Further Defining Protection Support Planning

By Lieutenant Colonel Michael Carvelli

The protection warfighting function would be strengthened by a more detailed and deliberate support planning process. This approach offers three distinct advantages over the current method. First, it provides protection professionals—leaders within the protection community—a logical framework to identify critical assets, allocate protection resources, and define the desired protection effect. Second, this process empowers maneuver commanders to make informed decisions regarding the allocation of scarce resources. Finally, it directly supports the commander's maneuver plan and contributes to achieving the overall end state.

Where Does Protection Fit in the Operations Process?

Commanders and staffs integrate protection—along with the other five warfighting functions—throughout the operations process of plan, prepare, execute, and assess. As illustrated in Figure 3-2 of Army doctrine publication (ADP) 3-37[1], protection and the military decision making process (MDMP) are mutually informing; protection informs the MDMP, and the MDMP, in turn, informs protection. Within this cyclical process, protection elements provide input at key decision points, and the protection staff receives resulting outputs. This continuous interaction refines the plan, shapes preparation activities, and enables effective execution with ongoing assessment.

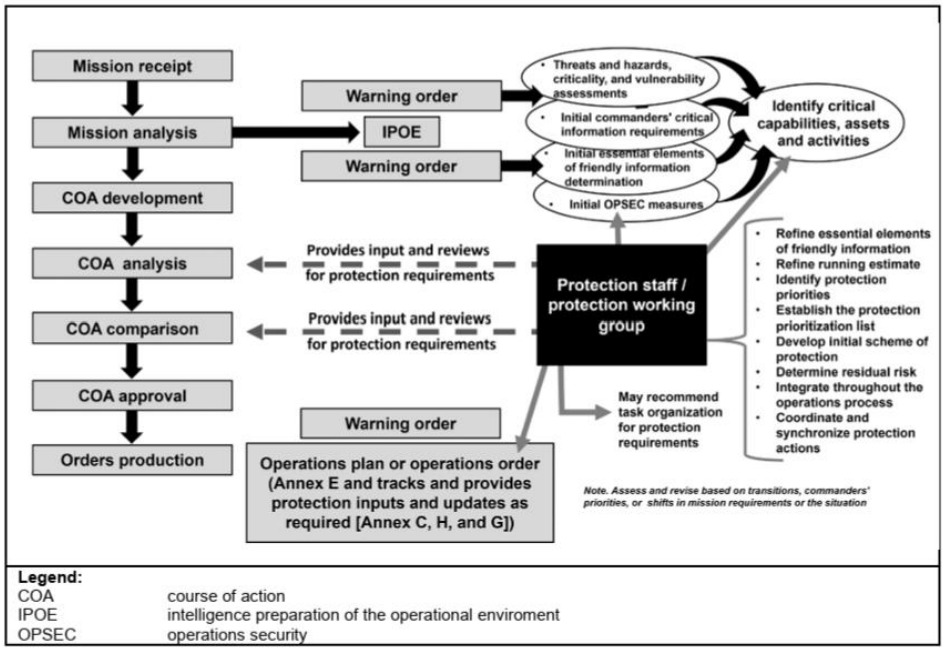

Figure 3-2. Protection planning

The primary output of the operations process plan phase for protection is the Prioritized Protection List (PPL). As detailed in Table 3-3 of ADP 3-37[2], the staff refines the PPL to identify friendly assets and/or activities critical to the success of the chosen course of action and aligned with the commander's intent. This refinement includes prioritizing these assets and activities, determining their location, adding clarifying notes, identifying relevant enemy threats, assigning

protective tasks to units, and mitigating associated risks. The PPL represents both the culmination of the protection planning process and a frequent point of failure.

What Are the Gaps?

There are several reasons the protection planning step often runs into trouble after the PPL is created. First, the list, read from left to right, does not follow a logical flow. It does not build step-by-step to a prioritized list of assets that clearly support the maneuver plan. Second, it does not give assigned units enough detail to act effectively. It is generally an assignment of responsibility to multiple units. Finally, the staff often uses the risk management process to determine the PPL instead of applying a proper targeting methodology.

Table 3-3. Example Protection Prioritization List

Priority	Critical Asset / Activity	Location (Grid / Proximity)	Notes	Threats	Units Tasked	Mitigation
1	DIVARTY Q53 (Radar)	DL43562765 / PL Bobcat	Critical for Counterfire missions, 4x	ENY Air, IDF(G-6, 9A51, 9A52, 2S19), SPF, EW Jamming	SPF, A, 3-265 ADA 1-172 CAV 1/233 MP CO	Survivability Position; Active / Passive Air Defense; Area Security
2	DIVARTY Q36 (Radar)	DL43682779 / PL Bobcat	Critical for Counterfire missions, 3x	ENY Air, IDF(G-6, 9A51, 9A52, 2S19), SPF, EW Jamming	A, 3-265 ADA 1-172 CAV 2/233 MP CO	Survivability Position; Active / Passive Air Defense; Area Security
3	DIVARTY Q37 (Radar)	DL44172960 / PL Bobcat	Critical for Counterfire missions, 3x	ENY Air, IDF(G-6, 9A51, 9A52, 2S19), SPF, EW Jamming	B, 3-265 ADA 1-172 CAV 3/233 MP CO	Survivability Position; Active / Passive Air Defense; Area Security
4	3-197 MLRS	DL43562765 / PL Bobcat	BN assigned to DIVARTY, 16x	IDF(G-6, 9A51, 9A52, 2S19), Chemical Attack	B, 3-265 ADA B, 1BCT (-) 2/333 MP CO(-)	Survivability Position; Active / Passive Air Defense; Area security
5	2-18 HIMARS	DL43682779/PL Bobcat OBJ Viking	BN assigned to DIVARTY, 16x	IDF(G-6, 9A51, 9A52, 2S19), Chemical Attack	C, 3-265 ADA B, 1BCT (-) 1/333 MP CO(-) 1MP CO(-)	Survivability Position; Active / Passive Air Defense; Area Security

Simply reading the PPL from left to right doesn't present information in a logical order. Staffs list assets, their location, add notes explaining why they're critical (often vaguely), list every potential threat, and then assign protection responsibilities to various units. This forces users of the PPL to make a lot of assumptions. For example, with the Q53 radar as the top priority, should the 3rd Battalion 265th Air Defense Artillery Regiment focus on air threats or indirect fire? Should

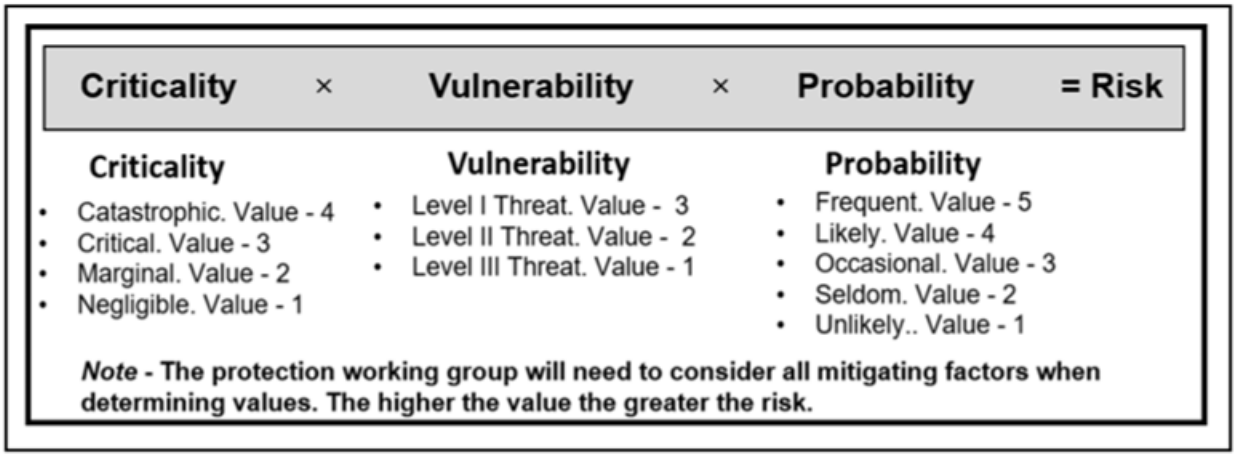

Figure 3-3. Example criticality, vulnerability, and probability values

the 1st Platoon 233rd Military Police Company prioritize enemy special purpose forces? Who is responsible for building a survivability position for the radar? Does the 1st Squadron 172nd Cavalry Regiment take the lead on area security, or are the military police responsible? There is too much information presented in a confusing way and not enough to clearly define the necessary steps to protect the Q53 radar.

Assigned units don't receive enough information to take concrete action to protect the critical asset. For example, what size special purpose force is considered a threat to the radar? If the cavalry unit is assigned to this task, should they focus on preventing an enemy squad or team from getting into direct fire range? If the PPL clearly stated the expected size of the Special

Purpose Forces threat, the cavalry unit could then focus on disrupting and reducing that force in the area, keeping it below a level where it could directly attack the radar.

The way this PPL is structured feels like it follows the risk management process rather than informing it. As illustrated in Figure 3-3 of ADP 3-37[3], determining if an asset or activity is truly critical relies on evaluating criticality, vulnerability, and probability. This process identifies the highest risks to the maneuver commander by prioritizing those assets or activities most critical to the organization, most vulnerable to attack, and most likely to be targeted by the enemy. These three factors combine to create a PPL that is poorly informed and difficult to put into action. Ultimately, the PPL becomes a list of assets requiring protection but lacks the necessary detail for units to effectively carry out those protective measures. To address these flaws, commanders and staffs should mirror the logic of other established integrating processes.

What Are Integrating Processes?

Commanders and staffs employ integrating processes to build shared understanding and synchronize warfighting functions—intelligence, movement and maneuver, fires, command and control, protection, and sustainment—with each other.[4] These processes inform one another during MDMP, running concurrently to support informed decision making by the commander. The integrating processes are:

1. Intelligence preparation of the operational environment.
2. Information collection.
3. Targeting.
4. Risk management.

Table 6-13, ATP 3.09-42, p6-24 1

5. Knowledge management.[5]

To improve protection support planning, integrating the targeting process—specifically including fire support tasks—is the most effective approach.

What Is the Targeting Process?

Targeting is the process of selecting and prioritizing targets and matching them with the appropriate response .[6] Leaders must identify the timing and controls to ensure that units effectively engage targets. Although there is no prescribed format, a fire support task might include the target description, trigger time or event, location, observers, delivery system, attack guidance, and communications (TTLODAC).[5] As shown in Table 6-13 from Army techniques publication (ATP) 3.09-42[6], TTLODAC provides enough information for an assigned fire support unit to employ fires assets. Using the TTLODAC example, the fire support unit understands the trigger when the fire support asset is on call, who is assigned to observe the target, the specific delivery system, guidance on the employment of the delivery system, and the means of communication during the event.

To be clear, TTLODAC provides a more defined framework than current protection-related doctrine. We can adapt its logic to create a friendly-focused process, incorporating risk management and targeting methodologies for enhanced protection.

How Can We Adjust TTLODAC to Protection?

To shift the focus from enemy and terrain-oriented fires to friendly-oriented protection, staffs must consider two key factors. First, they must analyze the enemy's scheme of maneuver to determine the enemy commander's high-payoff target list. Using the risk management process—criticality, vulnerability, and probability—staffs can help the commander visualize and describe those assets the enemy seeks to disrupt. Second, staffs must evaluate their commander's plan to identify critical friendly assets essential to mission success. By understanding both the enemy's intended targets and the commander's priorities for protection, the staff can develop a more informed PPL.

Once both enemy and friendly assets are incorporated, staffs can define protection support tasks. A potential model for this is to identify the friendly asset or activity, determine its location, assess the threat, define the desired protective effect, establish a trigger for protective action, assign a protector, provide protection guidance, and establish communication protocols (ALTETPGC).

What Gaps Does This Close?

Table 6-13. Completed worksheet for a fire support task – TTLODAC (example)

PHASE II: Assault on Objective Bears							
Task/purpose: Fire Support Task 1: Provide obscuration fires to disrupt the enemy's ability to observe the breaching operation. Purpose 1: Enable the successful breaching operation. Fire Support Task 2: Provide suppressive fires to disrupt the enemy mechanized infantry platoons' ability to place effective direct fire on the breach site. Purpose 2: Enable the successful breaching operation							
Priority of fire: Field Artillery: A Company; Mortars: B Company							
ALLOCATIONS: A Company 1x Critical Friendly Zone; C Company 1x Field Artillery Priority Target							
POSITIONING GUIDANCE: Mortars move along Route REDLEG and occupy mortar firing position 1 (azimuth of fire 1600); in place ready to fire not later than H+ 30 minutes.							
RESTRICTIONS/FSCM: Coordinated Fire Line is Phase Line RED; No-Fire Areas 1 & 2 in effect.							
Task	(T) Target	(T) Trigger	(L) Location	(O) Observer(s)	(D) Delivery System(s)	(A) Attack Guidance	(C) Communications
Fire Support Task 1	AB1000	A Company lead element crosses Phase Line Blue	NG12344567	Primary: A Company; Alternate: C Company	Primary: battalion mortars; Alternate: field artillery	20 minutes x 200 meters length smoke	Battalion mortar net FH800
Fire Support Task 2	AB1005	When support by fire position 1 is set	NG45671234	Primary/Alternate: B Company	Primary: field artillery; Alternate: attack aviation	Battalion 6 rounds high explosive /variable time	Primary: battalion fire support net FH600; Alternate: fire direction net FH700
FH – frequency hopping							

Employing this protection support task model offers three key benefits. First, it provides a logical framework for identifying, triggering, and protecting friendly assets and activities. While not a perfect solution, it enables commanders and staffs to assign units specific protection tasks that mitigate threats and hazards.

Second, it integrates protection considerations from both the enemy and friendly perspectives. Finally, it allows staffs to refine the logic of the PPL.

To refine the PPL, the following table demonstrates a lower level of detail than the protection support task model provides. However, by working backward from these tasks, staffs can develop an enhanced PPL. The table outlines priority, critical assets or activities, location, threat, effect, and protectors.

Priority	Critical Asset or Activity	Location	Threat	Effect	Protector
1	Q53 Radar	DL 45849101 / AO Danger	SPF – Direct Fire	Preserve	1/233 CAV
2	355 MRBC	DL 49188101 / OBJ Lions	112 BTG	Enable	2/42 MP CO
3	DIV Main CP	DL 47188591 / AA Seattle	ENY Air (SU-35)	Preserve	2/119 ADA
4	DIV Main CP	DL 47188591 / AA Seattle	SPF – Observation	Deny	1/233 CAV

Protection Prioritization List Example 1

From this PPL, the staff can create appropriate protection support tasks. For example, using the Q53 radar, a protection support task could look like this:

Asset or Activity	Location	Threat	Effect	Trigger	Protector	Guidance	Communication
Q53	DL 45849101/AO Danger	SPF – Direct Fire	Preserve	1/319 FA occupies PAA 12	1/233 CAV	From 1/319 occupation of PAA12 to 14 CSSB crossing PL Black	Primary: 1/319 BN NET FH600 Alternate: HHC/1/319 CO NET FH610

Protection Support Task Example 1

Why Is This Better?

Mirroring the targeting process provides protection planners a logical framework for executing MDMP throughout the entirety of the operations process. Implementing these protection support planning improvements results in an enhanced PPL and enables staffs to generate clear protection support tasks for assigned protection units. This focused approach is a significant improvement over assigning multiple unclarified tasks.

Endnotes:

[1] Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 3-37, *Protection*, January 2024,

[2] Ibid

[3] Ibid

[4] Ibid

[5] Ibid, p3-16

[6] Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-09.42, *Planning and Integrating Fires for BCT Operations*, March 2016, p6-22

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