

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity and Service-Level Intelligence Support

The past, present, and future

by Capt Lonnie W. Carraway & the Staff of Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

On 1 February 1988, the 29th CMC, Gen Alfred M Gray, established the Marine Corps Intelligence Center (MCIC) as a subordinate element of the newly formed Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC). The MCIC’s mission was “to provide threat analysis, intelligence awareness, and support to MCCDC and tenant activities, and for such external activities as may be directed.”¹ The nascent MCIC was resourced solely from existing headquarters structure until the Marine Corps secured funding in the President’s fiscal year 1990–1991 budget to hire Intelligence Community (IC)-funded analysts. In a letter to the Director of Naval Intelligence in June 1989, Gen Gray emphasized the importance of this funding, stating that it “offers the prospect of significant relief against the severe shortfalls in the availability of tailored intelligence essential to our mission of training, equipping, and organizing expeditionary forces.”² Gen Gray further elaborated that “our small Service facility will play a critical role by ensuring the collection and production of others is exploited and tailored to our unique Service mission needs.”³ He closed the letter by emphasizing that IC funding for MCIC, which would serve as the Marine Corps’ first and only Service-level intelligence center (SIC), ranks as his

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programmatic priority for intelligence and is “representative of my conviction that the Corps must be ‘fighting smart’ if it is to meet the combined challenge of an austere fiscal environment and an increasingly lethal and dynamic expeditionary threat universe.”⁴

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The historical record shows that the nascent MCIC quickly got to work in realizing the potential that the Commandant had envisioned. The center’s command chronology for 1990 reflects that in its second full year of operations its assigned complement of nine Marine

officers, fifteen Marine enlisted, and ten civilians were decisively engaged across all aspects of MCCDC planning and decision-making processes.⁵ MCIC personnel participated in multiple mission area analyses (the precursor to the capability-based assessment process), served as active members in multiple study advisory committees, participated in Service-level wargames, served as Marine Corps representatives on a Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency Joint Armor/Antiarmor Program, leveraged IC expertise to better understand the threat to the MV-22 Osprey, and coordinated IC subject-matter experts to brief the MCCDC commanding general on topics of special interest.

In 1990, the center published the first iteration of a new, comprehensive product intended to inform all aspects of Marine Corps Capability Development, titled “Overview of Planning and Programming Factors for Expeditionary Operations.” The lead author of the study, MCIC Deputy Robert Steele, explained in a 1991 *Gazette* article that the

MCIC's analytic efforts would address Gen Gray's concern that the Marine Corps cannot rely on the other Services to design and field military systems appropriate to the Marine Corps (i.e., lightweight and suitable for amphibious operations and sustainable in the field with minimal external dependencies). The study looked country-by-country at threat, weather, and terrain factors that would impact the viability of future Marine Corps systems and capabilities.⁶

By 1991, Gen Gray put into motion the next major evolution for the SIC—its organizational realignment from MCCDC to the Marine Corps Director of Intelligence. In a 1991 CMC White Letter, Gen Gray re-emphasized his commitment to the Center as “the institutional vehicle by which our Service exploits and augments existing defense intelligence capabilities in order to make sound decisions about our force structure for the future.”⁷ The CMC expressed his intent to further evolve the center's organization “consistent with the intelligence reorganizations and consolidations taking place within the other Services and to ensure a strong and equal voice for the Marine Corps within the defense intelligence community” by organizationally aligning the Center under the Marine Corps Director of Intelligence as a “tenant activity at Quantico, fully integrated into day-to-day operations of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command and the Marine Corps Research, Development, and Acquisition Command.”⁸ Shortly thereafter Gen Gray's intent was realized, with the former Marine Corps Intelligence *Center* re-designated as the Marine Corps Intelligence *Activity* (MCIA) established as a field activity under the Director of Intelligence's cognizance. The newly established MCIA's mission included the following:

- “Support the ... CMC and his staff in his role as the Marine Corps member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.”
- “Support the development of service unique doctrine, force structure, training, and education, and acquisition policy and programming.”
- “Support Fleet Marine Force contingency planning and other requirements for intelligence products which are not

satisfied by either theater, other service, or national research and analysis capabilities.”⁹

MCIA's fifteen specified tasks included the requirement to “provide mid and long-range intelligence products to inform the Marine Corps Concept-based Requirements System (CBRS) and Research and Development (R&D),” to “provide support to MCCDC in the development of intelligence concepts, doctrine and requirements,” to “serve as the Service Threat Validator for threats and assessments used in Service concepts, plans, and scenarios,” to “prepare the threat portions of Marine Corps plans, and particularly the Marine Corps Long-Range Plan, and the Marine Corps Campaign Plan,” to “provide

rect, on-the-ground support to tactical requirements. MCIA published a slew of new specialized products intended to support the warfighter at the tactical level, to include Compound Maps, Cultural Intelligence Smart Cards, Country Handbooks, and General Intelligence Requirement Handbooks.

While the Global War on Terror pivoted MCIA increasingly toward tactical-level support to the warfighter, another emerging factor also had significant implications for MCIA's day-to-day focus and organizational alignment. As a recipient of IC funding, MCIA gained formal responsibilities to serve as an active participant in the Defense Intelligence Enterprise's federated intelligence analysis and production

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threat, terrain, and general intelligence support to wargaming activities,” to “provide tailored threat support to all MARCORSSYSCOM programs with specific threat and terrain assessments ... (and for) other service S&TI organizations,” to “ensure technical threat support is available to the Marine Corps Operational Test & Evaluation Activity,” to “identify intelligence collection and production gaps of specific concern to the Marine Corps as a service,” among others.¹⁰

Throughout the Global War on Terror era, MCIA support to the originally envisioned Service-level functions declined in favor of increased direct support to the operating forces. MCIA was decisively engaged in support of tactical formations, providing a variety of products and services to include all-source analysis, geospatial intelligence, identity intelligence, and full-motion video processing exploitation and dissemination. MCIA regularly deployed elements forward to the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters to enable di-

program. Initially termed the Defense Intelligence Production Program and later the Defense Intelligence Analysis Program (DIAP), the intent of the program was to assign specific topic areas for which each SIC would serve as the subject-matter expert on behalf of the entire community. Each center would produce foundational intelligence on their assigned topics and support the requirements of other community members relative to those assigned topics. The intent was to reduce redundancy and ensure a consistent community-wide analytic line on key intelligence questions. Examples of topics assigned to MCIA included Naval Infantry and Marine Forces of the World, Police Forces of the World, Amphibious Combat Vehicles, and Amphibious Points of Entry.

The intent of DIAP was never to compel the SICs to align themselves solely as producers of intelligence on their assigned topics. On the contrary, the initial directive that established DIAP in 2005 specifically charges all DIAP participants to “perform primary

analysis—if the topic is within their assigned area of responsibility—or to apply the analysis of others to meet their customer’s intelligence requirements.”¹¹ However, over the ensuing years, the imperative to serve as a credible producer against assigned DIAP responsibilities had significant implications for MCIA’s organizational and operational alignment. In short, MCIA became very good at producing original analysis as the IC lead on narrowly-defined DIAP topics, but the organization’s capability to “apply the analysis of others to meet their customer’s (i.e. Marine Corps Service-level) requirements,” in line with DIAP guidance and CMC Gray’s original intent, began to atrophy.¹² Institutional memory of MCIA’s originally-envisioned and exceedingly well-defined role for intelligence support to Service requirements gradually faded.

MCIA and Force Design 2030

The *National Defense Strategy* of 2018 and the *38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance* in 2019 set in motion a watershed moment for the Marine Corps. The intelligence requirements to realize the Commandant’s vision were immense. MCIA quickly began to receive a wide array of requests for intelligence analysis and support from across the Force Development Enterprise (FDE)—requirements that in many cases the command was ill-equipped to address. This served as a catalyst for MCIA to quickly undergo a period of rapid organizational evolution in an effort to keep pace with these emergent demands for Service-level support—going back to its roots as a SIC oriented primarily on Service-level requirements.

To conceptualize Service-level intelligence support during this period of change, MCIA developed three lines of effort (LOE) in 2020 to guide its support of *Force Design 2030*, as well as other Service-level requirements. The LOEs are as follows: understand how the pacing threat thinks, acts, and fights, deliver decision advantage, and integrate and enhance the mission. The first two LOEs emphasized the imperative that MCIA analysts must understand the pacing threat and the associated problem set holistically—not solely focused on

MCIA’s narrow DIAP-defined areas of expertise. LOE 1 demanded that MCIA analysts must be conversant in all aspects of the IC’s understanding of the pacing threat that bears on Service-level planning and decision-making. Just as importantly, LOE 2 necessitated that MCIA integrate with Service-level planning and decision making processes—delivering decision advantage through the application of tailored products and services that meaningfully inform those Service processes. LOE 3 was oriented on the development of the internal processes to ensure resources were appropriately aligned against these command priorities.

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MCIA developed new product lines tailored to the Deputy Commandant for Combat Development & Integration (DC CD&I) and the FDE.¹³ From an analysis and production standpoint, MCIA reoriented its Service-level support through the establishment of the Pacing Threat Running Estimate Series, the Tailored Capability Threat Assessment Series, Maritime Reconnaissance & Counter-Reconnaissance Series, and Characterization of the Littoral Environment Series.

Pacing Threat Running Estimate (PTRE) Series

The PTRE presents a broad assessment of identified pacing threats of interest and concern to the USMC. The intent of this product is to provide a standard reference, grounded in authoritative IC analysis and tailored to the needs of the FDE. The PTRE compiles IC analysis and MCIA analysis

in a single location, leveraging Marine Corps subject-matter expertise to translate the overall impacts to the Service. The product serves as MCIA’s primary internal tool to track previously identified gaps relative to the pacing threat and to manage and assess MCIA’s efforts to close those gaps via organic collection capabilities or engagement with external partners.

Tailored Capability Threat Assessment (TCTA) Series

Just as MCIA’s first command deputy, Robert Steele, initially identified in 1991, capability and concept development must be grounded in a granular understanding of weather, enemy, and terrain factors in likely future operating areas. Moreover, these intelligence considerations must be factored in as early as possible in the capability and concept development processes. In 1990, MCIA unveiled the “Intelligence Support for Expeditionary Planners” product to address these imperatives, in 2021 MCIA established the Tailored Capability Threat Assessment (TCTA) series to do the same. The TCTA product line provides a focused, granular assessment of the unmitigated threat and environmental considerations that would impact a particular Marine Corps concept, capability, or system within discrete future expected operating areas (as defined by Defense Planning Scenarios that underpin USMC capability development efforts writ large). The TCTA series assesses threats and opportunities for Marine Corps capabilities across a number of parameters, including sensor threats, kinetic and non-kinetic effects threats, weather and terrain impacts, and access, basing, and overflight considerations. MCIA is integrated with CD&I capability integration officers for the development of new TCTAs, with key findings informing the drafting of capability development documents, as well as Program Objective Memorandum (POM) planning.

Maritime Reconnaissance and Counter-Reconnaissance (M-RXR) Series

The M-RXR series provides a detailed look at a particular environment across the range of enemy, weather, and



Rapid growth requires constant feedback. (Image provided by author.)

terrain considerations. The series focuses on impacts on the M-RXR mission set. This classified product is being developed in parallel with an unclassified Future Operating Environment product focused on M-RXR considerations for Marines. The intent of the M-RXR product is to complement and inform ongoing Service-level experimentation, as well as concept and capability development related to M-RXR. It also serves as a forcing function to further enhance MCIA's integration with the Office of Naval Intelligence and other IC partners concerned with maritime threats and the maritime domain.

Characterization of the Littoral Environment (CLE) Series

The CLE series provides a series of advanced analytic layers focused on geographically bounded areas of maritime key terrain. The series provides granular detail on the threats and opportunities within the littoral operating environment, especially from a weather and terrain standpoint, to inform force developers. This is particularly important as the Marine Corps continues to aggressively explore options for littoral mobility and sustainment.

In addition to these new analysis and production efforts, MCIA has been

equally engaged from a process perspective to ensure effective integration with Service-level planning and decision-making processes. Historically, the primary mechanism by which MCIA supported Service requirements was via a Request for Information (RFI)-based process. Individual action officers from across the FDE and other Service headquarters elements articulated their requirements via an RFI submission, and MCIA attempted to prioritize and

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respond to each request individually. MCIA focus areas and resource allocation were driven by the registered RFIs of those individual action officers who were aware of MCIA capabilities and how to request them. The extent to which these RFIs were aligned to the Service's most pressing requirements var-

ied significantly. In some cases, MCIA fielded competing RFIs from multiple action officers all working on varying aspects of the same problem set, generating significant inefficiencies as inter-related requirements competed against themselves. The volume of Service-level intelligence requirements extended far beyond MCIA's capacity to adjudicate every discrete requirement. MCIA since recognized that effective execution of MCIA's Service-level responsibilities requires an approach that is broadly comparable to the role of a G-2 on a General Officer-level staff. MCIA must maximize utilization of finite capacity, informing as many key Service-level decision points as completely and efficiently as possible. This imperative has led to the establishment of a Concept of Support-based Model, by which MCIA develops and executes a pre-established set of activities in support of various Service-level processes, thus ensuring a repeatable and well-understood set of intelligence support functions. This model reduces the need for individual action officers to register ad hoc RFIs based on their own understanding of how or when MCIA should integrate with a given planning and decision-making process. Three representative examples of this concept of support-based approach are the MCIA Concept of Support to POM Planning, Marine Corps Campaign of Learning, and the Joint Capability Integration & Development System

Support to the Marine Corps Program Objective Memorandum

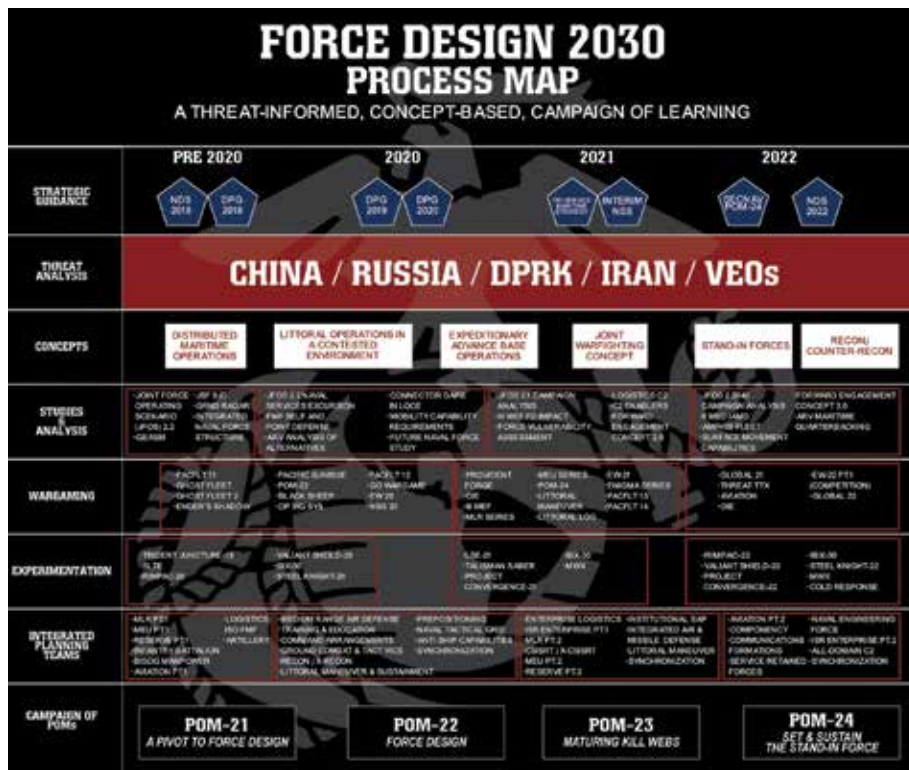
MCIA integration into the POM planning cycle included support to the Marine Corps Strategic Assessment (MCSA) managed by the Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations (DC PP&O), current POM planning managed by Marine Corps Integration Division within Capabilities Development Directorate, DC CD&I, and the transition for POM execution managed by Deputy Commandant for Programs & Resources. MCIA maintains regular participation alongside HQMC counterparts in the development of the MCSA. MCIA inputs describe the future security environment and impacts on Marine Corps warfight-

ing functions, which serves to inform the following year’s POM planning efforts.

MCIA directly participates in the POM planning process through principal-level participation in the bi-weekly Capability Portfolio Integration Board in addition to the monthly Capability Portfolio Review Board. MCIA coordinates high pay-off intelligence engagements for POM planners. POM Planners also are principal recipients of MCIA’s Quarterly Update Briefs for the FDE, which capture the latest updates to the Pacing Threat Running Estimate Series, the analytic findings from the latest Tailored Capability Threat Assessments, and key outputs from other high-priority analyses and production over the previous quarter. MCIA also provides direct inputs to CD&I POM planning documents such as recommended facts, assumptions, and limitations for problem framing or Annex B documents in support of POM transition.

Support to the Marine Corps Campaign of Learning (CoL).

The CoL is the institutional vehicle by which the Service determines information gaps that must be addressed in order to inform decision making for *Force Design 2030*. These information gaps are framed as learning demands. CoL activities include integrated planning teams, analytic studies, wargames, and FMF experimentation. Since 2019, MCIA has provided extensive intelligence support to CoL activities, particularly Service-level wargames and integrated planning teams. Over the course of 2021–2022, MCIA developed a comprehensive approach to develop and refine the prioritization schema for CoL activities based on CD&I priorities as well as the assessed “intelligence sensitivity” of each CoL activity (in other words, the extent to which intelligence support is likely to meaningfully impact outcomes and recommendations for each activity). MCIA is now an active participant in the Learning Demand Working Group, which provides an institutional mechanism to validate and prioritize MCIA’s support of various CoL activities. Moreover, MCIA generates new intelligence analysis and pro-



Force Design 2030 process map. (Photo provided by author.)

duction in direct response to designated intelligence-related learning demands identified within the construct of the CoL. The annual CoL plan reflects MCIA’s responsibility to provide the FDE with a quarterly brief that summarizes key findings from MCIA’s latest CoL-related intelligence analysis. Moreover, any analysis and production directly tied to a CoL intelligence learning demand are designated as a top priority for adjudication within the latest iteration of MCIA’s Command Intelligence Prioritization Framework.

Support to Joint Capability Integration & Development System (JCIDS)

MCIA’s persistent requirements to the FDE include regulatory and non-regulatory support under the auspices of the Joint Capability Integration & Development System and applicable DOD regulations that govern acquisitions. These requirements mandate particular threat inputs at certain milestones for a program to progress through the acquisitions process. This is done primarily in three ways: inclusion of threat summaries within capability develop-

ment documents (Tailored Capability Threat Assessments serve as a classified annex for these capability development documents), development of a Validated On-line Lifecycle Threat assessments, and support for drafting and registering of Critical Intelligence Parameters to identify any changes in the threat or operating environment that fundamentally impact the viability of a particular Marine Corps program.

Support to Marine Corps Protection

As with the formal acquisitions process, MCIA has initiated significant efforts to support Service-level functions for the protection of critical programs and technologies. Requirements for critical programs and technologies focus on protecting capabilities to preserve the Marine Corps’ strategic advantage and are largely of a counterintelligence nature. This effort begins in the “idea” phase or even at the level of academia and carries through to the fielding and use phase of capability development. Modern Day Marine Military Exposition is a great demonstration of capabilities that are presented to authorized individuals

in the Defense Sector of up-and-coming developmental products.¹⁵

Consistently, MCIA maintains a role in support of contingency and crisis operations. This has not changed throughout its history. CMC Gen David Berger has reaffirmed this requirement in the *Force Design 2030* annual update, “the Marine Corps remains an expeditionary crisis response force.”¹⁶ Wherever Marines are risking life and limb, their SIC has a responsibility to provide support for their respective geographic combat-

tematically process and exploit reporting from all relevant intelligence disciplines simultaneously and to disseminate the fused intelligence at the speed of decision. The implications are dramatic, not just for the warfighter but also for enabling Service-level decision-making. For example, how does the Service leverage these technologies to identify in real-time when a Critical Intelligence Parameter for one of its programs of record is breached or potentially breached? How does the Service understand in

2. Gen Alfred Gray, *Marine Corps Intelligence Initiatives and Objectives*, (Washington, DC: 1989).

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. *Marine Corps Combat Development Command Chronology*.

6. Robert Steele, “Intelligence Support for Expeditionary Planners,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 75, no. 9 (1991).

7. Gen Alfred Gray, “White Letter 2-91 USMC Intelligence Center,” (Washington, DC: June 1991).

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. United States Marine Corps, “Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (Previously Center) Table of Organization 7451,” (Quantico, VA: 28 May 1993).

11. U.S. Department of Defense, *GDIP Directive No. 006*, (Washington, DC: October 2005).

12. Ibid.

13. Components of DC CD&I: Capabilities Development Directorate, Futures Directorate/ Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, and Operations Analysis Directorate, Marine Corps Systems Command also functions as part of the FDE.

14. Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: July 2019).

15. United States Government Accountability Office, *DOD Critical Technologies: Plans for Communicating, Assessing, and Overseeing Protection Efforts Should be Completed*, (Washington, DC: January 2021).

16. Gen David H. Berger, *Force Design 2030 Annual Update*, (Washington, DC: May 2022).

>The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the DOD or the U.S. Government.

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ant commands or component Marine force commands lack the capability or capacity. This includes the responsibility of informing senior policy and decision makers within HQMC, up to and including the CMC as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff responsible for providing his informed advice and recommendations to the National Command Authority of imminent crisis events the world over.

The Future of MCIA and Service-level Intelligence Support

As MCIA sustains recent gains in the re-assertion of its historical roles in supporting Service-level functions and supporting the formal acquisitions process, the SIC will continue to evolve in support of the mission. Technology has enabled access to reporting streams that were previously stovepipes by each intelligence discipline’s disparate systems. Today, all-source intelligence analysts have access to exquisite data streams far beyond what was conceivable even in the recent past. Additionally, the application of data science tools and artificial intelligence/machine learning capabilities are used to address problems and automate analytic processes. These emergent technologies allow analysts to solve complex analytic issues in an accelerated timeframe to enhance operational effectiveness. The challenge now is to sys-

tematically process and exploit reporting from all relevant intelligence disciplines simultaneously and to disseminate the fused intelligence at the speed of decision. The implications are dramatic, not just for the warfighter but also for enabling Service-level decision-making. For example, how does the Service leverage these technologies to identify in real-time when a Critical Intelligence Parameter for one of its programs of record is breached or potentially breached? How does the Service understand in

real-time what the intelligence reveals related to adversary reactions to newly publicized Marine Corps capabilities or concepts? MCIA, together with other Marine Corps Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Enterprise stakeholders, is fully immersed in arriving at answers to these and related questions. Threat informing Marine Corps force development is a fundamental requirement to ensure the Marine Corps is “fighting smart” as Gen Gray described during the early years of the MCIC/MCIA. Consistently punching above its weight class, MCIA embodies the mantra of *doing more with less* for the services it performs to the Marine Corps—services generally accomplished by a dramatically larger workforce arrayed across multiple different organizations in the other DOD components. The mission is worthy of the best and brightest that the Marine Corps and National Capital Region have to offer—the potential impacts span decades, with the success of future missions, the lives of our future Marines, and the viability of billions in investments on the line.

Notes

1. Marine Corps History Division, *Marine Corps Combat Development Command Chronology*, (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 1988).

