



REDESIGNING MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SOLDIER ALIGNMENT

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Introduction

Within the Army Military Intelligence (MI) Corps, Soldier professional development requires a specialized approach that creates regionally intelligent subject matter experts with the necessary skills to advise combat commanders. MI Soldiers must be capable of understanding the enemy, civilian leadership, and external influences of a region through a relevant cultural lens. Soldiers would develop this type of expertise through years of experience, providing accurate and relevant intelligence to their commanders. Unfortunately, the current career models for MI Soldiers focus on an assignment progression tailored to leadership skills development. Soldiers rotate through the major commands—U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM), U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC)—and MI assignments without ever focusing on building or maintaining regional and cultural expertise. Through their assignment rotations, MI Soldiers shift their focus from one adversary and region to another, sometimes with vastly different cultures. The traditional approach of solely focusing on rotating Soldiers through assignments to create a diversity of experiences produces a gap in their understanding of language, culture, and adversarial norms.

Regional Alignment and Talent Management

Commanders expect MI Soldiers to understand both the adversary and the complex operational environment in a way that requires a deep cultural understanding. While analytical frameworks such as PMESII-PT,¹ which focus on political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time and ASCOPE,² which focuses on areas, structures, capabilities, organizations, people, and events effectively describe an operational environment, they inherently lack the depth required to understand the nuanced cultural factors that significantly influence behavior and meaning. This limitation hinders accurate interpretation and assessment of collected information. Culture is a complex variable that instructors cannot teach through annual language training, much less during pre-deployment preparation. Training Soldiers to understand a foreign culture would take the full course of an Army career. To create true subject matter experts and build cultural expertise, the Army must focus on aligning MI Soldiers to a threat area or region for the entire span of their careers.

Permanently aligning MI Soldiers' assignments to a geographic area of responsibility would improve their understanding of the target theater's relevant actors, cultural norms, and external influences. With MI Soldier assignments intentionally


aligned to an area of responsibility, Soldiers would inherently become more aware of what is normal and abnormal through continuous exposure. Through the management of MI personnel within specified geographic areas of responsibility, the Army could produce higher-quality intelligence to drive operations and build relationships with external organizations. To be effective, a model of reinforced expertise must align Soldiers' assignments across the Army from the strategic intelligence level down to the tactical military intelligence companies and detachments. Soldiers would need to study their regions through tactical, operational, and strategic lenses to understand the geography, doctrine, equipment, and capabilities common across potentially friendly and adversarial nations.

While the current career model favors a breadth of experience, a redesigned career path could focus on building depth of expertise over time. If Soldiers left their advanced individual training with an assigned area of responsibility and held to assignments focused on that mission, the Army would develop vastly superior intelligence support. Building additional skill identifiers to track MI strength across regions and reviewing the alignment of FORSCOM, INSCOM, and TRADOC would be critical first steps to implement this model. Following that, the Human Resources Command would need to track MI strength and utilize proper talent management, rather than simply managing billets, for Soldiers' assignments. The Army would also have to review theater alignments against the language and cultural training capabilities across installations to ensure that capabilities match needs. Finally, training requirements and exercises for MI Soldiers should emphasize scenarios that reinforce intelligence production through a regional and cultural understanding.

Over the last decade, the Army has discussed ideas and even considered associating language-dependent career field Soldiers with geographically aligned units. At the same time, the Army placed a renewed emphasis on language proficiency, shifting away from the Global War on Terrorism's focus on intelligence collection and production through reach-back or contracted support. The discussions about regionally aligning linguists and organizations left non-linguist MI Soldiers behind. In an Army that aims to build MI expertise through

cultural knowledge, MI Soldiers must align with a specific geographic area of responsibility and maintain a singular focus on a defined problem set. In the long term, the Army would reap substantial benefits from a model that reinforces the building of knowledge throughout Soldiers' careers.

Conclusion

The initial investment of time and resources to build this type of expertise is substantial. Still, this model would generate a massive return on that investment, as Soldiers do not require complete retraining to understand their new mission when they permanently change stations. Soldiers could also continue to rotate through successive leadership roles and diverse assignments as they experience FORSCOM, INSCOM, TRADOC, and SOCOM assignments. However, as Soldiers rotate through these organizations, their noncommissioned officers would be true experts in both the missions and the adversaries they encounter, focused on strengthening the profession of arms. Additionally, over time, these leaders would build relationships with other intelligence agencies, maintaining connections through years and decades rather than months. Commanders could rely on the intelligence derived from culturally knowledgeable Soldiers who fully embrace the complexities of the operational environment. 

Endnotes

1. Department of the Army, Field Manual 5-0, *Planning and Orders Production* (Government Publishing Office [GPO], 2024), 5.
2. Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces* (GPO, 2019), 3-6.

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