Protection Planning at Every Echelon

By Major Meghan L. Engleson and Major Stacey N. Wuchter

Protection is the overarching function under which the Army ensures preservation of the force and survivability of mission-related military and nonmilitary personnel and resources in order to ensure freedom of action throughout the whole of an operation.[1] Effective protection planning and prioritization will become increasingly important in events leading to future large-scale combat operations, and commanders and staffs at every echelon will need to place great emphasis on integrating protection planning across all domains and throughout the entirety of operations. Protection as a warfighting function is not limited to echelons above brigade. Commanders at every echelon must understand what to protect and how to protect it in order to best mitigate hostile actions and preserve gains while continuing to enable freedom of movement and momentum.

Theater Level Protection

According to Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-37, *Protection*, "Protection support within a theater of operations during large-scale ground combat operations is executed throughout the operational framework . . . protection priorities are not the same at every echelon or in every area of operations."[2] Each echelon prioritizes protection requirements differently across domains, and lower levels should nest with higher ones. However, protection priorities are changeable and should be reassessed and allowed to evolve as transitions and changes occur throughout the area of operations and with regard to available resources, operational or mission focus, or the commander's priorities.

There is currently no formal protection cell at the theater level. However, protection considerations are to remain a priority for large-scale combat operations. Air defense artillery officers from the brigade level to the theater level must synchronize their efforts with their joint counterparts to utilize the most effective capabilities for maneuver forces. Civil considerations are also important in establishing clear communication and trust amongst joint and coalition forces, allowing them to work together efficiently. While challenging, the commander must select the appropriate Service with which to plan and synchronize the staff for protection activities, depending on the area of operations.

Protection Planning at Echelons Above Brigade

The Army Strategic Education Program–Commander Program provides general officers at the division, corps, and, army levels with a developmental course to enhance leadership capabilities and prepare the Army's highest leaders for the future warfight. Designed to complement both Army and joint general officer education, this program focuses on Army doctrine, systems, capabilities, and other activities that enhance overall readiness of its formations, while simultaneously preparing commanders to conduct unified land operations at echelons above brigade. During the Army Strategic Education Program–Commander Program, multiple vignettes are presented by the various centers of excellence. The Maneuver Support Center of Excellence (MSCoE), Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, is responsible for the contribution of protection considerations and applicability for joint reception staging and onward integration (JRSOI), forward passage of lines, shaping operations, wet-gap crossing, transition to the defense, and consolidation of gains in an urban environment.

For JRSOI, protection focuses on maintaining force projection; building combat power; and protecting critical nodes, tactical assembly areas, and lines of communication. The rapid reconstitution of critical facilities and infrastructure is another consideration. All 16 protection tasks outlined in ADP 3-37 are key during JRSOI operations. Even before a Soldier arrives at the JRSOI location, force health protection sets the theater via Soldier readiness processing and environmental baseline surveys.

The protection focus for the forward passage of lines includes the transfer of obstacle control between responsible units (back to survivability), fratricide avoidance (which is at greatest risk during this operation), the construction and repair of passage of lines and assembly areas, and the engagement of the noncommitted enemy force while defeating enemy security and counter-unmanned aerial systems to prevent acquisition of the passing force. The forward passage of lines is one of the riskiest military operations, and commanders must plan avoidance measures along movement corridors to retain forward momentum and ensure that the tempo is not decreased. Engineers, which are task-organized with maneuver forces, conduct route clearance and improve ground lines of communication. Military police manage traffic and provide route security for uninterrupted freedom of movement. Chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) assets conduct route and area reconnaissance in case of any potential CBRN attacks.

Protection consideration for shaping operations should include the commander's critical capabilities, assets, and activities and active and passive protection integration. Protection considerations for wet-gap crossing include locations for pre-positioned bridging, allocation of assets, and the

manner in which protection is to be provided to the support area during the wet-gap operation.

Protection considerations for wet-gap crossings and transitions to the defense include enabling brigade combat teams in the close fight while the division and corps continue with the deep fight. During this type of operation, the protection prioritization list is reprioritized, as assessed and designated by the commander. Heightened protection measures for command nodes are critical in the prevention of electronic warfare attacks, and CBRN attacks should be anticipated as the enemy force conducts a counterattack. During security operations, commanders may reposition the theater detention facility and reserve force for area security in the support area. Information collection plans are also refined, and rehearsals of deception plans are incorporated based on time- or event-based triggers.

Protection considerations for detainee operations at the corps and theater level during consolidation of gains is paramount. To put this in perspective, divisions and, potentially, corps will need to establish plans for detainee holding areas and the transport of detainees to theater detention facilities. Detainee movement will be at a much larger scale than what our formations are accustomed to planning for. Other considerations include the impact of displaced civilian populations and the utilization of information operations to influence movement away from mobility corridors. During consolidation of gains, the protection warfighting function focuses on area security support to maneuver units, route remediation and repair, countermobility in support of defense and survivability, critical infrastructure repair, restoration of the rule of law and resettlement of the population, and detainee operations.

Protection Planning for Brigade and Below

Echelons below division do not have designated protection cells, yet commanders and staffs must ensure that the force remains protected, integrating directives from higher echelons and ensuring that subordinate units are receiving the support they need to execute protection tasks at their level. Effective protection plans require continuous and integrated vertical, and sometimes horizontal, planning, as many of the protection tasks require coordination with sister units.

Following are four examples of protection planning considerations at the levels of brigade and below. The first two are obviously applicable to tactical-level missions. The second two are less obviously applicable, but serve as examples of tactical planning to support operational and strategic operations.

Conduct Survivability

Camouflage, cover, and deception planning must be conducted at all levels. Over the past 2 decades, our forces have lost some of the skills that they had gained from effectively camouflaging our personnel and equipment during past wars. In Iraq, colossal bases surrounded by concrete Alaska barriers and monitored by surveillance cameras on walls, buildings, and in the air became the norm. Our presence in Iraq was not concealed. In fact, enemies used aerostat blimps as targets for indirect fire because they were centrally located and anything fired at them was sure to hit *something* on the ground. Threats from indirect-fire attacks were somewhat mitigated by hardening buildings. However, in the LSCO fight, it is unlikely that units—especially maneuver units—will remain in place long enough to effectively harden buildings. Instead, units need to learn to employ camouflage on the move and to very quickly find or create cover when halted. Today's technology has made it easier than ever to collect information and identify high-payoff targets—both for us and our adversaries. Deception planning at the tactical level includes taking measures to ensure that our critical assets and equipment are not easily identifiable or easy to target or attack.

Provide Force Health Protection

A vast number of casualties in any conflict are not due to combat operations, but are the result of illness sweeping through units. Ensuring that the unit understands and follows preventive-medicine guidelines, developing field sanitation plans, and training field sanitation teams result in incredibly high returns on investment for our warfighters. These actions include planning for acclimatization periods for replacements during JRSOI, training to identify poisonous plants and venomous animals in the region, and constantly pushing to prevent Soldiers from adopting the stray animals they will likely encounter. The adoption of strays by individuals and units during conflict may seem innocuous, but it is a well-documented phenomenon that has had terrible consequences in the past.

Coordinate Air and Missile Defense (AMD) Support

Air and missile defense (AMD) support is a task that would be easy for a brigade staff to brush off since AMD assets are often reserved at the theater level. However, brigade staffs must understand two things:

- There may be AMD assets that could be potential targets within their areas of operations, and, there may be critical assets or infrastructure that require AMD protection within their area of operations.
- The staff at higher echelons cannot develop the protection prioritization list and the critical asset/defended asset list in a vacuum.

A brigade protection officer or operations officer must coordinate with the division protection cell to develop the protection prioritization list. Higher echelons may not have the "on ground" understanding that brigades, battalions, or companies have of their assigned areas of operations. Constantly communicating and reassessing the protection prioritization list and ensuring that information flows both up and down the chain support the coordination of AMD assets at the highest levels.

Conduct Detention Operations

Those who are not in a military police unit, are likely thinking their units do not need to plan for detention

operations. After all, detention operations is a military police function, right? Well, partially. The maneuver force must have a plan to hold detained persons until they can be handed over to the military police. This may mean that the maneuver force is responsible for operations at the detainee collection point and, potentially, at the detainee holding area.[3]

All echelons must have a thorough understanding of how to execute the care, custody, and control of detained persons in accordance with Army regulations and the Geneva Conventions.[4] Improper execution at the tactical level can have detrimental effects at the strategic level, negatively impacting joint and partner operations and perceptions throughout the world. Additionally, crime does not necessarily stop just because elements are moving against the enemy and commanders are responsible for stopping and controlling criminal actions (whether normal crimes or war crimes) as they occur or are brought to light.

Protection at the level of brigade and below is not focused solely on the tactical-level subtasks listed in ADP 3-37, although those are important in guiding planning. Brigades must include deliberate protection planning and support to the division protection cell in order to ensure that the plans remain comprehensive, integrated, layered, redundant, and enduring—the principles of protection. Brigades need clear guidance and a complete understanding of the vision and desired end state of division and corps level operations in order to understand their responsibilities in the scheme of protection. The Army Strategic Education Program–Commander Program provides division, corps, and Army commanders with the commanders and subject matter experts from the various centers of excellence and a forum for deliberate planning for some of the most dangerous operations our future Army will face.

Endnotes:

[1]ADP 3-37, *Protection*, 31 July 2019, p. iv.

[2]Ibid, p. 1-8.

[3]Ibid.

[4]"Geneva Conventions Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War," United Nations, 12 August 1949, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/375?OpenDocument>, accessed on 10 August 2021.

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latest mine and unexploded ordnance technological advances and creating partnership synergy with professionals in nongovernmental organizations. Lastly, and most importantly, UNC engineers contribute to reconciliation on the Korean peninsula through the removal of mines.

Endnotes:

[1]*Agreement Concerning a Military Armistice in Korea*, UN, 27 July 1953, <https://peacemaker.un.org/koreadprk-militaryarmistice53>, accessed on 3 August 2020.

[2]*Letter Dated 6 September 2018 From the Representatives of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea to the United Nations Addressed to the Secretary-General*, UN, 6 September 2018, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1640603?ln=en>, accessed on 3 August 2020.

[3]"Agreement on Implementation of the Historic Panmunjom Declaration in the Military Domain," National Committee on North Korea, 18 September 2018, <https://www.ncnk.org/sites/default/files/Agreement%20on%20the%20Implementation%20of%20the%20Historic%20Panmunjom%20Declaration%20in%20the%20Military%20Domain.pdf>, accessed on 3 August 2020.

[4]"Full Text of President Moon Jae-in's Speech at the 74th UN General Assembly Session," Yonhap News Agency, 25 September 2019, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20190924010500315>, accessed on 3 August 2020.

[5]Ibid.

[6]International Mine Action Standards, IMAS Organization, 2001, <https://www.mineactionstandards.org/>, accessed on 3 August 2020.

[7]The demining season is determined by weather conditions that permit the activities necessary for removal of mines and unexploded ordnance. The length of the season depends on the location, but the season generally consists of warmer months with little precipitation, as lower temperatures can cause freezing and excess precipitation can cause unsafe conditions.

[8]"Full Text of President Moon Jae-in's Speech."

[9]"UN Officials Discuss Support for President Moon's Vision for DMZ Mine Removal," Yonhap News Agency, 17 February 2020, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20200217003600325>, accessed on 3 August 2020.

[10]"Full Text of President Moon Jae-in's Speech."

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