Commander’s Critical Information Requirements

by the MSTP Staff

“All information management should focus on critical information requirements. This demands vision on the part of the commander and understanding on the part of subordinates in order to recognize critical information when they see it.”

—Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 6, Command and Control

Commanders have always required critical elements of information to make sound, timely, and informed decisions on the battlefield. Determining the information needed to make these decisions is crucial to a commander’s ability to act decisively in the fog and friction of war. The commander’s critical information requirements (CCIR), issued as a subset of the commander’s battlespace area evaluation, is the commander’s method for focusing his staff on the information he needs for critical decision-making. CCIR aid the commander in reducing information needs to a manageable set. Marine Corps Reference Publication (MCRP) 5-12C, Marine Corps Supplement to the Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, defines the term CCIR as:

Information regarding the enemy and friendly activities and the environment identified by the commander as critical to maintaining situational awareness, planning future activities, and facilitating timely decisionmaking.

Despite their importance, Marine Air-Ground Task Force Staff Training Program commonly sees units encountering difficulty in utilizing CCIR by establishing too many, writing CCIR that are not properly focused on the commander’s needs, and not tracking current CCIR.

The three broad categories of CCIR identified above (enemy, friendly, and environment) are normally answered for the commander via the development of priority intelligence requirements (PIR), friendly forces information requirements (FFIR), and essential elements of friendly information (EEFI). PIR are those information requirements related to the enemy and the environment. FFIR relate to the status of friendly forces. EEFI concern information about friendly forces and plans that must be kept from the enemy.

CCIR help focus information management and drive the intelligence collection plan. CCIR are primarily a decisionmaking tool that links critical decisions or decision points the commander must make with the information required to make those decisions. For example, suppose a battalion commander is trying to decide where and when to breach an enemy minefield. To make this decision he may establish the following CCIR:

- What are the enemy units/weapon systems that can range the potential breach site? (PIR)
- Has the enemy deduced the location of our planned breach site? (EEFI)
- How long will it take for Company B (with attached obstacle clearing detachment [OCD]) to breach the minefield? (FFIR)

With these elements of information, the commander would be able to determine if there are enemy forces in place to counter the breach in progress, whether the enemy knows where the breach will be conducted, and the capability of his own breach force. The commander hopes to have all this information available when it comes time to make the decision. Without the focus provided by CCIR, the commander could have either too little data or too much irrelevant information. With CCIR, he is able to combine tailored information with his judgment, intuition, and experience to make a timely decision.

The following observations and recommendations may assist commanders and their staffs in the development and employment of CCIR:

- The terms CCIR and PIR are not interchangeable. A careful use of terminology is essential to effectively employ CCIR. Many times this is not the case, and confusion is the result. MCRP 5-12C defines a PIR as “an intelligence requirement associated with a decision that will critically affect the overall success of the command’s mission.” PIR support those CCIR that are related to the enemy and environment and are the highest order of intelligence requirements. While a PIR may constitute a CCIR, not all CCIR are PIR.
• Limit the number of CCIR to avoid diffusing their focus and diluting their critical nature. The tendency to designate too many CCIR violates the overarching reason they are used, which is to focus information management on the requirements the commander needs to make critical decisions. A leading cause of this problem is the tendency to designate lower priority staff information requirements as CCIR, even though they provide no service to the commander in making critical decisions. Although the staff frequently recommends information requirements to the commander to assist him in identifying what he is going to need in order to make the decisions, the commander alone approves CCIR. Although doctrine does not specify a maximum limit to the number of CCIR for a unit, the limited collection assets and capability of a particular staff to manage information will be the deciding factor in how many CCIR a commander can effectively designate. A classic example of how many CCIR a commander requires to make a critical decision is GEN Dwight D. Eisenhower’s decision to land at Normandy. To make the final decision to execute the largest amphibious assault in history, he required four pieces of information:

(1) When will I have sufficient landing craft to set a date for the invasion?
(2) How quickly can the reserve German panzer divisions respond to the assault?
(3) When will the weather break to allow the assault and buildup of forces ashore?
(4) Do the Germans know the deception plan?

• Post CCIR in a manner conducive to awareness, recognition, and reporting. Units routinely develop CCIR but often do not establish procedures to ensure they are posted in areas that will facilitate immediate reporting when the information becomes available. To be effective, CCIR need to be disseminated widely to all staff sections and subordinate commands and posted in a manner that will keep all necessary personnel focused on the requirements. Additionally, watch-standers and staff personnel need to be fully aware of the importance of the CCIR. When the information becomes available, it can then be recognized as a response to CCIR and reported to the commander as such.

• Focus CCIR. Writing CCIR with a focus that is too narrow provides information that does not support timely decisionmaking. The information a commander receives should, when combined with other elements of information he has identified, lead him to making critical decisions. For example, in the earlier breaching scenario, the commander asked, “How long would it take Company B to breach the minefield?” If instead, he had asked, “How many line charges and bangalore torpedoes does Company B have in its OCD?” he might have quickly received the correct numerical response, but he would not have learned the overall capability of the force to conduct the breach.

A useful technique that might assist staff members in determining recommended CCIR is to consider it within a hypothetical situation: “If you were a combat operations center watch officer and obtained the piece of information, would you awaken the commander at 0300 to deliver it to him? What decision or decision point does this information support?”

• Update CCIR to reflect changes in the battlespace and tactical situation. As planning and operations progress, the information needs of the commander will change. Many times units fail to make the necessary changes to the CCIR or disseminate changes to subordinate units. As CCIR are answered, current CCIR status is often not published, and precious resources are squandered duplicating information the staff has already obtained. CCIR must be constantly updated to reflect the commander’s current concerns so collection efforts and information management can be focused on the commander’s requirements.

• Track and report on higher headquarters (HHQ) CCIR. Subordinate units have a responsibility to main-