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## **EMPLOYING INTELLIGENCE, SURVEILLANCE, AND RECONNAISSANCE: ORGANIZING, TRAINING, AND EQUIPPING TO GET IT RIGHT**

In the January–February 2015 issue of *Air and Space Power Journal*, Capt Adam Young in his article “Employing Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance: Organizing, Training, and Equipping to Get It Right,” astutely presented a model for employment of airborne surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities similar to the close air support (CAS) structure. The article proposed *how* airborne collection assets should be employed and explored *who* should be qualified to task sensors for the supported commander, even with the land component. Captain Young presented the case for creation of ISR tactical controllers (ITC) within the tactical air control party (TACP). We would like to clarify the roles and responsibilities of current TACP members discussed in Captain Young’s ITC proposal.

His article summarizes some doctrinal issues of tactical airborne sensor tasking, but the problems are systemic to the collection-management process. The author’s comparison of CAS and collection management to contextualize the problems is sound but requires qualification. The joint tactical air strike request (JTAR) process facilitates CAS effects like dropping bombs. The collection-management process governs surveillance and reconnaissance operations. Many years ago, the joint community institutionalized the JTAR process but failed to do the same for collection management.

For its part, the US Air Force created two career fields to handle CAS planning and execution with the land component: the air liaison officer (ALO) and the TACP. ALOs and joint terminal attack controllers (JTAC) integrate CAS into the ground scheme of maneuver to avoid fratricide. JTACs draft CAS requests and staff them through the air support opera-



tions center. When the air and space operations center tasks the air requests to Air Force squadrons, aircrews at the squadrons plan the mission to produce requested effects. Simultaneously with aircrew planning, ALOs and JTACs plan the mission with ground units to ensure that approved air requests are reflected in the ground scheme of maneuver. From a tactical operations center or a forward position, the JTACs call in air strikes to avoid fratricide during execution. Finally, the JTACs provide inputs on battle damage assessment. The JTAR process streamlines CAS employment, but such is not the case for collection management.

Airborne collection management is split into two different categories: collection requirements management (CRM) and collection operations management (COM). CRM is the authority to determine *what* assets collect, based on priority. COM is the authority to determine *which assets* will collect requirements and *how* they collect priority requirements. Collection-management responsibilities are spread across persons from different services. Usually the ground element determines what information needs collection, and the supporting unit—often the air component—determines how best to attain the collection. The integration of Air Force ISR liaison officers (ISRLO) into the TACP addressed the air component's ISR integration into the ground scheme of maneuver.

For land operations, the supported ground commander delegates airborne collection management to a mixture of S2 and S3 staff members—most often the S2. The latter oversees such activities as plotting orders of battle, managing human intelligence teams, and coordinating ground-based ISR collection systems. Simply, airborne collection is one of many S2 responsibilities. More experienced individuals usually lead the intelligence sections while such matters as airborne collection management, at lower echelons, are often left to inexperienced personnel. The US Army first recognized the deficiency in its real-time airborne ISR integration, and the US Marine Corps followed.

Bad experiences with allowing untrained people to request and control airborne sensors, in part, led to implementation of the Air Force's

ISRLO program in 2006. The Army and Marine Corps needed individuals to advise them during operational planning, help them with the request process, and then execute ISR operations alongside them when needed. This model is the current *function* of the Air Force ISRLO; however, Captain Young's article does not accurately reflect this service agreement.

The author's problem is the equivalence of the ALO and the ISRLO. ALOs have an advisory-only function. ISRLOs have a threefold mission: advise, *assist*, and educate. Gen G. Michael Hostage, former commander of Air Combat Command, ensconced these roles in the command's *Air Support Operations Squadron (ASOS) Intelligence Operations Enabling Concept* in 2012. This document mirrors ISRLO roles implemented in the 2011 Air Forces Central (AFCENT) ISRLO concept of operations (CONOPS) when General Hostage was the combined force air component commander for US Central Command.

Most confusion about ISRLOs has to do with their assistance role, which includes sensor tasking authority (STA). Captain Young's article fell victim to this misunderstanding, referencing the Air Force's theater ISR CONOPS and the AFCENT ISRLO CONOPS: ISRLOs are not "to act as terminal controllers" (p. 33). The article incorrectly presumes that terminal control extends to STA. It does not. The above reference means that ISRLOs should not employ kinetic weapons. Joint Publication 3-09.3, *Close Air Support*, 25 November 2014, defines terminal control as "the authority to direct aircraft to maneuver into a position to deliver ordnance, passengers, or cargo to a specific location or target . . . [or] any electronic, mechanical, or visual control given to aircraft to facilitate target acquisition and resolution" (p. GL-14). No Air Force ground operator other than JTACs is allowed to conduct *terminal control*. However, ISRLOs most certainly exercise STA in their assistance function and have done so for at least the last six years in nearly every contingency operation. Consequently, ISRLOs are not like ALOs in this respect. ALOs cannot employ weapons unless they are JTAC qualified. ISRLOs can employ sensors if the supported commander al-



lows them to do so as members of their intelligence team. The challenge ahead for the ISRLO community is to formalize planning, execution, and assessment tactics, techniques, and procedures for this function; these efforts have been under way for several years and are nearing fruition.

Captain Young's observation that current doctrine on ISR has "yet to materialize into usable, tactical-level guidance" (p. 30) is absolutely correct and continues to be a source of frustration for ISRLOs and other individuals. The ISRLO program is the Air Force's initial answer to help with this joint problem. These first efforts are by no means a final answer, but it is important to realize that improvements to the execution function of collection management have already begun. Undoubtedly, the Air Force has a part to play in the joint effort to fix collection-management problems. However, fielding Air Force ITCs to correct a joint problem is a resource-intensive Band-Aid. Although the Air Force should bolster its STA capability with ground units through a modest increase in ISRLO manning and lead the way in building a training program for those who exercise STA over airborne ISR assets, it is neither realistic nor desirable for the service to completely take over this function for the other services. This problem is inherently joint, and both the Army and Marine Corps must seek solutions of their own to overcome issues with collection management.

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## **THE AUTHOR RESPONDS**

Captain Snelgrove and Captain Haley have added valuable insights to the ongoing and important discussions to optimize ISR employment. Getting this right is not only critical for the most effective employment of air, space, and cyber power but also pivotal to the success of



our joint and coalition partners. The fact that both authors have extensive operational ISR experience and have deployed as ISR liaison officers in support of the land component makes their insights particularly valuable. In essence, I agree with them about the lack of authoritative, tactical-level tactics, techniques, and procedures and doctrine; furthermore, I concur that the joint force needs uniquely trained ISR Airmen who can leverage and integrate resources across the entire ISR enterprise. Whether these ISR specialists are called ISR liaison officers, ISR tactical controllers, ISR coordinators, or something altogether different (e.g., ISR tactical directors—an initiative proposed by Twenty-Fifth Air Force) is less critical than the more important discussion concerning how to best implement this function to advance and improve ISR operations. I remain hopeful that the Air Force will recognize the need for these ISR specialists and that our service's leaders will continue to drive towards prioritizing and standardizing this ISR requirement. The dynamic nature of the modern battlefield will require nothing less than superbly prepared ISR forces to meet the threat.

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