

Opinion | Command by intent can ensure command post survivability

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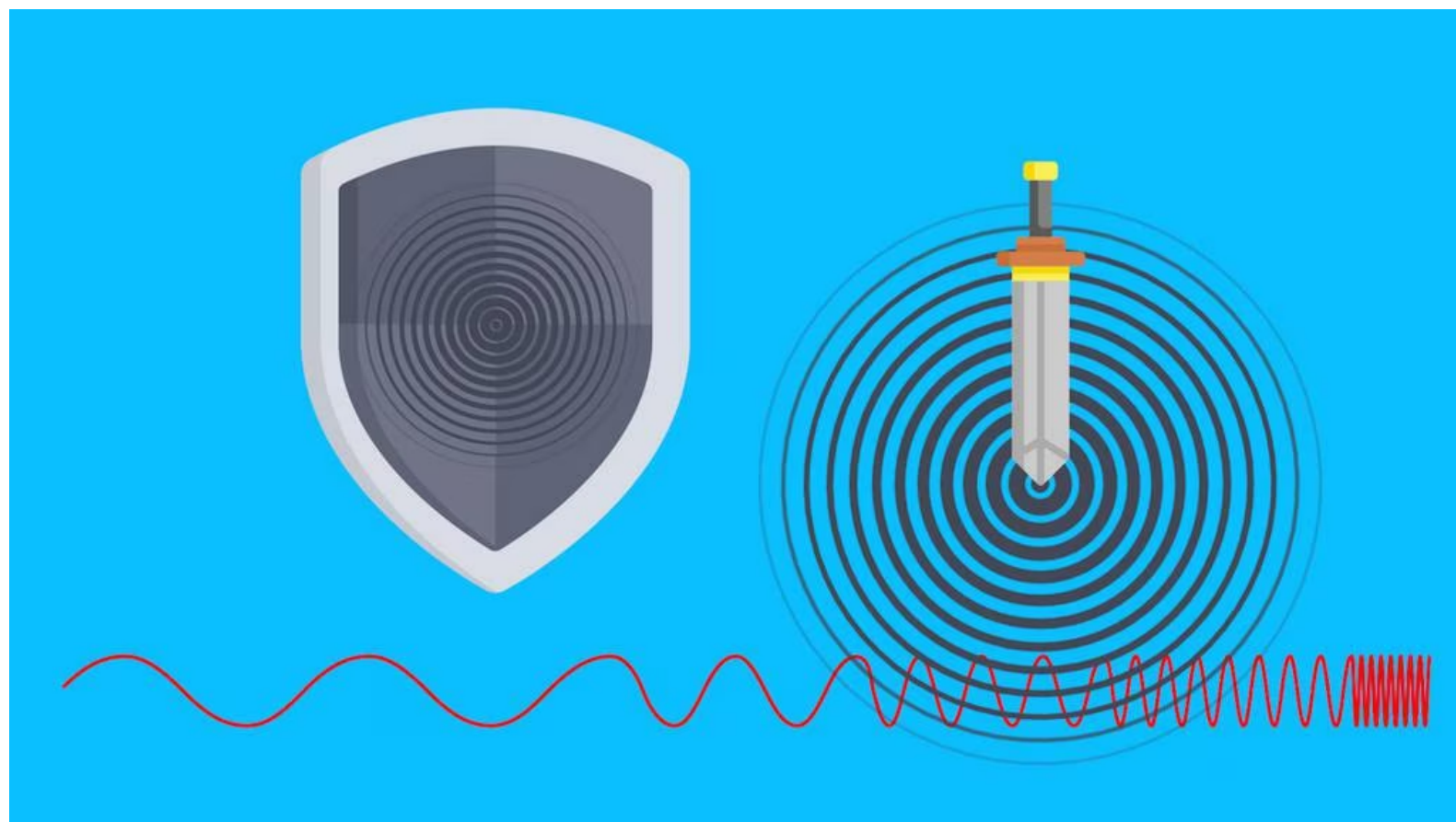


Image of electronic warfare

In a changing operational environment, where command posts are increasingly vulnerable, intent can serve as a stealth enabler.

A communicated commander's intent can serve as a way to limit electronic signatures and radio traffic, seeking to obfuscate the existence of a command post. In a mission command-driven environment, communication between

command post and units can be reduced. The limited radio and network traffic increases command post survivability.

The intent must explain how the commander seeks to fight the upcoming 12 – 24 hours, with limited interaction between subordinated units and the commander, providing freedom for the units to fulfill their missions. For a commander to deliver intent in a valuable and effective manner, the delivery has to be trained so the leader and the subordinates have a clear picture of what they set out to do.

The war in Ukraine has shown the tangible threat to command post survival, highlighted in the May-June 2023 “Military Review” article “The Graveyard of Command Posts,”

(<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/May-June-2023/Graveyard-of-Command-Posts/>) a development that became visible in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 (<https://madsciblog.tradoc.army.mil/92-ground-warfare-in-2050-how-it-might-look/>) where command posts that were sensed by sensors were targeted and destroyed.

Innovation is not only technology but also rethinking and adjusting how we act, our processes, and our tactics in a changing operational environment. So, the question is – how do you increase command post survivability? Our proposed way to rely on intent to carry the commander’s will, especially after the initial engagement phase, instead of constant communication should increase command post survivability. The limited electromagnetic activity will make it harder to identify command posts from other units, and the limited radio traffic will be mixed with the noise from the surrounding electromagnetic signatures.

In the era of counter-insurgency operations in the War on Terror, there was no threat from long-range fires supported by drones with electromagnetic sensors combined with localization by direction finding. The large-scale combat operations operational environment occurs over a larger area and can, in seconds, create a crescendo of destruction at an acquired target. How can the command by intent play out? Let us present one example.

In 2004, the III Corps Commander, then LTG Thomas Metz was able to leverage the Blue Force Tracker to have excellent visibility of BCTs within the 1st Cavalry Division in Fallujah, Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom. However, the 1 Marine Expeditionary Force did not have the Blue Force tracker, therefore the common operating picture was missing at the Corps level for the marine units. While in hindsight it seems if the 1 MEF had the same technology the blue picture would have been complete at the Corps level, the Marines were able to successfully execute the mission relying on commander's intent.

While it is impossible to say what difference it would have made for the marines to have the Blue Force tracker, this scenario demonstrates that having a full common operating picture may not be necessary for a unit to perform successfully. In this scenario, there was not the threat of an adversary sensing electromagnetic emissions and targeting from them, therefore the Corps could utilize all available means of RF communications. In a fight against a near peer adversary, this may not be the case, and the commander may have to rely solely on intent to reduce the EMS footprint.



This brings up another point of consideration for command and control, or C2: there is an intertwined relationship between C2 and the ability to utilize the EMS for communication. A commander must consider how he or she can command across all modes of available communication, including no communication. This means that the Primary, Alternate, Contingency, and Emergency plan must not only include how to communication but also *what* can be communicated over the available means.

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For instance, if a commander falls back to contingency comms which has only the bandwidth to send text messages versus full motion video and/or PowerPoint slides, then the commander must understand how to best utilize that mode of communication. The commander must be comfortable enough to degrade modes sometimes to the point of no communication (relying on intent) at various times depending upon the circumstances.

There are several other options to increase the command post's survivability, such as the Cold War-style separation of antennas and command post, but it is slow to establish and make the command post stationary and vulnerable. Another way is to split the command post into smaller units, but then these need to communicate, and

even if mobile, these subunits can be identified and targeted. By going through the different options, avoiding detection becomes an essential survival characteristic.

We wrote in C5ISRNET (<https://www.c4isrnet.com/opinion/2019/12/06/a-new-mindset-for-the-army-silent-running/>) in 2019, “The Army mindset must change to mirror the Navy’s tactic of “silent running” used to evade adversarial threats. While there are recent advances in sensor counter-measure techniques, such as low probability of detection and low probability of intercept, silent running reduces the emissions altogether, thus reducing the risk of detection.”

The War in Ukraine has proved our case. The modern battlefield is like the ocean, there is nowhere to hide, so survival depends on the ability to avoid targeting and maintain a stealthy posture.

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The age of commanders overlooking tactical action in a live drone video feed, engaging in constant communication, is gone. Today, and increasingly worse due to developments in sensor technology and drones, constant communications will unleash deadly violence and destruction upon the command post. Leading by delivered intent is a low-cost, retrograded tool that can be fielded today – by changing behavior and training the units.

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