

Integrating Tactical and Operational Collection: V Corps G-2 Lessons From Avenger Triad 24

by Major Brian Caniano

During large-scale combat operations (LSCO), corps headquarters operate at the transition between the operational and tactical levels of warfare. Corps commanders must understand the operational context of the battlefield to ensure their tactical operations achieve operational objectives.¹ Intelligence collection provides the information required for commanders to achieve this visualization. The corps G-2 must understand both its own tactical intelligence requirements and the operational level intelligence requirements of its higher headquarters to develop and execute a collection plan that encapsulates both levels of warfare.

U.S. Army doctrine provides a minimal description of efficient methods for corps headquarters to execute this process during LSCO. During the Avenger Triad 24 exercise in September 2024, V Corps refined techniques to integrate tactical collection requirements into a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Multi-Corps Land Combatant Command (MCLCC) collection plan and to conduct intelligence collection in a contested LSCO environment. The G-2 collection management and dissemination (CMD) section prioritized corps and division requests for the limited available collection from its higher headquarters while integrating nonintelligence capabilities to maximize collection opportunities. This required V Corps to learn and adapt to intelligence handover and collection differences between the operational and tactical levels.

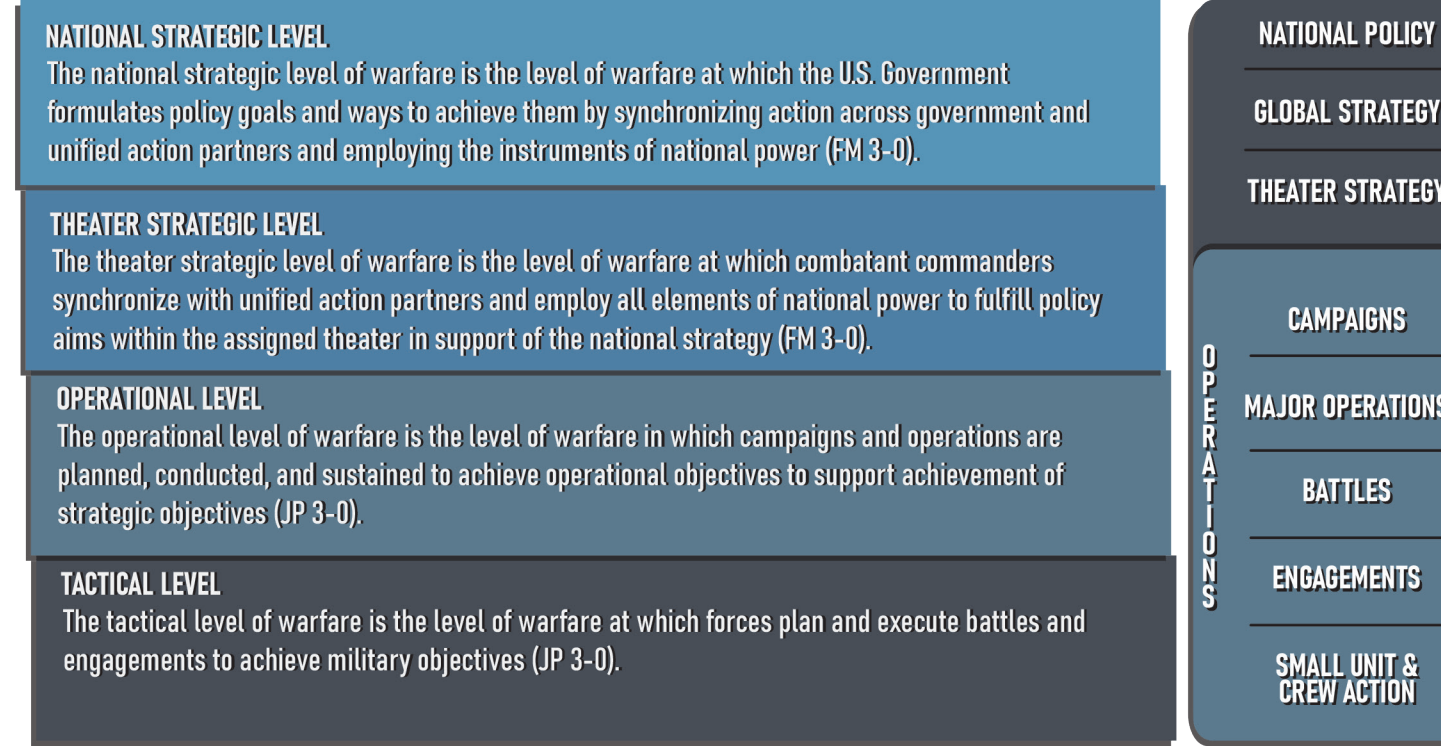


Figure 1. Levels of Warfare²

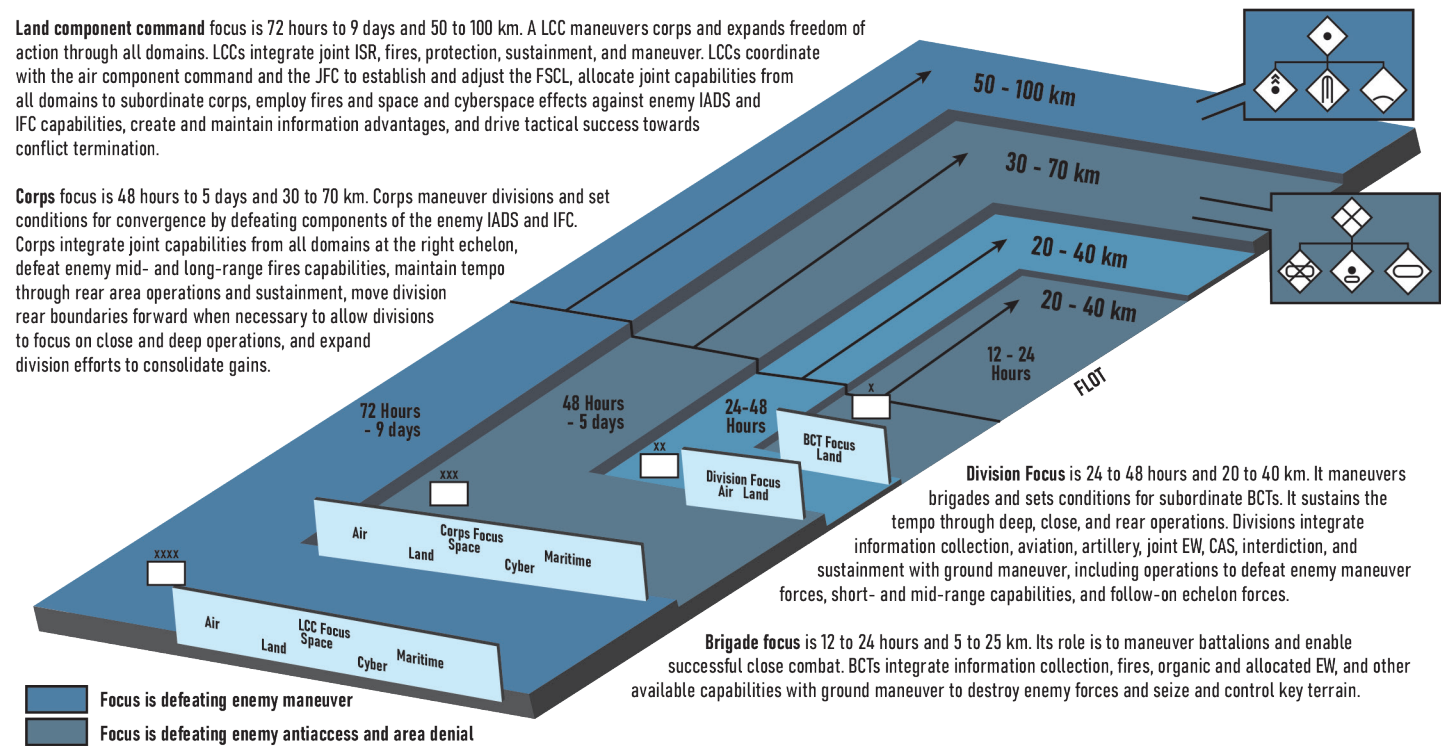
Exercise Background

During Avenger Triad 24, V Corps executed LSCO in a contested operational environment against a near-peer enemy. U.S. Army Europe-Africa served as the NATO MCLCC, commanding six corps of U.S., NATO, and allied units across several countries. The MCLCC G-2 CMD required subordinate units to submit requests for collection from the MCLCC and theater capabilities 96 hours in advance of execution to facilitate review and submission into the air operations center’s air tasking orders, with ad hoc and dynamic re-tasking within 96 hours also available through proper coordination. V Corps commanded three U.S. Army divisions, an expeditionary sustainment command, a fires brigade, a combat aviation brigade, and additional corps enabler formations. The 336th Expeditionary Military Intelligence Brigade provided V Corps G-2 with additional collection, targeting, and analytical support normally provided by an intelligence and electronic warfare battalion (corps). V Corps conducted both offensive and defensive operations during the exercise in support of the MCLCC.

Concept of Intelligence Collection

The V Corps collection strategy in entering Avenger Triad was to mix complementary geospatial intelligence and signals intelligence collection from higher echelon assets to cue V Corps full-motion video capabilities to detect high-payoff targets in real time for lethal targeting. Higher echelon assets provided the operational reach and detection capabilities to collect in the V Corps deep area and cue its assets. Organic full-motion video assets provided V Corps with a flexible, real-time capability that could be controlled internally on the battlefield to expedite the targeting of enemy high-payoff targets. Theater asset availability and corps asset freedom of movement on the battlefield were critical to the success of the V Corps collection strategy.

Corps, divisions, and brigades execute intelligence handover at the tactical level using established graphic control measures known as intelligence handover lines that regularly correspond with the unit’s fire support coordination measures. This relationship aligns collection with unit fire support plans to enable sensor-to-shooter operations at echelons in the corps and division deep areas. During Avenger Triad 24, corps and division intelligence handover lines and fire support coordination measures were within operational ranges of their aerial intelligence collection sensors. These lines shift as the battle progresses, with the higher headquarters conducting an intelligence handover of their former areas to their subordinate units to facilitate intelligence operations and targeting continuity.³



Note 1. Distances are from the FLOT toward the enemy			Note 2. Time and distances are illustrative and vary depending on the situation		
BCT	brigade combat team	FSCL	fire support coordination line	JFC	join force commander
CAS	close air support	IADS	integrated air defense system	km	kilometers
EW	electromagnetic warfare	IFC	integrated fires command	LCC	land component command
FLOT	forward line of own troops	ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance		

Figure 2. Notional Roles/Responsibilities in Time, Space, and Purpose at Different Echelons⁴

Lessons Learned During Execution

V Corps encountered several obstacles to executing its collection strategy during Avenger Triad 24. Enemy integrated air defense systems (IADS) at the brigade and above echelons significantly restricted freedom of movement for corps aerial collection platforms. These enemy assets protected the enemy's command posts, electronic warfare systems, and long-range artillery, constituting most of the V Corps high-payoff target list. The enemy's advanced electronic warfare capabilities also prevented V Corps sensors from transmitting their collection feeds for processing, exploitation, and dissemination by intelligence analysts. In addition to the enemy, weather conditions also restricted the ability of V Corps to utilize real-time full-motion video for targeting. These same restrictions also degraded the ability of the three subordinate V Corps divisions to conduct collection in their deep areas.

The transition from operational to tactical level intelligence operations entails a fog of war as the level of detail that corps and division G-2 sections must anticipate and plan against intensifies. Intelligence handover between the operational and tactical levels of warfare is not as linear as the handover process internal to corps and division. The MCLCC's collection focused on its high-payoff targets and the locations of enemy operational and strategic reserve forces. However, MCLCC and theater collection and targeting priorities were noncontiguous and did not directly align with territory beyond the V Corps deep area. The MCLCC and theater high-payoff targets were often located inside the V Corps intelligence handover line boundaries. Concurrently, there were areas of the battlefield beyond the V Corps deep area that were not a collection or targeting priority for the MCLCC but contained enemy units that would later be relevant to V Corps tactical operations.

V Corps encountered all of these problems simultaneously during Avenger Triad 24. Corps and divisions could not collect across the breadth of their deep areas with organic assets due to the enemy IADS and electromagnetic warfare threats. The MCLCC had limited collection on terrain and enemy forces beyond the corps deep area that V Corps would later have to detect and target. The operational environment did not support a detailed intelligence handover that could correspond to the pace of combat operations due to the sheer size and tempo of the battlefield. The V Corps G-2 collaborated with its higher, lower, and adjacent intelligence sections to develop solutions to fill these collection gaps.

Reimagining Intelligence Handover

The V Corps G-2 needed to develop a new element of its collection strategy to account for how the LSCO environment's complexity and tempo influenced the application of intelligence collection at the operational and tactical levels of warfare. This necessitated a realization at the corps level that it could not plan collection operations with the expectation of receiving a detailed intelligence handover for all areas beyond the current corps deep area from the MCLCC. The V Corps G-2 assumed responsibility for requesting collection through the MCLCC to fulfill tactical-level information requirements regardless of their position on the battlefield. The focus of corps intelligence collection should dictate the forward boundary based on its relevance to future planning, rather than being limited by the range of corps collection and fires assets. This would enable V Corps to correctly forecast feasible collection allotments for future operations and develop additional methods to supplement projected gaps in collection without disrupting operations. These two activities were paramount to V Corps and the MCLCC's success during Avenger Triad 24.

V Corps was constantly competing for intelligence collection asset allocation with its adjacent corps and the MCLCC due to the sheer size of the enemy on the battlefield. During planning and targeting meetings, V Corps identified intelligence requirements against enemy units that would not be within range of V Corps collection or fires capabilities for at least 48 to 72 hours. V Corps simultaneously recognized that many corps and division collection requirements within V Corps boundaries related to current and future operations would likely go unfulfilled due to the enemy's protection and electronic warfare capabilities. These two factors prompted V Corps to develop a comprehensive and efficient method to holistically assess and prioritize corps and division collection requirements that required support from MCLCC and theater assets.

V Corps G-2 CMD realized it could not assess the fulfillment of these tactical intelligence requirements simply by reviewing the MCLCC and theater collection plans to verify if sensors were allocated to a specific area or unit. The mere presence of collection over an area does not indicate that such collection completes the processing, exploitation, and dissemination process to generate actionable intelligence. To assess the intelligence it could expect to receive from the operational headquarters and the existing gaps, V Corps needed an adequate understanding of the MCLCC collection plan and its overall priorities for intelligence collection. V Corps also required an understanding of the collection plans and priorities of its adjacent multinational and allied corps headquarters to determine whether they were competing similar requirements. V Corps determined that listing both priority intelligence requirements and priority units for targeting best described the relevance of operational-level collection to the tactical level. This collective information enabled V Corps to identify collection gaps

against enemy second-echelon divisions and brigades beyond the V Corps deep area that were not enemy operational or strategic reserves. Identifying these gaps early enabled V Corps to request collection against these forces and empowered V Corps leaders to place their command emphasis on the need for resources to support collection and targeting during scheduled battle rhythm events with the MCLCC.

V Corps G-2 CMD leveraged their daily corps collection management working group to address collection gap concerns within the established battle rhythm and to keep pace with the tempo of LSCO. During Avenger Triad 24, the collection management working group agenda expanded from a review of collection plans between V Corps and subordinate units to include an assessment and review of prioritized collection requests to the MCLCC for the next 96 hours. The V Corps G-2 CMD section developed a list and graphic overlay of proposed collection requests incorporating division and corps requirements for each air tasking order cycle. V Corps G-2 CMD invited adjacent corps collection managers to the collection management working group to facilitate collection plan sharing and discussion. This collaboration was equally relevant to the corps and division CMD sections, as adjacent unit collection activities overlapped both echelons' deep areas. The collection management working group's output was a finalized list of prioritized requests for collection to the MCLCC. These processes resulted in an improved method of establishing collection priorities and identifying collection gaps, creating a shared understanding of collection requirements across echelons.

Integrating Nonintelligence Assets for Collection

Near-peer adversaries in LSCO have great depth in their air defense and electronic warfare capabilities to block the United States from detecting targets using aerial collection platforms. This prevents U.S. units from detecting and shaping high-payoff targets in the deep fight intended to enable successful future ground combat operations in the close fight. Due to the limited availability of theater and national collection assets during LSCO, corps and divisions must develop new strategies to collect intelligence in the face of vast enemy air defense and electronic warfare assets. V Corps developed two approaches to this problem. First, V Corps integrated allied territorial defense force elements into its collection plan to conduct ground reconnaissance against collection requirements. This gave V Corps a deep sensing capability that was not vulnerable to enemy IADS. Second, V Corps massed cyberspace and electromagnetic activities (CEMA) effects to neutralize enemy IADS at pre-planned intervals to support collection for follow-on deep attacks from the V Corps combat aviation brigade.

V Corps had no assigned or attached territorial defense forces. Still, elements of the Polish Territorial Defense Forces and the Lithuanian Land Forces operated within the V Corps area of operations under their respective national chains of command.⁵ The V Corps G-2 shared the collection plan for the next 96 hours with its corresponding Territorial Defense Forces liaison officers (LNOs) at the corps command post. The LNOs provided responses from their units on whether they could deliver supplementary collection on identified named areas of interest. The two Territorial Defense Forces communicated collection on targets using spot reports through their LNOs to the V Corps G-2 operations cell. This method greatly facilitated timely intelligence reporting on enemy areas that V Corps aerial intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets could not access due to the air defense threat.

V Corps also deployed CEMA effects from theater and national assets to temporarily neutralize the enemy air defense systems and enable V Corps full-motion video collection. Like the MCLCC and theater intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, these CEMA effects were limited in their availability across the battlespace. V Corps utilization of these effects supported corps out-of-contact attacks from the combat aviation brigade against enemy high-payoff targets. V Corps G-2 CMD integrated with V Corps planning operations for these deep attacks to allocate and request appropriate collection assets. V Corps adjusted its overall collection plan to account for these windows of CEMA effects to greatly enhance the survivability of assets and collection effectiveness.

Conclusion

The scale and tempo of the LSCO battlefield will continue to increase through technological innovation and expanded military investment from U.S. adversaries. We must recognize our processing and data transmission limitations as the U.S. Army and our allies adapt to these challenges. Tactical command posts must innovate new methods to process and prioritize intelligence requirements on the battlefield to leverage the vast capabilities of theater and national assets. Collaboration between the tactical- and operational-level CMD sections across the battlefield enables the efficient prioritization of collection

requests to ensure that tactical units achieve victory in the close fight.

Endnotes

1. Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-94, *Armies, Corps, and Division Operations* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 23 July 2021), 1-4–1-5.
2. Figure adapted from Figure 1-1, Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 2-19.3, *Corps and Division Intelligence Techniques* (Washington DC: U.S. GPO, 08 March 2023), 1-4.
3. Department of the Army, FM 2-0, *Intelligence* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 01 October 2023) 8-28–8-29.
4. Figure adapted from Figure 7-2, Department of the Army, FM 2-0, *Intelligence*, 7-7.
5. For additional information on Polish and Lithuanian territorial defense capabilities see Waldermar Skrzypczak, “Poland’s Territorial Defense Force—Its Role, Significance and Tasks,” (Pulaski Policy Papers Series, Casimir Pulaski Foundation, Warsaw, 2017), <https://pulaski.pl/en/polands-territorial-defence-force-its-role-significance-and-tasks/>; and “Land Force,” Structure, Lithuanian Armed Forces, <https://kariuomene.lt/en/structure/land-force/23583>.

MAJ Brian Caniano serves as the V Corps G-2 collection manager in Fort Knox, KY. He holds a master of arts in North American history from Arizona State University.