

Military Overhauls Intelligence Gathering, Analysis in Afghanistan. U.S. military officials in Afghanistan have ordered a series of steps to overhaul intelligence gathering and analysis in the war-torn country in response to deficiencies uncovered during a lengthy White House strategy review last year.

The overhaul will broaden the scope of intelligence gathering from hunting down extremists to gathering information about local attitudes, concerns, people and leaders as part of a deeper U.S. shift aimed at winning over the Afghan population.

The changes were ordered by Maj. Gen. Michael T. Flynn, director of intelligence for the military command in Afghanistan, and were detailed by a U.S. official and in a paper published Monday by the Center for a New American Security, a military think tank.

In the paper, Flynn and two other officials argued that intelligence efforts in Afghanistan have been focused too tightly on searching for enemy insurgents and roadside bombs, often ignoring crucial information from knowledgeable Afghans, local council meetings, radio broadcasts and similar sources.

"This vast and under-appreciated body of information, almost all of which is unclassified, admittedly offers few clues about where to find insurgents, but provides information of even greater strategic importance: a map for leveraging popular support and marginalizing the insurgency itself," Flynn and his co-authors wrote.

As part of the overhaul, Flynn ordered the creation of teams to work across the traditional military hierarchy and between units, collecting local information and passing it up the chain of command. **The teams will work out of new information centers, where analysts will compile reports on virtually all of Afghanistan's nearly 400 districts.**

Flynn and U.S. officials **compared the operation of the intelligence teams to journalists**, in that they can operate somewhat outside the traditional military hierarchy and move from unit to unit across regions to uncover information.

An official who described the idea on condition of anonymity said the intent was to get critical information at the "grassroots" that senior commanders need to make decisions.

The moves by Flynn were prompted, at least in part, by deficiencies discovered during last year's White House Afghan strategy review. During the review, administration officials pressed for information about dozens of critical Afghan districts, asking about local attitudes to the international military effort and about the strengths of local officials.

But intelligence analysts are so starved of information, they "could barely find enough information to scrape together even rudimentary assessments of pivotal Afghan districts," Flynn and his co-authors wrote.

Flynn makes clear that intelligence has a significant role in "finishing off enemy leaders." But he believes the military's priorities must be rebalanced to better understand local conditions.

In another change, **Flynn wants the intelligence reports to be widely available to allied militaries and non-governmental organizations, and not kept secret. For example, the reports could include accounts of previous development efforts, so an organization contemplating future work could learn about potential risks based on past experience.**

In ordering the most recent changes, Flynn acknowledged that an earlier effort, to expand intelligence "fusion centers," had failed. Fusion centers were designed to team intelligence experts with combat officers to quickly act on information.

But the fusion centers were too closely focused on purely military objectives and that "change has come more slowly than we can afford," he wrote.

Flynn's co-authors for the paper included Marine Capt. Matt Pottinger and Paul Batchelor, a senior official with the Defense Intelligence Agency. [Barnes/Stripes/5January2010]