

Force Protection for Checkpoint Operations

by First Lieutenant Patrick R. Milligan

Checkpoints are used to control movement of vehicles, personnel, or materiel along a specified route; and are classified as deliberate or hasty. They help prevent trafficking of contraband items, ensure proper use of routes by both civilian and military traffic, prevent unauthorized access or infiltration of restricted or controlled areas by local civilians or military forces, maintain continuous monitoring of road movement, and serve as local security and observation outposts.

This article will focus primarily on the issue of force protection — planning for and implementing force protection measures for both deliberate and hasty checkpoints. It will also address some of the tactics, techniques, and procedures utilized during checkpoint operations. The article is based on the experiences of Apache Troop, 1st Squadron, 1st U.S. Cavalry from 1 January 1996 to 17 October 1996 in Northeast Bosnia-Herzegovina. The soldiers of A Troop established seven deliberate checkpoints in a five month time period, all on major routes through the Zone of Separation.

Force Protection Planning

Force protection and checkpoint defense are primary concerns in a stability operations environment, and are mutually dependent. Force protection was a primary concern and *the* buzzword of Operation Joint Endeavor. Many specific measures were taken to prevent the unnecessary loss of manpower — as outlined in the tactics, techniques, and procedures implemented and utilized for vehicular convoys, base camp protection, and checkpoint operations. Checkpoint force protection measures (the focus of this article) included the use of improved materials for cover and concealment of soldiers and checkpoint structures, obstacle and barrier plans, perimeter lighting, and operational procedures (to include defense contingency plans).

Force protection planning for checkpoint operations requires in-depth troop leading procedures (TLPs) conducted at the platoon level. During mission analysis, it is important to focus on three specific areas — the Threat, the terrain, and the supporting assets needed during



Two Bradleys guard Checkpoint Apache 2 along Route Arizona in northeast Bosnia-Herzegovina.

checkpoint operations. Each item influences checkpoint force protection planning and may influence the execution of operations.

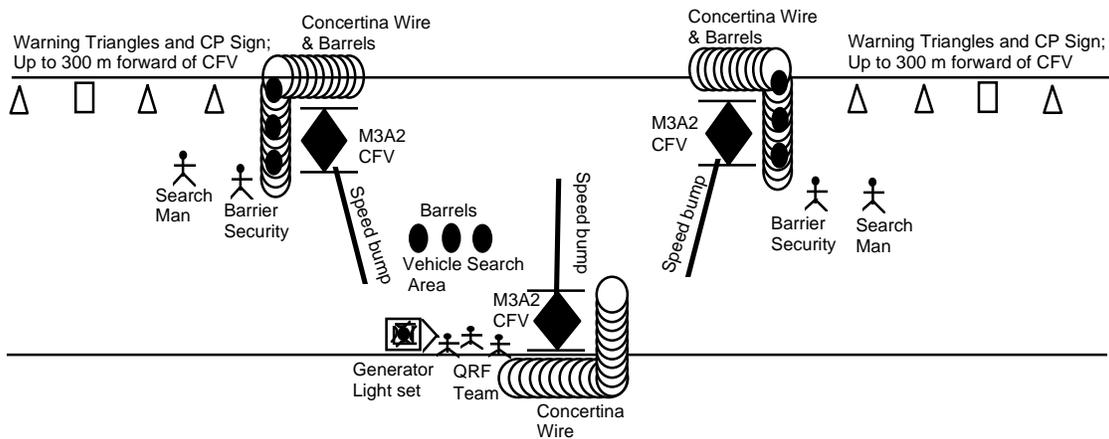
In a peacekeeping or peace-enforcing environment, the Threat is not always a visible, recognizable, or definable force. As the bombings in Beirut and Dhahran have both shown, invisible terrorists and factions dressed in civilian clothing, using guerrilla warfare tactics, pose a constant threat to our forces. During the planning phase, leaders must identify Threat avenues of approach (AAs) to the checkpoint (dismounted avenues of approach, possible sniper locations, and high speed vehicular AAs), and this vigilance must be continued by the soldiers manning a checkpoint. The Threat template incorporated with the checkpoint layout will assist in identifying threat AAs. The platoon leader, or checkpoint ground commander, must continually analyze, and if necessary, revise his threat IPB and make corrections to his CP defense plan. This becomes very important, especially if the checkpoint is located in a built-up area or if the activities in the area surrounding the checkpoint become more active. An example of the latter was our CP A2, established in January 1996. By early April, "Market Arizona" began nearby with a couple of dozen peddlers. By July, it had evolved into a large market with over a dozen permanent structures and more than a

hundred merchants. The checkpoint provided the blanket of security for free-market trading and enterprise for merchants of all ethnic backgrounds, but like any built-up area, it was always considered a potential threat platform.

The old adage, "Terrain Dictates," is often true in checkpoint operations. Defense of the checkpoint and force protection for your soldiers must be a primary concern — good IPB will assist in both areas. Terrain will also influence or dictate the size of your checkpoint, operational planning, the obstacle plan, and resupply operations. Deliberate checkpoints should not be located on restrictive terrain, for example, low ground with minimal fields of observation, on a curvy road, or in a built-up area. Easily defensible terrain will support more efficient operations; it will support your obstacle and defense plan, assist in resupply and relief-in-place operations, and provide the ability to establish adequate force protection.

On the other hand, the intent of a hasty checkpoint is surprise. These locations should limit detection from long distances. When planning a hasty checkpoint, leaders should analyze terrain and other restrictions as to how they will affect your CP. Key terrain surrounding your checkpoint must be observable at all times and targeted with direct- and indirect-fire weapon systems.

Temporary Checkpoint



Also consider how the checkpoint will receive its supply and other support. How will supporting indirect fires be utilized? How will civilian contractors service the checkpoint? How will this affect operations, and will their presence increase the threat? These are common questions which must be addressed and answered with solid solutions.

Resupply and refueling at your checkpoint must be specified with a plan. In it, you must address how your resupply element will conduct operations. Consider the LOGPAC's direction of travel to the checkpoint, access points to be used, number of vehicles in the resupply element, how the checkpoint will be defended with additional assets on site, arrival and departure times, assets needed to support the LOGPAC's arrival, etc. The lack of a reliable resupply or refuel plan will hinder and disrupt checkpoint operations at the most inopportune times, creating confusion that degrades checkpoint security and force protection.

Consider the supporting fires protecting the checkpoint and what assets are most appropriate — battalion or troop mortars, direct support 155mm, or attack helicopters? Where is this support located, and how long does it take to deliver fires? If fires are released, what type of round(s) will be fired to support the checkpoint [the most common fire plan would utilize illumination due to the effects of collateral damage on the civilian populace]? What organic weapons do you have that can deliver fires to deadspaces surrounding the checkpoint, and what types and quantities of round should you have on hand? All of these common and specific questions must have answers in the checkpoint defense plan. Plan fire support and air-ground coordination exercises and rehearsals on

a regular basis; by doing so you will be able to accurately determine if they will be able to support you when it counts. By the time you get fires released, the "war" may well be over, thus the rehearsals will provide you insight to adjust your CP defense plan as needed. Utilize organic M203 grenade launchers to cover deadspace within short range of the checkpoint; again, illumination will be the most likely round utilized.

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It's also important to coordinate with supporting civilian contractors. An exterminator team arriving at your checkpoint at 0200 in the morning will most likely create immediate suspicion and tension within the guard force. All checkpoint personnel must know who your contractors are (access rosters do work), their normal arrival times, and what they do. Civilian contractors or their vehicles are an easy mode of transport for terrorists or terrorist activity. Coordinating the arrival of civilian contractors and keeping your personnel informed will assist in checkpoint force protection and allow the supporting civilian elements to do their jobs. Without prior coordination, access to the checkpoint should be denied — the OIC and NCOIC must enforce this unwaveringly.

Checkpoint layout and level of preparation will be heavily dependent on the

threat, terrain, amount of traffic, and duration of operations. Restrictions such as road width, vegetation, and minefields will often affect or dictate the size and layout of your checkpoint. The sketch above depicts the layout and composition for a temporary checkpoint (the author's platoon SOP). This CP was occupied and manned for 48 hours by two 12-man scout sections.

Force Protection Implementation

Force protection measures will change with changes of mission, transition to a different phase of the same mission, or changes to the threat condition (THREAT-CON). The tactical commander must be flexible enough to plan and implement upgrades or reductions in force protection as needed. For example; about 180 days into our deployment to Bosnia, the force protection level was downgraded, which resulted in a change to the uniform requirement and a change in checkpoint operations. We transitioned from a rigid 100-percent vehicle search tactic to a more random method that facilitated freedom of movement through the Zone of Separation (ZOS).

Outlined below are the materials and TTPs utilized during checkpoint operations. The items are all available through normal Army supply channels, and will assist in establishing and operating an effective and defensible checkpoint.

Barrier Materials and Employment

Hesko bastions (see photo) filled with gravel or rock, with filled sandbags placed on top, provide cover and concealment approximately 5 feet high and 3 feet thick — a good base of force pro-

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tection. Hesco bastions should be used for inner perimeters and to protect soldiers' living areas at a static checkpoint; they may also be used as serpentine barriers, but unless reinforced with more dense materials they will not stand up to many vehicle hits. The inner compound of CP A2 included over 150 Hesco bastions and over 350 cubic meters of gravel fill, topped off with over 3,000 sandbags.

Wood sentinel sheds at the entrances to the checkpoint were placed behind concrete barriers (approximately four feet thick) and surrounded by double layers of sandbags — creating good cover and concealment for barrier guards when needed. The windows of the guard shack were shatterproof Plexiglas over wire mesh, creating a double layer of protection.

Checkpoint obstacle and barrier plans (vehicle serpentine) are essential to control checkpoint operations, and are a vital element of force protection. A short and narrow serpentine can restrict and impede movement, while a long and wide serpentine will be ineffective in controlling movement through the checkpoint. For static checkpoints, tetrahedrons constructed of heavy duty steel (e.g., railroad rails), 50-gallon drums filled with debris and reinforced with wire, anchored concertina wire sections, and telephone poles split in half lengthwise [laid on the ground and anchored under a tracked vehicle at a 45 degree angle to create speed bumps] are ideal for use in an obstacle/barrier plan as they are easily made or procured and are sturdy and durable enough to withstand continual vehicular traffic. Light one-man-lift tetrahedrons, 55-gallon drums, concertina wire and pickets, sandbags, and split telephone poles can be used effectively for a temporary checkpoint; they are transportable by 5-ton truck or by Bradley Fighting Vehicle. The well-planned and evenly-spaced serpentine will canalize movement through the checkpoint while providing an additional measure of force protection.

Perimeter lighting is very important and can be easily provided by using a standard 10,000 kilowatt military generator light set (which can be towed behind HMWVs, 113 Series vehicles, or Bradley Fighting Vehicles). One light set can provide adequate lighting for a CP 75-100 meters in length (good enough for a temporary checkpoint of 24-48 hours in duration); however, for a long-term deliberate checkpoint, two light sets

would be more efficient and effective, offering a contingency in case of maintenance troubles. Portable light units (mounted on a telescoping tripod, on a guard shack roof, or on a guard tower) provide additional barrier and perimeter lighting wherever needed [portable light units should be positioned to support ID checks and/or vehicle searches at CP entrances and on the CP vehicle search area]. Perimeter lighting is an important element of checkpoint operations, as it serves two purposes: it assists the occupying force in conducting normal operations with enhanced visibility during the hours of darkness, but just as important, a well-lit checkpoint sends a message of activity, alertness, and vigilance.

Operational Force Protection Measures

Operational TTPs established and executed on the checkpoint will assist in force protection, the key element in establishing and operating a successful checkpoint is the professional soldier who executes his mission on a daily basis with pride and vigilance. A professional-looking and acting soldier, backed by the firepower of an M1A1 tank or a Bradley Fighting Vehicle, creates an atmosphere of deadly force that local civilians and factional elements acknowledge and respect. A "We mean business" attitude and image establishes the base relationship for all activities, thereby reducing the possibility of actions against the checkpoint.

Checkpoint personnel must be capable of rapid transition from a peaceful to combat posture, should the need arise. Operations should always be supported with direct fire weapons and a form of communication. Entrances to the CP should be supported with your most lethal firepower asset [e.g., an M3A2 Cavalry Fighting Vehicle facing oncoming traffic] and be manned at all times to provide security and communications support for barrier personnel.

Barrier sentinels should operate under the two-man rule (one pulling security for the other) at all times. An additional form of communications (e.g., a Motorola radio or PRC-126 squad infantry radio) on the ground can greatly assist movement of traffic through the checkpoint and during potential threat situations. Redundant security measures and redundant communications are another method of enhancing force protection while conducting normal checkpoint operations.

Defensive procedures, such as CP alert rehearsals, vehicle searches, and use of MP canine units, contribute to force protection and deadly force image. CP alert exercises conducted on a regular basis ensure that soldiers and leaders are ready to defend the checkpoint at any time. No-notice alerts from an external element provide an element of surprise and realism. Prior to occupying the checkpoint, the author would coordinate an alert exercise time window and scenario with the Troop TOC. A 100-percent alert during the designated time window would be executed at the CP, with the Troop TOC providing intelligence updates to the CP as it executed the exercise. The CP would be defended accordingly for a specified time, requiring the soldiers to execute tasks ranging from casualty evacuation to conducting normal checkpoint traffic flow while at full alert. Following stand-down, normal CP operations resumed and an AAR was conducted. Soldier reaction time, proficiency of individual soldier skills, command and control discipline, and preparedness to defend the checkpoint greatly increased with the execution of no-notice alert exercises.

Direct fire target reference points (TRPs) and indirect fire targets should be close to Threat AAs for ease of identification during checkpoint defense operations or exercises. Quick identification of targets located around the checkpoint are vital to defensive operations, and should be reviewed daily by all personnel. A detailed sector sketch posted in key locations (i.e., at the entrance or exit of the soldiers' living quarters; in each sentinel shack, observation tower, or fighting position; and inside the turret of each vehicle) will continually serve as a reminder. However, the best approach is the constant question and answer sessions between leaders and their soldiers regarding checkpoint defense operations — every soldier must know the CP defense plan.

Random vehicle searches, hasty and deliberate, will ensure that local civilians and factional elements will not attempt to transport contraband through the checkpoint (or Zone of Separation). Vehicle searches often resulted in the confiscation of arms, ammunition, and explosives. Persons found to be violating the GFAP (General Framework Agreement for Peace) of the Dayton Peace Accord were dealt with in specified IFOR Rules Of Engagement. While the use of vehicle searches will not completely

eliminate transport of contraband, they will effectively disrupt the trafficking of such items which, in turn, will also reduce external threats to soldiers on the checkpoint.

If available, military police canine search teams attached to a checkpoint serve many purposes and can produce immediate results. Search dogs will find designated contraband items, such as explosives, weapons, or drugs, and use of canine search teams reinforces the vigilance and deadly force image projected at the checkpoint. One such GFAP offender was so intimidated by the sight of a canine search team that he voluntarily gave up his contraband (pistol and ammunition) prior to the dog searching his vehicle. Search dogs can also provide advanced notice of trouble — signaling the barrier security personnel of unseen explosives placed on a vehicle. Canine search units are an excellent asset for conducting checkpoint operations, and if available will directly contribute to mission success while providing an additional force protection measure.

Medical evacuation planning and execution is a critical task for checkpoint operations, and can often test leaders and soldiers alike. Detailed planning of medevac (ground or air) procedures for numerous situations, such as individual or vehicle mine injuries, must be addressed. CP medevac plans must be specific, detailed, and rehearsed on a regular basis. Medevac rehearsals at CP A2 were incorporated with CP alert exercises to ensure all personnel could execute their specified tasks, and someone else's, if needed. Restrictions and obstacles near the CP must be recognized and dealt with — for example, clearing vegetation or removing debris to support a helicopter landing zone. If activity surrounding the CP is too heavy to execute ground medevac or land a helicopter, then soldiers must know how to aeromedevac a casualty by hoist. During medevac or emergency situations, it is natural for checkpoint personnel to become focused on the immediate activity; however, leaders must ensure security and force protection are maintained.

Relief in place during checkpoint operations will not differ much from the same activity executed in the high intensity conflict (HIC) environment. Reliefs ideally should be conducted during periods of limited visibility and during periods of minimal activity near the checkpoint. A plan for relief must address specifically time, method, and sequence of

relief; time of transfer of responsibility for the CP; actions on contact during relief; transfer of responsibility procedures; target handoff procedures; contingency plans for changes of mission, etc. Execution techniques of the relief will vary by unit, however, a RIP checklist will facilitate ease of transfer between units. During execution of the relief, normal CP operations must continue; A2 was unique in that it was large enough that the outgoing unit could reposition vehicles to alternate positions and still maintain assigned areas of surveillance as the relieving unit occupied primary vehicle fighting positions on the CP. RIP operations conducted on a regular basis between organic units can become very efficient, but leaders and soldiers alike should not take this for granted and downgrade security measures for speed of relief. The RIP checklist should specifically address the following: current "enemy situation" (factional military or police operations, civilian activity or disturbances, criminal activity, expected factional operations, etc.), changes to the CP defense plan (TRPs, indirect fire target numbers and locations, obstacles and barriers added or removed, etc.), changes in supporting units (fire support assets, civilian contracted elements, LOGPAC times or methods of resupply, etc.), changes to access rosters, updates on suspected criminals, etc.

"Regardless of the mission, commanders must protect their forces at all times. They must be ready to counter activity that could bring harm to their units or jeopardize the mission." (FM 100-5, *Operations*) In the low intensity conflict environment, peacekeeping missions will often include ambiguous situations which will require peacekeeping forces to deal with tense or violent situations without becoming participants — one of the keys to success must be the preventive measure called force protection. Force protection is more than wearing your Kevlar vest and full battle rattle, or traveling in a four-vehicle convoy; all are necessary measures taken by leaders at all levels to ensure that our soldiers are not unnecessarily injured or killed. In this environment, FP is a critical element of checkpoint operations and requires detailed planning and stringent execution.

This article is not all-inclusive regarding checkpoint operations, nor is it intended to be a doctrinal revelation. It is, however, intended to assist the scout platoon leader in planning, and executing,

checkpoint operations, specifically addressing the important element of force protection. It is increasingly likely that the United States Army will continue to conduct stability operations throughout the world for years to come, and no matter the region, country or situation, force protection will be a major issue for every level of command, all the way to the platoon leader.

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