

Protection in an Armored Division— The Iron Way



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Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations*, defines protection as the “preservation of the effectiveness and survivability of mission-related military and nonmilitary personnel, equipment, facilities, information, and infrastructure deployed or located within or outside the boundaries of a given operational area.”¹ While this definition seems straightforward, effectively planning and executing the numerous tasks associated with the protection warfighting function (WfF)—which requires the integration of various discrete WfFs—can be challenging. This article outlines how the 1st Armored Division (1AD), known as America’s Tank Division, approaches protection during large-scale combat operations. It also shares best practices that emerged from the preparation and execution of Warfighter Exercise (WFX) 25-1, conducted in October 2024.

“Converse of Targeting” Methodology

As one of the newest Army WfFs, protection needs to be better understood and adequately integrated into mission planning and execution across the force. A common issue that hinders protection from effectively preserving combat power and ensuring freedom of maneuver is that various protection-related branches—such as Military Police, Air Defense, Engineer, and Chemical—operate in isolated “silos of excellence.” Additionally, failure to properly integrate and synchronize other WfFs into protection planning efforts is also common and compounded by staffing constraints across multiple command nodes. Facing these challenges, the 1AD protection enterprise significantly modified its processes, procedures, and fighting products during the command post exercises (CPXs) leading up to WFX 25-1. Much of the change was initiated with the arrival of Major General Curtis D. Taylor, the current commanding general of 1AD.

Upon taking command in July 2024, Major General Taylor provided initial guidance regarding each WfF—including a vision statement on protection within the division, in which he indicated that protection would be viewed as the converse of targeting and that the division Protection Working Group (PWG) would serve as a counter to the enemy’s Targeting Working Group. With this clear vision and a command-driven culture emphasizing protection planning, the 1AD protection cell worked diligently to

enhance its approach to the PWG and development of the protection prioritization list (PPL). The protection enterprise was directed to base planning efforts from the perspective of the enemy, with a particular focus on the enemy’s high-payoff target list (HPTL). As demonstrated by 1AD during CPX I-III, adhering to this process provides a clear understanding of what the enemy is likely to target and highlights the collection and delivery methods the enemy may use against items on the HPTL. Additionally, this methodology enabled the 1AD protection enterprise to more effectively prioritize critical assets, prescribe tasks (such as survivability moves, dispersion efforts, and alternating of Q-53 radar queuing cycles), and align protection enablers or other capabilities to mitigate risk. The analytical outputs were codified in the air tasking order (ATO) cycle on PPLs and were subsequently updated or adjusted through daily PWGs.

PWG Adjustments: Maintaining a 96-Hour Planning Horizon

During the CPX train-up for WFX 25-1, the 1AD protection enterprise faced challenges in maintaining a 96-hour planning horizon for critical tasks, such as making adjustments to the PPL, reallocating protection enablers, and conducting risk management analysis. To improve planning efficiency and focus within this 96-hour timeframe, the protection cell implemented significant changes to the PWG meeting agenda, the list of required attendees, and the assignments for briefings. Key revisions included the following:

- Opening the working group with a briefing by a division plans officer (G-5) focused on the division fight 96+ hours out. This provided timely planning updates and set the tone for keeping the discussion focused on three to four ATOs out.
- Reordering the PPL discussion and analysis (by ATO), starting at 96 hours out and working backward to the current fight. Staff analysis, discussion, and decisions that were focused on 96 hours out were prioritized and captured first.
- Preceding each PPL discussion (by ATO) with updated enemy HPTL analysis provided by the intelligence officer

(G-2). This improved the PPL discussion and analysis by providing critical updates to enemy HPTL items, targeting, tactics, patterns, and G-2 concerns. The continual reevaluation of the enemy HPTL within the 72-, 48-, and 24-hour windows was crucial to this effort, resulting in a more refined protection cell notion of enemy targeting objectives.

- Reorganizing the briefing order by priority of protection and reserving the final portion of the meeting for downtrace unit updates. This ensured that subordinate units had time to brief the protection enterprise, raise concerns, request additional enabler support, and provide critical input from their perspectives across the area of operations.
- Cutting all formal division staff briefing requirements, allowing only “by exception” critical updates pertinent to 1AD protection efforts. This preserved valuable time for G-5 updates, PPL discussions, and downtrace unit briefings.

After implementing these changes to the PWG meeting agenda, the 1AD protection enterprise experienced significant improvements in several areas, including overall operational awareness, PPL discussion and analysis, synchronization with subordinate units, promptness of requests for additional forces, and time management during the working group meeting. Output was primarily concentrated on decisions that needed Deputy Commanding General–Support approval. This included decisions concerning PPL updates, recommendations for the dynamic retasking of enablers, and refined protection guidance that was published in the daily fragmentary order.

Revamping of the PPL Template

Throughout CPX I-III, the 1AD protection enterprise developed multiple iterations of a PPL template to enhance the prioritization of mission-critical assets and the threats and hazards associated with each asset. These updates incorporated aligned enablers or mitigations and assessments of residual risks. The revised versions of the PPL were tailored to meet specific requirements set forth by the division commander. The top items on the PPL were assigned three layers of protection to address ground, air, and indirect fire threats. To codify these threats and synchronize the enablers or mitigations for comprehensive coverage across all three protection layers, adjustments were made to the doctrinal PPL template that has historically been used by 1AD, as outlined in Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-37, *Protection*.²

In the final PPL template, recognized as a best practice by the Mission Command Training Program during WFX 25-1, assets were organized into a three-tiered system based on their mission criticality (rather than using a simple 1–N priority list). (See Table 1.) Additionally, the format allowed for the identification of specific threats to each asset, presentation of a three-layer coverage status, and outline of specific units and tasks designed to mitigate risks through active and passive measures. The three tiers were—

- **Tier 1 (Mission-critical):** Loss of asset would result in mission failure. Assets receive prioritized resources to mitigate risk and cover all three layers of protection.
- **Tier 2:** Loss of asset would result in a severely degraded capability to accomplish the mission. Assets have three layers of protection to the greatest extent possible.
- **Tier 3:** Loss of asset would result in a degraded capability to accomplish the mission. Mission requirements/enabler availability determine the alignment of protection assets.

The transition to a tiered PPL with three-layer coverage status led to immediate positive outcomes. Specifically, it enhanced the prioritization of protection enablers, improved residual risk management, and facilitated asset movement between tiers. The tiered list presented division senior leaders with a clearer understanding of asset prioritization than the mere changing of numerical values would have. These modifications ultimately increased clarity and efficiency in discussions related to risk and enabler alignment and enabled the division to quickly capture changes and publish them in the daily fragmentary order.

Revision of the Protection Common Operating Picture

A significant revision implemented by the 1AD protection enterprise involved redesigning the division protection common operating picture. Utilizing the virtual joint operating center as the primary collaboration point, staff sections and essential entities related to the protection mission (G-2, division transportation officer, maneuver enhancement brigade) were provided with a dedicated space to share updates and products from various working groups. This information was consolidated into a comprehensive protection common operating picture slide, which displayed crucial details, including PPL changes, asset locations, enabler combat power, risks to the mission and forces, and significant activities related to protection. (See Tables 2 and 3.) The virtual joint operating center protection common operating picture streamlined communication across different command nodes and ensured that updated products were disseminated throughout the protection enterprise.

Changes to Rear Command Post Manning

Roster changes in the 1AD rear command post (RCP) significantly enhanced the ability of the protection enterprise to conduct effective PWGs and synchronize protection efforts across various WfFs. Increased representation from the division staff, including the division sustainment brigade, G-2, operations (G-3), air cell, fires cell, and G-5, improved WfF integration and facilitated more effective PPL analysis during the PWG, regardless of operational tempo or virtual communication challenges. This expanded staffing capacity allowed greater focus on incorporating protection into future operations planning at the RCP and division headquarters. Additionally, the increased representation from the maneuver enhancement brigade, including more operations planners, liaison officers, and air defense personnel, improved coordination of enabler support for the PPL and

PPL – ATO JK										
Asset (Owner)	Location	Criticality Notes	Threats	Prescriptive Mitigations	Identified Requirement	SPF	IDF	ADA	Aligned Units/Enablers	Mitigations/Coverage Notes
Tier 1 Assets (Loss results in mission failure)										
Patriot Battery (A/3-4 ADA)	DSA IRON	Critical for AMD coverage of PPL assets and AO IRON	SPF, IDF, UAS/Air	Hardened firing positions, displacement ops, local security, CFZ, local ADA coverage	1x MP or IN PLT 1x ADA PLT				93 MP BN: local security 67 MEB: survivability construction DIVARTY: CFZ 4-60 ADA: local ADA coverage	- Alternate firing positions must be constructed IVO templated battery firing site
Q53 Radars (DIVARTY)	DIV RPAs	Critical for 1AD counterfire missions	SPF, IDF, UAS/Air, Jamming	Survivability moves, local security, CFZ, local ADA coverage	1x MP or IN PLT per RPA 1x ADA PLT				2-12 IN BN: local security DIVARTY: CFZ 4-60 ADA: local ADA coverage	
HIMARS (2-300 FA)	DIV PAAs	Critical for 1AD counterfire and shaping missions	SPF, IDF, UAS/Air	Survivability moves after fire missions, displacement ops, local security, CFZ, local ADA coverage	1x MP or IN PLT per PAA 1x ADA PLT				2-12 IN BN: local security DIVARTY: CFZ 4-60 ADA: local ADA coverage	- HIMARS must conduct survivability move after each fire mission
Tier 2 Assets (Loss results in severely degraded ability to accomplish mission)										
FARPs (1AD CAB)	Various	Critical for CAB deep attack missions	SPF, IDF, UAS/Air	Survivability moves after use, local security, CFZ	1x MP or IN PLT				93 MP BN: local security DIVARTY: CFZ 4-60 ADA: early engagement coverage	- ADA coverage limited to early engagement along AAoAs - FARPs must conduct survivability move after aircraft utilize site
LSA IRON 2 (DSB)	OBI ATLANTA	Critical to sustain 1AD tempo N of PL PACKERS	SPF, IDF, UAS/Air, TBM	Survivability moves, displacement ops, local security, CFZ	1x MP or IN PLT				93 MP BN: local security DIVARTY: CFZ 4-60 ADA: early engagement coverage	- ADA coverage limited to early engagement along AAoAs
MRBCs (111 EN BDE)	OBI PORTLAND/ OBI ATLANTA	Critical for WGX ops/GLOC establishment throughout AO IRON	SPF, IDF, UAS/Air	Survivability moves, displacement ops, local security, CFZ, local ADA coverage	1x MP or IN CO 1x ADA PLT				93 MP BN: local security DIVARTY: CFZ 4-60 ADA: local ADA coverage	- MRBCs must remain dispersed during staging and movement across AO IRON
Tier 3 Assets (Loss results in degraded ability to accomplish mission)										
Existing Bridges (HN GOV)	OBI VIOLET	Critical for WGX ops/GLOC establishment throughout AO IRON	SPF, IDF, UAS/Air, TBM	Local security, CFZ, local ADA coverage	1x MP or IN PLT				93 MP BN: local security DIVARTY: CFZ 4-60 ADA: early engagement coverage	- Limited local security provided by HN LE - No active CFZ (out of range) - Limited local ADA coverage by HN MANPADs
CEC-As (MSCs)	Various	Critical for mobility operations across AO IRON	SPF, IDF, UAS/Air	Survivability moves, displacement ops, local security	N/A				MSCs: local/self security	- CEC-As will self-secure against ground threats - No dedicated CFZs aligned to CEC-As - ADA coverage limited to early engagement along AAoAs
DSA (MEB/DSB)	OBI PORTLAND	Critical for C2 and sustainment of 1AD mission	SPF, IDF, UAS/Air, TBM	Survivability moves, survivability construction, displacement ops, local security, CFZ, local ADA coverage	1x MP or IN CO 1x ADA PLT				67MEB/DSB: local security DIVARTY: CFZ 4-60 ADA: local ADA coverage	- Local security limited/provided by tenant units

Legend:

Dedicated Coverage	
Limited Coverage	
No Dedicated Coverage	

1AD—1st Armored Division
 AAoA—aerial avenue of approach
 ADA—air-defense artillery
 AMD—air and missile defense
 AO—area of operation
 As—armored
 ATO—air tasking order
 BDE—brigade
 BN—battalion
 C2—command and control
 CAB—combat aviation brigade
 CEC—combat engineer company
 CFZ—critical friendly zone
 CO—company
 DIV—division
 DIVARTY—division artillery
 DSA—division support area

DSB—division sustainment brigade
 EN—engineer
 FARP—forward arming and refueling point
 GLOC—ground line of communication
 GOV—government
 HIMARS—high-mobility artillery rocket system
 HN—host nation
 IDF—indirect fire
 IN—infantry
 IVO—in vicinity of
 LE—law enforcement
 LSA—logistical support area
 MANPAD—man-portable air defense
 MEB—maneuver enhancement brigade
 MP—military police
 MRBC—multirole bridge company
 MSC—major subordinate command

N—north
 N/A—not applicable
 OBJ—objective
 ops—operations
 PAA—position area for artillery
 PL—phase line
 PLT—platoon
 PPL—protection prioritization list
 RPA—radar position for artillery
 SPF—special-purpose forces
 TBM—theater ballistic missile
 UAS—unmanned aerial system
 WGX—wet-gap crossing

Table 1. PPL Template

CPCE MAP WITH RELEVANT OVERLAYS, PPL ASSETS, ENY LOCATIONS, AND PROTECTION-RELATED SIGACTS	LAST 24/NEXT 24-96:	
	RISK TO MISSION/FORCE:	
	RFFs/RFIs:	
	ANTICIPATED DECISIONS:	
PROTECTION/MEB ENABLER SLANTS (TCF, MPs, SHORADs, SENTINELS, MRBCs)	CURRENT ENY HPTL	CURRENT PPL
FPCON, CBRN DEFENSE WARNING, MOPP LEVEL, AMD WARNING, WEAPONS CONTROL STATUS		

Legend:

1AD—1st Armored Division
AMD—air and missile defense
CBRN—chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear
COP—common operating picture
CPCE—command post computing environment
ENY—enemy
FPCON—force protection condition
HPTL—high-payoff target list
MEB—maneuver enhancement brigade

MOPP—mission-oriented protective posture
MP—military police
MRBC—multirole bridge company
PPL—protection prioritization list
RFF—request for forces
RFI—request for information
SHORAD—short-range air defense
SIGACT—significant activity
TCF—tactical combat force

Table 2. 1AD Protection COP Template

G2 NOTES	CURRENT ENY HPTL	PROTECTION COP SLIDE	CURRENT PPL	PPL NOTES
AWG NOTES	ASSESSMENT WORKING GROUP SLIDE		MOBILITY WORKING GROUP SLIDE	DTO NOTES
SECTION RUNNING NOTES				
DAILY FRAGO INPUTS	PMO	ENG	AMD	CBRN
	CPCE LAYER LOCATIONS			
	PMO	ENG	AMD	CBRN
AAR COMMENTS				

1AD – 1st Armored Division
AAR – After Action Review
AMD – Air & Missile Defense
AWG – Assessment Working Group
CBRN – Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear
COP – Common Operating Picture
CPCE – Command Post Computing Environment
DTO – Division Transportation Officer


ENG – Engineer
ENY – Enemy
FRAGO – Fragmentary Order
HPTL – High Payoff Target List
PMO – Provost Marshal Office
PPL – Protection Prioritization List
VJOC – Virtual Joint Operating Center

Table 3. 1AD Protection COP Template

rear area security operations. An additional benefit of these staffing changes included the battle tracking and planning capacity necessary for the RCP to assume command of division operations for short periods as the mission required.

Offensive protection operations in the rear area constituted another added benefit of the RCP manning restructure. With the addition of a dedicated fires cell and an increase in maneuver enhancement brigade representation, operations aimed at targeting special-purpose forces behind the forward line of own troops became more synchronized and deliberate, bolstering efforts to protect critical assets and logistical nodes/operations throughout the rear area. The efficiency of offensive protection operations became especially important during the final phases of WFX 25-1, where the 1AD rear area and ground lines of communication far exceeded the doctrinal security capabilities of the attached maneuver enhancement brigade. The RCP manning changes enabled the 1AD protection enterprise to better integrate collection activities with tactical combat force and military police units across the rear to locate and disrupt special-purpose forces operations targeting PPL assets, command nodes, and critical sustainment operations.

Conclusion

Given the current events in Europe and the range of threats from the strategic support area to the division battlespace, the importance of protection is increasing. Protection requires thorough integration across all WfFs. Through its “Converse of Targeting” methodology, updates to the PWG agenda, and improvements in fighting products, the 1AD protection enterprise succeeded during WFX 25-1. Furthermore, the 1AD protection enterprise found that enhancing the clarity and conciseness of protection-related products prompted leaders from other WfFs to be more willing to allocate additional personnel, resources, and time to address the challenges. By sharing best practices from 1AD, units preparing for their WFXs or deployments can continue to improve their protection efforts, helping to preserve combat power and mitigate threats to their respective formations. 

Endnotes:

¹JP 3-0, *Joint Campaigns and Operations*, 18 June 2022.

²ADP 3-37, *Protection*, 31 July 2019.

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