

# Information-Collection Failures that Lead to ‘Discovery Learning’

by CPT Raymond A. Kuderka and CPT Andrew Eickbush

*“Before I can develop the ground-maneuver plan, I need to know what the enemy is doing.”* This sentence is echoed by operations officers during every scenario conducted at our Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Hohenfels, Germany.

Intelligence preparation of the battlefield is the intelligence officer’s primary task during mission analysis and serves as the catalyst synchronizing information collection (IC) with a ground-maneuver plan throughout the military decision-making process. The IC process at face value seems simple enough – staff provides analysis in the form of the commander’s critical information requirements (CCIR), thus enabling the commander to make informed operational decisions – but we’ve noticed that in most decisive-action training environment (DATE) rotations at JMRC, regardless of unit type or nation of origin, units fail to plan and execute an IC plan that supports the commander’s decision-making process.

Why? Though our list is not all-encompassing, most shortcomings of IC planning/execution can be attributed to the following failures:

- Not defining the operational framework;
- Producing convoluted IC overlays;
- Not understanding organic IC capabilities;
- Not prioritizing assets; and
- Executing inadequate staff coordination.

The result of these inefficiencies often leads to unnecessary “discovery learning” as the unit crosses the line of departure with little situational understanding of its immediate fight.

The following five problem sets describe established patterns we regularly see during rotations at JMRC. Each provides a starting point for discussion. The intent is for each unit to acknowledge these common shortcomings and provide a unit-tailored solution based on composition, disposition and mission to set the conditions for success.

## **Problem Set 1: defining operational framework**

Army doctrine on unified land operations states that “Army leaders are responsible for articulating their visualization of operations in time, space, purpose and resources” (Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, **Unified Land Operations**). This is accomplished through developing a standard operational framework that is consistent throughout all echelons. There is a direct connection between defined framework and its application to the development and execution of an IC plan.

Most units’ intelligence sections analyze the mission in a framework that most closely resembles the deep-close-security framework. According to this framework, “areas of operation can be divided into three distinct parts: support area, close area and deep area” (ADRP 3-0). We will use this framework to discuss observed trends throughout the rest of this article.

Most units view their assigned area of operation in a homogenous manner, resulting in little to no delineation between the deep and close fight. This view cripples IC planners’ ability to visualize the battlefield. Ultimately, without a clear understanding of the operational framework, units inevitably develop and execute an IC plan with three seams that the enemy exploits to gain a marked advantage.

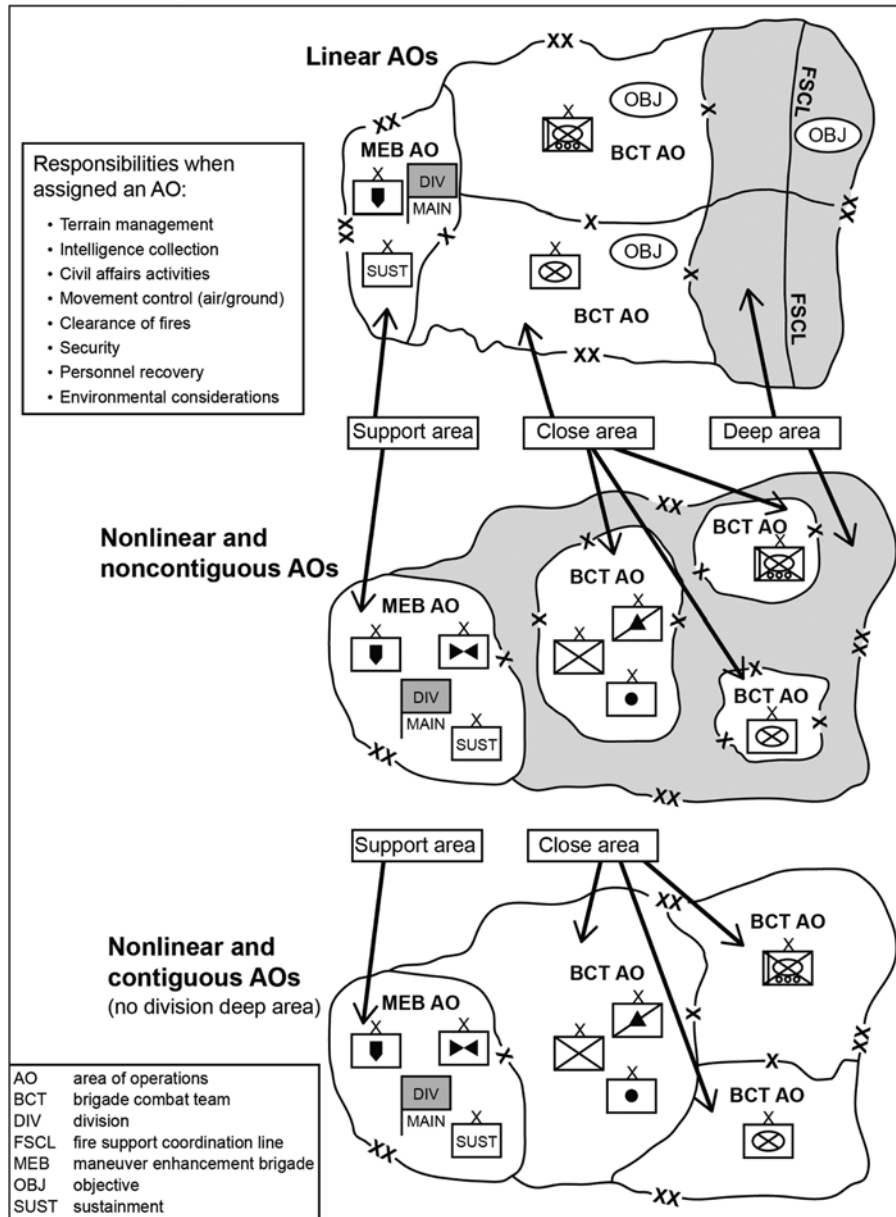


Figure 1. Example of deep-close-security operational framework. (Figure 1-1, ADRP 3-0)

### Seam 1: battalion close area

At the battalion level, the primary friction point lies in the belief that all critical-information requirements are located within their deep area. In addition, units assume that subordinate elements will execute counter-reconnaissance patrols without direct tasking. This leads to all organic IC efforts focused too far forward – to the furthest extent of the brigade’s close area. Consequently, the battalion fails to develop and task-organize IC assets/capabilities to collect on close-proximity named areas of interest (NAI), with a specific focus on enemy reconnaissance elements. These actions create “Seam 1” as depicted in Figure 2. The result is that the enemy has complete freedom of movement around the unit’s main body, with unrestricted surveillance and observation of indirect fires.

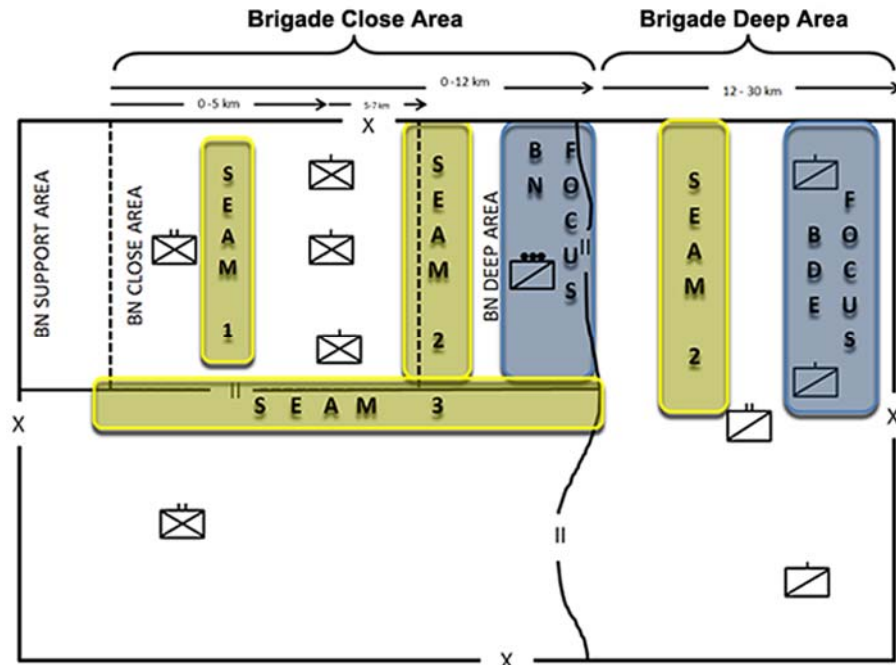


Figure 2. Brigade linear battlefield with defined deep and close areas.

## Seam 2: battalion deep area vs. brigade close area

Brigades and battalions struggle to define their individual roles and responsibilities for collection between their respective close and deep areas. This is the basis for Seam 2 depicted in Figure 2. Battalion and brigade operations and intelligence personnel rarely synchronize IC efforts. This lack of coordination often results in a combination of three outcomes:

- **Duplicated efforts** – Brigade and battalion establish NAIs and task-organic elements to collect information at the same geographic location. Often this is represented by a battalion that tasks organic reconnaissance assets to observe the same area the brigade is covering with an aerial IC platform.
- **Echelon prioritization** – IC overlays are developed and executed at both the brigade and battalion level without discussion, understanding or rehearsals. Consequently, neither echelon comprehends the prioritization of NAIs but merely assumes that templated NAIs will receive coverage. Unfortunately, rarely does NAI prioritization at the brigade and battalion match. As a result, the brigade does not collect on a critical (event-driven) NAI from the battalion perspective.
- **The deep focus** – Units tend to position their reconnaissance assets to the furthest extent of their deep area. Also, units do not have enough reconnaissance efforts to cover in both width and depth. The result is Seam 2 – a gap in coverage between the rearmost elements of the unit's reconnaissance effort and the forward edge of the unit's main body. Depending on the depth, it may constitute a gap in both time and space. For example, an enemy echelon may pass through deep brigade or echelon-above-brigade reconnaissance assets and, because it is not handed off to battalion scouts or other assets, it essentially disappears in the seam and is not observed again until it arrives in the battalion's forward edge of the battle area hours later. Worse, the enemy may appear again only in our rear or flanks (Seam 1), having taken advantage of the third seam.

## Seam 3: adjacent unit coordination

Successful operations include adjacent unit coordination. IC planning is no different. Units often state the need to synchronize their movements, fire plans and sustainment requirements but rarely share CCIR, IC overlays or current enemy assessments. Instead, they rely on their higher headquarters and digital platforms like Blue Force Tracker, Command Post of the Future or Distributed Common Ground System-Army to create common understanding. Absent from the process is direct verbal or face-to-face interaction. Most intelligence sections

routinely fail to establish effective primary, alternate, contingency and emergency plans, leaving each subordinate organization operating as an isolated unit.

This issue is amplified when working within multinational task forces that operate off varying mission command and communications systems, as witnessed at JMRC. This lack of direct synchronization creates Seam 3, which runs parallel along unit boundaries. The enemy anticipates this failure, seeks to identify the seam and then exploits it by committing its main attack on this axis.

## Nonlinear environment

Defining the operational framework within a nonlinear environment is conceptually much harder for most organizations. The frustration is often multiplied as the brigade and battalion focus of reconnaissance is overlaid over most of the same terrain. As depicted in Figure 3, it becomes clear how multiple aerial assets become layered within the same geographic footprint.

The Army's experiences during Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) are mostly built on a nonlinear operational framework. This nonlinear and static environment forced units to use IC assets to look internally on their area of operation (AO). This enabled subordinate units to one, accept, and two, expect, an abundance of nonorganic aerial IC platforms. Indirectly, this led to brigade assets collecting on multiple battalion and brigade NAIs from the same airspace at near-simultaneous time. These experiences built a perception that IC platforms could answer multiple information requirements within multiple areas during a single flight with minimal coordination. This caused a paradigm shift toward a substantial decrease in IC tasks directed at organic maneuver elements, including battalion scouts.

The Army has yet to transition back toward recognizing the finite aerial resources and their placement in the brigade and battalion reconnaissance efforts. Ultimately, the Army will continue to fight wars in both a linear and nonlinear operational framework. Each provides opportunities and limitations. Units must recognize how these frameworks affect their tasking of IC platforms.

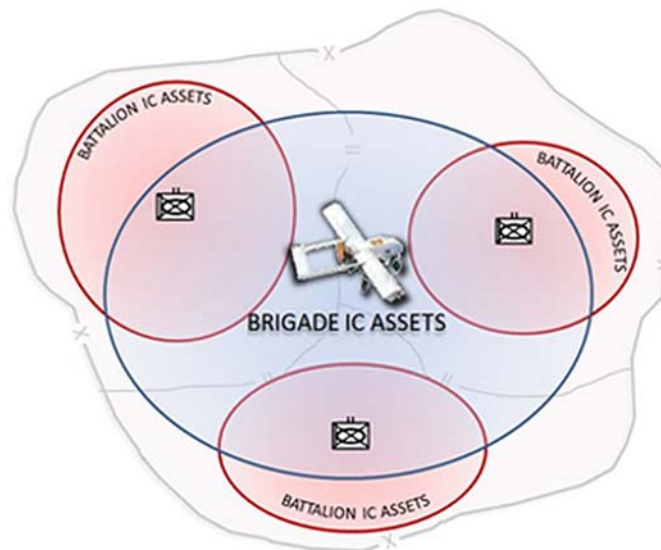


Figure 3. Brigade and battalion IC assets within a nonlinear framework.

## Problem Set 2: IC-overlay inadequacies

“The tasking and directing of information collection assets is fundamentally linked to the development of the IC overlay,” according to Field Manual (FM) 3-55, *Information Collection*. In DATE, intelligence sections routinely produce IC overlays that are not tied to satisfying CCIR; are convoluted and lack focus; and are not phased over time.

The foundation of an effective IC plan starts with a coordinated effort between the staff and commander to develop CCIR. Establishing priority information requirements (PIR) allows the collection manager to focus efforts

on finding information that will ultimately drive a decision. However, commanders rarely take ownership of this process, resulting in adoption of a higher echelon's CCIR or in the intelligence officer (S-2) creating his or her own information requirements. The residual effect is felt in the IC overlay as NAIs are chosen based on terrain analysis and templated enemy locations rather than on critical events that drive decisions.

An efficient IC overlay is clear, concise and easily understood. In most rotations, units struggle to adhere to these principles. The most identifiable shortcoming is the inability to delineate IC overlays between echelons. Often these products have countless NAIs that lack a specific focus, exceed IC collection capabilities and are not tied to the specific units plan (brigade NAIs on battalion IC overlay). In plain sense, the entire AO becomes an NAI. Consequently, units are overwhelmed and do not prioritize, resulting in a failure to task collection assets on critical NAIs.

The initial IC overlay developed to support an operation needs to adapt as conditions change. However, units fail to develop IC overlays that are phased over time as their operational focus changes (defense, offense, wide-area security). The common practice involves the application of NAIs across the depth of the AO based off assumptions from initial mission analysis. This results in units creating "enduring" or "legacy" NAIs with the belief that their relevance is applicable to all phases of the operation. Ultimately, if the IC plan is not updated, it is no longer relevant after the first day of the operation.

### **Problem Set 3: missed opportunities with organic and multinational capabilities**

Units often fail to effectively use their organic IC assets. This is predicated on deployed experiences that have conditioned units to use aerial platforms rather than ground elements. Indirectly, operations officers are focused on planning and lose sight of how and to whom specific information requirements were tasked.

Organizations often have a myriad of units with specific capabilities that have been attached to or reside within their organic footprint that could support the reconnaissance effort. These elements range from Air Force's Joint Tactical Air Controllers (JTAC) to forward observers to the basic infantryman. Each of these carries its own capabilities that can be applied to specific information requirements within the IC Synchronization Matrix. What units often fail to realize is that more than one unit is capable of answering CCIR. More importantly, we fail to disseminate CCIR effectively and efficiently to the myriad assets that could provide the answers.

A common example often observed at JMRC is described following.

The battalion S-2 develops a specific information requirement with an accompanying indicator of three or more *boyevaya mashina pekhoty* (BMPs) traveling through a mobility corridor within a valley. This information will answer a PIR that determines what avenue of approach the enemy main body will use for its attack. In addition, the PIR will also drive the battalion commander's decision concerning his counterattack plan. In the execution of the battalion IC plan, this PIR is often tasked to the forward-most element: the battalion scouts.

In most circumstances, Air Force JTACs are employed within the battalion-scout element in an effort to streamline the prosecution of targets through Type I or Type II close-air-support (CAS) control during force-on-force engagements. The attached JTACs are very capable of answering this same mission-critical PIR. However, rarely are the JTACs tasked to collect on, or are aware of, the unit's PIRs. This lack of awareness results in JTACs that do not understand the battalion's critical-information requirements. Information gathered is ultimately conveyed as a situation report rather than an answered PIR. This method relies on the radiotelephone operators' training to extract relevant information and inform unit leadership.

Another significant oversight is the incorporation of multinational partners. Often units arrive at JMRC with a pre-disposed list of limitations for their multinational partners. U.S. units must not focus on their multinational partners' constraints but rather on their capabilities. An example of this is when U.S. units focus on their multinational partners' limited night-vision devices, which hampers movement at night, as an excuse to relegate their role to insignificant tasks. Instead, leaders should consider how to leverage their counterpart's strengths wherein they are viewed as contributors rather than inhibitors.

Lastly, units rarely establish a system that efficiently uses the individual Soldier as an IC asset. CCIR is only known by leaders with the expectation that they will receive reports from subordinates, decipher the information and transmit the appropriate answer to designated PIRs. In practice, leaders rarely have the capability to track all the

PIRs and filter reports from subordinates to answer them. Soldiers who understand PIR can become the filters and report answers rather than sitreps. This will prevent excess traffic on the radio and enable company leadership to focus where required.

### **Problem Set 4: asset prioritization and retasking**

Leaders continue to rely on their counterinsurgency experiences as the Army transitions to DATE training scenarios at JMRC. Most previously deployed leaders have a shared experience relating IC assets to a false sense of ownership or tasking ability. This understanding is built on the surplus of theater IC assets present during OIF and OEF. Contingent to this experience is the execution of most immediate reconnaissance operations by “pulling” IC assets rather than using organic elements. Pulling IC assets was accomplished by applying the immediate CAS request to IC platforms – establishing the immediate IC request. Inevitably, units had success at receiving support for scantily planned reconnaissance efforts due to an abundance of IC assets.

The net result of this process was subordinate units that do not develop a distinct, focused IC plan using organic IC assets. Also, units lack the ability to forecast and request higher-level capabilities to satisfy information requirements that cannot be met using organic platforms. JMRC observer/controller/trainers (O/C/Ts) have observed units that plan under the assumption that if they find a brigade priority target, they will receive the higher-level organization’s organic asset(s) (Shadow) to continue to develop the intelligence. Ultimately, they believe, “If we find it, they will come.”

The failure of headquarters units to provide the required prioritization and oversight for IC is the reverse result to the immediate IC request. Just as a battalion was able to “pull assets,” brigade now has the means to retask. This ability has a detrimental impact on developing the IC Synchronization Matrix. Organizations no longer feel the need to designate assets by time to prioritized NAIs. IC fundamentals such as cueing, mixing and redundancy are not incorporated into asset management. Instead, the IC Synch Matrix resembles more of an asset-request template because allocated platforms rarely collect on requested NAIs. These assets are usually retasked as soon as they arrive on station.

Ultimately, units must understand that assets, to include IC platforms, are a finite resource. Battalions and brigades must clearly prioritize NAIs that satisfy CCIR. The dissemination of prioritization, both higher and lower, is vital to preventing IC assets from being “retasked.” An absence of prioritization prior to the fight will continue to increase higher units’ appetites to “pull” IC platforms to fill immediate needs as they arise during the fight.

### **Problem Set 5: need for staff collaboration**

“The operations officer, based on recommendations from the operations staff, tasks and directs the [IC] assets,” according to FM 3-55. The concept that IC is a collaborative process involving the entire staff is codified in doctrine and should be accepted by all leaders. However, most battalions continue to struggle with the practical application of cohesive IC development, leaving the battalion S-2 as the task’s sole proprietor. The compounding effects of this decision result in the absence of NAI prioritization in accordance with the ground-maneuver plan, limited organizational understanding of the information requirements tied to each NAI and, most importantly, subordinate organizations that are not specifically tasked to collect on critical NAIs that drive operational decisions by the battalion commander.

### **Conclusion**

The phrase “intelligence drives operations” is commonly accepted throughout the Army. IC is critical in making this phrase a reality. Throughout this article, we have identified five major shortcomings (problem sets) that prevent organizations from internalizing this mantra. Leaders need to acknowledge these common pitfalls to drive unit-tailored solutions. The success of the mission depends on it.

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## **Acronym Quick-Scan**

**ADRP** – Army doctrinal reference publication

**AO** – area of operation

**BMP** – *boyevaya mashina pekhoty*

**CAS** – close air support

**CCIR** – commander's critical information requirements

**DATE** – decisive-action training environment

**FM** – field manual

**IC** – information collection

**JMRC** – Joint Multinational Readiness Center

**JTAC** – Joint Terminal Attack Controller

**NAI** – named area of interest

**NATO** – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

**O/C/T** – observer/controller/trainer

**OEF** – Operation Enduring Freedom

**OIF** – Operation Iraqi Freedom

**PIR** – priority intelligence requirement