The War in Ukraine:

How the JSA Has Impacted Units in the European Theater

By Staff Sergeant Patrick W. Stewart

When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) partners considered appropriate geopolitical and military response options. For varying reasons, the U.S. response included all such options except deploying U.S. military personnel into Ukraine to engage in direct combat alongside Ukrainian forces. As the war between Ukraine and Russia progressed, the United States and its NATO partners refined their support parameters and supplied Ukraine with lethal-aid equipment, which is military equipment provided by one or more nations to another country that can no longer adequately equip its own military.[1]

History provides a template for this type of support; during the World War II era, the United States initiated the Lend-Lease Program, supporting its allies who were fighting against the Axis Powers.[2] With the historical Lend-Lease Program examples and current military doctrine, U.S. leaders in Washington, D.C., as well as at the headquarters of the U.S. Army European Command (EUCOM) and U.S. Army Europe and Africa (USAREUR-AF) have helped implement mission support for Ukraine via arms, ammunition, and explosives (AAE). The historical examples and current doctrine enabled EUCOM, through USAREUR-AF, to direct the USAREUR-AF-subordinate 21st Theater Sustainment Command (TSC) and its subordinate unit, the 18th Military Police Brigade, to establish and operate a joint security coordination center to provide protection in the joint security area (JSA) as part of the U.S./NATO support to Ukraine.

Why did EUCOM/USAREUR-AF task the 21st TSC/18th Military Police Brigade to operate a JSA in support of Ukraine? There are three primary military police disciplines: police operations, detention operations, and security and mobility support. Military police operate in support of commanders to establish and maintain an orderly environment in which commanders and their forces can operate with minimal threat interference.[3] Because the 18th Military Police Brigade is the only organic military police brigade throughout the USAREUR-AF area of responsibility (AOR), it works closely to support USAREUR-AF-derived missions and objectives. The mission of the 18th Military Police Brigade is to command competent and agile maneuver support formations trained in policing, detention, security, explosive ordnance disposal, and engineering operations, enabling decisive action in support of USAREUR-AF to protect the force and their Families, secure critical sites/assets, enhance the NATO alliance, and ensure freedom of movement. In the context of military police doctrine, the 18th Military Police Brigade mission statement, and the 18th Military Police Brigade role as the only maneuver support brigade in the 21st TSC, the decision to task the 18th Military Police Brigade to operate a joint security coordination center in support of Ukraine makes fundamental sense, as the structure of the EUCOM AOR is like that of a doctrinal JSA.

JSAs are areas within a theater that are designed to facilitate the protection of joint bases and their connecting lines of communication.[4] JSAs are continental U.S. garrison or contingency location structures meant to aid in the security of joint bases, garrisons, or contingency locations.[5] A JSA is vital in a conflict, ensuring that supplies, equipment, and personnel are secure and can reach frontline troops.

The EUCOM AOR consists of eight garrisons across Germany, Italy, Belgium, and Poland—all staffed with personnel from the 18th Military Police Brigade. The Soldiers of the 18th Military Police Brigade are trained, proficient, and capable of protecting joint bases and lines of communication in support of a JSA throughout the EUCOM AOR. Although not strictly a military police function or skill, providing security to AAE missions and transporting lethal aid to Ukrainian allies is a mission for which the Soldiers within the 18th Military Police Brigade are well-suited and trained to accomplish.

Tasking the 18th Military Police Brigade with operating a JSA is not only doctrinally sound but also logical because 18th Military Police Brigade personnel are permanently assigned to U.S. Army garrisons in Germany, Italy, and Belgium. This allows the 18th Military Police Brigade to organically provide support to seven of the eight garrisons within the European theater—the only exception being a garrison in Poland, where V Corps uses continental U.S.-based military police to provide additional support to the garrison law enforcement mission on a rotational basis. The geographic coverage of the 18th Military Police Brigade allowed strategic-level decision makers to focus on AAE aid to Ukraine and on safe transport without worrying about JSA security. Securing the JSA is inherent in the daily 18th Military Police Brigade garrison law enforcement mission.

Despite the doctrinal and logistical practicality, tasking the 18th Military Police Brigade has its shortcomings. The decision to support Ukraine with lethal aid caused the EUCOM AOR to partially shift to an operational theater. However, most units in the AOR did not shift from a garrison mindset to a mission-focused one. Units continued emphasizing training exercises to validate their mission-essential task lists. Individual brigades and rotational units

from the United States shifted to the mission-focused mindset on an as-needed basis. By no means should every unit in the European theater shift to a combat-focused mentality; however, clear priorities and guidance from theater and strategic-level units regarding how to balance supporting the only active war in the European theater with sustaining the force through robust garrison opportunities would have immensely helped the brigade level and rotational units.

The lack of prioritization and guidance was especially noticed at the team and squad levels within the 18th Military Police Brigade. The brigade has a 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week, 365-days-a-year mission to assist, protect, and defend U.S. Service members, their Families, and the installations across Europe. Regardless of what is happening around the world, that mission does not change. Additionally, the 21st TSC frequently tasks the military police to escort AAE from their arrival at German ports, across Germany, and into Poland until other NATO partners can pick up the lethal aid and provide it to the Ukrainian military. Depending on the route, mode of travel, and other factors that change from one time to the next, these missions can take multiple days, which requires that the 18th Military Police Brigade ask more of its Soldiers.

The strain on Soldiers of the 18th Military Police Brigade is increased by the ongoing Army recruitment issues. In 2022, the Army was able to retain Soldiers who were already serving but struggled to recruit new Soldiers for enlistment.[6] This recruiting challenge impacts military police working the law enforcement mission as well as support provided to the lethal aid mission, as junior noncommissioned officers and junior enlisted Soldiers usually conduct both missions. If and when the Army cannot recruit enough new Soldiers, fewer new military police are available to add to the ranks of the 18th Military Police Brigade to help disperse the load across the brigade missions. The combination of the AAE escort and daily law enforcement missions creates an extremely high operational tempo for the Soldiers of the 18th Military Police Brigade, which hinders the ability of the brigade to retain current Soldiers since extremely high operational tempos lead to burnout, which in turn, becomes a deciding factor for Soldiers facing reenlistment choices.

The 18th Military Police Brigade found opportunities within the 21st TSC guidelines to provide the required AAE escorts while still maintaining day-to-day law enforcement tasks. The 18th Military Police Brigade relied on the experience and knowledge of officers and noncommissioned officers within the brigade to coordinate with outside units to ensure that Soldiers could escort lethal aid across the theater without assuming undue risk for the Soldiers and equipment. Personnel in the 18th Military Police Brigade S-2 (intelligence) and S-3 (operations) offices understood that the most significant risk to AAE escort missions came from adversary actions against equipment. S-3 personnel relied on their experience from deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq to provide insight into the best ways to manage and support the AAE escort missions. S-2 personnel knew that the S-3 personnel and the Soldiers conducting the AAE escort missions needed as much insight into potential adversarial actions as possible. S-2 and S-3 personnel worked alongside one another to develop an understanding of the AAE escort mission and identify specific information required by the Soldiers on the mission.

After developing this understanding, the 18th Military Police Brigade escorted AAE across the theater with the least risk possible. S-2 personnel used insight from S-3 personnel to develop intelligence products that company commanders could use to brief their Soldiers on the risks associated with the AAE missions. Brigade S-2 human intelligence (HUMINT) collectors coordinated with HUMINT and counterintelligence elements at the 66th Military Intelligence Brigade–Theater (MIB [T]) to provide additional threat briefings to Soldiers conducting AAE escort missions. This coordination was especially helpful, as there are 66th MIB (T) HUMINT and counterintelligence elements located at EUCOM garrison, similar in manner to the 18th Military Police Brigade. The coordination between 18th Military Police Brigade HUMINT assets and 66th MIB (T) HUMINT and counterintelligence assets greatly enhanced the ability to mitigate risk to the AAE escort missions. However, relying on the knowledge or experience necessary for Soldiers at the brigade level to create these kinds of ad-hoc relationships would be inefficient. It would leave EUCOM at risk in future operations. The number of Soldiers with experience in Afghanistan and Iraq will decrease over time as these Soldiers age, retire, or decide to move on from the Army—meaning that EUCOM will eventually lose this knowledge and experience.

The problems facing EUCOM as the United States supports Ukraine in the war with Russia are manageable. Historical examples with associated lessons learned can, and should, be applied to the lethal-aid support mission. In addition to the examples of the World War II Lend-Lease Program, other situations that have occurred throughout the 20-plus years of combat in Afghanistan and Iraq can also serve as examples. For instance, the U.S. military operated numerous JSAs, known by such terminology as regional commands and train, advise, and assist commands. Policymakers at the European theater level can apply the tactics, techniques, procedures, and lessons learned from those experiences to the current mission set and document their implementation in support of Ukraine for future generations.

The initial recommendation for solving any shortcomings is to put USAREUR-AF in charge of the JSA, with each of its subordinate units fulfilling appropriate functional roles within the JSA. This would allow for more effective use of resources within the theater and better coordination across the units without the need to rely on individuals. USAREUR-AF subordinate units include V Corps, a maneuver-focused unit; the 66th MIB (T), a theater military intelligence asset; the 21st TSC, a logistics- and sustainment-focused unit; and the 18th Military Police Brigade, the theater force protection unit.

V Corps could operate as the theater operations and plans unit, the 66th MIB (T) could effectively operate as the theater security unit, and the 21st TSC could operate as the theater logistics and supply unit. To employ the units in this way, USAREUR-AF would need to provide more guidance and conduct more coordination amongst the units, but this would result in the most effective use of the Soldiers within each unit.

In terms of the AAE escort mission, USAREUR-AF could use V Corps to provide combat arms and maneuver personnel to protect lethal aid as it traverses the theater, with the 66th MIB (T) providing the intelligence and threat support and the 21st TSC providing the logistical expertise to most effectively move the lethal aid across multiple countries. The 18th Military Police Brigade could continue focusing on securing the JSA through its law enforcement mission and on working relationships with garrison force protection assets. Not only would this more evenly distribute the mission workload across the theater, but it would also allow the 18th Military Police Brigade to better secure the JSA, which would allow the AAE to more safely traverse the theater.

Providing lethal aid to our Ukrainian allies has proven to be a challenge. However, taking a step back to analyze all aspects of a challenge usually results in the development of multiple solutions. Historical examples of success and failure in similar situations, coupled with current doctrine, can help shape solutions to complex problems. In contrast, other solutions must be created based on current Army threats and mission variables. One thing is certain: The Army is a learning and evolving organization whose perspective is changed with each experience.

Endnotes:

[1]*Collins Online Dictionary*, Harper Collins Publishers, 15 May 2023, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/lethal-aid>, accessed on 13 July 2023.

[2]"Lend-Lease Act (1941)," *Milestone Documents*, National Archives, 28 June 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/lend-lease-act#:~:text=Passed%20on%20March%2011%2C%201941,defense%20of%20the%20United%20States.%22>, accessed on 13 July 2023.

[3]Field Manual (FM) 3-39, *Military Police Operations*, 9 April 2019.

[4]FM 3-0, *Operations*, 1 October 2022, pp. 3-21–3-22.

[5]Joint Publication (JP) 3-10, *Joint Security Operations in Theater*, 6 August 2021, p. vii.

[6]Michael Reinsch, *In a War for Talent—Recruiting, Retention and Opportunity: Army Leaders Work To Grow the Army of 2030*, U.S. Army, 14 October 2022, <https://www.army.mil/article/261158/in_a_war_for_talent_recruiting_retention_and_opportunity_army_leaders_work_to_grow_the_army_of_2030>, accessed on 3 July 2023.

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("Emerging Military Police . . . ," continued from page 24)

listening to the commands of military police on the ground like current military working dogs do? While robotic dogs with which military police could independently interact would be advantageous, our adversaries would be more likely to be able to hack the equipment to turn them against us. A robotic dog that is controlled via an interface would help mitigate the risk of hacking by a foreign government and could have a built-in fail-safe feature to effectively "decommission" the equipment.

Another significant change for military police platoons in 2040 will be the development and integration of artificial and machine-learning intelligence. By 2040, military police forces will use artificial intelligence and machine-learning intelligence to analyze vast amounts of data, identify enemy patterns, and detect potential threats with greater accuracy and speed. With equipment that can detect and gather criminal intelligence with greater accuracy and little to no "human error," we may find ourselves placing less risk not only on our Soldiers but also on the civilian population of the country in which our forces are operating.

The use of advanced training technologies is necessary in order for military police to be prepared for various scenarios. Virtual-reality training simulations represent a technology that has become increasingly essential for training regimens. These simulations offer a safe and controlled environment in which personnel can train against realistic scenarios. Furthermore, the use advanced data analytic tools can help identify areas that require improvement. While military police already have access to helpful tools such as "Shoot. Don't Shoot," scenarios with the Engagement Skills Trainer (virtual-reality simulations that replicate the sights, sounds, and even smells of the operational environment) provide unparalleled training. Soldiers often say, "Train as you fight"; these technological advances provide an excellent way to do just that.

In conclusion, the use of technology will significantly enhance the safety of military police platoon forces in 2040. The incorporation of drones, robots, and artificial intelligence technology will make it easier to detect criminal activities. Additionally, virtual-reality simulations can better prepare personnel for real-life situations. While potential risks may be involved, proper planning can ensure that these technologies become indispensable assets for military police platoons in the field.

Endnote:

[1]David Axe, "Russia's Electronic-Warfare Troops Knocked out 90 Percent of Ukraine's Drones," *Forbes*, 24 December 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2022/12/24/russia-electronic-warfare-knocked-out-90-percent-ukraines-drones/?sh=50a94737575c>, accessed on 22 May 2023.

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