DIRECT SUPPORT HUMINT in Operation Iraqi Freedom


HUMAN INTELLIGENCE (HUMINT) collection has been a central facet of intelligence support to combat operations in Iraq since March 2003. The experiences of the past six years have provided a volume of information on the successful use of HUMINT capabilities and improvements to maximize HUMINT effectiveness. This article focuses on echelon above division (EAD) HUMINT assets, most commonly used in direct support relationships, and their employment in support of maneuver commanders. EAD HUMINT capabilities comprise a significant percentage of all HUMINT collection capabilities at any level in Iraq. A larger aperture for analysis exists because they are employed countrywide in every brigade combat team (BCT) operating environment. As forces inevitably draw down in Iraq, the demand for and possible employment of EAD HUMINT assets will rise to support expanded operational environments that center on strategic hubs containing advisory and assistance brigades.

The lessons discussed in this article also apply to BCT-organic HUMINT capabilities. Strategic HUMINT and HUMINT not related to tactical operations are beyond the scope of this article. Those assets typically support the theater commander and their contributions to tactical maneuver operations are less directly observable than those of HUMINT assets found within FORSCOM organizations.

Since the start of the war, three military intelligence (MI) brigades have played a significant role in HUMINT collection in Iraq. The 205th MI Brigade, the 504th MI Brigade, and the 525th MI Brigade rotated through Iraq several times and provided most of the EAD HUMINT assets employed in Iraq. Commanders of Combined Joint Task Force-7 and the Multi-National Corps-Iraq used them throughout Iraq.

Having served in multiple rotations to Iraq as leaders in two of the three brigades, we will address how operational and tactical commanders in Iraq can improve the effectiveness of EAD HUMINT assets operating in their area of operations. This article examines HUMINT collection teams (HCTs) provided by MI brigades and suggests ways commanders can maximize the support they receive from those assets.

The MI HUMINT community has learned much from its experiences in Iraq, working closely with maneuver commanders. For example, Fort Huachuca reorganized HUMINT formations to expand the HUMINT Collector...
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Military Occupational Specialty 35M because these Soldiers were in greatest demand and were cost effective to educate and train. The introduction of the HUMINT Joint Training Center of Excellence at Fort Huachuca has gone a long way toward professionalizing the force through the improved Defense Source Operations Course and Advanced Source Operations Course. In addition to updating technical training, tactical training of HCTs ensures they are tactically competent to conduct missions either alone or in conjunction with maneuver units.

There is an awareness that to remain operationally agile in the counterinsurgency (COIN) environment, the HUMINT community must shed some of its old ways of doing business. This will mean being more responsive to the targeting process and working with other intelligence disciplines both jointly and operationally to meet maneuver commanders’ needs. With the transformation of tactical MI brigades to battlefield surveillance brigades (BfSBs), the BfSB now provides EAD HUMINT assets. The Army’s second BfSB, the 504th, is now deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In addition to HCTs, the BfSB also provides multifunctional teams that bring a much enhanced HUMINT, signals intelligence, and tactical site exploitation capability. The MI community has improved its ability to enable targeting and replace ad hoc augmentation of skill sets at the BCT level. Despite the recent transition, the HUMINT collection mission of the BfSB remains similar to that of legacy MI brigades.

There are four primary areas to improve in EAD HUMINT operations:

- HCTs are best suited to conduct source operations and should make source operations their primary focus when not conducting interrogations or similar occupational specialty-specific tasks.
- Unit boundaries should not constrain HUMINT operations and reporting.
- HUMINT is not optimized for weighting a decisive operation, at least in the traditional sense, so commanders should reposition HCTs judiciously.
- Mission, enemy, terrain, weather, troops, support and time available, and civil considerations should drive HUMINT command or support relationships.

A typical HUMINT structure in Iraq contains four elements:

- Staff support.
- Analysis.
- Command and control.
- Collection.

Staff support includes the intelligence staff officer for division, brigade, or battalion and supporting agencies. The analysis and control element or unit intelligence section conducts analysis. Command and control may include technical control by the assigned or supported unit through companies and their operational management teams or at the BfSB level in the HUMINT coordination element. HUMINT collection teams perform the collection tasks.

Human Source Contact Operations

Human intelligence collection teams are the best asset to conduct military source operations (MSO), especially source contact operations (SCO). HUMINT collection activities include “tactical questioning, screening, interrogation, debriefing, liaison, human source contact operations (SCO),…, document exploitation (DOCEX), and captured enemy equipment operations (CEE).”

Doctrine defines MSO as a subset of HUMINT collection: “MSO refers to the collection of foreign
military and military-related intelligence by humans from humans. MSO sources include one-time, continuous, and formal contacts from contact operations, and sources from interrogations, deb briefings, and liaison activities.\textsuperscript{5}

Human SCO is a subset of MSO. Human SCO focuses on establishing relationships that develop continuous and formal contacts: “Human SCO are operations directed toward the establishment of human sources who have agreed to meet and cooperate with HUMINT collectors for the purpose of providing information.”\textsuperscript{6} The sources included in human SCO are one-time contacts (level-one sources); continuous contacts (level-two sources); and formal contacts (level-three sources).

One-time contacts are individuals encountered only one time who may provide information of value, such as civilians encountered on a patrol, detainees questioned and then released, or those stopped at checkpoints.

Continuous contacts are sources that provide information more than once. However, neither one-time contacts nor continuous sources can be \textit{tasked} to provide information. Human intelligence collection teams can only sensitize them to the information they are looking for and debrief them; these teams cannot formally task them to actively seek information.

Formal contacts are individuals who agree to cooperate with HUMINT collectors and provide information to them. They are the only contacts that collectors can task to seek out and provide information. Several regulations provide specific guidelines for the recruitment and handling of formal contacts.\textsuperscript{7} These guidelines acknowledge the serious risks involved when the source becomes a formal contact, including the possibility of his death and the subsequent loss of intelligence information.

Human intelligence collection operations are one of the BfSB’s primary missions. The BfSB’s MI battalions comprise a large number of HCTs and other HUMINT assets. (By Army design, over two-thirds of the organic BfSB MI battalion collection capability is related to HUMINT). Thus, the BfSB emphasizes focused training on HUMINT collection operations in preparation for deployment. Because the collection teams reside in BfSB MI battalions, they are among the best trained in the Army for human SCO. Because HUMINT is the MI battalion mission, the unit provides the expertise, focus, and resources to train and employ SCO, a relatively low-cost but highly technical capability (similar to aviation or field artillery, both of which require precise training of individual Soldiers). When looking for expertise in such fields, one turns to their parent organizations for assistance. The many DOD, Joint, and Army policies, regulations, legal requirements, and technical nuances associated with MSO and human SCO require the capabilities of a qualified person trained in the collection mission.

Still, mistaken beliefs persist. Some commanders believe MSO means simply meeting with and engaging local leaders or religious figures. On more than one occasion, we heard a commander say, “I’m the best intelligence collector in my organization.” This belief may be accurate in many tactical formations, but it may also lead units into questionable moral or legal situations, especially if leaders think it is permissible to task a source for information. They may not understand the difference between soliciting information and tasking someone for it. Well-meaning but untrained personnel conducting source operations can make mistakes that lead to tragedies such as the murder of a source or members of his family, but human intelligence collection teams are trained to conduct source operations and to understand the nuances involved in working with different kinds of sources. Combat patrols should interact with the population to gather intelligence; their interaction with local civilians and political leaders is a core competency associated with COIN operations and is central to the “every Soldier a sensor” concept. Indeed, combat patrol contact with local civilians often leads to identification of potential sources for future MSO conducted by HCTs. However, we emphasize that only HUMINT personnel have the training and legal authority to conduct human SCO.\textsuperscript{8}

Human intelligence collection teams are trained to properly report and document sources. Whenever a team meets with a source more than once, they must register him in the source registry and...
follow-up with additional reports to the operational management team. These reports help all HUMINT collectors in the area—

- Evaluate the source’s reliability, placement, and access to information.
- Guard against adversary intelligence collection.
- Deconflict complications in source management.

For example, one common but unfortunate trend in Operation Iraqi Freedom is the “professional” source that provides information to multiple HCTs or military leaders in exchange for rewards. Without a standard deconfliction process, the sources will provide the same information, whether valid or not, to multiple entities. While these activities may not be apparent to the maneuver commander, they are critical to support the mission.

Intelligence Collection

Tactical questioning, interrogations, and human SCO are three different endeavors. Tactical questioning is a HUMINT collection activity, which any DOD employee can perform if he is trained according to the standards established in DOD Directive 3115.09, “DOD Intelligence Interrogations, Detainee Debriefings, and Tactical Questioning.” Tactical questioning is “expedient initial questioning for information of immediate tactical value.”

Soldiers on patrol conduct tactical questioning as they encounter the local populace or capture and detain personnel. Tactical questioning is essentially asking direct questions of another individual. It does not include the use of an approach, and is therefore not human SCO or interrogation. We have seen units order their collection teams to ride along regularly on patrols to conduct tactical questioning, instead of conducting source operations. Having HCTs ride along on patrols in this manner is tantamount to calling a crime scene investigator to investigate a playground fistfight. Put another way, any Soldier should be able to conduct tactical questioning because “every Soldier is a sensor,” but HUMINT collectors should...
focus on MSO. Units preparing for deployment can easily receive tactical questioning training by MI mobile training teams, so the use of a human intelligence collection team to perform tactical questioning is evidence that the units are not taking full advantage of the capabilities provided by these teams through planning and conducting source operations.

Commanders must integrate HCTs into their intelligence collection and tactical operational planning to ensure the collection teams get “outside of the wire” on a regular basis. Teams supporting units in Iraq are usually not adequately integrated into such daily unit planning or targeting processes. We observed that they were seldom included in targeting meetings, intelligence collection meetings, or planning sessions for future operations. Consequently, the collection teams did not focus adequately on their supported commander’s intelligence requirements and were occasionally reduced to trolling for information. Parent and supporting units must train their teams in doctrinal staff integration processes.

No matter whom they work for, collection teams must leave their forward operating bases to be effective. They should not just work with “walk-ins.” This practice cripples their ability to interact with the populace, identify potential sources, and gather information relevant to the supported unit’s mission or targets. It prevents them from conducting effective human SCO.

To meet the commander’s collection requirements effectively, HCTs and their parent MI battalions must remain actively engaged with the command they support. They must establish relationships at each level from human intelligence collection teams to battalion. Failing to remain engaged in this way means failing to add value to the supported command.Operational Boundaries

Human intelligence activities and information are relevant across operational boundaries and require crosstalk and rigorous attention to documenting and publishing HCT reports. Unit boundaries can severely constrain HUMINT operations in an environment where potential sources are not bound by those notional limits. Populations tend to be mobile unless physical control measures limit their movement. The battalion-, or BCT-level operating environment within urban areas is often not large enough to encompass the many destinations a source might travel to in a normal day or all the networks that tribes or ethnic groups have established. Units should consider the larger operational environment when conducting HUMINT operations.

Sometimes, the HCT will find information of intelligence value in another unit’s operating environment. There are many reasons for this. A source may not be willing to approach coalition forces because local insurgents know him and may harm him if they see him interacting with coalition forces. The source may feel that the chances of insurgents detecting his actions are reduced if he is in another town where he is unknown. Perhaps he only has access to information about insurgent activities in neighboring towns or areas. In either case, intelligence of value to units outside the operating environment should be actively shared, once collected.

Commanders sometimes inadvertently restrict their units’ collection and dissemination of HUMINT to information that is only relevant to their operating environment. The theater HUMINT enterprise and particularly EAD HCTs must remember that intelligence collected in their operating environment may have relevance outside of their supported unit’s boundaries. Intelligence collection assets should focus on the commander’s priority intelligence requirements and specific information requirements—but not at the expense of ignoring other collected information that could be actionable intelligence to adjacent units or higher echelons. Indeed, information collected in central Baghdad can have a direct correlation with events occurring in Mosul or Kirkuk. Information that might be valuable to other units must be documented and published in a universal HUMINT reporting system like the Combined Information Data Network Exchange, so other units can determine if they are interested in the information. The documentation should also provide contact information so units have the opportunity to conduct crosstalk for further exploitation. Such cross-boundary crosstalk is vital to the counterinsurgency effort. Insurgencies are...
not limited by boundaries. In fact, insurgents will exploit the use of boundaries by counterinsurgency forces. EAD HUMINT teams are uniquely situated to facilitate cross-boundary coordination by virtue of their parent brigade coverage across Iraq.

Reinforcing the Decisive Operation

Instead of moving human intelligence collection teams around the battlefield, commanders should consider reinforcing the decisive operation with HCTs in a mobile interrogation team role and change the command relationship, task, and purpose of these teams within an area of operations.

How can commanders use EAD HUMINT assets to reinforce the main effort? Commanders and their staffs often provide collection teams from the BfSB to a designated division, brigade, or battalion unit and ask their echelon command to relocate one or more to support the main effort just days before operations begin. However, this arrangement is usually not the correct answer. A collection team usually requires between 45 and 60 days, and sometimes even longer, to establish itself in a new area where no other team is involved. Consequently, there is no information sharing, or in this case, source handover, normally found when a new incoming unit replaces an existing unit for a relief in place. Within that 45- to 60-day period, the team assesses the population and establishes a rapport with key persons in the area, and develops sources to work with on a regular basis. Trust between the team and the population is essential to make the process work. The commander cannot easily accelerate the time required to establish these critical relationships. Once the HCT moves to another location, it must establish itself all over again.

Even if a team conducts a relief in place with another human intelligence collection team, establishing its presence takes time. While the procedure of source handoff conducted between the outgoing and incoming collection teams can hasten the overall process, trust between the incoming HCT and the local population still takes time to establish.

Once a team develops a relationship with the local population and collects information of intelligence value, moving it to another area should be the last option considered.

The commander could liken HCTs to indirect fire assets. Like indirect fire assets, HUMINT collection teams can cover a large area of terrain. In this case, the terrain consists of people living in a geographic area. In a perfect world and in a situation where massing fires is not a priority, we would operationally array indirect fire assets to provide continuous support to all coalition forces in a given operating area without having to move them. The same could be said of collection teams. In an unconstrained environment, we would place HCTs throughout Iraq so that no major populated area would go uncovered.

The best way to reinforce a commander’s decisive operation is not necessarily to move assets, but to change their mission and whom they support. It is better to augment the commander’s decisive operation by changing the support relationship of an already established HCT than by moving new teams into an area.

However, the analogy with fire support assets falls short when one masses HUMINT assets in a single location. Commanders will often move fire support assets so that they can mass effects on a given area. Today’s indirect fire assets can move to a new location, set themselves up, and be ready to accept fire missions in a matter of minutes, but this is not the case for HCTs. Collection teams require weeks to re-establish themselves in order to conduct source operations effectively. A commander may be able to move his organic collection teams temporarily to assist in an operation, but if the HCTs are unfamiliar with the area, they will likely only conduct tactical questioning or limited SCO with one-time contacts. Maneuver units trained to conduct tactical questioning will achieve much more intelligence than a few reassigned HCTs.

The commander can also mass BfSB intelligence support for an operation by using HCTs in a mobile interrogation team role. Equipped to move to a new location and conduct HUMINT collection operations, interrogation teams can screen detainees at

...place [HUMINT collection teams] throughout Iraq so that no major populated area would go uncovered.
the point of capture. They consist of two- to four-person teams equipped with the latest in biometric equipment and access to HUMINT databases. They are specifically trained in conducting interrogations. Unfortunately, when supporting maneuver units, interrogation teams in the past worked in a division or brigade detention facility where they never moved. Commanders who do not employ the teams during operations at the point of capture are not maximizing the capabilities these HUMINT assets bring to the fight. Moreover, under the Security Agreement operating environment in Iraq, the use of interrogation teams is even more relevant because coalition forces are not authorized to hold detainees for more than 24 hours without a detention order from an Iraqi judge. These teams can also conduct combined interrogations with Iraqi forces. When maneuver units conduct cordon and search or checkpoint operations, they can very quickly round up a large number of personnel to screen. In the early stages of Operation Iraqi Freedom, many units conducted raids and cordon and searches, yet failed to screen detainees at the point of capture. They simply turned them over to a detention facility. Almost every night, units gathered 40 to 50 personnel and sent them to detention facilities for screening, quickly overwhelming facilities unequipped to process them. While this practice is no longer widespread, it still occasionally happens. Interrogation teams are assets commanders can use to alleviate the detainee burden and better focus human intelligence collection requirements. If commanders include interrogation teams in pre-mission planning and sensitize them to information requirements, the teams can accompany units on raids, screen personnel temporarily detained at the point of capture, and determine whom to send to a detention facility for further questioning. This is a great way to separate those who have information of true intelligence value and those who do not, without overburdening a detention facility. There are obvious benefits to surgically selecting detainees during counterinsurgency operations.

With proper planning and the supported brigade commander’s approval, teams can also conduct field interrogations at the point of capture. Commanders know how perishable actionable intelligence is. When it has been determined that a detained individual has actionable intelligence, a team may conduct a field interrogation at the brigade commander’s discretion to get that information immediately. This is better than taking the detainee to a facility where it may take hours before an interrogator has a chance to talk to him. Since the security agreement became effective in January, units must now process and interrogate detainees within 24 hours before turning them over to a competent Iraqi authority or acquiring a detention order. Obtaining actionable intelligence at the point of capture can lead to immediate follow-on exploitation operations. However, field interrogation requires detailed preparation. Commanders should integrate interrogation teams into the planning process early on so that the team understands the commander’s intelligence requirements for a particular target.

Finally, how does the maneuver commander weight his decisive operation with echelon-above-division human intelligence? Once the staff identifies the requirement for additional support, the staff intelligence officer determines if there is
already an EAD collection team operating within the area. If there is, he requests a temporary change in the support relationship so that team can support his unit in the mission. Once the EAD collection team receives orders to support the new unit, the staff operations, training, and intelligence staff officers should immediately begin working with the team to develop “intelligence preparation of the battlespace” products and target information required for the upcoming operation. The EAD HCT must also participate in detailed planning of the operation.

The intelligence staff officer should then consider the unit’s temporary need for operational interrogation support and coordinate with higher echelons to secure that support relationship. Once an interrogation team is identified to support the operation, the intelligence staff officer should immediately include it in detailed operational planning and connect them with the HCT currently operating in the area. This combination of HUMINT assets will provide the unit with tremendous collection capability.

**HUMINT Collection Teams and Advantages of Avoiding Turbulence**

The key to successful HUMINT operations using EAD collection teams is to allow them to remain stable in an operating environment. The mission, enemy, terrain, weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations will determine the best command or support relationship for an EAD HCT task-organized to a multi-national division, brigade combat team, or battalion. Stability in an operating environment will maximize expertise about a particular population and area. The permissiveness of the environment and the number of people and coalition units present in an area are important factors to consider when changing support or command relationships with EAD HCTs. Another critical factor is the level of HUMINT expertise already present in the gaining unit. Collection teams require technical and tactical oversight to maximize their capabilities.

A direct support relationship may work best in rural areas or if population centers are widely dispersed and pools of potential sources are relatively static. The gaining unit should also have a good level of resident HUMINT expertise on its staff. Commanders should be careful not to overburden their existing unit structure with more assets than they can control effectively.

A direct support relationship also works well in a non-permissive environment. When a team leaves the wire in Iraq, it embarks on a combat operation. In areas that require considerable force protection for movement outside forward operating bases, it is always preferable for a collection team to move as part of a combat patrol. If a unit is conducting a focused operation in the same area, the best way to provide additional HUMINT support is simply to place the team in direct support of that unit for the duration of the operation and then return it to general support at completion.

A general support relationship, either at the BCT, division, or corps level, seems to work best when teams are covering large metropolitan areas where sources and networks move freely. Large metropolitan areas are also usually covered by several BCTs and maneuver battalions, which means that the HCT may have to travel across several unit boundaries in a relatively short distance, so a general support relationship would be most appropriate. If the environment is permissive, then the collection team should be able to move using its organic security and rely less on additional support, again favoring a general support relationship.

Finally, if the supported unit does not have resident HUMINT expertise, a general support relationship allows the BF SB to manage most of the technical oversight issues.

Many commanders worry that teams operating within their area of operations will not support them effectively. This is simply not the case. It would be self-defeating for EAD general support teams not to maintain good relations with the units and share the intelligence gathered. The maneuver units maintain the quick reaction forces that the HCTs will call on if they find themselves in trouble.

**Command Employment of Assets**

Whether in general or direct support, MI battalions from the BF SB must remain involved in HUMINT operations. The MI battalions—
- Provide a level of expertise and HUMINT focus usually not resident in the BCT.
● Provide maneuver commanders and their staffs with technical HUMINT advice from an external vantage point.
● Enable direct support teams to become better collectors for the supported unit through focused attention on team capabilities.

In conjunction with Multi-National Corps Iraq, the BfSB can help standardize direct support or general support teams’ HUMINT tasking and reporting procedures to ensure fidelity of data and its timely dissemination.

We would not recommend establishing a command relationship between a BfSB echelon-above-division collection team and a BCT. The complications of making that work and the often-fluid nature of counterinsurgency operations may outweigh the benefits, especially if the BCT has limited resident HUMINT experience on its staff.

Finally, some commanders do not understand the command and support relationship doctrine set forth in Appendix B of FM 3-0. Some units act as though they have a command relationship with a collection team when the HCT is really only in direct support or general support to them. This leads to needless confusion among team leaders and supported and other units. Some units attempt to break apart direct support HCTs to harvest individuals to fill vacancies in their units or to “cover” more ground with HUMINT. This, in effect, shatters the integrity of the team, making it less effective. The doctrine in FM 3-0 works effectively—so long as both supporting and supported units abide by it.

In summary, the HUMINT field is technical in nature and requires minimal overhead. As measured in output versus cost, HUMINT collection is dollar-for-dollar the most economical and most effective intelligence discipline.

Yet, because of its low cost, we often overlook HUMINT’s technical complexity and underestimate the training it requires. A collection team’s primary mission must be to conduct source operations or interrogations, not tactical questioning or so-called patrol “ride-alongs.” HCTs must have the opportunity to conduct HUMINT operations: the primary purpose for leaving the wire on any given day is to collect HUMINT. HUMINT reporting, and in some cases HUMINT operations, must cross unit boundaries. Commanders should not arbitrarily move HCTs about the operating environment because the cost-benefits of doing so are detrimental. Mission, enemy, terrain, weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations must drive command and support relationships—not land ownership.

These observations are derived from a sound understanding of operational doctrine, from the technical aspects of the HUMINT field that are analogous to similarly technical spheres such as field artillery or aviation, and from our combined 81-plus months of personal wartime observations in MI units in Iraq. We hope commanders who have the opportunity to work with EAD HCTs will incorporate these thoughts into the employment of HCT assets who are supporting their organizations. MR

NOTES

1. A human intelligence collection team (HCT) is an element that collects information from human sources and usually includes two to four human intelligence personnel.
3. An operational management team is an element that provides technical control and guidance to two to four deployed HCTs and often serves as a platoon headquarters consisting of two to four trained human intelligence leaders. A tactical HUMINT operations section is similar to a HUMINT operations cell and in Iraq, it is assigned to the battlefield surveillance brigade headquarters.
5. Ibid., 5-1.
6. Ibid., 1-9.
7. These sources are classified and include AR 381-172, Counterintelligence Force Protection Special Operations and Low-Level Source Operations; DIAM 58-11, Conduct & Oversight of Intelligence Activities; and DIAM 58-12, DOD HUMINT Management System.
10. This refers to sources who walk onto the forward operating base and present themselves at the unit’s location with information they believe will be of value.
11. “Value added” means it must be done right the first time; must change the outcome somehow, the receiving unit must adopt this action or product, and the mission “profits” from it.] MR
12. Listed in both the 205th and 504th MI Brigade AARs for OIF 5/7 and OIF 6/8. Experience has demonstrated that it took an HCT a minimum of 45 to 60 days to establish a source network in a newly assigned area that had no previous HCTs for it to conduct a relief in place.
13. FM 1-02, Operational Terms and Graphics and FM 3-0, Operations. “Task-organized” is a temporary grouping of forces designed to accomplish a particular mission.