

# Making Reconnaissance Guidance Say What You Think

by CPT Luke C. Bowers

Reconnaissance-troop commanders must be highly proficient and adaptable in combined-arms maneuver because cavalry units often operate in environments of uncertainty and with a disadvantage: they lack intelligence-planning products for enemy disposition and terrain effects during the operation's initial phases.

Despite the shortcomings in intelligence preparation, troops must deploy into the area of operation (AO) and answer the brigade combat team (BCT) and squadron commanders' priority information requirements (PIR) while exercising maneuver fundamentals.

Troops must employ movement techniques and formations suited to the facets of the mission variables: mission; enemy; terrain and weather; troops and support available; time available; and civil considerations (METT-TC).<sup>1</sup> However, recent observations from the combat-training centers (CTCs) reveal that troops lack proficiency when employing maneuver fundamentals and synchronizing warfighter functions during platoon- to squadron-level operations.<sup>2</sup> The absence of maneuver, as different from movement, may be symptomatic of current commanders' and leaders' poor habits learned and practiced during the war on terrorism; in counterinsurgency-centric tactics, techniques and procedures; or from inexperience in how to apply troop-leading procedures (TLPs) to reconnaissance planning.

Regardless of the phenomenon's cause, observable deficiency across multiple CTCs and BCT/squadron configurations should generate concern for the Armor Branch (as the proponent of reconnaissance) and reconnaissance organizations.

With that in mind, reconnaissance practitioners can derive reconnaissance guidance from the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) process and use it to develop a commander's intent that will accomplish the reconnaissance mission. An improved understanding of that process and application to the framework will likely increase the reconnaissance commander's ability to answer PIR as well as enhance unit survivability in an uncertain operating environment.

## IPB

The IPB is a highly important step in developing a troop's course of action (CoA) and ultimately its scheme of maneuver during TLP Step 3 (*make a tentative plan*). Moreover, IPB is the systematic process of analyzing METT-TC's mission variables in an AO and area of interest to determine their effect on operations.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the IPB process allows the commander to understand the operational environment (OE) and begin visualizing how to solve the tactical problem.

Many commanders, especially in time-constrained environments, will rapidly develop a CoA by simply applying a doctrinal template and graphic-control measures to their map and graphics. The enemy icons are templated in a manner that supports the friendly plan. Commanders become hesitant to change the generic situational template because doing so would require them to adjust the plan they have already decided to implement. However, adhering to the complete IPB process to gain understanding will likely prevent the phenomenon (and planning fallacy) of placing the blue marker on the map before the red.

**The first step**, *define the OE*, identifies (for further analysis) the OE's significant characteristics that may influence friendly CoAs and command decisions<sup>4</sup> that help the commander see the bigger picture. This step should facilitate understanding of the OE two levels up. There is potential to expend a great deal of time analyzing and assessing extraneous data here. Therefore commanders should parallel-plan with the squadron staff as early as possible – ideally during the first two steps of the squadron-level military decision-making process (MDMP). Parallel-planning at this point is most ideal because the squadron staff likely hasn't generated specific tasks or briefings that will require the troop commander's full attention. The troop commander can be efficient with his time by working with the squadron S-2 (intelligence officer) and S-3 (operations officer) early and sharing their analysis.

**The second step**, *describe the environmental effects on operations*, is immensely important in the planning process. Troop commanders should not maintain the onus for this exclusively or rely on squadron staff for analysis

of the terrain where they will fight alone. Troops should identify and train personnel as part of an orders working group to assist the commander with development of modified combined obstacle overlays (MCOOs) and/or graphical terrain-analysis overlays (GTAOs). Detailed map reconnaissance and terrain-model construction aid the entire troop team in gaining a shared understanding of the battlefield effects. This also frees the commander for parallel and collaborative planning with the squadron staff.

Ideally, the troop's senior scouts or the leading platoon will conduct analysis of route/axis distances for time considerations in later planning. The resulting analysis helps the commander understand the rate of movement necessary to be at reconnaissance objectives and answer PIR in conjunction with the information-collection (IC) plan. Also, this can alert the commander to a conflict of realistic timing for maneuver compared to the higher headquarters' recon guidance (for example, "rapid" or "deliberate"). Those leaders can then present analysis during TLPs and brief the situation paragraph of the troop operations-order brief.

A highly detailed terrain analysis will further enable the efficient development of terrain-based named areas of interest (NAIs) when the recon mission is terrain-focused. Commanders can use the assistance of the squadron and BCT staff products and estimates, including products from the BCT's geological terrain team; however, there will likely be competition for these resources, and the prudent commander should not wait or suspend planning for them. During Steps 1 and 2, the commander should have developed a number of analytical tools that can be used for planning and operation execution such as the GTAo, MCOO and light data chart.

**The third step**, *evaluate the threat/adversary*, drives the commander to assess how the enemy will influence friendly operations.<sup>5</sup> The commander evaluates the enemy through doctrine (if available) and/or historic examples under comparable factors; he/she uses U.S. doctrine as a final resort. The commander analyzes the enemy's strengths and weaknesses according to warfighter functions. The outcome of the analysis for strength predicts the high-value targets (HVT) for the enemy (potential high-payoff targets for the friendly). The resulting analysis should identify what strengths the enemy will employ during IPB Step 4 and what weaknesses the friendly commander will exploit with his strengths in CoA development.

For example, analysis that highlights an enemy's overmatch of strength in artillery may indicate that he will attempt to achieve decision through fires before exercising movement of infantry. The commander depicts this model of fighting graphically, without effects of weather and terrain, on a doctrinal template.

**The fourth step**, *determine threat/adversary CoA*, is where the commander places the red marker on the map and visualizes how the enemy will fight by integrating the effects of terrain and weather from IPB Step 2 and the strengths and doctemp of IPB Step 3. If the commander is disciplined and followed the steps sequentially, he/she will develop enemy CoAs that make sense for the enemy commander's task and purpose – respecting terrain's effects – and not an enemy plan that fits the CoA the friendly commander would prefer to support the blue plan.

When conducting threat-based reconnaissance, if the enemy is in the AO, the troop commander must depict enemy CoAs (and/or key weapon systems) with composition and disposition one level below the force opposing him. Detailed analysis of the threat's composition, disposition and tactical tasks, identified as PIR when applicable, will enable the sections and scouts to distinguish the most-likely CoA from the most-dangerous CoA or to invalidate incorrect assessments when maneuvering and conducting reconnaissance. The ultimate goal of this effort is to reduce or eliminate the chance of surprise for the friendly commander.<sup>6</sup> After Steps 3 and 4, the commander should have developed sitemps, threat CoA sketches/statements, the HVT list and event templates and matrix. He/she should have also updated information requirements relevant to the operation.<sup>7</sup>

The analysis generated from a complete IPB process allows the commander to develop reconnaissance guidance in a logical manner supporting his/her visualization of the operation. The application of IPB to reconnaissance guidance, consisting of *focus*, *tempo*, *engagement/disengagement* and *displacement* criteria, is discussed following.<sup>8</sup>

## **Focus on recon objective**

Once the commander has concluded IPB, he/she can see the terrain and the enemy. Then, it's time to see himself/herself and array forces according to recon tasks. The squadron's and BCT's PIRs are arrayed as the NAI, the geographical area where information that will satisfy a specific information requirement can be collected, and

it is depicted on the operations graphics.<sup>9</sup> The NAI location will drive the movement and maneuver of the troop. The NAI is the troop's reconnaissance objective and the equivalent of the armor/infantry company-team's traditional objective. The recon troop's NAI 0001 is the ubiquitous Objective Dog for any other company-team, and the troop must maneuver to those recon objectives with formations and movement techniques, supported by fires, to achieve a position of advantage and answer the PIR. This is where the reconnaissance professional applies his combat power (destructive, constructive and IC) with overwhelming force, synchronization and redundancy to answer the question (PIR) at the objective.<sup>10</sup>

When the reconnaissance objective is terrain-focused, the commander compares his terrain analysis from IPB Step 2 and commits enough forces to answer in the time required. For example, if it would take a single platoon one hour to reconnoiter an area, but only half an hour is available, then the commander may commit two recon platoons to the task and divide the area into two sub-objectives. This is a simplistic example; however, the key point is that analysis is conducted first, and then forces are arrayed to support the IPB outputs.

Similarly, if the recon focus is threat-based, or even if threat forces are assessed in an AO with a terrain focus, the commander builds the subordinate team with a task-organization that can defeat the force *en route* to the object or can survive initial contact according to engagement and disengagement criteria.

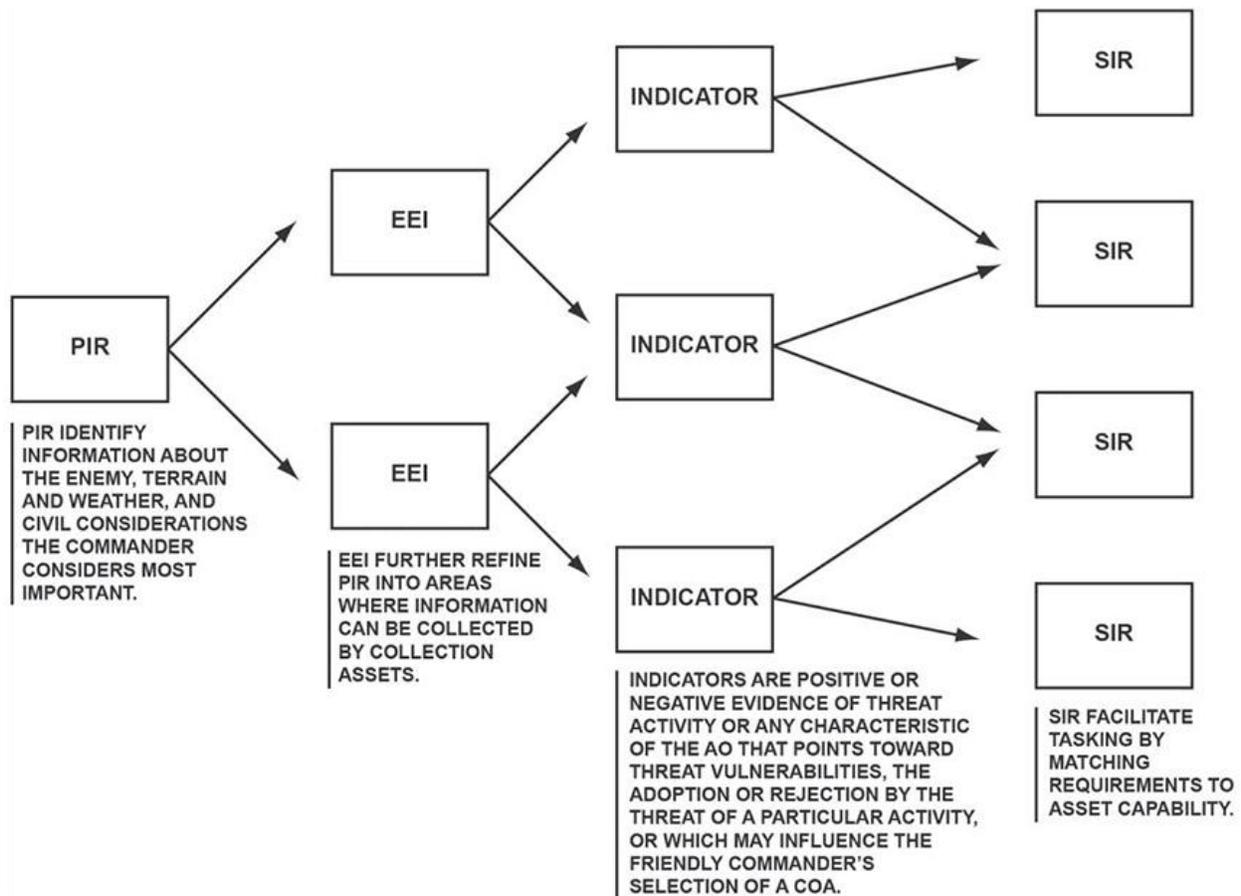


Figure 1. PIR refined. (From Figure 4-5 in FM 3-98).

## Tempo

There's a time for everything, but not enough time for everything.

Cavalry units conduct reconnaissance to answer the PIRs that shape the commander's decisions for CoA analysis or selection. Naturally, units will not have an unlimited amount of time to conduct the reconnaissance that BCTs and battalions rely on to improve the quality of their MDMP and finalize concepts. Rather, they will be given an

operational constraint in the form of the latest time information is of value (LTIOV),<sup>11</sup> the time suspense for information requirements that support the use of information collected for planning and CoA selection.

Troop commanders will conduct the analysis of their PIR and develop reconnaissance objectives, considering LTIOVs, against their mission variable to establish the tempo at which their organization must operate to accomplish the mission. Reconnaissance tempo should be directed from the commander or supported headquarters, nested with the information's utility in relation to operations synchronized in time; unfortunately, tempo can often be incorrectly communicated. Thus, commanders describe tempo in relation to the desired level of force protection and survivability of the reconnaissance element instead of the visualized pace of the operation. This is why troop commanders must ensure they fully understand the senior commander's vision of the operation and what conditions define an acceptable endstate.

For example, commanders should direct stealthy reconnaissance when maintaining surprise. The commander's desired force protection for this situation is communicated in terms of the engagement and disengagement criteria. Field Manual (FM) 3-98 provides the definitions of the terms used to describe the continuum of reconnaissance tempo.

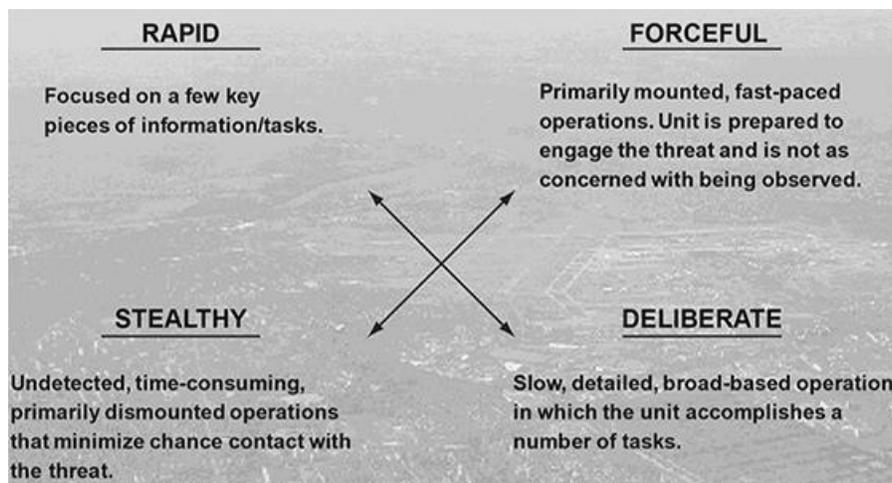


Figure 2. Recon tempo. (From Figure 4-2, FM 3-98)

## Engagement/disengagement

Fight or live to fight another day? Reconnaissance units, regardless of echelon, are assets that enable supported unit commanders to make the best tactical decision possible by reducing as much uncertainty in a situation as possible. In addition to reconnaissance enabling tasks, cavalry units will often transition directly from reconnaissance tasks into security tasks as the unit transitions to new phases of an operation. Commanders use the elements of engagement and disengagement criteria from the reconnaissance guidance to describe (for subordinates) how they visualize the reconnaissance unit doing this or to define how much risk the higher commander assesses as prudent.

The engagement criteria may use permissive or restrictive measures such as level/type of threat to fight or not fight, the bypass criteria, weapons-control status, etc. The subordinate commander or platoon leader should clearly understand the level of engagement he/she can commit to and the intent of the higher headquarters. The troop commander's IPB analysis enables him/her to determine how to develop control measures and coordinating instructions to nest with the higher headquarters' intent.

For example, assume a commander wants to defeat enemy reconnaissance forces equipped with *Boyevaya Razvedyvatelnaya Dozornaya Mashina* (BRDMs) – so the enemy must fight with little situational awareness in the main battle area (defending with mechanized infantry and armor) – then retain security on the flanks of the axis of attack. The supporting reconnaissance commander's analysis will determine the enemy force's recon elements disposition and the enemy disruption zone's defining areas. The troop commander will then direct, through his/her

engagement and disengagement criteria, that his/her forces may destroy BRDM and lesser recon forces, but disengage contact or hand over mechanized and armor forces to another force throughout the disruption zone.

Also, the commander can add greater complexity or enhance capability by directing the method of engagement (for example, destroy BRDM with an air-weapon team via 30mm).

## Displacement

The final element of reconnaissance is *displacement criteria*. It is often mistakenly confused for, or misspoken of as, *disengagement criteria*, but disengagement criteria are related to an enemy force and displacement criteria are related to the conditions of satisfying the PIR at the recon objective. Conditions such as compromise of position or covertness, inability to collect on the indicator as planned from the NAI, or that PIR are answered are event-based triggers that direct when a force should no longer focus on the objective. If displacement is not specified from a warning order, opord or in the plan's Annex L, the commander relies on the outputs from IPB Step 4 to develop logical displacement criteria.

The analysis of the enemy's CoA on a situational template, or multiple CoAs on an event template, will allow the commander to assess which triggers and conditions answer PIR and end the collection effort on the recon objective. Also, the troop commander must have a strong understanding of the commander's intent and concept of the operation one and two levels up. This understanding is essential because the reconnaissance troop will deploy early during the BCT planning process. As the staff analysis and estimates improve understanding, new requirements will likely impact the displacement criteria. Quality IPB analysis enables more efficient changes to the displacement criteria from a forward and/or austere position by units using frequency-modulation or digital-communication systems.

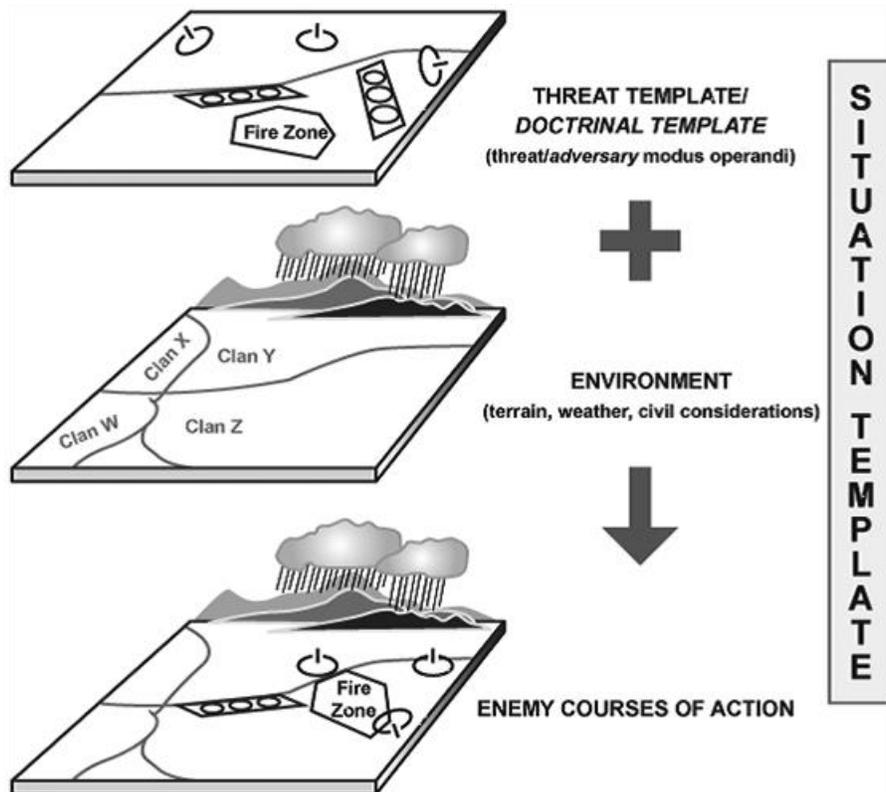


Figure 3. Determining CoAs (IPB Step 4). Commanders rely on outputs from this step to develop logical displacement criteria.

## Strengthen commander's intent

In summary, planning for reconnaissance tasks is no different than planning for the maneuver of a combined-arms company-team's offensive or defensive tasks. Each formation must apply the fundamentals of maneuver and integrate all warfighter functions planned through the TLP process.

Reconnaissance planning does not exclude any facet of the TLP process; rather, it integrates reconnaissance guidance to help commanders better communicate their vision of the force as it operates, which normally occurs under conditions of uncertainty. This is done most effectively when the commander develops the recon guidance from analysis during IPB. The IPB process and outputs provide the cognitive and contextual meaning to the guidance issued. It is the language and construct that reconnaissance professionals use to drive operations in uncertain environments to gain understanding and certainty for others.

Other organizations as well as BCTs down to section/squad levels must collectively study the doctrine of IPB and how reconnaissance guidance is derived from that analysis, including a discussion of the terms and definitions. The collective professional study will ensure common understanding across the units performing reconnaissance and those receiving the fruits of it.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> ADRP 1-02, **Operational Terms and Military Symbols**, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office (GPO), Dec. 7, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Author's observations from decisive-action training environment rotations at the Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, LA, from June 2015 to January 2016; at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Germany; and from trends reported by the Reconnaissance/Cavalry Council Jan. 28, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Army Technical Publication (ATP) 2-01.3, **Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield**, and Marine Corps Reference Publication (MCRP) 2-3A 3-1, **Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield and Battlespace**, Nov. 10, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, Figure 2-1.

<sup>8</sup> FM 3-98, **Reconnaissance and Security Operations**, Washington, DC: GPO, July 2015.

<sup>9</sup> ADRP 1-02.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> ATP 2-01.3 and MCRP 2-3A 3-1.

## Acronym Quick-Scan

**ADRP** – Army doctrinal reference publication

**AO** – area of operation

**ATP** – Army technical publication

**BCT** – brigade combat team

**BRDM** – *Boyevaya Razvedyvatelnaya Dozornaya Mashina* (Russian scout vehicle)

**CoA** – course of action

**CTC** – combat-training center

**EI** – essential element of information

**FM** – field manual

**GPO** – Government Printing Office

**GTAO** – graphical terrain-analysis overlay

**HVT** – high-value target

**IC** – information collection

**IPB** – intelligence preparation of the battlefield

**LTIOV** – latest time information is of value

**MCCC** – Maneuver Captain's Career Course

**MCRP** – Marine Corps reference publication

**MCOO** – modified combined obstacle overlay

**MDMP** – military decision-making process

**METT-TC** – mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, civil considerations

**NAI** – named area of interest

**OE** – operating environment

**PIR** – priority information requirement

**SIR** – specific information requirement

**TLP** – troop-leading procedure