Theater Intelligence
Operations in Competition

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For the joint force to play its role in advancing national interests, it must adopt a better framework for understanding, describing, and participating within a competitive operational environment.

—*Joint Doctrine Note 1-19,* Competition Continuum

Introduction

Sun Tzu was perhaps the first military theorist to espouse the idea of defeating an enemy without outright conflict. In his treatise, *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu wrote, "the ultimate achievement is to defeat the enemy without coming to battle."[1] While that maxim remains true, the U.S. Army must be prepared to fight and win the Nation's wars in all phases, from competition to crisis to conflict. The recent *Chief of Staff Paper #2* defines the Army's role succinctly as, "the Army contributes to military competition by building and employing land force capability and capacity to support a broad range of policy choices."[2] For the moment, the United States Army Europe and Africa (USAREUR–AF) remains in the competition phase with the Russian Federation. Russian competition activities are readily identifiable in a number of European and, increasingly more often, African nations. These activities are primarily "fought" in the non-kinetic information and cyberspace domains. Recent examples of competition activity in Western Europe, the Baltic States, and the Balkans point to both the scope and scale of Russian efforts to win without escalating to outright conflict. Indeed, one of Russia's primary goals is to maximize its influence in its near abroad while minimizing the influence of the West, given the Russians' skewed perception of the threat posed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States and the strength disparity in a conventional war.[3]

Within this operational environment, the USAREUR–AF G-2 is charged with providing predictive intelligence that supports the commanding general's Army Service component command and Combined Joint Force Land Component Command decision making to retain the strategic initiative and deter any potential adversaries. Successfully completing this mission requires the USAREUR–AF intelligence warfighting function to generate opportunities to compete against adversaries for access, influence, and information. It further requires the G-2 to master the ability to conduct intelligence operations in competition to enable maneuver and fires in the conflict phase, as well as set conditions for follow-on intelligence operations that would be too late to initiate during conflict (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Competition, Conflict, Cooperation Model[4]

The intelligence process, from ADP 2-0, *Intelligence*, best describes how we successfully set conditions on a daily basis, as it "directly drives and supports the operations process."[5] Using the intelligence process model (Figure 2 on the next page), we will briefly describe how USAREUR–AF conducts theater intelligence operations in competition.

Analyze and Assess

Throughout the intelligence process and at every step of the model, we rigorously analyze and continuously assess our efforts in theater to ensure we use our resources as efficiently as possible. Additionally, during competition, we analyze and assess our processes with distinct checks:
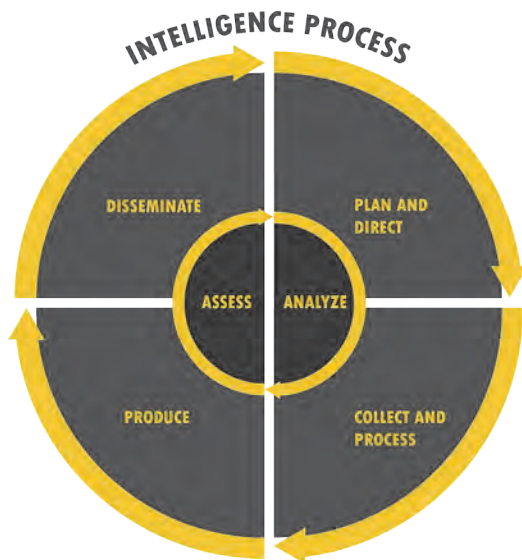
INTELLIGENCE PROCESS

Figure 2. Intelligence Process[6]

✦ Yearly, we synchronize efforts to maintain and guide the long-term intelligence strategy in both the African and European theaters.

✦ Quarterly, we invite the senior leaders and planners of the intelligence warfighting function to discuss the execution of that long-term strategy and assess its progress or identify areas to focus additional efforts.

By bringing together all vested intelligence organizations with divergent viewpoints, we arrive at a coordinated assessment of our efforts, which allows us to execute the entire intelligence process.

Plan and Direct

A primary focus of the intelligence warfighting function during competition is identifying adversary activity, especially from the adversary's associated intelligence services, within the information and cyberspace domains. Recent world events clearly demonstrate the aggressive nature of Russian intelligence services in these critical spheres.[7] This operational environment drives the first step in the doctrinal intelligence process. During the plan and direct step, the USAREUR–AF intelligence warfighting function identifies information requirements and the ways in which to best satisfy those requirements.[8] We incorporate and focus our efforts into the G-3–led targeting and collection board; specifically, the G-2 provides full spectrum intelligence support and situational awareness to lethal and nonlethal targeting. We accomplish this through the incorporation of regular intelligence operations from all disciplines fused into a comprehensive intelligence picture. To bring a more robust intelligence assessment to the targeting process, the theater analysis and control element (ACE) implements the 66th Military Intelligence (MI) Brigade-Theater's targeting process in cooperation with the USAREUR–AF G-2 team, which comprises collection management, counterintelligence (CI), human intelligence

(HUMINT), signals intelligence (SIGINT), and open-source intelligence (OSINT). The intelligence warfighting function takes advantage of major exercises, such as DEFENDER-Europe 21, as prime opportunities to refine and rehearse the targeting process. In conjunction with the larger intelligence community, the intelligence warfighting function assesses the outcome of these operations for lessons learned and tactics, techniques, and procedures to improve with each iteration.

Security cooperation with allies and partners also creates desired outcomes and favorable conditions in competition readily transferable to crisis or armed conflict. Bluntly, our bilateral and multilateral intelligence security cooperation is extensive. In addition to technical and analytical coordination, we participate in several multinational exercises designed to build familiarity and interoperability. USAREUR–AF HUMINT entities are active participants in national exercises in multiple countries across Europe. We expanded our own Kosovo Force CI/HUMINT certification exercise into a multilateral training opportunity to include representatives from certain partner nations. Additionally, we are an active participant in NATO's exercise Steadfast Interest HUMINT.

Intelligence planning for exercise DEFENDER-Europe 20 started in September 2019. It aptly demonstrates the vital role cooperation plays in the competition phase of conflict. The planned scale of DEFENDER-Europe 20 allowed for considerable intelligence planning and integration with our NATO partners and allies in both exercise and real-world intelligence requirements. The Multinational Corps Northeast J-2 and the USAREUR–AF G-2 Plans cells sent reciprocal representatives to the respective headquarters. Their goal was to conduct intelligence preparation of the battlefield, mission analysis, course of action development, and annex creation of both the Combined Joint Force Land Component Command and the Multinational Corps Northeast operations orders for the DEFENDER-Europe 20 planning process. They were integrated into in-person and geographically dispersed planning and briefing.

Collect and Process

Collection and processing synchronization is imperative to provide critical information to drive competition operations and feed intelligence into the targeting process.[9] Collection management takes on a new and interesting twist, as it requires execution on a continental scale in two separate and highly distinct theaters. Given current Russian and Chinese influence in Europe and growing influence in Africa, it becomes increasingly important to understand national, combatant command, ally, and partner collection capabilities and the ways in which to receive and apply that information to USAREUR–AF requirements.[10] In the competition phase, we find bilateral and multilateral combined collection to

A U.S. Soldier fast ropes out of a CH-47 Chinook during African Lion 21, U.S. Africa Command's largest joint annual exercise.

be very productive throughout the intelligence process. The 66th MI Brigade's series of OSINT-combined collection operations, Northern Raven, is a perfect example of this relationship. To date, this operation produced more than 300 OSINT reports by co-locating U.S. OSINT collection tools and doctrinal training with the cultural understanding, military knowledge, and native language skills of the allies and partners. These types of operations provide a more holistic insight into adversary operations that our organic collection does not always achieve. Given our long-standing partnerships with NATO allies, these combined collection operations help to strengthen relationships that will pay dividends in the conflict phase. With the recent merger of USAREUR and U.S. Army Africa into USAREUR–AF, we see a unique opportunity to practice collection skills against this challenging dynamic. In 2021, USAREUR–AF conducted two major exercises, DEFENDER-Europe 21 and the Southern European Task Force–Africa's African Lion 21, nearly simultaneously. Taken together, DEFENDER-Europe 21 and African Lion 21 allow USAREUR–AF to test its ability to manage competition activity in two concurrent major exercises against related but separate problem sets.

As ADP 2-0 explains, processing is mutually dependent with collection.[11] It is an inherent fact that the information derived from bilateral and multilateral collection operations is delivered in a variety of formats and systems. Rapid processing of the various types of intelligence is key to developing a thorough and usable product for all nations concerned. Likewise, when participating in the competitive targeting process, the USAREUR–AF intelligence warfighting function cannot simply provide an incident map to the G-3 in the hope it will be useful. It requires the efforts of collection management, ACE, G-2X, targeteers, and single-source subject matter experts to combine intelligence information reports, tactical reports, Klieglight reports, imagery, full

motion video, or moving target indicator data into a usable product understood and applied by the entire targeting board. More importantly, this intelligence product becomes the "map" to direct competition operations.

Produce

Production is the application of analysis to collected information and existing intelligence.[12] In most cases, the 66th MI Brigade ACE performs this function. In the USAREUR–AF G-2, we found that a complementary effort by a separate analytic cell focused on CI and HUMINT lends itself well to intelligence operations in the competition phase. Examples of this are the USAREUR–AF daily intelligence update, the G-2X foreign intelligence threat assessments, and special assessments. Make no mistake—these are not exclusive entities operating in isolation. They are complementary efforts working toward a common intelligence picture. As evidence, this CI and HUMINT analytic effort began developing a methodology for combining and collating multiple information streams to focus intelligence operations in competition by looking at where USAREUR–AF lives and works rather than focusing on adversary countries. We anticipate that this will further aid competition targeting for nonlethal effects like information operations by providing an ability to focus efforts in more precise locations rather than spreading finite resources in large areas. Additionally, the USAREUR–AF G-2 initiated a program of analysis to streamline and quantify our European partners' intelligence requests for information as a means to shape our SECRET Releasable production with our NATO partners. By producing intelligence that is actionable and shareable, we reach our end state to have a more tailored series of releasable products driven by our allies' and partners' intelligence priorities.

Two major factors influencing the production cycle are the continued efforts to refresh or reset USAREUR–AF collection assets across all single-source intelligence disciplines and the sustained efforts to develop or enhance existing partnerships with European and African allies. Using SIGINT as a model, SIGINT production is shared not just among a consortium of U.S. joint military units and intelligence agencies; rather, the USAREUR–AF G-2 employs its Intelligence and Security Cooperation branch to set conditions for combined SIGINT collection operations or to forge intelligence-sharing agreements. Indeed, the Intelligence and Security Cooperation branch is central to all partner initiatives in all phases of the intelligence cycle.

With regard to another intelligence discipline, geospatial intelligence (GEOINT), the 66th MI Brigade's Integrated GEOINT

Division (IGD) in Darmstadt, Germany, and Fort Gordon, Georgia, perform GEOINT production for USAREUR–AF. The IGD has proactively engaged with various intelligence disciplines and external data providers to increase its ability to inform the commander. To support HUMINT and CI efforts, the IGD has assisted multiple teams in visualizing foreign intelligence entity locations to inform operations and planning and has generated geospatial data to enable the automated detection of nefarious activities in the Joint Security Area. The IGD also coordinates with a Defense Intelligence Agency measurement and signature intelligence (MASINT) capability to gain awareness into adversary interests in the Joint Security Area. The geospatial outputs from the system enable the IGD to visualize and analyze the data in existing tools, and a GEOINT/MASINT product line is now in development. An explosion of commercial imagery sources also provides the IGD with many different avenues to pursue unclassified GEOINT production and adds new ways to publicly expose the adversary activities. Through the Predicative GEOINT Program, the IGD has already tasked commercial imagery satellites and generated baseline GEOINT products disseminated through the Protected Internet Exchange to support theater OSINT operations. Through an Army technology demonstration, the IGD is also assessing commercial synthetic-aperture radar imagery technologies for MI applications where speed and releaseability are of highest importance.

Disseminate

For intelligence to be relevant, it must be appropriately and rapidly shared with consumers. U.S. intelligence doctrine is clear on this point, stating, "Timely dissemination of intelligence and finished intelligence products is critical to the success of operations."[13] Example products from our regular intelligence dissemination include a daily intelligence update, G-2X threat assessments, SIGINT reporting, and regular intelligence briefings for the commanding general. Individually or combined, the family of intelligence products help to provide situational awareness to leaders of problem sets on two continents, encompassing more than 100 countries and 2.1 billion people. These products are routinely shared via links between the Distributed Common Ground System-Army and the U.S. Battlefield Information Collection and Exploitation System, which supports the point-to-point server federation and the dissemination of Foundation GEOINT data to allies and coalition partners. Additionally, the European GEOINT Edge Node uses cloud technology to disseminate Foundation GEOINT data and services in support of theater operations.

Conclusion

Sun Tzu understood the value of intelligence writing—"foreknowledge cannot be found by consulting the spirits."[14] Today, some 2,500 years after he wrote *The Art of War*, military leaders require predictive and timely intelligence to succeed across the spectrum, within competition, crisis, or conflict. Providing intelligence is the daily mission of the USAREUR–AF G-2. USAREUR–AF intelligence operations in the European and African theaters occupy a greater competitive space and encompass actions that can be taken to achieve objectives vis-à-vis an adversary.[15] While many of the factors associated with intelligence operations in competition do not differ from other theaters, our proximity to adversaries makes it unique. This proximity further requires the intelligence warfighting function to actively cooperate and participate with allies and partners. Ultimately, these factors as executed in the model of the intelligence process give way to a specific framework for intelligence operations in the competition phase in USAREUR–AF. 🟡

Epigraph

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Endnotes

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4. The authors adapted the graphic from two sources: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine Note 1-19, *Competition Continuum*, 2–6; and Kelly McCoy, "In the Beginning, There Was Competition: The Old Idea behind the New American Way of War," Modern War Institute (West Point, NY: April 11, 2018), https://mwi.usma.edu/beginning-competition-old-idea-behind-new-american-way-of-war/.

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15. Department of the Army, *The Army in Military Competition*, 11.

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