
Police Intelligence Operations: Future Focus of the Military Police Corps

By Captain Thomas D. Mott

Even after years of struggling to maintain its stature as a credible and specialized branch, the future of the Military Police Corps is still in question. One of the most-deployed branches during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, it appears that its role in the Army is no more certain today than it was before the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For years, other Army branches have tried to inch their way into military police roles. As evidenced by current missions in Iraq, it appears that other branches are more involved than ever in military police missions. Any Soldier can be trained to conduct route reconnaissance, traffic control, river crossings, route security, and convoy security. These are not specialized missions requiring military police-specific equipment or technical expertise. We have seen field artillery, armor, and chemical Soldiers employed in combat operations as military police, performing numerous area security tasks, maneuver and mobility support operations (MMSO), and limited law enforcement missions. Their original branches and training were springboards to learning military police missions. Soldiers from other branches have also been trained to conduct internment/resettlement (I/R) operations in Iraq, securing the most important prisoners in theater.

Back home, civilian police at stateside installations have easily integrated into community law enforcement. While military police Soldiers are overseas, the civilian police are gradually taking over military police jobs. Further extensions of Department of the Army police contracts could put military police out of garrison law enforcement all together.

One could argue that it is not the military police Soldiers who are in danger of losing their mission. One could say that the military police mission, as demonstrated in Iraq, is more critical than ever and is, in fact, understaffed. Field artillery, armor, and chemical Soldiers perform in other roles because their original missions are less critical. Indirect fire is in low demand. Tanks no longer race across miles of desert. The chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) threat is negligible. But knowing how to calculate trajectories, maneuver tanks, and

perform large-scale CBRN operations are specialized skills that will still have a place even after the war in Iraq is finished. No one else in the Army is trained or equipped to conduct such missions, so those branches still fill a critical niche.

Many military police Soldiers in Iraq have found themselves training, coaching, and mentoring the Iraqi police (IP) force. While military police Soldiers are busy with the IP force, Soldiers from other branches are performing military police root missions, proving to combat commanders and Army leadership that having a separate military police branch is not crucial. What happens to the military police Soldier when there are no IP forces left to train and a Soldier from another career field has taken his old job? How can the military police Soldier prove that he is still critical to the Army? What can he do that no one else can do?

The future of the Military Police Corps is police intelligence operations (PIO). The military police Soldier has the potential to be the best intelligence-gathering agent on the battlefield. While area security, MMSO, law enforcement, and I/R are still valid roles, they will only be useful to the extent that they are vehicles for conducting PIO.

During the course of their work with the IP force, the military police have been valuable in the underrecognized role of intelligence collection. Military police Soldiers in Iraq have produced some of the most lucrative intelligence on the battlefield, discovering the location of high-value targets, large weapons caches, and criminal activity. They then put that intelligence into the hands of maneuver commanders or acted on it themselves. The military police Soldiers have done this by simply talking to IP forces and local civilians during the course of other missions.

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One task that cannot be explicitly found in an Army technical manual is simply “How to Talk to People.” That is because it is not a task but a skill. Other branches can teach military police tasks, but cannot so easily teach military police skills. The military police Soldier can set himself apart from his infantry or cavalry counterparts with his ability to talk to the local man on the street and find out what is going on. It is in the nature of the infantryman and cavalry scout to be up-front, forthright, and rude. However, such an attitude does not translate well to the common shop owner in Baghdad, Pyongyang, or Tehran. It takes a certain knack to calmly and coolly approach a person on a street in a country you have just invaded and, in a nonthreatening manner, find out what the word on the street is. It is in the military police Soldier’s nature to do this during law enforcement duties at stateside installations but has not been emphasized during missions in Baghdad, Mosul, and Najaf.

There are Soldiers in the Army now who specialize in talking to people. Military intelligence Soldiers talk to informants, interrogate suspects, and analyze intelligence material. Tactical human intelligence teams (THTs) go out in the street and conduct missions very similar to those described above. But the Soldiers who do this in the Army now do not have such large numbers and resources and the same degree of independence as the Military Police Corps. While a brigade combat team (BCT) may have several THTs operating in its sector, the military police company or battalion, also in that battlespace, could do the same thing on a much larger scale. The military police unit will use some of its old standby functions—area security, MMSO and, as in Iraq today, law enforcement—as vehicles to get out into the street. But military police Soldiers should not perform area security, MMSO, and law enforcement for the sake of those missions alone. Their priority while performing these missions should be to gather intelligence. The ability to gather sizable amounts of actionable intelligence could set the Military Police Corps apart and help maintain its credibility as a branch.

While the idea of PIO was developed as a bridge to connect the Military Police Corps’ other four traditional functional areas of area security, MMSO, law enforcement, and I/R, it could now be seen as its primary focus. PIO are the main mission of the military police, supported by the other four traditional functional areas. The Military Police Corps could sell itself as an independent, fully equipped, and heavily manned intelligence-gathering force, secondarily capable of conducting the other four traditional functional areas. Such a structure also supports the desire of many military police leaders to retain military police units as battalion- and brigade-sized elements instead of dividing them into companies and platoons and attaching them directly to BCTs.

Perhaps more important is that a large, independent Military Police Corps highly skilled in intelligence collection could support current strategy at the theater level. Retired Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Krepinevich, executive director of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, recently cited the lack of intelligence gathering in Iraq. “US forces have overwhelming advantages in terms of combat power and mobility but a key disadvantage in terms of intelligence. If they know who the insurgents are and where they are, they can quickly suppress the insurgency. The Iraqi people are the best source of this intelligence.”¹ That is where military police Soldiers who are already on the road and in the IP stations, talking to common citizens every day, become invaluable. Military police commanders should explicitly tell their Soldiers to gather intelligence along with their missions to conduct route security and escort convoys, for example.

There will be a market for military police missions in the future, but the Military Police Corps must survive in its current configuration long enough to take part. Army units must be more aware of the security and political environment in which they act. Military police brigades and battalions, highly skilled in human intelligence collection and trained in the root missions of area security, MMSO, and law enforcement, fit the

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bill perfectly. This shift in mission focus necessitates a fundamental change in the way military police Soldiers train and conduct daily business.

Training: Train new military police Soldiers to talk to people and ask questions, be patient, be aware of their surroundings, and be cool customers. Recruitment and selection prior to military occupational specialty assignment will also need to be considered.

Daily business: Military police Soldiers, like their combat arms counterparts, can also be rather forthright and rude. Soldiers in today's Military Police Corps, stinging from the continual fight for legitimacy and worn out from continual deployment, conduct business very aggressively and impatiently. It may be necessary to be aggressive while collecting intelligence; however, to ask the probing questions that

get at the heart of an issue, military police Soldiers must learn to do so in a manner that invites people to talk to them and not be scared away. Military police, especially leaders, need to be cool, calm, and confident.

A fundamental change in attitude must accompany the change in mission focus. The Military Police Corps is still relevant and it can become even more so. While the mission in Iraq is incomplete and military police Soldiers will continue to have a critical role there, military police Soldiers can adapt and expand their influence in that mission while also preparing for the post-Iraq Army.

Endnote

¹ Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., "How to Win in Iraq," page 4, *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2005, <www.foreignaffairs.org>.