Scouts In: Reimagining Reconnaissance

by CPT Eric Glocer

The U.S. Army's method of collecting intelligence and conducting reconnaissance from ground-based platforms is constantly evolving to match its operating environment. As we transition from Iraq and Afghanistan to a more dynamic environment, a more holistic, less security-driven approach to tactical collection is as important as our current emphasis on fighting for information.

Current paradigm

Since the end of World War II, the U.S. Army has gone back and forth trying to answer the question of whether reconnaissance organizations should be light or heavy. Heavy organizations are more capable of conducting security operations and are capable of fighting for intelligence.[1] In contrast, light organizations are better suited to assess their environment without changing the situation or drawing in more troops.[2]

In recent years, the Army went from armored, forceful reconnaissance formations to the modular brigade structure that has fewer security capabilities.[3] It compartmentalized tactical-collection assets in reconnaissance organizations and maintained fewer organizations capable of conducting security on a larger scale than brigade.[4] This makes sense because of the extended duration of the war and how the asymmetrical nature of our opponents reduced our operational requirement to conduct large-scale security missions.

Now that the United States has removed forces in Iraq and is currently drawing down in Afghanistan, the Army must be prepared to fight both a conventional and asymmetric foe.[5] This differs from the earlier paradigm in that our conventional forces no longer primarily focus on an insurgent opponent.[6] As a result, the Army is deciding how to reshape ground-based intelligence collection. With that in mind, the concept of a heavy reconnaissance and security element that can provide security and, more notably, revive the capability of fighting for intelligence[7] is now being reviewed. This idea accounts for the need to fight for information, but it lacks lighter reconnaissance elements required to observe the environment without affecting it.[8]

The transition to build a security capability is warranted, but it does not address the Regular Army's gap in light, stealthy intelligence-collection capabilities. Only light brigades, as opposed to heavy and Stryker brigades, are capable of conducting reconnaissance without eliciting a response from their targets. Unfortunately, the motorized aspects of the reconnaissance squadron in light and airborne brigades make them too much of a firepower and mobility asset to freely conduct detailed, focused intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) without making contact.[9] Reconnaissance requirements go unfulfilled as a result.

Another shortcoming in the current model is more obvious when addressing an unconventional threat: intelligence and reconnaissance assets have distinct reporting channels, which degrades unity of effort. Intelligence assets report through military-intelligence (MI) companies, while reconnaissance assets report through the squadron. All reporting is combined with the assistant chief of staff/intelligence officer, but it could be optimized if units had a single reporting chain. An example of how to curtail this problem at the brigade level is to develop a habitual support relationship for an expeditionary MI brigade company within the squadron for missions. Such a relationship eliminates the training deficit current MI companies struggle with in maneuver brigades when they have to resource MI training without the support of an MI battalion.[10]

The final gap in our paradigm is that brigades are directly affected by their area of interest (AoI) but do not have the means to influence things outside of their area of operations (AO). The AoI is influenced at the operational level but ties directly to the tactical level. It can be influenced through temporary support relationships under the contemporary model, but these relationships should be habitual and formal.[11]

What's missing?

As the Army reviews its reconnaissance organizations, it should advocate that the corps build and train light-recon-capability sets that can receive scalable slices from MI and other enabling units. This would streamline reporting, create unity of effort and increase each asset's capabilities. These capability sets should be rapidly deployable, light ISR organizations that work for an operational commander with a support relationship to the brigades

operating in the vicinity. Such an organization can correct our current model by filling the capability gap for light, stealthy reconnaissance that is not currently addressed.

Most important, this organization must be capable of observing its environment without affecting it. By maintaining a low profile through the use of beyond-line-of-sight (BLOS) communications, detailed camouflage and increased standoff made possible by new optics, collectors can make visual and signal contact with the minimum force possible. Ideally they make contact with a force so small that its target does not know it is in contact. This enables the commander maximum flexibility to develop the situation and address the threat without forcing his hand. It also maximizes security through standoff and stealth. Ground-based ISR in this manner provides added capability over aerial ISR in that it is not weather dependent, and it can have days of continuous station time vs. hours of station time.

Multi-disciplined intelligence collection is optimal; you achieve greater speed and efficiency and gather a broader intelligence picture by mixing reconnaissance with MI. It makes cuing much quicker, as assets are commanded by the same entity. Reporting to the same headquarters also supports synthesizing intelligence at the lowest level, streamlining reports and making them more digestible to the commander they support. The result is a faster response with a more focused situational understanding and complete unity of effort.

Creating a multi-disciplined collection organization also dramatically increases the individual capabilities of each asset. Adding scouts to signals intelligence (SIGINT) and multi-function teams (MFTs) allows them to survive and operate close to the forward line-of-own-troops (FLOT) while providing ISR that typically cannot get as far forward. MI assets being co-located with scouts dramatically increases the scouts' situational awareness. Both can use each other for communications support and BLOS reporting through their distinct equipment sets. Best of all, it makes mixing second nature, greatly increasing overall capability.

We need a scalable organization[12] to be a "rapidly deployable force capable of living in austere environments," which is the current mandate from MG Terry Ferrell, commander of 7th Infantry Division. To do so, we must be able to react quickly and provide similar intelligence disciplines at each echelon. As long as each element is rapidly deployable, it can be tailored to match the size and needs of the supported unit and deployed as soon as possible to begin integration. For instance, if we have a squadron to support a mission, we can deploy as small an element as a platoon of mixed collectors or an element as large as the entire squadron, depending on the size of the supported organization and the intelligence requirement.

Task-organizing the element to the operational-level headquarters with a support relationship to the nearest tactical organization affords it the freedom to operate in the AoI.[13] It offers the tactical commander greater influence over the AoI and provides better situational awareness inside the AO. Doing so closes the void between operational and tactical influence. It allows the intelligence to flow directly to the tactical unit, providing an improved stream of reporting, while maintaining the operational commander's oversight and control of the reconnaissance asset. This closes the void between operational and tactical influence. The effect is a more cohesive effort between operational and tactical commanders.

Example
A prime example of an organization that was able to bridge the current paradigm's gap at the brigade level is a combined troop-level reconnaissance organization that tested at the National Training Center (NTC) during Rotation 14-08 in support of 2-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team. It contained a light reconnaissance troop, a long-range surveillance (LRS) detachment, an MFT, a sustainment team and a robust liaison element. While this example performed well, it is by no means the only such capability. Capability sets can range from a platoon-size element of mixed tactical collectors to a battalion-size element to support large-scale operations.

In this case, the troop was able to observe and influence most of the AO, and even beyond into division-level battle space, while remaining undetected and providing multi-disciplined situational awareness. In this example, the troop maintained a combined headquarters for multiple forms of intelligence, synthesizing intelligence from scouts, LRSs and MFTs. This ensured reports were properly routed and that all collectors operated in support of one set of goals.

The troop avoided direct- and indirect-fire contact while spread across the battlefield. This resulted in continuous reporting before, during and after traditional reconnaissance assets were decisively engaged. Direct contact from the brigade's organic squadron, paired with the troop's observation and technical collection, created a complete picture of the battlefield and improved the commander's situational understanding. When they became decisively engaged, the redundancy with the squadron provided clarity. It served as a vetting function to compare the chaotic and conflicting reports typical of direct contact. It was also able to report directly to the brigade through BLOS communications equipment to answer specific requests for information without having to interrupt forces under fire.

One of the ways the troop remained undetected was by staying light. The LRS detachment, with assault climbers and basic-mountaineering-qualified Soldiers, was able to traverse extremely restricted terrain to establish observation posts unlikely to make contact. The scouts, by conducting an infiltration in restricted terrain, were able to camouflage their positions and maintain a smaller footprint than any other maneuver element on the battlefield. The scouts then pulled the MFT forward as the scout section provided SIGINT collection. Scouts were also useful to the MFT when advising about camouflage and site selection to increase survivability. In positioning the MFT forward, the troops were able to reduce the lag time getting the MFT involved in tactical-site exploitation (TSE) and give them freedom of maneuver to support interrogations across the battlefield. Overall, this humvee-based organization was able to maneuver across more restrictive terrain than the Strykers, maintain a smaller footprint and thus avoid compromise.

The added benefit of having a multi-disciplined ISR collection organization is that assets were able to rely on each other to create a truly redundant communication, cueing and security network. Each element was able to communicate with each other and provide logistics support to their sister organizations. LRS was able to conduct reconnaissance pull to support the infiltration of the scouts, who in turn pulled the MFT.

By understanding each other's objectives and tasks, they were able to maintain continuous observation when their adjacent units had to break contact or conduct resupply. When an LRS team had to displace to avoid compromise, scouts were able to shift their observation to include the LRS team's named area of interest (NAI). The same happened when a scout section had to displace. On the objective, SIGINT and TSE could cue the attention of scouts and LRS to pinpoint targets within the NAI.

We task-organized a scout section with the MFT to position the MFT further forward than they were able to in the past, resulting in more rapid TSE and more responsive signal collection. It also provided a ground-based resupply option for LRS and facilitated evasion and recovery. Using the MFT's BLOS Global Rapid-Response Intelligence Package communications system, we were able to conduct a video-teleconference debriefing with an LRS team that had broken contact without having to launch a recovery operation. Finally, by sharing operational understanding, front-line collectors had a better understanding of their objective and could quickly cue from TSE.

Our command post was robust enough to receive multiple types of reports and compile them into one cohesive common operating picture. That picture being close to the brigade gave the staff and commander the option to see and request refinement of all reports, to include full-motion video, pictures and MFT reports. It also enabled us to receive immediate intelligence and keep our collectors updated on the situation in their sector.

Finally, by deploying with an augmented liaison element and co-locating our headquarters with the brigade headquarters, we were able to ensure reports would reach their intended destination. Our liaison element consisted of a field-grade officer, a senior captain and an S-3 Air noncommissioned officer to ensure our intelligence was properly processed and routed and our ISR assets were properly employed. It helps to have a field-grade liaison officer to let the appropriate decision-maker know when priority intelligence requirements (PIRs) are satisfied, especially as a brigade headquarters deals with the vast quantity of intelligence that comes from having all battalions in contact simultaneously. This ensures PIRs are not lost in the shuffle and decision-makers have all the information they need.

On a side note, augmenting our headquarters with a geospatial-intelligence cell enabled us to employ LRS operations with minimal headquarters support from the brigade. It also maximized our ability to employ rotary-wing assets.

Mitigating the risk

Creating a small multi-disciplined ground-based ISR asset that may operate outside the battlespace owner's AO comes with inherent risk that must be mitigated. It places regular units in a vulnerable and isolated position that makes direct-fire or indirect-fire compromise a potentially catastrophic event.[14] It also relies heavily on the responsiveness of higher headquarters for fire support and contingency management, and therefore requires risk to be underwritten at a high level.[15]

Just like employing a LRS detachment, the inherent risk in deploying a light element into an environment where it is likely to experience a relative combat-power overmatch makes it important to mitigate such risk with deliberate mission planning. Operating in small groups away from combat power increases the likelihood of destruction or capture upon compromise and reduces survivability in counter-reconnaissance. To mitigate, leaders must conduct very detailed planning with the adjacent unit and contingency coordination. It must include, at a minimum, the evasion plan of action, deconfliction of insertion and extraction, plus direct- and indirect-fire deconfliction. This should also be briefed to the battlespace owner due to the catastrophic nature of compromise.[16] The bottom line is the commander can only employ these forces when the operational tempo allows deliberate planning to offset the risk of the operation.[17]

As a whole, these risks may dramatically reduce the likelihood of tactically employing such an organization.[18] It is not feasible that this form of light reconnaissance be the only asset available for intelligence collection due to its tie to a deliberate tempo and increased risk. On the other hand, light multi-disciplined ISR in conjunction with heavier capabilities would fill this deficit. The rewards of being able to observe an opponent accurately without influencing his environment makes employing such a capability set compelling.

Conclusion

The nature of our new enemy requires us to maintain both security capabilities and light, mixed reconnaissance. Our shift to build heavier reconnaissance elements has come at the expense of our light-reconnaissance capability sets. In creating a light reconnaissance element to conduct this role, we have the opportunity to fill gaps in our capabilities.

We can finally give commanders the ability to influence the AoI and push ISR assets toward the FLOT while streamlining collaboration between combat-arms collectors and MI collectors.

Such an organization structure can be easily developed at the corps level as part of the reconnaissance and security construct of the future. However, there are several other ways commanders can create an *ad hoc* capability. In the light-infantry brigades, commanders can task-organize their MI company into a reconnaissance squadron. They can then shield a scout troop from mobility and firepower requirements to focus on low-profile ISR and pair MI collectors with maneuver assets. At the echelon above brigade, they can simply pull limited assets from their subordinate units or request support from the enhanced MI brigade and pair them with maneuver forces to collect at a higher level.

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Notes

[1] Gordon Sullivan, "Forward," **The Land Warfare Papers** No. 53, September 2005.

[2] John McGrath, **Scouts Out: The Development of Reconnaissance Units in Modern Armies,** Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2008.

[3] Sullivan.

[4] McGrath.

[5] Army Doctrinal Publication 3-0, **Unified Land Operations**, Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2011.

[6] This is based off personal experience while serving in 4th Brigade, 1st Cavalry, and working with at least four other brigades. While doctrine states we were focused on a full-spectrum opponent, the operational Army was primarily focused on security operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

[7] BG Leopoldo Quintas, "From the Commander's Hatch," *ARMOR*, July-September 2015. This is also much discussed in 201st BfSB but without a specific external source.

[8] Firsthand experience derived from NTC 14-03 and NTC 14-08.

[9] McGrath, supported by firsthand experience in Joint Readiness Training Center Rotation 13-09 in support of 3/82 and NTC 14-08.

[10] Field Manual (FM) 3-55, *Intelligence Collection*, Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2012. Pages 1-2 to 1-3 state this, but the practical implementation results in a compartmentalized technical reporting structure.

[11] FM 3-94, *Theater Army, Corps and Division Operations*, Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2014.

[12] MG T.R. Ferrell, 7th Infantry Division sensing session with company commanders, Aug. 27, 2014.

[13] FM 3-94.

[14] Curtis Taylor, "Trading Saber for Stealth: Can Surveillance Technology Replace Traditional Aggressive Reconnaissance?," *The Land Warfare Papers* No. 53, September 2005.

[15] FM 3-55.93, *Long-Range Surveillance Unit Operations*, Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2013. This is written specifically for LRS but still applies to all elements operating remotely from adjacent units.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Taylor.

[18] Ibid.

Acronym Quick-Scan

AO – area of operations
AoI – area of interest
BfSB – battlefield surveillance brigade
BLOS – beyond-line-of-sight
FLOT – forward line-of-own troops
FM – field manual
ISR – intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
JBLM – Joint Base Lewis-McChord
LRS – long-range surveillance
MFT – multi-function team
MI – military intelligence
NAI – named area of interest
NTC – National Training Center
PIR – priority information requirement
SIGINT – signals intelligence
TSE – tactical-site exploitation