up and mindlessly swinging; they need a strategy or game plan. The TF Guardian S-2 team based its fight strategy on priority intelligence requirements. By refining the priority intelligence requirements to ensure that collection and targeting efforts were set and understood from top to bottom, the S-2 team achieved early success. TF Guardian faced several challenges within the nine-month deployment window, including the Israel-Hamas conflict, the Syrian Democratic Forces-Tribal Forces conflict, Da'esh, Iranian-aligned militia groups, and the ever-present uncertainty conventional weapons bring to a deployed environment. In this demanding arena, the team needed to focus on what was essential to the commander. As the only

brigade combat team operating in this dynamic environment, with subordinate battalions owning large operational areas, the unit faced many challenges they had not trained against. These challenges compelled the team to learn quickly that aligning its efforts with the priority intelligence requirements, not the "shiny objects," provided the right focus for its fight.

Effective collection planning required collaboration across multiple echelons because of the large size of TF Guardian's area of operations. The TF Guardian S-2 team built a nontraditional collection team, leveraging enablers like the combat aviation brigade, the expeditionary air support squadron, and fixed-wing assets, including defensive counterair. The team actively shared information and named areas of interest with these enablers to build patterns of life on areas outside of its organic reach. The TF Guardian S-2 team relied on adjacent units in its collection planning as a boxer relies on their coach, corner man, and cut man.

The TF Guardian S-2 team quickly recognized that information comes from everywhere, is often unstructured and presented in unorthodox ways, and oversaturates reporting. For example, the team recognized that enemy logistics and reconnaissance events were often reported interchangeably or as simultaneous events. To garner intelligence specific to force protection, the team became very intentional in identifying patterns and indicators to filter out the white noise. For example, the collection team learned early that assuming nothing is happening and shifting collection assets too soon compromised the team's ability to accurately identify enemy actions. The TF Guardian S-2 team also created an internal tracking spreadsheet to rank the quality and accuracy of reporting organizations. Although somewhat disorganized, this method helped strengthen analytical assessments. The team prevented and disrupted numerous attacks on U.S. outstations through these strategies. The team's intentional focus facilitated the brigade commander's top priority for force protection.

KNOW THE RULES: Capabilities and Authorities

Before every match, the referee asks the two boxers if they fully understand the rules. During the fight for intelligence, it is imperative to understand what the S-2 team can and cannot do. For example, the TF Guardian S-2 team struggled to fully engage in intelligence support to targeting due to the mandated mission to provide force protection for counter-Da'esh operations. Multiple organizations with missions different from the Guardian's force protection responsibility surrounded the TF Guardian S-2 team. The team slowly recognized that it was conducting several parallel or duplicative efforts alongside adjacent and higher units. It was clear that not every organization's focus was on the tactical fight. The TF Guardian S-2 team needed to understand the authorities allowing them to operate and the roles and responsibilities of the other organizations with whom they shared the ring.

As a deployed S-2 team, developing a community of intelligence professionals across multiple echelons is imperative to maximize information sharing. The team discovered through interactions with numerous agencies that interpersonal skills are essential to prevent information stovepiping, which can add unneccesary complexity to the operational environment. The team mitigated these challenges and built a network by using means common to all agencies. For example, forums like ChatSurfer allowed the team to connect with various intelligence professionals and understand organizational roles in the combined joint area of operations or the intelligence community. The team developed its chatroom on this forum to efficiently and accurately disseminate information to the intelligence community. As of spring 2024, the TF Guardian S-2 team chatroom has grown to over 4,600 subscribers across national and tactical echelons, all collaborating on information, thereby reducing the dissemination timelines of intelligence reports.

Despite having access to signals intelligence, human intelligence, geospatial intelligence, and other intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets, the TF Guardian S-2 team still faced multiple restrictions due to authorities and availability. It was essential for the team to understand the capabilities and limitations of all available assets. Appropriately allocating collection assets was imperative for identifying indicators and warning of imminent threats. The team learned that, due to the capabilities and limitations of its ISR assets, it was necessary to overlay mixed collection and cue redundant assets to cover gaps in collection.

Fusion is the most important aspect for overcoming intelligence gaps; therefore, brigade S-2 teams must form an effective fusion cell that can digest single-source reporting and maintain a common intelligence picture. The TF Guardian S-2 team leveraged relationships and the 513th Military Intelligence Brigade-Theater to enhance its fusion efforts by implementing the Army's Integrated Database Platform. This platform enabled the integration of multiple intelligence reports and facilitated the sharing of information with Operation Inherent Resolve partners through the intelligence community. Understanding intelligence community member roles and layering all aspects of intelligence collection gave the TF Guardian S-2 team its left and right limits for how to fight for intelligence.

GET INTO A BRAWL: Pulling Information

Once a tactical unit enters its area of operations, information collection becomes a back-and-forth, push-and-pull much like a fighter throwing jabs and slipping punches to get into position for the right combination. A good S-2 team uses multiple forums to pull information from subordinate task forces and external agencies. This method feeds the larger intelligence community, from tactical to national levels, and ultimately

enables the commander to make informed decisions. An S-2 team cannot be afraid to take punches to the face by being wrong or hearing "no." An S-2 team must be willing to get into a brawl for information.

Fighting for intelligence means perseverance at the first sign of adversity and finding ways to get answers for intelligence requirements. Intelligence professionals need grit to get into and maintain their pace in the fight for intelligence. The TF Guardian S-2 team leaders instilled in their analysts the need to take initiative to find answers. The team learned that not all problem-solving must begin from scratch. When threat reporting was slow, the team dug deeper into historical products. When external agencies declined to share information, the team called other organizations. When mission requirements changed, the team adapted and adjusted its priorities. The TF Guardian S-2 team leaders coached their sections to have the grit to fill the intelligence gaps, knowing the information existed. Just as boxers don't stop fighting after a few punches to the face, the TF Guardian S-2 team did not stop trying to gain information.

The subordinate units had a unique perspective. They provided the tactical-level intelligence the TF commander needed to make timely decisions across the combined joint area of operations. The TF Guardian S-2 team tried to rapidly obtain the most accurate information by overcommunicating with calls, touchpoints, and databases. The TF Guardian S-2 team tracked significant activities, recent reporting, and personnel, weapons, and equipment across the battlefield using online databases such as Maven Smart System and the Army Intelligence Data Platform. The team pulled the vital information it needed through a concentrated effort to improve communications systems and processes between subordinate units and the brigade intelligence support element.

While the databases and chat platforms available to U.S. and coalition forces are invaluable aids to communication, they do not analyze the situation. Analysis depends on the people behind the systems and their ability to communicate up, down, and laterally. Intelligence synchronization meetings with subordinate battalions must be deliberate, with a clear agenda and format that allows for the sharing of reports, ideas, and assessments. Fighting for intelligence and staying synchronized grew more difficult when competing requirements, staff meetings, and significant activities emerged. A good fighter conserves energy by staying poised and trusting in their training. In this case, the TF Guardian S-2 team trusted its analysts to do their job, stick to the battle rhythm, and work for the intelligence.

CONCLUSION: Go Fight for Intelligence

No matter how hard a boxer trains or fights, they do not always win. However, a boxer gains experience and knowledge from every fight. The TF Guardian S-2 team did not win every round during its nine-month deployment. They did not achieve everything they set out to accomplish. However, as the team reflected on the play-by-play of its fight, each Soldier drew lessons to improve individually and collectively. Among the lessons learned: focus collection efforts, understand capabilities, and remain determined to gather information. Armed with these fundamentals, S-2 teams across the intelligence community can find success in the fight for intelligence. ✺

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