

INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION AND SHARING

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“Who controls the past controls the future.”

— George Orwell, 1984

Years from now after the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have ended, historians will pore over the operations and tactics of the U.S. Army during both campaigns. They will likely applaud the all-volunteer force and the courage of the individual Soldier; just as likely, however, they will criticize the lack of information sharing and management between the military and civilian departments of the U.S. government. Specifically, they will note the military's poor record in information management,

accessibility of intelligence gathered, and the inability to apply years of accumulated intelligence to current battlefield operations. A way to patch the current intelligence gap within the U.S. government would be to adopt an information collection program that accumulates data similar to major internet stock market trackers. Market trackers absorb information continuously, rigorously track trends, and enable traders to formulate decisions based off the latest news combined with historical data. The ability of market trackers to store and quickly recall historical data should be mimicked by the U.S. government so that commanders and diplomats possess relevant records that enable them to make decisions which take into account the economic, historical, cultural, political, anthropological, and environmental aspects of the region they are operating within.

When a unit assumes battlespace within Iraq, the first thing that a commander receives from his higher headquarters is a

plethora of maps detailing major avenues of approach, religious divides, key figures, demographics, key infrastructure, etc. However, much of the intelligence is outdated or watered down, and the source of this data is often unattributed. The source of this intelligence is necessary in order to winnow the chaff from the wheat. The intelligence received from higher headquarters can come from multiple sources, which oftentimes can be suspect and unverifiable. For example, is this intelligence derived from an Iraqi Army soldier, Iraqi policeman, neighborhood councils, street vendor, coalition signal assets, or from the previous military units that have operated within the current area of operations? Additionally, this initial trove of intelligence oftentimes provides just the basics and does not delve into more important issues that commanders need to know, such as the amount of money U.S. forces have spent developing the local infrastructure, the number of discontinued projects and reasons for their discontinuance, the quality of local leaders,

A Soldier with the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division talks with a local farmer during a patrol in Iraq June 28, 2007.

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and the attitudes of those leaders toward the U.S. military.

Counterinsurgencies are not won by more Soldiers, cutting edge technology, or more lethal weapon systems. Rather insurgents are defeated when the pacifying force fully understands the local citizenry, when the people identify with the pacifying force, and when there is an abundance of timely information which allows the pacifying force to apply their intelligence to operations that result in overturning and disrupting insurgent activity. Despite the great advances in the U.S. military's ability to leverage technology to gain intelligence, it has been less successful in storing and synchronizing the historical data compiled during the past several years in its campaigns in the Middle East. When a unit redeploys to the states, they usually dump all of their electronic files to their counterparts in no systematic or coherent manner. This is the ideal situation, though if they are on a more limited timeline they might just pass off the most essential information. With units being continually shifted around Iraq with little or no notice to respond to increased violence in different areas, it has been almost impossible for units to properly pass off their intelligence to the next battlespace owner or more importantly to future units that will operate in their sector. At best the problem a commander faces is an abundance of information that is improperly cataloged. Oftentimes, however, commanders and diplomats encounter the worse case scenario — a difficult situation where they have little to no information regarding a region or locale.

A way to remedy the chaotic state of intelligence management is to create a central intelligence collection platform that will allow any unit to upload operation summaries, economic analysis, tribal networks, environmental analysis, and graphical overlays into a central site that future commanders can access when they assume an assigned battlespace. Currently all military units in Iraq and Afghanistan have access to a worldwide SIPR (secure internet protocol router) network which allows them to access, view, and transmit secret information. Expanding this network to encompass a more centralized program of data sharing would not require any additional hardware. A fusion of geography and intelligence within a centralized network can ensure that commanders arrive at any location with the necessary intelligence derived from years of work by previous agencies and military units that have already provided a framework for understanding the enemy and the people in his assigned area. Commanders could then be spared the countless man hours recollecting data that has already been captured thru blood, sweat, and tears. A solution to the current intelligence blackhole would be to collect, store, and sift this data into a "geointel" site organized in a manner replicating stock market data.

Stocks are traded and bought based off intelligence. Any individual trader can access a plethora of information from open

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sources: basic charts showing a company's past performance, insightful analysis of the company from several analysts, company key leadership, income streams and expenditures, blogs by other traders, and future projected earnings. Stocks are heavily tracked on a daily basis, and without current information traders can quickly squander significant sums. Additionally, traders with insider information can profit spectacularly by making bets that a certain company will move forward on a certain course of action. The stock market mirrors combat and counterinsurgency operations primarily because intelligence

is the driving factor in both realms. Without proper intelligence, commanders are likely to make decisions that do not accurately match the historical patterns and events of the local area. By accessing a geointel site, they can quickly sift through actions made by previous commanders and assess the effectiveness of certain actions. Moreover, they can then verify key leaders in local neighborhoods, determine how effective previous operations were in the long run, and apply lessons learned from past operations. Ultimately, leaders on the ground can plan more effective orders that better mass effects that are not simply kinetic but instead produce an end result that can marginalize insurgents from the base population.

A geointel database should include all agencies of the U.S. government and also extend to coalition partners. Internal buffers can be placed within the site so that only cleared individuals and organizations can access certain intelligence products. The end state would be to encompass each city in the world from South America, Asia, and the Middle East. Each city in the geointel database would comprise of an abundance of historical data consisting of analysis, logistical, intelligence products, and operational summaries from all branches of the military, the State Department, EPA, CIA, and NSA. Moreover, the geointel database would incorporate cutting open source intelligence products produced by news agencies, RAND, and other think tanks. By combining products from different branches within the government, it would ensure that policy makers from different agencies would have a complete portrait of their region and thus prevent decisions based off of data comprised solely from their agency. Moreover, it would ensure that vital and incisive reports would be shared across the spectrum of agencies rather than being lost in a filing cabinet.

This fusion of intelligence would not have to be centrally managed and each commander or diplomat could individually assign and weigh different parameters and factors internally within his staff when deciding amongst several courses of action. Intelligence could be pushed down to the lowest level which would then facilitate bottom-up refinement as each new unit that was involved in a certain locale could update the existing data to include their latest experiences. The battlefield commander, diplomat, or Special Forces ODA team leader could then make informed



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A Soldier with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division and his interpreter talk with a local citizen during a mission in Iraq December 4, 2007.

military, foreign affairs, or political decisions that produce more effective results because the data retrieved from the geointel site would provide them with the latest ground truth supplemented with historic data.

The geointel database should not simply be a dumping area of intelligence products. Although the site should be simple, it should stress coherence and ease of information extraction. Each geographic area of the world from city to district would be assigned a distinct alpha numeric code number. When a certain region is accessed, information could be compartmentalized into different categories: terrain, key figures, economic history, political history, recent events, and linkages between the terrain with the surrounding area. The site would identify individuals who are leading experts in the area and summarize their work as it applies to the region. The structure of the site should provide ease of accessibility while also compartmentalizing information so that only certain areas can be accessed by individuals depending upon their level of clearance. There would need to be a thorough security vetting process to prohibit individuals from being able to achieve sensitive information outside of their region, scope, and responsibility. Reports posted would need to be heavily scrutinized, and readers could apply ratings

to authors and articles thus differentiating between those reports and analysts deemed credible and reliable as opposed to red herrings. An additional safeguard would be to have superiors and agencies to proof and screen all intelligence products posted by their subordinates so that faulty and inaccurate reporting could be stunted before other organizations implement inaccurate information. Moreover, authorship of each article would be apparent to the user if operational security permitted. Thus, readers could then view the analyst's oeuvre, credentials, and security levels and also allow the reader to directly contact the author as to their assumptions and inquire about related issues pertaining to an intelligence product.

The primary difference between the geointel database and market information is the level of security necessary in order to prevent compromising security. When market data is incorrect, traders lose vast financial sums. Likewise, when intelligence data is compromised or incorrect, policy decisions can err and lead to disastrous results which we have witnessed in the past several years. Nonetheless, unlike market information which is open sourced and shared, access to this database would have to be carefully safeguarded as keeping all of our national intelligence and operational information in one distinct site could lead

to major lapses when certain irresponsible individuals have access to the information. The geointel program would require periodical updates to its structure in order to streamline existing data, facilitate ease of information accessibility, and incorporate new storage and search technologies.

It should be noted that as of late the U.S. government has made great gains in catching up to the corporate world in terms of information collection and sharing. Programs such as A-Space and Intellepedia have taken root and offer leaders a quick way to access and share information. Despite these advances, Intellepedia and A-Space are insufficient and ill suited for terrain-based information collection. Intellepedia offers a great way to supplement the shortcomings of a geointel database because its form is ideal in terms of building personal histories or narratives. However, its design prohibits information to be structured in a manner which could fuse different sources of intelligence. For example, Intellepedia's narrative form prohibits overlays, statistics, and random information that is difficult to categorize to combine itself within its database as opposed to a simple market tracker like Yahoo Finance. Ultimately, what is needed is a geointel database which would be much larger and more unified. This database would combine even the most mundane and minutiae of information, thus allowing the leader on the ground to parse and pick through past products that are relevant to his current task and mission.

Decades from now it will be historians who will decide and judge how effective U.S. operations were in this war. In the interim we need to rethink how we capture our history so that we do not ignore the immediate past and fail to properly take these events into account when deciding operations in the here and now. Understanding the Malaysian or Vietnamese counterinsurgency does us little good when we fail to even capture or understand events a year ago in the province we are currently operating within.

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