



Command posts are crucial for planning and communication but face significant challenges in the field. These extensive setups draw attention due to their size and produce considerable noise, making them more detectable. (U.S. Army photo by William C. Beach)

# Command Post Threats Beyond the Electromagnetic Spectrum

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**I**n today's battlefield, ensuring command post survival is critical for successful military operations. The posts serve as hubs for planning, communication, and coordination, but they also face challenges beyond traditional concerns. The electromagnetic (EM) spectrum remains a significant factor, but issues such as noise pollution, fuel logistics, environmental impact, and habitat destruction also pose threats.

Let's explore these issues and their implications for modern military operations.

## The Electromagnetic Spectrum

Command post survival recurs as a theme throughout the intensive three weeks of the Precommand Course and the Battalion Command Sergeant Major Course. One notable point of discussion is command posts' appearance in the EM spectrum (Department of the Army [DA], 2023).

While posts' EM signatures are present in the spectrum,

it's crucial to recognize how other risks associated with large command posts can be more perilous (DA, 2023).

The countries that pose the greatest threat and immediate danger possess advanced collection capabilities that U.S. Soldiers didn't contend with during the war on terrorism. So, we must consider risks that underscore large command posts' potential dangers (DA, 2018).

## Noise Pollution and Fuel Logistics

I observed various command posts as senior intelligence sergeant major at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center. Whether it was an infantry, armor, or Stryker Brigade Combat Team, one common factor was the command post's commanding presence, which was notably large.

Most command posts consisted of four to five tents (each with at least one generator), vehicles to transport or support communications equipment, and the personnel needed to quickly emplace and displace the

post. Their size made them easily detectable via overhead collection, emphasizing the need for immediate action.

I witnessed the Opposing Force Intelligence Cell, augmented by geospatial analysts, swiftly identify command post locations during Combined Resolve 24-01. Large aggregated command posts also produce another detectable indicator: noise.

As noted above, at least one generator is typically required per tent, to power the necessary systems for a commander and staff to gather information and plan and order movements to engage and neutralize the enemy. However, that power generation also produces noise pollution.

Before I left the cantonment area for the day to see the command posts at brigade or battalion, I called the training and analysis feedback officer for the command post's eight-digit grid. (The grid was off by 400 to 900 meters from the true location 99 out of 100 times due to instrumentation variance.)

I turned off my truck and listened for the generators to find their location. In Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO), special purpose forces have greater freedom of maneuver in the rear area. A command post's noise is easily detectable, making it more targetable by long-range fires.

Power generation also requires an ample fuel supply.

Class III supply petroleum, oil, and lubricants (POL) are transported by HEMTT A4 Fuel Servicing Trucks. Each can transport 2,500 gallons of fuel and weighs between 64,000 and 72,000 pounds. A truck that large leaves vegetation disturbed. If a drone photographed an area one day and flew the same flight the next day after a HEMTT drove through, observers could quickly see the tire treads and disturbed earth.

The environmental impact of command post operations highlights a need to adopt more sustainable practices for the environment and operational security.

Shrinking or disaggregating (breaking up) portions of the command post would negate the need for as much fuel, reducing the opportunity for adversaries to use change detection technology to locate command posts.

Reducing the size or disaggregating portions of the command post also downsizes the number of people necessary to operate in one location.

## Environmental Impact and Habitat Destruction

In military operations, particularly during LSCO, organizations often establish command posts in uninhabited wooded areas. However, this practice can lead to significant habitat destruction. Establishing these positions involves clearing vegetation, creating trails, and setting up defensive structures, which can disrupt local ecosystems.

Additionally, troops in these areas generate a substantial amount of waste, with each person producing a considerable volume of trash. This waste, including packaging, food scraps, and other materials, pollutes the environment and increases the risk of

detection. Proper waste disposal practices are needed to mitigate these impacts and reduce military operations' environmental footprint in wooded areas (DA, 2020).

## Conclusion

Given the pacing and immediate threats the Army may face in the future, it's essential to know all the risks associated with large command posts.

They are detectable through the EM spectrum and overhead collection assets. They require noise-producing generators, which make them vulnerable to special-purpose forces and any civilians on the battlefield aligned with the adversary.

When generators are all in one location, they require large fuel trucks to meet their energy needs. Tire tracks in dense

vegetation make the post detectable to overhead collect and change detection technology.

Large command posts also lead to significant habitat destruction.

Taking a holistic approach to command post survivability is particularly important for the NCO corps. They serve as the operational units' backbone and are responsible for executing the commander's intent. NCOs play a critical role in ensuring their organizations are trained and prepared to address the diverse challenges associated with command post survivability.

Through effective training programs, NCOs can educate their subordinates on the risks posed to posts and implement measures to negate or minimize these threats.

Solutions may incorporate exercises that simulate scenarios involving noise pollution, fuel shortage, or



A Soldier with 4th Infantry Division refills petroleum containers during a Command Post Exercise. Each command post tent usually requires at least one generator. The generators provide considerable power — and noise. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. James Geelen)



Setting up command posts often involves clearing vegetation and creating trails, which can disrupt local ecosystems. This environmental consequence underscores the importance of adopting sustainable practices to protect our surroundings and maintain operational security. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Jacob Nunnenkamp)

environmental hazards — allowing units to develop adaptive strategies and procedures.

Additionally, NCOs can emphasize situational awareness and proactive risk management among their troops, empowering them to identify potential threats and take appropriate action to safeguard post security.

By instilling a culture of resilience and preparedness in their organizations, NCOs can enhance overall mission effectiveness and contribute to the success of military operations in dynamic and challenging environments.

So, during your conversations about command post survivability, remember: It isn't just about the spectrum. ■

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