

The Four Pillars of Crisis Intelligence

By Mike Shelby (@grayzoneintel)

Introduction

If you're reading this, then you're already ahead of most people. You're thinking beyond just stockpiling supplies and hoping for the best. You know that real preparedness isn't about having the best gear or the biggest stockpile—it's about being able to act on the right information at the right time. And that's what this ebook is about: intelligence.

For years, mainstream preparedness has focused on sustainment. Stockpile food, buy ammo, get your bug-out bag ready, and wait for the worst. And while sustainment is important, it only carries you so far. It sustains you into tomorrow, but it doesn't solve the *cause* of problems. It doesn't map out your local terrain. It doesn't identify local assets. It doesn't help you anticipate threats. It doesn't give you an operational advantage. But intelligence does.

There was a saying in the Army: *Intelligence drives the fight*. It means that no matter how much firepower you have, if you don't have intelligence—if you don't know what's happening around you, where the threats are, and what's coming next—then you're fighting blind. Intelligence informs you of where to go, when to be there, what to do, and who to do it to. The same is true in disaster preparedness. Intelligence is the key to making the right decisions before, during, and after a disaster.

That's why I wrote this ebook. My goal is simple: to teach you how to become the intelligence officer for your area. Whether it's for emergency preparedness, disaster response, community security, or dealing with political or social unrest, the ability to collect, analyze, and act on intelligence will give you an overwhelming advantage when things go south.

Who Am I, and Why Should You Listen to Me?

A little about me—I'm a former intelligence sergeant and spent nearly a decade in the U.S. Intelligence Community. I did multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan as a soldier and contractor, where my job was to track threats, analyze enemy movements, and help commanders make decisions in high-risk environments. Over those years, I saw firsthand how intelligence made the difference between success and failure, between getting ambushed and staying ahead of the fight.

But I also saw the limitations of our strategy overseas. I remember as a young soldier, watching Taliban fighters move freely between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and thinking to myself, *We are never going to stop this*. That realization was part of what led me to leave military and

government work, and start focusing on what really mattered—helping Americans develop their own intelligence capabilities at home.

In 2011, on my final deployment to Afghanistan as an intelligence contractor, I started writing about the practical applications of intelligence and preparedness, along with my concerns about the future of the United States. That grew into *Forward Observer* a few years later, where I began writing intelligence reports and teaching intelligence courses for civilians. Since then, I've trained hundreds of students—everyone from preppers and homesteaders to law enforcement and emergency responders—on how to use intelligence skills to protect their communities.

Why Intelligence Matters

Over the years, I've found that most people don't act on what they learn. They sit through webinars, take notes, and think, *Wow, that's great information*. And then they turn on Fox News, go back to their normal routines, and never follow through with what they've learned. They never build an Area Study, never develop a local intelligence network, never put in the work to understand the threats around them. Then, when disaster strikes, they're caught flat-footed.

I don't want that to be you.

The truth is, intelligence isn't rocket science. It's not something reserved for three-letter agencies or guys who did this for a living in the military. Anyone with common sense can learn how to do an Area Study, how to analyze threats, how to gather useful information from their community, and how to organize that information into actionable intelligence.

I've seen grandmothers and single moms go through my intelligence courses and do better work than some of the military-trained guys. Why? Because they were committed. They saw the value of intelligence and made it a priority.

And that's the real reason most people fail to act. It's not because they don't have the ability. It's because they don't understand how important intelligence really is.

I've had guys tell me, *Mike, I've lived in my area for 20 or 30 years—I know it like the back of my hand*. And I can tell right away they don't get it. An Area Study isn't just about knowing the roads and the neighborhoods. It's about understanding the critical dynamics of your area—who the key players are, where the vulnerabilities exist, what threats are emerging, and how all of these pieces interact. It's a tactical intelligence document that gives you a blueprint for action.

And whether or not you have it during a crisis, you'll quickly come to understand why it's so important.

My Wake-Up Call

The first time I realized how badly I needed an intelligence network was during Hurricane Harvey in 2017. We had hunkered down at the family ranch, just outside Houston, Texas. The

storm knocked out power, and at that time, I didn't have a ham radio set up. Worse, I hadn't even met the neighbors around me. We couldn't see them through the trees, and I hadn't taken the time to establish those connections.

So when the hurricane hit, I was not only in a literal blackout—I was in an information blackout.

And as an intel guy, that was a massive failure. I make mistakes, too.

Contrast that with what happened during COVID in 2020. By that time, I had built up a solid intelligence network of formal and informal sources. The moment things started shutting down, my crew and I jumped into a Signal chat and started pushing out real-time information for others making last minute preparations. Which stores were open? Which still had supplies? Which ones were enforcing masks? Where could you still get ammo? Which local butchers were still processing meat?

That network saved us time, effort, and a lot of stress. It gave us a direct pipeline to the information we needed, while everyone else was scrambling. And that's what I want you to have.

The Path Forward

I don't know what the next major crisis will be. Maybe it's already started. But I do know that those with intelligence networks will have the advantage. They'll know where to go for resources, which areas to avoid, what threats are active, and how to adapt rapidly to changing conditions.

No amount of beans, bullets, or band-aids will ever give you that level of awareness.

When the power goes out, when the internet drops, when banks close and crime spikes—intelligence will be your most valuable resource. And in this book, I'm going to show you some steps to build it.

These are practical steps you can take right now to create a working intelligence system for your tribe, your neighborhood, and your community. And it starts with a commitment.

I'm not asking you to make intelligence your full-time job. But if you can commit just a few minutes a day—or a couple of hours a week—you'll be miles ahead of everyone else.

So before we go any further, make yourself a promise: that you will put this into action. That you will take these principles and apply them to your own situation. Because the next crisis is coming. And when it does, you'll either be prepared—or you'll wish you had been.

Let's get to work.

Section 1: The Area Study – Your First Step in Preparedness

If you're serious about emergency preparedness, the first thing you need—after securing two weeks of food, water, and supplies—is an Area Study. I can't stress this enough. Your Area Study is the foundation of all preparedness and security planning. You should do one as soon as possible, especially before buying any more expensive gear or supplies.

People constantly ask me, *"Mike, what should I be preparing for?"* My answer is always the same: start with an Area Study. Because until you fully understand your local threats, vulnerabilities, and resources, you're just guessing. And guessing is not a strategy.

The Importance of Knowing Your Surroundings

I want to share a story that perfectly illustrates why this matters.

Travis Haley, a Force Recon Marine and Blackwater security contractor, was involved in the 2004 Battle of An-Najaf in Iraq. In a video he posted on YouTube marking the ten-year anniversary of the battle, he talks about being at the Coalition Provisional Authority compound when his unit was attacked by the Jaysh al-Mahdi—an extremist Shia insurgent group.¹ It turned into an all-out firefight, and they ended up killing a significant number of insurgents.

But what really stuck with me was something he said afterward:

"One of the big things that bothered me was not knowing my surroundings, the indigenous people, the Mahdi Army. We didn't study that stuff. It wasn't our job to do that. And I wish I would have. I wish I would have understood who those people were, what their motivations were, and why I had to sit there as long as I did with a rifle and kill people. So that bothers me."

That's a powerful admission. Here's an elite private military contractor, and what he wishes he had more than anything wasn't a better rifle, more ammo, or extra gear—it was **more information**.

That's exactly why we do Area Studies. When a crisis happens, whether it's a riot, a blackout, a natural disaster, or an economic collapse, the biggest advantage you can have isn't another piece of gear—it's local intelligence.

How an Area Study Prevented a Disaster

Let me give you another real-world example, this time from my own experience.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDnY93VmaRY>

In 2018, I was volunteering with the Cajun Navy during Hurricane Florence. If you're not familiar with them, they're a group of Gulf Coast good ol' boys—Cajuns, rednecks, and patriots—who run search and rescue operations during hurricanes and floods. These guys had monster trucks, airboats, and rafts ready to help people affected by flooding in Lumberton, North Carolina.

The county sheriff in Lumberton gave them the green light to begin search and rescue operations, and they needed a place to stage their trucks and boats. Someone suggested using a local volunteer fire station. The sheriff approved it. Seemed like a solid plan.

But then they ran it past me.

At the time, I was the S-2, the intel guy, for the Cajun Navy. The first thing I did was pull up a floodplain map, and I immediately saw a problem. The rural fire station was sitting in a 100-year floodplain. And Hurricane Florence wasn't just another hurricane—this was a once-in-a-thousand-year flood event.

I called the director of the Cajun Navy, and said, *"You guys should not be staging there. That place is going to be underwater by tomorrow."*

Then he asked where they should stage. So I pulled up Google Earth, found the highest point of elevation in the immediate area, and located a nearby Walmart parking lot outside the floodplain.

It had everything they needed—plenty of space, restaurants for hot meals, and even a hotel where the teams could rest after multiple days of search and rescue missions.

Sure enough, when the storm hit, the fire station ended up knee-deep in water. If they had staged there, all their gear would've been flooded. They would have been scrambling to move their trucks and boats in the middle of a hurricane, at night, in the pouring rain.

Instead, because we took five minutes to check a floodplain map, they were in the right spot, fully operational, and ready to go.

This is why every search and rescue team, every emergency response group, and every serious prepper needs to start with an Area Study.

The Two Core Questions of an Area Study

When we do an Area Study, we're trying to answer two fundamental questions:

1. **What am I up against?** – What are the specific threats, hazards, and vulnerabilities in my area?
2. **What do I have to work with?** – What resources, assets, and opportunities exist in my community?

This applies to every scenario: natural disasters, power grid failures, economic collapse, societal breakdown or zombie biker gangs.

Understanding Threats and Hazards

Threats and hazards are the things that can kill you or put you in danger.

- A threat is an individual or group with the intent and capability to do harm, like a gang or mob, an armed looter, or an organized insurgent group.
- A hazard is typically an environmental risk, like a flood, wildfire, or a chemical spill.

For example, the train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, was a hazard—a massive chemical spill that made the entire area unlivable. It wasn't an attack, but it was still lethal.

Then we have vulnerabilities—things that make us susceptible to threats and hazards.

- If you live in the desert, you're vulnerable to drought.
- If you don't have a way to purify water, you're vulnerable to contamination.
- If you haven't done an Area Study, then you're vulnerable to not knowing what local threats and hazards exist.

The most basic way to start your Area Study is by listing out all known, suspected, or potential threats and hazards for your area. Then move on to identifying your specific vulnerabilities. Which area conditions or specific circumstances make you susceptible to these threats and hazards? Identify those, and then you can prepare for that list of realistic scenarios.

Identifying Resources and Assets

Once we know what can harm us, we need to identify what can help us.

- Assets – These are individuals and organizations that can work with you: neighbors, veterans, high-skill individuals, local business owners, community leaders, or like-minded allies.
- Resources – These are the physical supplies, production facilities, and infrastructure that could be useful in a crisis.
- Opportunities – These could be established organizations, networking events, strategic partnerships, or financial ventures that you can develop now before an emergency happens.

For instance, I consider my local American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) chapters excellent opportunities to meet people, expand my network, and enlist help for disaster response efforts.

I don't have to try to meet dozens of these people individually around town—they're already in one place! They've already done the hard work for me! I just have to "go fishing" where the fish are. What organizations could you join and what meetings could you attend to do the same?

By identifying these six factors, you'll be able to conduct a hasty Area Assessment. And at the end of the Area Study, you have a blueprint for action:

- The threats and hazards tell you what scenarios to prepare for.
- The resources and assets tell you who and what you can develop and leverage to navigate and resolve emergencies.

What True Preparedness Looks Like

Preparedness isn't just about buying gear. Anyone can buy food storage, ammo, and water filtration systems. And maybe they can sleep better at night. But, for me, true preparedness is about two things:

1. Having accurate expectations of the future – If you know what disasters and emergency scenarios are possible, then you can prioritize your time, money, and energy on preparing for the most likely scenarios.
2. Ensuring your stack of assets is bigger than your stack of threats – If you have more resources and allies than you have threats and vulnerabilities, then you're prepared. If not, then you're just stockpiling for a fight you're not ready to win.

Why Local Intelligence Matters More Than Global Events

A lot of people worry about global threats—nuclear war, an EMP strike, or a total economic collapse. And sure, those are possibilities. But the real question is:

How does that crisis affect you at the local level?

- If there's a stock market crash, what happens in your town?
- If we go to war with China, how does that affect your neighborhood?
- If the power grid goes down, what happens in your community?

No matter what happens, you will be affected at the local level. And if you don't have local intelligence, you're flying blind. Remember, those *local effects* are what you need to prepare for, and we identify them in our Area Study.

Your Next Steps

If you take one thing from this chapter, let it be this: start your Area Study today. Identify your threats, hazards, and vulnerabilities. Map out your resources, assets, and opportunities. Develop an overview of your actual security situation.

Because when the next crisis hits, it won't be the guy with the biggest bug-out bag who wins—it will be the one with the best intelligence who can bring the most to the fight.

This chapter covered the simplest, most basic format for an Area Study. It is a *first step* that tackles the six most important factors for your area. It's a starting point, but a solid one.

If you're interested in having a guide for developing a full Area Study, I wrote *The Area Intelligence Handbook*, a step-by-step guide to getting your Area Study done, which is available for purchase online.²

² Print editions are available from my webstore at: <https://www.grayzonestore.com>.

Section 2: Building Your Intelligence Network

Now that you understand the importance of an Area Study, it's time to talk about the next crucial piece of your intelligence system: an intelligence network.

Even with a solid Area Study, you will still run into intelligence gaps—things you need to know but don't. That's where intelligence networks come in.

Why You Need an Intelligence Network

During an emergency, you're going to realize that there's critical information on current conditions that you don't have:

- What areas are currently flooded due to heavy rain?
- Which bridges were washed away during the hurricane?
- Where are looters operating after a disaster?
- What local gangs are active, and what are they up to?

These are the types of questions that your Area Study can't answer for you, and we need to address these intelligence gaps. The moment you find an intel gap, you have two choices:

1. Ignore it and hope it doesn't come back to bite you.
2. Use your intelligence network to find the answer.

An intelligence network moves information from those who have it to those who need it.

Earlier in this ebook, I mentioned seeing firsthand how this can work during COVID. My group had a Signal chat where we shared real-time intelligence. If someone had a question—*Is this store still open? Where can I get ammo?*—it was answered within minutes because someone in the group either had the answer or could go find it.

This is called Human Intelligence (HUMINT)—information gathered from human sources. And the best way to start gathering HUMINT is through friends and family.

The Foundation of Your Intelligence Network

Your first sources should be the people you already know: neighbors, local friends and family, and your extended tribe.

One key advantage of HUMINT is that it's "taskable." That means you can *task* a trusted source to gather specific information for you.

When I moved to my current town, one of my first priorities was building local connections. In any crisis—whether it's a natural disaster, political unrest, or just a crime surge—having insider access to information is crucial.

One of the best ways to do that is by developing relationships with law enforcement. But here's the thing—you can't just walk into a sheriff's office, start asking questions, and expect them to trust you. You have to approach it tactically.

I already had an acquaintance who worked at the sheriff's office, and I knew that gave me an opportunity. Instead of bluntly asking for intel, I developed a friendship with this acquaintance over time.

I went down to the sheriff's office one day, and my buddy gave me the "nickel tour." As we walked around, I casually asked:

"Hey, do you know of deputies that are into hunting and fishing?"

That might seem like a simple question, but it served a very specific purpose.

1. It helped me identify deputies who were outdoorsmen. Law enforcement officers who hunt and fish tend to be more self-reliant, might be conservative, and are more likely to be interested in preparedness and community security.
2. It gave me an opening to meet more deputies. If my buddy introduced me to another deputy who was into hunting, that was a natural conversation starter.
3. It's an affinity question. Instead of coming across as some random guy looking for intel, I was just another hunter looking to connect with some like-minded shooting buddies.

Sure enough, my buddy pointed me toward a few guys who were into the same things I was. With some gentle prodding, a few weeks later I got invited to go fishing at a deputy's property—a homestead with a private pond.

So there we were, fishing and having a normal conversation. But at the same time, I was developing an intelligence source.

We talked about how the world was going sideways, what he was seeing locally, and what concerned him the most about the future. And over time I built another direct line to local law enforcement.

I would have never gotten that kind of access by just walking into the sheriff's office and asking questions. But by taking a tactical approach, I developed another point of contact who had access to information that I didn't.

This is why relationship-building is everything when it comes to local intelligence.

It's not about wearing a badge. It's not about having a title. It's about knowing the right people and having the right conversations. That's how you begin building an effective intelligence network.

And this is why you need local sources—people who have access to information you don't and can collect it for you.

The Strategic Power of an Intelligence Network

Intelligence networks aren't just about gathering information—they're also about power and influence.

Colonel John Boyd, an Air Force fighter pilot and strategic thinker, introduced the concept of Grand Strategy. In short, Grand Strategy is the effort to:

1. Connect yourself to as many power centers as possible.
2. Remove your adversaries from as many power centers as possible.

Think about your local political, social, and economic landscape.

Wouldn't you rather be connected to more power centers—local leaders, influential groups, law enforcement, business owners?

And wouldn't you rather see people who oppose your interests removed from those power centers?

This is one of the highest-level uses of an intelligence network—not just gathering information, but positioning yourself strategically in your community.

Case Study: The Rothschild Intelligence Network

If you want a real-world example of how powerful intelligence networks can be, look at the Rothschild family in the early 1800s.

The Rothschilds built one of the most powerful financial empires in history, with offices in Frankfurt, London, Vienna, Paris, and Naples. Their clients included kings, queens, chancellors, and aristocrats.

So how did they build and maintain this empire? Through an exceptional intelligence and communications network.

In the early 19th century, if you sent a letter from London to Frankfurt, it took seven days to arrive. But the Rothschilds had their own private courier network.

When Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo, the Rothschild network received the news 24 hours later—days before anyone else. This gave them a massive strategic advantage in the financial markets and allowed them to stay ahead of their competition.

This lesson isn't about speed—nobody is going to beat the internet today. The lesson is about the quality of information. Your intelligence network should include sources with access to high-value information that you wouldn't otherwise have.

How to Start Your Own Intelligence Network – Building Blocks

Step 1: Map Your Existing Network

Write down everyone you already know in your area. Identify:

- Like-minded individuals who would be interested in information-sharing.
- Key local players—law enforcement, first responders, business owners.
- People who have access to useful information.

Then, start developing relationships with those people.

Step 2: Engage with Your Community

Here's where I've had the most success:

- Church – Even if you're not religious, this is one of the best places to meet solid people.
- Political meetings – County political meetings, city council meetings, community forums, or anywhere else that people “in the know” congregate.
- Gun clubs, outdoor groups, and hunting/fishing communities – Great places to meet like-minded people.

Step 3: Start a Local Information-Sharing Group

Sometimes the term “intelligence network” can sound a little aggressive. If that's a concern, just call it an information-sharing network.

A simple way to start is by saying to a trusted friend:

“Hey Tom, some friends and I are starting a Signal chat to share local information—kind of like a neighborhood watch so we can stay updated on local conditions. See something, say something. Do you want to join?”

Intelligence networking is a “people person” business. If you're not what they would call a “people person” then your job is to find someone who is.

Organizing a Formal Group

If you want to take another route, then start a preparedness network.

I did this in 2020, and it's been incredibly effective at introducing me to others and organizing my community. Here's how it works:

- We meet once a month on a Saturday morning.
- The meeting starts with an intel briefing—I share what I'm seeing locally, and others contribute.
- We have members in law enforcement, so we get updates on area crime and security threats.
- We offer free training taught by volunteers from within our network. Topics have included everything from active shooter considerations and cold weather injury treatment to building a preparedness pantry, First Aid and Stop the Bleed.
- We invite friends, family, and community members to attend the free training. This lets us identify potential new members.
- After the meeting, we do work projects for members of the network, like building fences, butchering chickens, building greenhouses, etc.

Here's the best part:

- Like-minded people self-select into the network. They start attending the meetings, contributing information and sharing knowledge. And if we really like someone, then we get to know them better by inviting them hog hunting or to join us for dinner.
- And if we don't like someone, then we just don't invite them to future meetups.

Over time, this has grown into a reliable network that helps us stay ahead of local events.

Every Person Is a Sensor

In the Army, we used to say: "Every soldier is a sensor."

That means everyone sees, hears, and learns something that could have intelligence value.

The same applies to your community. Every neighbor is seeing and hearing things, too. And if you have an intelligence network in place, that local intelligence will reach you—while everyone else is in the dark.

The Bottom Line

If you take nothing else from this chapter, take this:

Your intelligence network is just as important as your food and ammo stockpile. Some would argue even more important. And you should have a functioning intelligence network before the next crisis hits.

Getting started with a basic network isn't terribly complicated. Start with the people you already know, grow your network, and structure it around information-sharing. An intelligence network is

like having a super power during an emergency because it will enable you to make better decisions faster.

If you want more information about how to develop a functional intelligence network for emergency preparedness and community security, that's one of the key topics I teach at Special Projects.³

³ If you want to fast-track your Area Study and Intelligence Network through in-depth training and advice, then you'd be interested in *Special Projects*. See if it's a good fit for you here: <https://www.forwardobserver.com/special-projects>

Section 3: Real-Time Intelligence Collection

Now that we've covered Area Studies and intelligence networks, it's time to take it a step further and talk about real-time intelligence collection.

It's one thing to have a solid understanding of your area. It's another thing to actively collect intelligence as events unfold. And that's exactly what we're going to get into here, building on the last chapter.

There are four primary methods of intelligence collection—called intelligence disciplines—that will allow you to track threats, verify information, and get real-time updates when things go south:

1. Human Intelligence (HUMINT) – Gathering information from people. I gave you a crash course on this in the last chapter.
2. Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) – Gathering information from publicly available sources.
3. Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) – Monitoring radio frequencies and electronic communications.
4. Imagery Intelligence (IMINT) – Using maps, aerial imagery, and drones for reconnaissance.

Each of these disciplines plays a crucial role in building a complete intelligence picture. Like we did in the last chapter, I'm giving you an introduction to them here. So let's go through the rest one by one.

OSINT: Open Source Intelligence

OSINT is intelligence gathered from publicly available sources.

That includes:

- News media – TV, radio, newspapers, and online news sites.
- Government reports – Crime reports, emergency alerts, city council minutes.
- Social media – Twitter/X, Facebook groups, Reddit, Telegram, Nextdoor.
- Online databases – Property records, business registrations, FOIA documents.

When I began my career in intelligence in 2004, an estimated 80–90% of all available intelligence information was open source. That was before the explosion of social media, telematics, and online data creation, so today, it's probably closer to 95%.

And that's great news for us. If you're doing an Area Study, OSINT alone can probably satisfy 50–75% of it. I've done enough custom Area Studies to confidently say that even if you live in a very rural area, at least half of the information you need is already online.

How to Use OSINT for Local Intelligence

1. Follow local news outlets and first responder feeds.
 - Many police, fire, and local government offices have social media accounts and public information officers. Follow them.
 - Set up Google Alerts for your city and county to track breaking events.
2. Monitor social media for on-the-ground reports.
 - Twitter/X and local media outlets are great for breaking news.
 - Nextdoor and Facebook groups can give local intel from people in your neighborhood.
3. Use online tools to research your area.
 - CrimeMapping.com – See crime reports in your area.
 - OpenSecrets.org – Look up political contributions with just a name and zip code.
 - Zillow & County Tax Records – Identify home and land owners, and property details.

SIGINT: Signals Intelligence

SIGINT is intelligence derived from electronic communications and radio signals. This includes information from radio traffic, police scanners, internet traffic, and other electronic and digital signals.

The best way to get started is by doing something called Low-Level Voice Intercept (LLVI). We get our radio receivers out, and we start scanning frequency bands for radio traffic. Specifically, you'll want to document:

- Call signs
- Frequencies
- Times of transmission
- And, of course, the actual information being relayed

The goal is to develop a baseline of local radio activity over time. That way, if something pops off, I know where to start listening. If a disaster happens, I already know that *these guys talk on this frequency every Tuesday night*. So I can turn on my radio and start scanning those frequencies.

Identifying baseline activity also becomes important for radio direction-finding. Last year, some buddies and I set up our SIGINT gear and tried to find students during an RTO Basics

communications course put on by a friend's training company. It was right outside Houston, Texas, so the communications environment was congested. Identifying the students' radio transmissions was like trying to find a needle in a haystack. And because the physical environment was full of buildings and dense vegetation, direction-finding those transmissions was also a huge challenge. Moral of the story: identifying a radio frequency baseline for your area helps you identify off-baseline radio activity more quickly.

So imagine your neighborhood during a disaster. While using a radio scanner to listen into local communications, you identify strange voices on frequencies you've never seen used before. This is odd. The longer you listen, the more clear it becomes that these guys are looting homes in the area. Because they're transmitting on VHF, and likely using walkie-talkies, you know they're probably within a couple miles of you and may be much closer. So you use a directional antenna to determine the general direction of their transmissions. And now you know – whoever they are – they're currently... *over that way*.

How to Use SIGINT for Preparedness

1. Get a police scanner.
 - Even though most cities encrypt their police channels now, roughly 90% of all official frequencies in the U.S. are still in the clear.
 - Rural and suburban area fire departments, EMS, and public works still usually transmit unencrypted.
2. Monitor local emergency channels.
 - Fire, EMS, search and rescue, and public works can give critical disaster information.
 - Listen for road closures, power outages, and emergency response locations.
3. Track weather & disaster alerts with NOAA radio.
 - National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather broadcasts give up-to-the-minute warnings for hurricanes, tornadoes, and major storms.

IMINT: Imagery Intelligence

IMINT is intelligence gathered from photos, videos, and aerial images from drones and satellites. I also cover maps here.

Google Earth is fantastic for quick imagery checks. I know it's a Google product, but it's still one of the best tools for zooming in and getting a bird's-eye view of an area.

If you're using Google Earth, always check the date on the imagery. If the imagery is older than 3–6 months, it may be outdated, especially in areas that are rapidly changing. The more recent, the better.

Drones are also becoming prolific in some areas. I run some basic DJI drones because they could be an invaluable tool during a local emergency.

How to Use IMINT for Preparedness

1. Google Earth & ArcGIS for pre-disaster planning.
 - Look at floodplains, critical infrastructure, and escape routes. You can download floodplain data from FEMA.⁴
 - Check for recent updates—don't rely on outdated imagery.
2. Drones for real-time intelligence.
 - Drones can be used to get “eyes on” an area too dangerous for humans, such as wildfires.
3. Use physical maps for your Area Study.
 - You need three kinds of maps:
 - Topographic maps (USGS or MyTopo).
 - Satellite imagery (Google Earth or ArcGIS).
 - Street maps (Google Maps or OpenStreetMap).

⁴ <https://msc.fema.gov/portal/home>

Section 4: Special Projects & the Way Forward

Given everything we've covered, do you think intelligence should play a role in securing your future? I hope so.

In this chapter, I've given you a roadmap.

- I've explained the importance of intelligence.
- I've broken down what I call "Area Intelligence."
- We've gone through the Area Study—the foundation of preparedness and security planning.
- We've covered Intelligence Networks—how to get inside information from people in your area.
- We've talked about real-time collection—how to get critical information when it matters most.

Now you have a strategy and the basic tools to get started.

But let me ask you something:

If I had something that could help you do this better and faster...

If I had a system that would help you build a better Area Study, develop a stronger Intelligence Network, and improve your Intelligence Collection skills...

Would you be interested?

If I had a place where I published my research... A place where I cover the history of national crises, domestic conflicts and civil wars, revolutions, and collapse scenarios... A place where you could learn from history and be better prepared for the future...

Would you want to be a part of that?



Because here's the bottom line: regardless of what happens in the future, the only way forward is building power and influence.

- We need political power to make sure we live under laws that align with our values.
- We need social power to protect our culture and communities—to keep the good stuff in and the bad stuff out.
- And we need economic power because money solves a lot of problems. Money is stored power.

And intelligence is the tool that fuels the growth of power and influence.

I created **Special Projects** for people who see where things are headed and want to be proactive rather than reactive.

In Special Projects, we take intelligence learning and doing to the next level.

Every month, members get exclusive training, coaching, and networking opportunities to turn intelligence concepts into real-world assets. You'll learn how to gather and analyze critical information, build a trusted local network, and position yourself as a key asset in any crisis.

My goal is to help members cut down on the amount of time and effort it takes to build an Area Study, develop their intelligence network, and gain intelligence and security skills.

This isn't just about surviving the next crisis—it's about gaining long-term security, influence, and control over your future.

If you want to build real intelligence capabilities...

If you want to develop a local network that wields power and influence...

If you want to be part of a network of people who are serious about preparedness...

Then I invite you to join Special Projects.

Fast track your development here → <https://www.forwardobserver.com/special-projects>

Because when the next crisis hits, those armed with intelligence will lead and win.