The ~~Mouth Breather's~~ Platoon Leader's Guide to IPB

by CPT Brandon Colas

You! Yes, *you*, platoon leader, are responsible for intelligence preparation of the battlefield.

Yet another acronym, you whimper to yourself. *When will this end? They already made me the fire-safety officer – why am I responsible for something else?*

Well, stop whining! This is important! Even more important than dental appointments and putting "how to respond to a bomb threat" papers by your telephone and posting stickers that remind everyone to "turn the lights off to save electricity because our budget isn't getting any bigger"!

This article, written by a mouth-breather, is for you, a fellow mouth-breather. We'll walk through the steps of IPB and learn how it applies to the Armor platoon leader and the company commander's fight.

IPB is a reference document with two parts. First, we'll discuss how to do IPB; second, we'll look at what the S-2 shop needs from you to help with their IPB at the battalion level.

What is IPB?

IPB is the "systematic, continuous process of analyzing the threat and environment in a specific geographic area." IPB helps the commander determine how to apply his combat power by determining the threat's most likely course of action and describing the environment, and effects of the environment, on both friendly and enemy forces.

A few 'take-aways' based on this definition:

- IPB is a process that is constantly happening because each new fact can change or help clarify our perspective of the battlefield. These facts and trends can come from reading a newspaper reporter's observations or seeing a Raven feed or conducting an after-action review after a firefight.
- IPB is very similar to what you do already during your troop-leading procedures. As you analyze mission, enemy, terrain, troops available, time and civilians, you're looking at both enemy and terrain.

Full-blown IPB for the battalion is the S-2's responsibility. That's why he gets quick access to secret and sometimes top-

secret databases. Also, it's why he works closely with higher elements (like the brigade S-2) and other enablers (like the brigade's military-intelligence company or three-letter government agencies).

While the S-2 shop is responsible for the big picture for the battalion commander, the details that matter for you – and the judgments that affect how you fight your platoon – will need a significant amount of input and work on your part. What did you expect? In other words, drawing from your previous experience, you will need to tailor and assess the products you get from your S-2 shop and company intelligence-support team.

How do I conduct IPB?

IPB takes place in four steps. Let's look at the steps, and then go into more detail.

First, define the battlefield environment. Second, describe the battlefield effects. Third, evaluate the threat. And fourth, determine threat COAs.

Hint: use this section as a checklist. Hence the boxes.

Step 1: define battlefield environment

In this step we identify specific features of the environment or activities therein that may influence COAs. If we do this right, we can save time and effort by intentionally deciding to focus on areas that matter – the ones that will affect the commander's decisions and what the enemy will do.

❑ **Identify significant characteristics of the environment.** (For example, *The Chattahoochee River between Fort Benning and Fort Mitchell is crossed by only one bridge.*)

- Geography, terrain and weather
- Population demographics (ethnic groups, religious groups, age, income, etc.)
- Political factors (role of tribes, gangs, etc.)
- Critical infrastructure (powerplants, hospitals, etc.)

❑ **Identify limits of the command's area of operations and battlespace/ operational environment.**

- This is something higher headquarters gives you.
- Don't forget to consider the area of interest as well (and don't let this become too broad).[1]

❑ **Identify the amount of detail required based on time available.**

❑ **Evaluate existing databases and identify intelligence gaps.**

- Your S-2 shop will have some of this for you. Don't forget that open sources[2] can be of great value for this.
- Don't forget that many of your gaps can be filled through requests for information you send up through your CoIST.

Step 2: describe battlefield effects

In this step, we look at how the battlefield affects, through its effects, both friendly and enemy forces. You may need to read that sentence twice. When we do this right, we help the commander exploit the terrain (and weather, politics and economics, etc.) that best support the operation. It also helps the commander know how to plan deception operations. Evaluate the battlefield *from the perspective of the threat* and from your own as much as possible. In counterinsurgency operations in particular, we look at battlefield effects from the perspective of the local population, besides that of the enemy and friendly sides.

❑ **Terrain analysis**

- Make sure to identify gaps. You've identified that bridge, but how much weight can it sustain? These gaps that you identify help us make reconnaissance plans at battalion, company and platoon levels.
- Observation and fields of fire
- Cover and concealment
- Obstacles
- Key terrain
- Avenues of approach

❑ **Terrain's effects on operations**

- Identify engagement areas and ambush sites
- Identify battle positions, objectives, observation posts, etc.

❑ **Weather analysis and effects**

- Visibility
- Winds
- Precipitation
- Cloud cover
- Temperature and humidity

❑ **Other characteristics**

- What other factors from Step 1 – such as demographics and economics – are going to have a direct affect on how you conduct operations in your AO? This is where you go into detail discussing things like how 51 percent of the population of Pakistan uses only four cell-phone companies and this could affect our information-operations plan if we conduct earthquake relief, etc.

❑ **Describe the battlefield effects on threat and friendly capabilities and broad COAs.**

- Remember, other countries' vehicles and weapons systems are affected in different ways than U.S. vehicles and weapon systems (think about the performance of an AK-47 in extreme weather conditions).

Step 3: evaluate threat

This is when you determine the threat capabilities, doctrinal principles and tactics, techniques and procedures. Note that you are not yet determining what you think the threat *will* do – you're making an assessment about what the enemy *can* do. When you do this right, you're able to effectively evaluate what the threat is capable of doing against our forces.

❑ **Update or create threat models**

- Doctrinal template: looking at databases and an evaluation of past operations, determine how the threat employs his combat forces. This is something the S-2 shop will help you with. For this, think "org chart."
- Description of preferred tactics and options: this goes right along with the doctrinal template, but you go into more detail about actual TTPs. For this, think in terms of how they conduct battle drills and the like. Military and paramilitary forces always follow patterns.

Warfighter function	System	Capabilities	Strengths	Weaknesses	Other
Movement and maneuver	5x T-72 tanks	40 mph hard-ball road 25 mph off-road 500-gallon fuel tank max range of 250 miles 1x122mm cannon 1x12.7mm AA gun thermal sights	4" of steel armor	Maintenance issues Requires particular type of diesel fuel	

Figure 1. A table describing threat capabilities can help you visualize what the enemy has and what those systems can do.

- Identify high-value targets and high-payoff targets: the point of identifying HVTs / HPTs is that you can determine what to fight first and what the threat needs to protect for their operations.

❑ **Description of threat capabilities**: go by warfighter function.[3] Think in terms of what the enemy has and what those systems can do. Time permitting, a table can help. (See Figure 1.)

Step 4: Determine threat COA

This final step identifies the likely threat COAs that can influence accomplishment of the friendly mission. When this is done right, the commander will avoid being surprised by an unanticipated action of the threat.

It might seem like this is the step where we take a wild guess. Wrong! Think about it. There is only one right answer (what the enemy actually does), but if we can anticipate, say, 70 percent of that, we're very well prepared.

Based on what we've already learned and studied about the terrain and weather, as well as what the enemy is equipped with and what the enemy tends to, there are fewer "options" for the enemy than it seems. We don't have to know 100 percent about the enemy to be effective enough to win. We just have to know enough. *Your best guess should never be uneducated.*

❑ **Identify the threat's likely objectives and desired end state.**

- Start with a level above your own (if you're fighting a squad, ask what the platoon would do).
- Objectives and end state are usually assumptions, so keep that in mind.

- Beware of mirror-imaging (other cultures do not think like ours).

❑ **Identify COAs available to the threat.**

- Tie this in to threat doctrine and likely objectives.
- Think about threat COAs that could significantly influence your mission, even if they are less optimal for the enemy.[4]

❑ **Develop each COA in detail.**

- Needs to pass the FADS test: Is it *feasible* (can it happen)? Is it *acceptable* (in terms of risk)? Is it *distinct* (different from the others)? Is it *suitable* (will it meet threat objectives)? If the answer is yes to all these questions, you have a legitimate COA.

❑ **Identify initial collection requirements.**

- Think in terms of what you would need to know to determine if the opposing force was choosing a particular COA. If the enemy was planning on defending a particular hilltop, you'd expect to see fighting positions emplaced. If you don't see said fighting positions, you need to look at the other COAs of the enemy.
- This is where you can do more research on your own[5] and send up RFIs through your CoIST.

How do I contribute to the big picture of the battalion?

Great question! Thanks for asking!

You contribute in two ways.

Debriefs. Debrief reports (Figure 2) are critical to the S-2 shop. Without receiving your perspective on where you went (i.e., terrain) and what happened (i.e., enemy), your shop won't be able to get a full picture of the AO. Your S-2 shop doesn't have the ability to go on patrols as often as you do (although they probably will embed when they can), so you need to serve as their eyes and ears to help merge the other intelligence reports from other battalions, brigade, division, three-letter government agencies and the like. What you see and observe matters;

DATE	Date of report		UNIT	Unit submitting report	
PATROLLER	Senior patrol leader		MISSION TYPE	i.e. reconnaissance, engagement, etc	
SP (DTG)	SP time and date		RP (DTG)	RP time and date	
MISSION (TASK & PURPOSE)		Brief task and purpose of the mission with accompanying brief			
INCIDENT TYPE		Type of significant activity (if any)			
GRID	Point grid of specific actions		FOB/TOWN/CP	Towns, CPs, FOBs operated in	
SUMMARY OF INCIDENT		Short 3-5 sentence summary of patrol events for use on the SIGACT tracker			
ENEMY BDA		As needed			
FRIENDLY BDA		As needed			
RTE TRAFFICABILITY		By route account of trafficability as per route reconnaissance standards			
OBSTACLES		Significant road or route hazards with bypasses if found (with grids)			
SITUATION BRIEF		The detailed, factual account of the partrol from SP to RP. This does not include the patrol leader's opinions *(this goes in the remarks section).* Includes pictures, times and grids - account of radio traffic *(if possible).*			
ENEMY TTPs		Any notable TTPs observed during the patrol to aid the AAR process after mission			
REMARKS		Any opinions the patrol leader or soldiers on patrol may have regarding TTPs, enemy activity, populous interaction or general perceptions			
# OF PERSONS DETAINED		As needed			

Figure 2. Sample of a patrol debrief report.

the quality of the S-2 shop's analysis is only as good as what you tell them!

Based on your reporting, the S-2 shop can build data (including predictive analysis) on attacks based on particular enemy units. And don't just give them "raw data"— please include your own analysis. What you think matters; just make it clear if you are making an assessment or observation.

Feedback. The S-2 is a service shop. If their analysis isn't what you need or isn't right, they need to know. Let your CoIST know when they're wrong (and when they're right). If the imagery they provided wasn't what you were looking for, or was perfect, let them know. If you want to see the interrogation summary of the guy you captured last week or want to make sure he is asked particular questions, tell them. They have some great resources and can tap into much bigger platforms, not only at the brigade level but above that. Work through your CoIST and they'll help get what you need.

CPT Brandon Colas is a staff officer for 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry, Fort Benning, GA. He has also served as an aide-de-camp for both the deputy commanding general for U.S. Division-Center, Baghdad, Iraq, and the director, Iraqi National Counter-Terrorism Force Transition Team, Bagh-dad. Other assignments include deputy secretary of the general staff, Fort Drum, NY, and rifle platoon leader, 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, Fort Drum and Hawijah, Iraq. He earned his commission from Cedarville University, Cedarville, OH, ROTC and is a graduate of the Infantry Officer Basic Course, Military Intelligence Captain's Career Course and Cavalry Leader's Course. His military schooling also includes Airborne School and the Jordanian Peace Operations Training Center course in Amman, Jordan. He holds a bachelor's of arts degree in English and history from Cedarville University.

Notes

[1] Actual quote from a space-operations officer at the Military Intelligence Captain's Career Course: "Your AI isn't just the ground outside your AO! It's 20,000 feet up! It's the sun! And solar flares! You need to brief your commander on solar flares!" Right.

[2] About 90 percent of all intelligence is readily available through the Internet, newspapers, magazines and books. It's the analysis that turns it from data into a truly valuable product. If you don't have an opensource.gov account, you should open one today. Also, intel soldiers get access to more data on this site – remember that as your CoIST is developed.

[3] You know: movement and maneuver, fires, intelligence, sustainment, command-and-control and protection.

[4] For example, think about what happens when a soldier is kidnapped while down-range. Everything stops, and everything focuses on recovery. One lost soldier costs far more resources for U.S. forces than a spectacular attack on a humvee or mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicle.

[5] For example, you can refer to Field Manual 2-01.3, ***Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield*** (new); FM 2-19.4, ***Brigade Intelligence Operations***; FM 2-91.4, ***Intelligence Support to Urban Operations***; FM 34-8, ***Intelligence for Commanders***; FM 34-130, **Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield** (old); and Training Circular 7-100, ***Hybrid Threat***.