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Alert and Ready

An Organizational Design Assessment
of Marine Corps Intelligence

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Summary

Background

U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) intelligence personnel collect, analyze, and disseminate intelligence to support USMC operational components and leaders. The geopolitical landscape within which this occurs has changed drastically since the 1994 Intelligence Plan (Van Riper Plan) sought to restructure USMC intelligence in response to perceived shortcomings exposed by the first Gulf War.[1] Today, international security concerns abound, and issues such as the rise of lethal nonstate actors, nuclear proliferation by rogue nations, and shifting power dynamics in strategically vital regions all threaten global stability. These external developments have unfolded alongside an ongoing internal reorganization of the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC), as well as the workforce and structure of USMC intelligence more specifically.

Not only have the threats changed since the implementation of the Van Riper Plan, but the tools needed to counter a diverse array of adversaries have changed as well. Globalization, sophisticated satellite technology, and the ubiquitous reach of the Internet, among other developments, have spawned advances in real-time communication. To meet the demands of this complex security and information environment, the USMC has grown to 202,000 marines, and the number of marines with intelligence military occupational specialties has more

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[1] See C4I Staff, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, "The Future of Marine Corps Intelligence," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 78, No. 4, April 1995, pp. 26–29.

than doubled since 1994. Continuous counterinsurgency operations have changed tactical support structures, and technological innovations have provided new tools and capabilities. Furthermore, the USMC has been tasked with taking the lead on issues of cultural intelligence within the broader IC.

With Operation Iraqi Freedom coming to a close and an Operation Enduring Freedom drawdown a distinct possibility, a new USMC force posture will begin to take shape. Despite the possibility that the service will have both less money and fewer troops, the USMC intelligence enterprise will no doubt be called upon to remain alert and ready while "doing more with less," a common theme expressed in interviews and a mainstay of USMC culture.

Purpose of This Research

The USMC asked the RAND National Defense Research Institute to review the organizational design and assess how the USMC intelligence enterprise can more efficiently and effectively carry out current and future missions and functions. The study was designed to focus explicitly on organizational structure. The research considered four organizational levels, depicted in Figure S.1: (1) the Intelligence Department (Director of Intelligence [DIRINT] and immediate staff), (2) the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity, (3) the intelligence and radio battalions, and (4) the combat elements, primarily the ground combat element.

Our findings are based on a review of the literature on organizations and organizational theory, interviews with more than 100 marines or USMC civilians, and a structured assessment process.

Key Findings

The Marine Corps Intelligence Department Reflects an Accumulation of 20 Years of Organizational Change

The USMC Intelligence Department (I-Dept), by virtue of its headquarters placement, focuses more on inputs (e.g., money, manpower)

Figure S.1
**Structure of Marine Corps Intelligence and the Four Organizational Levels
Analyzed**
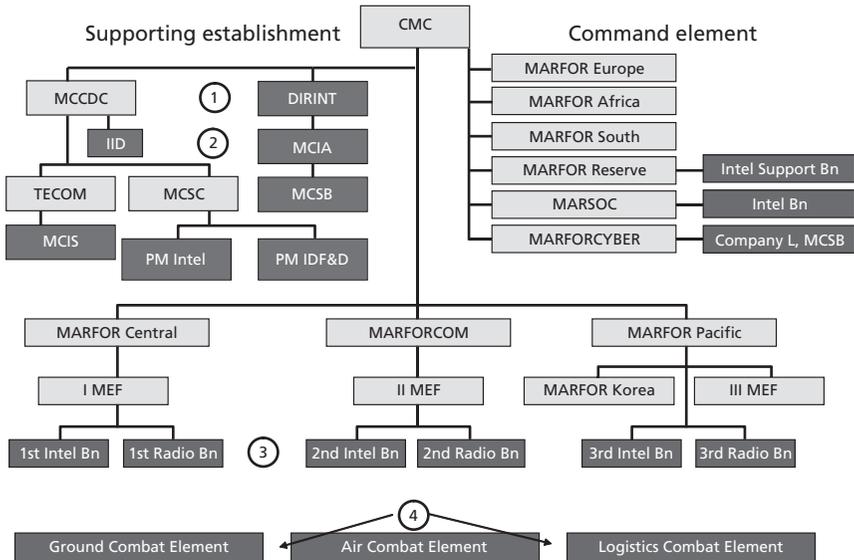
NOTE: Bn = battalion. IID = USMC Intelligence Integration Division. MARFOR = USMC
Forces. MARFORCOM = USMC Forces Command. MARSOC = USMC Forces Special
Operations Command. MCCDC = USMC Combat Development Command.
MCIA = USMC Intelligence Activity. MCIS = USMC Intelligence School. MCSB = Marine
Cryptologic Support Battalion. MCSC = USMC Systems Command. MEF = Marine
Expeditionary Force. PM IDF&D = program manager, intelligence data fusion and
dissemination. PM Intel = program manager, intelligence systems. TECOM = USMC
Training and Education Command.
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than customers (e.g., the operating forces). Moreover, the I-Dept has
grown rapidly and reactively rather than in a planned manner. As a
result, names of subunits do not reflect their actual functions, and the
organization is somewhat opaque to outsiders, making it difficult to
engage. There has been an inconsistent long-term strategic focus on
overall IC goals because the various I-Dept offices are more consumed
with day-to-day activities.

The Marine Corps Intelligence Activity Lacks Customer Orientation and Has Unclear Priorities

Serving multiple masters complicates coordination processes in MCIA, and resources do not always align with priorities. Its multiple customers (e.g., IC, DIRINT and I-Dept, operating forces) and its functional organization lead to frequent "reach in" by knowledgeable personnel to gain needed data, information, or assistance, to the detriment of overall organizational functioning. Customer service is lacking, and MCIA has neither an effectively oriented web presence nor 24/7 service. Products and services lack functional integration focused on customer needs.

The Focus of the Marine Expeditionary Force is "Up" and Disciplinary

Support of the combat elements is generally described as lacking in that it is not relevant and not timely. Moreover, products are not sufficiently integrated across functions. When there are competing demands, servicing the "up" customer takes priority, irrespective of real need. The intelligence battalion trains as an intelligence battalion but does not deploy as a battalion, while the radio battalion is perceived as residing in its own cocoon.

Combat Elements Have Shifted from a Functional to a Matrix Structure but Are Hampered by a Lack of Experience

Over the past few years, the intelligence structure at the Ground Combat Element (GCE) has shifted from functional to matrix, from a battalion-level functional S2 intelligence structure to a company-level intelligence cell in which intelligence personnel from the battalion S2 section are "matrixed" with infantry marines at the company level. The liability of a matrix structure in the present environment is that intelligence personnel assigned to battalion level need to be experienced and expert in their craft, and that is not always the case.

There Are Other Issues Related to Mission, Workforce, Leadership, Culture, and Technology

Some of these issues might be construed as "organizational" in a broader sense; others, not. We discuss these points throughout this monograph because they have the potential to affect USMC intelligence strategic objectives and thus may require attention or resolution through organizational changes or other approaches. Organizational change could improve performance in these issue areas, or it could be counterproductive and hamper the effectiveness of the organizational changes analyzed in Chapter Seven.

Recommendations

The Intelligence Department Is a Functional Hierarchy and Should Stay That Way, but Opportunistic Improvements Are Needed

The issues and concerns that we identified in I-Dept can be addressed without changing the nature of the department's functional structure, but rather by realigning it. Specifically, several of the resourcing functions could be grouped together. Appropriate roles and reporting relationships should be established for senior civilians. One subunit with an operational orientation (the Intelligence Estimates Branch) could be placed elsewhere because it is functionally different from all other subunits. However, because it supports high-level offices (primarily, the Commandant of the Marine Corps), it is best kept in the I-Dept.

The Marine Corps Intelligence Activity Should Reorganize into a Specialized Matrix Known as a Front-Back Organization

For MCIA, we recommend a structural alternative that is a specialized matrix form called a front-back organization. This structure is designed to accommodate both customer and product effectiveness and functional efficiency. It can also better accommodate absences for training or deployment. Furthermore, it has the advantage of maintaining easy access and habituation with customers but allocates expertise more efficiently, and it allows more functional training and development of expertise because experts are a pooled resource. The ability to manage

and monitor customer needs and demands, and to efficiently allocate expertise and resources to meet those demands, is particularly important to MCIA, with its host of varied customers.

Marine Expeditionary Force Could Be More Effective if Organized into Integrated Matrix Habitual Relationships

A significant change at the MEF level would be to integrate functions in the battalion by creating discipline-integrated, company-level units and to associate these units habitually in both general and direct support relationships with particular regimental combat units.[2] In practice, the USMC is familiar with such an integrated structure because it is used elsewhere and is the basic structural form for Marine Expeditionary Unit intelligence capabilities. This structure better supports decentralized decisionmaking and, because the USMC operating concept focuses on the Marine Expeditionary Brigade as the key organization, it provides dedicated and habitual support for that commander.

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[2] A model for such habituation between formations in the USMC is artillery. However, there are differences in the traditional relationship between artillery and the regimental combat units and what we are proposing for intelligence. Artillery units are one level above intelligence units; we are proposing an intelligence company to support a regimental combat team where, for artillery, it would be a whole battalion. Moreover, artillery has a well-developed doctrine for this support, with fire support coordinators or artillery liaison teams allocated to all levels of the supported organization. Intelligence doctrine only discusses the role of the intelligence battalion commander as the overall intelligence support coordinator for the MEF. (This has its own problems.) If the organizational structure is changed at this level, intelligence doctrine needs to be extended beyond that for the intelligence support coordinator.