

MANEUVER ENHANCEMENT BRIGADE: THE QUEST FOR LEGITIMACY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

MANEUVER ENHANCEMENT BRIGADE: THE QUEST FOR LEGITIMACY

by

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ABSTRACT

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In the fall of 2003, the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Peter J. Schoomaker ordered the U.S. Army, to begin the process of converting the Army to a modular, brigade-based force.¹ Under the lead of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), General Schoomaker directed the conversion to be swift and to not utilize the Army's more deliberate force development methods.² At the heart of the brigade-based structure, the Brigade Combat Team (BCT), (Heavy, Infantry and Stryker), would drive the transformation efforts and would answer the continual call as the decisive combat element on the modern battlefield. Supporting these BCTs were five doctrinally identified modular support brigades: Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, Fires Brigade, Combat Aviation Brigade, Sustainment Brigade and Maneuver Enhancement Brigade. As the support brigades evolved they would begin to demonstrate their relevance in the modular force. It is the evolution of the Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, its demonstration of relevance and its quest for legitimacy that serves as the focus of this Strategic Research Project.

MANEUVER ENHANCEMENT BRIGADE: THE QUEST FOR LEGITIMACY

Less than two years after the devastating attacks upon America on September 11, 2001, the United States Army found itself in intense operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. These operations were clearly placing a heavy strain on the forces of the U.S. Army.³ Chief of Staff of the Army, General Peter J. Schoomaker was convinced these operations, as well as the demands of the Global War on Terror, required the U.S. Army to dramatically change how the Army organized its forces.⁴ In the fall of 2003 General Schoomaker ordered the U.S. Army, to begin the process of converting the Army to a modular, brigade-based force.⁵ Under the lead of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), General Schoomaker directed the conversion be swift and to not become bogged down by utilizing the Army's more deliberate force development methods.⁶

As the Army began efforts to overhaul its division-based structure, the chief of staff's guidance was clear. General Schoomaker believed the Army needed to become a more expeditionary force if it was to meet the demands of the current and future conflicts.⁷ The new Army structure needed to be made up of smaller, more versatile formations, able to deploy promptly to meet specific combat requirements.⁸

To date, the Army's shift from the long held division-based structure to a modular brigade-based structure has been challenging by many standards, arguably successful and clearly necessary to meet the operational requirements of the missions and threats facing the United States today. Dr. John Bonin stated, "This shift has made it easier for the Army to strategically tailor land forces to the combatant commander's full spectrum requirements."⁹ Undertaking overarching transformation of the force, while concurrently

waging war in two major theatres of operation; has stretched leadership, infrastructure and resourcing of the Army to edge of capability.

At the heart of the brigade-based structure, the Brigade Combat Team (BCT), (Heavy, Infantry and Stryker), drive the ongoing transformation and answer the continual call as the decisive combat element on the modern battlefield. Five doctrinally identified modular support brigades: Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, Fires Brigade, Combat Aviation Brigade, Sustainment Brigade and Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, continue to evolve and demonstrate relevance in the modular force. It is the evolution of the Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, its demonstration of relevance and its quest for legitimacy that serves as the focus of this Strategic Research Project.

Modularity – Movement to the Brigade based Army

To fully understand the Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB), one must fundamentally understand the origins of modularity from which the MEB evolved. This section will briefly discuss the history of the modular force and the goals the Army intends to achieve through modularization.

With the end of the Cold War, the Army began to review its current force structure and to ask if that structure was capable of meeting the challenges of the pending 21st Century. In the early 1990s the Army began to seriously discuss the concept of modularity.¹⁰ In January 1995 TRADOC published a pamphlet outlining its Concept for Modularity. This pamphlet, TRADOC PAM 525-68, envisioned the future Army would deal with force strength constraints, dollar constraints, and limits on strategic lift required to transport forces and capability into theater.¹¹ Further discussion and experimentation continued through the 1990s and into the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The Army Strategic Planning Guidance, 2006-2023 (ASPG) indicated the Combatant Commander would receive better support to accomplish their mission through modular, capabilities-based forces.¹² The ASPG advocated the modular capabilities-based force was capable of effectively delivering the right Army capabilities at the right place and time.¹³ The Army Modernization Plan of 2005 identified the modular forces concept as a bold and comprehensive initiative.¹⁴ The modular force would provide more relevant units that would possess greater versatility for the demands of frequent deployments, a wider range of mission capability, and true joint interdependency.¹⁵ These listed documents along with numerous others, clearly demonstrate the Army's steady glide path toward securing a fully modular force. The transformation to the modular force would prove to be the most aggressive and radical reorganization of the Army since the Pentomic reorganization of the late 1950s.¹⁶

As to be expected, the transformation of the Army would not be limited to only the active force, but would also significantly impact Army National Guard and Army Reserve forces. In a February 2004 op-ed, former Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld stated, "The new more "Modular Army" will be appropriate for the 21st Century."¹⁷ Secretary Rumsfeld stressed that transformation would span the entire Army stating, "We are working hard by rebalancing skill sets within the Reserve component and between the active and reserve force."¹⁸ Under the strong direction of Secretary Rumsfeld and the dedicated leadership of General Schoomaker, modularity was now on its way to transforming the Army.

The move to the modular force required the Army to begin converting itself from its long held organizational structure centered on divisions.¹⁹ Divisions which numbered

in size from 10,000 to 18,000 soldiers would still exist, but the Army would become centered on brigades totaling at most 3,900 soldiers.²⁰ The move to the modular army became known as “modularity” and would prove to alter every echelon of the force from battalion to army in both the active and reserve component.²¹ Through modularity, the Army intended to achieve increase combat power, increase the rotational pool of ready units, and reduce stress on the force by developing a predictable deployment cycle.²² Further, the Army believed it would create an operating force that when deployed, would require less augmentation.²³ The Army maintained that by organizing around BCTs and Support Brigades it will be able to “better meet the challenges of the 21st century security environment and, specifically, jointly fight and win the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).”²⁴

As General Schoomaker led the transformation to the modular force, he was adamant that the transformation not be bogged down in the usual deliberate force development procedures.²⁵ To this end, General Schoomaker directed TRADOC to create an ad hoc group tasked to develop the modular force design and thus “Task Force Modularity” was stood up.²⁶ General Schoomaker’s guidance to the task force was clear. The transformation process must be quick; accepting a certain level of risk, knowing problems would be worked out as the Army gained operational experience with the new design.²⁷ General Schoomaker set three goals that the initial modular brigade combat teams had to meet: First, they had to be as capable as current units. Second, they had to be easier to deploy than existing units. Finally, they had to be configured in a way that permitted the Army to transform without having an increase in manpower.²⁸

The task force utilized a force design they labeled as “units of action” as they struggled to design the new force. It was during the discussion on units of action that the concept of a “Protection Brigade” was first discussed. On September 21, 2005 the protection brigade was officially named the Combat Support Brigade (Maneuver Enhancement) (CSB-ME). Feeling a more precise designation for the brigade was the designation “Maneuver Enhancement Brigade”, the designation was officially changed on November 7, 2007²⁹

The creation of the MEB resulted in a command that was a direct departure from the Army’s long held tradition of organizing its force structure around specific branch or specialties.³⁰ The newly designed brigade was a multifunctional headquarters, with a staff possessing the expertise to command and control chemical, engineer, air defense and military police units.³¹ Through augmentation of civil affairs, psychological operations, and combat service support forces, the MEB was capable of conducting security, stabilization and reconstruction operations.³² Yet further enhancing the capability of the MEB was the concept of assigning a tactical combat force (TCF) to the MEB to enhance the unit’s capability of defensive maneuver and limited offensive maneuver.

Task Force Modularity’s concept of units of action evolved into the development of the eight modular brigades as they are known today. The task force officially disbanded in February 2005, having addressed the major decisions required for the modular force.³³ As they disbanded, the transformed modular brigade combat teams of the 3d Infantry Division had deployed to Iraq.³⁴

Over the next few years, doctrine struggled to catch up with and to keep pace with the already fielded and rapidly developing modular brigades. In addition to developing specific doctrine for each of the modular brigades, the Army published Field Manual 3-0 (FM 3-0) "Operations" in its final form in February 2008. Appendix C of FM 3-0 provides an overview of the Army Modular Force and its organizations.

Appendix C, FM 3-0, clearly identifies the BCTs as the centerpiece for Army maneuver.³⁵ The BCTs are designed to serve as the basic building block of the Army's tactical formation.³⁶ BCTs when attached to a higher echelon headquarters such as a division, corps or theater army, will become part of a force-tailored formation designed to meet a specific operational requirement.³⁷

Further, FM 3-0 reiterates the main goals of transformation as it identifies Divisions as the Army's primary tactical warfighting headquarters, their principal task being to direct subordinate brigade operations.³⁸ "Divisions are not fixed formations and are capable of commanding up to six BCTs in major combat operations."³⁹ Concurrently the division is capable of commanding the wide array of modular support brigades and functional brigades supporting the missions of the Division.⁴⁰

Each of the three BCTs (Heavy, Infantry and Stryker), bring a unique set of capabilities to the Divisions they support. Likewise, the five modular support brigades (Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, Fires Brigade, Combat Aviation Brigade, Sustainment Brigade and Maneuver Enhancement Brigade), complement the BCTs and are tailored to support the specific missions the Division is called upon to execute. The support brigades provide multifunctional capabilities to the deployed forces. "Support brigades have the organic expertise to command and control various unit types."⁴¹ "The number

and type of subordinate units vary among the different types of brigades as they provide either general or direct support to forces under the division.”⁴²

Noteworthy in the doctrine is the important distinction of the modular brigades designed and capable to occupy and control operational areas as well as perform stability and maneuver support tasks. As one would anticipate, the three BCTs are capable of such functions, but among the modular support brigades, only the Maneuver Enhancement Brigade is doctrinally deemed capable of such functions. When assigned, the MEB can employ a maneuver battalion as a Tactical Combat Force (TCF) providing the MEB the capability of executing limited offensive and defensive operations.⁴³ This distinction clearly sets the Maneuver Enhancement Brigade apart from the remaining modular support brigades and functional brigades found in the Division area of operation. By design the Maneuver Enhancement Brigade is capable of performing numerous functions previously performed by the Division Rear in the Division-based Army.⁴⁴

As General Schoomaker had directed, the transformation to the modular force was swift. The transformation came with a large price tag in time, resources, manpower and funding, but as anticipated, has been able to meet the requirements of operations in two theatres, which are now entering into its seventh year. Today, the Army continues to transform, constantly analyzing the initial decisions made by Task Force Modularity and refining the type, make-up and number of modular brigades in the force.

Standing Up – Inception, Development, Doctrine, and Fielding.

TRADOC Futures Center, working in conjunction with the U.S. Army Maneuver Support Center (MANSCEN) at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, tasked the U.S. Army Maneuver Support Battle Lab (MSBL), also at Fort Leonard Wood, to “develop and

experiment with the MEB” concept.⁴⁵ To fully address the concept of the MEB, MANSCEN chose to establish a General Officer Working Group with the charter to refine the mission statement, propose employment concepts, and develop the organizational design of the MEB.⁴⁶

The Task Force Modularity concept of the protection brigade or MEB as it became known was in an effort to create a modular brigade capable of providing both functional support and reinforcing support to the BCTs.⁴⁷ The MEB as described in initial Army Doctrine was a command and control headquarters with a highly capable, multifunctional staff. The MEB’s key capabilities were identified as; protection, movement and maneuver, and sustainment functions.⁴⁸

The MEB is not designed to replace the functional Engineer, Military Police or Chemical brigades on the battlefield. Rather, the MEB is designed to provide an intermediate multifunctional capability to the division commander, capable of providing command and control for a limited number of assets from those specific branches. When a mission requires a more functional approach or capability exceeds the MEB, selected functional missions are transferred to a functional brigade for execution. The MEB structure reduces the command and control footprint in the battle space by providing an economy of force through its multifunctional capability. From the inception of the protection brigade and still present today, is a discussion which centers on the depth of branch capability within the MEB.⁴⁹ This concern was shared by General Schoomaker during the initial design phase of the MEB; however, reasoning that deferring such questions to when the Army actually established the unit seemed best, he approved the initial design.⁵⁰

The MEB shares many common characteristics with other support brigades in that it is tailorable, modular, expeditionary, networked, joint interdependent, agile and multifunctional. However, the MEB has no direct antecedent in today's force structure and unlike other support or functional brigades; the MEB is staffed and trained to Command and Control (C2) an assigned area of operations (AO) and to control terrain.⁵¹ "It is in this regard that the MEB is similar in nature to the BCT, but without the BCT's inherent maneuver capability."⁵² Clearly, the MEB is designed to form a bridge between the capabilities found in the BCTs and the more robust capabilities found in the functional brigades.⁵³

As the MEB continued to evolve and be tested, doctrine for the MEB also evolved. By the time of final approval of FM 3-90.31, Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Operations in February 2009, the doctrinal mission of the MEB had grown to four key tasks. The four key tasks being: conduct maneuver support operations, conduct support area operations, conduct consequence management and conduct stability operations.⁵⁴ Secondary missions include: Economy of Force mission to free up BCTs, Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear and High-Yield Explosives (CBRNE), Consequence Management Response Force (CCMRF), Civil Support Operations, Stability Operations missions such as the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR).⁵⁵

Fielding of the first MEBs began in 2006. The initial fielding plan called for four regular Army MEBs, sixteen Army National Guard MEBs and three Army Reserve MEBs.⁵⁶ To date, three regular Army, two Army Reserve and thirteen Army National Guard MEBs have stood up.⁵⁷ Current plans call for one more regular Army MEB to stand up at Ft. Drum, New York; one more Army Reserve MEB to stand up in Hawaii

and three additional Army National Guard MEBs to stand up in Utah, Illinois and Arizona by the end of 2012.⁵⁸

In the Fight – The deployment of Maneuver Enhancement Brigades.

As of today, no Maneuver Enhancement Brigades have been utilized in support of operations in Iraq. Furthermore, only the 1st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, one of the three standing active Army Maneuver Enhancement Brigades, has been utilized in Afghanistan. The 110th MEB, Missouri Army National Guard and the 141st MEB, North Dakota Army National Guard, have each deployed in support of the NATO led Kosovo Force (KFOR), serving as the command element of Multinational Task Force East (MNTF-E). The 196th MEB, South Dakota Army National Guard, will deploy to Afghanistan in the spring of 2010, but will perform in a support and operating base security capacity, not reflective of a doctrinal MEB mission.

Although limited in number of deployments to date, the MEBs deployed have proven to be highly capable and effective formations in the operational environment. The MEBs have demonstrated the capability to command and control in highly kinetic combat environments as well as the capability to employ all elements of power in continually evolving stability operations. As the mission transitions to stability operations, “the combat power of a brigade combat team (BCT) may not be required or desirable.”⁵⁹ The MEB brings to the stability mission a robust engineering capability, a military police and effects staff.⁶⁰ “The MEB offers planners another viable option for a brigade level C2 headquarters capable of integrating joint, combined, and interagency capabilities in regions not yet ready for full transition to civilian control.”⁶¹ The MEB brings a level of expertise and flexibility not found in other brigades. The MEB provides an economy of force as it reduces the overall force footprint through its ability to employ

needed Engineer, Military Police, and Chemical assets without a functional brigade presence.

During the recent 2008 to 2009 deployment of the 1st MEB to Afghanistan, the brigade commanded two maneuver battalion task forces, United States Air Force expeditionary security forces, three Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), a military police company, a signal company, Air Force Prime Base Engineer Emergency Force, and Afghan National Army embedded training teams.⁶² The task force also interacted with interagency assets such as the United States Public Health Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).⁶³ Commander Colonel Scott Spellmon stated “the MEB is a good fit for the Counter-insurgency (COIN) environment.”⁶⁴ Spellmon further stated: “The MEB headquarters has the staff expertise necessary to plan and provide C2 for the restoration of infrastructure, development of security forces and improvement of local governance capacity.”⁶⁵

The MEBs deployed into theatre to date have clearly demonstrated the value of the MEBs multi-functional capability. It is this multi-functional command and control capability combined with correct subordinate unit alignments that will provide the division, corps and theatre commanders a flexible force capability to conduct full spectrum operations.⁶⁶ The MEB is well structured to perform in the numerous stability environments the Army finds itself operating in today. If properly augmented with TCF capability, the MEB will also perform well in limited counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist environments found throughout the world today. The MEB should no longer be overlooked as a viable option to meet the tactical needs of today's operations.

The Maneuver Enhancement Brigade in Support of Homeland Security.

Yet to be employed in support of an incident, the Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and its capabilities have received widespread consideration in the Homeland Security arena. The multi-functional capability (Engineer, Military Police and Chemical) of the MEBs is seen as a viable response option for many of the threat scenarios under consideration by both the United States Northern Command (NORTHCOM) and the Department of Homeland Security leadership.

Over the past several years, the Army has worked to establish the CCMRF. This force is designed to be a “robust federal entry force that is scalable and task-organized to mitigate further loss of life and relieve suffering in response to a CBRNE disaster.”⁶⁷ The CCMRF “supports local and state requests for assistance as part of a coordinated federal response” to a CBRNE disaster.⁶⁸

In the February 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates pledged continued support to the CCMRF concept stating “the Department will begin reorganizing these forces to enhance their lifesaving capabilities, maximize their flexibility, and reduce their response times.”⁶⁹ Gates further stated: “the Department will begin restructuring the original CCMRF to increase its ability to respond more rapidly to an event here at home.”⁷⁰

The CCMRFs are internally organized with three task forces (Task Force Operations, Task Force Aviation and Task Force Medical) and are assigned to NORTHCOM.⁷¹ U.S. Army North (ARNORTH) works with the Department of the Army, U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), the National Guard and other agencies to develop, organize and unify this military capability in the land domain for CBRNE

response.⁷² In this capacity, U.S. Army North is responsible for training, equipping and certifying the CCMRF elements.

The nation's first CCMRF, identified as 9.1 stood up in 2008. The elements of CCMRF 9.1 were primarily derived from forces of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, of Fort Stewart, Georgia. The MEB structure entered into the CCMRF mission as the 4th MEB of Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri became the Task Force Operation element of the second CCMRF identified as CCMRF 10.1. The MEB elements continue to participate in the CCMRF mission as CCMRF 10.2 recently stood up with the 218th MEB, a National Guard MEB from South Carolina serving as the Task Force Operations element. CCMRF 9.1 and 10.1 are primarily comprised of active duty units, while CCMRF 10.2 is comprised largely of reserve component units.

It is important to recognize that the types of forces, equipment and experience required for response to a CBRNE incident are different than those required for a natural disaster.⁷³ CCMRFs have the expertise to provide support to domestic CBRNE consequence management missions of which the MEB has the potential to play a major role.⁷⁴ The concept of deploying active Army soldiers or National Guard soldiers in title 10 status within the United States borders has been met with mixed reviews by those who do not fully understand the CCMRF mission. While many applaud the Department of Defense for preparing for worst case scenarios within the United States; there are some who are quick to raise concerns over the legalities of Title 10 forces in this role, specifically regarding the limitations of the Posse Comitatus Act. In October 2008 the American Civil Liberties Union initiated a FOIA request that raised several concerns

regarding the CCMRF.⁷⁵ The potential deployment of CCMRF marks the first time an active military unit has been given a dedicated assignment to Northern Command.⁷⁶

Also addressed in the February 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report, Secretary Gates stated, “the Department will draw on existing National Guard forces to build a Homeland Response Force (HRF) in each of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regions.”⁷⁷ “These ten HRFs will provide a regional response capability; focus on planning, training and exercising; and forge strong links between the federal level and state and local authorities.”⁷⁸ The HRF mission is distinctly different from the CCMRF mission in that it is tailored to respond to non-CBRNE incidents such as manmade incidents and natural disasters.⁷⁹ Turning toward National Guard assets to share in this Homeland Security mission will likely be seen as a positive approach to addressing some of the concerns raised around the Posse Comitatus Act issues.

Given the anticipated response required for CCMRF and HRF missions inside the United States, the MEB and its ability to quickly bring support to civil authorities through the employment of Engineer assets, law enforcement assets and CBRNE capability, the MEB formation is an ideal formation. The number of MEBs presently active in the Army and in the Army National Guard is sufficient to participate in the CCMRF rotation and to meet the Secretary’s goal of one HRF per FEMA region.

The Struggle for Legitimacy

Nearly four years after the fielding of the first MEB, the MEBs have seen limited combat action and remain a largely unknown entity in the force. Although the MEB appears to be finding acceptance as an ideal force structure and capability for the CCMRF, HRF and other Homeland Security missions, the MEB continues to find little

support for its utilization in combat operations. This challenge must be overcome if the MEBs are to ever find force wide acceptance, utilization and legitimacy in the modular force.

Several contributing factors appear to have led to the current state of the MEB's lack of utilization and acceptance within the force. One key factor is what appears to be a certain level of resistance to the concept of a multifunctional brigade. This resistance is most prevalent among the functional brigade communities who may perceive the MEB formation as a threat to their future existence. Specifically, the Engineer, Military Police and Chemical communities appear to have not yet come to grips with the role the MEB will play and the relationship it will have with their functional brigades. Given the requirement for the MEB commander to be branch qualified as either Engineer, Military Police or Chemical, it is imperative that a relationship build with these communities to begin to develop high quality leaders, capable of commanding the MEB.

A second contributing factor to the MEBs lack of utilization appears to be the preponderance of MEBs assigned to the reserve component. Today, all but three of the existing MEBs in the Army are found in the National Guard and the Army Reserve. This lack of representation within the active Army force structure has resulted in a lack of exposure across the force. Division staffs and war planners at all levels are unfamiliar with the MEB and its capability and have failed to schedule the MEB for deployments into Iraq and Afghanistan. A continued failure to deploy the MEB formations into overseas contingency operations will result in a missed opportunity to validate the MEB capability and to utilize a highly capable organization uniquely tailored for today's stability operations.⁸⁰

Given the high number of the total MEB force structure found in the Army National Guard, the National Guard has been an active participant in the development of the MEB from its inception. From this participation, two relatively major philosophical differences arose between the National Guard and the active Army. These differences centered on the TCF concept and the rank structure of the command.

The Army National Guard is a strong advocate that the MEB should have a tactical combat force (TCF) assigned to the MEB in its organic structure. The addition of the TCF to the MEBs organic structure will insure the MEBs ability to conduct full spectrum operations at all times, not needing to depend on its ability to request and receive a TCF by attachment. Further, the organic TCF will foster a stronger command relationship and habitual training relationship. The organic TCF is seen as a critical component to the MEBs ability to perform stability operations in today's world.

The second philosophical difference centered on the rank structure of the MEB command. The Army National Guard advocated that the MEB should be commanded by a Brigadier General rather than by a Colonel. This discussion stemmed from early conceptual models of utilization of the MEB. Often times the conceptual models of the MEB were depicted in a linear battlefield concept in which the MEB was shown as the terrain owner of what had once been referred to as the Division Rear. Given that often times, the Division would detail one of its Brigadier Generals to C2 the Division Rear, bringing with it the rank and authority to influence all assets found in the rear, it seemed a natural conclusion for the MEB commander to hold that same rank and authority as well. Just as within the BCTs, the actual Table of Organization (TOE) for the MEB authorized but did not require a Brigadier General to command the MEB. The Army

National Guard issued guidance authorizing states to fill their MEBs with Brigadier Generals. At present, the Army National Guard is considering rescinding this authorization due to a lack of Brigadier General Officer billets within the total Army National Guard structure.

Although not uncommon in the current operational environment for deployed units to be assigned missions outside the scope of their doctrinal foundations, it could be argued that to date, none of the deployed Maneuver Enhancement Brigades have been utilized in their true doctrinal capacity. Maneuver Enhancement Brigades have deployed with only headquarters elements, leaving organic Brigade Support Battalions and Signal Companies behind. Mission sets have ranged from quasi-BCT utilization in the case of the 1st MEB, to a mission reflective of a Regional Support Group mission in the pending deployment of the 196th MEB. As the Army continues to move toward its target date of 2017 for completion of transformation to the modular force, Army leadership must continually evaluate and validate the initial decisions of transformation. It is essential that we continue to adjust the force where necessary to insure the Army arrives at 2017 with the correct unit formations in the Army's inventory.

In light of MEB utilization to date, it will be difficult for the Army to validate doctrine or to garner lessons learned concerning the employment of this modular support brigade and to fully assess the brigade's value to the total force. Army leadership and war planners must begin to recognize the dynamic capability of the Maneuver Enhancement Brigades and must begin to properly employ the MEBs in the fight if the MEB is to be afforded the opportunity to demonstrate its value within the total modular force.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered in part as a road ahead for the MEB. These recommendations reflect points offered by this author and by other leaders who have worked closely in the development and fielding of the MEB and who have personally commanded a MEB. The recommendations are directed toward continuing to define the MEB role in the modular force, increasing the utilization of the MEB and a broader understanding of the capability of the MEB formation in the modular Army.

1. In the Fight: At the present time, “DA, FORSCOM, the Combatant Commands and their Army Service component commands do not yet fully understand MEBs and their potential.”⁸¹ Planners at all levels must become educated on the multi-functional capability of the MEB and the capability it can bring to the current fight. The Army must begin to utilize this valuable asset. After having commanded the 1st MEB in Afghanistan for fifteen months, COL Scott Spellmon stated, “This organization has an important role to fulfill today in Afghanistan and Iraq.”⁸² Clearly the multi-functional capability of the MEB placed under one multi-functional headquarters, brings a mix of skills highly useful in COIN operations in regions that are transitioning from insurgency to peace.⁸³

2. Balance the Force: The heavy preponderance of MEBs in the reserve component has created an imbalance across the force. This imbalance has led to a lack of relationship between MEBs and most active division and corps. These headquarters are unfamiliar with the true capability of the MEB and how to employ them in full spectrum operations.⁸⁴ In the near term the existing Army National Guard and Army Reserve MEBs must develop training associations with active component commands.⁸⁵ The Army should consider increasing the number of active component

MEBs. The insufficient number of active component MEBs does not provide for adequate active component capacity of at least two MEBs per ARFORGEN.⁸⁶ Dr. John Bonin offered, “One of the ways for the Army to mitigate its risk of having only 45 instead of 48 Regular Army BCTs would be to add three Regular Army MEBs.”⁸⁷ Recent Department of the Army structure recommendations to keep only two active component MEBs (1st & 4th) will only prove to increase the existing challenges.⁸⁸

3. Tactical Combat Force (TCF): The discussion centering on the utilization of and relationship of the TCF must be resolved. In the present non-linear environment, the justification for a TCF to be organic to the MEB structure is stronger than ever. Although the MEB is clearly not a BCT, the MEB will be called upon to deal with threats within their area of operations that exceed the capability of the units habitually assigned to a MEB. The TCF is critical to the MEBs ability to shape and control their area of operations, especially in the unpredictable stability operations environment.

The recent employment of the 1st MEB is a clear example of the full spectrum capability of a MEB when provided the TCF asset. The Division staffs and planners assigning battle space to the MEB must be confident that the MEB can fully control and execute its assigned missions. TCF capability is vital to the MEBs ability to execute that mission. When deployed, the MEB should be deployed with each of its organic assets. The Brigade Support Battalion (BSB), Signal Company and TCF are all critical to the MEB’s ability to perform its mission. The habitual relationship gained through training with organic assets should not be overlooked, as it has been in MEB deployments to date.

4. Support to Homeland Security: The MEB is an ideal formation to be utilized in support of the CCMRF and HRF missions. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report clearly identified the intent to utilize active component and reserve component forces to support Homeland Security. It is anticipated that this requirement will become a permanent mission requirement of the armed forces. The MEB's multi-functional capability allows for it to quickly adapt to the fluid environment of a natural or manmade disasters.

The MEB should continue to play a key role in the defense of our homeland; however caution must be utilized to not stove-pipe the MEB toward only conducting Homeland Security type missions. The MEB is a highly capable combat asset and it should continue to be manned, resourced and allowed to develop its wartime capability.

5. Commanding the MEB: Two issues must be resolved concerning the commanding of the MEB. The issues needing to be addressed are the branch specialty of the commander and the grade of the commander. The current MEB TOE calls for the commander to possess the branch specialty designator of 01C, requiring the commander hold either an Engineer, Military Police or Chemical officer branch. It is recommended the MEB commander position be able to be filled by any officer who holds any Combat Arms or Maneuver Support branch. It is however imperative that the MEB commander have experience in a BCT setting, preferably at the Field Grade level.⁸⁹

The transition to the modular force created eight units of action, each bringing specific capability to the fight. In every case, with the exception of the Reserve Component MEBs, the Brigades have been commanded by a Colonel. This should be

the standard for all modular brigades. The authority to own or control battle space is given by the Division Commander to a specific unit and is unaffected by the rank of the commander commanding the unit it has been given. The effectiveness of the terrain manager comes from the authority vested in them by the Division and the relationships they develop with the tenants of that terrain.

Conclusion

In 2003, as General Schoomaker set out to transform the Army to the modular force, his vision was clear. The Army must become more expeditionary if it is to meet the operational demands of the 21st century.⁹⁰ General Schoomaker was adamant the transformation must be swift, not becoming bogged down in the normal force development channels.⁹¹ To keep the process moving forward, the Army chief of staff stated that “nothing had to be perfect. In fact, he expected the initial versions to have weak points that could be fixed later as the Army conducted additional analysis and gained operational experience with the designs.”⁹² Today, the Army continues to conduct its analysis of the modular force and refine that structure based upon lessons learned. To date, the Maneuver Enhancement Brigade has not sufficiently been put to the test. The Maneuver Enhancement Brigade is a dynamic multi-functional formation that is at a critical point in its development. The MEB must resolve basic organizational questions, continue to define its role in support of Homeland Security and most importantly, be put into the fight, if it is to ever secure legitimacy and find its position among the other seven modular brigades of today’s Army.

Endnotes

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⁶ Ibid., iv.

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