



## SUGGESTIONS FOR CREATING A COMPANY-LEVEL INTEL CELL

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**Y**ou're a company commander, deployed in Iraq. You have plenty to do already, and now the boss is pushing you to start a company intel cell, a "fusion cell," because his boss is pushing him to do so. And though you'd like to "organize for intelligence," in David Kilcullen's words, you don't have a lot of options. Daily patrols, debriefs, and planning consume the time of your platoon leaders and your platoon sergeants. Your fire support officer (FSO) runs around like a maniac between meetings with sheiks and five projects designed to boost the local economy. You look at your training room ... and shudder. Where do you begin?

Or maybe you're a platoon leader or a platoon sergeant. You're trying to figure out what's really going on, how the insurgent groups work together or don't, where the Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army fit in, and how these Civil Affairs projects are going to improve your neighborhood's security. You don't get nearly enough information from your boss on what's going on, despite the hours of meetings he attends each week. You're faithful with turning in debriefs, but no one's ever responded to yours. Some weeks you get your target, some weeks he gets away. Attacks go up or down, based more off on weather, you think, than operations. Is anyone even trying to put the big picture together here?

### Caveat

Much of what is written here will seem intuitive for officers and senior NCOs. However, no one gave me such advice while I was starting our company's intel cell. What I learned from trial and error I want to contribute to the conversation, and perhaps others can start a few steps ahead of me. In his "28 Articles, Fundamentals of a Company-level Counterinsurgency," David Kilcullen writes of established company S2 cells, and this, I believe, is how they might operate. The suggestions given here were effective for my company, but, as Kilcullen warns of his own commands, "Apply them judiciously and skeptically." This article presupposes regular



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*Soldiers from the 3rd Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment talk with a local resident during a patrol in Mosul, Iraq, February 9, 2008.*

SIPRNET (secure internet protocol router network) access, a security clearance, and access to your battalion's shared drive.

### Structure

Who will run your company S2 cell? If your battalion has a surplus of lieutenants, I'd try to get one of them first. Most battalions don't though, so as a second choice I'd recommend tasking your company FSO. Now, there's an obvious trade-off here: if your FSO is going to deliver your company timely and significant targets, his economic projects, IO messages, and even patrolling need to take a back seat. He can probably still do them all, but something must give along the way. The biggest reason you want a senior leader in charge of your intel cell (besides his level of responsibility, organization and communication skills, and ability to analyze) is that rank helps get things done. An E-3, even if he's smart, is going to get a lot less help in the battalion tactical operations center (TOC) than an O-2. If our company had questions about targets from the S2, or if I needed help with imagery for a future operation, it was easy for me to go to the TOC and gain clarification.

Furthermore, most junior Soldiers and NCOs don't have the clearance needed to do the work of a company analyst. That being said, the company intel leader must be able and willing to delegate, especially to those in the headquarters platoon who generally don't patrol.

### Techniques

**1. You need an M3 account.** Let me say that again: you need an M3 account. If there is only one thing to take away from this article, take away the fact that you need an M3 account. The M3 system, which is set up on SIPRNET, is a search engine for a giant database of reports from the Department of Defense, CIA, and other government agencies. Was an interrogation done at Logistics Support Area (LSA) Anaconda? In a few days it'll be plugged sent to the M3 database. Even when document exploitation (DOCEX) is done back in the States, it gets a mention in M3.

You use the M3 system just like any search engine. Just type in the name of a person — or a town — and the results will flow in. Since the Arabic vowels (or lack thereof) cause such chaos when transliterated into English, use an asterisk in their place. So, if we were to look up my name in connection with Fort Drum, you'd type BR\*ND\*N C\*L\*S AND F\*RT DR\*M. In a few seconds, you'd get a smattering of results (or perhaps not).

The real power with an M3 account comes from its ability to automatically search for you and send the results to your SIPRNET e-mail address. By setting up a user profile, you can have the system e-mail you each report containing the name of your town, unit, or neighborhood. I had two profiles set for our town and received about 10 separate reports each day.

Now, there are other databases out there such as Pathfinder and Query Tree. They are worth your time to explore. But for the company level, you'll do fine with just an M3 account. Your battalion S2 already has access and can set you up with one.

**2. Be the company's collective memory.** You're the one getting the info. Eventually, you need to try and tie everything together. Be organized. Save every M3 e-mail you get unless it's completely irrelevant. Set up folders to track the different insurgent groups in your town. Start making separate

files for each insurgent, or track them on an Excel sheet. (Maybe you can delegate that to the training room.) Jump on your S2's shared drive and see what he already knows and is tracking in your area, and save yourself some precious time. Get your platoon leaders' debriefs and study them. Start your own significant action (SIGACT) trackers for areas in your city, times, dates, and types of attacks. What about the IPs — who works at which checkpoint on what days? You might find some interesting connections there, but only if you take the time and are organized enough to know how and where to look.

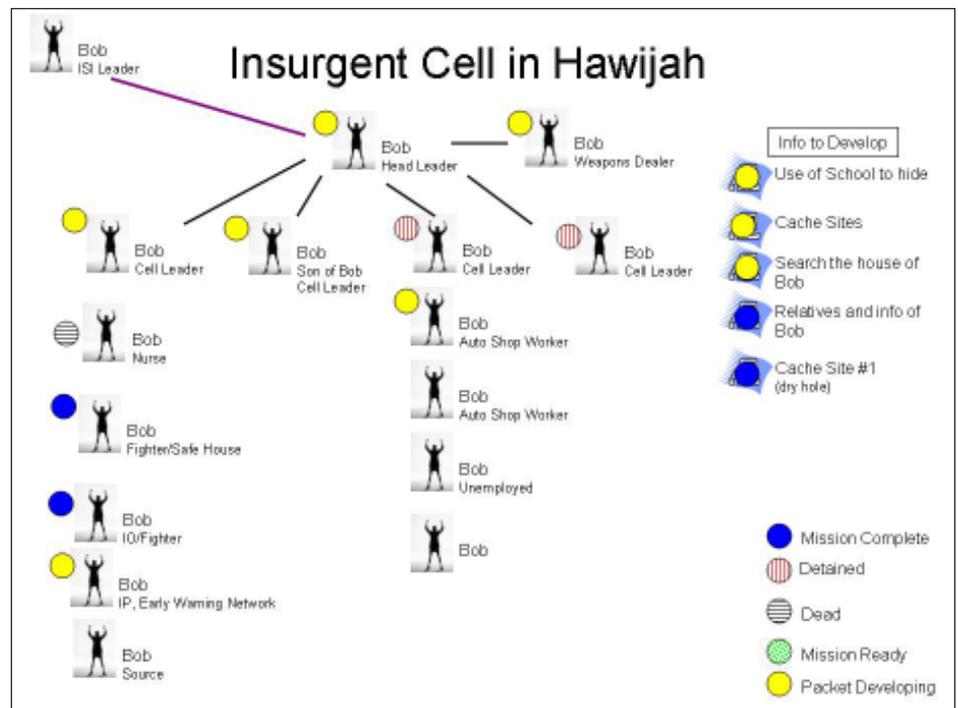
Once you get good at this, you will at least have a decent guess on when and where attacks will occur. In this fight, you're rarely ahead of the insurgents — but being organized and starting to track what happens will make you walk a little closer behind them.

**3. Know your turf.** Obviously, you need to know the physical terrain. This is why you still need to patrol. When a platoon leader tells you that he had a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) fired at him on North Bridge by the mosque, you'll know that he's referring to the Al-Akbar mosque at the corner of North Bridge and Massachusetts (the same mosque that came up in an interrogation report last week).

You also need to know the human terrain. You especially need to know who, exactly, are the different insurgent groups operating in your area. During our rest-in-place (RIP) with the outgoing unit, we learned a lot about the insurgents' tactics. But at the company level, the unit we replaced didn't seem to have a clear understanding just who the insurgents actually were. Once we started doing company intel work, we learned that our town had at least seven separate insurgent groups, all with different motivations, tactics, and members. And once we figured this out, we could start to target specific groups and specific individuals, which leads me to my next point.

**4. Link diagrams are critical.** Just to show that you don't need an MI degree to do this, I include an example in Figure 1. The nice thing about a link diagram is that it graphically depicts relationships that previously only existed on reports. It will keep your targeting on track and let you develop your fight on a more methodical level than simply driving out on what pretty much becomes a — I'm going to say it because it's true — presence patrol (gasp!). The S2 will certainly have some link diagrams already made, but they won't be enough, and it'll work better at the company level when you start creating your own.

Figure 1 — Example Link Diagram



Your link diagram doesn't need to be pretty. A plain PowerPoint slide can get the job done. I put one together for our company based off a few interrogation reports. We used kinetic operations and what I'll call harassing operations to work on the cell for a month. And within that month we detained half their members and rendered that cell ineffective. In fact, a few of the higher-ranking insurgents actually drove up to our forward operating base (FOB) and turned themselves in.

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**5. Debriefs are your lifeline.** Since the company intel leader, of necessity, will patrol much less than others in his company, debriefs from the platoon leaders become more important. This is one area in which I could have done better. Sitting down with the platoon leader when the patrol was done, or sitting in on an after action review (AAR), and consistently reading the typed debriefs will keep the company intel cell closely connected with what's occurring outside the wire.

Platoon sergeants aren't generally writing the debriefs. But if you don't talk to them, you will fail. They have more combat experience than the platoon leaders and have the best idea of what's happening on the ground. Listen and learn from them.

**6. Use Falconview.** And talk to the Kiowa pilots or to your S2 imagery officer, S3, or anyone who can get you recent imagery of your entire AO. If it's more than a year old, it is outdated. If it doesn't already have a GRG (gridded reference graphics) system on it, make one and pass it out to the battalion and company and platoons. You need to be able to plot on Falconview, and get a better image transferred to a PowerPoint slide, which you can pass out to the platoon leaders and platoon sergeants who will actually be using it.

For larger objectives, such as a village, make a GRG for the PLs, PSGs, and SLs to use on the ground. Have your battle captain e-mail it to the pilots a few days before and keep a few copies in the TOC for reference. It'll make operations much easier for everyone involved.

**7. Generate target packets.** Your job is to locate the enemy and give the platoon leader enough information to exploit the objective. You don't need a PowerPoint Tab to put together a decent target packet. Here's what I always tried to include:

- The target's name and alias and why we want him;
- A physical description and occupation;
- A picture, if I could find it; and
- His MDCOA (most dangerous course of action) and MPCOA (most probable course of action).

I'd have at least three tactical questions to be asked while on the objective. I'd also include satellite or Kiowa photos of the objective. Sometimes I'd get the Raven unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) to fly by and snap a bunch of pictures about a week before the operation. Five or six slides in the presentation should cover everything. The platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and commander all get copies.

And save everything you make. You'll eventually need it again.

**8. Setbacks happen.** And it's particularly painful when they happen to you. When I was a platoon leader, I had no problems grumbling when passed bad intel. After I got hurt I was moved to being company fire support officer and intel cell leader. So I would sometimes end up being that guy — the guy who actually passed out bad intel, which was even more frustrating than just receiving it. Especially since my former platoon sergeant told me exactly what he thought after each operation.

Everyone already knows that it often takes a dozen or two dozen cordon and searches before netting a bad guy. But for some reason you'll probably forget that after you become the company intel expert. You are tracking insurgents in your area. You, yourself, have figured out where that dude is, and you arranged for the air support and the SIGINT team to come out and everyone is watching the operation via Shadow in the TOC... and it's the wrong house. Get over it. Keep targeting. Your company needs you, and you'll get better with time.

**9. Learn the Arabic script.** Instead of doing Sudoku puzzles when you're bored, spend two weeks studying the Arabic alphabet — and it can be done in less — and learn how to transliterate it into English. It will hurt your brain, but you'll actually understand how Arabic names get sloppily mixed up into all of those reports you get from M3. It'll help you improve at building and organizing files on your local insurgents, as well as searching for their information. Just trust me on this one. It's worth your time.

**10. Read the GRINTSUMs (graphic intelligence summaries).** As painful as it may be. It's kind of like taking your vitamins or working out even though you don't feel like it. The people who publish the GRINTSUM have more intel experience and resources than you. You'll learn the bigger picture within and outside of your AO. And you never know what tips you might pick up from the GRINTSUM that you would've missed otherwise.

When looking at GRINTSUMs, resist the urge just to study the battalion level. You certainly should start there, but you need to read what the brigade S2 shop has to say as well.

### In Conclusion

After reading this article, you have no doubt realized that I am not a genius. I've never had formal Military Intelligence training, and I didn't apply all of my ideas here as diligently as I could have. However, we have had some success with these techniques, and I hope that a few of these suggestions — in particular, the use of an M3 account — can help you as well. Happy targeting!

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