Paradigm Shift: Transforming the Protection WFF to Meet the New Peer Competitor in Multi-Domain Operations

By Major Joel D. Maxwell

During the waning days of the Afghanistan surge in 2011, the 101st Airborne Division protection chief for Regional Command East, Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, coordinated a weekly huddle with seven brigade (force) protection officers. Each of the seven officers was assigned an additional duty as a brigade protection officer—five were assigned as brigade provost marshals; one was assigned as an infantry officer; and one was assigned as the brigade chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear officer. A typical meeting flowed like a logistics synchronization rather than the coordination of a warfighting function (WFF) for operations. Some of the common questions and guidance from the protection chief included: "What is the status of your rapid aerostat initial-deployment systems towers systems?" "We will have a contractor out tomorrow to repair the camera on your persistent ground surveillance system blimp." And "Parts are currently on backorder for your entry control point sensors."

The protection chief also provided a checklist for conducting force protection assessments at each forward operating base and combat outpost, with a requirement to annually assess each location. Assessors found a platoon from a field artillery battery in charge of base defense at one forward operating base, an infantry platoon at another, and cooks at a third. Some locations had separate operations centers for base defense and battalion/company operations, and video feeds from various sensors were not always displayed in both operations centers. Higher-echelon operations centers located on a different forward operating base often could not see the video feeds from the base sensors in real time. Force protection equipment was sometimes found in storage, as the unit lacked the expertise to set up the commercial, off-the-shelf system and/or the personnel trained to properly monitor it. All of these conditions made it difficult for a commander to visualize risk and make decisions to preserve the force.

As the Army transitions from nearly 2 decades of fighting insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq, it must prepare for competition and armed conflict against a peer competitor that can and will challenge U.S. forces in all domains. Gone are the days of assured communications and air superiority. In such an environment, the Army can no longer afford a passive and reactive protection WFF detached from maneuver. The future protection WFF must be anticipatory, proactive, and synchronized with maneuver, preserving the commander's critical capabilities assets and activities, denying threat and enemy freedom of action, and enabling access to create windows of protection superiority (see Figure 1).

The Problem

The root problem visualized in the Army operating concept of multi-domain operations is stand-off. The adversary will create stand-off by separating the joint force in time, space, and function as the adversary converges multidomain effects. Even more problematic is how it creates political stand-off by fracturing friendly alliances and partnerships. These adversarial actions reduce the Army's ability to recognize, decide, and react to the true nature of a threat, which may result in an adversarial "win" without fighting—*a fait accompli*. The protection WFF must enable access in all domains in order to deter the adversary in competition and, if necessary, defeat it in armed conflict. Furthermore, protection must deny the adversary the ability to create stand-off in all domains throughout the competition continuum (competition, crisis, armed conflict, and return to competition) See Figure 2.

The Past

On 16 November 2020, Commanding General John M. Murray, U.S. Army Futures Command, remotely opened the Future Studies Program 2021 with a key question: Have we entered a paradigm shift in modern warfare where the defense is the dominant form of maneuver? From the beginning of human history, members of our species have killed one another while protecting their own warriors, loved ones, and communities of nations. The scope and scale of defensive structures have ranged from dirt walls in a village in Africa to the Great Wall of China (built to keep out the Mongol hordes) to the Civil War fortifications around Washington, D.C. (arguably the most fortified city on the planet at that time). As one side discovers new ways of killing, the other creates new forms of protection from the effects of the new weapons systems—helmets and shields (for arrows and spears), gas masks (for chemicals), and reactive armor (for shaped charges and kinetic energy). Even tactics evolve to incorporate protection; for example, the Greek phalanx was a tactical formation that maneuvered with the protection of interlocking shields as an integral part of its effectiveness.

Although protection has existed throughout human history, protection doctrine is relatively new. The first doctrinal mention of protection was as an element of combat

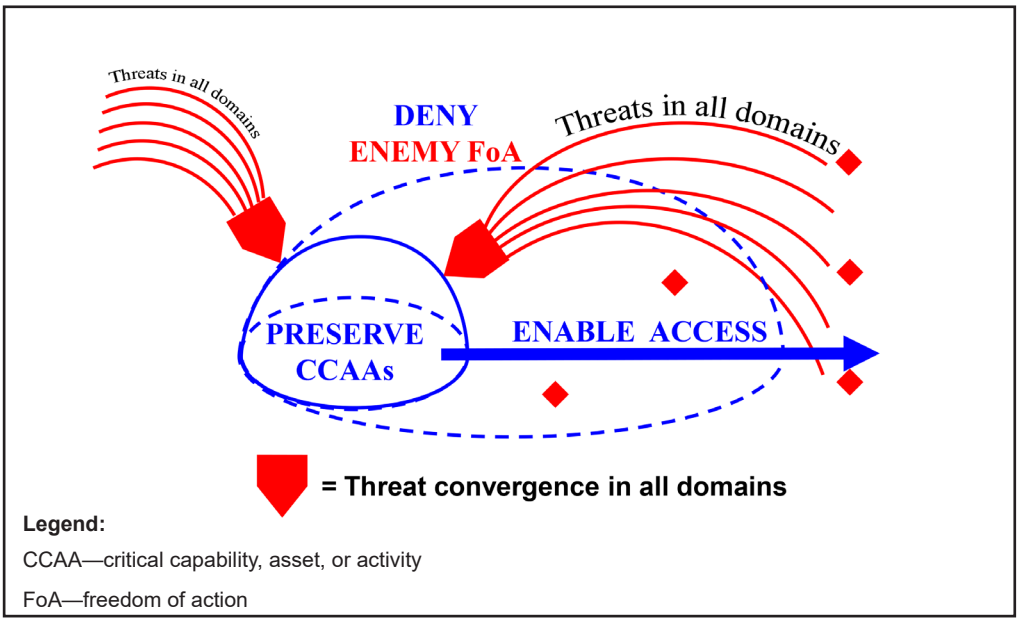


Figure 1. Future goals of the protection WFF

power in 1993, in now-obsolete Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*.[1] The original definition of protection consisted of four components (operational security, Soldier health, safety, and fratricide avoidance) and contained the verb "conserve."[2] Protection was still an element of combat power in 2001; and with subtle language changes, the four components were identical.[3] However, the verb in the definition changed from "conserve" to "preserve."[4] The first protection FM was released in 2009; it contained a similar definition (still with the verb "preserve"), although the four components were transformed into five principles: full-dimension, integrated, layered, redundant, and enduring.[5] The only recent change in current doctrine was in 2019, when "full-dimension" was changed to "comprehensive."[6]

The War on Terrorism defined protection by entry control points; HESCO® barriers; persistent ground surveillance system blimps; and even the technologically advanced counter rocket, artillery, and mortar systems, which are inherently passive and reactive. But the protection of the past is insufficient against future peer competitors. As the Army visualizes a future operating environment and peer competitor threat, the goals of the principles listed above are nearly impossible to achieve from an asset density and a cost perspective point of view. The Army cannot protect everything, everywhere; instead, it must create "windows" of protection. Protection must be proactive, anticipatory, and integrated with maneuver. The following statement from the original *Ranger Handbook* still rings true today: "Protected maneuver and fires generates combat power."[7]

Dynamic Change

A dramatic shift in modern warfare, spurred by multiple technological advances, has occurred over the past decade. U.S. adversaries now possess hypersonic weapons that are capable of striking at much greater distances, challenging current air defense systems. China and Russia have invested in their integrated air defense systems, seriously contesting air space control. Cyberspace is now more contested than ever, as adversaries continuously probe, seeking and discovering weaknesses to exploit.

The adversary can see and strike in the homeland; assured power projection is a thing of the past. The enemy's deep area is our rear area; the entire battlefield framework is now a contested space. These advances require a shift in how the Army executes the protection WFF. The Army must rethink how it conducts reception, staging, onward movement, and integration; they will be contested and must be protected. The Army must converge protection, creating the protected windows necessary to defeat stand-off with greater speed, at greater distances, and in all domains.

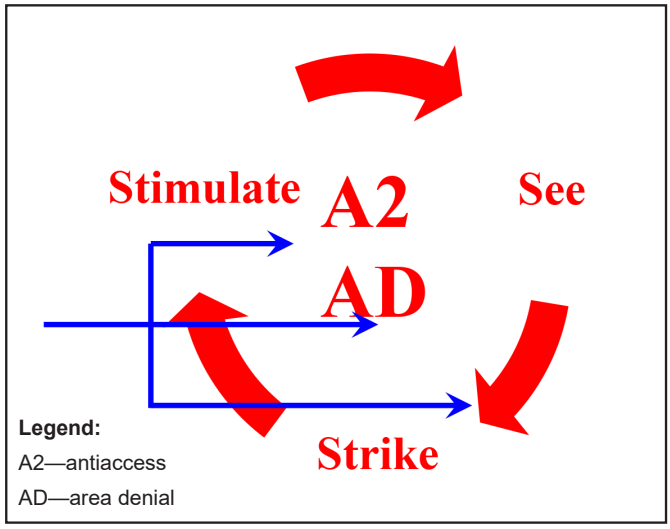


Figure 2. Denial of adversarial stand-off

The Future

Returning to General Murray's question, the primacy of the offense versus defense has historically shifted over time. Defense dominated during medieval times, as illustrated by castles, moats, and fortifications; costly sieges were the only defeat mechanism. With the era of cannons and gunpowder, the primacy of offense returned—until World War I, when machine guns and trench warfare put defense back in the forefront. Combined arms maneuver (*Blitzkrieg*) during World War II resulted in the return of offense to its former glory. With China and Russia investing in and proliferating

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Endnotes:

[1]Christopher Mewett, "Understanding War's Enduring Nature Alongside Its Changing Character," *War on the Rocks*, 21 January 2014, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/01/understanding-wars-enduring-nature-alongside-its-changing-character/>, accessed on 4 October 2021.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, Cornell University, 1989, pp. 366–367.

[4]Blaine T. Browne and Robert C. Cottrell, *Uncertain Order: The World in the Twentieth Century*, Prentice Hall, 2003, pp. 68–69.

[5]MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray, *The Dynamics of Military Revolution—1300–2050*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 151–174.

[6]Karl-Heinz Frieser, "The Blitzkrieg Legend—The 1940 Campaign in the West," *Canadian Army Journal*, Vol. 9, 2006, pp. 133–136.

[7]John Antal, "Top Attack: Lessons Learned from the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War," *Mad Scientist Laboratory*, 1 April 2021, <https://madsciblog.tradoc.army.mil/317-top-attack-lessons-learned-from-the-second-nagorno-karabakh-war/>, accessed on 4 October 2021.

[8]John Antal, "Death from Above—How Secure Tactical Video Transmission Impacted the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War," 2021, <https://www.academia.edu/45460690/Death_from_Above_How_Secure_Tactical_Video_Transmission_Impacted_the_Second_Nagorno_Karabakh_War>, accessed on 4 October 2021.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid.

[12]*Multi-Domain Large Scale Combat Operations (MD-LSCO) Army Organization Gap Study (17x Critical Gaps)*, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, 16 October 2019.

[13]*Waypoint 2028–2029*, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, 6 August 2021, <U.S. Army STAND-TO! | Waypoint 2028-2029>, accessed on 4 October 2021.

[14]Army Doctrine Publication 3-37, *Protection*, 31 July 2019.

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James R. Fitzsimonds and Jan M. Vantol, "Revolutions in Military Affairs," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Spring 1994, pp. 24–31, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a360252.pdf>, accessed on 4 October 2021.

Captain Bigelow is a small-group leader for the Military Police Captain's Career Course, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He holds a bachelor's degree in history from Hartwick College, Oneonta, New York, and master's degrees in business and organizational security management from Webster University and public administration from Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant.

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antiaccess and area denial technology, is the future fight reliant upon the primacy of the defense? Is the Army capable of countering these defenses and protecting an advancing force?

By employing the *Army Futures Command Concept for Protection 2028*,[8] the Army is capable of defeating stand-off and protecting the force. The central idea of the concept is that "Army forces, as part of joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational teams, conduct protection activities in all domains, the electromagnetic spectrum, and information environment, to preserve commanders' critical capabilities, assets, and activities; deny threat and enemy freedom of action; and enable access to achieve protected windows of superiority."[9] The concept outlines how protection expands beyond passive actions, checklists, and the prevention of enemy activities in friendly areas and is more active across broader spaces. Commanders must be able to see adversaries and deny them anonymity, counter specific strengths, achieve positions of advantage, and expand and exploit gained areas. The future Army must do more than simply create a list of things to be protected and describe the assets that will be used to protect them; it must simultaneously deny the threat in all domains while opening protected windows of superiority that enable access for friendly forces. For the Army to succeed, the whole of government and other joint, interorganizational, and multinational partners must expand the protection capability, increase capacity in competition, and operate at scale in armed conflict. Protection must be proactive and anticipatory in all domains and must be integrated with maneuver.

Endnotes:

[1]FM 100-5, *Operations*, 14 June 1993 (now obsolete).

[2]Ibid.

[3]FM 3-0, *Operations*, 6 October 2017.

[4]Ibid.

[5]FM 3-37, *Protection*, 30 September 2001 (now obsolete).

[6]Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-37, *Protection*, 31 July 2019.

[7]U.S. Army Infantry School Soldier Handbook (SH) 21-76, *Ranger Handbook*, February 1985.

[8]U.S. Army Futures Command Pamphlet 71-20-7, *Army Futures Command Concept for Protection 2028*, 7 April 2021, <afc-pam-71-20-7-afc-protection-concept-vfinal-apr21.pdf>, accessed on 9 September 2021.

[9]Ibid.

Major Maxwell is the chief of the Protection Branch, Maneuver Support Capability Development and Integration Directorate, Futures and Concepts Center, U.S. Army Futures Command, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He holds bachelor's degrees in criminal justice and public administration from Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri, and a master's degree in criminal justice from the University of Louisville, Kentucky.