EOD in LSCO

By Colonel Shawn L. Kadlec

How long will it be until explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) units get here? No doubt, many of you have asked yourselves this question during multiple deployments to Iraq or Afghanistan. One of the many lessons learned from counterinsurgency and counter-improvised explosive device operations has been the need to embed EOD teams into maneuver and maneuver support operations. As the U.S. Army transitions its focus to large-scale combat operations (LSCO), we must adapt these lessons learned and apply them to our training and doctrine for LSCO. A recent wet-gap crossing exercise conducted by the 50th Multirole Bridge Company, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and EOD teams from the 79th Ordnance Battalion (EOD), Fort Riley, Kansas, provides an example of how the lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan apply to LSCO missions. In conjunction with this training example, pending EOD doctrine updates will describe a spectrum of EOD operations in LSCO and explain the associated risk. Collectively, these two items provide a template to further assess training and doctrine updates required to better integrate EOD into maneuver and maneuver support operations during LSCO.

In August 2021, EOD teams from the 630th Ordnance Company (EOD) and the 774th Ordnance Company (EOD), both from the 79th Ordnance Battalion, enabled the 50th Multirole Bridge Company to construct and operate an improved ribbon bridge to cross a section of Milford Lake, Fort Riley. EOD teams identified and rendered-safe a variety of explosive threats and hazards that jeopardized the success of the training operation. While many of the threat scenarios included improvised weapons systems and munitions, the lessons learned and implications also apply to state-sponsored weapons systems and munitions. For example, the improvised rocket launcher aimed at the crossing site could just as easily be an abandoned Russian 9A52-4 Tornado multiple-rocket launcher. Similarly, the improvised explosive devices could easily be replaced with unexploded ordnance left behind after a friendly force artillery barrage designed to drive enemy forces off a beachhead. In all cases, the presence of embedded EOD teams significantly reduces the risk posed by these weapons systems and munitions.

Unfortunately, current EOD doctrine (or even other doctrine) does not adequately describe the role of EOD LSCO—and it does an even poorer job of describing EOD capabilities, limitations, and options for operations like wet-gap

crossings, minefield breaches, and other maneuver and maneuver support operations. To address this, the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command Proponent Office–EOD submitted an urgent revision for Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 4-32, *Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Operations,*[1] which serves as an initial revision for the incorporation of LSCO considerations. Of note, the urgent revision introduces "assault EOD" into the doctrinal vernacular.

The term "assault EOD" is a slowly emerging doctrinal concept that has been debated within the EOD community for almost 2 years. The term originated in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization publication entitled *Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Principles and Minimum Standards of Proficiency* and is defined as follows: "Assault EOD comprises all EOD actions conducted during support to either law enforcement or military forces involved in nonpermissive operations. The aim of assault EOD is to provide suitable supporting assets to maintain the momentum of an assaulting force, either in land or maritime environments."[2] The term as well as the need for the term are debatable. However, a debate is beyond the scope of this article.

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is reduced. (I have personally encountered both of these arguments since standing up the Protection Division, Fielded Force Integration Directorate, U.S. Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.)

Finally, Sparrow discusses the real value and benefits of an integrated, multidisciplined, harms reduction program like the Army protection warfighting function. These benefits include recognizing that some professions might have done a better job than others of learning the art and science of undoing harms and have developed more sophisticated tools and approaches within their domains. Lessons drawn from best practices within such professions can be applied more broadly. There is also value in recognizing that almost all vital operational decisions lie between low-level incident response (the realm of true specialists) and high, national-level policy decision making. Most protection programs and efforts can, therefore, be scoped between these two extremes.

This book covers many other topics that are helpful to the protection professional, regardless of branch or specialty, including a discussion about how some harms "have a brain behind them," while others are occupational or environmental hazards. The real value of *The Character of Harms*, however, is its focus on assisting protection practitioners in both the public and private sectors with successfully establishing or improving their overarching protection programs. The real-world vignettes and practical programmatic advice are what set this resource apart from the standard references of doctrinal Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-37, *Protection*,[1] or conceptual U.S. Army Futures Command (AFC) Pamphlet (Pam), 71-20-7 *Army Futures Command Concept for Protection*.[2]

I highly recommend *The Character of Harms*. It is a straightforward and insightful book, which can be applied to Army protection warfighting function efforts at any echelon.

Endnotes:

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

[2]AFC Pam 71-20-7, *Army Futures Command Concept for Protection*, 7 April 2021.

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Terminology debates aside, the aim of the urgent revision is to establish a doctrinal foundation that defines and describes a spectrum of EOD capabilities, limitations, and risks associated with employing EOD units in support of maneuver and maneuver support units (the assault force) in nonpermissive environments. The intentionally broad definition of "assault force" potentially includes everything from a military police company conducting rear area security missions to a special operations force carrying out a raid on a high-value target. This broad spectrum of "assault forces," therefore, includes a wide array of maneuver support and protection forces to preserve and enable operations during LSCO.

Returning to the 50th Multirole Bridge Company example and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization definition of assault EOD—the embedded EOD teams maintained the momentum of an assaulting force in a nonpermissive environment. EOD teams reduced risk to friendly force operations through the positive identification of, and precision render-safe/unusable procedures taken against, adversary weapons systems and munitions. These precise actions ensured that abandoned weapons systems and munitions did not inadvertently delay or prevent the establishment of critical wet-gap crossing control measures or prevent the establishment of the crossing site through the accidental launching of rockets into friendly force staging areas, thereby destroying key terrain/facilities or releasing chemical agents. This exercise and pending EOD doctrine updates provide a great template for incorporating the lessons learned from counter-insurgency and counter-improvised explosive device operations and applying them to LSCO. It also provides a conceptualization for future doctrine updates, exercises, and experimentation at home station, combined training centers, and other venues.

The time is here to determine when, how, and why the spectrum of EOD capabilities is incorporated into maneuver and maneuver support operations in nonpermissive environments. Doing so will ensure that we capture the lessons learned from counter-insurgency and counter-improvised explosive devices while self-modernizing for the future battlefield. There won't be time to wait for EOD support in LSCO.

Endnotes:

[1]ATP 4-32, *Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Operations*, 30 September 2013.

[2]*Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Principles and Minimum Standards of Proficiency*, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 7 February 2020.

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