Improving Brigade Combat Team Intelligence Collection Operations for Large-Scale Ground Combat

by Major William Denn, Major Jason Turner, and Captain Adam Wojciechowski

Where and When Will the Enemy Attack?

After detailed mission analysis, the brigade staff was confident they knew where and when the enemy would attack. Over the next 2 days, the engineers dug extensive battle positions, platoons rehearsed their plan, scouts seeded observation posts, and intelligence analysts watched their drone feeds to give advanced warning. When the enemy did arrive, they attacked with such speed and audacity that before the brigade knew it, the enemy had penetrated their defenses and was heading straight for their command post. Every echelon was surprised: the intelligence analysts, the scouts forward, and the platoons in their defensive positions—there was little advance warning. While this is a hypothetical vignette, unfortunately this scenario occurs far too often at the U.S. Army's combat training centers.

Introduction

The U.S. Army is undergoing a dramatic shift in training competencies to fight in large-scale combat operations rather than the counterinsurgency and advisory missions of the past 17 years in Iraq and Afghanistan. Brigades are learning that large-scale ground combat operations require fundamentally different skillsets and competencies than the counterinsurgency fight of the past. Because of how quickly the battlefield moves—at the speed of mechanized forces attacking over large distances—the above vignette is an illustration of how brigades fail to layer their intelligence collection over large areas to give friendly forces enough warning and certainty of enemy intentions to adequately prepare for combat.

In the last year, after having observed multiple brigades encounter similar challenges at the U.S. Army Joint Multinational Readiness Center, we, the authors, have identified several challenges that brigades must address:

- Manning and training an intelligence collection management team at the brigade level that is able to adequately plan and synchronize an effective collection strategy.
- Scoping the brigade's deep fight sufficiently to give the brigade enough advance notification to prepare for contact with the enemy.
- Layering intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets appropriately to increase the chances of detection; planning intelligence handover to coordinate between these ISR assets (and units); and ultimately enabling targeting of the enemy throughout the depth of the battlespace.

Manning and Training Collection Management Cells

The role of the brigade collection manager is essential for planning an effective collection strategy to satisfy the commander's intelligence gaps; for synchronizing the brigade's ISR assets (including the cavalry squadron and radars); and for integrating higher, joint, theater, and national-level ISR assets. However, the struggle for brigades is that no formalized collection manager position exists in the modified table of organization and equipment. Units choose a collection manager from existing personnel, usually a lieutenant or junior captain, in a part-time capacity. This often untrained collection manager then attempts to conduct the difficult task of planning and managing the entire ISR

enterprise for the brigade. Even when collection managers have received training, for example at the U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence (USAICoE) or Defense Intelligence Agency, they are unprepared to effectively synchronize and integrate units such as the cavalry squadron; to participate in brigade battle rhythm events like military decision-making process (MDMP) wargaming and information collection/fires rehearsals; and to contribute to targeting working groups.

U.S. Army photo by PFC Courtney Hubbard

U.S. Soldiers of the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, provide information to ground units from the tactical operations center while a Latvian soldier, right, observes during exercise Combined Resolve IV at the U.S. Army's Joint Mulitnational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, May 17, 2015.

Collection management is a complex enough task that it requires a team to manage all collection management requirements. Successful brigades dedicate at least four to six intelligence analysts to aid the collection manager in planning, ISR current operations management, assessments, and targeting—especially in support of 24/7 operations.

Successful brigades will effectively use subordinate liaisons, especially from their cavalry squadron, to integrate into collection management working groups to plan and task assets and units for collection. This allows subordinates to help aid in refinement based on their knowledge of their own capabilities. This input is essential to refine the information collection synchronization matrix that is included in daily fragmentary orders with the specific indicators and source of reporting their assets and teams must answer.

Today's ISR capabilities are also increasingly complex and rapidly changing with technology. There is little expectation that a junior captain can be a subject matter expert in what these ISR assets can or cannot collect. Therefore, it is important to integrate the brigade's warrant officers into collection management planning. The brigade's military occupational specialty (MOS) 352N (Signals Intelligence Analysis Technician), MOS 351M (Human Intelligence Collection Technician), and MOS 131A (Field Artillery Targeting Technician) are especially critical. For example, unused by most brigades is the ability for the Q50/53 counterfire radar to be employed as an ISR asset by reporting lines of bearing whenever enemy counterfire radar transmissions are detected. Without input from these warrant officers, these nonconventional ISR assets will not be included in a brigade's information collection synchronization matrix.

The brigade's ad hoc collection management team must not fight for the first time at a combat training center or in combat. They require practice and training as a team in order to understand what outputs they must produce and how they integrate into a brigade staff within planning (MDMP) and execution (current operations). USAICoE's standardization of military intelligence certification through the Military Intelligence Training Strategy (MITS) framework is an important first step in identifying the need to train and certify collection management crews. Rarely, however, are brigade combat teams (BCTs) arriving at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center with a certified collection management crew that trained together in a previous MITS exercise, nor are they using established collection management standard operating procedures to structure how they operate. BCT commanders and S-2s must place more emphasis on establishing and training their collection management teams before combat training center rotations. Successful BCTs operationalize their collection management cells to operate year-round, even in garrison, rather than on an ad hoc basis during brigade collective training events.

Finally, while school options exist for collection managers, we are not yet observing school-trained collection managers successfully operating at the BCT level. We encourage USAICoE to improve its collection management program of instruction, focusing on—

- ✦ Managing and leading a collection team.
- ✦ Leveraging joint asset capabilities.
- ✦ Integrating collection management into the BCT rehearsals, MDMP (course of action development and wargaming), and targeting process.

Scoping the "Deep Fight"

Within the counterinsurgency era, the BCT often lacked a "deep fight," instead focusing on the needs of platoons and companies in a close tactical fight. Within a large-scale ground combat operations environment, a BCT's deep fight is essential to mission success. FM 3-0, *Operations,* defines the deep area as, "the portion of the commander's area of operations that is not assigned to subordinate units. Operations in the deep area involve efforts to prevent uncommitted or out of contact enemy maneuver forces from being committed in a coherent manner or preventing enabling capabilities […] from creating effects in the close area. […] The purpose of operations in the deep area is to set the condition for success in the close area or to set the conditions for future operations."[1]

Brigades often struggle with where they should define the deep fight. Brigades typically arrive at a combat training center with their maps limited to the geographic training area boundaries or the area of operations boundaries dictated to them by their higher headquarters. Especially for a combat training center like the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, which has a relatively small training area (10 kilometers by 20 kilometers), this decision on the scope of their maps is their first lost opportunity and requires coaching. From an intelligence collection perspective, the brigade's deep fight extends much farther outside the dictated area of operations.

U.S. Army doctrine provides us with assistance to help understand a brigade's deep fight using the concept of area of influence. ATP 2-01.3, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield,* defines an area of influence as "a geographical area wherein a commander is directly capable of influencing operations by maneuver or fire support systems normally under the commander's command or control. The area of influence includes terrain inside and outside the [area of operations] AO and is determined by both the G-2/S-2 and G-3/S-3."[2]

During mission analysis, brigades typically show their area of operations or area of interest but do not refer to their area of influence. As a concept, the area of influence provides additional space so that the brigade cannot only see the enemy with ISR assets but also has the space to shape the enemy using indirect fires, maneuver, or aviation assets. When the area of influence extends outside the area of operations, coordination with higher headquarters or adjacent units is required. To ignore it shrinks the brigade's focus and increases the likelihood of tactical surprise by the enemy. Moreover, just because the higher headquarters plans for an intelligence handover line does not mean they will focus collection on the near side of it.

Our recommendation is for brigades to consider the full extent of their area of influence and to conduct appropriate mission analysis (terrain, enemy, and friendly capabilities) to maximize the brigade's ability to target and shape within the area of influence before the enemy enters the brigade's area of operations.

Layering ISR to Maximize Detection and Targeting

If a brigade can properly man and train its collection management cell and give the cell enough geographic and temporal space to plan for during mission analysis, then the final key to success is to plan and layer the ISR appropriately to find the enemy.

As part of mission analysis, a BCT S-2 and a collection manager must first consider their overall approach to collection management. JP 2-01*, Joint and National Intelligence Support to Military Operations,* advises, "When developing a collection plan, collection managers should consider whether to maximize efficiency by dispersing collection assets across the widest geographic area in order to maximize collection, or place them in nearby or the same geographic areas to overlap their sensor ranges for synergistic effects, thus providing more opportunities for dynamic tipping and cueing, asset mix, and/or asset redundancy."[3] This concept of asset convergence or dispersion is determined based on whether the enemy course of action is clear versus unknown. For combat training center rotations, the brigade typically understands from where and when the enemy is expected to approach, and we subsequently recommend that the brigade attempt to maximize asset convergence.

Reliance on one type of collection asset severely restricts the level of certainty and dramatically increases the mission risk of not identifying a target. Collection managers must analyze the best assets to answer the commander's intelligence needs and should attempt to layer (or mix) complementary ISR assets to further increase the likelihood of observation. Figure 1 (on the next page), from JP 2-01, illustrates some of these planning factors; however, we recommend collection managers also study ATP 3-55.3, *ISR Optimization—Multi-Service Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Optimization,* published

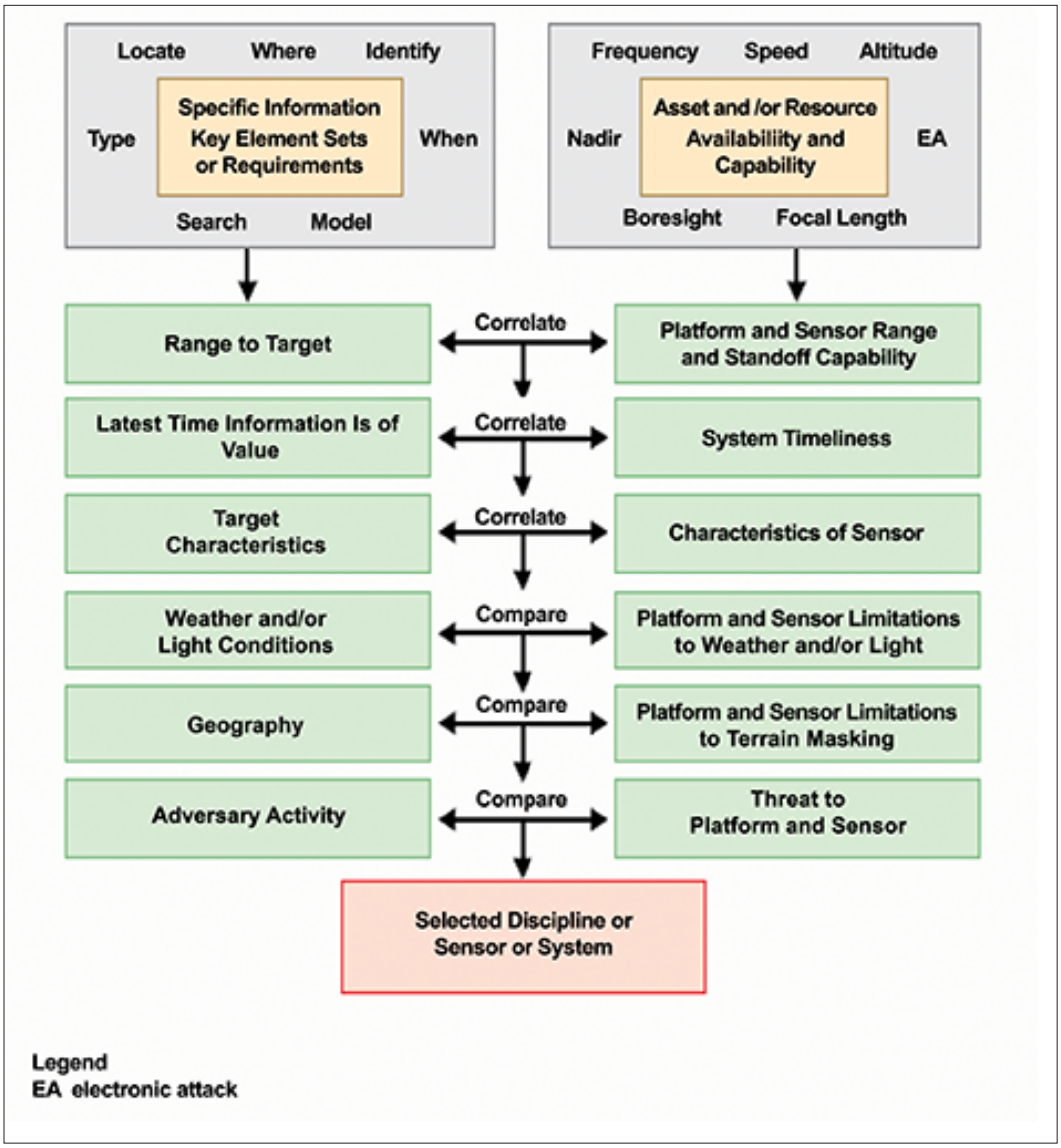


Figure 1. Asset and/or Resource Availability and Capability Factors[4]

in September 2019. ATP 3-55.3 provides more detailed guidance on ISR employment for specific mission requirements based on capabilities.

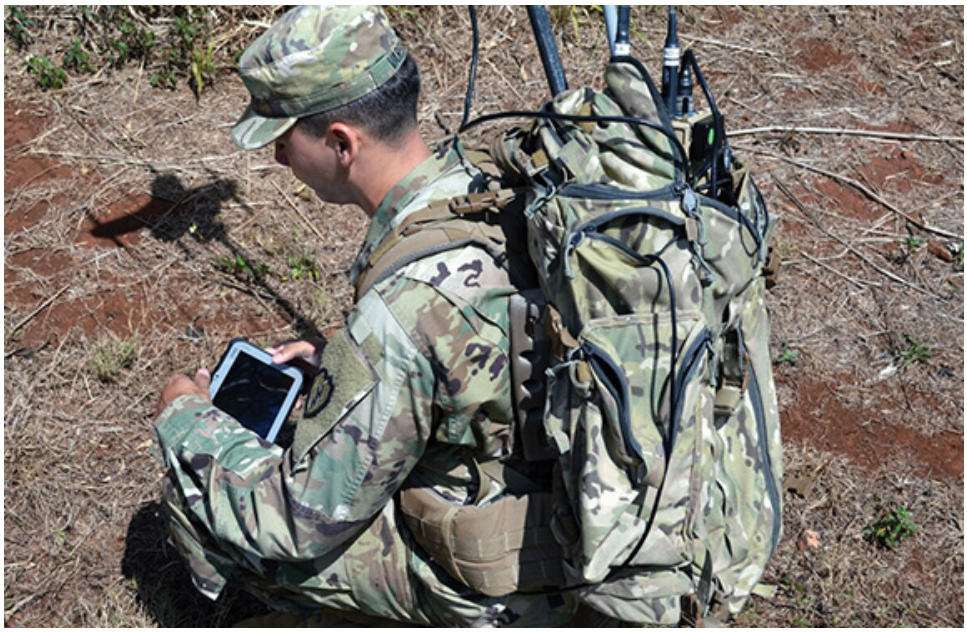
Once assets are determined appropriate or not, brigades typically fail to consider layering ISR assets in order to mass their effects. Layering ISR begins with theater collection, like the Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS), which provides important ground moving target indicator intelligence as the enemy moves in the brigades' deep areas. With regard to JSTARS, brigades understand the concept of cueing onto a full-motion video asset, but then they over-rely on their aerial full-motion video ISR (division MQ-1C Gray Eagle or brigade RQ-7B Shadow).

Most brigades fail to task their cavalry formations, infantry/armor battalions, or fire support teams to observe multiple named areas of interest to confirm or deny enemy courses in conjunction with their aerial ISR to enable targeting. Battalions also arrive unprepared to leverage their own organic battalion-level ISR assets, like small unmanned aircraft systems or their own scout platoons. Moreover, brigades struggle to publish a daily information collection synchronization matrix with their fragmentary orders to inform or direct ISR assets, like their cavalry squadron. When weather turns poor, or division assets redirect to higher priority missions, brigades are unprepared because they have not adequately layered all-weather redundant ISR assets, again, like their cavalry squadron.

Brigades do not conduct effective intelligence handover between these assets and units. To avoid surprise, brigades must plan and conduct deliberate intelligence handovers with ISR assets. It starts with an initial notification of enemy movement with theater deep assets in the division area of operations and an assessment by the brigade's current operations floor of what routes and time horizons the enemy is expected to take. Brigade aerial ISR then should acquire the enemy to enable further advance warning and enable brigade indirect fire shaping. The brigade's current operations section should prepare to tip and pass these targets to their reconnaissance squadron in their series of observation posts or scout sections in depth. After the handover of these targets, the brigade should be free to return their aerial ISR to focus back on the brigade's deep areas. Finally, the reconnaissance squadron conducts a deliberate handover of these targets into the infantry/armor battalions' close fight where remnants of the enemy are eventually destroyed.

The intelligence handover of targets is a difficult and deliberate process that requires planning, graphic control measures, and rehearsals. Currently, brigades are not conducting effective information collection technical rehearsals, information collection and fires rehearsals, and

combined arms rehearsals to synchronize the handover of the enemy from the brigade's deep areas into the battalions' close fight. While outside the scope of this article, we recommend brigades spend some effort to understand what is necessary to rehearse in the information collection and fires rehearsal to shape the deep fight and conduct effective intelligence handover.



U.S. Army photo by SSG Armando R. Limon

An electronic warfare specialist with 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, operates a Versatile Radio Observation and Direction finder at Schofield Barracks, HI.

Conclusion

The evolution of our fundamental skillsets while linking ISR to targeting across the BCT will continue to use much that the BCT has to offer. We focused on three areas that will allow BCTs to capitalize on the myriad of collection assets and increase their lethality:

- Ensuring a collection management team exists and trains together year-round to plan and synchronize the BCT's collection strategy.
- Conducting analysis of the area of influence to understand and plan for the BCT's deep fight. By doing so, a BCT can conduct a systematic attrition of its enemy instead of simply reacting to contact. To guarantee success in identifying the enemy, the BCT must maximize the utilization and layering of its ISR assets, including its reconnaissance squadron and nonstandard ISR like counterfire radars.
- Conducting an effective information collection and fires rehearsal because it is important for all operators to understand the sensor-to-shooter plan.

As the U.S. Army continues training BCTs for large-scale war, we must relearn many of these fundamentals of large-scale ground combat operations so that we can maximize capabilities to defeat our Nation's emerging threats. Implementing these recommendations will likely reverse several negative trends identified during multinational brigade-level exercises at the combat training centers, specifically in the areas of information collection management and synchronization of information collection and fires.

Endnotes

1. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 6 October 2017), 1-34. Change 1 was issued on 6 December 2017.

2. Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication 2-01.3, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 1 March 2019), 3-3.

3. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 2-01, *Joint and National Intelligence Support to Military Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 5 July 2017), III-30.

4. Ibid., III-23.

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