
The MEB in the Early Phases of Campaign Planning

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Field Manual (FM) 3-90.31, *Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Operations*, published in February 2009, joins the body of published doctrine and scholarly considerations of ways that the maneuver enhancement brigade (MEB) will be employed in current and future conflicts and contingencies. That body of published doctrine considers mission sets that an MEB would best be equipped to execute in support of a division or corps conducting defensive, offensive, or stability operations in an established theater. It does not give any consideration to the opening phases of a campaign and the benefits that the MEB affords a regional combatant commander during the joint reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (JRSOI) process as the commander builds combat power in order to begin decisive operations.

Because of its multifunctionality and inherent capabilities, the MEB is uniquely suited to enter a theater of operations during the initial phases of a campaign. The MEB offers the combatant commander a single command and control node designed to control all of the combat enablers necessary for mission support during JRSOI, as well as combat missions once the commander has assembled sufficient combat power to begin decisive operations. This capability is in addition to operations in support of an existing deployed force, already thoroughly described in the existing body of doctrine. By acting as a single headquarters that is responsible for supporting units conducting JRSOI, the MEB provides significant synergies to initial entry into a theater of operations, whether by forced entry or permissive entry.

The MEB is designed to command and control the following battalions:

- Chemical
- Engineer
- Military police

The MEB may also command the following elements, as needed:

- Air defense
- Civil affairs (CA)
- Explosive ordnance disposal (EOD)
- Psychological operations (PSYOP)

Each of these elements is a combat multiplier during the early phases of an operation, ensuring that units deploying into the theater of operations are protected during their vulnerable JRSOI period. The MEB elements also ensure that deploying units have sufficient infrastructure, whether host nation or theater construction, enabling the combatant commander to rapidly assemble combat power and begin decisive operations according to the JRSOI principles of synchronization, knowledge, and speed. The MEB enables the combatant commander to establish command and control over these diverse units with a single command and control node, conserving deployment and JRSOI throughput capacity for the sustainment units who enable JRSOI and the combat units who will achieve the commander's objectives.

For initial entry under permissive conditions, the MEB controls CA, engineer, and military police units in support of the sustainment units conducting JRSOI.

- CA units interact with the local populace and government on behalf of the deploying U.S. forces to obtain access to infrastructure and available resources to reduce deployment demands for the deploying force.
- Engineers upgrade and maintain the host nation infrastructure required to receive units and their equipment, create and maintain the staging areas where units receive their equipment and prepare for onward movement, and assist the host nation maintenance of the avenues of approach that units use for onward movement.
- Military police help host nation forces control the movement of arriving units, units moving onward to integrate with the units they will fight with, and sustainment movements in support of all forces in-theater.

While the main force conducts JRSOI, the MEB should be under operational control of the senior sustainment command in-theater. Shortly before the combatant commander has sufficient combat power to initiate operations, the MEB should be assigned operational control of combat forces so that it can provide support to combat forces in keeping with the mission sets outlined in FM 3-90.31:

- Maneuver support operations
- Support area operations
- Consequence management operations
- Stability operations

Before the MEB, these diverse units each required a separate functional brigade headquarters to control them. Alternatively, they lost some capability if they were not assigned to a functional brigade headquarters, since each unit performed its own responsibilities, along with all of those normally performed by a functional higher headquarters. The MEB is a multifunctional headquarters that bridges the gap between these two extremes. Although it does not have the full capabilities of a traditional functional brigade headquarters, it does have significant capability for the chemical, engineer, and military police functions, as well as some capability for EOD, PSYOP, CA, and air defense functions. Assigning the MEB to control these units during initial JRSOI operations reduces the number of headquarters required for deployment during the crucial entry operations or drastically improves the capabilities of these units by freeing them from performing brigade-level responsibilities.

The MEB enables more efficient throughput during JRSOI in a permissive environment, but the full capabilities of the MEB may not be required, because the host nation will provide the vast majority of the support required by deploying forces. During forced entry operations, the MEB truly demonstrates its versatility. The missions required during permissive entry are still necessary, but other missions join them. U.S. planners expect many opponents to make use of rocket-delivered chemical weapons during U.S. forced entry operations. The MEB is well suited to address that threat to JRSOI operations, acting as the higher headquarters for air defense units protecting JRSOI nodes and controlling the chemical and EOD units that are able to mitigate the consequences of any rocket attacks, whether chemical or conventional. This mitigation will likely be required even following successful air defense against rocket attacks, because of the dangers of ordnance on the battlefield and the likely civilian population surrounding the ports of debarkation used during the JRSOI process. The MEB is also capable of assuming responsibility for the area of operations where the JRSOI operation occurs and is able to command and control a maneuver battalion to act as a tactical combat force for all of the RSOI nodes, if necessary. Assigning all of these missions to a single headquarters provides significant protection synergies in support of RSOI operations.

Deployment throughput capacity is always less than the combatant commander desires, and early in the process the commander must balance the requirements for combat units to achieve operational goals, sustainment units to process other units through JRSOI, and enabling units to support both combat units achieving operational objectives and sustainment units receiving the main body of the force into theater. Deploying an MEB reduces the requirement to deploy command and control nodes early in the deployment process, because it is able to control multiple functional battalions and reduce the initial need for functional brigade headquarters.

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The MEB must be considered for early deployment as part of a theater opening force because of its inherent capabilities, particularly in environments that are not entirely permissive. Because of the multifunctionality capability it brings, the MEB reduces the requirement to deploy command and control nodes for the combatant commander during the early stages of deployment, when deployment capacity is at a premium. Because the MEB commands and controls both engineers and military police as a single headquarters in support of sustainment units during JRSOI, it supplies vital synergies for the sustainment headquarters to leverage, simplifying the very complicated process of JRSOI. With its capability to own terrain and protect the JRSOI process, it also preserves combat units for decisive operations. The MEB provides significant capabilities to initial entry into a theater of operations in every circumstance and should be among the first units to deploy into any new theater of operations.



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