MILITARY POLICE OPERATIONS IN 2040

By Colonel Jeremy E. Kerfoot

The battlefield of 2040 will be dynamic, demanding, and lethal. The speeds and distances of future warfare will require semiautonomous and independent operations at echelon and across the full spectrum of battlespace to synergize efforts in support of maneuver operations. The environment of 2040 will drive how the Army fights and how the Military Police Regiment must adapt to provide better maneuver support from the strategic support area forward to the close fight. The technology that supports this environment will be enhanced by artificial-intelligence processing and challenged by peer adversaries that can operate in the multidomain arena. Military police support will be required across all phases of operations, from competition to conflict to consolidation.

Though the future battlefield will be characterized by increased swiftness and lethality, one point remains: Boots on the ground will be necessary to exact control where needed on the battlefield; this is where military police can assist. Through our missions of support to large-scale combat operations, security and mobility support, protected logistics, detention operations, and host nation security integration, military police will continue to demonstrate utility to the Army in the future fight. This concept was recently tested during Warfighter Exercise 24-03, held at the Mission Command Training Complex, Fort Cavazos, Texas, in April 2023.

Support to Large-Scale Combat Operations

During Warfighter Exercise 24-03, the 89th Military Police Brigade, Fort Cavazos, supported III Armored Corps, Fort Cavazos, in a scenario in which the brigade was required to defend against and ultimately overcome a peer adversary with future capabilities. Military police performed their prescribed functional role and were allowed to execute assigned tasks within doctrinal parameters. With a focus on conducting security and mobility support, detention operations, and host nation security coordination, military police have an increased awareness of an operational environment that can enable maneuver forces to identify and react to challenges and opportunities across the wide range of military operations. Many of the current military police tasks will not change in nature on the 2040 battlefield; however, the way in which those tasks are executed will. The speed at which military police will be required to analyze and perform tasks will likely be the principal change in how missions are completed.

Security and Mobility Support

The security and mobility support mission protects the force and preserves the commander's freedom of action, with units expediting the secure movement of theater resources to ensure that commanders receive the troops, supplies, and equipment needed to support the operational plan and changing tactical situations. Military police units take proactive measures to detect, deter, and defeat threat forces operating within the rear to close areas. The 2040 battlefield will include longer ground lines of communication, stretching the capability of military police to cover ground assets across the breadth of the operating area. The speed at which the battle could unfold and the need to relocate logistics and headquarters hubs to avoid targeting will require an agile force that can cover ground lines of communication and provide area security to cover "the middle," ensuring the protection of any seams.

Military police must be armed to detect and delay up to Level III reconstituted threats[1] in the rear area and defeat lower threat levels within the battlespace. Sensors such as those onboard small, unmanned aerial vehicles provide "at will" surveillance and detection capability along routes and within prescribed areas. Static sensors could be used to detect environmental changes along routes. Equally important is the use of artificial intelligence to scrutinize reporting and intelligence in order to provide predictive analysis and potential targeting information. The continued ability of military police to gather human and criminal intelligence on the battlefield and to provide analysis at greater speeds will assist in the development of an understanding of the battlefield beyond the known enemy, which in turn, will have a bearing on the phases of operations.

Protected Logistics

Protected logistics, a subset of security and mobility support operations, will be critical in keeping up with the tempo of the fight and moving supplies, personnel, and equipment forward on the future battlefield. Whether or not the 2040 battlefield includes unmanned robotic vehicles, military police will be needed for escorting and protecting logistics. In conjunction with their roles in route security and regulation, military police are ideal for providing a ground-based protection capability for critical protected logistics that need to make it to the front. Armed with enhanced lethality and protection, maneuver and logistics units would need to have this critical task conducted in order to keep the momentum going and unencumber maneuver units in the sector.

Detention Operations

The 2040 battlefield will require that military police continue to conduct detention operations, support internally displaced persons, and perform battlefield confinement. There is no alternative, as military police are the experts in the field. The speed and lethality of future combat will result in the potential for larger populations of detainees who will need care and custody as they are sped to the rear and vetted for intelligence value. Military police elements will need to be agile in their execution of detention operations, as the distances from which detainees may be coming could require that additional temporary or permanent detention facilities be stood up. As the likelihood of future battles persists in and around densely urban areas, the need to help care for and move internally displaced persons off the battlefield will continue. This is a mission that was proven critical during Warfighter Exercise 24-03, as military police elements worked with host nation security forces to move internally displaced persons off the main supply routes. Military police of the future will also be armed with an improved ability to collect human intelligence through interaction, available sensors, and biometric exploitation and analysis.

Host Nation Security Integration

The 2040 battlefield will continue to require host nation security coordination and integration. Military police have a natural ability to connect with both military and civilian security forces—especially in a law enforcement capacity. Military police can be used in the host nation security coordination of critical areas identified by risk and protection priorities and can provide partnerships to bolster multinational operations. A key outcome of host nation coordination is criminal intelligence, which can be gained and analyzed to support ongoing operations and targeting. Military police can partner with civil affairs organizations to ensure the consistent application of host nation operations to meet the needs of maneuver forces. An enhanced artificial-intelligence capability will be needed in order to analyze criminal intelligence and improve equipment interoperability and translation services for communication technology to help units adapt and communicate with host nation security forces on the 2040 battlefield.

2040 Requirements

To maximize military police capability in the year 2040, military police formations must be provided with the appropriate technology and equipment to be practical enablers for maneuver, including command-and-control systems, survivability/mobility technology, and sensors and surveillance equipment. Formations at echelon must be armed with a highly mobile command-and-control platform that can be used across the battlefield. Whether this is a joint, light, tactical vehicle or a Stryker variant, mobility of a mission command headquarters will be critical for keeping pace with the support needed for subordinates and maneuver elements. An enhanced communications capability coupled with upper tactical infrastructure to effectively communicate support and assist in the security of communications would be inherent in the mobile platform. Military police, operating in the same battlespace as maneuver elements, must be equipped to execute all operations in support of those elements.

As military police operate across the battlefield, they must also be provided with survivability measures to execute dynamic and versatile missions that may unexpectedly arise. Enhanced armor protection and updated mobility platforms are necessities, and military police formations should be outfitted with equipment similar to that of maneuver elements to ensure that they can survive on the future battlefield and neutralize threats as they arise. Lethality is a consideration for up to a Level II threat,[2] with the ability to detect and delay a Level III threat. As military police operate in the rear to close areas, they must be able to engage threats in order to survive.

Military police executing operations across the battlefield must also have the ability to sense and surveil the operating environment. Passive and active sensors can detect environmental changes and will provide predictive analysis for mission execution. And surveillance technology—either launched from, or attached to, vehicles—will provide amplified "eyes on" for the execution of military police mission sets. This intensified surveillance capability will assist in protecting friendly elements and targeting the enemy and in adjusting mission plans accordingly. At every level, military police will use tools and systems enabled by artificial intelligence to analyze and examine the operational environment. Military police must employ analytical assessment tools that focus on security and policing considerations and on impacts that are useful for maneuvering during conflict and the consolidation of gains.

Epilogue

Military police forces will continue to ensure that practical efforts are consistent, nested, and conducted within a shared framework as they support maneuver and mobility. Consistent with our history and heritage of protecting and preserving the force, the military police of 2040 will not replace any specific capability or competency currently provided but will take an informed approach toward increasing the effectiveness of current capabilities to an Army that will need to be able to function in semiautonomous formations in complex environments. The ability of military police formations to survive, detect, and defeat threats and enemy mission command in those tough environments will be crucial in enabling the freedom of action of maneuver.

Endnotes:

[1]Level III threats contain up to four armored tanks that have been bypassed by maneuver elements and may be in the rear area.

[2]Level II threats consist of one or two tanks or a squad of special forces.

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