Prioritizing Protection:

Creating Synchronized Success

By Sergeant First Class Mark D. Moore

As the battlefield evolves into domains defined by cutting-edge technology, the protection warfighting function (WFF) and protection cell integration role are more critical than ever. The protection concept is familiar, as the protection WFF has been organized as such since at least 2006. The role and actions of the protection WFF are familiar to enablers supporting protection missions. However, integration of protection with the other WFFs requires a more focused initiative at echelon. Actions must be taken to—

- Integrate key stakeholders into the Protection Working Group (PWG).
- Become familiar with the requirements of, and resources needed by, maneuver support elements to achieve combat effectiveness.
- Develop an understanding of the capabilities and limitations of protection assets.
- Understand interoperability and its role in intelligence preparation of the battlefield.
- Address institutional knowledge gaps.[1]

The first step in creating synchronized success is based largely on personalities and talent management. The right people must be serving in the right roles. They must be capable of working outside of their comfort zones to create relationships and build social capital with other staff members and members of other WFFs. Protection planners within echelons echo a common frustration: Physical barriers that require work to take place on different floors or even in separate buildings cause breakdowns in communication and hinder integration. While challenging, this pales in comparison to the challenges that lie ahead in a decentralized command system. Staff members must learn to communicate, plan, and integrate protection into every mission. The protection of personnel and property is not unique to deployed environments; while some roles have parallels in garrison, organizations must train as they fight and they must exercise the resources of the Army Protection Program. The protection prioritization list, often a central focus, is a key output of the PWG. For the protection priority list to be an effective tool, stakeholders must be integrated throughout the staff. This allows for a shared understanding of the mission and operational picture. If the PWG does not maintain a robust and diverse population, then the necessary relationships must be developed through engagements between the protection staff and adjacent leaders.

Familiarity with the requirements of warfighting elements and the resources needed to achieve combat effectiveness is paramount for multidomain operations. Commanders must continuously consider the coordination, synchronization, and integration of the protection capabilities necessary to consolidate gains and achieve the desired end state.[2] For example, on 1 August 2024, the XVIII Airborne Corps, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, began conducting Warfighter Exercise 24-05, which continued for 9 days. A protection fusion cell with representation from each of the WFFs and subordinate unit liaison officers conducted planning from a shared table, where they each addressed their unit capabilities and limitations. A common frustration of many of the protection cell members was that there was little to no focus on implementing scenarios in brigade level exercises, particularly for those outside the maneuver element. This situation occurs for various reasons: insufficient overall time allotted for the exercise, enablers disconnected as the primary "customer" or focus of the training, or the mindset that the proposed scenarios are unlikely to occur in the real-world operational environment—which, in the case of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive threat environments, could not be farther from the truth. With regard to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Russia has reportedly engaged Soldiers with chemical weapons, openly admitting to the use of riot control agents and even the toxic choking agent chloropicrin, which was first deployed on the battlefields of World War I.[3] For this reason, representatives of all WFFs must have a clear understanding of what action should be taken in the event of a chemical attack or similar crisis. Space must be allotted for focus on these scenarios, no matter how unlikely they seem to be. After all, we don't rise to the level of our expectations; we fall to the level of our training.[4]

Once requirements are understood across the staff, efforts can be synchronized through the scheme of protection to support the commander's intent and mission success. Members of the protection cell and PWG are expected to articulate the capabilities and limitations of their roles. To effectively accomplish this goal, personnel with the experience and knowledge must be part of the planning process to showcase their expertise.[5] The average Soldier cannot likely communicate the length of bridging assets, the weight limitations of the assets, or the average time it takes to execute a gap crossing, but engineers proficient in their field could inform the staff about each of these characteristics, as well as explain why the information might be a priority within the scheme of protection and, subsequently, the protection prioritization list. Although each of the protection tasks comes with its operational consideration, each must be synchronized and integrated within the scheme of protection to ensure reinforced protection efforts.[6]

As the PWG finds its rhythm, maintaining effectiveness requires constant repetition. The operational environment is ever-changing; therefore, the outputs of the protection cell must be based on the most current information and intelligence. Interoperability with supporting assets and adjacent units must be leveraged to facilitate this goal. Security forces assistance brigade personnel are an example of an asset that can be utilized to conduct intelligence preparation of the battlefield. Through partnerships with host-nation forces, human intelligence can be readily communicated to provide information about the state of the battlefield and to address civilian considerations regarding current and future plans. Another consideration is the way in which the intelligence and signal communities can play a critical role in achieving an information advantage. The disparity between command post software systems and the real-world environment requires that user input into predictive algorithms and the subsequent data output are correctly interpreted by subject matter experts who can translate the information into actionable intelligence.

Finally, the institutional foundation of protection must be addressed throughout the joint force. The Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officer Course, Fort Bliss, Texas, is one resource, where staff sergeants and above are educated on the foundations of the military decision-making process and the joint planning process. This course further explores Army operations through mission command and decisive action in multidomain and large-scale combat operations. Although the Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officer Course serves as an excellent primer for the WFFs, it should fully address the nuances of protection. While this course is branch-immaterial, other branch- or specialty-specific courses focus on furthering knowledge particular to the professions within the protection cell. The Protection Integration Course, Maneuver Support Center of Excellence (MSCoE), Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, is an example of a course that currently aims to bridge the gap in training. While this resident course is still in its infancy, it addresses many of the aforementioned concerns, bringing together members of protection cells from various echelons to train the latest in doctrine and foster discussions on lessons learned and best practices. The Joint Engineer Operations Course, U.S. Army Engineer School, Fort Leonard Wood, is another example; there, students are exposed to sister Service engineer planning considerations for a joint engineer staff in joint operations. Course managers at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command could support this training by including protection lessons into the Senior Leader Course within the Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development System, creating leaders who have an earlier familiarity with operations outside the tactical level.

The integration of the protection WFF and protection cells will be critical on the ever-evolving multidomain battlefield. Understanding the roles, functions, and outputs while synchronizing efforts across the operational environment will provide the foundations of mission success. Protection must be a continuous and enduring process that is planned, prepared, executed, and assessed throughout Army operations. It must encompass everything that makes Army forces difficult to detect, disrupt, and destroy.[7]

Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win.

—Sun Tzu[8]

Endnotes:

[1]E. John Busuego, "Lessons Learned in the Theater Force Protection Cell," *Army Chemical Review*, Summer 2019.

[2]Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-37, *Protection*, 10 January 2024, p. 2-9.

[3]John Healey and David Lammy, "U.K. Sanctions Russian Troops Deploying Chemical Weapons on the Battlefield," *GOV.UK*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-sanctions-russian-troops-deploying-chemical-weapons-on-the-battlefield>, accessed on 15 January 2025.

[4]Carmina Archilochi, *The Fragments of Archilochus*, undated.

[5]Tara K. Bradley, "Protection Integration in the Operations Process," *Military Police*, Spring 2015.

[6]ADP 3-37, p. 3-13.

[7]Ibid, p. vii.

[8]Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 5th Century B.C.

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