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INTELLIGENCE REACHBACK REQUIRES ANALYSTS FORWARD

by

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The contents of this paper reflect my personal opinions and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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| 15. Abstract: Although intelligence reachback provided significant support to Task Force 58's (TF-58) combat operations in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the presence of intelligence analysts forward was critical to mission accomplishment. Modern technology and communications provide nearly continuous connectivity between deployed forces and the entire intelligence community throughout all levels of security classification. Intelligence reachback, the process of using this capability to exploit the manpower, resources, production capacity, and specialty skills of intelligence organizations geographically displaced from the deployed forces, allows intelligence personnel closest to the fight to concentrate on analysis and supporting the commander. The actions of TF-58 during OEF provide an excellent illustrative example of how Marines incorporated intelligence reachback, made possible by improvements in technology and communications over the past decade, to overcome the unique staffing and employment of Marine forces during amphibious operations. During both the planning and execution of operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, reachback enabled forward deployed analysts within the intelligence sections (S-2) of two Marine Expeditionary Units, Special Operations Capable (MEU(SOC)) to support not only their respective organic units but also a higher headquarters (TF-58), adjacent U.S. forces and coalition forces. It is not the answer to all intelligence related problems, it has its pros and cons, but used effectively, as in the case of TF-58, reachback can facilitate one's ability to produce timely, accurate and useful intelligence to support operations planning. | | | |
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“Rich, high density, time sensitive, complex processing of data that is in high demand by fast paced consumers (i.e. USMC Commanders) must be forward or it will be irrelevant.”

– Major Drew Cukor, USMC¹

It is not the answer to all intelligence related problems, it has its pros and cons, but used effectively, as in the case of Task Force-58 (TF-58), intelligence reachback can facilitate one’s ability to produce timely, accurate and useful intelligence to support operations planning. Modern technology and communications provide nearly continuous connectivity between deployed forces and the entire intelligence community throughout all levels of security classification. Intelligence reachback, the process of using this capability to exploit the manpower, resources, production capacity, and specialty skills of intelligence organizations geographically displaced from the deployed forces, allows intelligence personnel closest to the fight to concentrate on analysis and supporting the commander. Although intelligence reachback provided significant support to TF-58’s combat operations in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the presence of intelligence analysts forward was critical to mission accomplishment. The actions of TF-58 during OEF provide an excellent illustrative example of how Marines incorporated intelligence reachback, made possible by improvements in technology and communications over the past decade, to overcome the unique staffing and employment of Marine forces during amphibious operations. During both the planning and execution of operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, reachback enabled forward deployed analysts within the intelligence sections (S-2) of two Marine Expeditionary Units, Special

¹ Cukor, Drew E. (Major, USMC). <cukorde@26meu.usmc.mil> “FW: Lt. Gen. Michael Hagee Interview.” [E-mail to Lieutenant Colonel Greg Koziuk, USMC <koziukgg@mcia.quantico.usmc.mil>] 26 Nov 2002.

Operations Capable (MEU(SOC)) to support not only their respective organic units, but also a higher headquarters (TF-58), adjacent U.S. forces and coalition forces.

Despite TF-58's achievements there exists the possibility that one could misperceive from this successful use of Marine amphibious forces that intelligence reachback can be accomplished without intelligence analysts forward. This misperception, combined with a misunderstanding of how the intelligence process works can create a dangerous misconception of what occurred in Afghanistan. Recent remarks from a high-ranking Marine Corps officer raise several questions about how some leaders may believe TF-58 utilized intelligence reachback during those operations. The most disturbing aspect of these comments is the possible belief that analysts "were not located forward in Afghanistan."² On the contrary, the best and brightest analysts performed without peer from within Afghanistan while TF-58 conducted operations. This essay will explain the processes used to provide intelligence support to TF-58 and identify those potential problem areas of reachback that all future joint task force commanders must consider when establishing their joint staffs.

Staffing Required Reachback

The genesis of TF 58 stemmed from a United States Central Command (CENTCOM) planning order to conduct amphibious raids into Afghanistan issued on 30 October 2001. At its inception, the task force personnel roster consisted of six Marines from three separate and distinct units – Headquarters, I Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF); Headquarters, Marine Forces, Central Command, Tampa (MARCENT Tampa); and Combined Joint Task Force, Consequence Management (CJTF CM). Recognizing

² San Diego Union-Tribune editorial board, "Interview: Lt. Gen. Michael Hagee," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 24 November 2002.

the requirement for additional personnel, the commander of TF-58, Brigadier General James N. Mattis, issued guidance for establishing a larger headquarters staff. "The Commanding General's (CG) guidance on 'growing' the staff was simple: he wanted a small staff comprised of aggressive officers who were able to act with initiative, make rapid decisions and recommendations, and exercise good judgment."³ Additionally, Vice Admiral Charles W. Moore, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) and Combined Force Maritime Component Commander (CFMCC), made his intent clear that he could not support a large staff with communications, office space, or even a command ship. The staff would remain small and focus on the planning necessary to "Conduct a minimum of three to five raids into Afghanistan over a 30-day period," as stated in the NAVCENT Warning Order of 1 November 2001.

The unique staffing of the TF-58 N-2 required innovative techniques for providing intelligence support to the operating forces. The intelligence section of TF-58 (TF-58 N-2) gradually grew from zero during the first week of November to seven by D-Day, 25 November 2001. These individuals, four officers and three Marine linguists (with no formal training in intelligence), found themselves hard-pressed to provide the type of intelligence needed to support a force consisting of the Task Force 58 Headquarters; two MEU(SOC)s, the 15th MEU(SOC) and the 26th MEU(SOC); and the coalition forces assigned to TF-58. Unable to provide analysis or intelligence products on their own due to the irregular staffing limits, the TF-58 N-2 focused its efforts on facilitating intelligence reachback for the MEUs deployed in Afghanistan. Future scenarios involving larger intelligence staffs capable of providing greater organic

³ "Forming, 27 October to 5 November 2001." *Unclassified Documents from Marine Task Force 58's Operations in Afghanistan*. February 2002, Available online: <<http://www.strategypage.com/articles/tf58/>> [20 November 2002].

intelligence support to their commander may be less reliant on reachback to accomplish their missions. Therefore, one should carefully consider TF-58's unique circumstances before attempting to replicate a similar type organization.

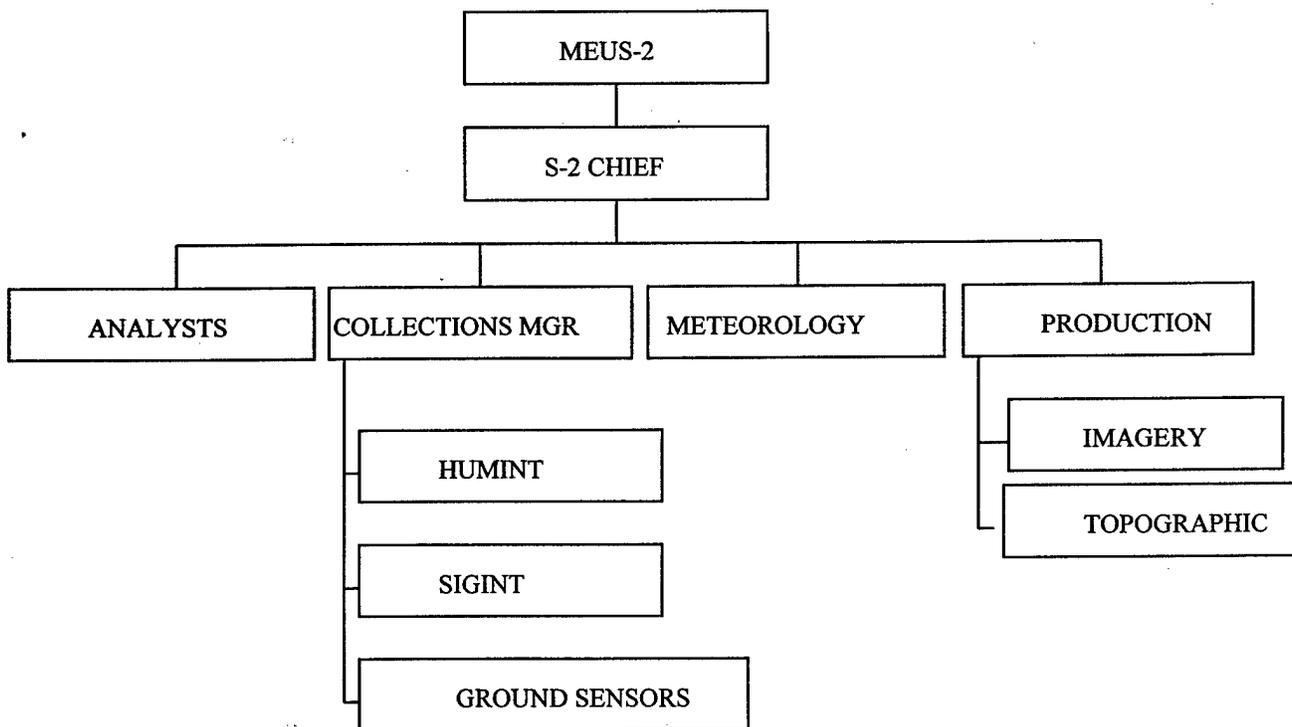
On 8 November, TF-58 established an N-2 section, two individuals consisting of a Lieutenant Colonel from I MEF and a Major from MARCENT, Tampa, and immediately prioritized and developed the initial potential targets. The primary areas of interest were the border camps and drug facilities located in southern Afghanistan near the Pakistan border. The secondary area of interest fell on the main lines of communication (LOC) from Qandahar to other parts of southern Afghanistan*. Although not really targets per se, the interdiction of these routes could possibly afford TF-58 an opportunity to engage Taliban forces headquartered in the Qandahar area. These potential targets initiated the first instances of intelligence reachback from TF-58 to other intelligence organizations. Imagery requirements for drug facilities, potential helicopter landing zones (HLZ), route studies, potential interdiction points along Route 1, assessments of reaction times for Taliban forces from Qandahar to these potential interdiction points, and traffic pattern analyses for this route present several examples of intelligence needed by the task force that could not be produced by a staff of two. Far from robust enough to accomplish the daunting challenges ahead of them, the TF-58 N-2 developed its role as a conduit of information between those organizations that could produce intelligence support and those units that would use it for planning or execution.

Familiar with the organic intelligence capabilities of the subordinate MEU(SOC) S-2s (see Figure 1) and understanding the potential of external intelligence organizations

* The main LOC in Afghanistan consists of Route 1, a highway that loops around the entire country's central mountain region. This route connects Kabul to Qandahar, Qandahar to Herat, Herat to Mazar e-Sharif, and Mazar e-Sharif to Kabul.

willing to assist TF-58, the N-2 section provided help where it could. TF-58 intelligence officers participated in Operating Planning Teams (OPT) in Bahrain and aboard amphibious ships, provided reporting from maritime patrol aircraft conducting surveillance and reconnaissance, and maintained situational awareness among the TF-58 staff. The most critical contribution from the TF-58 N-2, working from within the NAVCENT N-2 at Naval Support Activity (NSA), Bahrain, came in its role as liaison to other commands. The establishment of this vital communication node in Bahrain to facilitate reachback proved to be critical in the overall success of TF-58 operations.

TYPICAL MEU S-2 ASSETS AVAILABLE FOR AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS (Figure 1)



General Mattis decided not to combine the two MEUs for combat operations; instead he employed a supported, supporting relationship between the two forces to conduct operations while simultaneously planning for future operations. “The CG’s initial intent was to establish tactical positions, defend quickly, and leverage the power of

Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) aviation and theater Close Air Support (CAS) assets to defeat enemy forces attempting to attack Marine forces.”⁴ Although this initial concept of operations changed rapidly, the decision not to merge the two MEUs remained.

While probably not considered before this decision, the intelligence support aspect of this arrangement proved to be advantageous to all parties considering the limited personnel in the TF-58 N-2. Although their respective operations were synchronized with each other, the decision not to integrate the forces greatly reduced the need for extensive coordination between the intelligence personnel of the two MEUs and the TF-58 N-2. By designing operations that maintained unit integrity and capitalized on their established Standing Operating Procedures (SOPs), TF-58 preserved the inherent strengths of the self-contained operational organization of the MEUs.⁵ Through this arrangement, each of the MEUs could focus on their respective missions while maintaining an overall awareness of the situation. Consequently, the TF-58 N-2 would not need to deconflict support requirements and evade another task that they were not staffed to do. Whether by luck or the conscientious design of its commander, TF-58 N-2’s ability to effectively provide intelligence support to its subordinate units revolved around this decision.

As the concept of operations developed, it became clear to planners that TF-58 would need to establish a Forward Operating Base (FOB) in southern Afghanistan if it

⁴ “Forming, 27 October to 5 November 2001.” *Unclassified Documents from Marine Task Force 58’s Operations in Afghanistan*. February 2002, Available online: <<http://www.strategypage.com/articles/tf58/>> [20 November 2002].

⁵ “Planning, 6 November to 24 November 2001.” *Unclassified Documents from Marine Task Force 58’s Operations in Afghanistan*. February 2002, Available online: <<http://www.strategypage.com/articles/tf58/>> [20 November 2002].

hoped to conduct any significant operations. The intelligence focus shifted to support this concept by identifying airfields that could potentially support TF-58 operations. The establishment of FOB Rhino as the primary objective provided clear and unprecedented guidance for intelligence personnel resulting in a decrease of wasted effort and an increase in tangible intelligence support to the MEUs. "The 15th MEU(SOC) would seize and secure FOB Rhino while the 26th MEU(SOC) would conduct raid, interdiction, and seizure missions from the FOB."⁶ With this decision, the TF-58 N-2 became less occupied in the planning process and more involved with acquiring intelligence support for the MEU S-2s and disseminating products that originated from other organizations for planning and execution of their respective missions.

Most intelligence analysis and production occurred through the efforts of the MEU S-2s in Afghanistan or intelligence organizations such as the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA), the National Ground Intelligence Center (NGIC) or the Joint Intelligence Center at CENTCOM (JICCENT) working from the United States. General Mattis relied heavily on the MEU S-2s for his daily intelligence support and rarely interacted with his own N-2, primarily because of the geographic displacement of the two parties. Fortunately for the TF-58 N-2, the intelligence sections of the two MEUs were more than capable of supporting General Mattis while he was in Afghanistan and not physically located with the TF-58 N-2. General Mattis's reliance on Major Beau Higgins, 15th MEU(SOC) S-2, and Major Greg Koziuk, 26th MEU(SOC) S-2, and their respective staffs for immediate intelligence support allowed the TF-58 N-2 to provide the conduit between the MEUs and other intelligence organizations for their requirements.

⁶ Ibid.

While TF-58's N-2 personnel represented the task force in multiple video teleconferences (VTC), the MEU S-2s supported the Commander, Task Force-58 (CTF-58).*

Without the extensive capabilities of the two MEUs, intelligence support to the commander would have been lacking. The organic intelligence personnel for the two MEUs compensated for the fact that no TF-58 N-2 Marine positioned himself with General Mattis. The MEU S-2s essentially acted as CTF-58's intelligence section while also fulfilling the requirements for their respective MEUs. Although this unconventional approach of support worked, it demanded a lot from the MEU S-2 sections already responsible for supporting their own commanders and other forces conducting operations with TF-58. The presence of TF-58 intelligence personnel in Bahrain afforded an opportunity to preserve connectivity between external intelligence organizations and the MEU S-2s, but at the cost of separating TF-58 intelligence personnel from their commander. This type of arrangement, the separation of intelligence officers from their boss, will not work in all scenarios nor would it be acceptable to some commanders.

Technology Facilitated Reachback

Improvements in technology and communications during the last decade have made intelligence reachback possible. Similar support to a relatively small task force during the Gulf War a decade earlier would have been unthinkable at the time and TF-58 remains more of an anomaly than the norm. However, with these advancements come additional concerns for personnel providing intelligence support such as the flexibility of the supporting organizations, the technological capabilities of the supported forces, and the selection of the classification levels of information. Reachback, using enhanced

* Some examples are the Daily TF-58 Intelligence VTCs, the Battle Damage Assessment VTCs, the Targeting VTCs, the Daily Airborne Reconnaissance Scheduling (DARS) VTCs, and other VTCs to address detainees, Sensitive Sites for Exploitation (SSEs), etc.

technology, improved the intelligence support to TF-58, but one must understand that it merely enhanced the individual efforts of the analysts working directly with the operators in Afghanistan who adeptly tailored products to fit specific missions.

The video teleconference has altered the manner in which forces and analysts interact. Daily VTCs between TF-58, CFMCC and JICCENT occurred beginning on 8 November using the Joint Worldwide Intelligence Communications System (JWICS). The participants in these VTCs eventually grew to include the two MEUs, when JWICS communications to the amphibious ships were operational, MCIA, NGIC, and the Combined Forces Land Component Commander (CFLCC) G-2 when Tactical Control (TACON) of TF-58 passed from CFMCC on 30 November. During these VTCs, TF-58 provided a daily situation report to VTC participants and shared the areas of interests that planners had identified during OPTs. These VTCs were the “primary entry point” for requirements and provided an opportunity for TF-58 to reach back and exploit the capabilities of these intelligence organizations by relying on the manpower, resources, production capacity, and specialty skills that did not exist within TF-58.⁷

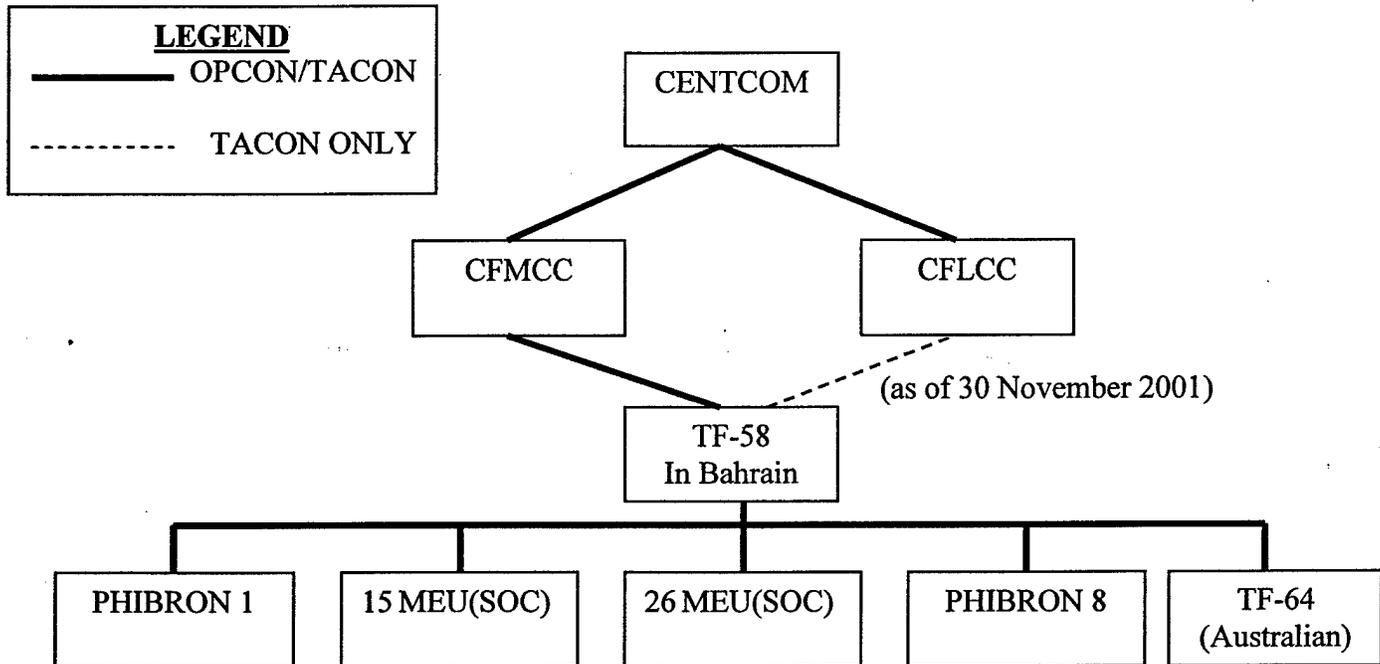
Considered vital by its participants, the daily intelligence VTC became the critical node for providing intelligence reachback to the operating forces in Afghanistan. MCIA felt that the efforts of TF-58 N-2 during these VTCs “were some of the most critical to the effective and efficient transmission of requirements and resultant products.”⁸ The minutes of these VTCs were captured and sent out via e-mail to myriad intelligence personnel both within and external to the TF-58 organization. This process allowed those individuals unable to attend the VTC, primarily because of a lack of JWICS VTC

⁷ Chandler, Mark S. (Lieutenant Colonel, USMC). <ChandlerMS@hqmc.usmc.mil> “RE: Intelligence Reachback Questionnaire.” [E-mail to author] 15 January 2003.

⁸ Ibid.

capability, to maintain situational awareness of TF-58 operations and requirements. Some MEU intelligence personnel in Afghanistan, unable to participate in the VTCs due to a lack of bandwidth, relied heavily on these minutes to keep informed of the situation above the task force level, while simultaneously tracking their product requests.⁹ The communication node in Bahrain allowed information to flow two ways, increased the effectiveness of the intelligence reachback support provided to the operating forces, and provided the most time-efficient means of identifying intelligence requirements for operational planning (see Figure 2).

TF-58 COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS (Figure 2)



This separation of missions between the two MEUs allowed each of the MEU S-2 staffs to conduct a thorough mission analysis and determine what intelligence support products would assist them in providing relevant information to their respective commanders. Each MEU identified information they needed to conduct their missions as

⁹ Spirk, David, Jr. (Staff Sergeant, USMC). <spirk@hotmail.com> "Re: FW: Survey Response from Former 26MEU Senior Intel Analyst." [E-mail to author] 15 January 2003.

well as potential future missions that could arise. The MEUs sent these requests for information (RFIs) and requests for specific intelligence products to the TF-58 N-2 in Bahrain who then consolidated and vocalized them at the daily intelligence VTCs. Excellent communication between the MEU S-2s and the TF-58 N-2 in Bahrain made responsive and accurate intelligence support to planning possible. Quick turn around times from MCIA, NGIC and JICCEN during this planning phase led to the establishment of mutual trust and admiration among all intelligence personnel involved. The technology of the VTC allowed individuals to look each other in the 'virtual' eye and mutually understand the importance of the interaction. This relationship proved invaluable over the next three months and would consistently respond to multiple mission tasking, last minute changes, and impossible deadlines.

The Marine Corps Intelligence Activity carried a significant amount of this load and repeatedly provided results that astonished TF-58 intelligence personnel. Historically not organized to provide near real time tactical intelligence production support to deployed forces, MCIA's Operational Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Mark Chandler, adapted his personnel manning to react to daily TF-58 requests for support and "essentially became a 24-hour intelligence support and production center providing direct support to TF-58."¹⁰ One must understand, however, that other national level and Department of Defense (DoD) production requirements assigned to MCIA during this period diminished in importance, and in some cases were put entirely on hold, because of this refocus in support for TF-58's operations. The trade-off became critical to TF-58's intelligence reachback. Future reliance on organizations like MCIA for reachback will

¹⁰ *United States Marine Corps: Operation Enduring Freedom; Combat Assessment Team Summary Report*, (Quantico, Va.: CG MCCDC, 2003), 104.

need to take into account their capability to adapt to a fluid, dynamic combat environment.

During both the planning and execution of operations in Afghanistan, LtCol Chandler's team of professionals provided imagery interpretation skills, analytical assessments, and digital mapping support critical to mission accomplishment. These significant capabilities provided by MCIA overcame the inadequacies of the JICCNET, which "was neither organized nor equipped to support the time-sensitive and expeditionary nature of TF-58's requirements."¹¹ MCIA's development of a repository web site database on the Secret Internet Protocol Router Network (SIPRNET) allowed intelligence personnel in Bahrain and Afghanistan to research and pull relevant intelligence products and information for planning purposes.

Intelligence reachback allowed the Marine Corps' service production center to coordinate, produce and disseminate requested intelligence information used for operational planning in Afghanistan. The ability to do this effectively relied on the timeliness of the requests. "Discipline must be maintained to not try reachback for intelligence that is required too close to the mission execution timeline."¹² It was imperative to use this technique to support planning and not current operations; although on several occasions MCIA did provide products inside of the 24-hour window. The support process, when exercised inside the 48-72 hour window, pushed personnel and technology to their limit and rarely allowed the analysts forward to fully utilize the intelligence products to support operations. The MEU intelligence sections quickly realized that intelligence support for the current fight could not be received from the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Chandler, Mark S. (Lieutenant Colonel, USMC). <ChandlerMS@hqmc.usmc.mil> "RE: Intelligence Reachback Questionnaire." [E-mail to author] 15 January 2003.

intelligence community in a timely manner and that they would be responsible for supporting the TF-58 commander in his operational decisions.¹³

Intelligence support during the planning phase included information on sites in Pakistan, imagery requests, route studies in all directions from FOB Rhino, cross-country mobility studies, river crossings, HLZs, minefield and obstacle belts, line of sight diagrams, and nearly every other form of support imaginable. Marine forces would continue to need support in these areas after they secured FOB Rhino and began conducting operations in southern Afghanistan. Intelligence reachback permitted TF-58 and the two MEUs to identify their needs and receive intelligence product support for mission planning in a timely manner. The crucial element missing from this depiction of intelligence reachback is what the intelligence personnel within the MEU S-2 staffs did with this information when they received it. Their performance during amphibious operations in Afghanistan was nothing less than Herculean and illustrates the secret behind intelligence reachback.

“While the intelligence sections of both MEU(SOC)s valued the support of the MCIA, their own accomplishments and efforts cannot be understated. The Marines of these two staffs supported not only the requirements of their own organic units, but also the additional requirements of a higher headquarters (TF-58), and adjacent U.S. and coalition force units. The MEU(SOC) S-2 sections maintained the current intelligence picture and produced hundreds of specialized intelligence products in support of MEU(SOC), Special Operations Forces (SOF) and coalition force mission planning. The MEU(SOC) S-2 sections possessed a significant forward deployed analytical and production capability utilizing both national technical means (NTM) imagery and geospatial data. Their products were in high demand in both the joint and coalition environment in which they operated.”¹⁴

¹³ Higgins, Beau (Major, USMC). <HigginsJB@15meu.usmc.mil> “RE: Intelligence Reachback Questionnaire.” [E-mail to author] 17 January 2003.

¹⁴ Gillan, Andrew J. (Major, USMC) Intelligence Action Officer, Enduring Freedom Combat Assessment Team, Memorandum for the Record, subject: “Meeting Between Major Gillan (EFCAT-SCAR), Lieutenant

As an example, over the course of sixty-seven days, 26th MEU(SOC) downloaded literally thousands of images from the National Imagery and Mapping Agency's (NIMA) Imagery Product Library (IPL), and over two GHz of mapping data via NIMA's Gateway Navigator and Raster Roam. They used fourteen 67-foot rolls of paper on their plotter, producing mission-specific maps and intelligence products.¹⁵ The imagery interpretation and topographic detachments "provided the only capability in Afghanistan to produce high demand, hard copy imagery and geospatial products in a timely manner."¹⁶ Intelligence reachback is definitely a force multiplier, but forward deployed intelligence analysts must take advantage of this capability in order to exploit its potential.

Technology and improved communications gave TF-58 and the two MEUs the ability to use intelligence reachback to support combat operations in Afghanistan. Once ashore, "reachback was made possible by the Joint Task Force (JTF) Enabler system that provided the entire task force including Marines, other services and some coalition members with reliable secure telephone, VTC, chat, e-mail and file transfer to higher headquarters and other support agencies around the world."¹⁷ 15th MEU(SOC) intelligence personnel established SIPRNET connectivity with TF-58 intelligence personnel in Bahrain within six hours of securing FOB Rhino. This SIPRNET connectivity was near constant for the entire three-month operation. Providing a reliable

Colonel Koziuk (26 MEU), Lieutenant Colonel Chandler (MCIA), Major Egerer (HQMC-Intel)," 13 November 2002.

¹⁵ Koziuk, Greg (Lieutenant Colonel, USMC). <koziukgg@mcia.quantico.usmc.mil> "MCAT Review." [E-mail to Major Andrew Gillan, USMC <gillanaj@hqmc.usmc.mil>] 4 Dec 2002.

¹⁶ Koziuk, Greg (Lieutenant Colonel, USMC). <koziukgg@mcia.quantico.usmc.mil> "RE: Intelligence Reachback Questionnaire." [E-mail to author] 10 January 2003.

¹⁷ *United States Marine Corps: Operation Enduring Freedom; Combat Assessment Team Summary Report*, (Quantico, Va.: CG MCCDC, 2003), 110.

medium for e-mail, chat and intelligence product dissemination, SIPRNET communications were invaluable to supporting the task force.

Using an intelligence section of approximately thirty Marines at FOB Rhino^{*}, the 15th MEU S-2 maintained the proper analytical and production capability with the operators in Afghanistan.¹⁸ Their ability to request intelligence support products from national organizations, such as MCIA and NIMA, and subsequently tailor these products to support specific operations illustrates the proper use of reachback. The work of intelligence analysts in both MEUs drove operations on several occasions, not because they possessed intelligence support products from national agencies but rather because they had modified these products to fit their particular forces and respective missions. Technology and communications made this chore easier but reachback alone could not accomplish this task.

Top Secret communications using JWICS proved to be more difficult to establish and maintain. The Marine Corps Enduring Freedom Combat Assessment Team Report notes that, "While JWICS provided a 'backbone' for what might have been a common intelligence picture, a significant bandwidth limitation in mobile C2 suites ashore meant, in effect, that TF-58 could not participate in higher level intelligence sharing once they were ashore. A large percentage of coordination with theater and national level intelligence organizations is done at the special compartmentalized information (SCI)

^{*} The number of Marines at FOB Rhino was capped and limited Major Higgins to deploying 30 of his approximately 50 intelligence Marines. Among those who worked from Rhino were analysts, a collection manager, topographic specialists, imagery interpreters, Human Intelligence (HUMINT) specialists, ground sensor specialists, Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) specialists, and others.

¹⁸ Higgins, Beau (Major, USMC). <HigginsJB@15meu.usmc.mil> "RE: Intelligence Reachback Questionnaire." [E-mail to author] 17 January 2003.

level.”¹⁹ Although predominantly accurate, this statement fails to recognize that TF-58 intelligence personnel in Bahrain did maintain this SCI connectivity with theater and national level intelligence organizations throughout the operation. TF-58 intelligence personnel in Bahrain, as well as the MEU intelligence personnel that remained afloat, attempted to overcome this classification obstacle by frequently sanitizing intelligence products available on JWICS down to a secret level and redisseminating them to the MEUs through SIPRNET channels. This limitation did result “in delays producing intelligence support products or the MEUs having to settle for text and incomplete versions of some products.”²⁰ However, retaining the TF-58 node in Bahrain prevented a complete absence of SCI level intelligence because it ensured a human interface between the theater/national level organizations and the operating forces deployed in Afghanistan.

This human interface or liaison was essential to overcoming intelligence challenges as they occurred. The presence of Marines stationed at theater, service and national commands who were able to listen to and comprehend the requirements of TF-58, as voiced during the many VTCs, and interpret them to their respective organizations to initiate intelligence support in one form or another proved critical to the successful accomplishment of TF-58’s mission.²¹ Reachback cannot flourish without the right individuals in the right jobs dedicated to assisting the intelligence effort supporting the operating forces. The Marines, Sailors, Soldiers, and Airmen who provided intelligence support during the three months that TF-58 operated in Afghanistan did so because they wanted to help the analysts at the pointy end of the spear in whatever way they could.

¹⁹ *United States Marine Corps: Operation Enduring Freedom; Combat Assessment Team Summary Report*, (Quantico, Va.: CG MCCDC, 2003), 105.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

Few would argue that intelligence reachback has changed the way that operating forces receive support; however, some may argue that this support can occur using new technology and communications without the presence of intelligence analysts forward. An intelligence analyst in the United States can now provide information to deployed units through VTCs, e-mails, chatrooms and several other media with the click of a mouse. Bypassing unaffected units, a stateside analyst can 'talk' directly to a commander about his assessment of enemy intentions based on the latest information from the intelligence community. The sensor-to-shooter concept provides another possible example of an attempt to eliminate levels of command to engage enemy forces based on the near-real time acquisition of information. Armed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) roaming the skies of our adversaries identifying targets for destruction present an idealistic notion of how future combat will occur. However, ground forces planning to conduct combat operations need tailored intelligence support that only analysts intimately familiar with the capabilities of their force and in complete understanding of the commander's intent can provide. These analysts are best prepared to provide this support because they have trained with, deployed with, and fought with their units. Their proximity to forward operations gives them a better appreciation of the ground situation while also earning them the respect and trust of their commanders. The most effective use of reachback through technology and communications is an efficient pipeline of requests from analysts forward to organizations that create intelligence products for planning purposes; the more stream-lined this pipeline, the greater the support to operational planning.

Intelligence reachback provided significant support to TF-58's operations in Afghanistan during OEF but the presence of intelligence analysts forward proved critical to mission accomplishment. The unconventional staffing of the TF-58 N-2 section required extensive use of intelligence reachback to support forces conducting combat operations in Afghanistan. Unable to provide analysis and develop intelligence products with the limited number of intelligence personnel available, the TF-58 N-2 utilized improvements in technology and communication to reachback for intelligence support. Other circumstances peculiar to TF-58 such as the decision not to collocate an intelligence officer with the commander and the decision to keep the MEUs missions separate facilitated the use of reachback, but at a cost. Future commanders and staffs must weigh these costs versus gains to determine if similar ad hoc staff arrangements would be applicable to their mission. The continued advancements of technology and communications assisted the TF-58 N-2 in providing intelligence support for planning purposes. Nevertheless, it is imperative to understand that technology and communications are simply tools to expedite the request and dissemination processes. The intelligence analyst closest to the commander engaged in the fight must exploit this force multiplier by tailoring products acquired using reachback to the specific needs of the commander and his forces. This human element, this intelligence analyst forward concept, is not new and should not change in the future. Instead, we must ensure that we continue to develop additional tools, along the lines of technology and communications, to improve reachback capabilities in the future without eliminating the need for analysts forward.