Information Operations in Support of Special Operations

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THE INCREASED operational tempo of special operations forces (SOF) since the events of 11 September 2001 and the changing role of the U.S. Special Operations Command have increased the need for improved, comprehensive information operations (IO) support to special operations (SO). Properly coordinated and employed, information operations can conserve limited resources, reduce operational risk, and significantly enhance SO mission accomplishment.

Although SOF units have employed information operations with notable success, particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq, information operations still lack broad acceptance and integration into SO staff organization, planning, and mission execution, particularly at the tactical level. To enhance effective IO support to SOF, the SO community must clarify organizational requirements and responsibilities; develop standing IO planning capabilities and manning levels; and institutionalize the resulting IO process across operational headquarters (HQ).

On 30 October 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld signed the U.S. Department of Defense "Information Operations Roadmap," Which defines IO as "the integrated employment of the core capabilities of electronic warfare [EW], computer network operations [CNO], psychological operations [PSYOP], military deception, and operations security [OPSEC], with specified supporting and related capabilities to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp adversarial human and automated decision-making while protecting our own."[1] The Roadmap identifies physical security, information assurance, counterintelligence (CI), and physical attack as IO supporting capabilities and recognizes the key role that IO-related capabilities of public affairs and civil-military operations (CMO) play.

The Roadmap also lists the following integrated IO functions that are of overriding importance:

- Deter, discourage, dissuade, and direct an adversary, thereby disrupting his unity of command and purpose while preserving our own.
- Protect our plans and misdirect the adversary's plans, allowing our forces to mass effects to maximum advantage while the adversary expends his resources to little effect.
- Control the adversary's communications and networks while protecting ours and crippling his ability to direct an organized defense while preserving effective command and control (C2) of our forces.

We cannot meet the challenges of today's operating environment by engaging in ongoing academic debates on the nature of information operations or by maintaining ad-hoc second-tier staff elements. . . . Establishing and filling core IO billets in peacetime enhances the quality and completeness of planning and also builds key relationships that will enhance performance in wartime.

Support to SO Missions

When properly integrated, IO can facilitate and enhance special operations across the operational spectrum. At the strategic level, IO support to special operations can include such actions as mission-focused support from other government agencies, reinforcing policy statements, related elements of regional security and cooperation programs, and IO support from coalition partners. The joint special operations task force (JSOTF) can also benefit from the theater or higher joint task force (JTF) IO campaign and the secondary effects of other coalition operations on enemy forces and civilians in the joint SO area. These actions significantly shape the SOF operational environment and, properly leveraged, can help accomplish the commander's objectives.

Surprisingly, many SO planners fail to realize that information operations can also significantly enhance SOF mission accomplishment through focused, coordinated tactical activities. For example, using a direct-action mission framework, unit planners employ

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A PSYOP officer passes out material in Gereshk, Afghanistan, 12 December 2003.

Surprisingly, many SO planners fail to realize that information operations can also significantly enhance SOF mission accomplishment through focused, coordinated tactical activities. For example, using a direct-action mission framework, unit planners employ OPSEC, deception, and information assurance to protect the purpose, scope, timing, and location of the operation, while PSYOP conditions the adversary.

OPSEC, deception, and information assurance to protect the purpose, scope, timing, and location of the operation, while PSYOP conditions the adversary, weakening his morale and promoting his belief in the inevitability of defeat. During actions on the objective, EW and CNO elements isolate enemy command, control, communications, computer, and intelligence (C4I) systems to prevent warnings or calls for reinforcements, while tactical PSYOP deters local civilian interference and tactical deceptions misdirect the adversary's awareness or response. Following the operation, PSYOP, civil affairs, and the public affairs office exploit the mission's success to increase popular support for U.S. objectives and to reduce the adversary's freedom of operation.

To further this level of integration, commanders should include IO tasks on the tactical unit synchronization matrix with the same level of specificity, command emphasis, and measures of effectiveness as kinetic and maneuver tasks. This requires a dedicated IO planning element with requisite skills as well as the tools and processes for broader collaborative integration with other headquarters and supporting organizations.

Because many strategic- and theater-level IO planners lack SOF-specific experience and focus, and tactical-level SO units possess limited planning and execution assets, the operational-level SOF headquarters emerges as the key node in planning and synchronizing IO support to special operations. In a region assigned to a geographic combatant commander, the theater special operations command (TSOC) is the likely candidate to integrate information operations in support of special operations.

IO Integration

In peacetime, the TSOC performs SO planning and normally maintains operational control (OPCON) of SOF engaged in most theater security and cooperation actions. In a contingency, the TSOC might serve as the core of a stand-alone JSOTF, a JSOTF under a designated JTF, or as a combined forces special operations component (CFSOC) with control over multiple subordinate U.S. and coalition JSOTFs. In an emerging war-on-terrorism role, the TSOC might also serve as a forward C2 node for forces OPCON to U.S. Special Operations Command.

Whatever function the TSOC fills, permanently adding trained IO planners and standardized IO integration processes is critical to maximizing IO support to special operations. Among the key en-

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A Marine intelligence officer discusses operations with soldiers and Marines near Kandahar, Afghanistan.

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abling factors are—

- Defining specific operational IO requirements.
- Obtaining appropriate permanent and augmented manpower to meet those requirements.
- Developing a staff organization and standing operating procedures to smoothly coordinate IO support.

The TSOC's peacetime operational requirements are to generate or revise contingency plans (CONPLANs), operations plans, and functional plans in support of the theater mission; to plan and execute the SOF portion of the theater security and cooperation plan; and to provide input for higher HQ force-development initiatives. Although TSOC does not routinely employ all of the IO primary, supporting, and related capabilities in peacetime, permanently assigned IO expertise in each core capability (at a minimum) is a key factor in adequately addressing these requirements.

Establishing and filling core IO billets in peacetime enhances the quality and completeness of planning and also builds key relationships that will enhance performance in wartime. Doing so lessens dependence on an often-delayed joint manning document (JMD) fill of personnel with varying experience and capabilities. Also, an aggressive peacetime IO plan, focused on influencing key adversaries, can positively alter the operating environment and potentially reduce the occurrence of crises.

In the event that an outside headquarters, such as an Army special forces group or naval special warfare task group is tasked as a stand-alone JSOTF in theater, these same expanded peacetime TSOC capabilities would provide a resident, theater-specific IO planning cell to physically (or virtually) augment the JSOTF. While U.S. Strategic Command's Joint Information Operations Center has this "push" capability, there is only one SOF-oriented team available for global support.

One viable method for a TSOC commander to meet peacetime IO planning requirements is to form a permanent cell of personnel with PSYOP, EW, CNO, and IO-related intelligence expertise under the supervision of a deputy J3 for information operations (DJ3IO). Although intelligence is not a core IO capability, gathering and analyzing IO-relevant data requires specialized training and experience in nodal and human factors analyses. The TSOC IO cell becomes a critical functional component of the TSOC joint planning group.

PSYOP and civil affairs will require additional manning beyond the IO planning group. As separate

PSYOP and Civil Affairs soldiers visit a village near Kandahar, Afghanistan, September 2003.

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SOF components, PSYOP and civil affairs units in theater are subject to TSOC operational control and theater coordination in the same manner as other service SOF (in the absence of a standing JTF, joint CMO task force, or joint PSYOP task force). Personnel assigned to meet specific coordination and reporting requirements cannot function effectively as dual-hatted IO planners.

Because of the "zero-sum-gain" nature of manning, certain IO functions might be covered in peacetime through secondary functional expertise. With the requisite functional training, a planner allocated to a J2 CI billet could fill the command operations security coordinator position while an equally trained J35 or J5 planner could meet peacetime deception-planning requirements. Although this option reduces additional manpower requirements, the ideal solution remains having dedicated functional personnel assigned to each core IO capability.

Contingency IO

Contingency operations (CONOPs) substantially expand a TSOC's functions. In addition to sustaining peacetime responsibilities and maintaining broader theater situational awareness, the TSOC will often form the initial core of the JSOTF. In this role, the TSOC could be responsible for such functions as—

- Battle tracking.
- Operational-level SO feasibility assessments.
- Preliminary mission analysis.
- Subordinate mission tasking.
- Orders and annexes development.
- Subordinate CONPLAN review and approval.
- Vertical and horizontal liaison (shared awareness).
- Deconfliction and review of supporting plans.
- Targeting and fires planning.
- Combat assessment and feedback processes.
- Developing future plans.

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Augmentation. The TSOC (either JSOTF or CFSOC) normally requires increased IO manning to meet expanded responsibilities in a contingency. Other situation-unique factors also determine IO needs, including—

- The operational scenario (geospatial, political environment, and rules of engagement).
- Enemy capabilities (C4I structure and weapons systems).

- The composition of friendly forces (a JTF with corresponding major support commands, a number of subordinate JSOTFs, coalition partners, or higher HQ battle rhythm).

This expansion of responsibilities is in addition to a standard "doubling" of peacetime manpower to meet shift requirements through JMD fills or a "Request for Forces" from service component IO capabilities.

Integration. The most efficient way to integrate the expanded IO cell during a contingency seems to be to transition from a centralized cell under the DJ3IO in peacetime to a diffused IO organization that fills coordinating positions in the joint operations center, J2 analysis, J3/J5 plans section, joint fires element, the special plans group, and other key boards, bureaus, and centers as required in wartime.

After reaching a predetermined level of capability and manning through augmentation, the DJ3IO disperses key personnel to other staff sections to man semipermanent workspaces. The remaining members of the J3 IO cell not directly tasked to integrate with other staff sections retain theater-level operational oversight; integrate and deconflict SOF information operations with the JTF or theater IO plan; and prioritize SOF allocated IO resources to subordinate unit tasks. The DJ3IO functions as the focal point to ensure that IO personnel are available where operational requirements and the battle rhythm dictate.

A word of caution: although the DJ3IO's training and background qualify him to fill a deputy chief of plans billet, commanders should avoid this temptation. Assigning the DJ3IO to another primary duty detracts from his ability to synchronize and deconflict information operations or to add his influence to short suspense issues in a complex operational environment.

For planning and coordination, each SO force-providing unit down to the Army Special Forces group, Air Force SO squadron, and Navy special warfare task element should have a dedicated IO coordinator in peacetime. The IO coordinator should have a broad-based knowledge of IO capabilities to support SOF and, ideally, be a trained and functionally certified IO planner for his service component.[2] Most services are discussing initiatives to place permanent IO billets at this level.

In a contingency environment, tactical units below the JSOTF level will find it difficult to fill a robust IO JMD because of the higher headquarters' demands on IO force-providers. Mission parameters dictate what IO planning skills are essential for tactical mission accomplishment. To offset unit shortages, service component SOF can request IO support teams from their service's IO commands.[3]

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Because of the paucity of IO personnel and experience at levels subordinate to the CFSOC or JSOTF, the SOF tactical IO planner's primary responsibilities are generally limited to—

- Mission analysis to identify desired IO effects.
- Tentative support and targeting requirements.
- Course of action refinement.
- Information operations subject matter expertise to the commander.

The IO planner's core product to the CFSOC or JSOTF headquarters is an IO support request that CFSOC or JSOTF information operations planners develop into specific actions and asset allocations. Once the CFSOC or JSOTF information operations cell allocates available resources, the subordinate SOF IO cell completes final coordination and integrates the scheduled action into the tactical unit synchronization matrix. Adequate command emphasis, training, collaborative tools, and liaison are necessary for this critical interaction between layered IO cells.

Moving Forward

The SOF community must maximize IO assets and capabilities at the operational level during both peacetime and contingency operations to enhance effective IO support to special operations. We cannot meet the challenges of today's operating environment by engaging in ongoing academic debates on the nature of information operations or by maintaining ad-hoc second-tier staff elements.

Planners at all levels need to engage their chains of command in discussions of IO challenges and work cooperatively to implement the best solutions. The goal should be to rapidly establish a flexible, durable organizational framework to deliver focused, coordinated IO products and capabilities that enhance SOF mission accomplishment, ultimately reducing risk to special operators. ***MR***

NOTES

1. Department of Defense, "Information Operations Roadmap," 30 October 2003.
2. Ideally, the DJ3 would be an O5/O4 staff position filled by a broad-based IO integrator function, such as one from Army Functional Area 30.
3. Army, 1st Information Operations Command (Land), Army Intelligence and Security Command, Fort Belvoir, Virginia; Navy, Fleet Information Warfare Center, Naval Amphibious Base, Norfolk, Virginia, on-line at <www.fiwc.navy.mil>; Air Force, Air Force Information Warfare Center, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, on-line at <http://afiwcweb.lackland.af.mil/home/index.cfm>.