

# HUMINT – CONCEPTUALIZATION AND USE IN MILITARY OPERATIONS

## *HUMINT – DO CONCEITO AO EMPREGO EM CONTEXTO MILITAR*

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### **Abstract**

As society becomes increasingly globalised, security threats become more unpredictable and covert. Therefore, there is an urgent need for intelligence gathering tools that can provide military commanders the advice they need to mount a flexible and timely response. Because conflicts are taking place in densely populated urban areas, the human factor, a source of uncertainty which must be accounted for when carrying out intelligence operations, has become more important than ever. Now, as in the past, human interaction remains a crucial tool for intelligence gathering, making Human Intelligence, a branch of the broader field of Intelligence, especially relevant. This study examines the aspects underpinning HUMINT operations, from the traits of a HUMINT collector, to what constitutes an activity to support a commander's decision making. This article analyses HUMINT in military contexts to ascertain how it can best be used to support military operations. To that end, the study used deductive reasoning and a qualitative research strategy based on documentary and content analysis and on interviews with experts with operational experience.

**Keywords:** Intelligence Disciplines, HUMINT, Information, Intelligence.

### **Resumo**

*Numa sociedade marcada por um processo de globalização crescente e contínuo onde concomitantemente, se verifica uma imprevisibilidade e dissimulação de atuação da ameaça no seio da mesma, urge explorar ferramentas de obtenção de informações que permitam desenvolver um aconselhamento flexível e oportuno à conduta das operações militares. Assim, com a deslocalização do conflito para zonas urbanas, densamente povoadas, assume de forma acrescida o elemento humano, fator de desequilíbrio a ter em conta nas*

**How to cite this paper:** Silva, C. M. C. R. M. (2019). HUMINT – Conceptualization and use in military operations. *Revista de Ciências Militares*, may, VII(1), 45-70. Retrieved from <https://cidium.ium.pt/site/index.php/pt/publicacoes/as-colecoes>

atividades de informação. Porquanto, as interações entre pessoas, hoje, tal como no passado, no âmbito da obtenção de informação, continuam a ser preponderantes. É neste contexto, que a atividade de Human Intelligence, enquanto disciplina das Informações, assume particular relevância. Com este estudo, pretende-se compreender as especificidades de emprego desta atividade, desde o perfil do operador ao próprio conceito de ação no apoio à decisão de um comandante. Numa perspetiva militar tem, este trabalho, como objeto de estudo, a atividade HUMINT, assumindo este elemento a base para atingir o objetivo de compreender as possibilidades e os contributos da HUMINT no apoio à conduta das operações militares. Para atingir este desiderato, efetuou-se uma investigação com base num raciocínio dedutivo, assente numa estratégia qualitativa, através de uma análise documental e de conteúdo, com recurso a entrevistas a especialistas com experiência operacional.

**Palavras-chave:** Disciplinas das Informações, HUMINT, Informação, Informações.

## Introduction

[...] it is only the enlightened ruler and the wise general who will use the highest intelligence of the army for purposes of spying [...] on them depends an army's ability to move.

Sun Tzu (2009, p. 101)

Espionage has often been called the world's second-oldest profession. People have needed intelligence ever since their survival instincts instilled in them the desire to know what to do next, by what means, and against what threats (Bartolomeu 2010, pp. 6-9).

The emergence of global markets along with advances in technology and new security agreements between transnational organisations has brought the world's countries and their populations closer together. However, this proximity has also created challenges that can often be exploited to obtain economic advantages over competing businesses or to combat threats to security and defence<sup>1</sup> (Herman, 1996, pp. 9-16). In regards to the latter, the National Defence Strategic Concept (CEDN) describes Intelligence and the systems responsible for producing it as critical "instruments for identifying and assessing threats and opportunities in volatile and complex scenarios" (CEDN, 2013, pp. 2-8).

As such, it is useful to examine how Intelligence and the activities that underpin it can be employed to reduce uncertainty, an essential aspect of how threats operate. Information activities carried out during Information Operations are "actions designed to affect the information environment and / or the information systems. They can be performed by any actor and include protection measures" (NATO, 2018, p. 89). Cardoso (2004, pp. 150-151) notes that these "Information activities involve a complex process of collection, evaluation, integration, and interpretation of intelligence [...] which must be timely and accurate enough to be useful." Accuracy is the biggest challenge in conducting Intelligence activities and

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<sup>1</sup> Defence refers to all activities carried out to maintain Security. In other words, Security is a goal and Defence is the activity carried out to achieve that goal (Carvalho, 2009, p.1).

it has only become more daunting since the globalisation boost of the late 20th century, which had a broad impact across all sectors of society, especially affecting the economy, governance, and national security.

The CEDN (2013, pp. 2-4) describes current threats as both volatile and diffuse. Paradoxically, the same advances in technology that amplify the impact (damage) of an attack while reducing costs and exposure also require that attackers remain anonymous by infiltrating and hiding among the population. Globalisation has allowed the enemy to walk amongst the population rather than fighting only in the “caves” of Afghanistan, as Fred Burton (2005) describes the delocalisation of conflict to urban areas.

New technologies have brought with them new ways of obtaining information, which is used to produce intelligence. Despite this, Burton (2005) argues that although technology can be used to detect the actions, patterns of action, or procedures of insurgents, it cannot identify or explain their intentions. “Signals and electronic sources [...] will only go so far in terms of getting inside a terrorist’s mind and actually pre-empting an attack”.

This issue is all the more relevant and opportune now that the enemy is “at our doorstep” rather than in the deserts of Iraq and Afghanistan. Because military forces increasingly operate in urban environments, they must develop situational awareness and adapt to the “human terrain” where the operations take place (Baker, 2007).

The way wars are fought is clearly changing at a global level. Rupert Smith (2008, p.14) describes the current paradigm of warfare as “war amongst the people”, emphasising the role of the human element, particularly in democracies (Smith, 2008 cited in Bartolomeu, 2012).

Human Intelligence (HUMINT) was chosen as the topic of this study because, now as in the past, interpersonal relationships remain a crucial source of intelligence. Writing this article provided an opportunity for reflection and for confronting different perspectives and perceptions about the relevance of HUMINT as one of the tools available to the Intelligence Production Cycle<sup>2</sup> (IPC), which can be used to support the tactical level of military operations<sup>3</sup>.

Due to the timeliness and relevance of this issue, this article aims to ascertain how HUMINT can be used to support military operations. To that end, article will analyse HUMINT as an Intelligence discipline (EME, 2008, p. 31).

To narrow the scope of the study, and in light of the legislation restricting HUMINT activities by military forces in national territory, the analysis was delimited to military HUMINT operations in international settings, that is, as part of a National Deployed Force (NDF).

As for methodology, the article used deductive reasoning and a qualitative research

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<sup>2</sup> The IPC is a sequence of intelligence activities in which news are obtained, turned into information and exploited. This sequence comprises four distinct phases (orientation or direction of the collection efforts, collection, processing, and dissemination) which culminate in the delivery of the finished product. Each step of the cycle must be synchronized with the commander’s decision-making and operational requirements to successfully influence the outcome of the operation (NATO, 2016, pp. 1-4).

<sup>3</sup> The level “at which activities, battles and engagements are planned and executed to accomplish military objectives assigned to the tactical level. Successfully achieving these objectives will contribute to success at the operational and strategic levels” (NATO, 2017, pp. 1-10).

strategy to analyse data collected from interviews with experts with experience in Intelligence operations and from documents available in open sources, in order to identify topics for further research.

The excerpts cited in the Portuguese version of this article were kept in the original English to prevent any mistakes that may arise from mistranslations, as well as to avoid changing the meaning of the specific concepts and very specific terminology used in the field of Intelligence.

The article begins by deconstructing the concept of Intelligence, explaining how and for what purpose it can be used, also describing the role of each of its disciplines. This first chapter will provide evidence that HUMINT is an effective tool for collecting information which can then be used to produce timely intelligence.

The second chapter will address the limitations of HUMINT, identifying specific aspects and restrictions to its use and correlating the processes involved in this activity with the processes involved in the production of Intelligence.

The third and final chapter will describe the qualities, traits, and innate and acquired skills a collector must possess in order to carry out HUMINT activities, also addressing the role of the soldier as sensor.

The conclusions section will summarise the study and determine whether the general objective has been achieved. The concluding remarks will describe some situations in which HUMINT activities can be carried out by the military to support the IPC.

## 1. Intelligence – The Process

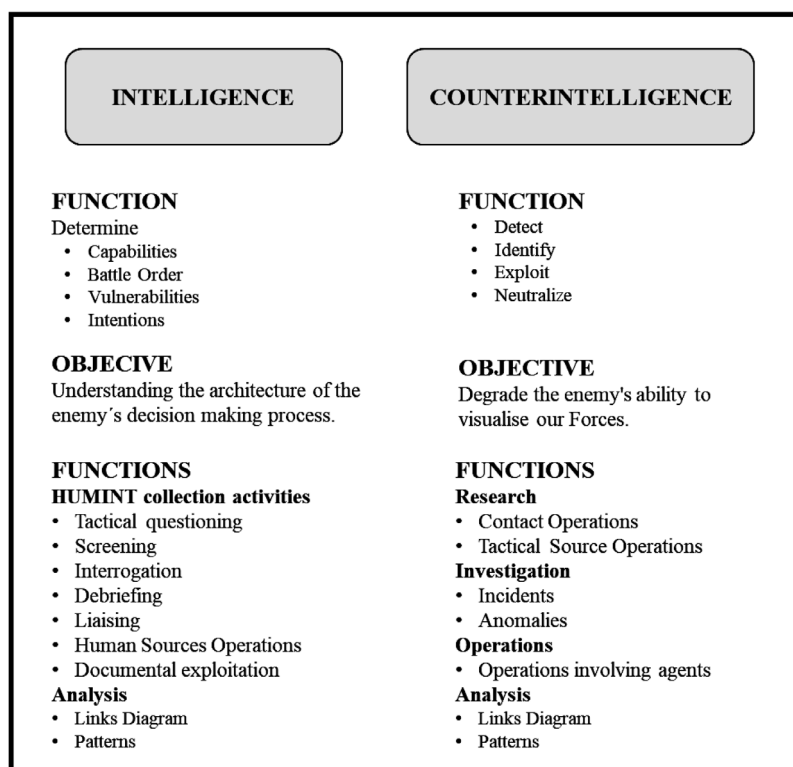
### 1.1. Background

NATO doctrine describes Intelligence as “unprocessed data which may be used in the production of intelligence” (NATO, 2018, p.89). To clarify, the English terms *information* and *intelligence* correspond to the Portuguese terms *informação* and *informações*. The document defines Intelligence as “the product resulting from the directed collection and processing of information regarding the environment and the capabilities and intentions of actors, in order to identify threats and offer opportunities for exploitation by decision makers” (NATO, 2018, pp. 90). That is, Intelligence is the knowledge and understanding that results from the integration and prospective analysis of “information” (i.e. *informação*). N. Rêgo (2018) explains that the Portuguese translation of Intelligence, *Informações*, refers to the combination of multiple pieces of “information”, adding that this translation can lead to confusion between *informação* and *informações*, or to the use of *informações* simply as the plural of *informação*. Spain and Brazil, on the other hand, have adopted the terms *intelligenza* and *inteligência* to avoid misinterpretations. The only Portuguese doctrinal publication on Intelligence, issued by the Portuguese Army, avoided this linguistic confusion between *informação* and *informações* by referring to the first as *notícias* [news], or “any unprocessed data of any nature (fact, document, or material) that can be used in the production of intelligence” (PDE 2-0, 2009, p. 1-4).

Intelligence activities in general, and HUMINT activities in particular are characterised by

secrecy, largely due to the need to preserve and protect the sources<sup>4</sup> from whom information is collected (Bispo, 2004, pp. 81-82). The author states that winning the fight for information superiority implies conducting counterintelligence activities to disrupt an opponent’s actions. Bispo (2004, pp. 81-83) adds that “the histories of other countries, about which much has been written [...] generally agree that Counterintelligence is an instrumental component of the Intelligence process.”

Therefore, although the line that separates the operational activities involved in Counterintelligence and Intelligence is thin and may prove difficult to untangle, it should be stressed that they serve different purposes. Whereas Counterintelligence generally aims to identify and neutralise threats, the aim of Intelligence is to obtain an advantage over an opponent by studying not only their abilities, intentions and weaknesses but also the terrain where the operations will take place. Figure 1 shows that HUMINT capabilities and targets can be used both for Intelligence and Counterintelligence activities (PDE 2-0, 2009, 24 -25, 191-192).



**Figure 1 – Intelligence versus Counterintelligence.**

Source: Adapted from U.S. Army (2010, pp.1-6).

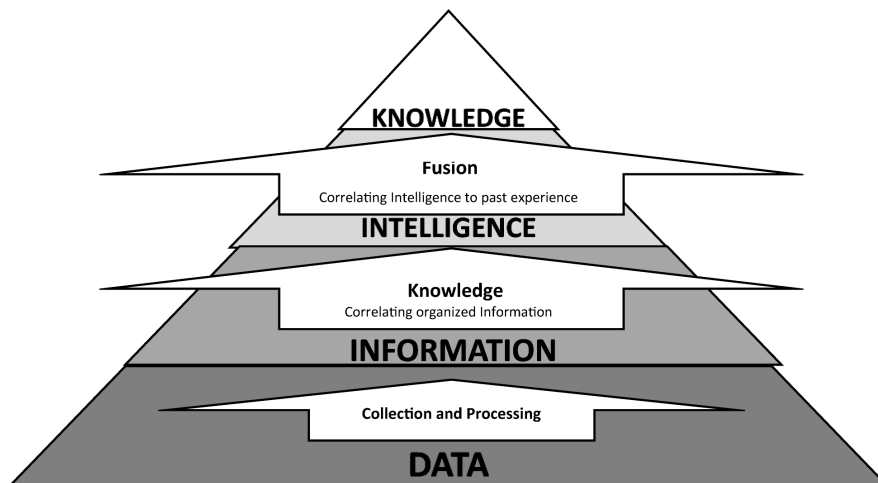
Despite some conceptual differences between the model presented in Figure 1 and HUMINT activities, they are generally used to achieve the same goals.

<sup>4</sup> The concept of sources used in this study is that of people from whom a specialist collects information. Those people can be classified as Sources, Contacts or Agents according to level of exploitation and to whether the source knows about the nature of the relationship.

This conceptual distinction reveals that the Intelligence process contains a set of concepts that warrant discussion even among experts, which must be defined in order to proceed with the analysis. As stated above, there is some confusion, which is sometimes caused by mistranslation, between the concepts of Intelligence (*Information*) and information (*informação*). Thus, according to Bispo, “information is a set of data contextualised according to space, time, and scenario of action [...] alone, it does not tell us how an enemy will act, what their actions will be, or when they execute them” (2004, p. 78). In this context, data are any signals detected by a sensor, regardless of origin (human, electronic or mechanical), and transmitted by a system (PDE 2-0, 2009, p. 26).

On the other hand, from a military perspective, the Intelligence process can be defined as “the product that results from the processing of news on foreign nations, organizations or elements that are potentially or openly hostile [...]” (PDE 2-0, 2009, p. 245). Bispo also notes that intelligence is “the knowledge that comes from correlated, organized and contextualised information” (2004, p. 78). This means that, when represented in a knowledge pyramid (Figure 2), Intelligence is hierarchically superior to information.

For Gonçalves (2008, p.4) “Intelligence is knowledge”. However, because Intelligence is not an end in itself but a tool to support the decision-making process, it seems somewhat reductive to consider that no extrinsic or intrinsic factors are involved in its production. Moreover, Waltz seems to share this opinion. He describes knowledge as information that has been analysed, understood, and correlated to previously acquired information, interpreted in light of past experiences (Waltz, 2003, p. 3).



**Figure 2 – Knowledge Pyramid.**

Source: Adapted from EME (2008); Rêgo (2018); and Waltz (2003).

It can be inferred from the scheme above that Intelligence has an empirical and theoretical basis, which must be operationalised through a process. Knowledge is acquired by processing news in a systematic and structured way in order to identify relevant content, discover hidden or missing content, and process content that is deemed necessary.

Along with several other concepts, Goldman (2006, p. 79) defines Intelligence as the “function,

activities or organizations that are involved in the process of planning, gathering and analysing information of potential value to decision makers and to the production of intelligence”. The author adds that Intelligence is the product of a cyclical process known as the IPC (EME, 2008).

### **1.2. Actionable Intelligence**

According to Hitz (2010), Intelligence services must act in a preventive and pre-emptive manner to produce timely intelligence that allows decision makers to take the necessary measures to prevent an attack. Therefore, timeliness is critical in producing Intelligence to support the decision-making process of an operation.

Despite this, traditional Intelligence structures and processes have found it difficult to adapt to current threats, forcing decision makers to reflect on the changes that must be made to optimise the process of obtaining intelligence to support decision making, that is, the production of Actionable Intelligence (Mazumadar, 2013, pp. 40-42).

The Institute of Land Warfare (2005, p. 15) defines Actionable Intelligence as intelligence that provides commanders and soldiers a high level of situational awareness, disseminated with the speed, accuracy and timeliness necessary to maximise a force’s combat power and accomplish the mission. Thus, given the nature of current threats, Actionable Intelligence is the key to gaining superiority and defeating the traditional, irregular and disruptive methods the enemy uses to accomplish its mission.

This is achieved through superiority of information, which enhances situational awareness and decision making (Lagares, 2018, p. 62). It can be inferred, then, that Actionable Intelligence is a tool for obtaining information superiority, which can be described as the advantage a commander gains over an opponent by having access to better and more timely information, which enables faster decision making and allows that commander to maintain or gain control of the battleground (Nunes, 2015, pp. 35-36). It can be deduced from this that “Time” is an essential factor in disseminating Actionable Intelligence. This direct interaction has time and again proved that HUMINT is instrumental to the collection of Actionable Intelligence (Mazumadar, 2013, p. 41). Mazumadar’s point notwithstanding, superficial comparisons of the importance of HUMINT over the other intelligence disciplines should be avoided because all play a specific role in the IPC, either used individually to achieve a specific goal or in a symbiotic relationship with the others to optimise the collection effort.

Therefore, regardless of the type of conflict where an intelligence discipline will be used – traditional or asymmetric – it must be coordinated with the other disciplines to produce truly effective Actionable Intelligence. Although this study does not specifically address it, the All Source Intelligence Analysis process should be mentioned as it plays a major role in the production of Actionable Intelligence to support the decision-making process.

### **1.3. Taxonomy of Intelligence sources**

Shulsky and Schmitt (2002) provide some examples of intelligence collection methods, such as espionage using undercover agents, aerial drone images, intercepting communications, and research using open-source documents.

A taxonomy based on disciplines was created to organise the different methods and systems for collecting intelligence through observation, detection, recording, and transmission of news / information on conditions, situations, or events (EME, 2008, p. 32). Due to bureaucratic reasons or historical precedent, countries and organizations have adapted their doctrines according to the relevance of the information processed by analysts.

The Intelligence Community (Clark, 2007, pp. 84-88) has divided its research methods by using the abbreviation INT, which stands for Intelligence, to define areas of responsibility within organizations. Therefore, it can be deduced that this taxonomy is not the result of a conceptual description of Intelligence, but of bureaucratic initiatives.

Table 1 identifies the doctrines covered in this study:

**Table 1 – Intelligence Disciplines**

<b>Portuguese Army</b>	<b>U.S. Army</b>	<b>NATO</b>	<b>Clark</b> (2007, pp. 83-86)
<b>HUMINT</b>	<b>HUMINT</b>	<b>HUMINT</b>	<b>HUMINT</b>
IMINT	IMINT	IMINT	ACINT
ACINT	OSINT	OSINT	OSINT
MASINT	MASINT	MASINT	COMINT
SIGINT	SIGINT	ACINT	
		SIGINT (COMINT/ELINT)	

Source: Adapted from Clark (2007), EME (2008), NATO (2016), and U.S. Army (2010).

As highlighted in Table 1, HUMINT is mentioned in each of the doctrines. One possible inference, with which Steele (2012, p. 41) agrees, is that it involves relatively low costs and fewer resources. Another possible reason is that it is easier to understand than other more technological methods because the information is processed through a “chain” composed of people in which the information is transferred from the source to the collector and from the analyst to the decision maker.

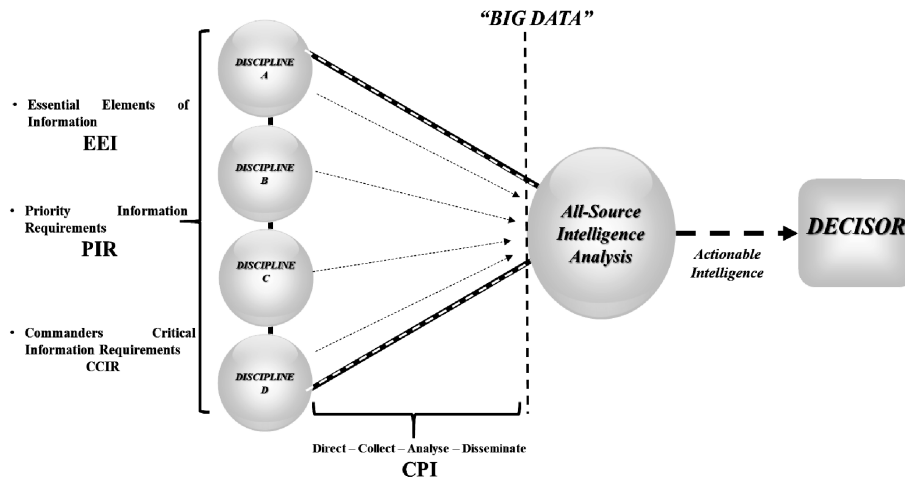
In addition to the national doctrine, the literature review included open-source documents (OSINT) due to the relevance of the open-source information available on the current operational environment, which revealed that:

- (i) Human Intelligence (HUMINT) – is Intelligence obtained from information collected by a human source;
- (ii) Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) – is Intelligence obtained from information with potential value available in open sources, that is, sources that can be viewed by the general public;
- (iii) Imagery Intelligence (IMINT) – is Intelligence obtained from the visual exploitation of photography, infrared sensors, lasers, radar, among other methods through which images of objects are reproduced in optical or electronic devices;

- (iv) Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) – is Intelligence obtained by intercepting communications (Communications Intelligence) or electromagnetic emissions (Electronics Intelligence);
- (v) Measurements and Signature Intelligence (MASINT) – is scientific and technical intelligence obtained via quantitative and qualitative analysis of data (metric, spatial, wavelength, etc.) derived from objects / targets and fixed or dynamic sources, which can be used to detect, locate, track, identify, and / or describe those sources (Adapted from EME (2008, pp. 32-35) and Clark (2007, pp. 84-85)).

Interestingly, some of these disciplines are usually associated with technologically developed societies. However, Clark (2007, p. 86) points out some aspects that are worth mentioning: except for MASINT, the other disciplines have existed for centuries. The act of collecting information from open sources stretches back to when the first manuscripts were written. The author cites the following passage taken from the Old Testament as an example of HUMINT activity: “[...] Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan [...]”. The origins of SIGINT, and specifically of COMINT, can be traced back to flag codes and smoke signals. Finally, when spies drew sketches and blueprints of castles and cities, they were collecting IMINT.

Although each discipline has a specific set of goals, as described above, linkages between them can and should be established to ensure information redundancy – an analysis variable used to confirm veracity –, which greatly enhances the production of Actionable Intelligence, as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3 – Multidisciplinary Process for Integrating Intelligence in the production of Actionable Intelligence.**

Source: Adapted from Herman (1996).

Figure 3 depicts the process by which support is provided to decision makers through the dissemination of Actionable Intelligence. Another aspect worthy of mention is that the process includes Big Data integration, which allows sensors from the various disciplines to

meet the critical information requirements described in the collection plan. The Big Data concept refers to the high volume of structured and unstructured data that can sometimes overwhelm organizations. However, it is not the amount of available data that is important, but the advantages organizations can obtain from those data (Instituto SAS, 2018).

Upon delivery of these Big Data, All Source Intelligence Analysis has the fundamental role of analysing, integrating and disseminating the consolidated product – Actionable Intelligence – to decision makers. To fully grasp the complexity of this process, it is necessary to understand that these data “come from multiple sources, which makes it difficult to connect, combine, clean and transpose them across systems. Despite this, it is necessary to establish and correlate relationships, hierarchies and multiple links” between data to minimise the risk of overlooking information or intelligence that could have provided better and more accurate situational awareness (Instituto SAS, 2018). The scheme in Figure 4 shows how Atwood (2015) contextualised and classified this complexity.

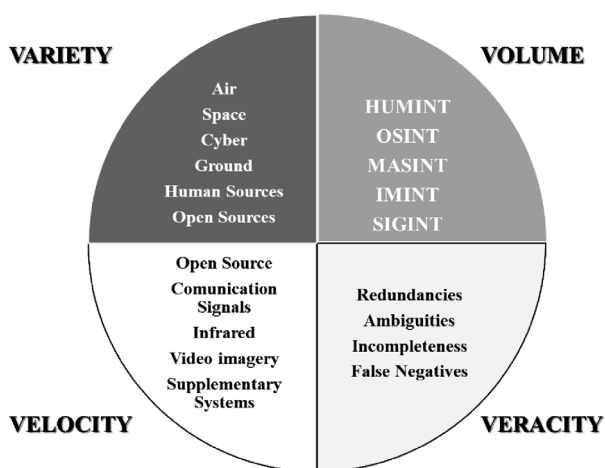


Figure 4 – The four “Vs” or variables that describe the complexity of “Big Data”.

Source: Adapted from Atwood (2015).

In regards to volume, the organization collects information from a variety of sources, which range from humans to satellites. This has been facilitated by technological advances and specific platforms which have been created for the purpose. Veracity requires the ability to obtain the same information through different methods – redundancies –, and is a useful mechanism for evaluating the accuracy or veracity of the information collected.

Since data are being transmitted at unprecedented speeds and must be processed in a timely manner, velocity is a crucial factor in producing timely intelligence. Variety refers to obtaining information in different formats: structured data from traditional databases (such as numerical data) and unstructured data from sources such as documents, email, audio, video, and satellite imagery (Instituto SAS, 2018).

It can be deduced from this that ensuring complementarity and proximity between disciplines is the key to producing solid intelligence. Regarding the methods used to collect

intelligence, P. Gomes C. (email interview, 17 November 2018) states that the nature of a conflict and the theatre of operations determines, or should determine, the disciplines to be employed. In the case of HUMINT, this will always depend on the time available and on the regularity of the contacts, as well as on the language, culture and type of conflict and society.

## 2. HUMINT as a source of intelligence

### 2.1. Background

To ascertain the importance of the human element in the IPC, this chapter will address several factors involved in HUMINT activities, such as: specific features, strengths, weaknesses, and constraints, among other aspects.

Thus, HUMINT can be described as an Intelligence discipline that aims to obtain intelligence and / or information through the interaction between experts – HUMINT collectors – and human sources (EME, 2008, p. 31). U.S. military doctrine defines HUMINT as:

[...] the collection by a trained HUMINT Collector of foreign information from people and multimedia to identify elements, intentions, composition, strength, dispositions, tactics, equipment, personnel, and capabilities. It uses human sources as a tool and a variety of collection methods, both passively and actively, to gather information to satisfy the commander's intelligence requirements and cross-cue other intelligence disciplines.

U.S. Army (2010, p. 108)

It can be deduced from the excerpt above that HUMINT uses human sources to obtain credible information that can be confirmed by other collection methods, thus providing as much intelligence as possible to commanders and decision makers.

As mentioned above, HUMINT was the first intelligence discipline, and it still remains the most effective in the long term, especially against targets that use asymmetric tactics. The best way to obtain Actionable Intelligence is by collecting information from within the target's own organizational structure to discover who, what, when, where, why, and how an enemy plans to operate (Mazumadar, 2013, p. 18). However, this type of covert operation takes years as it requires establishing a relationship with a source that has a high enough level of access to information that can become Actionable Intelligence. Overt HUMINT activities such as debriefing patrols, interrogating detainees, liaising with local entities, and interacting with non-governmental actors are also an excellent source of intelligence on asymmetric forces (Mazumadar, 2013, pp. 18-20).

This intelligence source “[...] includes all types of data and information collected by humans from open or classified sources through direct observation of behaviours, events or objects” (Fernandes, 2014, p. 111).

HUMINT can provide intelligence on “[...] plans and intentions, deliberations and decisions, research and development goals and strategies, doctrine, leadership, political or military relationships, weapons systems, physical and cultural infrastructure, and medical conditions” (ITACG, 2009, p. 7). Therefore, HUMINT can collect data and information “[...] that is difficult or sometimes impossible to collect by other [...] means [...]” (ITACG, 2009).

It can be inferred from this that HUMINT remains as instrumental as it has always been in providing decision support for asymmetric warfare.

## **2.2. Limitations of HUMINT**

Because HUMINT activities involve people and interpersonal relationships, some limitations must be addressed so that mechanisms can be developed to mitigate them. The following limitations were identified:

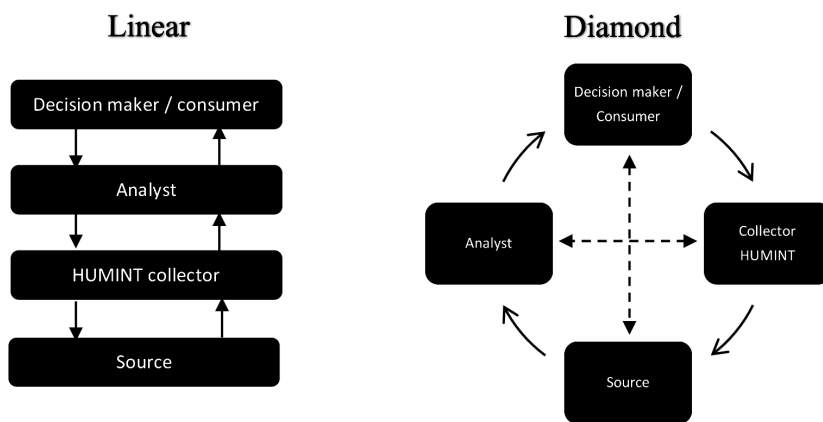
- (i) Interpersonal Skills – HUMINT depends more on the individual innate or acquired qualities of a person than on the ability to operate equipment of any kind;
- (ii) Primary requirements – Before any HUMINT operation can take place, there is a preparation phase during which people of interest are identified, that is, potential targets from whom useful information can be collected;
- (iii) Insufficient personnel – The technical and personal traits a HUMINT collector must possess, mean that, even though the assets used undergo a careful selection process, they are often unable to meet all intelligence needs. Therefore, prioritising those needs according to level of criticality is especially important.
- (iv) Time constraints – Time is an especially important factor in HUMINT activities since developing close relationships and gaining a source's trust entails spending time with them;
- (v) Language barrier – Although HUMINT collectors can use interpreters, if they are not able to hold a conversation with a source, this can limit their ability to collect information as well as the ability to establish a rapport because the interaction between the collector and the source is being "filtered";
- (vi) Not understanding the mission – lack of knowledge about the mission and about how these methods should be used often leads to HUMINT collectors being assigned tasks that should be assigned to the Military Police or a Counterintelligence Unit;
- (vii) Assessing and disseminating information – The time required to produce and assess the veracity of the information collected entails coordinating a number of factors to ensure that actionable intelligence is delivered in a timely manner;
- (viii) Terrain – The terrain can pose challenges when a target operates in areas that are difficult to access (e.g. mountains, desert, etc.) or where sophisticated equipment cannot be used effectively;
- (ix) Human factor – Intelligence Units should consider the local populations of the areas where HUMINT operations will be carried out, and familiarise themselves with their social and cultural background. Without support from local populations, any operation will be more difficult to carry out (Mazumadar (2013, p.26) and U.S. Army (2010)).

It can be deduced from the above that HUMINT activities are clearly underpinned by a network of extrinsic and intrinsic relationships which directly influence the success of an operation. The aspects identified here emphasise that, in addition to individual qualities, a number of other factors are involved in successfully delivering Actionable Intelligence to decision makers.

### 2.3. The Intelligence Production Cycle and the HUMINT Collection Cycle

Although the main focus of this study is not to provide a detailed analysis of the IPC, this section will outline some principles that will serve to contextualise the study’s approach to HUMINT. Menezes (2012, p.19) argues that “the IPC model has garnered some criticism, especially regarding the lack of communication between those who collect intelligence and decision makers, and especially between collection and analysis”. Furthermore, Silva (2018, pp. 28-30) argues that the Direction, Collection, Analysis, and Dissemination phases should include assessment and feedback mechanisms between the two entities involved in the process – analyst and decision maker.

Referring to HUMINT, Steele (2012, pp. 5-6) mentions that the Intelligence paradigm underwent a change at the beginning of the 21st century which especially affected the relationships and processes that occur between actors. The changes in the operational environment resulted in the need to find new ways of establishing relationships. Linear schemes (Figure 5) give priority to the hierarchy of the intelligence flow and scrupulously respect existing bureaucratic processes. Diamond schemes (Figure 5) emphasise dynamic relationships through which links can be created in a timely manner along the intelligence chain. According to Steele (2012, p. 5), these links will enable the delivery of Timely Intelligence.



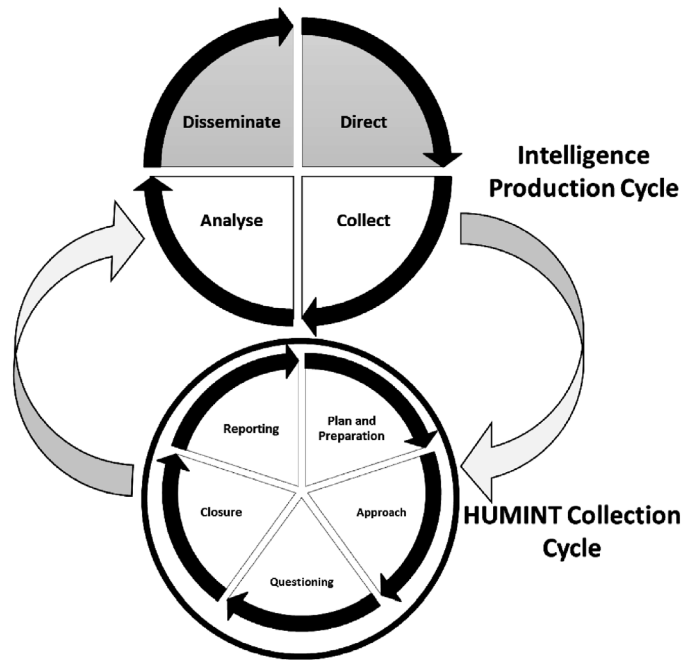
**Figure 5 – Linear versus Diamond Paradigms.**

*Source:* Adapted from Steele (2012, p. 5).

In regards to the IPC and the Diamond scheme, Silva (2018) and Steele (2012) stress that the means by which information is collected – the HUMINT collector – and the decision maker / consumer should work in close proximity, adding that the collector’s actions during an operation can be directed to focus on the *intention* behind an information requirement or need.

Furthermore, the links between the IPC and the phases of a HUMINT operation should be outlined. All HUMINT activities, regardless of the methods used in the operation that they are supporting, comprise five phases: planning and preparation, approach, questioning, termination, and reporting. Usually, these phases occur in sequence. However, a given

technique of approach may yield critical information at an earlier stage than predicted, both accelerating and reducing the phases of the HUMINT Collection Cycle (HCC) depicted in Figure 6.



**Figure 6 – Interaction between the IPC and the HCC.**  
 Source: Adapted from Silva (2018) and U.S. Army (2010).

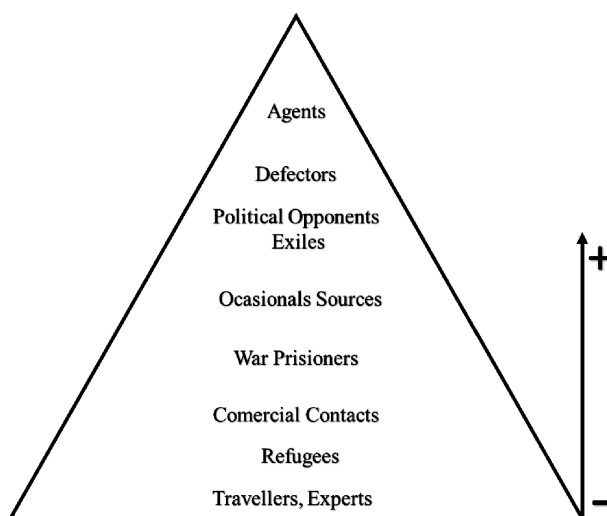
In order to raise the awareness of the scientific and military community to this issue, this section will describe each phase individually. In the Planning and Preparation phase, the HUMINT collector collects the data needed for the operation, focusing on any administrative and operational aspects that require attention (U.S. Army, 2010, pp. 1-5). Administrative aspects relate to expenses, transportation, and liaising with other entities (e.g. local police, international counterparts, among others). Operational aspects include force protection and intelligence on the rendezvous location, the routes to and from the rendezvous location, communications, and background information on the source (history, relationships, traits, reliability).

In the Approach phase, the collector creates an environment conducive to information sharing by establishing the necessary security conditions and by developing a rapport with the source to encourage their cooperation.

After the external conditions are established to allow for information to be exchanged, the collector begins the Questioning phase using all available methods (e.g. elicitation,

debriefing or interrogation<sup>5</sup>) to question the source on a sequence of topics, which can be both predefined and contingent, depending on the collection requirements defined by commanders, and which confirm or disprove the veracity and consistency of the information collected.

The procedures and techniques used during the questioning phase will depend on the collector's assessment of a particular source and the environment where the operation will take place. The sources can be classified according to the potential value, quantity, and sensitivity of the collected information, based on level of access. Thus, as shown in Figure 7, Herman (1996, p. 63) considers that, in most cases, information obtained from travellers or experts on specific issues tends to be less relevant than information provided by agents.



**Figure 7 – Pyramid depicting the value, quantity and sensitivity of a HUMINT source.**

*Source:* Adapted from Herman (1996, p. 63).

Still during the encounter, in the Termination phase, the collector will recap the conversation to confirm the information obtained from the source and to assess if sufficient trust has been established to set up a future meeting. Finally, in the Reporting phase, the collector transmits the collected information through a written or oral report so that it can be analysed, processed and, when applicable, disseminated.

In addition to the phases described above, a set of conditioning and subjective factors may affect the conduct of HUMINT activities, such as empathy or antipathy between the actors, the sensitivity of the information that was or will be shared, and the security of the location where the encounter will take place. These factors will determine the innate and acquired traits that the HUMINT collector must possess.

<sup>5</sup> In order to keep this article unclassified, no specific HUMINT techniques, tactics or operational procedures will be described here.

### 3. The HUMINT collector

Spies cannot be usefully employed without a certain intuitive sagacity.

Sun Tzu (2009, p. 99)

Before any analysis of the traits of HUMINT collector can be carried out, it should be stressed that this activity is based on a relationship between two people, wherein one attempts to obtain information from the other without the other knowing about it or having the intention to give it (Sayre, 2004, p. 17). There is no evidence, either explicit or implicit, that the fundamentals of interpersonal relationships have changed in any way since the origins of civilization. Today, as in the past, relationships require at least a rapport<sup>6</sup> between two people. The ability to empathise and the trust established between the two actors are the pillars that sustain a successful and beneficial relationship.

It can be inferred from this that a HUMINT collector should have traits that allow them to carry out HUMINT operations, which can be described, on the one hand, as a “fine-tuned science” and, on the other, as a “delicate work of art” (Mazumadar, 2013, p. 23). The author adds that, in addition to technical skills, a collector’s innate qualities are crucial for the success of a HUMINT operation.

However, the success of a HUMINT operation does not depend on the number of agents on the ground, but rather on how qualified they are for the mission. Not only do they have to be good at what they do, they must be able to handle a variety of situations, as it is not profitable to have more than one spy on the same assignment (Zegart, 2007). Hitz (2010, p. 274) argues that, for an infiltration operation to be successful, “the agent must be good at it”, because only good agents on the ground can ensure an effective operation that accomplishes all its objectives.

#### 3.1. Traits

As has been established, the human element plays a critical role in HUMINT. Although the “definition of a good” HUMINT collector includes a set of intangible qualities, there are certain traits that they must possess (U.S Army, 2010):

- (i) Alertness – The HUMINT collector must be alert at all times. The collector must be able to focus both on the information being provided and on constantly assessing its value and veracity by analysing the source’s behaviour and the security of the environment where the encounter is taking place;
- (ii) Patience and Tact – The collector must be patient in order to establish trust and empathy with the source during the encounter. Any outbursts or displays of impatience may cause a source to lose respect for the collector and become less willing to convey the information;
- (ii) Credibility – The collector must project a clear image of professionalism and confidence, must be able to articulate complex situations and concepts, and must

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<sup>6</sup> A concept from the field of psychology which refers to the technique used to connect with and empathise with another person (Significados, 2018).

- also behave in a believable and consistent manner, following through on any promises made and refraining from making promises that cannot be kept;
- (iii) Objectivity and Self-control – If the collector is not objective, this may cause them to unconsciously distort their analysis of the information collected and prevent them from using the questioning techniques effectively. The collector must not lose the initiative during the encounter, nor display irritation or anger if the conversation is not going as expected;
  - (iv) Adaptability – The collector’s ability to adapt to different personalities and to all types of locations, operational rhythms, and environments is crucial to the success of a HUMINT operation.
  - (v) Perseverance – Resilience in the face of an uncooperative source or of any attitudes from the source that may prevent the collector from achieving an objective is a crucial factor for success;
  - (vi) Appearance and Demeanour – The collector’s personal appearance and demeanour when interacting with a source are relevant aspects because the source will also be evaluating and judging the collector, even if unconsciously. Projecting a positive image will make the source more willing to engage in conversation;
  - (vii) Initiative – Establishing and maintaining control is the key to a successful encounter. This does not mean that the collector should dominate the source physically but that they should take the initiative in the conversation and direct it towards predefined topics.

Having determined the personal traits of a HUMINT collector in conceptual terms, this chapter will now identify the practical qualities that a HUMINT collector should possess in operational terms. To that end, a universe of 20 distinct qualities were identified by analysing interviews to military officers who supervised and trained military HUMINT collectors, both on national territory and abroad. The qualities mentioned more often are shown in Figure 8.

## HUMINT operator traits



■ Empathic ■ Alert ■ Disciplined ■ Judicious ■ Communicative ■ Principled ■ Credible

**Figure 8 – Essential qualities of a HUMINT collector.**

Source: Interviews with officers with operational experience from the three branches of the military (2018).

The numbers highlighted in the pie chart indicate the number of times a quality was mentioned. As can be inferred from the chart above, the interviewees generally agreed that a collector should possess the right balance between empathy and attention to detail because they must constantly analyse not only the source's behaviour but also the surrounding environment.

When asked which was more important, innate or acquired skills, all interviewees agreed that personal qualities are more relevant than acquired skills, especially, as stated by H. Rodrigues (email interview, 19 November 2018), during the recruitment and selection of intelligence collectors. Along the same lines, F. Machado (email interview, 20 November 2018) believes that if an individual does not possess innate skills for this activity, they will never be able to do it effectively no matter how much training they receive. Introverts and individuals with speech impediments, noticeable marks, many personal vulnerabilities, or who are unable to take the initiative and have trouble making decisions will find it difficult to conduct HUMINT activities.

Despite this, acquired skills must be taken into consideration when "building" a HUMINT collector. According to C. Cavaco (email interview, 15 November 2018), in order to optimise the small pool of human resources capable of conducting HUMINT operations, only the most suitable candidates can be selected as collectors. These candidates should possess high levels of emotional intelligence<sup>7</sup> and be capable of systematically organizing the information

<sup>7</sup> Emotional intelligence is "the ability to manage feelings so that they are expressed appropriately and effectively, enabling people to work together smoothly toward their common goals" (Goleman, 2011, pp. 10-20).

collected in a format that can be disseminated. Cavaco further added that “in this line of business, it is not enough to be nice or popular; one must also be disciplined and systematic”.

### 3.2. Training

The general and specific training of a HUMINT collector is always based on the assumption that the selection process has identified the most suitable candidates for the job (otherwise the training would not be successful). The candidates must learn certain techniques, tactics and procedures that will enhance their interpersonal, persuasion and reaction skills and prepare them for the range of personalities and situations that they may encounter in an operational environment.

Although it is not the purpose of this study to go into the operational and technical details of HUMINT collection, this chapter will briefly address the areas of knowledge and background of a HUMINT collector, in accordance with the selection requirements of the Applied Psychology Army Centre and of the Army Military Intelligence and Security Centre. The latter is responsible for delivering the HUMINT Collector Course to the branches of the Armed Forces, the National Republican Guard, the Military Judicial Police, the Maritime Police and the Public Security Police.

Training is continuous because, in addition to the technical areas that will be specified below, the collector must acquire intelligence on the area of operations where the activities will take place (social, political, and economic structures, history and culture), on the threats or potential threats that they may encounter (organization, modus operandi, equipment, and intentions), and on any local laws that may affect the conduct of operations. The collector should also have cultural awareness, linguistic proficiency (fluency in the local language), and behavioural analysis skills, in addition to knowing the information requirements to be met (U.S. Army, 2010, pp. 18-22).

Therefore, during the initial stages of training, attention should be given to: Planning, Execution, Reporting, and General requirements (CPAE, 2009).

#### (i) Planning

Once a mission has been assigned, planning accounts for 80% of the chances of success / failure. Therefore, the orders should include specific objectives so that the collector can acquire the intelligence they need to:

- Plan the operation in a detailed, organized manner;
- Think – “What do I need to know to accomplish the mission?”;
- Devise a coherent, achievable plan with the data available;
- Study the source by analysing and learning their patterns of behaviour, their level of access, any previous contacts that may have been established, interests, occupation, etc.

#### (ii) Execution

Having completed the planning stage, the collector will receive theoretical and practical training that will allow them to assess whether it will be difficult to adapt to a given source. Collectors must train for situations where the source’s “way of being and acting” is “very different” from their own. Furthermore, they should

develop critical analysis skills so that they can accurately assess any challenges and develop mechanisms to overcome them.

Therefore, training should emphasise that, when approaching a source, the collector should:

- Be polite;
- Dress appropriately to the source and the location;
- Be a “good listener”;
- Be empathic;
- Be able to read the source’s body language without neglecting any of the above requirements.

Maintain a consistent narrative, which includes:

- Introducing themselves;
- Telling a credible cover story;
- Establishing / enhancing a rapport;
- Meeting the goals set for the encounter;
- Recapping the topics addressed in the encounter;
- Setting up a future meeting with the source.

(iii) Reporting

Training collectors to write reports serves a dual purpose: standardising processes and keeping a record of the information obtained. Therefore, training should emphasise the following skills:

- The ability to write synthetically (in a clear, precise, concise, and timely manner);
- The ability to formulate comments and observations about the encounter in writing;
- The ability to interpret the source’s statements;
- The ability to explain in writing whether the source’s verbal and non-verbal communication was consistent / inconsistent.

(iv) General requirements

Given the specific features of HUMINT operations, any collector in training should also have the following skills:

- The ability to work with a team;
- Above average general knowledge;
- A high level of maturity;
- An internal locus of control<sup>8</sup>;
- Non aggressive demeanour;
- Quick thinking;
- The ability to argue while maintaining impartiality.

### 3.3. Soldiers as sensors

The training required to collect information from human sources cannot, however, be

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<sup>8</sup> Degree to which people feel they have no control over the events that influence their lives (Psicoativo, 2018).

delivered to such a small universe of agents, otherwise the available human resources will not be optimised. Despite this, as Steele (2012) observes, soldiers continue to be thought of in terms of quantity rather than quality. The training soldiers receive essentially covers the equipment and systems that they will be operating rather than also investing on developing their innate qualities and skills.

Because of the considerable complexity inherent in the operational environments where military operations take place, it would be beneficial if HUMINT activities could be performed by both specialised and non-specialised assets. For example, the fact that forces sometimes come into close contact with the local population during routine operations while on patrol, on foot or by car, provides opportunities that can be exploited. Therefore, military commanders should be aware that, just as soldiers can be trained to fight as infantry, they can also receive basic training to serve as sensors to collect information (Institute of Land Warfare, 2005).

Here, too, the training given to soldiers when preparing them to take part in a military operation should take into consideration that soldiers are objectively “exposed” to information that could be of significant value if collected. As the report by the Institute of Land Warfare (2005, pp. 5-6) states, it will only be possible to effect cultural and conceptual changes in the way forces are employed through doctrine, training, and by developing leaders who can increasingly integrate Intelligence into their operations.

By introducing these changes, decision makers and commanders should realise the huge potential soldiers have as intelligence collectors integrated into a larger plan that involves all Intelligence disciplines at their disposal. This requires that soldiers on the battlefield understand the value of reporting their experiences, perceptions, and judgments accurately and concisely and that they maintain situational awareness at all times during an operation.

In current operations, the characteristics of the operational environment where military forces are employed means that everyone involved in combat is responsible for collecting Intelligence (Steele, 2012).

Finally, because “every soldier is a sensor”, training plays a vital role. In addition to receiving training for specific objectives, soldiers should also be taught techniques that will allow them to act as sensors. This implies making commanders aware of the advantages and practical consequences of having soldiers produce Actionable Intelligence to support decision makers.

## Conclusions

This section will revisit the GO in order to present the study’s findings and critical reflection in a systematic way. The study attempted to ascertain how HUMINT can be employed in supporting military operations.

To that end, the study used deductive reasoning and a qualitative research strategy based on documentary and content analysis and on interviews with experts with operational experience.

To explain all the dimensions involved in a HUMINT operation, the analysis began by laying down a conceptual framework, which revealed that the use of human sources to collect

information has been a constant throughout history. The arguments provided showed, on the one hand, that this activity could have originated in the need to gain an advantage over someone or something in order to survive, and, on the other, that the advances in technology and globalisation have not rendered HUMINT ineffective, nor do they limit its use.

Now, as in the past, interpersonal relationships remain crucial despite the ever-changing, volatile nature of the operational environment. Current threats are global, diffuse and infiltrate amongst the population, making HUMINT an invaluable tool in combatting them.

Several authors cited in this study emphasise that threats have become delocalised and that military forces are increasingly employed in densely populated urban areas, conditioning or limiting the way military operations are carried out. Furthermore, conducting incisive, objective military operations with minimum collateral damage requires timely intelligence, that is, intelligence that helps commanders make decisions and employ their forces in the right place, at the right time to ensure that the mission is accomplished.

Next, the concept of Intelligence was deconstructed and its goals separated from those of Counterintelligence, as the operational processes involved in both are somewhat entangled and call for clarification<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, it was ascertained that, despite their similarities, the two areas have ultimately different goals. The goal of counterintelligence is to identify and neutralise threats while the goal of Intelligence is to identify aspects that provide an advantage over an opponent, enemy, or competitor by analysing collected information on their capabilities, intentions, and weaknesses, as well as on the operational environment where the conflict may occur. This clarification was important insofar as HUMINT, in the strictest sense, that of operational conduct, that is, the use of techniques, tactics and procedures, is used in both disciplines.

By depicting the value of Intelligence, in the broadest sense, as a stratified pyramid, it was possible to visualise the process in which the information obtained is transformed into intelligence that can be delivered to decision makers, but also to identify, through the interaction of the IPC and the HCC, the importance of the Intelligence principle of timeliness in the production of Actionable Intelligence.

Therefore, given the uncertain, diffuse patterns of action of current threats, it was possible to infer that the decisive element in accomplishing a mission is maintaining high levels of common situational awareness and ensuring that intelligence is disseminated in a rapid, effective and timely manner to optimise a force's combat power.

Time and human interaction are, then, the two most important factors in achieving this because, regardless of the type of sensor used, the information is collected, analysed, processed by people so that other people can make decisions based on that information. Therefore, the human element is present in the fundamental stages of the IPC – Directing, Analysing, and Processing Intelligence for decision support. Moreover, HUMINT, as a method of collecting information from human sources, has something unique over the other disciplines.

The classification of Intelligence according to disciplines refers to the different types

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<sup>9</sup> In operational contexts, the 2X structure is used to describe that function in an organization.

of methods or systems of collecting information, which can range from human sources to communications, the internet, photographs, and electromagnetic signals, among others. This taxonomy of Intelligence disciplines was created for bureaucratic or historical reasons, and provides a doctrinal basis for the use of those methods. It was possible to deduce from the literature analysed that HUMINT, that is, the collection of information from human sources, is the one discipline that is always needed when conducting an operation. Although Intelligence disciplines such as OSINT, SIGINT, and IMINT are associated with an increasingly technological society, they do not lessen the relevance of HUMINT because, despite the sophistication and unquestionable value of those disciplines to the IPC, HUMINT is the only information collection method that can uncover the intentions and motivations of an enemy.

In addition to these aspects, the study identified that the information collected by the different types of sensors must be integrated and processed so that Actionable Intelligence can be delivered to decision makers. This will enable correlating the links and information obtained from different sources and testing their veracity by employing redundant methods to gain a more realistic and accurate picture of the situation.

After describing Intelligence from a holistic perspective by studying the relationship between the goals and means employed, the study attempted to understand how HUMINT directly and indirectly supports the decision-making process.

To that end, HUMINT was defined as an Intelligence discipline that exploits interpersonal relationships – with sources or contacts – to collect data in a systematic and controlled way. These interactions can provide information about the connections, intentions and motivations of a particular actor, making it possible to establish links between individuals and / or organizations.

By analysing the human factor, the study identified a number of unique advantages provided by HUMINT. However, it was also possible to deduce that there are limits to its employment. One of those limitations is the set of innate and acquired qualities that a HUMINT specialist must have, as well as the time required to establish a rapport with a source.

Therefore, in light of the time and timeliness requirements covered in this reflection, the study identified and established a set of links between the IPC and the HCC. By listing the processes involved in the HCC, it was possible to understand the processes involved in a HUMINT operation and link them to the corresponding phases of the IPC. It was possible to infer from this analysis that a relationship of proximity between the decision maker, who defines the collection requirements, and the information collector is a key factor in the successful delivery of Actionable Intelligence, and that it will result in a continued effort to adapt to any new information requirements that may emerge from a volatile operational environment.

Having identified the complex extrinsic and intrinsic factors involved in HUMINT operations, such as the relevance of the human element, the study identified a set of innate and acquired qualities a HUMINT collector must possess, which will greatly enhance the results obtained. The interviews conducted with Armed Forces officers with operational

experience as heads of Military Intelligence Cells in operational theatres, namely Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Lithuania, provided an invaluable contribution to this analysis.

All interviewees agreed that, in addition to technical skills, HUMINT collectors must possess a set of innate qualities, namely, empathy, credibility, and alertness. By correlating these data with the doctrine on intelligence, it was possible to infer, based on the theoretical literature and the opinions of experts with operational experience, that, in order to become a HUMINT specialist, one must possess certain individual qualities.

All interviewees agreed that HUMINT collectors must be trained to adjust their actions and attitudes in order to acquire and consolidate the techniques, tactics and procedures required for HUMINT operations. This training is continuous, both in regards to the skills acquired and to the “human” terrain where the operation will be carried out.

Therefore, the process of recruiting and selecting HUMINT collectors is instrumental in optimising the organization’s resources due to the specificity and responsibility inherent to operations of this nature. Although this study’s goal was not to list the selection procedures, it was worth noting the aspects that should be explored during the different stages of the selection process to determine if the candidate’s innate qualities correspond to the basic requirements of a HUMINT collector.

Although, as mentioned above, HUMINT collectors are given specialised training in extracting information from human sources, soldiers can also be excellent information collectors. Basic intelligence training would make soldiers who carry out patrols among the local population aware of the importance of reporting their experiences, perceptions, and judgments with precision and brevity. This cultural change in how “soldiers” are employed, along with greater awareness by commanders and decision makers, would significantly increase the Actionable Intelligence available to military commanders.

In order to assess the influence of this activity on a mission’s chances of success, future studies may use the findings presented in the conclusions section of this scientific article to analyse specific case studies in which HUMINT operations have been used to support military decision making.

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