



TACTICAL

C O N C E P T S

By Sid Heal

GATHERING AND DISSEMINATING INTELLIGENCE

In tactical operations, one of the most fundamental requirements for effective decision-making is good intelligence. Intelligence is one of the most critical components of any successful tactical operation. (For a more thorough understanding of intelligence concepts, see "Intelligence, EEI, OIR and Assumptions," *The Tactical Edge*, Summer 1997, p. 61 and "Intelligence, Trends, Potentials, Capabilities and Intentions," *The Tactical Edge*, Winter 2000, p. 76.) Obtaining good intelligence then, becomes an essential requirement.

There are two schools of thought in how best to go about it. Traditionally, law enforcement has used a passive strategy. This strategy advocates methods that rely on previously deployed personnel in the belief that, because they are already in the field, and in many cases personally involved with the incident, they are the most able to provide the necessary information. One of the most common manifestations of this school of thought is the "windshield survey."

When a major incident, such as an earthquake, flood, fire or storm occurs, a windshield survey is implemented using field units to report what they observe to a central location, usually a command post, where a more complete picture is assembled and decisions are made. While this philosophy seems very practical, it falls short because intelligence gathering is a collateral duty and duties directly relating to the situation predominate. Field units quickly become involved in fighting fires, rescues, traffic control and other tasks based upon the local situation as it is presented to them. Thus, this method places command personnel in the position of passively accepting intelligence rather than actively seeking it.

The second method advocates a proactive approach and avoids competing priorities. This strategy, called "active intelligence," assigns intelligence missions to personnel and units whose primary responsibility is to obtain the information and relay it to a command post. Gathering intelligence is no longer a subordinate task, but the primary mission. Even this strategy is not without its drawbacks, however, because it utilizes resources in a supporting role that cannot otherwise be used to resolve the problem at hand. Thus, a dilemma is revealed. A commander who relies solely on a windshield survey is forced to make decisions based upon incomplete information, while one who relies entirely on an active strategy is required to forego early assessments and divert units from the problem at hand. Because both passive and active intelligence-gathering methods have drawbacks, a combination of the two is often the most effective. In major disasters, the first information to arrive at a command post is almost always field reports, but they never complete the intelligence picture. (For more information on field reports, see "Intelligence, SALUTE Report," *The Tactical Edge*, Fall 1998, p. 73.) Thus, when time and resources permit, the intelligence function is augmented by designated units with specific assignments who "fill in the blanks."

PROCESSING INTELLIGENCE

Once the information has reached a command post, it is processed into intelligence for incorporation into the decision-making process throughout the tactical organization. (For an understanding of the differences between information and intelligence, see "Intelligence Gathering,

Information vs. Intelligence," *The Tactical Edge*, Fall 1994, p. 77. For more information on organizations designed to handle tactical operations, see "Emerging Multi-Organizational Networks, EMONs," *The Tactical Edge*, Winter, 1999, p. 62.) Historically, the most common method of disseminating intelligence has been a "push" strategy. This strategy uses higher headquarters to decide who needs to know what, and then "push" it to subordinate units in the form of intelligence summaries. This is an extremely labor-intensive activity. In large operations, and those with widely separated geographical locations, relevant information for one component may be completely useless to another. Thus, the intelligence product must not only be prioritized, but separated and routed in different directions.

Another method employs a "pull" strategy. The pull method places information in a central repository where it is available for subordinate units to access as desired. Information can then be pushed as needed, and pulled as desired. In this manner, local commanders are provided an ability to build their own intelligence picture by augmenting what they have been given with whatever else they want to know. Items such as weather, maps and photographs are just some of the more common types of intelligence that are able to be readily stored and "pulled." While some common methods of storing this information for easy access have included status boards, folders and filing cabinets, their physical location required someone to be present to glean the necessary information. Nowadays, one of the easiest and most accessible locations is in a secure area of the Internet. Any authorized person with access to the Internet can then search and draw from a variety of sources, such as intelligence reports and summaries, graph-

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ics, maps, photographs, and the like.

Each of the strategies has its own strengths and weaknesses and there is no “right answer.” The most effective solutions have used the advantages of one strategy to offset the disadvantages of another. For example, a passive strategy can be used to gain whatever information is available in the shortest amount of time, but recognizing that the intelligence picture is still not complete, will assign designated personnel or units specific intelligence missions to augment the initial reports. Likewise, organizations will always find it necessary to push information that must be incorporated into

decision-making to ensure a common operational picture, while installing information in some common location where it can be accessed at will by subordinate and/or remote units. (For more information on a common operational picture, see “Situation Awareness and a Common Operational Picture,” *The Tactical Edge*, Winter 2002, p. 43.) Regardless of the strategy, the most fundamental requirement is to get the true picture, whatever it is. (Paraphrased from Winston Churchill in a note to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 24 November 1940. “The great thing is to get the true picture, whatever it is.”) ■

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