

# FORCE PROTECTION AND COALITION OUTPOSTS

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Force protection measures are critical to maintaining combat power at coalition outposts (COPs) and greatly contribute to mission success in Iraq. A little over a year ago, most Soldiers had probably never heard of a coalition outpost. With our current operating environment (OE) in Iraq, we could not do without them. Now, nearly every Soldier in a maneuver battalion has served time on one of these small, company-sized bases. COPs are vital to our mission of securing the local populace and training and operating with Iraqi Security Forces. An effective COP must be embedded into the community in which it serves. Being so close to the populace has obvious advantages, but it also makes COPs very susceptible to enemy attack. Effective, protected COPs require commanders to deliberately plan, prepare, and execute for this mission.

In the fall of 2007, while deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, I found myself as an HHC company commander based out of Forward Operating Base (FOB) Rustamiyah. My unit — the 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment — was responsible for the Karada Peninsula OE and several neighboring sectors in Baghdad. A few months into the deployment, my battalion commander asked me to begin conducting force protection assessments of our multiple coalition outposts and joint security stations (JSS). As an infantry officer, conducting an external look at a location for security reasons is common practice. In my quest to help the battalion with its COP security measures, I witnessed the security challenges first hand.

In order to be certified as our battalion's antiterrorism officer (ATO), I had to first go to the Antiterrorism Level II course. The level II course is a 40-hour course not regularly conducted in combat. Due to the overwhelming demand to have ATOs certified in theater, a mobile class was created and taught by the Multi-National Force-Iraq Strategic Operations Command (MNF-I STRATOPS) Protection. This same MNF-I STRATOPS protection element also traveled throughout Iraq and evaluated the force protection plans and

procedures at forward operating bases.

Forward operating bases are a means of pulling Soldiers away from the cities and urban areas where enemy insurgents can easily inflict casualties. One of the negative aspects of all of the standoff that provided security to U.S. Soldiers was that the U.S. forces were now tens of kilometers from the Iraqi people they had come to secure. From these distances, employing combat power in the company operating environments could take as long as 30 minutes to an hour.

In early 2007, as part of the "surge," our priorities shifted, and brigades had to find a way to more effectively employ their combat power in their OEs. As a result, the Army created the "coalition outpost," and GEN David Petraeus (then commanding general of Multi-National Force – Iraq) and LTG Raymond Odierno (then commanding general of III Corps) made implementation of COPs a priority. The COP provided company commanders with the ability to maintain nearly a company's worth of combat power in his OE.

In my class of over 50 Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors, Marines, and contractors, I was surprised to find that I was the only Soldier whose sole purpose of receiving the training was to assess more forward, smaller locations (COPs). My class, interesting as it was, was designed around teaching ATOs about FOB-level force protection. Early in the instruction, knowing that COPs were essential to mission success and of high importance, I asked when we would progress to the lessons where we would discuss building, manning, and securing COPs. A silence fell over the class. I quickly realized that the COP concept was so new (even though we had been executing it in theater) that the model had not caught up with the curriculum.

Often you will hear company-level outposts referred to as patrol bases. Because a COP is a near permanent fixture to the muhallah (neighborhood) it resides in, it does not fit the description of a "patrol base" by existing for less than 24 hours.



*Army engineers build a barrier wall at a forward operating base in southeastern Iraq in August 2007.*

SPC Creighton Holub

FM 3-90, *Tactics*, makes reference to an obscure term: “combat outpost.” A combat outpost is, “a reinforced OP (observation post) capable of conducting limited combat operations . . . in restrictive terrain.” A combat outpost would allow a platoon leader or commander to operate for extended periods of time from a defendable position. While the field manual leads the reader to believe that “restrictive terrain” is a mountainous or heavily forested area, a heavily populated and urbanized area could be just as restrictive. It is likely that the term “combat outpost” was changed to “coalition outpost” to reflect the multitude of nations that are aiding the United States in the war on terrorism.

In a city of more than seven million inhabitants like Baghdad, real estate is a highly sought after commodity. It’s hard enough for a civilian to find an empty house or apartment so finding enough room to secure a mechanized or motorized company can be a daunting task.

Once the company commander has secured his site, the construction begins. In agricultural areas, building a COP is challenging, but commanders generally have the freedom to design the dimensions of their COPs and create standoff from assault. In urban areas, commanders often are restricted by what structures are available.

FM 7-8, *Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*, states: “The challenge to the defender is to retain the initiative, that is, to keep the enemy reacting and unable to execute his own plan.” Once on the ground, the commander must find ways of securing his unconventional outpost. The security measures must be strong enough to halt attack, or appear so untouchable that its sight alone will deter the enemy, while at the same time encourage the local nationals to approach the COP with tips and enemy information.

According to FM 7-8, the first priority with any military operation is security. In regards to security, priorities of work for a COP are no different than a patrol base or combat outpost. Security is an enduring operation that will never reach completion: establishing security positions, clearing and identifying dead space, placing obstacles in avenues of approach, creating target reference points and final protective fires,

and requesting indirect fire targets never end.

Creating these fortresses that keep the enemy out may make the COP so ominous that the very people we are seeking to help are too afraid to approach the COP. Commanders must conduct combat patrols with the purpose of getting to know the people. Local people will provide the greatest intelligence about the enemy and aid in the restoration efforts to return the area into a secure location.

Maximizing combat power in a sustained combat operation is integral to defeating the enemy. Sustaining combat power is precisely what the theory of the COP suggests. Unfortunately, manpower is not without its limits. When an entire infantry or armor company is pushed to a COP, it goes without saying that it must also secure itself. At any given time, one third of that company is committed to the force protection of that COP. That same platoon that was guarding the entrance gate or roving the COP perimeter for eight hours will finish its day by conducting a combat patrol in the company sector.

Rapid fielding initiatives have brought some of the greatest technologies the world has seen to our fingertips. If these technologies are implemented properly, commanders can preserve some of that combat power for patrols. The contracting company Raytheon has developed Rapid Aerostat Initial Deployment (RAID) systems specifically for U.S. military and law enforcement surveillance needs. At the FOB level, large aerial blimps (RAID Aerostat) with surveillance equipment are being used. The COPs can be outfitted with similar tower surveillance systems (RAID towers) that can also monitor vast amounts of battlespace. The company command post can have one Soldier who monitors radios and traverses several cameras to watch the dead space that guard positions cannot see and potentially make several guard positions unnecessary. Both the tower and the blimp can be equipped with infrared video, a laser range finder, laser range designator, and laser illuminator. These tools can give units real time data and current locations on enemy targets, route status, cover dead space, and even make corrections on indirect fire targets.

The Army’s Rapid Equipping Force, in cooperation with Exponent, Inc., has been fielding Rapid Deployment Integrated Surveillance System (RDISS) to COPs and FOBs in Afghanistan and Iraq. The RDISS comes in a complete package that is fully mission capable in a short period of time, and takes very little time for the Soldiers to master its capabilities. The RDISS offers a command post the ability to simultaneously monitor several cameras with pan and zoom features, and several fixed cameras. The first RDISS system that 2-69 AR received was at one of our joint security stations. Manned by our attached airborne company, JSS Muthana, like many of our outposts, was surrounded by apartment buildings and homes and was attached to an Iraqi Police station. The cameras were a definite home run. With just one Soldier, the sergeant of the guard could monitor his guard positions and the dead space his guards could not see, zoom in on enemy avenues of approach, and check in on his Iraqi Police counterparts to ensure they were properly executing their duties.

While the paratroopers were the first to receive the RDISS, I have to give credit to the ingenuity of our Cobra Company (C Company, 2-69AR, 3rd HBCT, 3rd ID). Long before the first RDISS had arrived, Cobra’s leaders had heard of the system, but it seemed the cameras were just being fielded and were not likely to get to the COP soon enough. With so much air traffic near the Karada Peninsula, the company’s Raven unmanned aerial vehicle was rendered useless. With no surveillance package available, Cobra mounted its Raven in a window that overlooked some dead space of the COP, and the “Raven on a Stick” concept was born. Just like that, Cobra had an ad hoc RDISS.

Technologies like this and others can reduce the numbers required to secure the COPs and FOBs, and in turn, free up combat power for the COPs. This technique will preserve combat power for the COP’s true purpose of providing a forward position for Soldiers to operate from.

With the proper resources, a COP can be as secure as a FOB. Regrettably, with so many forces on the FOB, that is where the main focus is for assets. Even when the main concern is the COP, battalions and brigades are hindered by time or changing



MAJ Robert Lenz

*A Soldier installs an RDISS system on Camp Victory in Baghdad. The system allows the monitoring of several locations using fixed cameras.*

priorities. In the early stages of building COPs, the logistic pushes of huge trucks and trailers seem never ending. Reducing or minimizing big logistical packages can eliminate unnecessary combat patrols, and lower the risk of encountering improvised explosive devices. As the COP matures, it can sustain itself with smaller packages that are moved with only what an infantry or armor platoon can move in its organic vehicles.

With the unpredictable nature of building a COP in an urban area, designing a COP package that will work everywhere in Baghdad is simply not feasible. There is not a formula based on COP size that will fix all or likely more than one COP. That being said, many company commanders do request similar equipment: RAID towers, RDISS camera packages, Command Post Node (CPN) for data transfer, Kevlar boards and blankets, Lightweight Counter-Mortar Radar (LCMR), mobile barriers and lift arm gates for entry control points, and high intensity spotlights.

Although a fix-all COP package will never work, a smaller universal COP package could be devised. Each time a brigade is given the mission to employ a new COP, the division-level support networks could push a universal COP package (or multiple

packages based on predicted COP numbers) to the commander on the ground.

When I first began assessing 2-69 AR's COPs, it seemed only battalions and brigade-level ATOs inspected COPs and that is where the information flow seemed to stop. When we were assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division, the ATO inspections stopped at the brigade level. Each maneuver battalion may have one to six COPs or COP-like locations. The battalion ATO is a good start, but a battalion can do only so much with its resources and ATO. I felt that I was well trained by the ATO class and my experience as an infantryman. While the current status of all COPs is tracked, COPs do not get the visibility that FOBs do. I believed that what was needed was a division or theater-level COP assessment team that could aid the ATO with assessments similar to those done on FOBs. The group that taught my ATO class, MNF-I STRATOPS Protection, also travels the Iraq OE inspecting FOBs. They have the personnel, resources, and capabilities to bring concepts to fruition and help units with force protection short falls. This group should have a team that inspects COPs.

In March of 2008, I returned from my mid-tour leave to find that the 4th Infantry

Division had arrived and brought some changes with them. A division-level team of four Soldiers and one civilian, each trained in a specific area relevant to COP force protection and safety, was dispatched into our brigade's OE. I was pleasantly surprised to see the assessment they had completed at JSS Muthana. The level of detail that each inspector brought to the fight was outstanding. Not only had they done a very detailed analysis of my battalion's JSS, but what I had learned from their level of detail was invaluable. Our battalion is currently making numerous force protection upgrades based on their assessment.

The idea of the coalition outpost is still in its infancy. None the less, it is budding very quickly. The *Joint Forward Operations Base Force Protection Handbook* issued at the AT level II course was a good starting point for my COP education, but I have learned much more from working with the Soldiers, NCOs, and commanders as I made my assessments.

Maintaining a rapport with the people and training and operating with Iraqi Security Forces are essential for an independent and self-sufficient Iraq. To successfully accomplish these goals, the coalition forces must be in close proximity to the Iraqi people. The coalition outpost is the most effective means of establishing and maintaining this rapport. The COPs must have a force protection plan, robust force protection measures, and the resources to implement the plan. Additionally, this plan must be wholeheartedly backed by the entire chain of command, from theater level down to the company level. To aid the leaders, the Army has equipped its Soldiers with some of the newest ideas, technologies, and changes to doctrine to support COPs and COP force protection. Yet, in over 200 years of service and evolution, the Soldier remains our greatest resource.

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