

VAN DEMAN PROGRAM ARTICLE

DEPTH AND PROCESS IN THE MIBOLC CURRICULUM

by

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In order to better teach strategy for 21st century conflict, the Military Intelligence Basic Officer Leadership Course (MIBOLC) curriculum should be expanded to include greater emphasis on Iraqi and Afghan culture, as well as specific terrorist and insurgent groups currently operating in these countries. Understanding the worldviews of both the general populations of these countries and the insurgent and terrorist groups operating within them will allow for better threat analysis and war gaming. If the MIBOLC program of instruction (POI) is altered to accommodate this additional block of instruction, S-2 sections will be better equipped to advise Combatant Commanders.

For military intelligence professionals, predicting and preparing for future enemy behavior is paramount. Most of our conscious decisions as human beings stem from our worldviews, which are often multi-layered, the most important ideals being at the core. Also known as *Weltanschauung*, a worldview is a “coherent collection of concepts allowing us to ‘construct a global image of the world, and in this way to understand as many elements of our experience as possible.’”¹ A deep understanding of another’s worldview can easily aid in producing a fairly accurate estimate of that person’s future actions. However, simply observing a person’s actions may in fact prove misleading as to that person’s intentions and future actions. Intense focus on another person’s actions without an understanding of their core ideology, history, motivations, and goals can lead to myopic decisions. For this reason, leaders in military intelligence should be equipped with a deep understanding of the core ideology and motivations of the Iraqi and Afghan populations as well as of the insurgent and terrorist groups operating within them.



Two days of the current POI for MIBOLC are allocated to instruction on cultural awareness, along with practical cultural experience gained during an Iraq and an Afghanistan scenario. These aspects of MIBOLC are important, but are not sufficient innate of themselves to fully prepare future military intelligence leaders for deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan. Due to human resource and time constraints, the POI is focused on process and preparing leaders to deal with any challenges with which they are confronted. However, many soldiers enter and leave MIBOLC without a deep understanding of, for example, the specific differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims, the ideology of Islamist extremists, or the relationship between Muqtada Al-Sadr and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

While many intelligence professionals engage professional development opportunities in their spare time, there must also be a formal gauge to ensure that a baseline standard of understanding of the current operating environment and primary enemy threat is maintained. Everyone in the United States Army should and most likely does know that there are differences between Sunni and Shia Muslims. However, sectarian violence is largely understood in organizational terms: group A has grievances with group B, and therefore group C (Coalition Forces) will need to mediate. This level of understanding is sufficient for the general public and most military branches; however, there is a greater expectation of military intelligence professionals. In 2006, reporter Jeff Stein of Congressional Quarterly caused a firestorm in the media by interviewing several members of congress, including the newly appointed House Intelligence Committee Chair, on the difference between Sunnis and Shiites.³ Their incorrect responses to such a basic question, so relevant to the current conflicts facing the United States in the Middle East, caused controversy because it was deemed unacceptable for both policymakers and the intelligence community.

This point is especially relevant for all-source intelligence leaders within the military intelligence branch because they are expected to create the comprehensive picture of the enemy threat for the commander. Equipping these leaders with proficiency in the process of gaining an understanding of an insurgency is not sufficient. Although many region-specific issues such as friction between tribes and neighborhoods may be too in-depth and classified for training while in TRADOC courses, more comprehensive issues should still be covered and tested. For example, testable material should include working knowledge of the recent history of Iraq and Afghanistan (1980-present), the major terrorist and insurgent groups in these countries today, and the pervasive ideologies of these regions. Understanding these topics sheds light on the ideological boundaries between the population and the insurgents and terrorist groups within it, which is essential for creating long-term stability.

The current POI should be adjusted to incorporate instruction on these and other specific topics that will help make military intelligence officers experts on the enemy that we are currently fighting. Islamist extremism has already demonstrated its longevity and multi-faceted global reach. While new threats will surely arise, intelligence professionals must demonstrate both a proficient understanding of the current primary threat as well as an aptitude to understand and counter future potential threats. In other words, process is important for addressing future threats, but it must not come at the expense of proficiency in countering the current threat. However, gaining a deep understanding of current enemies' worldviews and proficiency in process are not mutually exclusive, understanding the former can serve as a practical exercise for the latter.

Having established a solid foundation in understanding a population's worldview and that of the insurgents and terrorists within it, introduction to analytical tools flows smoothly and

logically. Analytical tools such as the activities and association matrices, pattern analysis wheels, pattern of life analyses, and link diagrams help to determine enemy patterns based on their past activities. Coupling the interpretation of these enemy actions with a sophisticated understanding of their worldview creates a more complete understanding. Furthermore, this combination yields a much higher predictive potential by adding a layer of depth in analysis.

Due to the Army-wide demands for personnel, the length of MIBOLC and other TRADOC intelligence courses is limited, requiring innovative restructuring of these courses to meet any new requirements. One option to accommodate a greater understanding of the current enemy threat and region-specific issues is to establish a modest pre-commission reading list for future military intelligence officers, the material to be tested upon arrival at Fort Huachuca. Reading these books before beginning MIBOLC would ensure a uniform minimum understanding of the current operating environment, creating a foundation of knowledge which instructors could then build upon with more specific information. Creating this uniform foundation of knowledge would also facilitate better small-group and classroom discussion, allowing students to delve into the deeper underlying layers of the current enemy threat within the operating environment.

An alternative to issuing a pre-commission reading list would be to publish a list of study-focus questions towards which future military intelligence officers could then hone their own professional development initiatives. Therefore, the same end-state as the pre-commission reading list could be achieved with study focus questions and in a less confining manner. However, this approach would certainly depend on the level of initiative that future military intelligence officers would actually exercise in understanding the list of study-focus questions.

Methods to ensure individual initiative could include a written test as well as group discussions with instructors gauging the students' level of comprehension of the issues being discussed.

Another approach to incorporating region-specific knowledge of the enemy threat within the current course scheduling confines would be greater reliance on small-group projects. Specifically, during the portion of the course dedicated to the study of counter-insurgency, students could be broken down into small groups and tasked to read selected books off the Commanding General's recommended reading list for military intelligence professionals. With each group producing a summary of the book they had read, a simple folder or database online could be developed to store these summaries. Groups could also present the material to the rest of the class in a short presentation to share the information efficiently. These measures could be added in conjunction with an expanded POI, to include the recent history of Iraq and Afghanistan (1980-present), the major terrorist and insurgent groups in these countries today, and the pervasive ideologies of these regions. While only adding a day or two to the length of the course, or even by just compressing aspects of the current structure, modest gains in working knowledge of these topics would be achieved.

Implementing these changes should also be done in concert with a standardized test to ensure that all military intelligence leaders have a proficient understanding. As a profession, enacting this change would be holding our ranks to a high standard, one which we would deem necessary to accomplish our mission. In much the same way that the Army Physical Fitness Test ensures that all soldiers meet a minimum level of physical fitness, a level deemed necessary to accomplish basic soldiering tasks, implementing this test would ensure that all of our leaders can give well-informed recommendations. With our members serving in every corner of the globe, and many with diverse knowledge requirements, such a test may seem inappropriate. However,

with the interconnectedness and global reach of our current enemies, a baseline level of understanding should be required discipline-wide.

Requiring a deeper understanding of the current enemies of the United States will ensure a more nuanced approach towards our enemies at the operational and tactical level. The increasing sophistication of our enemies requires an appropriate escalation in the training of the leaders responsible for identifying and separating insurgents, “like fish swimming in the water of the population.”⁴ The benefits of implementing these changes will be a better comprehensive understanding of the enemy, better recommendations to combatant commanders, and a greater willingness from commanders to listen to the advice of their S2s.

¹ Apostel and Van der Veken, Wereldbeelden. Van fragmentering naar integratie, in Vidal, C. (2008) Wat is een wereldbeeld? (What is a worldview?), in Van Belle, H. & Van der Veken, J., Editors, Nieuwheid denken. De wetenschappen en het creatieve aspect van dewerkelijkheid, in press. Acco, Leuven.

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Dr. Gene Bunkowske, “Onion Diagram,” http://www.foundbytes.com/witness/CrossCO/onion_use.htm (accessed February 9, 2009).

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Tom Baldwin, “New House Intelligence Committee Chair Short on Intelligence,” Fox News, December 13, 2006, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,236199,00.html> (accessed February 1, 2009).

John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 28.