"It may be of interest to future generals to realize that one makes plans to fit circumstances and does not try to create circumstances to fit plans. That way lies danger."

—General George S. Patton, USA

Before leading a unit into battle, all commanders should initiate their planning efforts with a careful, thorough analysis of the enemy and terrain. This holds as true for the lieutenant as the general if they are to heed General Patton's warning against "creating circumstances to fit their plan." Intelligence preparation of the battlespace (IPB) is an invaluable tool for understanding the "circumstances" a leader faces by providing a method for visualizing threat capabilities and courses of action within a given area of operations.

Observations gained from recent exercises indicate that IPB products, particularly terrain-analysis products, are routinely produced and disseminated to the staff, but the subsequent use of these products is not carried through into execution. The end result is that many of our Marines, while familiar with the terminology of IPB and its principal products, have yet to harness its full potential because it remains largely misunderstood. The aim of this article is to correct some of the basic misunderstandings regarding IPB by providing some insights into how the entire staff is involved in the process, and the utility of the various IPB products in both the planning process and execution.

Many readers at this point will wonder, "What is so difficult to understand about IPB? Isn't it just the MCOO (modified combined obstacles overlay) that the intel guys make to show me where I can and can't move?" Others might think "I know all I need to know about IPB—it helps me gain some initial understanding about the enemy, weather, and terrain but it doesn't do anything for me once we move past mission analysis." Intelligence officers reading this article may react with "I'm tired of it being called IPB – it should be Commander's Preparation of the Battlespace, because intel is only responsible for some of the products."

Each of these statements reflects a selective reading of MCRP 2-12A, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield*, and a partial understanding of the IPB process. Each of these attitudes currently exists, to varying degrees, throughout our operating forces. If we are going to capitalize on the opportunities that an effective use of IPB provides, we must begin by answering the question, "What is IPB?"

What is IPB?

INTELLIGENCE PREPARATION OF THE BATTLEFIELD

"IPB is a systematic, continuous process of analyzing the threat and environment in a specific geographic area. It is designed to support staff estimates and military decision-making. Applying the IPB process helps the commander selectively apply and maximize his combat power at critical points in time and space on the battlefield…."

MCRP 2-12A/FM 34-130

A common misunderstanding of IPB is founded upon the faulty view that it is simply a product, or a collection of products—this is not the way IPB is described in our current doctrine. In fact, the MCRP concludes its description by stating, "The IPB process is continuous. IPB is conducted prior to and during the command's initial planning for an operation, and is continued during the conduct of the operation." Significant for our understanding of IPB are two key thoughts—IPB is a continuous process that does not end until the operation is concluded and IPB is designed to integrate the planning efforts of the entire staff. This allows the commander to "selectively apply and maximize his combat power at critical points in time and space on the battlefield." The full contribution of IPB and the utility of its associated products begin with the understanding that IPB is a process to encourage staff integration over the entire life cycle of an operation.

Modified Combined Obstacle Overlay

One of the earliest IPB products produced and arguably the most identifiable is the MCOO. The MCOO is a product used to depict the effect of battlespace on military operations. It is normally based on a product depicting all obstacles to mobility, both natural and manmade. The production of the MCOO is the responsibility of the "G/S-2," aided by a topographic detachment and is produced for the area of operations/area of interest designated by the commander.

IPB PRODUCTS

PRODUCT	PRIMARY PLANNING STEPS SUPPORTED
Modified Combined Obstacles Overlay	Mission Analysis COA Development Transition
Doctrinal Template	Mission Analysis COA Development COA Comparison and Decision Transition
Situational Template(s)	COA Development COA War Game COA Comparison and Decision Orders Development Transition
Event Template(s) and Matrice(s)	COA War Game COA Comparison and Decision Orders Development Transition

The MCOO is the first opportunity in the process for staff integration. The staff it supports selects the information it depicts; therefore the MCOO will vary from command to command. As new information and reporting changes our assessment of the battlefield's effects on operations, the MCOO, like any other IPB product needs to be updated and reviewed accordingly. Hence, the MCOO, with adequate staff involvement, supports the commander and his staff's understanding of the battlefield environment and provides the "2" with valuable insights concerning staff information needs.

The Doctrinal Template

The first template produced in the IPB process is the doctrinal template, defined by the MCRP as "a model based on postulated threat doctrine. Doctrinal templates illustrate the disposition and activity of threat forces and assets—high value targets—conducting a particular operation unconstrained by the effects of the battlefield environment." Like the MCOO, the doctrinal template is constructed by the "2" and provides the commander and staff with a picture of how threat doctrine will be applied under ideal conditions. The effort invested by the "2" to develop the doctrinal template makes him particularly well suited to identify and describe the enemy's center(s) of gravity. The doctrinal template aids visualization of the threat by providing the commander and staff with an early picture of how the threat will likely fight and supports the preliminary identification of opportunities for the advantageous use of friendly fires and maneuver.

Two questions invariably arise during a discussion of doctrinal templates: What value is this template if the threat has no doctrine (e.g., a terrorist threat, paramilitary forces). And what if the threat does not follow established doctrine? First, although the enemy may not have published reams of doctrinal manuals, it is almost certain to have established operating patterns of some sort. It is the job of the "2" to analyze the enemy's operations and identify these patterns (task organization of forces, timing, distances, relative locations, use of terrain or weather). The result may not be a typical Soviet model doctrinal template, but it will depict how the enemy prefers to employ his forces.

Second, it is rare for a military force to totally abandon the doctrinal habits that have been ingrained through training, organization, and operations. Even so, IPB does allow for the adoption of non-conventional tactics or courses of action. Additionally, IPB stresses that enemy doctrine, capabilities, and current tactics should, like the MCOO, be constantly reviewed and updated. Developing a thorough understanding of threat doctrine and operational patterns stimulates information requirements across the MAGTF staff and dictates a continuous refinement of the doctrinal template.

The Situation Template

A natural extension of the doctrinal template, the situation template graphically illustrates threat courses of action (COAs) we will likely face during execution. The MCRP defines the situation template as, "…doctrinal templates depicting a particular operation modified to account for the effects of the battlefield environment and the threat's current situation."

The "2" bears the primary responsibility for producing this template based on his analysis of enemy tactics, doctrine, likely objectives, end state, and terrain and weather factors. However, if he attempts to create the situation template without assistance from across the staff (i.e., warfighting function subject matter experts) it will suffer from a number of errors (perceived or actual), and its utility will be severely limited. Staff integration must occur during the preparation of this template for use throughout planning and execution. The absence of staff "ownership" undermines acceptance of the template and virtually guarantees it will be ignored during COA development and wargaming.

The Event Template and Matrix

The final product generated by the formal IPB process is the event template. It depicts named areas of interest where activity (or lack of) will indicate adoption of a particular threat COA, and serves as a guide for collection planning. The event matrix summarizes the information presented in the template and emphasizes the significant points—in much the same way that a COA narrative will aid one's comprehension of a COA graphic. Superficially, it may appear that the event template and matrix will be developed solely by the "2". In reality, it is only after these products are viewed in their full context, namely as an integral part of wargaming and development of the command's decision support template (DST), that the need for continued staff integration during the event template's development becomes apparent. Because the event template comprises the full range of threat COAs, it is an essential tool for developing the DST.

Although not formal IPB products, no discussion of IPB is complete without considering the DST and the decision support matrix (DSM). Produced jointly by the operations and intelligence sections as a result of the staff's wargaming effort, the DST/DSM summarize the anticipated actions and reactions of both friendly and enemy forces during the operation. The DST/DSM's depiction of friendly options, targeted areas of interest, time phaselines associated with movements of friendly forces, decision points and likely actions; coupled with its forecast of enemy options, likely reactions, and timing, provides a solid foundation for development of the command's execution checklist. Combining the DSM with a DST helps the commander and staff visualize how the operation will likely unfold, and anticipate many of the decisions that must be made to achieve success on the battlefield.

Conclusion

It would not be an overstatement to suggest that in a commander's continuing efforts to integrate the planning and execution efforts of his staff, there is no tool with more untapped potential than the IPB process. IPB is a relatively simple process, but its proper application is easily overlooked in the heat of planning and execution. Employing the IPB process as a staff integration tool is not automatic—it requires the participation of every Marine involved in the planning and execution of operations. Orienting on the enemy is fundamental to maneuver warfare—IPB is a key planning and execution tool that can focus the command on the enemy. The resultant rise in the effectiveness of our operations will be well worth the effort.