HUMINT-CENTRIC OPERATIONS: Developing Actionable Intelligence in the Urban Counterinsurgency Environment

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This article was solicited from the author by Military Review *as a companion piece to his article, "The Decisive Weapon: A Brigade Combat Team Commander's Perspective on Information Operations," published in May-June 2006. It is based on an unclassified briefing COL Baker presents regularly to leaders preparing to deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan.*

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A FEW WEEKS AFTER assuming command of the 2d Brigade Combat Team (2BCT), 1st Armored Division, I found myself sitting in a tactical command center in downtown Baghdad conducting a brigade cordon-and-search. The reports flooding in from my battalion commanders were virtually all the same:

"STRIKER 6, this is REGULAR 6. Objectives 27, 28, 29 secure and cleared. Nothing significant to report. Over."

We spent nearly ten hours searching for insurgents and weapons in hundreds of dwellings throughout our objective area, a bad neighborhood off Haifa Street that was a hub of insurgent activity—and for what? Ultimately, we captured a dozen weapons and a handful of suspects.

Much more worrisome to me than the meager results of our operation was the ill will and anger we had created among the Iraqi citizens who were the unwelcome recipients of our dead-of-night operations. I had been on enough such sweeps already to picture the scene clearly: mothers crying, children screaming, husbands humiliated. No matter how professionally you executed such searches, the net result was inevitably ugly.

That profoundly disappointing experience led me to a blunt realization: our dependency on conventional intelligence collection methods and our failure to understand the negative perceptions our actions were generating among Iraqi citizens threatened to doom our mission. If we did not change our methods, and change them quickly, we were not going to be successful in the urban counterinsurgency (COIN) environment in which we found ourselves. As a result of that realization, I made two decisions in the ensuing days that affected the way our combat team would operate for the remainder of our deployment. First, we would reform the way we conducted intelligence operations, and second, we would make information operations (IO) a pillar of our daily operational framework.

My purpose in writing this article is to share with the reader insights and lessons learned from the reform of our intelligence operations; specifically, what we learned by conducting human intelligence (HUMINT)-centric operations in a heavy BCT in Iraq. To that end, I want to briefly describe the initial state of my BCT and our area of operations (AO), identify the major intelligence challenges that we faced, and offer solutions and techniques we adapted or developed in order to overcome our challenges.

Background

Second BCT deployed to Iraq in May 2003. We were a conventional heavy BCT, task-organized with two mechanized infantry battalions, a cavalry squadron, an armor battalion, a field artillery battalion, an engineer battalion, a support battalion, and a military police battalion. The BCT's train-up prior to deployment had focused on conventional, mid- to high-intensity combat, and our battalion and brigade headquarters and staff processes were still optimized to fight a conventional threat.

Our AO included two districts in Baghdad—Karkh and Karada. Within these two districts lived somewhere between 700,000 and a million citizens, among them Sunnis, Shi'as, and the city's largest population of Christians. Our AO also included the heavily fortified Green Zone and several neighborhoods with large populations of retired Iraqi generals, plus numerous ethnic, sectarian and political entities (either preexisting or emerging, such as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Dawa Party, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan).

With the exception of our counterintelligence warrant officer and a few other officers who had some previous exposure to HUMINT operations, we neither understood nor anticipated the inadequacy of our conventionally designed intelligence collection and analysis system. More importantly, almost no one understood the dominant role that HUMINT operations would play in developing actionable intelligence on a burgeoning insurgency.

The intelligence system we brought to Iraq was designed to identify conventional enemy formations, and our intelligence personnel were trained to conduct predictive analysis about an enemy based upon our knowledge of his equipment and doctrine. Exactly none of these conditions existed after Saddam's army was defeated.

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Instead, we found ourselves in the midst of an insurgency, confronted by an elusive enemy force that wore no uniform and blended seamlessly into the local population. Conventional intelligence collection systems just don't work in this type of environment; our imagery operations, electronic reconnaissance, and standard combat patrols and surveillance operations were simply ineffective. After faithfully applying these conventional ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) methods and assets to our combat operations, we netted almost no actionable intelligence.

Challenges

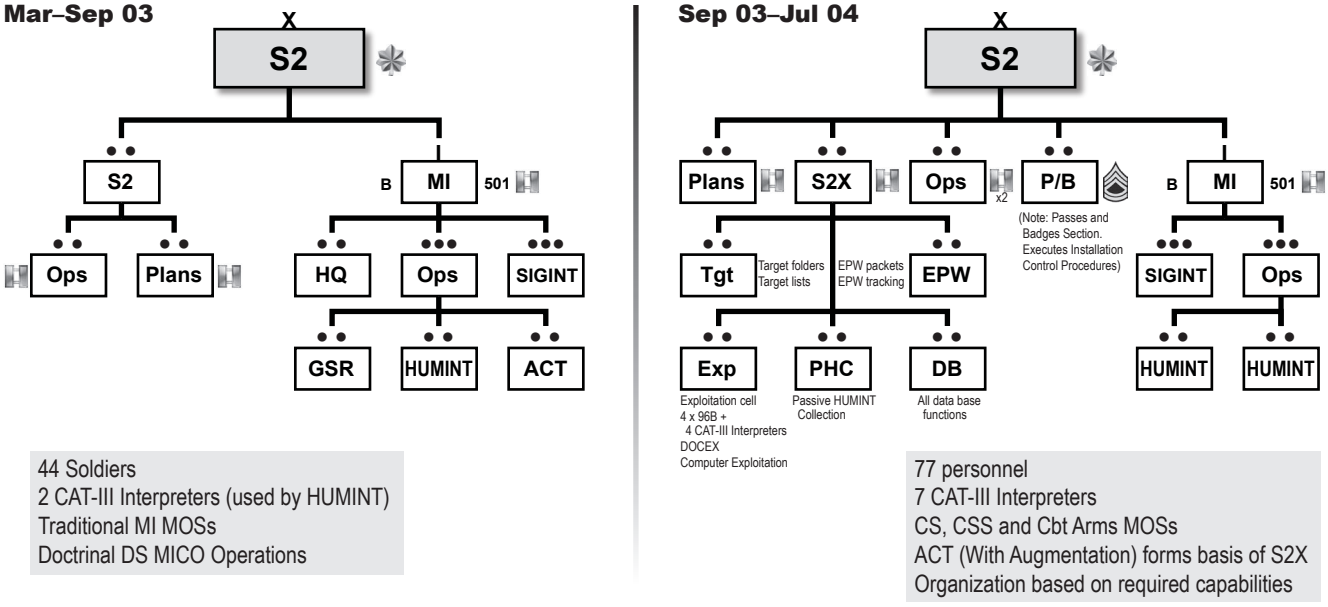
Realizing that we were fighting a growing insurgency and that the current conventional organization and training of our battalion and brigade intelligence sections were inadequate to address our needs, I decided to transition our conventional BCT intelligence system into a HUMINT-centric system.

Not unexpectedly, a change of this magnitude for a unit engaged in combat against a growing insurgency presented many challenges. After considering the circumstances we faced in our AO and our leadership's lack of experience and familiarity with COIN operations, I found that our challenges could be grouped into three general categories: leadership, organization, and training.

Leadership

When people are confronted with substantive change that runs counter to their doctrine and training, it's natural for them to be uncomfortable and therefore hesitant to embrace that change. I assumed this would be the case from the beginning; thus, I set about implementing mechanisms to ensure that compliance with our intelligence changes was rapid and "as directed." From the beginning, I felt it was necessary to convince my commanders and staffs that transitioning to a HUMINT-based approach to intelligence was my absolute highest priority.

As a commander, you must set the conditions to ensure that your subordinates make HUMINT operations a priority and that they synchronize such operations with your headquarters. You must start out by providing a sound concept your subordinates can understand and follow: visualize the plan, describe it to your people, and then direct them in execution. After close consultation with my



2 BCT, 1 AD Intel Organization

staff and other individuals with COIN experience, I presented a vision and draft organization for how I wanted units in the BCT to conduct intelligence operations. Central to our new intelligence system was the development of an extensive network of Iraqi informants. I felt it was absolutely key to identify and develop indigenous sources who had the ability to infiltrate Iraqi society and blend in. Such human sources of intelligence represent a critical capability that no ISR technology, no matter how sophisticated or advanced, can match.

Once we had decided to rely primarily upon informants for our intelligence collection, we modified our analysis process to bring it more in line with police procedures. This meant a heavy reliance on evidentiary-based link diagrams to associate individuals with enemy cells and networks, and some conventional pattern analysis when appropriate. Units were also directed to modify the organizational structures of their intelligence sections to accommodate new functional requirements such as intelligence exploitation cells, more robust current operations and plans cells, and additional subject matter experts who could support analysis and exploitation activities.

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After we developed a concept and described it to the BCT's leaders, the final (and most leader-intensive) part of our transition was getting those leaders to buy in. I fully expected that many of my subordinate commanders would be very uncomfortable changing their intelligence organizations, collection assets, and analysis processes, particularly in the middle of a war. Throughout their careers, they and their Soldiers had experienced only conventional military intelligence operations. Forcing them to abandon a system they were comfortable with and that they thought adequate required commanders at all levels, starting at brigade, to stay personally involved in all aspects of the transformation.

HUMINT Battle Rhythm

Anticipating that I would likely face some resistance from within my organization, I implemented mechanisms that would allow me to promote compliance, conformity, understanding, and confidence in our new approach to intelligence collection and analysis. Two particularly useful venues that allowed me to stay personally involved in intelligence operations with my subordinate leaders were weekly

reconnaissance and surveillance (R&S) back-briefs and BCT after-action reviews (AARs).

My weekly intelligence battle rhythm consisted of a brigade intelligence targeting meeting on Sunday, followed by a BCT fragmentary order on Tuesday, and then the R&S meeting on Thursday. I personally chaired the latter, with my intelligence officer (S2) and all the BCT's battalion operations officers (S3s) in attendance.

R&S meeting. The R&S meeting was particularly useful for several reasons. First, it allowed me to confirm that the decisions, priorities, and guidance I had provided during my weekly targeting board had been accurately disseminated and interpreted by my subordinate commands. Second, it allowed me to monitor our weekly recruitment and development of informants, who were absolutely central to our HUMINT-based intelligence program. Third, it gave me the opportunity to directly provide or clarify guidance from the weekly brigade intelligence FRAGO to all of the BCT S3s. Fourth, it improved my situational awareness of each of my battalion AOs. Finally, taking the time to personally chair this meeting demonstrated my commitment to making HUMINT-centric operations a top priority in the BCT.

During these meetings, the battalion S3s were required to brief me on a number of mandated topics: the priority of their collection actions, the status of informant recruitment and training, the allocation of intelligence collection assets, and any additional R&S support they required from brigade level or higher. Each battalion used a brigade-standardized matrix to cross-walk their priority intelligence requirements (PIR) with the asset or assets they planned to dedicate against their PIR. Any informant a battalion was using was listed on this matrix along with our organic collection assets.

The gathering of battalion S3s was one of our most important and productive intelligence meetings. It allowed me to assess the development and use of HUMINT assets, to ensure that the battalions' intelligence and collection requirements were nested with the brigade's, and to see how the battalions were progressing in the development and use of informants. It also provided a venue for the battalions to share lessons learned about intelligence targeting and collection.

Weekly BCT AAR. Another meeting that facilitated professional and informative dialog and gave me an opportunity to provide guidance to my commanders on intelligence issues was our weekly BCT AAR. It was held on Saturday, with every battalion commander and S2 attending. Each AAR began with the brigade S2 providing a detailed intelligence update of the entire BCT AO, followed by a discussion to ensure that we all shared a common enemy picture. This forum also allowed for the dissemination of intelligence lessons learned and best practices, and it gave me an opportunity to identify challenges and seek solutions from fellow commanders. Once our intelligence portion of the AAR was complete, the battalion S2s departed with the BCT S2 to synchronize BCT intelligence issues. Commanders stayed and we continued our AAR of information and maneuver operations.

Net gain. These two weekly venues, the R&S meeting and the AAR, were essential to reforming our intelligence system and improving our individual and unit performance. They—

- Allowed me and the BCT S2 to routinely emphasize or reinforce key components of our intelligence system.
- Promoted a learning environment within a chaotic and fast-paced operational environment.
- Allowed the immediate sharing of lessons (good and bad) among key battalion leaders.
- Provided me with immediate feedback on how well we were adapting to our new system.
- Fostered a better understanding of, and leader buy-in to, our new method of intelligence operations.

Eventually, once leaders at all levels understood the new system of intelligence collection and analysis better, had gained experience with it, and had bought into it, I was able to back off and be less directive. My subordinate leaders were then free to adapt and modify their intelligence operations to best fit the needs of their AOs.

Organization and Team Building

It was relatively easy to visualize, describe, and modify the organizational structure and the processes that we adopted to transform our intelligence operations. The greater challenge was manning our new model and training our Soldiers and leaders to conduct HUMINT operations.

As you would expect of a learning institution, our Army is changing its organizational structures and doctrine to address many of the intelligence

shortcomings that units experienced early on in Iraq. In fact, the intelligence section of today's BCT now includes an exploitation cell—a capability (and personnel) we didn't have just two years ago. In addition to these organizational and doctrinal improvements, BCTs now have more experienced leaders who understand the need to collect HUMINT in the current operating environment.

That said, manning is one of the challenges units encounter when they try to adapt their intelligence sections to HUMINT operations. HUMINT-centric operations are very manpower intensive—the amount of information that must be collected, analyzed, and synthesized to produce actionable intelligence can be overwhelming. Personnel needed for activities such as document and technical exploitation, interrogations, informant meetings, and plans and current operations present additional manpower challenges. As a result, commanders will find themselves undermanned when they have to staff their transformed intelligence activities according to the typical authorization for a conventional intelligence section. The number of authorized billets and Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs) is simply inadequate to conduct and sustain HUMINT-centric operations. To develop an effective brigade intelligence team, you will have to find additional personnel to man it.

One way to address this shortcoming is to screen and select non-intelligence-MOS Soldiers from your BCT who have the required skills: intellectual capacity, technical expertise, and a natural proclivity to contribute to your intelligence effort. We never hesitated to take Soldiers out of other sections or units to resource our intelligence sections. We had more than enough combat power in our organizations to overmatch the enemy in Iraq; what we didn't have was the depth and knowledge in our intelligence sections to find the enemy in the first place. To fix that, we integrated infantry and armor Soldiers, cooks, communications specialists, and mechanics into our brigade and battalion intelligence sections. Commanders might also look closely at any National Guard and Reserve units attached to them during deployment. Many of the Soldiers in these units already have unique skill sets (e.g., law enforcement, finance, computers and telecommunications) that make them excellent choices to serve as intelligence augmentees.

Having to build and train our intelligence team during combat was hardly ideal. Fortunately, units today have the opportunity to reorganize and train their intelligence sections and systems at home station prior to deployment. When we redeployed to our home station, we endured the typical personnel chaos (Soldiers changing station and leaving the service) that occurs in the wake of a long deployment. After the majority of our personnel turnover was over, we immediately set about building and training our intelligence sections in anticipation of the brigade's next deployment.

Working closely with the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) and 1st Armored Division Headquarters, we developed a HUMINT-centric pre-rotational training program to facilitate the early and progressive training of our new intelligence teams. The chief of the division's All-source Collection Element (ACE) and CMTC's scenario writers and leaders developed a detailed enemy situation and database that replicated an insurgent-terrorist activity, one that could fully exercise the BCT's intelligence units. The intelligence flow began six months prior to commencement of our maneuver training exercise, as our intelligence sections at home received a steady stream of notional intelligence reports, interrogation debriefings, and programmed meetings with HUMINT sources. Using the torrent of information generated by the division ACE and CMTC, our intelligence sections were able to sustain the intelligence processes and techniques that we had developed while previously deployed to Iraq.

With that pre-rotational data and information provided in advance, our intelligence teams were required to conduct analysis, build link diagrams and target folders, and produce other intelligence products that passed along the hard lessons learned during our first deployment. We also continued to

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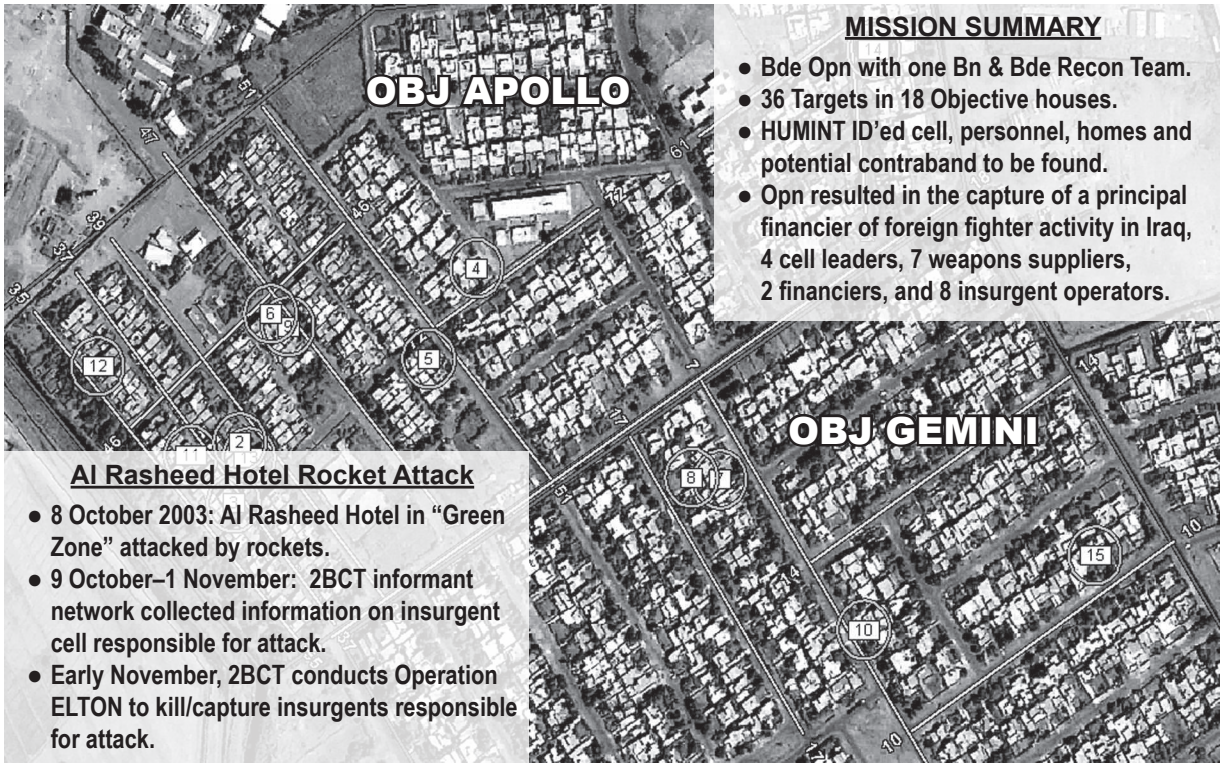
run our weekly intelligence battle rhythm just like we had in Iraq. My staff would provide me with current intelligence updates, recommend changes or additions to our PIR, conduct current analysis of insurgent organizations in our AO, and suggest intelligence targeting priorities.

These pre-rotational intelligence activities supported three important goals: first, they allowed us to train our newly staffed intelligence teams throughout the BCT based upon lessons we had learned and processes we had developed in Iraq. Second, they enabled us to maximize our training experience when we finally deployed for our rotation—instead of spending valuable time learning undergraduate lessons at an expensive postgraduate training event, we were able to hit the ground running based upon actionable intelligence our sections had developed over the previous six months. Finally, and most importantly, they developed the confidence of the new Soldiers and leaders in our intelligence sections.

Informants

As I stated earlier, leveraging informants as our principal intelligence-collection asset constituted a significant shift from the way most of us had ever operated. The theory and logic behind using local sources to obtain information and intelligence is easy to grasp; however, the practical aspects of developing these nonstandard collection assets are less obvious.

In general, we had two challenges with informants: finding them and training them. Initially we relied upon informants who routinely provided unsolicited information to our units. We would track the accuracy and consistency of the information they gave us and, after they established a credible and reliable track record, we would begin to reward them for useful information. Later on, as our knowledge of our AO improved and, more importantly, our understanding of the culture and the nuances of local demographics increased, we became more savvy and cultivated informants from different ethnic, sectarian, political, tribal, and other groups within our AO. Eventually, the brigade's intelligence sections developed a rapport with three to five informants who consistently provided reliable information we could develop into actionable intelligence.



Operation Elton, November 2003: Elton was 2BCT's first major operation to rely exclusively on intelligence from informants. Targeted houses were pinpointed by GPS devices.

Among our informants were members of political parties, local government officials, prostitutes, police officers, retired Iraqi generals, prominent businessmen, and expatriates. Of course we recognized that there was risk associated with using informants. For example, we were concerned that they might be collecting on us, or that the information they provided might have been designed to settle personal vendettas. Consequently, our BCT S2 and counterintelligence warrant officer developed a vetting program to minimize such risks. All of our informants were screened to validate the quality of their information and to check their motivations for providing it. We also implemented careful measures to ensure that informants were not collecting on U.S. forces or providing information that would put our Soldiers at risk.

Once we determined that a potential informant was reliable and useful, it became necessary to train and equip him so that he could provide more accurate and timely information. We typically provided our informants with Global Positioning System (GPS) devices, digital cameras, and cell phones. The phones not only improved the timeliness of information, but also allowed informants to keep their distance from us, thus minimizing the chance they would be personally compromised. Later on, as Internet cafes began to flourish in the Iraqi economy, we helped our informants establish email accounts and used that medium as another way to communicate with them.

GPS devices were also important, because most informants could not accurately determine or communicate address information that was sufficient to pinpoint target locations. With some basic training, our informants could use their GPSs to identify key locations using the military grid reference system. This increased the accuracy of location marking and measurably enhanced our ability to develop precise, actionable intelligence. Occasionally it was useful to give informants automobiles, too, to facilitate their movement and collection activities inside and outside our AO.

We discovered that identifying and training an informant was a complex and time-consuming process. Finding the right type of individual willing to work with you is both an art and a science. Our counterintelligence-trained Soldiers were instrumental in ensuring that we worked with the most reliable, most consistently accurate informants. Training and equipping our informants were key to their effectiveness and paid great dividends in terms of the volume and accuracy of their information. Because informants were the foundation of our HUMINT system in the brigade, we resourced them accordingly.

DOD

Captured insurgent material. 2BCT learned the hard way that it's not enough merely to seize evidence. Contraband must be properly handled and documented to aid in insurgent prosecution.

Collecting and Exploiting Evidence

Although developing indigenous sources of intelligence was central to the way we operated, we quickly discovered that there was another key component to our HUMINT-driven system: the collection and exploitation of evidence. It is not only frustrating, but also detrimental to your mission success to culminate an operation with the capture of insurgents or terrorists only to be directed to release them because your justification for detaining them can't endure the scrutiny of a military or civilian legal review. We quickly learned after a couple of very avoidable incidents that our ability to successfully prosecute intelligence operations was directly linked to the ability of our Soldiers to collect, preserve, and exploit evidence related to our captured suspects. To remedy that, we initiated a training program to give our Soldiers and leaders the skills they needed to manage evidence.

Leveraging the experience and training of our military police, National Guardsmen with law enforcement skills, and FBI agents in country, we were able to rapidly train our Soldiers on the essential requirements for capturing, securing, associating, safeguarding, and

exploiting evidence. Once they were armed with this training and an effective HUMINT-based intelligence process, our seizure and detention rate for insurgents, terrorists, and other miscreants soared.

Closely linked to the collection and association of evidence to suspects was the exploitation of that evidence. Early in our deployment we were frustrated by the inability of organizations above brigade level to exploit evidence in a timely manner and then provide feedback that we could use.

This was particularly true when it came to captured computer hard drives and cell phones. The standard policy was that these items had to be expedited to division headquarters within 24 hours of capture. This made sense because division was the first echelon above brigade that had the knowledge and expertise to exploit these devices. Unfortunately, for many reasons the turnaround time to receive intelligence from echelons above brigade was typically too slow, or the resultant product too incomplete, to help us.

What we needed was the ability to exploit these items at the BCT level for tactical information, in parallel with the division and corps intelligence shops, which were focused on other priorities. Based upon our previous working relationship with the FBI team in country, we managed to get a copy of a software program the agency was using to exploit hard drives. My BCT communications platoon loaded the software on their computers, received some basic training, and instantly we had the ability to exploit hard drives. We dedicated a couple of linguists to our communications platoon section, integrated this element into our S2X cell, and from then on conducted our own tactical-level technical exploitation of computers. We still had to forward hard drives and cell phones to division within 24 hours of capture, but now we just copied the hard drive, forwarded the complete captured system to division, and exploited the information simultaneously with the division.

This easy technical remedy to our hard-drive exploitation problem consistently provided big payoffs for us. The new capability was useful for documenting evidence to support the detention of an insurgent and for developing follow-up targets. We had the same challenge with cell phones. Unfortunately, we couldn't acquire the technical capability we needed to exploit them as we had with the hard drives. I believe that phone exploitation is yet another trainable skill and capability that we should give our BCT communications platoons.

As with cell phones and hard drives, we were challenged to fully exploit our detainees. Specifically, we had to get them to provide information, and then we had to exploit that information to incarcerate them or to assist us in developing further intelligence to support future counterinsurgency operations. To address this challenge, we developed and adapted two useful tools as we gained experience at tactical-level interrogations. One was a detailed line of questioning that our HUMINT Collection Teams (HCTs) could use when questioning detainees; the other was the "cage infiltrator"—an Iraqi informant who would pose as a detainee in our holding facility to gather valuable intelligence from actual detainees.

Developed by the HCT team leader and the S2, a detailed line of questioning is extremely important for prioritizing the avenues of questioning that your trained and authorized interrogators pursue. It is an especially important tool given the latter's extraordinary workload and the limited amount of time they can dedicate to initial and follow-up interrogation sessions.

As a commander, I found that it was imperative to take a personal interest in the line of questioning our HCTs pursued. For example, it was important to ensure that their line of questioning meshed exactly with the BCT's PIRs and intelligence targeting priorities. I spent a lot of time with my S2 and battalion commanders refining our PIR and specific intelligence requirements (SIR), reviewing and establishing collection priorities, and synchronizing our collection efforts. This entire effort can be derailed if the line of questioning your interrogators pursue isn't nested with your unit's priorities.

To ensure development of the most effective interrogation line of questioning, my S2 required our HCTs to participate in the following five-step process (weekly or mission-specific):

- HCTs receive updated PIR and associated SIR from the unit S2.
- HCTs receive a current intelligence briefing from the NCO in charge of the unit S2X cell.
- Senior HUMINT warrant officer attends the BCT commander's daily intelligence briefings to facilitate his understanding of the latest changes in intelligence priorities.

DOD

Suspects detained during a 2BCT raid. Note the computer in the right foreground. Once the brigade acquired the capability to exploit hard-drives, computers became great sources of intelligence and evidence.

- HCTs develop lines of questioning and back-brief the unit S2 and senior HUMINT warrant officer.
- HCTs conduct interrogations.

We found that it was easy for our HCTs to determine the right questions to ask as long as they thoroughly understood our current PIR and SIR (which we continuously updated and refined).

Because detainees figured out very quickly that we treat prisoners humanely, it was not long before many of them refused to provide useful information. During interrogations we would typically hear things like "I'm innocent, I was just sleeping at my cousin's house when you arrested me," or "Saddam bad, Bush good, thank Allah for the USA." If we didn't have substantive evidence to link these detainees to a crime or insurgent activity, their strategy of denial, obsequious behavior, or happenstance alibi was difficult to dispute. One day, my S2 came to me with an idea. At his suggestion, we planted an informant in our holding facility with instructions to listen to the detainees' conversations and then report to us what they discussed. This technique, which we dubbed "cage infiltration," resulted in immediate intelligence.

Subsequently, we redesigned the individual spaces in our holding facility so that we could place our infiltrators in individual detention spaces, between suspected insurgent leaders and their possible followers. The only way these detainees could communicate among themselves was to talk past our infiltrator to their accomplice or cell member. Our interrogation teams would then remove our infiltrator under the guise of a routine interrogation, debrief him, and then return him to the holding area. Armed with the new information, our interrogators could often modify their line of questioning for more effective and productive follow-up interviews.

In a very short time, this technique became our single most effective method for gaining information and intelligence from our detainee population. An additional benefit to using cage infiltrators was that they were interactive. Over time, as they became more experienced and adept at what they were doing, they became quite clever at developing a dialog with their fellow detainees that would draw out additional information useful in incriminating the suspect or in developing future targetable information.

Another twist to this technique was the use of a taxi-driver informant. Despite our best efforts, there were times when we couldn't build a case strong enough to support the long-term detention

of a suspect. When that happened, we would make our apologies for the inconvenience the suspect had endured and offer him a taxi ride back to his residence. It was not unusual for these suspects to brag to the driver or among themselves on their way home how they had deceived the "stupid" Americans. They would incriminate themselves in the process or reveal details that we could use to conduct follow-up COIN operations. Upon returning to our headquarters, the taxi driver was debriefed on the suspect's conversation. Based upon the nature of any new information the informant presented, we decided either to recapture the suspect or to cease pursuing him.

Ensuring that the line of questioning our HCTs pursued was nested with the BCT's intelligence priorities, coupled with some simple deception techniques such as using cage infiltrators in our holding facility, considerably improved the quantity and quality of intelligence that we obtained from our detainees.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of this article I have attempted to identify some of the major intelligence challenges my BCT faced during our first tour in Iraq. I have provided examples of how we met these challenges and adapted to best meet our needs at the time. I've also shared some of our more useful and effective practices in the hope that others may use or modify them to support their needs. I don't pretend that the examples and practices I've offered represent definitive solutions to the countless intelligence challenges units face in Iraq. My intent, rather, was to demonstrate that by direct and constant leadership involvement at all levels, conventional units can effectively organize, train for, and execute HUMINT-centric operations in a COIN environment with great success.

One Final Thought

This article is designed to complement a previous piece I wrote for *Military Review* ("The Decisive Weapon: A Brigade Combat Team Commander's Perspective on Information Operations") in which I described the contribution that IO made to our COIN efforts in Baghdad.[1]

Although HUMINT-centric operations and IO may appear distinctly different in terms of their aims, they are closely linked; in fact, they are mutually supportive. HUMINT-centric operations target the insurgent and the terrorist, but in doing so they produce precise and timely information that allows our Soldiers to locate and attack insurgent forces with surgical precision, minimum violence, and minor collateral damage. A corollary benefit is that our actions result in minimal harm and inconvenience to the local population, helping us to convince them that we have the intent and capacity to improve their security and daily lives by eliminating the insurgent threat.

Likewise, IO synergistically supports our intelligence efforts by convincing the local population that it is in their best interest, personally and nationally, to tolerate and even support our efforts to improve their lives. Through IO, we share with the population the progress that is being achieved politically, economically, and socially, and we ensure that they know about the violence and harm the insurgents are wreaking upon their fellow citizens and their nation.

Similarly, through IO we are able to let the population know that we can separate and protect them from insurgent-terrorist threats when they have the confidence to share targetable information with us. The more adept we become at conducting IO and influencing the population, the more information the population will provide to enable us to target the insurgents and terrorists. It's a win-win dynamic.

Given the environment our forces are operating in today and will continue to confront in the future, HUMINT-centric operations and IO are no longer merely "enablers" or supporting efforts. Quite simply, they are the decisive components of our strategy. Both of these critical operations must be embraced; they must become the twin pillars of the framework from which we operate. No longer can we allow our greater comfort with conventional combat operations to minimize these decisive components of a winning COIN strategy. ***MR***

NOTES

1. Ralph O. Baker, "The Decisive Weapon: A Brigade Combat Team Commander's Perspective on Information Operations," *Military Review* 86 (May-June 2006): 33-51.