



Small-Unit Operations in an IED Environment

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The focused efforts of noncommissioned officers in training, development, and employment of their Soldiers and their capabilities continue to persistently apply pressure against the enemy as well as ensure the security and freedom of our nation. Our NCOs' efforts create success in spite of the enemy's objectives. Execution of operations is depicted in modern Soldiers' ability to anticipate enemy tactics, techniques, and procedures, or TTP, employ counter-improvised explosive device principles "to, on, and from" the objective, and apply appropriate actions upon enemy contact while operating in an IED environment.

Given the thwarted efforts of the enemy, much of the enemy's TTPs evolved into the use of minimal-resource-required weapon systems. These are the "weapon of choice," but fail at effectively disrupting our operations. The failure by the enemy is a result of the unrelenting resilience and skill of the U.S. Soldier, who develops disciplines and counter TTPs throughout the course of operations. Difficult lessons and discovery learning continues

to take place, but it is an example of how the U.S. Soldier learns, adapts and shapes the conduct of operations. Soldiers study the enemy and employ disciplines to make the IED ineffective against their formations.

Characteristics of close combat identified in FM 3-21.8, combined with disciplined focused leadership and the can-do approach of NCOs, enable the small-unit leader to effectively consider the tactical characterization and emplacement techniques of the enemy. This results in the continual development of how to stay ahead of the enemy in planning and conduct of operations.

The NCO Corps displays how thorough threat assessments before every operation are key to success while operating in an IED environment. These threat assessments focused on "where would I put the IED/ambush site if I were the enemy to ensure effective IED fire?" By thinking like the enemy, we increase our critical decision making when considering intent, capability, and location in terms of time, space, and distance as it relates to an enemy action within an estimated target area.

While conducting operations, the enemy does just as we do with them. They observe our operations in order to identify possible points of vulnerability. As they observe and orient themselves on what they think our next move will be, they decide on the best course of action and proceed by positioning IED/ambush locations. Varying routes, movement time, infiltration and exfiltration points, conduct of threat assessments and operational disciplines work together to disable the enemy's ability to forecast our operations.

As a result of learning, training and experience, six disciplines are essential in successfully conducting small-unit operations in an IED environment.

Discipline 1 – Think like the IED emplacer

This first discipline allows us to understand why the enemy utilizes chosen tactics and techniques. There are four basic types of IEDs: victim operated, command wire, booby trap and radio controlled.

We understand they must be placed in a position in which the enemy believes we will maneuver. This requires the enemy to study our TTPs and patterns and then place weapon systems based on that understanding. Thinking like the enemy enables the small-unit leader to get ahead of the enemy by adjusting TTPs and changing patterns.

Discipline 2 – Treat all located IEDs as bait

Effective IEDs target elements within the kill radius of the weapon. The IED is concealed in a manner so the targeted element is unaware of its location. If an IED is seen, consider that it was designed to focus attention and draw an element into the effective range of the unseen weapon.

Discipline 3 – The identified IED is not the immediate problem

Where there is one IED, there likely are more. This discipline removes the assumption that all weapons found equals all weapons placed.

Discipline 4 – Always suspect booby trap

Booby-trap devices are designed by the enemy to function when an individual discovers an item and believes it to be exactly what he sees. These weapons are designed with concealed triggers and placed in such a manner that a Soldier who approaches, touches, and/or moves the weapon causes it to detonate.

Discipline 5 – No area is safe until cleared by you

This discipline works in parallel to Discipline 3. The found IED is probably designed to draw you into the kill radius of another IED. Although an element may maneuver through and clear an area previously, the area should not be considered clear. Continual situational awareness and assessment of probable IED emplacement locations and IED indicators enable the Soldier's ability to mitigate unseen or undetected IEDs. Remember, where there is one, there are probably more.

Discipline 6 – Continually adjust routes

The enemy continually observes our operations to place effective improvised weapon systems to cause casualties. Operational success is increased by minimizing observable patterns that are exploitable by the enemy. If patterns are inherent to the mission, maximize effort and minimize predictability. For example, if there are only two places to cross a canal, create your own crossing.

A formation's discipline and continued learning creates operational success in spite of the enemy's objectives. Small unit operations is where successes are achieved, where mental agility and physical toughness enable the leader and his or her Soldiers to stay ahead of the enemy "to, on, and from" the objective and apply appropriate actions upon enemy contact while operating in an IED environment.

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