

Operationalizing the Protection Prioritized List

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The California National Guard 40th Infantry Division (40ID), participated in Warfighter Exercise (WFX) 22-4 Command Post Exercise at Fort Hood, Texas from 4-13 April 2022. The WFX provided the 40ID with the tools and confidence to execute a WFX later in the year and their follow-on mobilization in 2023.

Working with the Army's III Corps during the WFX allowed the 40ID staff to solidify processes while innovating new ways to synchronize the movement and maneuver with sustainment and protection warfighting functions. The division's protection cell is instrumental in synchronizing the disparate warfighting functions. 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's operational area.

The 40ID's Rear Command Post (RCP) used the Protection Prioritized List (PPL) as the central planning product to synchronize all operations in the division rear area for the next 72-96 hours. Staff planners in the RCP organized the PPL within the Air Tasking Order (ATO) framework that the fires warfighting function uses to plan air support, indirect fires, and Army aviation attacks.

Synchronizing operations allows the RCP to maximize the limited resources of the division's Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB), a multifunctional brigade headquarters designed to command and control forces more efficiently from multiple organizations that conduct tasks to enable support area operations. Maximizing the MEB's efficiency helps extend operational reach while limiting risks to forces (RTF).

Integrating the PPL to the ATO cycle allows for thorough staff analysis and coordination to maximize resources while enabling the Division staff to assess risks to mission (RTM) during the decisive operation. The "critical path" is what many in army staffs use to describe the logical ordering and nesting of key products and meetings that facilitate the commander's decision-making. The Division staff invests a significant amount of time in determining the specific critical path for their organization that best enables decision-making for their commander. The RCP sustainment synchronization, transportation working group, maintenance working group, and protection working group allowed staff planners to manage information at various echelons, to extend operational reach and manage RTM.

“We need to strongly connect the PPL with the division's operations to ensure that we are protecting the right things that the division needs for operational reach. Using the ATO cycle days as the framework for our planning will synchronize protection with sustainment, maneuver, and fires. It also is a forcing function to revisit the PPL daily and make necessary adjustments.”

BG Robert T. Wooldridge, 40ID DCG-S

The MEB Commander also serves as the division's Protection Coordinator (PCOORD), a draft doctrinal role very similar to the Division Artillery Commander who operates as the Division Fire Support Coordinator (FSCOORD). The FSCOORD provides the approved targeting guidance, High Payoff Target List, attack guidance matrix, and target selection standards with the targeting team in relationship to the intelligence and operations situation briefings. Similarly, the PCOORD discusses the resourcing needed to protect the approved PPL. Additionally, the PCOORD assesses the task force capabilities and availability of the MEB resources and then deconflicts future PPL, while coordinating resources for decisive operations 72-96 hours out.

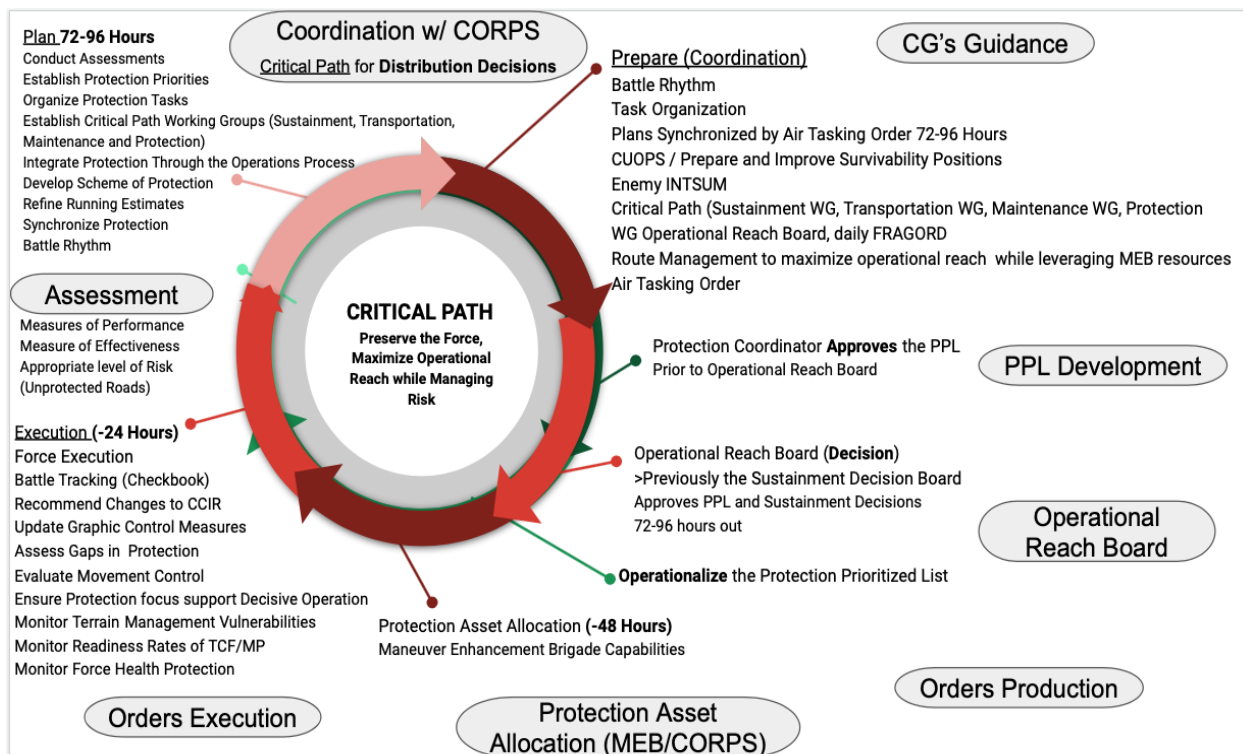


Figure 1: Visual depiction of the planning cycle

Assets on the PPL become named areas of interest (NAI) for the MEB, thus requiring resources to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance and, or protection of the PPL assets ensuring no gaps in NAI coverage. The PCOORD then notifies the protection enterprise by leveraging the critical path (see Figure 1) to present the RTF based on gaps in NAI coverage. The critical path includes the PPL, protection working group, operational reach board, and the Commander's update brief. The critical path allows the PCOORD to communicate risk to the Deputy Commanding General or the Deputy Commanding General for Support (DCG-S) leading to

dynamic re-tasking of resources for adequate protection or assuming risk in favor of seizing the initiative.

Critical to a division's success is to "operationalize" the PPL by publishing an updated PPL in each division fragmentary order, along with the appropriate tasks to subordinate units that conduct the protection mission. This ensures that subordinate units have sufficient time to plan, prepare, and protect items on the PPL while the protection enterprise assesses gaps and subsequent RTM.

Figure 1 is a visual depiction of the planning cycle as it relates to the PPL, while following the Army operations processⁱ of plan, prepare, execute, and assess while overlapping elements of the ATO cycle.

The Operation Reach Board is a daily meeting, chaired by the Division DCG-S, that merges protection and sustainment decisions into one decision board. The 40ID protection enterprise assessed the PPL up to 96 hours ahead in coordination with the ATO cycle. Figure 2 illustrates how the 40ID leveraged the critical path in coordination with the ATO cycle. This effort allowed the division to preserve combat power during the attack (DJ), then transition to protect critical assets during the wet gap crossing (DK-DL), and finally preserve combat power in preparation for future operations (DM).

By operationalizing the PPL and aligning it with ATO framework, the RCP successfully synchronized movement and maneuver with sustainment and protection warfighting functions. This technique may increase the synchronization of division units throughout the entire United States Army.

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40ID PROTECTION PRIORITIZATION LIST (PPL)		AS OF: DATE/TIME ZONE	
Legend: + =Added since previous ATO, ↑ =raised priority since last ATO, ↓ =Lowered priority, ^ =Defended by Corps assets, * =UNDEFENDED			
MEB EXECUTION (NEXT 24)	PPL MEB PLANNING (NEXT 48)	PPL Div/MEB PLANNING (NEXT 72)	PPL Div PLANNING (NEXT 96)
10 April	11 April	12 April	13 April
ATO - DJ	ATO - DK	ATO - DL	ATO - DM
DIVARTY	Wet Gap Crossing ↑	11 ACR C2 Node ↑	11 ACR C2 Node ↑
3-197 MLRS	3-197 MLRS	Wet Gap Crossing ↓	DIVARTY ↑
Wet Gap Crossing +	DIVARTY ↓	1-35 Eng BN ↑	3-197 MLRS ↑
MSR Illinois ↑	11 ACR C2 Node ↑	DIVARTY ↓	Wet Gap Crossing ^ ↓
MSR Washington ↑	1-35 Eng BN ↑	3-197 MLRS ↓	MSR Illinois ↑
DSA (includes DMAIN)	MSR Nebraska ↑	MSR Nebraska	MSR Nebraska
Combat Support Hospital ^	MSR Illinois ↓	MSR Illinois	1-35 Eng BN
MSR Sacramento	DSA ↓ (DIV Rear)	Combat Support Hospital ^ ↑	Combat Support Hospital ^ ↑
MSR Nebraska	Combat Support Hospital ^ ↓	DSA ↑	MSR Sacramento ↑
* MSR Kansas	MSR Sacramento ↓	MSR Sacramento	* MSR Washington ↑
11 ACR C2 Node +	MSR Washington ↓	* MSR Washington	* MSR Kansas ↑
1-35 Eng BN	* MSR Kansas	* MSR Kansas	* DSA (Transition to CORPS Rear) ^ ↓
	* MSR Tampa +	* MSR Tampa	* MSR Tampa ↑
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Figure 2: "critical path" in coordination with the ATO cycleⁱⁱ

ⁱ FM 5-0, Planning and Orders Production, Headquarters, Department of the Army, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN35403-FM_5-0-000-WEB-1.pdf, May 2022

ⁱⁱ APPENDIX 12 (PROTECTION PRIORITIZATION LIST) TO ANNEX E (PROTECTION) TO OPORD 2204 40ID