



# Red Diamond

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## Intelligence and Reconnaissance Brigades Give PLA Theater Commands Unprecedented Reach

*Peter Wood & Rob Taber, Intelligence Analysts, TRADOC G-2*

***The People's Liberation Army (PLA) Army's Intelligence and Reconnaissance Brigades (IRBs) represent a new and different challenge for U.S. Army Corps counterreconnaissance operations due to the scope, scale, and multidomain nature of their capabilities.*** IRBs give China's operational ground forces the ability to collect, process, and exploit intelligence in support of Theater Command (TC) operations. These highly capable, technologically advanced units, built around both manned and unmanned reconnaissance assets, pose a sophisticated threat to U.S. Army forces by enabling deep targeting for long-range fires and supporting joint operations. Understanding the IRBs' disposition, organization, capabilities, and roles aids the U.S. Army in developing effective tactics, techniques, and procedures, as well as adapting doctrine, training, and force structure to accomplish the counterreconnaissance task to "destroy, defeat, or repel all enemy reconnaissance element within capabilities and following engagement criteria."<sup>1</sup>

***The IRBs, which do not have an exact U.S. Army equivalent, are designed to support operational-level, sophisticated mechanized forces and the PLA's systems warfare approach using a combination of reconnaissance platforms.***<sup>2</sup> They provide critical intelligence support to TC fires and maneuver operations through manned and unmanned deep reconnaissance, concealment, and infiltration missions. IRBs are one of the enablers under a TC army, including standalone electronic warfare brigades and river crossing brigades, that are not tasked to a specific group army but act as task-organizable assets to support operations. While group armies' combined-arms brigades have their own scout and reconnaissance units, the IRBs fill a vital gap by providing direct reconnaissance support to PLA operational-level long-range fires.



U.S. Army  
Training and Doctrine Command, G-2

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**2<sup>nd</sup> Intelligence and Reconnaissance Brigade, Southern Theater Command Ground Force**

MUCD | 31647

Vehicle | LN70  
NumberType | Intelligence and  
ReconnaissanceHonorary Title | Mighty Brigade of the  
Southern Lands

DIR: Dismounted Intelligence and Reconnaissance

IR: Intelligence and Reconnaissance

CSS: Combat Service Support

CI: Counter Intelligence

SS: Service Support

UI: Unidentified

SEC: Security

◇: Assessed

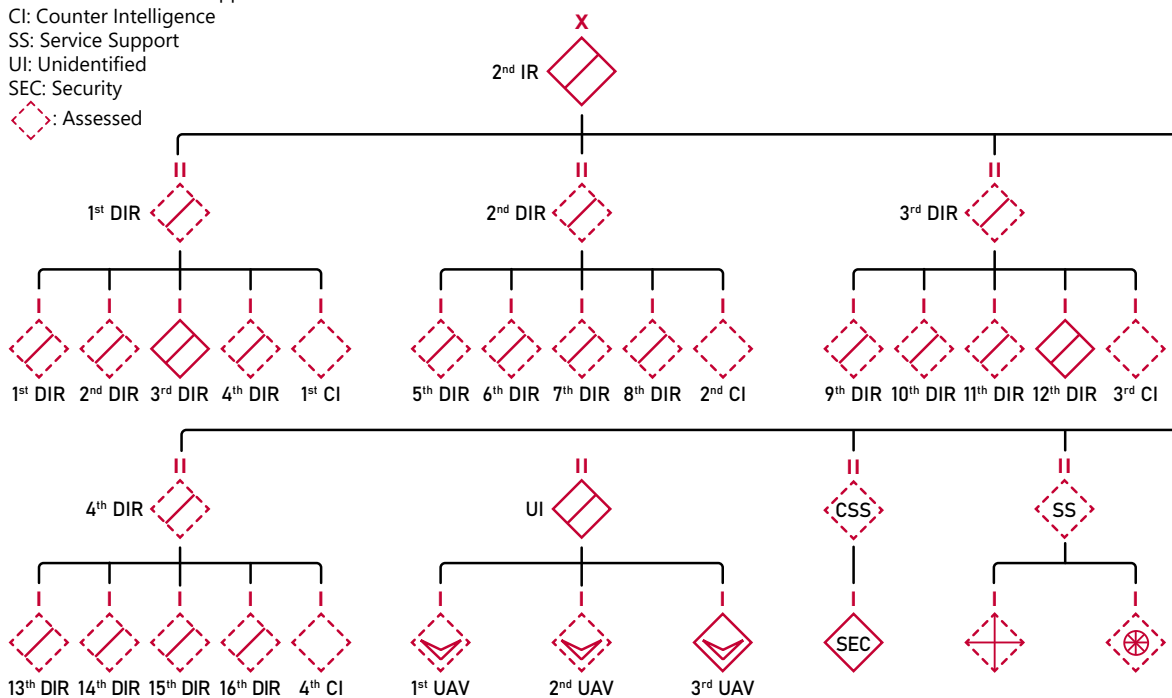


Figure 1: 2nd IRB Order of Battle (Source: U.S. Army Asian Studies Detachment ASD24C01001 “Basic Facts Sheet: Southern Theater Command Ground Force 2nd Intelligence and Reconnaissance Brigade”)

### IRB Disposition and Organization

**Each of the PLA's five TC Armies and the Xinjiang Military Command have established subordinate IRBs, described as a “new combat capability” and one of President Xi Jinping’s priorities.**

Information available on the 2nd IRB suggests these units possess a mix of traditional dismounted reconnaissance, unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), counterintelligence, combat service, and service support elements.<sup>3</sup> Given the PLA Army focus on standardization, the structure is likely similar across all TCs. The 6th IRB may differ due to the Western TC’s larger formations, including combined-arms divisions and regiments instead of group armies and combined-arms brigades.

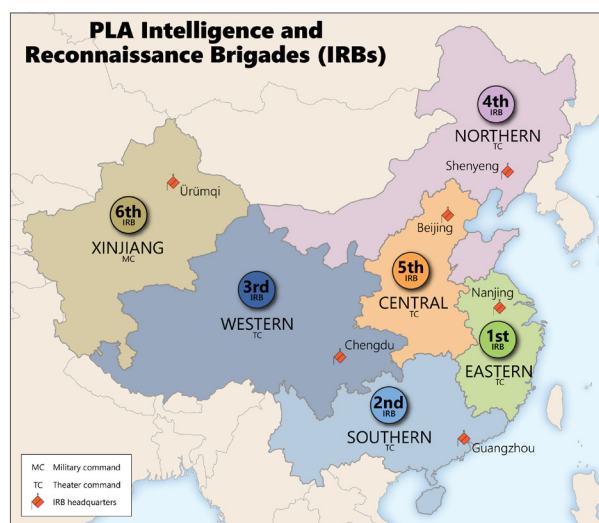


Figure 2: Disposition of IRBs (Source: Authors Derived).

## IRB Capabilities

**IRBs field a diverse array of ground- and air-based manned and unmanned reconnaissance systems to provide layered and redundant intelligence collection in their area of operations.** The IRBs likely employ a variety of ground surveillance and battlefield surveillance radars such as the **JY-17A** and **BS-903A**, alongside UAS including the **CH-4**, **BZK-006A**, and **KVD-002**.<sup>4</sup> To extend the capabilities of an IRBs' ISR capabilities (and likely to match the increasing range of PLA Army fires, IRBs have been featured using longer-range medium-altitude, long endurance UAS such as the KVD-002. The KVD-002, derived from the CH-4, has an endurance of approximately 30 hours but must operate from a runway, unlike the smaller rocket-assisted launch-capable BZK-006. IRBs likely also employ a multitude of smaller UAS with a variety of sophisticated sensor options.<sup>5</sup> While IRBs' technical reconnaissance capabilities remain a gap in open-source information, it is highly likely they conduct electronic intelligence and signals intelligence through ground- and UAS-based systems focused on radio direction-finding, network surveillance, radar detection, and fire-finding.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 3: CH-4 UAV (Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CH-4\\_at\\_Airshow\\_China\\_Zhuhai\\_2022.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CH-4_at_Airshow_China_Zhuhai_2022.jpg))



Figure 4: 2nd IRB soldiers working with a fixed-wing UAS (Source: U.S. Army Asian Studies Detachment OSIR: ASD24C01001)

## IRB Roles

**IRBs represent the force pool the TC task organizes into “reconnaissance intelligence groups” to conduct deep reconnaissance supporting fires, collection on high-value targets, and reconnaissance support to PLA joint operations.**<sup>7</sup> Deep reconnaissance refers to operations focused beyond the range of a unit's organic weapons systems.<sup>8</sup> For the TC, this includes the **PCH-191** modular rocket launcher system, which can range out to 500 kilometers. The PLA Army likely demonstrated this relationship between the IRB and joint fires capabilities during the 2023 JOINT SWORD deterrence exercises, which featured large-scale mobilization in Fujian Province across the Strait from Taiwan.

**The IRBs likely answer TC intelligence requirements on adversary operational-level entities such as command posts, long-range fires formations, sustainment nodes, and integrated air defense sites.** Additionally, IRB elements have been observed conducting integrated ground and air reconnaissance training, and tactical coordination with PLA Army Aviation Brigades, conducting joint training with special forces and People's Army Police mobile contingents, and supporting disaster relief efforts.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 5: 1st IRB soldiers training with 2nd PAP  
(Source: U.S. Army Asian Studies Detachment OSIR: ASD24C01001)



Figure 6: PCH-191 Modular Rocket Launcher  
(Source: U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons China Maritime Report No. 32, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1031&context=cmssi-maritime-reports>.)

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S. ARMY

***The IRBs represent a significant PLA capability extending the reach of its fires and ISR and operating at a scale and sophistication that likely merits a focused counterreconnaissance and threat mitigation approach.*** The IRBs represents a highly capable, technologically advanced reconnaissance threat operating in their opponents' close and rear areas. By characterizing counterreconnaissance as a continuous, proactive function in Field Manual 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*, the U.S. Army could shift its counterreconnaissance operations from detecting enemy reconnaissance to destroying, defeating, or repelling it before it can effectively support adversary fires.

***Incorporating scenarios that realistically replicate IRB capabilities and mission sets into U.S. Army training could likely provide a more realistic UAS threat and drive counter-UAS training.*** This includes IRB UAS, tactics, electronic warfare, and combined-arms integration. Simulating IRBs' dispersed network of dismounted and aerial reconnaissance assets would likely help units experience unprecedented levels of transparency on the battlefield, requiring a renewed focus on camouflage, concealment, deception, dispersal, and masking electronic signatures.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 U.S. Army FM 3-98 Reconnaissance and Security Operations, 5-4, 10 JAN 2023.
- 2 U.S. Army Military Intelligence Brigades-Theater (MIB-T), Multi-Domain Task Forces (MDTF), and Armored Cavalry Regiments (ACR) have analogous capability and similar tasks, but are not identical in disposition, organization, capabilities, nor roles to the IRB.
- 3 U.S. Army Asian Studies Detachment, OSIR: ASD24C01001, Basic Facts Sheet: Southern Theater Command Ground Force 2nd Intelligence and Reconnaissance Brigade, 16 October 2023.
- 4 Arostegui, Joshua. "China Maritime Report No. 32: The PCH191 Modular Long-Range Rocket Launcher: Reshaping the PLA Army's Role in a Cross-Strait Campaign." 19, 3 NOV 2023, and U.S. Army Asian Studies Detachment, OSIR: ASD24C01001, Basic Facts Sheet: Southern Theater Command Ground Force 2nd Intelligence and Reconnaissance Brigade, 16 October 2023. And Congyi, Lin, "PLA Army's Newly Unveiled Armed Recon Drone Likely Joined Drills Around Taiwan Island, Global Times, 22 SEP 2023.
- 5 U.S. Army, ATP 7-100.3 Chinese Tactics, 2021.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 U.S. Army Asian Studies Detachment, OSIR: ASD24C01001, Basic Facts Sheet: Southern Theater Command Ground Force 2nd Intelligence and Reconnaissance Brigade, 16 October 2023, and U.S. Army Asian Studies Detachment, OSIR: ASD25C21060, China Southern Theater Command Military Activities Report, 6 May 2025, and U.S. Army Asian Studies Detachment, OSIR: ASD25C01035, China Northern Theater Command Ground Force Activities Report, 3-6 May.
- 9 U.S. Army ADP 3-0 Operations, 3-35, 3-36, page 31, March 2025.



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