MITIGATING INTELLIGENCE FAILURE: A FOCUS ON STRENGTHENING REAR AREA OPERATIONS

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U.S. Army Soldiers drive a line of M2A3 Bradley Fighting Vehicles to their objective point during Project Flytrap at Bemowo Piskie Training Area, Poland, July 28, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Christopher Saunders)

Introduction

Intelligence failure haunts every zone of the battlefield. When intelligence failure occurs, targets evade destruction; decision points fade into the shadows of ambiguity; and enemy forces scheme, maneuver, and kill in the darkness. Every intelligence officer recognizes the potentially dire consequences of intelligence failure and aggressively seeks to prevent it. Institutionally, the Army recognized the risks associated with intelligence failure and arrayed its intelligence doctrine, training, and organizations in a manner to avoid or reduce the possibility of failure. The processes and procedures for units conducting intelligence operations in the rear area must, therefore, be congruent with the magnitude of intelligence failure in this critical battle zone area.

Even in ideal conditions, the sustainment framework can be extremely fragile. For example, sea states, port facility issues, or any of several other circumstantial events can easily disrupt archipelagic sustainment, even absent an enemy threat. Factor in an aggressive and determined enemy—perhaps one that has prioritized sustainment disruption as a key targeting objective—and the conditions for intelligence failure are well established. When intelligence failure occurs in the rear area, it is most likely to affect the sustainment framework or targets associated with fires and aviation, which are often the primary means of engagement employed by a corps-level formation. Thus, intelligence failure in the rear area can prevent sustainment, hamper fires, or remove aviation assets from a commander's employable toolset. The standard intelligence processes I Corps previously followed were insufficient to address the significance of potential consequences should intelligence fail in the rear area.

The Problem

From late 2023 through December 2024, I Corps conducted its train-up to Warfighter 25-02. During pre-execution exercises, the G-2 emphasized improving intelligence support to the rear area, with particular emphasis on—

- ✦ Finding corps-level intelligence process efficiencies.
- ✦ Unifying commanders' understanding.
- ✦ Adjusting the burden placed on small intelligence sections.
- ✦ Increasing rear area representation in the targeting process.

Corps-level intelligence process efficiencies. I Corps had numerous units operating independently in the rear area, which impacted the intelligence battle rhythm and processes. Organically, I Corps has an expeditionary sustainment command, an engineer brigade, a fires brigade, a combat aviation brigade, a signal brigade, a military police brigade, and a military intelligence brigade. These units all operate or are headquartered in the corps rear area. The corps operational framework calls for a reserve brigade combat team, plus at least one maneuver enhancement brigade with additional battalion- and brigade-level attachments, to operate in the rear area.

Given that multiple brigade-level intelligence sections operated independently, it was common and completely understandable for multiple unique assessments of the rear area to propagate through several different battle rhythm events. Because each of those briefs increased the intelligence synchronization time significantly, and because time was our most valued resource, I Corps G-2 must gain something more than a redundant assessment.

This overlap in rear area intelligence also led to a potentially overwhelming number of unique collection requests for every air tasking order cycle, placing a significant burden on the I Corps collection management team. These were often redundant, but due diligence still required the collection management team to adjudicate each request. This unnecessarily burdened an already small section with additional work.

Commanders' understanding. Similarly, if there are multiple brigade commanders in the rear area with each unit's intelligence officers and sections operating relatively independently, there will likely be multiple interpretations of the rear area enemy situation. There are battle rhythm events that synchronize rear area operations, but these are exponentially more effective if the participating commanders arrive with the same understanding of the enemy situation. Without unity of understanding, the likelihood of disunity in effort and operations is high or at least higher than it should be.

Small intelligence sections' workload. Though small, brigade-level sections still have minimum doctrinal requirements:

✦ Commander's situational awareness: Advise the functional command commander on the larger battlefield.

✦ Support to force protection: Provide information and intelligence on emerging threats to the mission and threats to the force.

I Corps included functional analysis as a standard task for its subordinate commands and separate brigades. Organically, the Corps G-2 is composed entirely of intelligence Soldiers lacking the inherent knowledge possessed by these subordinate units. For example, the combat engineer brigade is best positioned to identify the threat's critical capabilities and vulnerabilities and conduct intelligence preparation of the operational environment during counter-mobility operations. The functional brigades' S-2s and subordinate commands' G-2s can leverage those experts to augment their analysis of the opposing force. Functional analysis briefs extraordinarily well and pays dividends; however, functional analysis will not inherently be a priority as each rear area formation rightfully prioritizes the commander's situational awareness and its force protection.

Rear area representation in the targeting process. Like functional analysis, there is a burgeoning potential for rear area formations to develop nominations for targeting. These formations experience enemy operations differently than units in the deep and close areas, and they have a unique perspective on which systems are disrupting rear area activities. This insight can and should be represented throughout the targeting process.

Formations must reduce the likelihood of intelligence failure by addressing intelligence synchronization and reducing workload on intelligence sections. Intelligence section leaders should make a significant effort to ensure unity in the understanding of brigade-level commanders. Without commanders' understanding, conditions are ripe for intelligence failure, which leads to operational failure. Operational failure in the rear area has a cascading effect on all operations.

The Solution

Before Warfighter 25-02, the I Corps G-2 appointed a senior intelligence officer to the rear area to reduce the likelihood of intelligence failure. This individual and their team streamlined the rear area tenant unit intelligence activities. I Corps resourced the G-2X (human intelligence and counter-intelligence operations cell) to the rear area command post, and liaison officers for the expeditionary-military intelligence brigade were also located in the rear area.

Key to the smooth functioning of this process was buy-in from the tenant rear area brigades as well as their regular participation in the rear area threat and targeting synchronization (RATTS) meeting. The RATTS meeting was designed to feed the I Corps intelligence synchronization working group, sustainment working group, protection working group, and targeting working group. Unfortunately, the timing could not support all those groups. The result was hours of intelligence decay between the RATTS, the sustainment working group, and the protection working group. Open lines of communication were leveraged to mitigate this issue.

Due to an already grueling battle rhythm, the RATTS was very direct and simple. Conducted virtually, the meeting consisted of an overview by the senior intelligence officer, followed by a roundtable in which each unit informally answered the question: What is killing you and how? Answers were fed into the various working groups, sorted by threat awareness (sent to the sustainment working group) and targeting or operations (sent to the targeting and protection working groups). Specific units reported on niche analytic topics such as civilian impacts from the civil affairs unit and enemy targeting trend analysis by the counter-fire artillery brigade.

I Corps first implemented the RATTS process before Warfighter 25-02 during a preparatory command post exercise. The rear area intelligence workload was spread across multiple organizations and focused through the RATTS. One significant challenge was integrating U.S. Army Reserve formations into the process. Reserve scheduling limitations prevented these formations from participating fully in the preparatory command post exercise. In future contingency operations, it should be expected that many rear area units will primarily be reserve formations. Therefore, every effort must be made to develop habitual relationships with supporting reserve formations and include them in training and exercises.

During the exercise, the RATTS was conducted daily, and a Maven Smart System common intelligence picture dedicated to the rear area was produced. It was far from perfect, and we made several key observations for improvement and optimization.

Lack of a formalized rear area targeting and collection discussion. The fires officer, dedicated to the rear area by the Deputy Commanding General-Protection, was marginally isolated from the RATTS. Despite the haggard coordination, the rear area targeteer did produce sound analysis linking enemy systems to rear area disruptions. Residual collection and bonus opportunities covering the rear area were considered when collection was planned. This process worked, but the rear area senior intelligence officer could have certainly added more formality and rigor to reduce the strain on the collection management and dissemination team and the aviation brigade team. In future operations, the I Corps rear area senior intelligence officer will include the fires officer in the RATTS and incorporate targeting recommendations into the I Corps targeting process.

Note: I Corps does not as a standard practice have a Deputy Commanding General-Protection; however, during this warfighter the Corps benefitted from a U.S. Army Reserve brigadier general filling this role.

Task organization of rear area sensors. During the training leading up to Warfighter 25-01, I Corps experimented with task organizing sensors in the rear area. I Corps tested a multitude of relationships, achieving the best results by splitting responsibility between the maneuver enhancement brigade and the expeditionary-military intelligence brigade.

Rear area senior intelligence officer. The I Corps G-2 selected the 593rd Corps Sustainment Command G-2 to be the rear area senior intelligence officer. This was the obvious choice because the rear area brigades have majors as their S-2s, while the corps sustainment command has a lieutenant colonel as its G-2. In retrospect, the officer selected should align more closely with the protection effort and have ready access to the fires and maneuver enterprises. This would also allow the corps sustainment command G-2 to focus more fully on intelligence support to sustainment and functional analysis of enemy forces sustainment.

Full integration of all rear area elements. Initially, some rear area elements were excluded unintentionally, most notably the civil affairs battalion. However, in addition to providing an overview of civil actions affecting operations, they were able to drill down and track specific threat tactics, techniques, and procedures, as well as capabilities of the special purpose forces.

During execution, the G-2's experiment to improve intelligence support to the rear area accomplished its goal. The intelligence process at echelon was optimized for greater unity of understanding and reduced workload on rear area intelligence sections. By the opposing force commander's own admission, the aggressive and synchronized actions of the rear area security elements limited the freedom of movement of his special purpose forces. Doctrinally, the special purpose forces provides intelligence to the opposing force commander along with an option for disruption. By reducing the special purpose forces' freedom of movement, enemy targeting was degraded, as was their ability to affect the I Corps long-range fires, aviation operations, and sustainment activities.

Recommendation

Corps and divisions should seek means to streamline their intelligence processes, and aligning the rear area problem set under a single leader is an effective way to gain efficiencies. The utility of a rear area senior intelligence officer, however, is mainly dependent on how the rear area is addressed: a singular commander fighting the rear area in the same way they fight a division battlespace maximizes the value of the rear area senior intelligence officer. A second significant challenge for headquarters is staffing a rear area intelligence section. Optimally, using a lieutenant colonel without an already assigned senior intelligence officer role would be preferable to dual-hatting the corps sustainment command G-2. Within a U.S. Army corps, there are some lieutenant colonel options: the corps deputy G-2 and the expeditionary-military intelligence brigade deputy commander.

Habitually, the corps G-2 will remain focused on the corps deep area and support the divisions. Effective targeting in the deep area and sustainment to the divisions teeters on the razor's edge of rear area security and functionality. Attempting to assign yet another rear area task to the corps or division G-2 analysis and control element will likely result in less than adequate support. Dedicating an organization and a senior intelligence officer to the rear area will unburden the G-2 of this responsibility, maximize efficiencies, and reduce the likelihood of intelligence failure. ✴

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