

Protection in the Modern Battlespace:

A Conceptual Approach for Battalion and Brigade Staffs

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The 2024 revision of Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-37, *Protection*, represents a significant shift in how the U.S. Army conceptualizes and implements protection. By consolidating the previous 16 protection tasks into four core concepts—conduct risk management, protect capabilities, protect areas, and protect information¹—the updated doctrine offers a more accessible and holistic framework. This conceptual approach is particularly beneficial for battalion and brigade staffs, who often manage protection responsibilities with limited personnel.² This article examines the implications of this doctrinal shift, focusing on its integration into training and development for junior leaders and the evolving challenges posed by emerging technologies.

Protection Below Division Level: Bridging the Knowledge Gap

Battalion and brigade staffs typically include a small cadre of personnel specifically trained in protection disciplines. This limited staffing creates a potential knowledge gap, particularly given the complexity and breadth of protection tasks. The concept-driven approach of ADP 3-37 addresses this challenge by providing a simplified yet comprehensive framework.³ By focusing on core concepts rather than individual tasks, the doctrine empowers junior leaders to understand the interconnected nature of protection and its integration across all warfighting functions, without requiring military occupational specialties expertise to be included in every protection task. This is crucial for effective decision making and efficient resource allocation at these echelons.

Developing Proficient Units: Integrating Protection into Training

Experiences from recent brigade-level training exercises highlight the importance of aligning training with the commander's decision-making process. A documented decrease in average staff experience (such as second lieutenants in captain positions) underscores the need for targeted training that emphasizes the practical application of protection principles. Integrating ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, into staff training can bridge this gap by emphasizing the transformation of data into actionable knowledge and shared understanding.⁴ This foundation enables staff personnel to effectively contribute to the commander's understanding of

the operational environment and support informed decision making related to protection activities.

Challenges in Protection

The integrated nature of protection across warfighting functions has potential barriers for military personnel who may lack experience and knowledge of protection concepts and functions. Consider the following scenario: A mass vegetable recall is issued due to E. coli contamination, and 50 Soldiers report to sick call with symptoms resembling food poisoning after eating at a dining facility. Addressing this scenario is a force health protection issue that requires staff integration across multiple functions and calls for several different personnel (medical, logistics, human resources, operations, and protection) to mitigate the incident. When personnel understand the collaborative nature of protection tasks and concepts, unit readiness improves.

The Evolving Threat Landscape: Emerging Technologies and Protection

The contemporary operational environment is characterized by rapidly evolving technologies that present both opportunities and challenges for protection. Two key areas of concern are the proliferation of small unmanned aircraft systems (UASs) and the increasing volume of information shared online.

Small UASs and the accessibility and increasing sophistication of commercially available drones pose significant threats to military operations. The commercial drone market is expected to experience substantial growth, rising from \$13 billion in 2024 to over \$65 billion by 2032.⁵ The growth of small UASs mandates a more proactive approach to mitigating these evolving threats. Beyond traditional air defense concerns, small UASs present operational challenges related to surveillance, reconnaissance, and potential payload delivery. Soldiers must adapt their training and tactics to counter these threats, including implementing protocols for operating in contested airspace while developing effective counter-small UAS measures. Some military installations have already implemented drone-free zones, with clear directives to neutralize all small UASs identified to be in prohibited airspace.

Information Proliferation

The vast amount of personal information shared online, particularly through social media and dating applications, creates vulnerabilities that adversaries can exploit. Currently in America, 30 percent of adults have used a dating app.⁶ These applications often involve geolocation data, unit affiliations, and personal details that can be aggregated to compromise operational security and help facilitate targeted attacks on military personnel. Training must emphasize the importance of online information security and responsible social media conduct. Protecting information in the digital domain is now a critical aspect of force protection.

Operating in a Degraded Environment: Embracing Analog Solutions

The increasing reliance on technology creates vulnerabilities in electromagnetic spectrum-contested environments. Units must be prepared to operate effectively in degraded environments, where access to digital systems is limited or denied. This requires using minimal resources to achieve proficiency in analog communication methods, manual battle tracking, and operations. Training should emphasize the importance of these low-tech solutions to ensure continuity of operations in contested environments.

Conclusion

The 2024 update to ADP 3-37 provides a crucial framework for understanding and implementing protection in the modern battlespace. By adopting a concept-driven approach, the doctrine empowers junior leaders at the battalion and brigade levels to effectively manage protection responsibilities. Furthermore, the updated doctrine recognizes the evolving threat landscape, emphasizing the need to adapt to emerging technologies and prepare for operations in degraded environments. This shift toward a more holistic and adaptable understanding of protection is essential for maintaining a proactive posture in an increasingly complex and contested operational environment.



Endnotes:

¹ADP 3-37, *Protection*, 10 January 2024.

²ATP 3-21.20, *Infantry Battalion*, 28 December 2016.

³ADP 3-37, *Protection*, 10 January 2024.

⁴ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, 31 July 2019.

⁵“Commercial Drone Market Size, Industry Share & COVID-19 Impact Analysis,” *Fortune Business*, 24 March 2025, <<https://www.fortunebusinessinsights.com/commercial-drone-market-102171>>, accessed on 16 April 2025.

⁶Emily A. Vogels, “10 Facts About Americans and Online Dating in 2019”, *Pew Research Center*, 6 February 2020, <<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/02/06/10-facts-about-americans-and-online-dating/>>, accessed on 16 April 2025.

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