



Stop Looking Up

Organic Brigade Targeting Capabilities Through TiC

By John Bismark-O'Brien, Warrant Officer Instruction Branch, WOBC Class 004-25/501-25

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Though divisions are replacing brigade combat teams (BCTs) as the Army's principal warfighting formation, existing friction points in targeting efforts at the brigade level must be carefully addressed during this process, or targeting may begin to lose relevance at the maneuver brigade level (Hadley et al., 2023; Grindstaff, 2025). The ongoing force structure transition under Army Structure (ARSTRUC) 2025-2029 has removed critical enablers from the brigade echelon, including organic cavalry squadrons, Shadow and Raven unmanned aircraft system (UAS) platforms, organic artillery and brigade-level military intelligence companies. In the short term, the loss of many of these capabilities degrades the organic targeting capability of maneuver brigades to detect, deliver and assess. Brigade targeting teams across the Army, who already demonstrate consistent over-reliance on division-level assets, must start looking away from division as a solution to this problem and look instead toward future organic brigade capabilities (Woods, 2024; Grindstaff, 2025).

By 2029, maneuver brigades will have significantly more organic detection and delivery capability than they had prior

to ARSTRUC 2025-2029 (Baker & Ulrich, 2025). The Army Transformation in Contact (TiC) initiative is the Army's modernization initiative that equips selected units with emerging technologies and allows them to experiment, adapt, and generate feedback across doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, education, personnel, facilities and policy (DOTMLPF-P). TiC brigades are demonstrating both the viability and limitations of low-cost and lethal UAS in mitigating the loss of organic sensors and field artillery. Targeting officers (TOs) serving in direct support field artillery battalions must understand what capabilities these systems will provide the maneuver brigades we support and how to synchronize them effectively into the Army's targeting methodology.

Operational Trends

As the Russo-Ukrainian war continues, the primacy of UAS on the modern battlefield becomes more apparent. In Drone Operations Information from the Armed Forces of Ukraine, analysts Ullrich and Lessard (2025) highlight the decisive role of attack systems like low-cost unmanned systems (LUS) and

U.S. Army PFC. Robert Dee II, a M1 armored crewman with the 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Division, working alongside the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment (1-7 Cav), poses for a photo at Fort Hood, Texas, Feb 23, 2026. The 1-7 Cav operated a new gunnery progression to test the new TIC 2.0, Transforming in Contact, initiative, which involves new technology for electronic warfare. (U.S. Army Reserve Photo by Sgt. Joseph Honce)

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loitering munitions (LMs) in augmenting and executing fires against high-payoff targets (HPTs). A LUS is an affordable, attritable drone platform designed to support maneuver units with reconnaissance, target acquisition and strike capabilities in contested environments. A LM is a precision-guided aerial weapon system capable of autonomously detecting and delivering effects on targets after loitering in the battlespace (Lavin, 2025; Baker & Ullrich, 2025). Attack drones have become integral to the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) kill chain, accounting for 54% of Russian losses on the battlefield as of February 2025 (Ullrich & Lessard, 2025). Rather than relying solely on traditional indirect fires, the UAF routinely uses attack drones to prosecute HPTs such as command posts, armor, artillery systems and logistical nodes. The ability of attack drones to engage targets independently or cue other fires assets has enabled the UAF to conduct dispersed, mobile operations while creating lethal effects.

The U.S. Army is actively integrating multiple LUS systems and LMs like the Low Altitude Stalking and Strike Ordnance (LASSO) into brigade-level operations under the TiC initiative. The 2nd Mobile Brigade Combat Team (MBCT), 101st Airborne Division (2/101), the 2nd Light Brigade Combat Team (LBCT), 25th Infantry Division (2/25) and 3rd LBCT, 10th Mountain Division (3/10 MTN) have all incorporated LASSO teams into their structure as one of the only deep strike capabilities organic to the brigade. LASSO has been unanimously highlighted within TiC as a key capability within the broader suite of Robotics and Autonomous Systems (RAS) that enables these formations to deliver rapid, precision fires on HPTs (Baker & Ullrich, 2025; CALL, 2025c).

However, the Army's growing utilization of LUS and LMs has exposed a critical limiting factor: brigade-level airspace management. As brigades operate dozens of UAS concurrently, including short-range reconnaissance drones (SRR), medium-range

reconnaissance (MRR) platforms and LMs like LASSO, airspace deconfliction becomes increasingly complex. Many units still rely on static Restricted Operating Zones (ROZs) or aviation-centric airspace control models that do not support the dynamic, low-altitude, time-sensitive employment LMs require (CALL, 2025d, pp. 10–14). Without pre-assigned altitude blocks, procedural ROZ templates or time-based launch corridors in the Unit Airspace Plan (UAP), LMs often face delays or are denied launch altogether. The absence of real-time air picture tools at the battalion and company level, where operators frequently lack visibility on ROZ status or loitering tracks, amplifies this friction point. As a result, units default to chat or voice-based airspace clearance. LMs require predictability in airspace control to function effectively. As demonstrated during TiC rotations, brigades must treat LMs as fires assets during planning and rehearsal, integrating them into fire support coordination measures (FSCMs), establishing altitude layering and ensuring the UAP enables launches when required (Baker & Ullrich, 2025; CALL, 2025d).

Loitering Munition Integration into Targeting

These observed trends, in both ongoing interstate conflicts and Army transformation efforts, highlight the growing operational relevance of LMs at the brigade level. While systems like LASSO offer maneuver commanders a flexible and precise means to engage HPTs, their effectiveness is not inherent to the platform. Success depends on the brigade's ability to deliberately integrate these systems into the fires enterprise through disciplined planning, synchronization and execution (CALL, 2025d). This responsibility falls in many ways on the brigade targeting officer, who serves as an integrator of fires and effects through the decide, detect, deliver, assess (D3A) methodology and who should embed LM employment in the brigade's targeting process.

During Combined Resolve (CBR) 25-01, 3/10 LBCT employed LASSO to conduct 79 precision strikes against enemy armor, artillery, air defense systems (ADA) and reconnaissance platforms (CALL, 2025a). 3/10 LBCT employed LASSO from LUS platoons at the battalion level and the brigade UAS platoon. Similarly, 2/25 LBCT employed a consolidated LASSO platoon from its Recon and Strike Company during JPMRC 25-01.

U.S. Army soldiers with the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment (1-7 Cav), fire a U.S. Army Abrams M1A2 System Enhancement Package Version 3 (SEPV3) at Fort Hood, Texas, Feb 23, 2026. The 1-7 Cav operated a new gunnery progression to test the new TIC 2.0, Transforming in Contact, initiative, which involves new technology for electronic warfare. (U.S. Army Reserve Photo by Sgt. Joseph Honce)



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2/25 LBCT executed deep strikes through the brigade fires cell, successfully engaging command posts and artillery beyond the range of organic 105mm howitzers (CALL, 2025d, pp. 15–24). Units that achieved the greatest success incorporated preplanned altitude blocks within a brigade-level ROZ and early integration of LASSO into the targeting cycle. In contrast, formations without established altitude deconfliction, rehearsed LM employment or rapid clearance procedures experienced delays that reduced strike timeliness and effectiveness (CALL, 2025d).

These operational successes underscore the requirement for deliberate integration of LMs into the brigade's targeting process. The brigade TO plays a central role in this effort from receipt of mission through execution. As the lead integrator for the decide, detect, deliver, assess (D3A) process, the TO must ensure that LM employment aligns with the commander's targeting guidance and priorities (Department of the Army, 2023). This includes validating LMs as appropriate delivery systems during the decide phase, assigning them against specific HPTs in the High-Payoff Target List (HPTL) and assigning engagement criteria and execution responsibilities in the Attack Guidance Matrix (AGM). The TO should embed LM delivery windows and triggers into the Target Synchronization Matrix (TSM) and coordinate to deconflict these engagements with surface fires and maneuver.

In addition to integrating LMs into targeting products, the targeting officer is responsible for coordinating technical and procedural enablers that ensure successful execution. The TO must coordinate with the brigade's fire support officer (FSO) and S3 to ensure that the fires team rehearses LM employment during technical and tactical fire support and combined arms rehearsals. As a staff lead for targeting working groups (TWGs) and the targeting coordination board (TCB), the TO facilitates synchronization across warfighting functions and should ensure that LM launches are prioritized appropriately within limited airspace. When properly integrated by the targeting officer, LMs

provide the brigade with a responsive, precision fires capability that complements artillery in both the deep and close fight.

Proposed Framework – Brigade “Free-Fly” ROZ

The next publication of FM 3-52, Airspace Control (2024), is still in draft form. However, lessons learned on UAS saturation in congested airspace indicate the need for a more permissive procedural Army airspace framework (CALL, 2025d). In the meantime, to enhance the integration of LMs and small reconnaissance UAS into the brigade targeting process, brigade and division airspace planners should consider establishing a standing unmanned aircraft area (UA) ROZ within a brigade's boundaries. This procedural control measure would pre-allocate altitude blocks (e.g., 0–500 ft AGL for SRR, 500–1200 ft AGL for LMs such as LASSO) and publish them in the UAP, enabling rapid launch without repeated airspace clearance requests. Observations from CBR 25-01 indicate that this approach, used successfully by 3/10 LBCT, enabled rapid employment of both SRR and LASSO (CALL, 2025c).

Conclusion

Even as the Army transitions toward division-centric operations, the brigade's ability to generate effects should not rely too heavily on higher-echelon assets. Loitering munitions, particularly LASSO, offer a viable path to restore organic capability at the brigade level, especially if targeting officers deliberately integrate them into the targeting cycle through doctrinal planning products, rehearsed procedures and synchronized airspace architecture. These systems achieve effectiveness when they align with the brigade's targeting framework and the commander's intent, not merely through their technical specifications. Targeting officers must lead this effort, treating LMs not as novel toys, but as integral components of the brigade's ability to detect, deliver and assess effects in support of maneuver.

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