Urban Reconnaissance Through Supervised Autonomy

By Colonel Jonathan W. Bennett

On 12 April 2023, senior leaders from the Office of the Provost Marshal General, 200th Military Police Command, Fort Meade, Maryland, and the 290th Military Police Brigade, Nashville, Tennessee, had the opportunity to observe a demonstration of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), Arlington, Virginia, Urban Reconnaissance Through Supervised Autonomy (URSA) system and consider potential uses for military police missions. DARPA developed the program to enable autonomous systems managed and operated by U.S. ground forces to detect hostile forces and identify combatants before U.S. troops encounter them.

The purpose of the military police leaders' observation of the technology demonstration was to consider the value of using this type of technology in military police missions, such as detention operations, area security, and force protection. Military police observers included Major General Cary J. "Joe" Cowan Jr., Commanding General; Brigadier General Matthew N. Metzel, Deputy Commanding General; and Colonel Shannon M. Lucas, Deputy Provost Marshal General, 200th Military Police Command, and Colonel Jonathan W. Bennett, Commander, 290th Military Police Brigade. The team was very impressed with the capabilities and potential of URSA, and the military police leaders are continuing discussions with DARPA regarding the possibility of integrating URSA into future training exercises to further test it in specific mission contexts.

URSA in Detention Operations

URSA, including small, unmanned ground and air systems and a mission commander module, could be integrated into detention operations battalions. Small, unmanned ground vehicles could conduct patrols around the perimeter of the facility, and small, unmanned aerial vehicles could fly over compounds on regular intervals to gather data and build assessments. Guard force watch commanders could be trained to operate and monitor URSA to allow vastly greater situational awareness of activities taking place within the facilities and nearly instantaneous accountability of enemy prisoners of war in custody. Detention operations security personnel could use the system to better understand potential internal threats and identify individuals of potential intelligence value. URSA could serve as a significant combat multiplier for the detention operations mission, allowing detention operations battalions to increase the number of enemy prisoners of war they could manage without additional personnel requirements.



URSA mission commanders review captured footage of a scenario event.



Observers interact with one of the ground systems.

Field Testing at Titan Warrior 23

The 200th Military Police command and 290th Military Police Brigade worked with DARPA to conduct a field test of URSA at the 290th Military Police Brigade Titan Warrior '23 exercise held at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, from 30 July to 3 August 2023. As a part of the field test, the URSA team equipped Camp Bobcat (a theater detention facility training site) with active cameras and robotics systems while the Soldiers of the 290th conducted their culminating detention operations training events. Soldiers were trained on the URSA system and taught how to employ its capabilities to ensure better care, custody, and control of enemy prisoners of war inside the theater detention facility.

Colonel Bennett is the commander of the 290th Military Police Brigade. He holds a bachelor's degree in English from George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, and a master's degree in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He is the vice president of Strategic Engineering Solutions, Arlington. He has worked at DARPA for more than 19 years, helping to develop breakthrough national security technologies.