

What is Protection in 2040?

By Mr. Michael J. Martori

“The protection warfighting function is essential to preserving future capabilities in multidomain operations.”

—D. Scott McKean¹

Protection has always been a complicated and complex warfighting function—from the War on Terrorism (when protection was defined by base defense, barriers, physical security, persistent ground surveillance, and blimps, which are inherently passive and reactive) to today’s need for dispersion, sensor-to-shooter interactions, and robotics, which shift the focus to active measures that provide overmatch. If you ask 10 different people what they think protection is, you will likely get 10 different answers. So, what is protection?

As the Army modernizes through its signature systems and adaptive formations, leaders and Soldiers must understand protection in 2030 and, more importantly, operationalized protection. Approving U.S. Army Futures Command (AFC) Pamphlet (Pam) 71-20-7, *Army Futures Command Concept for Protection 2028*,² in 2021 was a significant first step in realizing these goals. Fast forward to today; and now, it is AFC’s mission to deliver the Army of 2030 and design the Army of 2040. Protection in 2030 must include ways to preserve critical capabilities, assets, and activities against threats in all domains; deny the enemy freedom of action; and enable access so that commanders can apply maximum combat power to defeat the enemy. Protection capabilities must deny, degrade, and disrupt enemy positions of advantage, freedom of action, and abilities to destroy friendly critical capabilities, assets, and activities across the operational environment, including the homeland.

In speaking about the ever-changing character of warfare, General James E. Rainey, AFC Commanding General, makes these three points:³

- There is a paradigm shift from “conducting fires to maneuver” to “conducting maneuver to fire.” Some of you may be shaking your heads, but think about our future fight and how fires will shape that fight—even more than troops on the ground will. General Rainey says, “I personally think fires is going to move back up ahead of maneuver to the top slot. We’re going to maneuver to place fires versus using fires to condition maneuver.”
- There is a need for capable formations that are enabled by human-machine integration. The Army fights by formation, and capable formations—with all the systems, personnel, and training necessary to fight and win our Nation’s wars—are required. Through human-machine integration, robotic systems will become our forward line, or “first contact,” if you will.
- We must “figure out” protection. It’s this point that keeps me up at night. Hearing a senior Army leader say that we must “figure out protection” is scary. Large-scale combat operations are very different than operations conducted during the last fight. On a battlefield where you can be killed if you can be seen, and you can be seen; well . . . you fill in the blank. In that fight, protection is more critical than ever. Although artificial intelligence, machine learning, dispersion, deception, signature systems, and capable formations will all provide protection, more must be done.

For protection to truly be understood in 2040, commanders must change the way they think about it. Think about the last warfighter exercise in which you were involved and about the role of the protection cell in that exercise. How did the protection coordinator influence the fight—or even make him- or herself be heard, outside of providing the commander with a Protection Prioritized List (PPL)? Too often, protection personnel talk about protection with other protection personnel, which is mildly interesting but not very useful. The protection cell is responsible for preserving the effectiveness and survivability of mission-related military and nonmilitary personnel, equipment, facilities, information, and infrastructure deployed or located within the division operational

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to report EOD incidents would allow EOD teams on the ground to make reports to EOD leaders in real time. This repository of information could also be used to address and mitigate issues during the stabilization phase of the of the operation. A well-established and sustained EOCOP is imperative for successful joint communication and protection efforts within the area of operations. Enforcing a shared understanding of explosive hazards on the battlespace allows all agencies, departments, and branches of the military to benefit from a well-maintained and disseminated EOCOP. Second, and more importantly, integration with an artificial intelligence/machine-learning system is essential for EOD support for discerning explosive and explosive ordnance threats. The platform must be capable of searching for, and deriving meaningful information from, web-based sources such as various media outlets, social networks, news stories, uploaded videos, and video logs in order to gain an information advantage. The platform must then be able to identify, recognize, and distinguish explosive ordnance threats found during searches and logically categorize them on a map within the CPCE. Commanders who gain an informational advantage can quickly and accurately gain situational awareness, allow for informed and swift decision making, and exert influence in their areas of operations. Such capabilities would provide EOD battalions and groups with historical and real-time information and intelligence on unexploded ordnance; new explosive hazards or munitions requiring reporting and/or interrogation; and emerging adversary tactics, techniques, and procedures. With these capabilities, EOD leaders may present lifesaving recommendations to and for Soldiers on the ground and ensure that EOD technicians are better equipped to mitigate, attack, and exploit explosive threats with precision and veracity.

As the Army seeks to better understand roles and best practices within the LSCO paradigm, it is imperative that EOD professionals—as well as all other professionals within the Army—seek to evolve and prepare for the possibility of a LSCO fight. EOD personnel have a profound opportunity to assist commanders in making knowledgeable and audacious decisions to fight and win our Nation's wars.



Endnote:

¹Pete Blaber, *The Mission, the Men, and Me: Lessons From a Former Delta Force Commander*, Dutton Caliber, New York, 2017, p. 234.

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area. If the PPL were integrated as a product to synchronize operations for the next 72–96 hours—along with the air tasking order framework that fires personnel use to plan air support, indirect fires, and aviation attacks—into centralized planning, that would be useful! Integrating the PPL into the air tasking order cycle would allow for thorough staff analysis and coordination to maximize resources, while also enabling the commander to assess risk to the mission during decisive operations. Like the fire support coordinator who (with the targeting team) provides approved guidance, the high-payoff target list, the attack guidance matrix, and target selection standards in relationship to the intelligence and operations situation briefings, the protection coordinator provides guidance on resources needed to protect the approved PPL, assesses task force capabilities and the availability of resources, and then deconflicts future PPLs—all while coordinating resources for decisive operations 72–96 hours before an operation. Protection must be engrained in commanders' thought processes and integrated into the operations process.

If protection in 2040 resembles what it does today, our Army risks failure. Although opinions differ, most leaders can describe what protection currently looks like, what enables it, and what effects it has on mission success. If you ask those same leaders about those same three aspects of protection in 2040, I wonder if you would get any answer at all—never mind differing opinions.

In closing, I offer this description of protection in 2040: “Protection in 2040 will be fully integrated into the operations process through the commander's decision boards, enabled by machine learning and algorithms that fuse data and information to assist commanders in making informed, real-time, risk-based decisions and by systems supported by human-machine integration that provide protected maneuver to enable precision fires.”



Endnotes:

¹AFC Pam 71-20-7, *Army Futures Command Concept for Protection 2028*, 9 April 2021.

²Ibid.

³General James E. Rainey, Association of the United States Army Global Force Symposium and Exposition, Huntsville, Alabama, 28 March 2023.

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