



# CSM Forum

by *Command Sergeant Major Warren K. Robinson*  
*Command Sergeant Major of the MI Corps*  
*U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence*



We can talk about sensors, big data, analytics, and modernization strategies, but at the core of military intelligence is intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB). In 1975, U.S. Army BG Eugene Kelly, Jr., approved the concept of IPB, saying that “IPB is not new; we’ve been doing much of it all along.” Since then, the Army has formalized, documented, and updated the original four-step process, most recently in the March 2019 ATP 2-01.3, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield*. As we switch our focus to large-scale ground combat and multi-domain operations against a peer threat, IPB has become more relevant than ever. This major shift will cause us to relook how the Army conducts business, and intelligence professionals must adapt.



Understanding the different types of operations in a highly expeditionary environment will be a paradigm shift from what most of the current Army has ever experienced. As we prepare for multi-domain operations in 2028, intelligence will be tasked to fill gaps previously not seen because the capabilities of our adversaries are going to be much more sophisticated than those we’ve experienced in the past 17 years of counterinsurgency operations.

IPB’s four-step process (with sub-steps) results in intelligence products that allow staffs to effectively conduct the military decision-making process and assist in developing friendly courses of action and decision points for the commander. It also helps commanders and staffs understand friendly and enemy capabilities and vulnerabilities in each domain. The process involves 1) defining the operational environment, 2) describing the environmental effects on operations, 3) evaluating the threat, and 4) determining threat courses of action.

You might be asking yourself, “In the hectic pace of large-scale ground combat operations, who has time for all these steps and sub-steps?” The answer is, “We do.” Remember, the “P” in IPB stands for “preparation.” Hasty preparation rarely results in a quality product, so following the IPB process is of paramount importance. In addition, IPB sets the stage

for the location of forces, logistics, and required capabilities to offer the advantage of control by evaluating multiple courses of action based on capabilities, effects, and potential/probable circumstances. It is therefore critical to planning information collection and targeting operations. It affects every other warfighting function and ensures a complete view of the operational environment.

Land is not the only domain we must consider in IPB. We need to take into account all the domains—air, land, maritime, space, and cyberspace, as well as the information environment and the electromagnetic spectrum—and we need to understand how these areas interrelate. It’s a tall order, but that’s why the IPB process is so important. One of the biggest shifts in preparing for multi-domain operations is recognizing our peer threats’ cyberspace capabilities and the potential effects on friendly networks. For example, the traditional modified combined obstacle overlays will now likely include cyberspace considerations such as telephone networks, radio stations, internet cafés, and media kiosks, among other things. An entity that controls the flow and content of information in multiple domains has a significant advantage.

Effective IPB does not just happen. It requires training with several sets and reps in multiple environments and scenarios. It is also a collaborative effort, with close interaction between the commander, the G-2/S-2, the G-3/S-3, and the rest of the staff. This offers not only an opportunity to become proficient in conducting IPB, but also provides opportunities for the professional development of officers, warrant officers, and noncommissioned officers of every rank.

The intelligence warfighting function requires each discipline to bring its unique flavor to fill in gaps left by others. Intelligence plays an important role in situational understanding across all domains, and IPB is a great opportunity to showcase how the disciplines create a full picture of an adversary and the battlefield. ✨

**Always Out Front!**