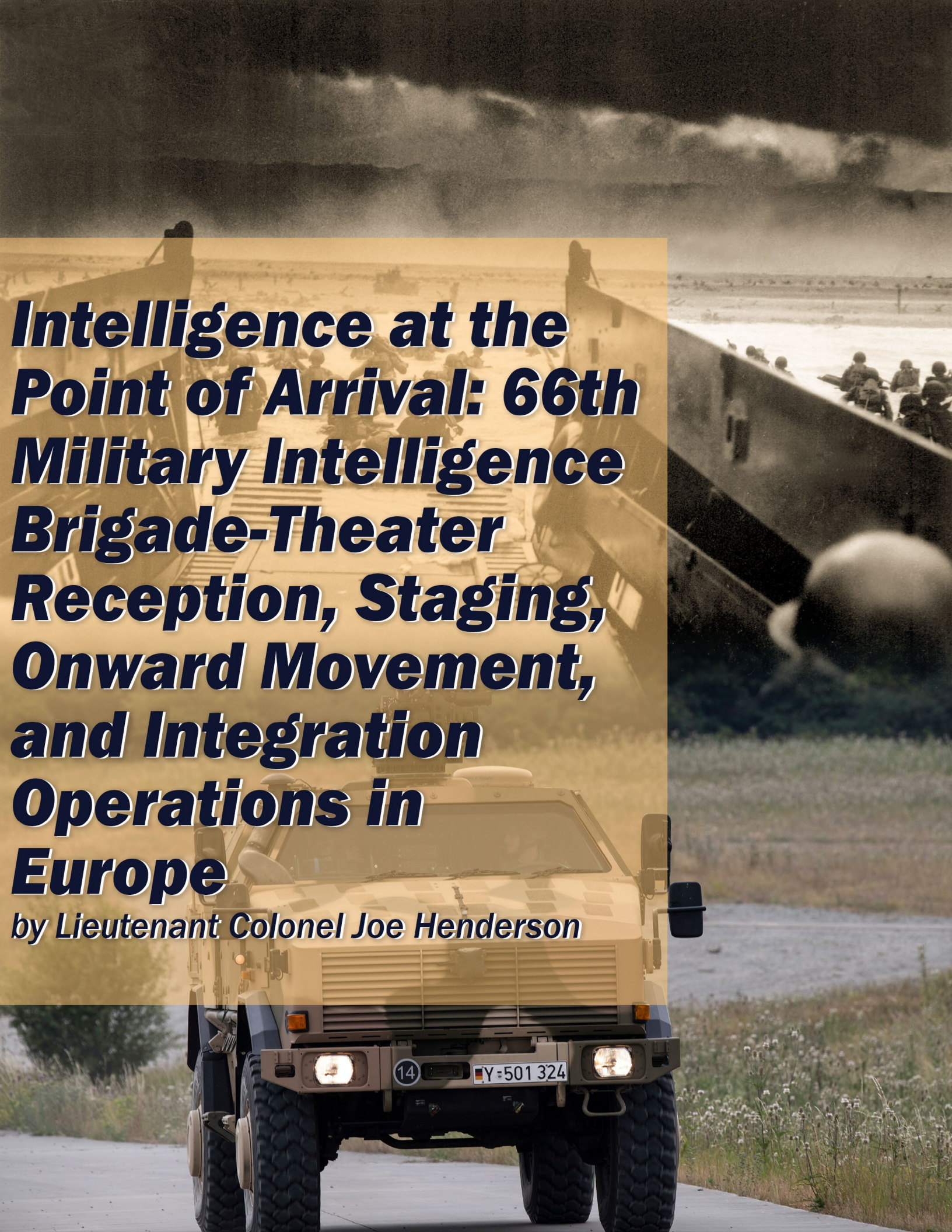

Intelligence at the Point of Arrival: 66th Military Intelligence Brigade-Theater Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration Operations in Europe

by Lieutenant Colonel Joe Henderson

Historical Context

Reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) "is the process that delivers combat power to the JFC [joint force commander] in the operational theater. . . . Siezing the initiative demands prompt processing of personnel and equipment throughout the deployment process. . . . Effective RSOI matches personnel with their equipment, minimizing staging and sustainment requirements."[1] While always a deliberate operation, RSOI takes on many forms depending on the units involved, the time available, and when forces arrive on the competition continuum. Successful RSOI operations are as diverse as Great Britain before the D-Day invasion in World War II, Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Storm, and, more recently, Camp Buehring, Kuwait, during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Regardless of the circumstances, the Theater Army must welcome and prepare units for their mission, a process that can take months to develop and years to refine. Having supported over 50 divisions in Europe during World War II, the U.S. Army Europe and Africa (USAREUR-AF) now needs to relearn those same RSOI lessons 75 years later.

After the Russian Invasion of Crimea in 2014, the United States deployed forces to Europe as part of Operation Atlantic Resolve, the largest deployment of combat troops to Europe since the last REFORGER (Return of Forces to Germany) exercise in 1993.[2] This rotation of forces signaled what was to come, and in February 2022, with the impending Russian invasion of Ukraine, the need to receive units immediately into theater became critical. Pressed for time and operating in a resource-constrained environment, USAREUR-AF formulated a do-it-all RSOI solution with limited help from the wider Army or joint enterprise.

Current Operational Landscape

While the Army and USAREUR-AF headquarters leaned on many units in the theater to contribute to the RSOI process, support for the intelligence warfighting function fell mainly to the 66th Military Intelligence Brigade–Theater (MIB-T). Established in its current form in 2009,[3] the 66th MIB-T "serves as the theater level intelligence focal point. . . for deploying forces. It maintains a regional intelligence architecture that deploying and theater-aligned units can access. . . and maintains a valuable database of intelligence regarding persons of interest and the evolving doctrine and capabilities of regional military forces."[4]

Core Tasks and Lines of Effort

The 66th MIB-T is uniquely positioned to support RSOI and set the theater, as outlined in Field Manual 2-0, *Intelligence*. In fact, six of the seven MIB-T core tasks described in the field manual focus on theater-setting and RSOI for deploying intelligence units.[5] With this doctrinal focus as a guiding handrail, the 66th MIB-T and the USAREUR-AF G-2 grouped their responsibilities into six lines of effort: planning and coordination, theater-specific training, foundry support, intelligence architecture, authorities, and key relationships.

Planning and coordination. The first step in getting a unit successfully into the theater is long-range planning and continued engagement. While not always possible in times of crisis, 66th MIB-T planners adopted a steady-state model to support the deployment of regionally aligned forces; exercise participants; smaller, tailored, operationally controlled forces; and contingency and crisis response forces. In conjunction with USAREUR-AF G-2 and V Corps G-2, 66th MIB-T conducts the initial pre-deployment in-briefing with incoming units no earlier than 180 days before a unit's ordered latest arrival date. Planners and intelligence subject matter experts provide classified intelligence assessments of threats in the area of operations and confirm that incoming units have access to all intelligence reporting repositories, the RSOI content repository on Microsoft SharePoint, and the theater common intelligence picture. These up-front efforts ensure that deploying units are trained in their theater responsibilities and know whom to contact for help over the coming months. Intelligence planners conduct weekly check-ins with deployed forces, monitor training progress, and proactively address any concerns. Planners additionally review draft theater intelligence requirements and tasks to intelligence units for publication in the USAREUR-AF campaign order's fragmentary order.

Theater-specific training. Following the initial in-briefing, units' focus for the next six months will be on identifying and completing necessary theater-specific training. While most units understand the basic requirements for a deployment, they need to focus on completing unique mission- or theater-specific intelligence training requirements. These requirements are specific to the Soldiers' military occupational specialty, the position they will fill (such as collection manager or embedded analyst), or the way USAREUR-AF will employ the entire unit. These requirements continue to grow as analysts in theater develop new tactics, techniques, and procedures and standard operating procedures and eventually include rotational units providing federated support to USAREUR-AF missions from home station. The 66th MIB-T created an RSOI content repository on Microsoft SharePoint to capture all these requirements, including supporting documents and helpful points of contact, enabling deploying units to understand and track them throughout the process.

USAREUR-AF theater-specific training also includes establishing accounts and initial instruction on the use of the Army Intelligence Data Platform (AIDP). As an early adopter of the platform, 66th MIB-T and the USAREUR-AF analysis and control element use AIDP to maintain the theater ground common intelligence picture. "AIDP sets the foundation for future technology integration . . . and allows for better, more

responsive handling of information during multi-domain operations because it is always gathering and processing data. As a cloud-based intel solution, multiple users, from multiple different regions of the world, can access AIDP simultaneously … in the Army Intel Cloud environment."[6] Because most deploying units are completely unfamiliar with the new system, 66th MIB-T trainers provide a roadshow exhibition for intelligence leaders and a week-long analyst training overview. These courses enable deploying units to achieve an initial operational capability on the system, and Soldiers develop their proficiency by working with AIDP daily. USAREUR-AF G-2 leaders travel to unit outstations to monitor adoption timelines, and the 66th MIB-T hosts yearly conferences to exchange ideas and develop AIDP tactics, techniques, and procedures across all U.S. European Command's component intelligence directorates.

Foundry support. Most deploying units accomplish required training through the Army Foundry Intelligence Training Program. The Foundry Program enables Army intelligence personnel to train on intelligence skills and receive certifications required to execute intelligence missions successfully.[7] The 66th MIB-T European Foundry Platform coordinates with deploying units' home station Foundry platforms to facilitate pre-deployment training, ensuring the units have the required training materials and facilities to train on basic intelligence skills and exquisite capabilities their Soldiers will need in the European area of responsibility. If the unit is unable to complete the required training at home station, the European Foundry Platform provides training at the forward location in Grafenwoehr, Germany. Options include training entire formations at the European Foundry Platform, sending qualified instructors to the unit's deployed location, providing training via video teleconferencing, or hosting individual Soldiers and teams for live environment training with 66th MIB-T analysts and collectors.

Intelligence architecture. None of this collaboration would be possible without a backbone of network architecture provided by the 66th MIB-T's technical support platoon and the USAREUR-AF G-26. Planners and technical experts ensure that deploying units understand the theater architecture requirements and focus their pre-deployment site surveys on understanding the specific networks and infrastructure available at each forward location. Key to this process is understanding the connections to the wider intelligence architecture, including NATO and bilateral allied networks through the Battlefield Information Collection and Exploitation System and the USAREUR-AF theater-specific mission partner environment network.[8] Additionally, the 66th MIB-T technical support platoon facilitates military intelligence systems maintainer/integrator training; a black/red test and communications exercise to validate equipment; and cross domain solution training for Army systems and tailored, accredited USAREUR-AF cross domain solution systems and software.

Authorities. Simply being able to operate does not guarantee the necessary authorities, and many rotational units discover they lack the permissions to achieve their objectives. Here, the 66th MIB-T assists forces in navigating the bureaucracy of foreign nation partnerships or provides access to unique 66th MIB-T theater- or U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM)-derived authorities. This includes embedding counterintelligence (CI) agents and human intelligence collectors with forward-deployed 66th MIB-T field offices to conduct force protection investigations and foreign military intelligence collection activities (also known as FORMICA) debriefings, or using the 66th MIB-T as an INSCOM liaison to coordinate with the U.S. Army CI Command for expanded CI authorities. Additionally, operating in the European theater is very different from the familiarity most deploying forces have when operating in a declared theater of active armed conflict. Arriving units must work through sovereign nations to gain concurrence or authorization to conduct operations and training exercises, adding an unexpected layer of complexity. The 66th MIB-T eases this transition by ensuring that deploying forces understand the relationships they will inherit with key partners, allies, and agencies upon arrival in theater.

Key relationships. The 66th MIB-T and USAREUR-AF intelligence and security cooperation planners maintain databases of theater-specific personalities, threats, agencies, and relationships. 66th MIB-T planners connect deploying forces to these databases, allowing leaders to dialogue with portfolio subject matter experts and to digest lessons learned from earlier unit deployments. These lessons learned include topics such as the process for conducting foreign disclosure and intelligence sharing with partner nations and NATO countries, existing plans and timelines for upcoming operational activities and exercises, cultural sensitization and things to avoid, backgrounds on key leadership personalities and internal host nation relationships, and even fun partnership event opportunities to build camaraderie. Deploying forces also receive briefings on host nation support for services, supplies, and facilities.[9] While most deploying units rotate into theater for 9 to 12 months, 66th MIB-T provides the continuity and maintains relationships with countries and intelligence agencies over years and decades. Some of the most fruitful and long-term partnerships are through the forward-stationed CI field offices that conduct bilateral operations. They play an integral role in force protection operations by mitigating CI threats to deploying forces.[10]

Working with partners and allies also requires deploying units to leverage the strengths of different partnerships. Many NATO allies have significant expertise in areas where U.S. forces may be lacking, and host nation intelligence professionals

always have a better understanding of the threat in their area than rotational forces. While national interests may not always align perfectly, gaining consensus is vital to ensuring all sides benefit from combined operations and analysis. The 66th MIB-T fosters enduring cooperation by keeping intelligence operations as simple as possible: limiting the use of acronyms, using common terms and procedures, and relying on NATO doctrine whenever possible.

For all the success over the past two years, there is still room for improvement. The 66th MIB-T, V Corps, and the USAREUR-AF G-2 team continue to revise processes, incorporating lessons learned from the deployment of multiple corps, divisions, expeditionary-military intelligence brigades, and enablers that have supported the Ukrainian crisis. One notable area for necessary improvement is a deeper integration of NATO allies into all aspects of the intelligence warfighting function. The U.S. Army must develop a culture of intelligence sharing and overcome the default "no foreign nationals" (more commonly known as NOFORN) dissemination control mindset.

Fully integrating allies into operations is a formidable problem. The difficulties experienced by the 66th MIB-T in 2024 are some of the same issues identified in 2020 by Major Chad Lorenz in his article "Setting the Theater: Intelligence and Interoperability in DEFENDER-Europe 20," namely: friendly collection operations, information sharing through the mission partner environment, and provisioning of the INSCOM Cloud Initiative (a precursor to AIDP).[11] While the theater will always seek to improve the integration of allies, the USAREUR-AF Commander, having assumed the dual role of commander of NATO's Allied Land Command (LANDCOM), presents a renewed opportunity to focus on interoperability. As LANDCOM serves as the multi-corps land component command, the need to provide RSOI support to multinational corps and divisions will require greater integration with allies across all phases of operations.[12] In this regard, 66th MIB-T may have an easier time integrating with NATO allies, as other theaters and MIB-Ts do not have the benefit of the overarching NATO alliance to guide their missions.

Ensuring Future Success

The 66th Military Intelligence Brigade–Theater has proven indispensable in revitalizing the U.S. Army's intelligence RSOI capabilities in Europe. Facing the urgent demands of a new security landscape, the brigade successfully established a robust framework across six key lines of effort—from initial planning and theater-specific training to providing critical intelligence architecture and leveraging established relationships. This comprehensive support ensures that deploying forces are not just present in the theater but are immediately effective and integrated into the operational environment.

However, the mission is not without its challenges. The persistent need to deepen integration with NATO allies and overcome institutional hurdles to information sharing remains a critical area for improvement. The future success of collective defense in Europe hinges on transforming this challenge into a strength. As the 66th MIB-T continues to refine its processes, its role in fostering true interoperability will be more vital than ever, reinforcing the allied solidarity required to ensure a stable and secure Europe.

Endnotes

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