

COMBAT SUPPORT ENABLEMENT OF PROTECTION SECURITY AND MOBILITY OPERATIONS

By Captain Andres N. Figueroa

From the lens of a junior officer with some experience in a military police combat support battalion, the enablement of protection is evident in multiple operational environments. The beauty of the U.S. Army Military Police Corps Regiment is that we enable protection during crisis in garrison and deployed environments. However, I argue that we don't just *enable* protection; rather, we *are* protection.

Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Campaigns and Operations*, defines protection as the “efforts to secure and defend 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 to maintain mission effectiveness.”¹ If you've ever been part of a military police combat support battalion, you know that it embodies this definition around the clock. During all hours of the day, the sons and daughters of our Corps tactical military police battalions immerse themselves in protection through law enforcement operations. A subordinate unit within the same battalion simultaneously indulges itself in protection by providing support to combatant commanders in tactical environments. This multifaceted aspect of our combat support battalions is the primary reason for our extreme value to the Army. Although I know how crucial we are in providing protection during crisis in both garrison and deployed environments, I'd like to demonstrate just how our tactical units epitomize protection on the battlefield.

According to JP 3-0, a crisis is “an incident or situation involving a possible threat to the United States, its citizens, military forces, or vital interests that develops rapidly and creates a condition of such diplomatic, economic, or military importance that commitment of military forces and resources is contemplated to achieve national and/or strategic objectives”²; and according to Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-37, *Protection*, it “occurs when an adversary takes action or when there are indications and warnings that our opponent is likely to do something contrary to U.S. interests that is serious enough to warrant a military response.”³ For the purposes of this article, let's refer to crisis as “war.” Our Army exists to fight and win our Nation's wars, and protection is a critical component that enables our success.

There are four categories of primary protection tasks: conduct risk management, protect capabilities, protect areas, and protect information.⁴ Our combat support units

arguably find themselves to be primary contributors for protecting capabilities and areas during war. But, how do they do this? Protection on the battlefield is accomplished through one of our most prized disciplines—security and mobility support.

I believe that we can support maneuver commanders and add tremendous value to the fight when our combat support units focus on assisting with establishing the forward line of troops (FLOT) and rear area security. Performance of these tasks allows us to prove that our tactical elements are critical factors impacting the entire battlefield.

War must start somewhere, and the FLOT must be established. Our role at the FLOT is short-lived; our combat support units replace maneuver assets at the FLOT, which allows the maneuver units to push further into the battlefield thereby turning the FLOT into the rear area. Within the protection realm, the military police combat support unit is the primary force that understands security, making it valuable for the offensive advances of maneuver elements. To contextualize this process, think of a gap crossing and where it fits in on Figure 1.

On the map of Figure 1, our combat support units have a heavy presence at the FLOT. In supporting entrance onto the battlefield, the focus should be mainly on traffic control posts and route reconnaissance. Traffic control post efforts allow freedom of movement and maneuver in the deep area. Military police combat support units ensure that the battlespace does not get congested. If requested, our forces can also execute route reconnaissance and provide valuable feedback to maneuver commanders. Traffic control posts and route reconnaissance enable us to carry out the fundamentals of security. Military police provide reaction time and maneuver space for the main efforts.

As actions on the objective at the FLOT continue and maneuver forces pass through the governed sectors, the responsibility of the military police combat support unit quickly transitions from securing the FLOT to securing the rear area. In the rear, the most critical combat support unit efforts consist of convoy security and area security. In this space, the combat support units quickly become the security experts in order to protect supporting forces of other warfighting functions against Level I and Level II threats. Here, our Regiment can be heavily involved in brigade and division support areas within large-scale combat operations, as depicted in Figure 2.

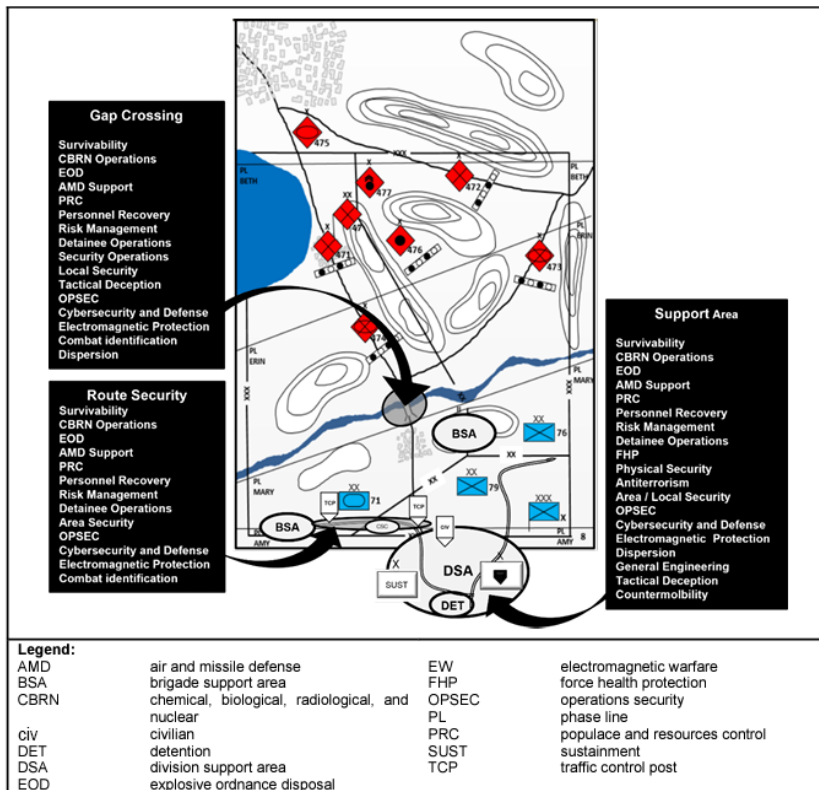


Figure 1. Notional protection measures during large-scale combat operations⁵

Support units at the helm of brigade and division support areas recognize significant value in our military police combat support units because we allow them to focus on their primary missions by keeping them secure. Many of the elements within these support areas consist of sustainers and maintainers that must fully focus on their jobs in order to appropriately support maneuver forces; they cannot sacrifice personnel for security. That is where military police come into play. Our modified table of organization and equipment allows us to protect and defend support forces with the correlating weapons required to defeat enemy forces that might find their way into the rear area. Tactical military police units can facilitate continued support operations in the rear area by securing logistics package operations during movement and support areas during operations. These aspects of our jobs may not be the most appealing, and they can be extremely thankless—but they allow us to embrace our enabling capabilities for adjacent units during large-scale combat operations.

I know what you are thinking: There are other military police disciplines like policing operations and detainee operations as well! You're right; there are. I am not arguing that one discipline is stronger or more critical than another; that would be a long dissertation. Instead, I am attempting to generate thought about the most critical aspects of proving our worth to maneuver forces on the battlefield. As our Army continues to emphasize large-scale combat operations, our military police combat support units must establish themselves in the fight for maneuver space by enabling protection through security and mobility operations. Although protection is but one of the six warfighting functions (and some may view military police as just a "piece of the pie"), without military police, protection cannot reach its full potential.

Endnotes:

- ¹JP 3-0, *Joint Campaigns and Operations*, 18 June 2022.
- ²Ibid.
- ³ADP 3-37, *Protection*, 10 January 2024.
- ⁴Ibid.
- ⁵Ibid.
- ⁶Army Technique Publication (ATP) 3-39.30, *Security and Mobility Support*, 21 May 2020.

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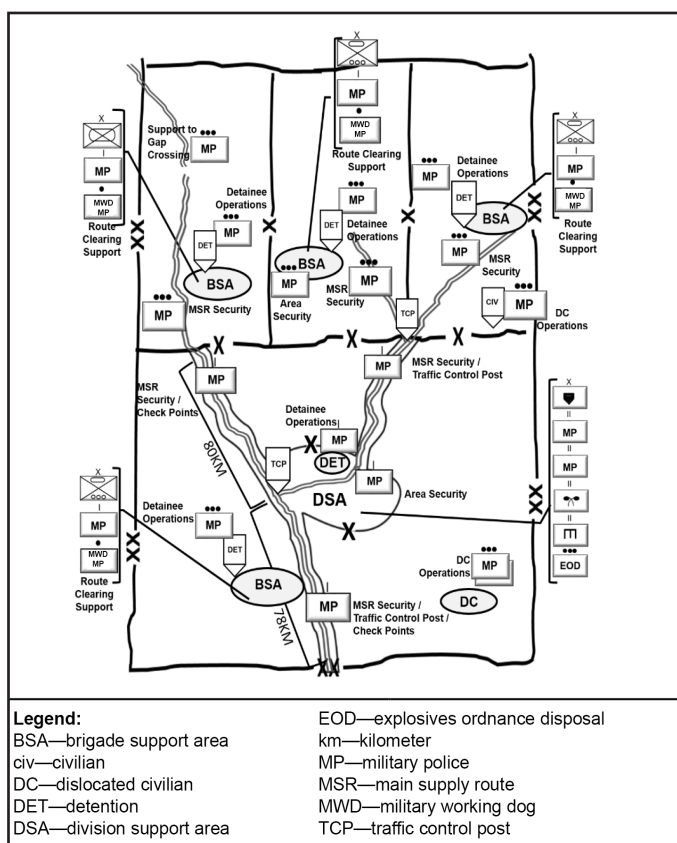


Figure 2. Notional military police support to a division in the offense⁶