INTELLIGENCE PREPARATION OF THE OPERATIONAL AREA

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Abstract: The purpose of this article, is to offer a brief insight about the intelligence preparation of the operational area, which is the first step to be taken when it comes for starting a military operation. Then it becomes a continuous process that is providing situational awareness for all the command structures, by gathering and analyzing all available information about the options of both friendly and enemy forces, before and during a military operation, in a designated area. In recent conflicts, new threats such as terrorism appeared, which means that the situations evolve faster and in a harder to predict way. As a consequence the newest concepts are using every soldier as a sensor, and all information is being processed and transmitted as much as possible, in real time, thus providing the command structures a real time situational awareness. Given this situation, it is obvious that now more than ever, the intelligence preparation of the operational area is of outmost importance.

Keywords: preparation, information, intelligence, awareness, command.

1. THE CONCEPT OF "INTELLIGENCE PREPARATION OF THE OPERATIONAL AREA"

1.1. General aspects

The intelligence preparation of the operational area, is always the first step that must be taken, before commencing any type of operation in a designated area, being a continuous process that begins before taking any offensive or defensive action and ends after the purpose of the operation has been accomplished. Given the previous description, it is easy to understand, that the intelligence preparation of the operational area is a process trough witch all available information in the operational area, is being continuously gathered and analyzed.

Given the permanent evolution of technology and the fact that the types of threats are permanently becoming more and more diverse, the intelligence preparation is becoming a process of which complexity and speed, keeps on increasing so that today it is possible that the decision making structures can even have real time information from the operational area available. This possibility has in many cases become, a necessary possibility, mostly due to the asymmetric character that most conflicts have today.

As a distinction from classic conflicts, where two or more different countries were taking part in the conflict, using regular troops which were easy to identify and also the operational areas, were easy to identify, the asymmetric conflict is a type of conflict in which the involved parts are no longer only different countries, but also private, criminal or terrorist organizations that are fighting each other or against some countries national armies over ideology or in order to gain large sums of money.

In such cases those involved don't have a uniform and are using tactics such as roadside bombs, ambushes, and assassination, due to the lack of resources necessary for sustained combat.

If in the past, the classical character of the conflict was making the intelligence preparation of the battlefield, a less critical process after the beginning of the operations, having as a main purpose to keep track of the overall situation, which was an easy thing to do, nowadays the hybrid character of the conflicts, is making that the intelligence preparation of the operational area to become a critical process both before starting the operations but also during the operations, because the situations are evolving very fast. As an example of fast evolving situation we can use a simple example. We can presume that one man is entering a checkpoint, wearing no uniform and using a civilian car. This man can prove to be a suicidal terrorist that right after entering the checkpoint is detonating the car he is in, thus creating a critical situation in a place where moments ago, the situation was normal. In such cases, in order for the decision makers to be able to handle the situation, it is necessary that the information would reach them without delay, so that control over the situation could be achieved as fast as possible.

In order to achieve that, the newest concept is using each soldier as a sensor, to rely information in real time. In other words, the attacked personnel would send real time information to the decision makers, which would be able to decide without delay which is the best course of action they should use next, in order to reduce as much as possible, the loss of human lives and the loss of materials.

1.2. Specific theoretical aspects

Each time, in order to do the intelligence preparation of the operational area, there are certain general steps that must be followed, keeping in mind the fact that each one of the steps must be adapted to the specific characteristics of each area and each situation. There are a number of four steps that must be taken. These are defining the operational area, describing the effects that the area could have, threat evaluation, and determining all possible enemy courses of action.

Each step, or function, is being exercised continuously in order to always have the latest information, if possible real time information, so that the decisions could be the best possible in order to properly go from one operation to another, in order to achieve the main goal.

1.2.1 Defining the operational area

This is the first step that must be taken and it has the following points that must be achieved:

• Identifying the specific characteristics of the operational area, such as the land characteristics, local weather, temperature, wet or dry environment, type of transport infrastructure, asphalt roads, communication routes, area demography, local population, the number of civilians, religion, local habits. All of this aspects are influencing the operations of all those involved, friendly and enemy operations, so a thorough analysis is necessary in order to be able to make correct decisions at a later time when they will be needed.

• Establishing limitations for the interest zones, which means that it is necessary to delimitate the geographical areas that are of greatest importance for the command structures.

These first two steps also have the role of pointing the areas where sufficient information does not exist, thus fixing these problems becoming possible, in order to know as much as possible about the situation on the field.

1.2.2. Describing the effects of the operational area

This step is about the opportunities for the both parts, which are available in the area, such as political orientation, local population support or local media attitude. These information might prove useful later on, when the courses of action are going to be developed, in order to achieve maximum efficiency.

1.2.3. Threat evaluation

During this step, enemy forces are being analyzed, in order to determine their possibilities. If the identified threats are already known, then historical facts can be used in order to determine the way the enemy might react.

If the threats are of unknown nature, certain observations must be taken during the operations, so that patterns could be created for later use, in such cases being of very high importance the possibility of providing the command structures with real time information.

Furthermore, the enemy's doctrine must be taken in consideration, in order to elaborate predictions which are as precise as possible.

1.2.4. Determining the enemy's most likely courses of action

Step four, the last one of the steps is using all the information gathered during the previous three steps. After all the information about what is the most probable for the enemy to do, about the capabilities the enemy has, about its interest and about the way the environment might influence its possibilities, has been gathered, the enemy's courses of action can be determined and they can be ordered from the most probable to the least probable course of action. Once this was done, the effort must be concentrated on permanently getting the latest information from the operational area, in order to have some type of a heads up, when it comes for the chances that might occur in the enemy's course of action. The courses of action determined at step four, are only valid if:

• A correct analysis has been made when it comes for a few aspects such as friendly forces priorities and the way that the environment is going to affect both friendly and enemy forces.

• All opportunities both for the enemy and friendly forces, were identified in a correct manner.

• Both the way the enemy acts and the way the area is influencing the operations, has been accounted for.

In short words we can say that all the courses of action can't be accounted for in a correct manner, if the first three steps, were node done in a correct manner.

"*If I always appear prepared, it is because before entering on an undertaking, I have meditated for long and foreseen what may occur.*"[1].

1.3. Different levels when it comes for the intelligence preparation of the operational area

Depending on the size of the interest area, distinction can be made between three levels, the intelligence preparation might have. These levels are the tactical level, the operational level and the strategic level.
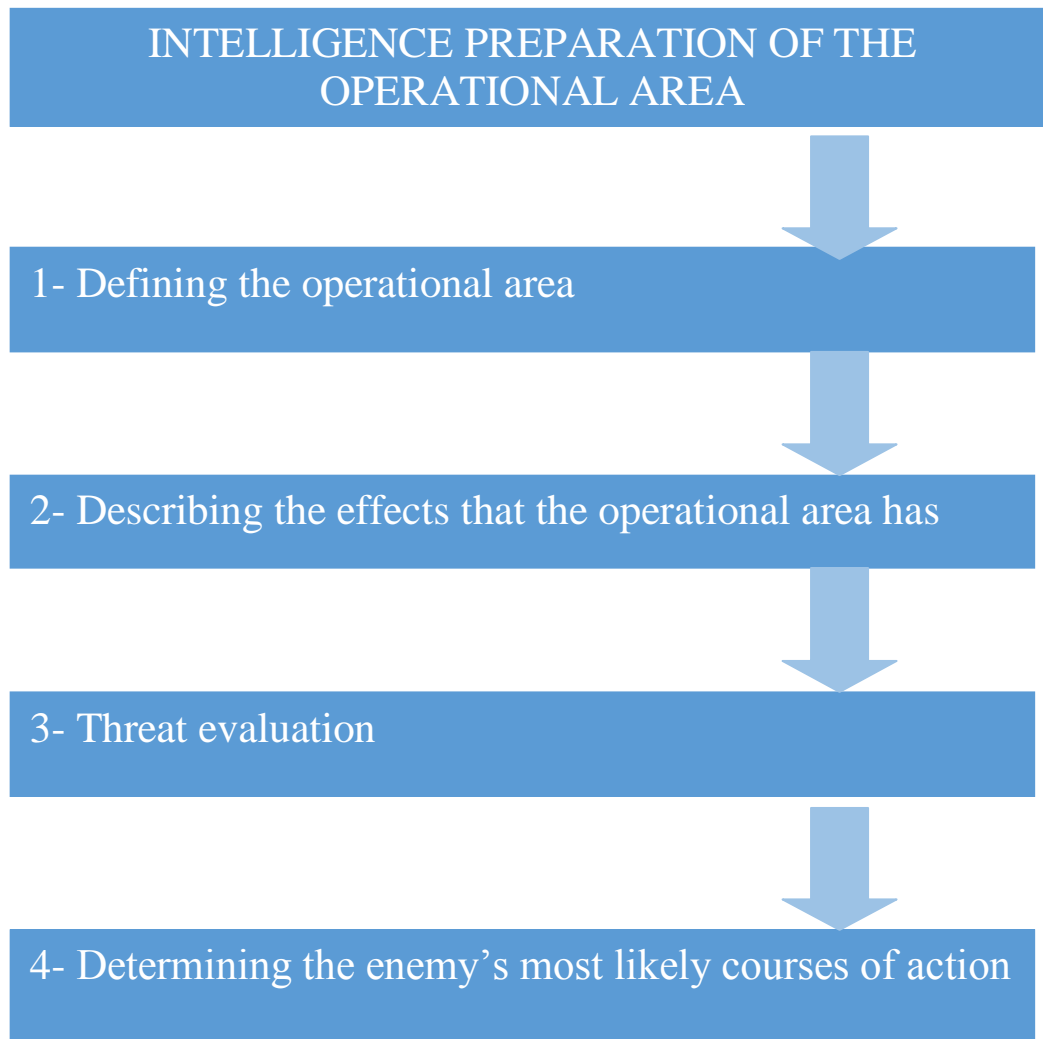
INTELLIGENCE PREPARATION OF THE OPERATIONAL AREA

1- Defining the operational area

2- Describing the effects that the operational area has

3- Threat evaluation

4- Determining the enemy's most likely courses of action

FIG 1: Steps for intelligence preparation of the operational area

1.3.1. Tactical level

This level, in case tactical level units are involved in specific operations, is being limited to the following characteristics:
  - The terrain and weather influence over the operations.
  - The local transport and communications level.
  - The danger generated by specific local disease.
  - Enemy forces references, when it comes for their combat effectiveness and efficiency.
  - Civilian villages' locations.
  - Potential refugees that the operations might have as a side effect and their most likely routes.

- Agreed upon rules of engagement.

In tactical level case the units involved may face limitations such as:
- Local press and propaganda actions.
- Local organizations support or opposition when it comes for the operations.
- Local economy, trading routes.
- Dangerous local criminal organizations.
- Local governments that may be corrupted using various sums of money.

1.3.2. Operational level

In case of this level, additional aspects may be considered, such as:
- Cities where resources or enemy forces might be found.
- Local infrastructure that can be used by the enemy.
- Potential involvement of third organizations that might have some types of interests in the operational area.
- The reaction of local population and local organizations.
- Local law systems.

1.3.3. Strategic level

In this case, some extra aspects must be considered, such as:
-World media support.
-The support of own population, when it comes for the operations.
-The enemy's government ability to deal with the situation.
-Both friendly and enemy forces national economy's ability to support operations of such level.

Given these characteristics, we can determine the character that the operation has.

"*Ironically, our tactical successes did not prevent our strategic failure and North Vietnam's tactical failures did not prevent their strategic success…Our failure as military professional to judge the true nature of Vietnam' war had a profound effect. It resulted in confusion throughout the national security establishment over tactics, grand tactics and strategy…*" [2]

2. CONCLUSIONS OVER THE INTELLIGENCE PREPARATION OF THE OPERATIONAL AREA

Given the new types of threats specific to the modern operational areas, the intelligence preparation of the operational area has become of critical importance, both before starting such operations, but also during their development, the purpose being to achieve a high degree of situational awareness, if possible to achieve real time situational awareness in order to be able to make the best possible decisions at all times.

In this context, it is easy to understand the level of complexity this continuous process might reach, and also it's ever growing importance.

REFFRENCES

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[2] Harry G. Summers-1982, Field Manual 34-130, Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington, DC, 8 July, 1994, page 5-1.