SPECIAL INTELLIGENCE TARGETING IN KANDAHAR CITY, 2011-2012

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During a deployment to Afghanistan during 2011 and 2012, my multifunction team (MFT 3301) conducted more than 300 combat patrols and detained 108 high-value individuals (HVIs) from target lists spanning every echelon between company and theater levels. My team's keys to success were innovation, adaptability, and the trust to operate freely within our commander's intent. This article is a brief summary of my team's story and a small analysis of our successes.

The sun leaned on the Soldiers — a stale desert heat that sapped both will and strength from all beneath it. I was a newly appointed second lieutenant given charge of an MFT.

Kandahar City's Camp Nathan Smith (CNS) was where we would lay our heads while away from hearth and home for the next 12 months. It was July and it was hot. We were part of the main effort against the insurgency in Regional Command South (RC-S), and we were there to do one thing: catch bad guys. We were understrength, of course. Of the 12 Soldiers (including me) that I was supposed to have, I deployed with eight — one of whom would depart after only three months to exit the Army. The team was composed of two signals intelligence (SIGINT) Soldiers, five human intelligence (HUMINT) Soldiers — one of whom was the NCOIC — and me. Despite the manning shortage, our morale was high; we were excited at the prospect of doing our job and experiencing a great deployment.

After completing the reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) training at Kandahar Airfield (KAF), the team moved to CNS to fulfill a direct support role to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 4th Infantry Division. We settled into our living area and took the tour of the forward operating base (FOB). CNS was small but had many of the conveniences of the so-called mega-FOBs like KAF and Bagram with fewer people and therefore fewer headaches. After the quick tour, I went up to meet with the BCT S2 at the headquarters, find my team room, and get to work.

After meeting with the S2, I met with the assistant S3, who in turn paired me with the BCT's scout platoon. The scout platoon leader (PL) and I divided up sections of his platoon into primary and secondary assault forces, exploitation/search teams, and security teams. Each section of his platoon was augmented with a member or members of my MFT to support the appropriate effort (direction finders [DF] with each assault team and battlefield forensics experts with each exploitation team). I would remain paired with the PL and provide any additional guidance or updates via tactical radio. This was the disposition of what would become "Team CNS" — the 2nd BCT, 4th ID focused targeting force.

Photos by SGT Brendan Mackie

A Soldier with the 163rd Military Intelligence Battalion, 504th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, speaks with members of the Afghan Border Police before hitting a possible weapons cache site during an operation near Yaro Kalay, Afghanistan, on 4 June 2012.

Innovation

The brigade commander had a three-fold operational focus for our mission in Kandahar City. This was:

1) Maintain pressure on the insurgency,
2) Disrupt insurgent networks, and
3) Prevent spectacular attacks.

If we were able to accomplish these tasks, then he would have the white space necessary to focus on transitioning authority back to the local government and reducing tactical infrastructure throughout Kandahar City.

Because of the nature of Kandahar City, we began to develop a training plan on CNS that would keep us sharp in the event of a planned patrol or time-sensitive target (TST). We trained with our targeting equipment and incorporated members of the scout platoon into that training. We learned to move as one unit — each DF Soldier would lead one of the assault teams. We would practice running, walking, maneuvering all throughout CNS. We were able to zero in on our practice targets quickly — usually within minutes of the beginning of the drill. Being able to communicate nonverbally with the assault teams reaped huge dividends as the entire element could seamlessly move along an azimuth and then fluidly change direction without any disruption in momentum or violence of action.

Knowing that Kandahar City was an environment conducive to special intelligence (SI) targeting, it seemed prudent to leverage all of the appropriate assets to support that effort. Seeing as how our team room was already in headquarters, we brought in a SI analyst to work directly with the team and moved a radio and a Blue Force Tracker (BFT) into the office so that we could have reach-back all the way back into our databases while out on patrol. This simple arrangement became an SI operations cell capable of launching and monitoring an SI-enabled focused targeting force throughout all of Kandahar City and surrounding rural areas. The flexibility gained by the patrolling team to conduct SI-enabled raids and on-site exploitation, analysis, and re-tasking turned a conventional Army formation of 35 Soldiers into a formidable targeting force that would systematically take down network after network of insurgents in Kandahar City.

CPT Michael Lewis, a 2007 West Point graduate, served as an MFT leader for Alpha Company, 163rd Military Intelligence Battalion, 504th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade (BfSB). He had previously deployed to Iraq in 2009 where his team was pushed far from the flagpole. He worked in Mosul, and the 504th was near Baghdad. "It was difficult for us to get supplies; in fact I had to barter with the unit that I was directly supporting because it was logistically difficult for the 163rd to support me. It's hard to get a supply drop when you are a one-hour flight from your parent unit," Lewis said, "Finally, I had to get the brigade involved to ensure that we were supplied."

During that deployment, Lewis augmented the scout platoon and they became the brigade's TST team. His MFT followed the same basic procedure as my team would in Afghanistan two years later — trigger initiated the mission

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and then complete a sensitive site exploitation (SSE) in hopes for a follow-on mission. This was particularly helpful in a target rich environment. Because the area offered so many opportunities to be out of the gate enroute to the objective, many missions would begin right after the other ended. They worked the target decks of every echelon in Iraq. CPT Lewis's MFT detained multiple high-level targets during his rotation.

"Our rest plan was energy drinks," Lewis joked.

This is a great example of how, while Team CNS did not reinvent the wheel, we took lessons learned from previous teams and improved upon them. Adding a reach-back capability to the patrols on the ground proved to be one of the most significant improvements.

Adaptability

Military Intelligence analysis is by its nature required to be flexible. Threats evolve and adapt new tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs); one enemy falls and gives way to another, different threat with a different problem set to solve. Situations do not fall into a particular pattern exposing a particular end from the beginning. On the contrary, the rapid development of enemy situations is not measured in days or weeks but in hours. Two methodologies of analysis are espoused in the intelligence community: the formal military decision-making process (MDMP) that follows a strict metric tested both by time and application and has shown to be empirically reliable, and the thin-slicing method that derives rapid conclusions based on limited information in a very short time which also promises accurate results.

In addition to adding the reach-back capability, we were also fortunate enough to provide SI support to some of the other agencies that were supporting RC-S. Each of these organizations worked under different rules and had different capabilities as well as internal goals. Providing support to these entities required a great deal of flexibility — moving from SI-focused targeting to HUMINT targeting with minimal notice, chasing dynamic targets across the battlefield, operating at night and during the day, and oftentimes conducting multiple patrols a day. One of the hallmarks of working with these groups was the time-sensitive nature of many of their targets. It was not unusual for us to be

activated in the middle of the night for an unexpected night raid as a target moved into our area of operations (AO). It was a standard practice for Team CNS to leave the gate at 0200 and return at 0600 with an HVI in custody, only to be retasked and sent after another target by 0800. We were good, we knew we were good, and we had fun being good at what we did.

The adaptability of Team CNS to pivot between deliberate planning and relying on developed TTPs allowed us to seamlessly integrate into a variety of formations with exceedingly positive results.

One of the seminal events during our deployment was a series of operations that took place in the autumn of 2011. These operations were aimed

Soldiers with Security Force Assistance Team 8 and the 163rd Military Intelligence Battalion evaluate local terrain features during a dismounted patrol in Enjergay, Afghanistan, on 2 June 2012.

at repelling a cell from a transnational terrorist network that had moved into Kandahar City with the intent to conduct violence in conjunction with the International Day of Peace. RC-S determined that between 30 and 35 of these terrorists had infiltrated the city and began working as day-laborers while planning spectacular attacks against RC-S Afghan leadership during the peace day conference.

It was an early Monday morning when we were called into the operations center and briefed on the situation. We were told that there were more than 30 of these fighters that had moved into the area, and we were given target information on 11 key individuals within the network that were definitely in Kandahar City. That first day, Team CNS actively targeted each of these 11 individuals and successfully detained eight of them. Through incidental collection and analysis on the objective, we concluded that we also detained an additional six individuals who were part of the 30-plus fighters in the area for whom we did not have accurate targeting data but did confirm through biometrics and tactical questioning. The following two days were similarly successful, adding to a grand total of 23 of the 35 fighters that were eventually detained. Team CNS was responsible for the capture of two-thirds of the terrorists in that network in Kandahar City; the other four agencies working in the area detained the remaining 12 individuals.

How did we accomplish this? Adaptability. We did not sit and wait for the targets to come to us, but we actively pursued them. When one target fell out of range, we could dynamically re-task ourselves to hunt down the next on the list. At one point while on the objective and going through a tactical-questioning session with a detained individual, one of my Soldiers identified another target approximately one kilometer away from our current position. He, with

my consent and the consent of the scout PL, took a small group of Soldiers and positively identified and detained him as well, bringing him from the point of capture back to our detainee holding area. It didn't require an elaborate pre-planned checklist, just a Soldier's initiative and adaptability. This brings me to my final key to success — trust.

Trust

After the initial series of successes that Team CNS had in detaining HVIs in Kandahar City, the brigade commander trusted us. He trusted the operational center, trusted the capability of the team, and trusted that we would achieve results. He knew that the team would deliver real effects on the operational environment because we had a proven methodology that would satisfy his three-fold guidance.

We maintained pressure on the insurgency by consistently being on patrol. Even our presence patrols had an effect because we would purposefully enter enemy support zones. We disrupted insurgent networks by removing HVIs from all warfighting functions, rendering the enemy's ability to conduct any operations in Kandahar City completely null. We did not focus on only targeting leaders or facilitators within insurgent networks; we also actively targeted low-level fighters (improvised explosive device [IED] emplacers, for example). By removing this seemingly small aspect of the network, the insurgents were unable to successfully carry out attacks.

Team CNS was intelligence driven. We did not leave the FOB unless we had credible targets that could realistically be targeted and held in detention. Once a potential target met the threshold for derogatory reporting, we would launch and usually detain within a few hours. On-site exploitation would either lead to follow-on targets or feed the post-operation

analysis and dissemination function of the targeting cycle to develop future target sets and even illuminate additional networks.

In his book, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, Malcolm Gladwell discusses the idea of "thin-slicing." Thin-slicing is a term used in psychology and philosophy to describe the ability to find patterns in events based only on "thin slices," or narrow windows, of experience. Using this notion, Gladwell suggests that in the first few moments of an experience, or at the initial exposure to something new, the mind very quickly generates impressions, decisions, and judgments at the unconscious level. These impressions, decisions, and judgments are the root of the hunch or "gut-feeling" that are experienced when there is little or no evidence dictating that a conclusion should be made.

The preponderance of intelligence that was analyzed and acted upon bred the trust that became the lifeblood of our operations. For better or worse, we were a personality-driven organization that was built around a culture of trust. The right people using the right skills at the right time to generate the appropriate and desired effects.

Team CNS was visited by representatives from the Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG), the Army Cryptological Office, the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), the RC-S commander, and the 504th BfSB commander. During every encounter, we happily explained how we operated and why we were successful. Furthermore, we learned from each of these visitors. We were always open to advice on how to better execute our missions. Our methodologies were captured and taught to our relief as we prepared to return home after a successful deployment. Additionally, the TTPs that we developed were captured by CALL and AWG and entered into their training programs for the broader Army.

The key takeaway from this article is that enthusiastic Soldiers with the freedom to be innovative and adaptive and the trust of their higher command will make the Army better in any capacity. With doctrine and lessons learned as a baseline, adaptive and innovative leaders will develop better ways of doing things.

Team CNS conducted more than 300 combat patrols and detained 108 HVIs. We reset the 2nd BCT, 4th ID high-value target list several times, caught HVIs in multiple battalion areas of operations, and supported theater targeting by detaining joint task force (JTF)-level targets. The keys to the success of Team CNS were innovation, adaptability, and the trust to operate freely within our commander's intent. To quote the 504th BFSB commander, we "contributed to the irreversible momentum toward victory."

References
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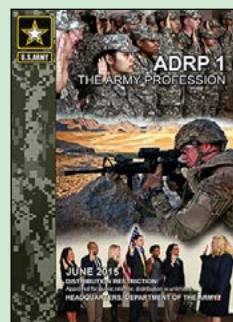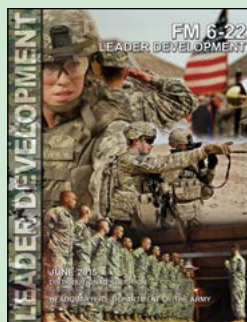
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