Unifying the Brigade Combat Team Information-Collection Effort

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Executive summary: Through decisive-action combat-training-center (CTC) rotations and the development of the military-intelligence (MI) gunnery program, the Army is exploring training-centric solutions to issues associated with the planning and execution of information collection (IC) against a near-peer hybrid threat at the brigade combat team (BCT) level. Despite these necessary endeavors, leaders must explore organizational solutions in conjunction with any training efforts. Four primary challenges present themselves in execution of BCT-level IC in decisive action: seams between units, reporting lag, rigid/inflexible collection planning vs. intent-based collection and an undefined role for the BCT's military-intelligence company (MICo). To address these issues, BCTs can consider an internal task-organization change that repurposes their MICo as a "Hunter Company" responsible for answering BCT commander priority-information requirements (PIRs). This change follows the principle of unity of command, as the cavalry squadron takes unified ownership of all elements of IC (reconnaissance, surveillance, intelligence and security operations). In turn, the BCT's analytical effort unifies as the MICo transfers its analytical capabilities directly to the BCT's S-2 section, resulting in clear delineation of efforts between the BCT S-2 (analysis) and MICo (collection).

Once the Army's CTCs transitioned to decisive-action training scenarios, the force began a necessary re-education in near-peer conventional warfare. Countless lessons from years of rotations and observations from conflicts such as those in eastern Ukraine, Syria and northern Iraq informed our leaders on the nature of such warfare and how to effectively wage it. However, these essential steps only represent one piece (or perhaps two) of the puzzle known as doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel and facilities (DOTMLPF, the framework for developing solutions to problems based on solution type).

A key problem for a BCT in the execution of decisive action is IC. How does a BCT collect data about the enemy, rapidly disseminate it to various personnel, process it into intelligence and make sound, timely decisions based on said intelligence? The Army, through the development of the MI gunnery program, is diligently working to address this problem as a training solution. Yet leaders must also explore organizational solutions to the problem.

The challenges BCTs face in the execution of IC result from a disjointed organizational scheme, where multiple units with different communications architecture operate semi-independently while attempting to contribute to a mutual goal of IC. To address the problem, the BCT must be task-organized to enable unity of command in the entire IC effort.[1] Until that occurs, IC plans will lack synchronization and flexibility, and BCTs will struggle to rapidly collect and process enemy-related data that drives winning decisions.

Four distinct problems exist in the execution of IC at the BCT level: reconnaissance seams, intelligence lag, task/purpose for information collectors and the MICo's role. BCTs can explore an organizational solution to address each of these problems through an internal task-organization change that reorganizes and repurposes the MICo as a "Hunter Company" solely focused on answering BCT commander PIRs.

BCT's IC challenges

The MICo is an IC element, and BCT-level leaders must constantly evaluate whether their sole intelligence unit is truly organized, purposed and equipped as such. To increase efficiency and attain unity of command for IC, the MICo must transfer the bulk of its intelligence analysts directly to the headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) brigade S-2 section (where they work in a tactical environment), reconfigure collection assets to more survivable platforms and realign with the cavalry squadron. Previous discussions at senior levels of our Army took place regarding the placement of the MICo in the cavalry squadron, but the discussion here is inherently different, as a change of organization, mission and focus should precede any MICo task-organization change. In short, MICos in their current state cannot be in the cavalry squadron, but they can once they adopt a mission focused on reconnaissance-enabling IC.

This organizational solution kills two birds with one stone, as it unifies IC efforts under the cavalry squadron and creates clear delineation of responsibilities between the BCT S-2 and the MICo. The BCT S-2 focuses on analysis and requirement development, and the MICo (aka Hunter Company) focuses on IC and aggregation (consolidation and packaging of data collected for easier consumption by analysts). Once the task-organization change occurs, the MICo takes on the role of the "Hunter Company" and the commander positions himself to actively manage forward IC, target handoff, aggregating enemy-related reporting and feeding consolidated reports to the BCT S-2 and cavalry squadron.

To better understand the endstate, we must first understand the depth of IC-related problems. There are four main IC challenges in the BCT:

- **Reconnaissance seams.** The doctrinal template of a BCT in defense or offense presents multiple seams.[2] These seams disrupt timely and accurate collection and dissemination of information. There are physical seams created by unit boundaries, communication seams created by differences in adjacent units' primary, alternate, contingency and emergency architecture and planning seams represented by non-nested IC planning at echelon. This creates a "telephone game" as reporting filters up through multiple echelons and BCT S-2s struggle to determine the veracity of any reports.

Also, the physical and organizational separation of reconnaissance and intelligence units exacerbates this problem, as units do not form habitual and formalized relationships among the intelligence company, BCT S-2, cavalry squadron and battalion-level scout platoons. The Hunter Company concept reduces seams through the concept of "aggregation" where the company command post (CP), through persistent contact with multi-disciplined intelligence collectors and cavalry units, gather singular reports, measure them against PIRs/intelligence requirements and aggregate information for analysis by the BCT S-2.

- **Intelligence lag.** Passing information among the multiple reconnaissance/IC seams without a coordination point creates stale reporting to decision makers, resulting in decisions made too late or too slowly to exploit opportunities to enable decision-based operations. The current structure of MICo ground collectors focuses on generating reports that take hours, if not days, to publish. Therefore BCTs become habitually reliant on higher-echelon collection assets to provide indications and warnings that drive decision-making. However, this habit is impractical, as an observation from a theater or division asset arrives at a tank or Bradley fighting position in a communications-challenged environment far too late to provide any value.

A restructure and realignment of existing assets within the BCT would drastically reduce this lag. The proposed Hunter concept not only streamlines IC, but it does not inhibit capabilities to generate signals-intelligence (sigint)/human-intelligence (humint) reports, as those reports still provide value once published. The concept of aggregation at the Hunter Company reduces said lag as an intelligence node with access to data geographically and temporally closer to the point of collection, and with a direct relationship with the BCT S-2; this situation immediately disseminates the information as opposed to waiting for information to flow through multiple echelons.

- **Task and purpose vs. intelligence synchronization.** The most recognizable IC product is the intelligence synchronization matrix (ISM). This matrix aligns assets in time and generally against a named area of interest (NAI). This product has reduced value at the BCT level. The ISM is appropriate when aligning ground maneuver against non-organic aerial assets but not for a BCT in a hybrid-threat conflict. The ISM fails to create shared understanding and to drive collection, as it limits the ability of subordinate leaders to take disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to answer PIR. When PIR-relevant information manifests outside of the planned sequence the ISM identifies, collectors are unable to adjust collection for fear of desynchronizing the IC plan, therefore predisposing the IC community against the principles of mission command.

Use of mission orders should apply to intelligence formations in the same manner as it applies to maneuver forces. Currently no unit in the BCT can organize to receive IC-centric task/purpose and align its collection assets against the ISM to achieve the commander's intent. Restructuring, realigning and repurposing the intelligence company addresses this.

- **MICo role in the decisive-action training environment (DATE) fight.** The MICo's current systems, training, organization and culture is more adaptable to a counterinsurgency (COIN) operation than a fight against a near-peer conventional threat with asymmetrical affiliates. As the training scenario and threat situation evolves, leaders must examine how the MICo evolves with them. The proposal is to unburden the MICo of its analytical responsibilities (thus giving it the sole mission of IC) and reorganize the company into the cavalry squadron. The MICo commander has no clearly defined role within the BCT fight, as doctrine is unclear and opinions on the subject are wide-ranging. Many often see the MICo commander as no more than a force provider and "special adviser" for ground-sensor teams, brigade intelligence-support element (BISE) personnel and Shadow tactical unmanned aerial system (TUAS).

Once task-organization changes for these elements occur, the MICo commander often has minimal influence on the company's activities and devotes most of his time and effort to employing the Shadow TUAS. Therefore, efforts to employ ground sensors (humint and sigint) fall by the wayside as maneuver battalions focus on achieving their assigned missions and sensor teams lack clear guidance for integration, collection and reporting.

Task-organization recommendations

- Explore options to remove the "IC platoon" from the MICo and place it in the brigade's HHC under the BCT S-2's direct control. This enables the BCT S-2 to oversee training and readiness for the Soldiers he leads in combat (the BISE).
- Realign 12 35F analysts assigned to the company operations and intelligence-support team to the multi-functional platoon.
- Reorganize the multi-functional platoon into two "multi-sensor platoons" with the mission to conduct ground-surveillance radar (GSR), direction-finding (DF) and small unmanned aerial system (UAS) missions. Ideally, these assets would operate on a prime mover commonly seen throughout the BCT (for example, Bradley, Stryker or gun truck), thus enabling improved integration and survivability.
- Comprise these "multi-sensor teams" (MSTs) of existing 35Fs (all-source intelligence analysts), 35Ns (sigint analysts) and 35Ps (cryptolinguists), and possibly augment them with 19D cavalry scouts or 11B infantrymen already in the BCT. The 35M (humint collectors) Soldiers then align into the "human-domain platoon."

To achieve the described multi-function capability, some equipment requisitions must take place. All the recommended systems are readily available or can be procured relatively quickly. The key systems required would be a manportable DF signals system such as the PRD-13 (common on most installations), ground radars (Manportable Surveillance and Target Acquisition Radars (MSTARs) are available in Army inventories) and the Portable Unmanned Aircraft, or PUMA, readily available at most installations.

Other systems with similar capabilities would work as well; the PRD-13, MSTAR and PUMA purely provide examples of flexible, survivable IC capabilities that constitute an MST.

Under this task-organization, the MICo possesses multi-disciplined collection capabilities required to rapidly answer PIR as well as conduct reconnaissance handover and rapid cueing, mixing and redundancy. GSR, for instance, provides a persistent moving-target indicator of mounted or dismounted movement out to 42 kilometers, day or night and in foggy or dusty conditions. Because it is capable of scanning large areas, it serves as the ideal asset for aggregating activity across several NAIs and cueing electro-optical assets whose scan process is necessarily more deliberate. Small UAS teams can provide threat-focused route reconnaissance ahead of a cavalry troop, "talking" mechanized combat power onto successful direct-fire engagements. Sigint DF teams provide simple, tactically relevant DF signatures from positions along the BCT's forward-line-of-troops (FLoT), which can identify high-priority targets or exploit poor communications security.

The exact specifications or model numbers of the systems the Hunter Company employs is a nuanced discussion, but what they all share is that their design, function and implementation orients on providing tactical information of value without any requirement for Upper Tactical Internet or highly specialized (and scarcely available) technical support. Simply put, the Hunter Company, through organizational and minor materiel changes, constitutes the ability to internally and rapidly execute the IC fundamentals of cueing, mixing and redundancy, a capability not present in current BCT design.

After all aforementioned task-organization changes and equipment requisitions, the remaining element within the standard MICo is the Shadow TUAS platoon. Due to its high demand and the convenient nature of analyzing full-motion video, Shadow TUAS often becomes the sole asset within the MICo sought after for IC. Unfortunately, the Shadow TUAS requires a level, compacted airstrip for landing, which either requires securing an existing airstrip or constructing a new one through an intensive engineer effort (also requiring engineer equipment not present within the BCT). Along with that, the Shadow platoon has a sizable footprint, intensive maintenance requirements and multiple administrative/safety requirements before initiating flight operations.

All these constraints, combined with the high demand for TUAS coverage, forces MICo commanders to devote most of their time toward ensuring proper execution of TUAS operations. In the Hunter Company concept, the commander fights closer to the FLoT and will have less time and ability to focus his or her efforts on the plethora of sustainment-related issues associated with Shadow TUAS.[3] Therefore, to make this task-organization work, BCTs must task their brigade engineer battalion (BEB) with maintenance of the UAS site. This includes ensuring security, sustainment and communications support, as well as enabling TUAS launches to occur at times prescribed by the BCT and/or Hunter Company. BEB staffs, through their current relationships with MICos, have a reasonable understanding of Shadow TUAS and how to execute the aforementioned tasks from the BCT.

The MICo (aka Hunter Company) commander would retain all other oversight, especially as it relates to maneuvering the Shadow and collecting mission-related information.

MICo to Hunter Company

The Hunter Company, once organized as described, becomes responsible for the aggregation of all relevant reporting at the Hunter CP. The commander receives task and purpose from the cavalry-squadron commander according to BCT PIRs and has control of all his/her platoons to prosecute the commander's guidance. Ideally, this guidance is no longer constrained by ISMs and task-organization orders but comes via mission orders based on commander's intent. For example: "No later than 19 2100 May 2017, identify obstacles and 2x battalions of enemy combat power east of PL Maria."

To accomplish this guidance, the Hunter Company retains tactical control of all platoons. The commander positions the 10-Soldier CP on a mission, enemy, terrain, troops, time and civilian considerations (METT-TC) basis to have communications with all MSTs, human-domain collectors, cavalry-troop screens and battalion-level scout platoons (possible locations: BCT tactical-actions center (TAC) or cavalry squadron's tactical-operations center/TAC). The Hunter CP relies heavily on Joint Capabilities Release or Joint Battle Command Platform and various radio systems to enable reporting. The Hunter CP can also serve as the net-control station for the brigade's operations-and-intelligence network to ensure synchronization of collection and reporting.

Using the commander's decision points and PIR as a guideline, Hunter CP aggregates and synthesizes reporting of immediate tactical relevance and disseminates information across the BCT.

Repurposing the company in such a manner streamlines reporting. Maneuver-unit reconnaissance formations gain access to agile and responsive organic, multi-disciplined platforms. And the BCT's IC effort is managed by a single formation (the cavalry squadron). This reduces the number and impact of IC/reconnaissance seams.

Figure 1. The Hunter Company commander locates his CP on a METT-TC basis to have voice communication with all MSTs and cavalry troops. The Hunter CP then ingests all reporting from IC elements, aggregates data into discernible information and sends consolidated reports for consumption and analysis by the BCT S-2.

Hunter Company operations – actions
1. Hunter Company receives task and purpose from cav S-2/S-3.
2. Hunter Company constructs recon plan and MST/TUAS taskings.
3. Hunter Company aligns assets to ensure all physical intelligence seams are observed by one or more intelligence disciplines.
4. Hunter Company establishes Hunter CP to streamline reporting channels and tasking chain.
5. Hunter Company coordinates intelligence handover.
6. Hunter Company realigns sensors to cover lost or gained NAIs.
7. Hunter Company creates humint tasking to achieve depth and breadth of collection across the BCT AO.
8. Brigade S-2 disseminates finished intelligence and conducts informed and flexible BCT maneuver.

These recommendations may seem aggressive at first glance, as this is a significant departure from conventional wisdom and breaks the paradigm of who MI Soldiers are and what they do. However, there is evidence that not only would this arrangement enable tactical success, it would create a reconnaissance culture within its parent unit. To illustrate this, there is a viable test case: 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR), which employs its MICo in the Hunter Company design.

Throughout examination of MICo GSR reporting from five National Training Center (NTC) rotations, MICo ground sensors generated 210 reports (50 training days at roughly four to five reports per day). During a single phase (72 hours) of one rotation, 11th ACR's intelligence company provided 166 reports (three training days at more than 50 reports daily). By these numbers, one can ascertain that 11th ACR's MICo markedly improved its report-processing capability simply by redesigning its intelligence formation.

The 11th ACR has not always employed its intelligence formation in the Hunter Company design, but in the roughly two years since the design's inception, 11th ACR has experienced marked improvement in reporting, situational awareness, reconnaissance culture and sound tactical decision-making. The increased success that 11th ACR experienced shortly after adopting a Hunter Company design leads one to believe that the same success can be replicated within a BCT.

Point/counterpoint

Point: 11th ACR enjoys extreme advantages, including "home field," multiple repetitions and fewer burdens from a higher headquarters, so its success in this endeavor is not transferrable to BCTs.

Counterpoint: While 11th ACR does enjoy reasonable advantages over rotational-training units, these alone do not explain a tenfold difference in intelligence reporting. Also, any argument based on discrediting 11th ACR success does not address the salient points of seam reduction, aggregation, intelligence lag, internal cueing/mixing/ redundancy, etc.

Point: The cavalry squadron should be focused forward and not multi-directionally, as is required to maintain rear-area collection.

Counterpoint: Through the application of mission command, the cavalry-squadron commander and staff can relay all rear-area collection requirements to the Hunter Company with minimal work on their part. The Hunter Company then takes ownership of said tasks and oversees execution, primarily by the human-domain platoon (humint collectors). Lastly, the reduction of seams brought forth by the Hunter Company increases the ability of units to conduct target handoff with one another, thus reducing the ability of the enemy to infiltrate the rear area, diminishing the requirement for rear-area collection.

Point: The cavalry squadron S-2 is already responsible for sending consolidated reconnaissance observation reports to the BCT S-2.

Counterpoint: Battalion-level intelligence officers constantly juggle a series of specified and implied tasks; chief among them is answering requirements for their battalion/squadron commander. Doing this while simultaneously chasing down and packaging information for BCT-level consumption is a bridge too far. The constitution of Hunter Company and its execution of aggregation creates a delineation of effort between it and the cav S-2 for collection/aggregation (Hunter) and analysis (S-2).

Point: How does Hunter Company apply to stability operations?

Counterpoint: When questions such as this are posed, COIN operations in Iraq/Afghanistan and their associated framework come to mind. However, future stability operations may not be applied in such a way that units semi-independently manage "battlespaces" to improve local governance/security/etc. Regardless of whether similar conflicts occur in the future, the concepts of unity of command, seam reduction, organic cueing/mixing/ redundancy and aggregation still apply to any other imaginable framework. More discussions are also necessary to examine whether assigning cavalry squadrons "battlespace owner" missions was appropriate. Perhaps a unified, passive reconnaissance and IC mission across a BCT area of operations (AO) could have worked better for cavalry squadrons? It's worth exploring.

Point: The current MICo organization works when its personnel are properly trained and a proper level of IC planning occurs for each mission.

Counterpoint: Leaders must consistently explore training solutions to known problems, but not all problems can be solved simply through "better training." Innovative leaders must continuously examine solutions across the DOTMLPF spectrum and be willing to explore answers beyond training improvement. Also, the IC challenges (seams, intelligence lag, task/purpose for collectors and defining a role for the MICo) can only be mitigated through training, not solved.

Conclusion

BCTs face challenges in the execution of nested and synchronized IC plans within the framework of decisive action. This problem is born of a disjointed organizational concept, where multiple geographically separated units with different communications architecture operate semi-independently while attempting to contribute to a mutual goal of IC. This problem transcends leadership; the Army must not ask talented leaders within a BCT to overcome organizational inefficiencies – the Army must instead address them.

To truly address the problem, the BCT must be task-organized to enable unity of command in the entire IC effort. If a BCT was to restructure, reorganize and re-equip its MICo into Hunter companies, it would achieve unity of command for IC planning and execution. The cavalry squadron would certainly improve, and it would increase the BCT's ability to be a flexible, intelligence-driven organization.

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Notes

[1] There are four elements of IC: intelligence operations, reconnaissance, surveillance and security operations.
[2] A seam is defined as a point in which information, tasking or other coordination must take place for mission accomplishment – in this case, the identification and tracking of enemy formations, obstacles, etc.
[3] Countless Shadow TUAS issues occur during each NTC rotation, almost all of which directly relate to extremely complex maintenance issues and/or issues associated with operating on an isolated airstrip away from higher headquarters. For these and many other reasons, the Army should explore options to field BCTs a more expeditionary TUAS solution that is less sustainment-intensive, does not require an airstrip to land on and is not as loud during flight operations. Existing systems such as ScanEagle and Aerosonde are much more agile and more effective in a DATE.

Acronym Quick-Scan

ABCT – armored brigade combat team
ACR – armored cavalry regiment
AO – area of operation
BCT – brigade combat team
BEB – brigade engineer battalion
BISE – brigade intelligence-support element
COIN – counterinsurgency
CP – command post
CTC – combat-training center
DATE – decisive-action training environment
DF – direction-finding
DOTMLPF – doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel and facilities
EAB – echelons above brigade
FLoT – forward-line-of-troops
GSR – ground-surveillance radar
HCT – humint collection team
HHC – headquarters and headquarters company
Humint – human intelligence
IC – information collection
ISM – intelligence synchronization matrix
ISR – intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
METT-TC – mission, enemy, terrain, troops, time and civilian considerations
MI – military intelligence
MICo – military-intelligence company
MST – multi-sensor team
MSTAR – Manportable Surveillance and Target Acquisition Radar
NAI – named area of interest
NTC – National Training Center
OMT – operational-management team
PIR – priority-information requirement
PL – phase line
PUMA – portable unmanned aircraft
Sigint – signals intelligence
TAC – tactical-actions center
TUAS – tactical unmanned aerial system
UAS – unmanned aerial system