



# the IPB process in low-intensity conflict

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In preparing to conduct task force level intelligence operations in a low intensity environment, a battalion S-2 has numerous handouts and guides available that will serve as a framework. All of these references contain the requirements and techniques for conducting successful operations against an insurgent force. In other types of low intensity conflict, however, these references may prove inadequate.

The 2d Battalion, 27th Infantry, for example, during its deployment to the Republic of Panama in August 1989 as part of Exercise Nimrod Dancer, faced a "show of force" contingency or an "actions short of war" scenario. (This was, of course, some months before Operation JUST CAUSE began in December 1989, in which the battalion also participated.) The intelligence planners soon realized that they needed to ex-

amine the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) process and look for ways to present the mass of information to commanders in formats that would make it more useful and timely.

~~The results of this experience should broaden the efforts already being dedicated to training intelligence professionals in low intensity operations.~~

As the task force deployed to Panama, the units knew they were in for a challenge. They had previously participated in such exercises as Team Spirit in Korea and those at the Joint Readiness Training Center. Now, though, they would be exposed to a different environment in which their task would be to "protect and defend" and "exercise our rights in accordance with the Panama Canal Treaty." This meant that the combat-ready soldiers would have to exhibit their discipline and training by adhering strictly to rigid rules of engagement and conducting operations as professionally as possible.

The S-2 had been reading about General Manuel Antonio Noriega's Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) and tended to picture it as an army, led by one man and supported by a chain of command. What he found instead was that the PDF was a conglomeration of many different forces. It included the local police, the military zone garrisons, assorted infantry and military police companies, naval infantry (marines), a small navy, a smaller air force, special operations forces, and paramilitary support groups.

In many areas, the chain of command was not represented by the ranking commander but by the most dominant figure. The leaders often had been chosen by General Noriega for their special blend of personal loyalty and competence.

Interestingly, many of these trusted commanders were not anti-American, but had followed Noriega because he had played a key role in the advancement of their careers. At the same time, though, many had indicated through numerous sources that they would not fight against the United States, and it was uncertain what they might do in the event of hostilities.

The Panamanian soldiers themselves were a key unknown. While their paydays often came and went without compensation, they were still better off than many of their civilian counterparts. And although many of them had voted against Noriega's candidate in the May 1989 elections, intelligence estimates indicated that should hostilities begin, half of the PDF regulars would surrender if given an opportunity. The rest would probably put up sporadic resistance until they were overwhelmed or would try to escape to fight from bases in the jungle.

For the time being, the PDF had placed itself in a defensive posture, allowing U.S. soldiers to train and conduct operations in Panama relatively free of hindrance. But there were many factors that could rapidly change this situation.

In an effort to bolster support for his regime and defend against U.S. intervention, Noriega had created the Dignity Battalions (DBs), made up of Panamanian nationals who had cast their lot with him. When originally formed, some of these battalions had boasted a strength of more than 1,000 members each. By August 1989, though, many were down to 100 to

150 hardcore members with a small PDF cadre. The rest were government employees who had been ordered to participate or risk losing their jobs.

Although the reliability of the DBs was questionable, these groups had to be addressed during the staff planning for all of the battalion's exercises. For the most part, they were ill-trained, having received some weapons, tactics, and terrorist training to be used against the United States in the event of hostilities. Still, they were armed, many had violent crimes and drug convictions in their backgrounds, and they had tried to "bait" U.S. units into counter-productive incidents.

Another group that could not be overlooked was composed of the nationals of other countries that were unfriendly to the United States. There were Cuban and Nicaraguan military advisors in Panama, for example, whose influence had yet to be determined but who clearly thought that an unstable Panama would work in their favor. Additionally, there were Syrians and Libyans who had helped the Dignity Battalions train for terrorist operations.

Finally, the PDF had special operations forces, the best trained of which was a special security anti-terror force that could conduct special operations anywhere in Panama. In fact, they had received anti-terrorist training earlier from the United States and Israel. Although their primary mission in the event of hostilities would be to protect Noriega and his headquarters, they could not be ruled out as pre-emptive strike force. The PDF also had a commando unit—actually more like a light infantry company—that was frequently used to guard Noriega at his homes.

## GENERAL POPULATION

As to the general population (usually the key ingredient in low intensity conflict), the Panamanian people created an interesting problem. Most were reported to be anti-Noriega but apathetic to the notion that they should do anything to oust him. The opposition had repeatedly called for participation in programs designed to force him from power, but these efforts had failed. While the people could be expected to support Noriega's removal by the U.S., they could not be expected to support a large loss of Panamanian life or any attempt to alter or abrogate the Carter-Torrijos Treaty. Thus, the general populace could not be expected to play an important role in a short-term conflict with the Panama Defense Forces.

An assessment of the opposition party showed that the largest and most notable, led by Gabriel Endara (who became President after Operation JUST CAUSE) had chosen peaceful resistance as its method of struggle against the regime. It called for the people not to pay their taxes or participate in the Government's lottery. The group's few demonstrations had been small and non-violent. These people had not taken to the streets in mass since the debacle in May 1989 in which they had been beaten by PDF and DB members. While they publicly called for the Panamanians to solve Panama's problems, privately they also looked to the United States to move against Noriega.

It was in this environment, then, that the commanders and

the staff of the battalion task force would plan and conduct their operations during the exercise. In addition to the many other constraints upon the leaders and soldiers in executing their missions, the chain of command down to the team leaders had to make sure all of the soldiers' movements and actions were in accordance with the Panama Canal Treaty.

Accordingly, they trained their soldiers using color coded maps that reflected the treaty's specific points. Its definitions were so fine that areas of operation were broken down by streets and buildings. In some cases, buildings had certain floors or rooms that U.S. soldiers could not enter without violating the treaty's provisions. They had to cross streets at specific points, orient weapons in certain directions, and take the most direct routes.

The discipline of the small unit leaders was further tested by the restrictive rules of engagement. In the event they were threatened or fired upon, both leaders and individual soldiers had to follow these rules—to the letter and in the prescribed order. A violation could involve a loss of life, create an incident that would threaten the United States' posture in Panama, or begin an all-out conflict. Such rules demanded the leaders' daily attention to the discipline and maturity of their young soldiers.

Another challenge presented to the company commanders and their squad and patrol leaders was the possibility of having to fight elements of different PDF units that had different capabilities, tactical missions, morale, commanders, and equipment. At many Panamanian outposts, as many as three different PDF elements could be found sharing duties.

Too, commanders had to be prepared to launch major security missions, with their platoons going to different areas controlled by different Panamanian units. In these situations, the distinction between "committed" and "reinforcing" elements became hard to determine.

The commanders also had to consider the different kinds of terrain in the task force's area of operations. One platoon of a company might be committed, for example, to an open area of sparse vegetation with tall grasses, another to an urban environment, and the third to hilly terrain and thick jungle—all on the same mission.

Once the staff members became aware of the full extent of the information that would have to be included in the IPB process, they knew that they needed better ways of presenting the intelligence data.

Obviously, addressing the variations in terrain and opposing forces would create an extensive intelligence annex at company level. At battalion task force level, the annex was as long as the entire remainder of the operations plan. Doctrinally, the annex was correct. It listed and discussed all the approved areas: The area of operations broken down into the OCOKA factors for each (observation and fields of fire, cover and concealment, obstacles and movement, key terrain, and avenues of approach); the enemy situation, including composition, disposition, and strength; the enemy capabilities; and conclusions and probable courses of action.

The problem was that the various commanders tended to read the document initially and try to store the information.

ENEMY UNITS	SITE/OBJ # 1	SITE/OBJ # 2	SITE/OBJ # 3
ENEMY # 1	PLATOON POSSIBLE	PLATOON UNLIKELY	SQUAD PROBABLE
ENEMY # 2	SQUAD UNLIKELY	PLATOON PROBABLE	SQUAD POSSIBLE
ENEMY # 3	PLATOON PROBABLE	SQUAD POSSIBLE	SQUAD UNLIKELY
ENEMY # 4 (SOF)	SQUAD POSSIBLE	SQUAD POSSIBLE	SQUAD UNLIKELY

Figure 1

Because of its length and their other daily operations, though, they might not be able to retain important specific details when time came to execute the operation.

The battalion commander therefore tasked his S-2 staff to come up with a "working document" that he and his subordinate commanders could refer to on a moment's notice. He asked them to break the annex down into matrices with the emphasis on the OCOKA factors, the sites to be secured, the opposing forces that might try to disrupt the unit, their level of response, and any indicators of a particular response.

With this guidance in mind, the S-2 staff broke down the intelligence verbiage into three easy-to-use, quick-reference matrices containing the critical information: The Enemy Response Matrix, the OCOKA Matrix, and the Enemy Courses of Action Matrix.

The Enemy Response Matrix (Figure 1) combined enemy composition, disposition, and probable courses of action into an easy-reference, grid format. In essence, this matrix allowed a company commander to prepare for and execute his mission knowing the units he might face and in what strength. This format also enabled him to concentrate on the enemy units that posed the greatest threat to his mission without having to go through the entire intelligence document. Most important, it helped him in selecting patrol routes and gathering battlefield information during the mission.

	SITE
OBSERVATION FIELDS/FIRE	LIMITED DUE TO ROLLING TERRAIN/RAIN FOREST. GOOD 100 METERS TO THE WEST. OBSTRUCTED BY BUILDINGS TO THE NORTH AND TALL GRASSES TO THE SOUTH.
COVER AND CONCEALMENT	RAIN FOREST PROVIDES CONCEALMENT FROM LIMITED COVER. ROLLING TERRAIN PROVIDES COVER AND CONCEALMENT FROM SMALL ARMS FIRE.
OBSTACLES	LAKE TO THE SOUTHWEST. RAIN FOREST LIMITED TO MOVEMENT ABOVE SQUAD LEVEL. CONCERTINA WIRE AND FENCE AROUND OBJECTIVE.
KEY TERRAIN	HIGH GROUND VIC (AB 123456) INTERSECTION OF RED AND BLUE ROADS VIC (AB 123456) BUILDING VIC (AB 113448) (OBJECTIVE)
AVENUES OF APPROACH	RED ROAD FROM THE NORTH BLUE ROAD FROM THE WEST LAKE (WATERBORNE) FROM THE SOUTHEAST

Figure 2

The OCOKA Matrix (Figure 2) broke down the military aspects of the terrain, or OCOKA, factors. Here again, a company commander could now focus his attention on the sites or objectives that applied only to him. Instead of having to

extract the terrain information from the battalion level plan, he could easily concentrate his planning on the specifics presented to him. Also, during the course of his reconnaissance, he could personally check specific areas for accuracy and for their importance to the accomplishment of his mission.

The most important of these matrices, the **Enemy Courses of Action Matrix** (Figure 3), combined the enemy's probable courses of action with his capabilities. This presented a company commander with the options that would be available to his foe during the operation.

The matrix was laid out by site, addressing the enemy's potential response (in the order of probability and level of threat to friendly forces) and the indicators of those actions.

SITE	
POTENTIAL ENEMY RESPONSE	INDICATORS
1. LOW THREAT	VISUAL SIGHTING
A. OVERT/RECON	SENSOR ACTIVATIONS
B. COVERT/RECON	TRAFFIC/BUSSES/CAMERA CREWS
C. DEMONSTRATIONS	
2. MEDIUM THREAT	NIGHT MOVEMENT/INCREASED
A. PROBING/HARASSING DISPOSITIONS	READINESS/SENSOR SITUATIONS
B. ROAD BLOCKS AND OBSTRUCTIONS	DETECTION
C. WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT	CLASSIFY/SOLDF
D. COMMUNICATIONS	
	INCREASED ACTIVITY/GOOD
	MOVEMENT
	TROOPS
	WEAPONS

Figure 3

While this matrix may seem simplistic, it successfully presented the enemy options in a clear, easily understood format for the commander on the ground. The indicators were examples of the activity that could lead the enemy to respond over time; and with more information, some indicators might be ruled out as more became known about the enemy. Moreover, they served as a starting point for both collecting intelligence and stimulating the process of recognizing key enemy activity. For example, in other theaters, the movement of busses and people might not be worth noting. In Panama, however, busses were the PDF's primary means of transporting paramilitary groups.

Although these matrix formats were prepared for use in a low intensity conflict operation, they should be considered for use across the entire operational continuum. They could easily be applied to a high intensity conflict that involved armor and motorized rifle units and adapted for use in offensive and defensive operations, not just security missions.

The Enemy Courses of Action Matrix could be used in an offensive operations plan. The levels of threat would then be replaced with the degree of tactical surprise achieved by the offensive force. For example, the headings *Low Threat*, *Medium Threat*, and *High Threat* could be replaced by *Surprise*, *Some Warning*, and *Full Warning*.

In short, these are tools that a battalion task force S-2 can

use when preparing for operations on a multidimensional battlefield.

The crisis in Panama provided a valuable lesson for the intelligence officers who were on the scene. Intelligence and operations at strategic level can have an immediate effect on the enemy's force disposition and probable courses of action. Nothing more dramatically demonstrated this than the coup attempt of 3 October 1989. To provide the task force commander with up-to-date information and intelligence, the S-2 staff had to monitor army-level intelligence nets. And there is no scenario in which tactical intelligence officers are trained to base their intelligence formats on the reporting of a command three echelons above them. Normally, intelligence information is filtered level by level so that it is applicable to the units it is passed to. In the Panama crisis, however, army level reports had a direct and immediate effect on the PDF in the task force's area of operations.

If the task force commander had had to wait to get the information through the proper channels of dissemination, his decisions concerning his operations could not have been as timely. This is no indictment of the higher staffs or commanders, just an example of how rapidly intelligence can perish in a low intensity conflict or an "actions short of war" situation.

Intelligence officers are taught that "intelligence is for the commander." But if intelligence products are to be useful, they must also be concise and easily understood. The commander must be able to see the enemy and his capabilities quickly and completely. Although encyclopedic intelligence annexes are valuable as an information tool, at the brigade and battalion task force levels they are unwieldy and do not best serve the commander's needs in preparing his operations plans and orders.

Timely and well-formatted intelligence is associated with operational success on the battlefield. In the exercise in Panama, the matrix format clearly made the development of the IPB easier and contributed immeasurably to the timely dissemination of intelligence to the company commanders.

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