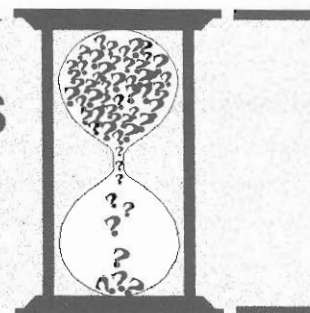


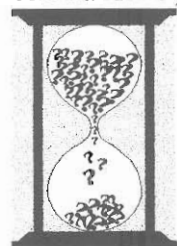
Making Timely Decisions in an NBC Environment



The challenge for tomorrow's commanders, leaders, and soldiers in a high-technology Army will not be their ability to protect against an enemy's NBC attacks. We will have an arsenal of individual and unit protective equipment to protect our forces against such attacks. Making timely decisions to properly use NBC protective equipment and protective measures will be the challenge.

In the future, volumes of information will be available on the status of the battlefield. This information will include the enemy's available NBC weapons, locations, and reported attacks. New technologies will produce volumes of information to manipulate, filter, and consume. Our greatest challenge will be to identify NBC decision/trigger points to implement protective measures and execute them when they occur.

To support a unit's operations in an NBC environment, NBC staffs must develop NBC decision/trigger points. These NBC decision/trigger points will cue a commander when it is time to make a decision concerning NBC protection. These cues must be decided well in advance of actual NBC events, and must take into account the time it takes to warn forces as well as the time it takes forces to assume higher protective postures. As NBC decision/trigger points are being developed, the NBC staff must be sensitive to their commander's propensity to take risk.



The recent Division XXI Advanced Warfare Experiment (AWE) held at the National Training Center showed that we truly can take control of the battlespace and provide the commander with real-time information on developing situations. The difficulty during this AWE was not gathering information from sensor systems, but making decisions based on this gathered information. How much information is needed to make timely decisions?

The challenge of making timely decisions is

evident in the emerging biological defense doctrine. When do you alert the force of a suspected biological attack? How many NBC attack indicators does it take to have your soldiers assume a higher protective posture? Is one alert from a biological detection enough? Two? How much information is enough before we say "Bio!" or "Gas!"

Will commanders want "just a little more information" before making the decision to have a large portion of their forces assume a higher protective posture? Knowing their decisions could greatly restrict their force's ability to maneuver and operate, commanders may choose to wait for a little more information. They may want to "confirm a suspected NBC attack" before having their forces assume a higher protective posture. A wait for "just a little more information" could mean death to many.

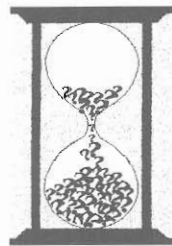


This concern is echoed in a recent National Defense University paper. "There is also a danger that commanders and leaders at all levels could grow too dependent on "perfect" information and hesitate to seize initiative in the absence of a complete picture."

Risk taking is what decisionmaking is all about. In this world of ever-increasing U.S. information dominance, a commander must remain willing to assume some level of risk when making decisions. Commanders take risks by doing something that is not 100 percent sure. Their decisions are based on incomplete pieces of information that do not show what the outcome of their decisions will be.

How many NBC "intelligence indicators" are enough? There is never enough information until you know the exact outcome of your decisions or non-decisions. Here's an example: A commander of an infantry brigade receives information that two enemy helicopters are flying directly toward

his front. His unit is presently digging in against a possible enemy offensive. The enemy has been continuously operating helicopters in the area over the last several days. The chemical officer has told him



the weather is perfect for a biological attack. The enemy is known to have biological agents at his disposal and it is reported that there have been suspected biological attacks in the theater. *What protective posture should he have his troops in at this time?*

At 10 kilometers out, the two helicopters turn and fly parallel to the brigade's front. They never change altitude. *Should the commander change his unit's protective posture?*

Three hours after the helicopters have left the brigade's have left the brigade's area of concern, the only biological detector in the brigade's are reports a suspected biological cloud passing over its position. The biological detector is collocated at the airfield with the brigade CP. If what the BIDS has detected is a cloud of aerosolized biological agent, it has already passed over 90 percent of the brigade at this time.

Decisions! Decisions! Can a commander see into the future? Even with the most sophisticated eyes and sensors on the battlefield, will commanders have enough information to keep their soldiers from peril? Or will they still rely on that old "gut feeling" that great leaders have relied on throughout the ages to "tell the future?"

It is very easy to dismiss the idea of having "cut in stone" NBC decision/trigger points. Many believe they do not give enough flexibility to commanders or their staffs in evolving situations. Yet, without finite boundaries established for the implementation of NBC protective measures, we will find ourselves precariously balanced on an abyss of information. By having these boundaries (NBC decision/trigger

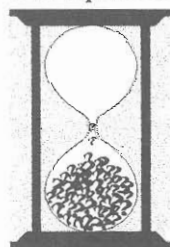
points), commanders will have the ability to say, "I have enough information for this decision."

Making decisions on a battlefield with NBC weapons will be tough. With loads of information bearing down on commanders, decisions will have to be made in a timely manner. Future commanders will rely more heavily on their NBC staffs to synthesize information independently and alert them when a decision is required.

Joint Vision 2010 has very little information on how we will actually conduct decisionmaking in the 21st Century. It does state, "Real time information will likely drive parallel, not sequential, planning and real time, not prearranged, decisionmaking." These words make it sound as if we will be fighting in a "reaction" mode rather than in a proactive one.

Commanders must be encouraged to stand fast in their decisionmaking, their risk taking. It is easy to say commanders will use "real time, not prearranged, decisionmaking." But prearranged cues must be set in place to ensure the proper decisions are made at the proper time.

Decisionmaking should be the glue that binds Joint Vision 2010's four operational concepts (dominant maneuver, precision engagement, full dimensional protection, and focused logistics). Without this glue to bind and provide a seamless connection between information dominance and JV 2010's four operational concepts, future commanders will be unable to conduct effective operations across the battlespace, a battlespace that may include significant NBC threats.



We must ensure our commanders are given NBC decision/trigger points and are confident in the use of them. For when commanders' information "barometers" have exceeded their comfort zones, they will make a decision with or without the advice of their NBC staffs.

At the time this article was written SFC Zapata was the NBC NCO for the Army Special Operations Command. He began his career in the 21st Chemical Company, 82d Airborne Division at Fort Bragg. He served 9 years with the 10th Special Forces Group Airborne forward deployed in Europe; was an Observer/Controller in the Joint Readiness Training Center, and a senior writer/instructor for the doctrine office of the U.S. Army Chemical School. During Operation Desert Storm, SFC Zapata served as NBC NCO and Operations Sergeant for a Joint Special Operations Task Force. In his most recent deployment, SFC Zapata was attached to 1st AD with the Center for Army Lessons Learned in the former Yugoslavia. He is a graduate of various military courses to include: Jumpmaster, Tech Escort (J5), NBC Recon (L5), Recondo, Jungle Operations, ANCOC, various NATO NBC courses, the Combat Developments Course, the Training Developer's course, and the U.S. Special Operations Command Acquisition Management Course.