Developing an Open Source Intelligence "Battle Rhythm"– Meeting the Challenge of Maintaining Situational Understanding in a Complex World

by Colonel Kevin C. Wulfhorst

Listing the websites in this article does not imply any endorsement by the U.S. Army, the U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence, or any U.S. government agency, and the content on these websites does not express the views of the U.S. Army, the Defense of Department or any government agency.

Introduction

Reserve Component (RC) MI Analysts in a Troop Program Unit status generally conduct a two-day Battle Assembly each month in which they perform intelligence research and analysis, usually in an Army Reserve Intelligence Support Center. Since the end of the Cold War, and especially over the last 10 to 12 years with the reduction of military and civilian staffs at combatant commands and national agencies, more and more "real-world" intelligence production at operational and strategic levels is being assigned to RC intelligence units. This strategic intelligence production is vital for Army components at combatant commands to accomplish the Army's mission of "winning in a complex world."

As TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World, states "the U.S. requires "ready land forces" capable of "protecting our nation and securing our vital interests against determined, elusive, and increasingly capable enemies." To defeat these enemies, U.S. land forces must *"develop situational understanding through action"* and "Army commanders develop an understanding of complex situations in depth, breadth, and context through the integration of intelligence and operations. . ."

RC MI analysts are called upon to contribute to this situational understanding through the real-world intelligence products they generate for joint and Army intelligence organizations during Battle Assembly weekends. However, the complex world is changing at an increasingly rapid pace, and significant political-military developments can occur in the 28 days between Battle Assemblies. Intelligence analysts must develop the capacity to maintain a "situational understanding" through unclassified news resources when they are away from the intelligence production facility.

Developing a Situational Understanding "Battle Rhythm"

From June 2012 until March 2013, I served as the Director for the European Command (EUCOM) J2 Joint Reserve Intelligence Support Element (JRISE), based at Fort Meade, Maryland. The JRISE consisted of U.S. Army, U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force MI detachments supporting the EUCOM J2 collection management, J2X, intelligence engagements, targeting, contingency planning, and cyber sections in Stuttgart, Germany. During my first meeting with Brigadier General John Bansemer, the Air Force general serving as EUCOM J2, he noted that a key challenge for reserve MI analysts was maintaining "situational awareness" of political-military development in conflict areas in the EUCOM area of responsibility (AOR).

BG Bansemer noted that analysts should "hit the ground running" on Saturday morning, and not have to spend several hours getting "up to speed" on military developments, especially when developing targeting packages and intelligence requirements in support of EUCOM contingency planning. Although he noted that in most cases it was difficult if not impossible for RC analysts to access classified intelligence reporting and intelligence products, he stressed that each analyst should allocate time to maintain "situational awareness" of military and political developments in the EUCOM AOR by accessing unclassified news resources.

To support this goal as the J2 JRISE Director, I prepared a list of websites that provide timely news and analysis of global political and military activity. As a civilian, I serve as an FBI intelligence analyst, and I had developed my own list of unclassified "open source" news resources and analytic resources for the intelligence analysts on my squad. I utilize these resources several times each month to identify political, military, and economic development worldwide which might impact foreign counterintelligence and cyber threats directed against civilian and military targets in New Jersey.

I used my FBI resource list as a baseline to develop an open source, monthly situational understanding "battle rhythm." That is, a schedule of daily, weekly, and monthly information checks of these websites to maintain awareness of global military and political developments. This rest of this article will provide an overview of the type of websites I access and a description of their content, the actual "battle rhythm" I use to access the sites, and finally a list of the websites with links to each resource.

At the end of the article is a list of websites of news organizations, intelligence and defense related blogs, online journals and research institutions or "think tanks" with the hyperlink and a brief description. Most of the websites and their digital content are free, however, several of the news and journal websites charge fees for unlimited access.

Website Overview

The keystone website for maintaining awareness of global political-military developments is the Open Source Center (OSC). All MI analysts should have *opensource.gov* bookmarked on their favorites list. Formerly known as the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), staffed by the CIA, OSC provides translations of political, military, and economic reports and translations of print and broadcast media from 210 countries and 73 languages. The OSC articles can be viewed by region, or by specific country and topic, which makes it an ideal resource for regionally aligned MI analysts.

OSC analysts also research and produce finished analytic pieces on significant political and cultural events, and publish "Master Narratives" on important countries. These are historically grounded stories that reflect a community's identity and experiences, or explain its hopes, aspirations, and concerns. These insights can be used by analysts to better understand critical audience segments and key influencers, build analytic capabilities, and develop actionable messaging and counter-messaging strategies. The website also provides access to technical/scientific information in commercial databases such as Jane's, IEEE, EBSCOHost, Lexis/Nexis, and access to regional and topical news/information sites including *Stratfor* and the *Economist Intelligence Unit*.

There are a number of newspaper, television, wire service, and magazine websites that provide up-to-date international geo-political news on a daily basis. They include *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Bloomberg News, Reuters,* the *BBC World Service,* and *The Economist*. The Economist, based in the United Kingdom, is a weekly international news and business publication. Despite its name, its content goes beyond economics and business, and offers reporting, commentary and analysis on world current affairs, business, finance, science and technology, culture, society, media, and the arts.

Research institutions, think tanks, and foreign policy blogs are great sources of in-depth, analytic articles that range from 3 to 4 page bulletins on current international events to multiple page reports or book-length publications that provide detailed research and analytic findings on significant

trends or political-military developments. Some think tanks have existed for decades, such as RAND, established after World War II, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, while other are post-Cold War, such as the Center for a New American Security.

Another source for research and analysis of political-military topics are defense-related websites that host original analysis of defense issues, as well as content from other publications and research institutions. These sites include *Defense One, War on the Rocks,* and *Real Clear Defense.* Each of these sites disseminates a daily or weekly bulletin or update via email which contains links to three to five articles that the editors select as particularly relevant or timely.

Finally, there are several organizations funded by the U.S. government or foundations that collect, analyze, and publish data and finished analytic pieces on terrorism and other national security threat areas. Two important sites are the *Combating Terrorism Center (CTC)* at West Point and *The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)*. The CTC produces in-depth research reports on terrorist ideology, terrorist strategy and structure, and emerging threat and publishes *The Sentinel*. The Sentinel is a monthly, independent publication that provides analysis of the contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence. START is a university-based research center committed to the scientific study of the causes and human consequences of terrorism in the U.S. and around the world

Using all of these news and analysis websites, I developed a "battle rhythm" of daily, weekly, and monthly review of website content to maintain situational awareness. Each morning, I scan the *"World"* and *"United States"* sections of The New York Times website. I pay for a digital subscription so that I can access all content. Next, I open my email inbox and scan the *"Defense One Today," "D Brief," "War on the Rocks Daily Newsletter,"* and *"Foreign Policy Situation Report"* for articles of interest. I scan the titles and read the articles related to my own threat prioritization. Each evening, I read *"The Evening CSIS"* email.

Weekly, I check my email box for the Foreign Policy *"Editors Picks"* and the *"New on the Economist"* emails, and read the *International Project for Terrorism Weekly Update*. I log into Opensource.gov and review the articles in my key country list and check War on the Rocks and the Foreign Policy National Security Channel and Best Defense Blog for articles of interest that may not have been included in the daily emails.

Every other week I read the Homeland Security Digital Library email *"HSDL Critical Releases in Homeland Security".*

I also check the regional pages in the CSIS and RAND webpages and the topical pages in the CNAS webpage. Monthly I review the table of contents of The Sentinel, on the CTC website, and scan the list of any new publications on the START homepage.

This "battle rhythm" allows me to efficiently maintain a "situational awareness" of the global conflict areas and threat actors I need to understand to be an effective intelligence analyst for the FBI and for the U.S. Army Reserve. Of course, each intelligence analyst can tailor the frequency of site reviews and number of news resources based on the sophistication and complexity of their intelligence analysis and production mission. I would suggest, however, that subscribing to the daily and weekly bulletins and newsletter disseminated by the defense and military news websites, usually for free, is critical in achieving continuous situational understanding. Good luck as your create your own individual "open source intelligence battle rhythm."

News Sources for Intelligence Analysts

News Websites

Open Source Center (Formerly FBIS). The OSC, staffed by the Central Intelligence Agency, provides translations of political, military, and economic reports from 210 countries and 73 languages. The website also provides access to technical/scientific information in commercial databases like Jane's, IEEE, EBSCOHost, Lexis/Nexis, ProQuest and access to regional and topical news/information sites including Stratfor and the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). At www.opensource.gov.

Foreign Policy. Foreign Policy is an international source for global news, providing an evolving network of insights and analysis coupled with rapidly expanding original reporting. In 2012, Foreign Policy launched FP National Security, a "channel" covering global defense, intelligence, cyber and tech issues. At http://nationalsecurity.foreignpolicy.com.

Foreign Policy Situation Report. A daily email summary of articles on the Foreign Policy website. At http://www.foreignpolicy.com/situation_report.

The Economist. The Economist newsmagazine is a weekly international news and business publication, which offers reporting, commentary and analysis on world current affairs, business, finance, science and technology, culture, society, media and the arts. At www.economist.com.

Defense/Military News Websites

War on the Rocks. War on the Rocks is a platform for analysis, commentary, debate, and multimedia content on foreign policy and national security issues. It features articles and podcasts. Subscribe to the War on the Rocks Daily Newsletter on the right side of the main page: http://waronterocks.com/.

Defense One. Defense One delivers news, breaking analysis and ideas on topics and trends. At http://www.defenseone.com. At the bottom of the main page, you can enter your email to receive Defense One Today, a morning email with news, analysis and ideas for national security leaders and stakeholders. Another daily email bulletin from Defense One is the D Brief, a national security newsletter by senior reporter Gordon Lubold. Subscribe here: http://www.defenseone.com/news/2014/10/d-brief/96299/.

RealClearDefense, a sister site of **RealClearPolitics**, a catch-all source for defense news and commentary. RealClearPolitics.com (RCP) is an independent political web site. Updated every morning and throughout the day, RCP culls and publishes highlights from commentary, news, polling data, and links to important resources from all points of the political compass and covering all the important issues of the day. At http://www.realcleardefense.com.

Research Institutions/Think Tanks

Center for Strategic and International Studies. CSIS is a bipartisan, nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. The Center's 220 full-time staff and large network of affiliated scholars conduct research and analysis and develop policy initiatives that look to the future and anticipate change. At http://csis.org.

Critical Questions is CSIS's short analysis series. CSIS experts provide quick answers to the essential questions posed by today's top international events. View Critical Questions here: http://csis.org/publications/browse/all/all/Critical%20Questions. To subscribe: https://my.csis.org/csis/CSIS1700/CSISCreateAccount.aspx. CSIS analyst H. Andrew Schwartz publishes a daily email newsletter, "The Evening CSIS." It is a daily guide to key insights CSIS brings to the events of the day plus highly recommended content from around the world. Here is the link to subscribe: http://csis.informz.net/CSIS/profile.asp?fid=3092.

RAND Corporation. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research and analysis institution. RAND focuses on issues such as health, education, national security, international affairs, law and business, the environment, and more. RAND is a nonpartisan organization. At http://www.rand.org.

Center for a New American Security (CNAS). CNAS provides research, ideas, and analysis. CNAS is located in Washington, and was established in February 2007 by co-founders Kurt M. Campbell and Michèle A. Flournoy. At http://www.cnas.org

Information on Terrorist Groups and Attacks

The Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point. The CTC serves as an important national resource that rigorously studies the terrorist threat and provides policy-relevant research while moving the boundaries of academic knowledge. The CTC produces in-depth research reports on terrorist ideology, terrorist strategy and structure, and emerging threat. The CTC also publishes The Sentinel which is a monthly, independent publication that leverages the Center's global network of scholars and practitioners to understand and confront contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence. At http://www.ctc.usma.edu.

The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). START is a university-based research center committed to the study of the causes and human consequences of terrorism in the U.S. and around the world. START is also maintains the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). GTD is an open-source database including information on terrorist events around the world from 1970 through 2011. Headquartered at the University of Maryland, START supports research efforts of social scientists at more than 50 academic and research institutions. At http://www.start.umd.edu/start.

The Investigative Project on Terrorism. The Investigative Project on Terrorism (IPT) is a non-profit research group founded by Steven Emerson in 1995. It is a comprehensive data center focused on radical Islamic terrorist groups. For more than a decade, the IPT has investigated the operations, funding, activities, and front groups of Islamic terrorist and extremist groups in the U.S. and around the world. Click on the "subscribe" button on the upper right side of the main screen to receive the weekly update–an email with relevant news articles organized under the following topics:

✦ General security, policy.
✦ Air, rail, port, health, energy and communication security.
✦ Financing, money laundering, fraud, identity theft, civil litigation.
✦ Border security, immigration and customs.
✦ International.
✦ Comment/analysis.

At http://www.investigativeproject.org.

The Homeland Security Digital Library (HSDL). HSDL is the nation's premier collection of documents related to homeland security policy, strategy, and organizational management. The HSDL is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's National Preparedness Directorate,

FEMA, and the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security. HSDL's mission is to strengthen national security of the U.S. by supporting federal, state, local, and tribal analysis, debate, and decision making needs. The HSDL is composed of homeland security related documents collected from a wide variety of sources. These include federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies, professional organizations, think tanks, academic institutions, and international governing bodies. Every two weeks, the HSDL disseminates "HSDL Critical Releases in Homeland Security" an email which contains links to a targeted collection of recently released documents of particular interest or potential importance.

Featured Topics: Hand selected lists featuring documents relevant to current issues in homeland security.

Critical Releases: A list compiled every two weeks highlighting recent resources of particular interest or potential importance.

News Digest Collection: Archives of periodic digests with a focus on homeland security topics.

I3P Cyber Infrastructure Collection: A specialized collection created by the Institute for Information Infrastructure Protection (I3P) focusing on the fields of infrastructure protection and cyber security. (Note: this collection was acquired in 2008 and is not actively updated.)

Policy and Strategy Section: Direct access to key U.S. policy documents, presidential directives, national strategy documents, major legislation, and executive orders.

HSDL Blog: On the Homefront, a synopsis of the most recent reports and issues in homeland security. The blog also includes a calendar of upcoming conferences and eventas well as the ability to search across the best homeland security related blogs and bloggers.

Books and Journals: Pointers to commercial sources of homeland security related research.

At https://www.hsdl.org/.

COL Wulfhorst is a graduate of the Armor Officers Basic and Advanced Courses; the MI Officer Transition Course; Counterintelligence and Imagery Analysis Courses; the Signal Officers Advanced Course; the Combined Arms and Services Staff School; the Command and General Staff College, and the Advanced Joint Professional Military Education-II. He holds a BA in History and Russian from The Pennsylvania State University as well as a Master of Education degree in Human Services and Human Resource Administration from Boston University. He holds an MS in Strategic Intelligence from the National Intelligence University and a Master of Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College. He has served in many active duty and reserve assignments, the latest as Director, JRISE, supporting the EUCOM J2 prior to taking command of the 1st BDE (MI), 100th DIV (OS). As a civilian, he is a Supervisory Intelligence Analyst with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Newark NJ Field Office.