

MEBs **side-by-side** With a BCT: Is the Gap Filled?

By Major Troy S. Parrish

The contemporary battlefield is anything but linear. This notion is well documented and easy to confirm at any level from platoon to corps. As the United States and its allies continue to look into the future for ways to improve training, doctrine, and capabilities for combating enemies, one modular brigade-sized organization that is targeted to fill a multirole capability is the maneuver enhancement brigade (MEB). The expectation is that a carefully organized MEB can function independently in its own operational environment and control an area of operations, much as a typical brigade combat team (BCT) does. Based on my education at the Command and General Staff College, multiple deployments to Iraq, and personal beliefs and understanding, the MEB seems best suited to perform a supporting role in any area of operations and should not be overwhelmed with the role of owning an operational environment. It is an atypical expectation for the types of units that normally comprise an MEB and introduces unnecessary confusion in an already confusing environment.

The majority of combat and stability/support operations in the operating environment are conducted in urban areas. Urban operations are complex and confusing and require complete immersion in the urban area. When combat operations of a lethal nature are conducted, the BCT—whether an infantry brigade combat team (IBCT), Stryker brigade combat team (SBCT), or heavy brigade combat team (HBCT)—is designed for that role. It seems logical that the organization that specializes in lethal combat operations controls the terrain that it is operating in, and supporting elements perform their responsibilities after careful coordination with the owner of the operational environment. Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in the last eight years have proven that this ownership belongs with the unit that is managing all operations and is also capable of reacting to an increase in hostile, lethal operations.

Similarly, during stability operations it is expected that there is a shift in the role of the BCT. For obvious reasons, a BCT will not conduct lethal operations unless warranted

under the rules of engagement or national policy. Non-lethal operations demonstrate a significant decrease in the necessity for units capable of affecting a target with direct and indirect fires. However, at any moment, a seemingly peaceful area of operations can explode with hostile actions and demand action. For this reason alone, the BCT is prepared to respond much more convincingly than any other organization on the battlefield—including the MEB.

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The MEB typically deploys to an area of operations with engineer; military police; civil affairs; psychological operations; and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) units. It is important to note that these types of organizations greatly enhance the capabilities of the maneuver force commander in an area of operations. In fact, it is easy to conclude that a long-term operation would demand elements of each of those capabilities for a BCT to be successful. It is also easy to conclude that those units are reinforcing the existing capability already contained in the BCT. That is why I suggest that the MEB and its subordinate elements bring a combat capability to bear best during long-term operations. A BCT will have the capability—but during extended operations when the goal is to transition to stability operations, an MEB fulfills much of the increased requirement for stability tasks.

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