

Reconnaissance beyond the Coordinated Fire Line

Division Warfighter Trends

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*Charges of cavalry are equally serviceable in the beginning, **the middle** and the end of a battle [emphasis added].*

—Napoleon Bonaparte

In the decisive action training environment (DATE) Warfighter, divisions and corps struggle to continuously plan and execute reconnaissance operations beyond the coordinated fire line (CFL). The lack of ground-based reconnaissance assets at the division level contributes to this problem. The Army is addressing

this gap, but the concept currently being tested by the Reconnaissance and Security Brigade Combat Team (R&S BCT) is only part of the solution. Overall, divisions fail to maintain situational awareness of upcoming decision points and the priority intelligence requirements (PIR) associated with them. As a result, the reconnaissance portion of the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) plan often becomes overlooked in favor of the deliberate, lethal targeting cycle. As operations progress, this deliberate targeting usually evolves predominantly into dynamic targeting beyond

A U.S. Army cavalry scout assigned to 8th Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, conducts reconnaissance 13 September 2017 during Decisive Action Rotation 17-09 at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, California. (Photo by Spc. John Scarpati, U.S. Army)



the CFL. This leads to an overall trend of fires and intelligence collection driving the maneuver plan rather than the two acting in support of it. However, placing maneuver back into the forefront of capturing operational objectives is achievable. Divisions must reempower the operations and intelligence synchronization meeting (OPSYNC) and introduce a reconnaissance cell into the main command post. This cell will represent either the R&S BCT or the division reconnaissance task force created from organic assets.

Decision Points and Future Planning

During the military decision-making process (MDMP) that occurs before operations commence, divisions identify decision points that are typically well planned and well articulated. However, as operations progress, divisions lose awareness of upcoming decision points. They fail to adjust the decision support matrix (DSM) as the operational environment changes. This is not to suggest divisions completely disregard the DSM. Key senior leaders, such as the G-2 (intelligence officer), G-3 (operations officer), and chief of staff (COS), remain

aware of upcoming decision points and typically keep the commander well updated during scheduled battle-rhythm events, such as the division targeting working group. Despite this awareness among the leadership, divisions typically lose the critical oversight of upcoming decision points on the floor of the current operations integration center (COIC). The DSM and PIR are printed out and posted for reference, but as the mission progresses through phases, these documents fade into the background and become familiar standard wallpaper. As a result,

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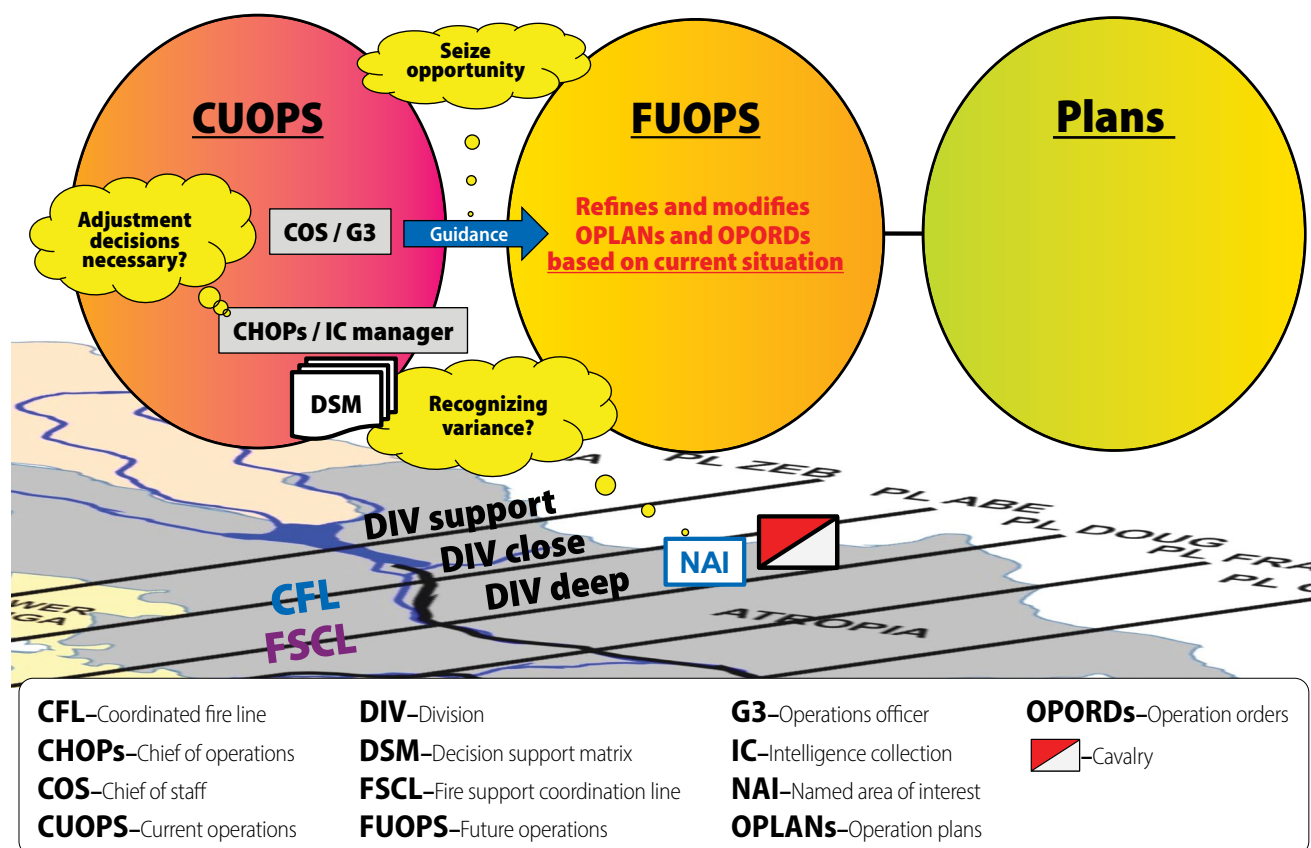
the chief of operations (CHOPS)—the staff member responsible for managing the COIC and normally the first leader given the opportunity to analyze information reported from subordinate units—is at a significant disadvantage in regards to recognizing variance. Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, *The Operations Process*, describes the role of commanders and staff in analyzing the changing situation on the battlefield:

During execution, commanders and staffs monitor the situation to identify changes in conditions. Then they ask if these changes affect the overall conduct of operations or their part of it and if the changes are significant. Finally, they identify if the changed conditions represent variances from the order—especially opportunities and risks. Staff members use running estimates to look for indicators of variances that affect their areas of expertise. The commander, COS (XO), and command post cell chiefs look for indicators of variances that affect the overall operation.¹

The COS is expected to look for indicators of variance, but the CHOPS is the first point on the critical path toward the commander's decision and must be trained to look for it as well. The best way to do this is for the CHOPS to become thoroughly familiar with the DSM. If given the opportunity to conduct MDMP with the rest of the staff—in particular, the war game and the combined arms rehearsal—the CHOPS becomes very familiar with the document and the decision points before operations. Even the best DSMs are difficult to decipher on the surface, and unless units integrate them into synchronization drills or morning and evening update briefs, they will not assist the staff in the way designed.

Confirming, Updating, and Tracking Priority Intelligence Requirements

Beyond the CFL, in accordance with the ISR plan, sensors are dedicated to answering PIR. The lack of awareness of these sensors on the COIC floor often leads to an overemphasis on dynamic targeting occurring in the joint air ground integration cell (JAGIC), most often at the expense of these specific reconnaissance missions. In addition to remaining familiar with the upcoming decision points on the DSM, the CHOPS must be kept apprised of the way in which PIR will be answered. If the division staff limits



(Figure adapted by author from Operations Group Delta Mission Command Training Program original figure. The figure illustrates a reconnaissance mission conducted beyond the CFL in the division deep area. Whether an unmanned sensor or an actual unit, reporting from the mission is relayed by either a reconnaissance cell or the IC manager to the CHOPs in the COIC. Using the DSM, the CHOPs determines if confirming or denying the PIR associated with the NAI shows variance with the existing plan. The CHOPs then recommends to the COS if an adjustment decision is necessary. If needed, the G-3 issues guidance to FUOPs to refine the plan.)

Figure 1. Decisive Action Training Exercise Environment and the Current Operations Integration Center Integration Cells

information requirements to only critical information that will enable decisions, the actual number of PIR should be manageable and resourced. The targeting cycle and all the working groups contained within it (information collection working group, targeting working group, and targeting decision board) naturally occur out of sight and out of mind from the COIC floor. An exception would be those members of the staff who participate through chat rooms. The benefit of this method frees up the CHOPS and the JAGIC to prosecute lethal targets; the con of this process is the CHOPS remaining unaware of which sensors have been dedicated to answering particular PIR. This is not to suggest that the CHOPS is even necessary in the actual targeting cycle discussed above, and certainly the personnel within the JAGIC are responsible for knowing and recommending delivery systems, etc.

Regardless, the potential missed opportunities to seize the initiative demand that the CHOPS be aware of when specific reconnaissance missions aimed at confirming or denying PIR are being conducted.

Another factor compounding the overall problem is that divisions are primarily limited to unmanned aircraft system (UAS) reconnaissance beyond the CFL. This is not a new phenomenon and, as mentioned at the beginning of this article, the Army has been working to fill this gap with some form of ground-based reconnaissance at echelons above brigade. In an article from the April 2017 edition of *Armor* magazine titled "The Reconnaissance and Security Strike Group: A Multi-Domain Battle Enabler," Nathan Jennings does an excellent job of describing the functions and potential missions these types of organizations will perform for the Army in the future.² But until the Army puts

“... unless divisions create a reconnaissance and surveillance task force out of their internal assets, they are severely restricted in terms of gathering intelligence requirements beyond the CFL [coordinated fire line].”

this organization into practice, in DATE scenarios, divisions must rely on organic Gray Eagle UASs or occasionally special operation forces to confirm PIR beyond the CFL or the fire support coordination line.

It is tempting to ask, *why does any of this matter?* Are divisions able to answer PIR beyond the CFL using only their organic Gray Eagles; if so, why do we even concern ourselves with the CHOPS's role in it? The answer has to do with the link between current operations and future operations, and shortening staff reaction time to seize the initiative.

Figure 1 (on page 33) illustrates the battlefield geometry of the DATE and the integration cells normally located within the COIC. As stated previously, unless divisions create a reconnaissance and surveillance task force out of their internal assets, they are severely restricted in terms of gathering intelligence requirements beyond the CFL. Moreover, even when divisions do create a reconnaissance task force, there is a deliberate and conscious balance that must take place. Combat power is taken away from the brigade combat teams in order to build a task force robust enough to survive beyond the CFL to accomplish reconnaissance objectives.

Some divisions believe they cannot afford to lose this combat power within their brigade combat teams. Active-duty and National Guard divisions in past Warfighter exercises have approached this problem in different ways, with different levels of success. For purposes of illustration, figure 1 depicts a reconnaissance mission beyond the CFL as a generic cavalry unit moving to a named area of interest to confirm or deny division PIR. Confirming or denying PIR gives the personnel within the COIC, specifically the CHOPS, the first opportunity to recognize potential change in the division's operation. Figure 1 depicts how the DSM is the tool best suited to allow the CHOPS to recognize this variance. With the combined input from the intelligence collection manager and the rest of the staff, the CHOPS can make the quick determination if an execution or adjustment decision may be necessary. Of

note, the process at this point remains within the COIC and should not take much time, provided the CHOPS remains well versed in the DSM. ADRP 5-0 describes execution decisions as the following:

Execution decisions implement a planned action under circumstances anticipated in the order. In their most basic form, execution decisions are decisions the commander foresees and identifies for execution during the operation. They apply resources at times or situations already established in the order.³

ADRP 5-0 goes on to describe adjustment decisions:

Adjustment decisions modify the operation to respond to unanticipated opportunities and threats. They often require implementing unanticipated operations and resynchronizing the warfighting functions. Commanders make these decisions, delegating implementing authority only after directing the major change themselves.⁴

Of note, if the division conducted a thorough war game, the unanticipated opportunities and threats as described above may have been previously identified as branch plans implementing change. However, before the commander directs this change, the information must be analyzed. The CHOPS is the first point on the critical path toward making these types of decisions. If the CHOPS determines that an adjustment decision may be necessary, he notifies the COS, who together with the G-3 organizes the staff to conduct the steps of the rapid decision-making process. Figure 1 then shows the G-3 providing the guidance to future operations to refine the plan in accordance with the *changing situation*. The goal of this entire process is to eliminate the current trend in DATE Warfighters of failing to recognize variance and making adjustment decisions *only* at certain points in the scheduled battle rhythm, such as the commander's update brief or the targeting decision board. Empowering the CHOPS to recognize variance, to determine if the situation has changed based on

reporting from reconnaissance missions beyond the CFL, enables the division to flatten the network, quickly seize initiative, and exploit opportunities.

Forcing Functions: The Empowered Operations and Intelligence Synchronization Meeting and the Division Recon Cell

One key figure, the commander, is omitted from the process as described above. This is certainly not meant to minimize the role of the commander; he or she plays the dominant role in the rapid decision-making process. But the commander does not and should not monitor the situation from the COIC floor *at all times*. This responsibility falls squarely on the staff and personnel within the COIC. Therefore, the key to ensuring information collection is holistic and nested with the targeting cycle in support of maneuver is two-fold: divisions should insert a forcing function into the battle rhythm and introduce a reconnaissance cell into the main command post.

The forcing function can take many forms. Essentially, it is whatever synchronization meeting or drill the COIC uses to allow the staff sections to provide their running estimates and together gain better understanding of the friendly and enemy situation. Most divisions use the OPSYNC to do this. Field Manual 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*, states, “The operations synchronization meeting is the most important event in the battle rhythm in support of the current operation.”⁵ Despite the general use of the OPSYNC, divisions seldom use this scheduled battle rhythm event to review the DSM and any upcoming decision points. The culprit here is time; COIC personnel typically refine the way they conduct OPSYNC over the course of the Warfighter, narrowing down what information is necessary versus what is redundant. Compounding the problem, the DSM is a busy document and not well suited for gaining understanding at a glance, especially when it is seldom utilized. As a result, COIC personnel seldom include it in the OPSYNC or any other meeting or drill to resynchronize operations. This reoccurring problem has been observed and reported on in the last three years of the Mission Command Training Program’s (MCTP) key observations documents. In 2014, MCTP reported, “Units are not directly linking

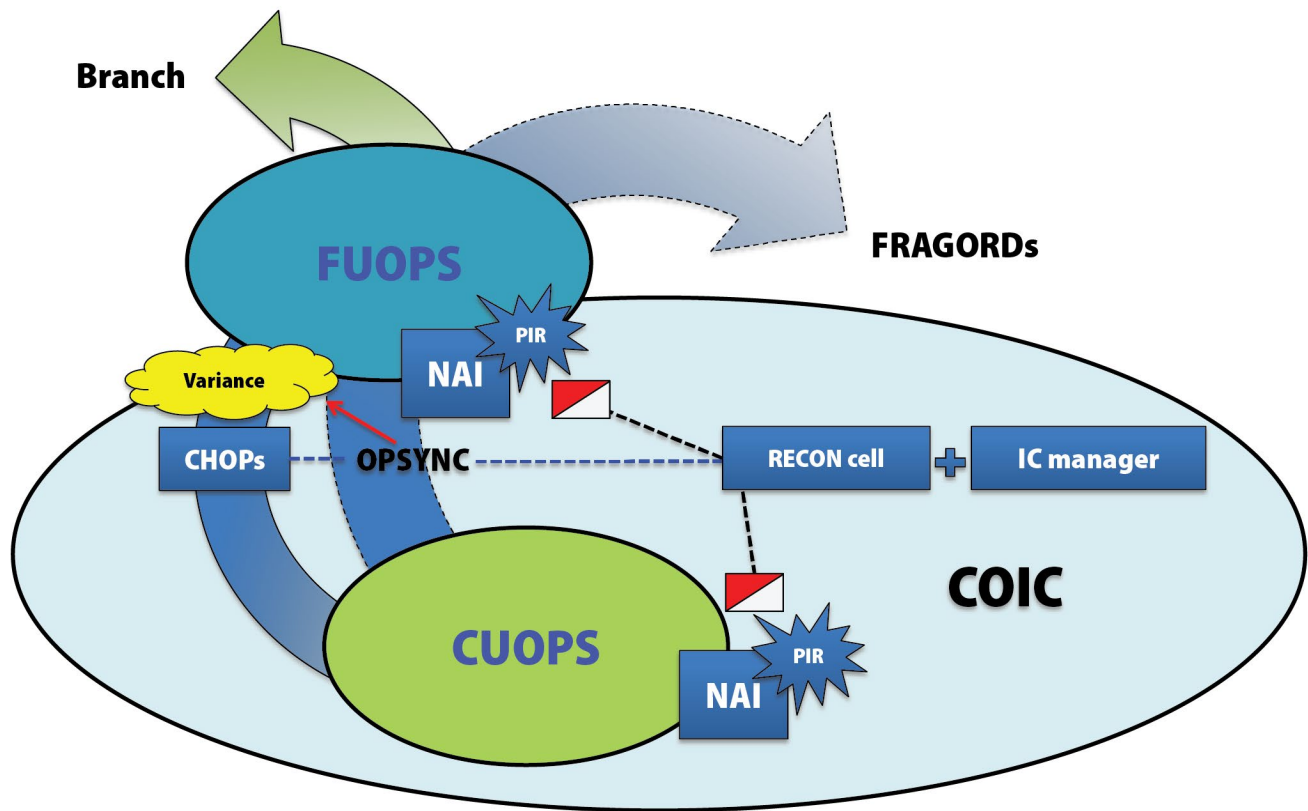
the CCIRs to decisions that the commander needs to make.”⁶ Digging deeper, in 2016, MCTP reported,

Some staffs struggle to identify if a decision is pending or to update commanders with conditions prior to asking them to make a decision. Common causes include tracking too many CCIR [commander’s critical information requirements] at one time, failing to focus CCIR on upcoming decisions or confusing other information requirements (such as essential elements of friendly information [EEFI] or “wake-up criteria”) with CCIR thereby preventing the current operations cell from sharing critical information with commanders in advance of a decision. Finally, CCIR are rarely answered definitively; assessment methods are neither developed nor refined following COA development. Since staffs fail to provide complete assessments, commanders must rely on their own intuitive processes to determine conditions related to anticipated decisions.⁷

The good news is this problem can be fixed rather simply. Units must *force* themselves to discuss the DSM at some point in their synchronization drill, preferably at the beginning of the meeting and again at the end. An example of this drill’s agenda follows: The CHOPS begins the brief with a quick overview of the upcoming decision points in the current phase, noting the indicators associated with the related PIR. The staff then proceeds with their reports and updated estimates. At the end of the brief, the CHOPS takes the time to once more go over the decision points in the current phase; this time every staff member is better informed to determine how and why the situation may have changed. Finally, the CHOPS concludes the brief by asking the future operations representatives in attendance if anything discussed during the brief changes what they are currently working on in their integration cell.

More Than a Liaison: The Reconnaissance Cell in the Division Current Operations Integration Center

To provide additional focus on answering PIR and to assist the CHOPS in the process described above, the division should create a reconnaissance cell in the



CHOPS—Chief of operations

COIC—Current operations integration center

CUOPS—Current operations

FRAGORDs—Fragmentary order

FUOPS—Future operations

IC—Intelligence collection

NAI—Named area of interest

OPSYNC—Operations and intelligence
synchronization meeting

PIR—Priority intelligence requirement

RECON—Reconnaissance

—Cavalry

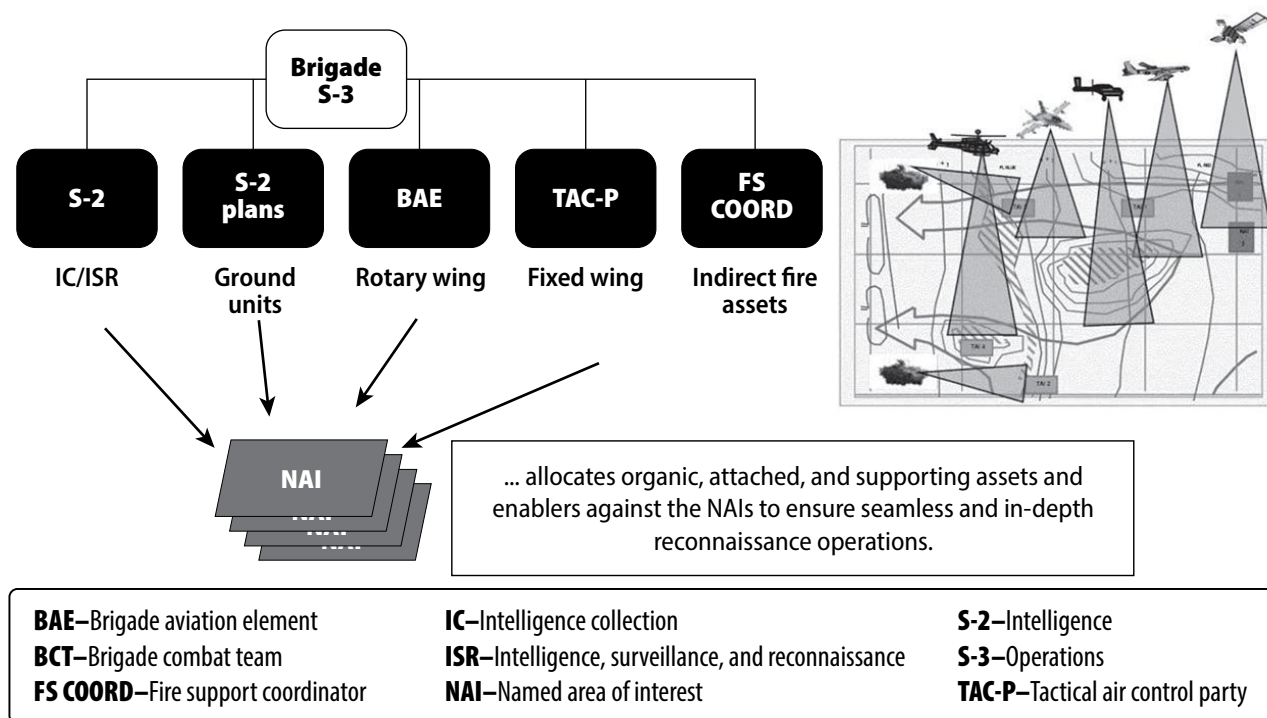
(Figure by author. The CHOPS recognizes variance in the current plan through the reporting of the reconnaissance units tasked with observing NAIs. Using the OPSYNC as the synchronization drill for the warfighting functions in the COIC, the variance initiates the rapid decision-making process, which FUOPs eventually turns into a branch plan.)

Figure 2. Input from the Reconnaissance Cell Drives Fire and Maneuver and Future Planning

COIC. The OPSYNC process as described is relatively simple, yet it can be difficult to implement initially. This is because analysis takes time, and the objective of a synchronization drill is meant to gain understanding quickly. However, with repetition, both the CHOPS and the staff will become better at quickly determining what information is important and which pieces are irrelevant. This is definitely a step in the right direction; however, more often than not in DATE Warfighter exercises, the CHOPS is swamped with dynamic targeting in support of the lethal fight occurring in the JAGIC and simply cannot afford to dedicate enough time and focus on decision points outside the actual

OPSYNC. The addition of a reconnaissance cell in the COIC will assist the CHOPS with this problem. The reconnaissance cell will ensure that PIR are continually managed and answered. Working with the information collection manager and the CHOPS, the reconnaissance cell ensures division reconnaissance (intelligence) drives fires and maneuver (see figure 2).

Figure 3 (on page 37) depicts a brigade reconnaissance cell as shown in Center for Army Lessons Learned Handbook 17-12, *Reconnaissance and Security Commander's Handbook*; it is useful for determining which functions a division-level cell should emulate.⁸ If the division has been task organized with



(Figure from CALL Handbook 17-12, *Reconnaissance and Security Commander's Handbook*, April 2017)

Figure 3. The Brigade Reconnaissance Cell Coordinates and Synchronizes the Brigade Combat Team's Reconnaissance Operations

the proposed R&S BCT for a particular phase or phases of the operation, then the reconnaissance cell should closely mirror figure 3 regarding size and functions. If the division creates an internal reconnaissance-and-security task force from organic assets, then the reconnaissance cell within the COIC will be correspondingly smaller. The cell must have enough personnel to allow for twenty-four-hour operations and to represent the cell in targeting and information-collection working groups. Regardless of the size and manning involved, the purpose of the reconnaissance cell remains the same: to represent the reconnaissance units on the battlefield and to ensure reconnaissance continues to support the maneuver plan.

The officer in charge of the cell should be the chief of reconnaissance. His presence removes some of the burdens of managing PIR from the CHOPS, though it's critical the two must work closely together. The chief of reconnaissance becomes a critical bridge between current and future operations by providing focus and attention on the reconnaissance missions currently in execution as well as those planned to

allow future operations to continue with their planning efforts. The reconnaissance chief's presence in the COIC and the OPSYNC helps to prevent the familiar DATE Warfighter trend of ignoring PIR in favor of only dynamic targeting. His or her presence also provides emphasis on the ground- or aerial-based reconnaissance missions capable and suitable for answering PIR beyond the CFL. This frees up the division's limited and crucial Gray Eagles for lethal targeting and confirming/denying PIR deeper in the area of operations.

Final Thoughts: Reconnaissance, Decisions, and Maintaining the Initiative

In the current DATE Warfighter scenario, divisions are squandering opportunities to seize the initiative from their near-peer enemies. By failing to closely manage PIR and the associated DSM within the COIC, the ability to determine if the situation has changed from previously approved plans diminishes significantly. As a result, commanders are seldom

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asked to make decisions outside their scheduled battle rhythm events. ADRP 3-0, *Operations*, states,

Timely decisions and actions are essential for effective command. Commanders who consistently decide and act more quickly than the enemy have a significant advantage. By the time the slower commander decides and acts, the faster one has already changed the situation, rendering the slower one's actions inappropriate. With such an advantage, the commander can maintain the initiative and dictate the tempo.⁹

Charging the division CHOPS within the COIC with closely managing PIR and the DSM is a crucial part of providing commanders this opportunity to seize initiative.

In order for the CHOPS to perform this task correctly, the COIC must reempower the OPSYNC as a synchronization drill that includes a DSM review. The division must also introduce a reconnaissance cell within the COIC. This cell not only acts as a liaison to the ground and air reconnaissance units within the task organization, but also ensures that reconnaissance missions are considered within the information collection and targeting cycles and are monitored on the COIC floor for answering PIR. This emphasis on reconnaissance within the COIC will mitigate the DATE Warfighter trend of ignoring missions tasked with answering PIR in favor of only the dynamic, lethal targeting occurring in the division's busy JAGIC. Regardless of the mission set, the Army's need for reconnaissance remains paramount, and with a few steps, we can ensure reconnaissance does indeed drive fires and maneuver. ■

Notes

Epigraph. Napoléon Bonaparte, "The Military Maxims of Napoleon," in *Roots of Strategy: The Five Greatest Military Classics of All Time*, ed. Thomas R. Phillips (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1985).

1. Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 2012), 4-36.
2. Nathan A. Jennings, "The Reconnaissance and Security Strike Group: A Multi-Domain Battle Enabler," *Armor* (Spring 2017), 39-44.
3. ADRP 5-0, *The Operations Process*, 4-32.
4. *Ibid.*, 4-33.
5. Field Manual 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2014), 1-45.
6. Edward T. Bohnemann, *MCTP Trends in a Decisive Action Warfighter Exercise* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Mission Command Training Program, 2014).
7. Edward T. Bohnemann, *MCTP FY 15 Key Observations: Decisive Action Exercises* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Mission Command Training Program, April 2016).
8. Center for Army Lessons Learned Handbook 17-12, *Reconnaissance and Security Commander's Handbook* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, April 2017), 25.
9. ADRP 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2016), 3-52.