

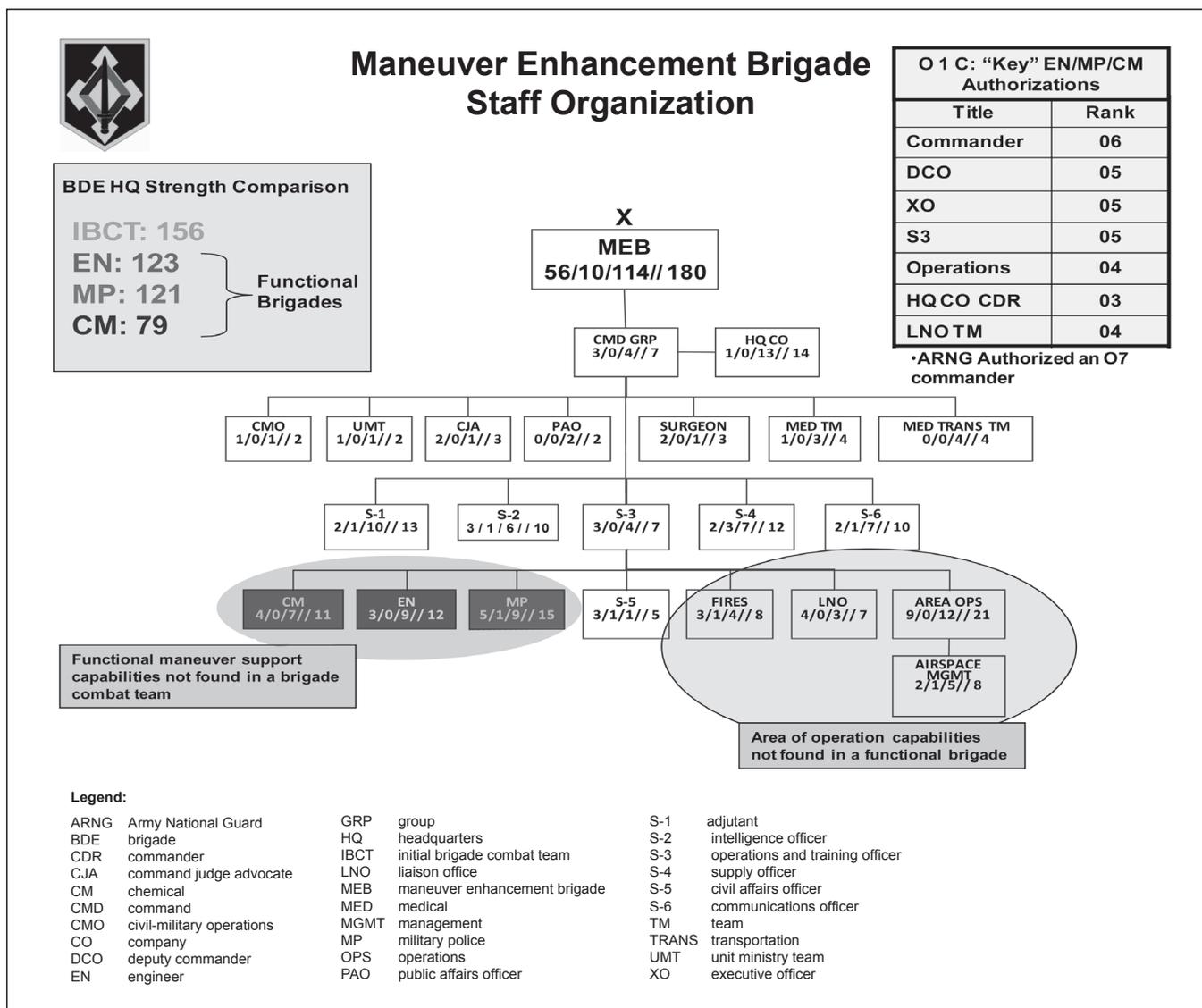
Maneuver Enhancement Brigade or Maneuver Enhancement–Brigade Combat Teams?

By Major Stephen A. Wickersham

There's a problem with the current manning and equipping and total planned number of the current maneuver enhancement brigades (MEBs). According to Colonel Robert H. Risberg, 4th MEB commander, the MEBs are manned and equipped only after the brigade combat teams (BCTs).¹ This article will argue that MEBs should not only be manned and equipped with the same prioritization as BCTs, but during stability operations, they should have priority. Arguably, the majority of combat

operations in the foreseeable future will likely be stability operations such as the ones in Iraq and Afghanistan. Additionally, the MEB is arguably more capable and adept at conducting stability operations than other BCTs.

Thomas Barnett, author of *The Pentagon's New Map*, refers to *core* and *gap* countries or regions of the world.² He defines core regions as those that have viable technology and resources that can support their populace, and gap regions as those that cannot. He contends that most



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future conflicts will arise between the core and the gap nations and that the core nations must help raise the gap nations from their plight. The United States—the supreme core nation—must lead that effort, and this will lead us to conduct long-term stability operations. High-intensity offensive operations may still be required from time to time, but these will likely be short-lived affairs, followed by long-term counterinsurgency, stability, and security operations.

If this is what we expect the majority of our future operations to be, then would we not want to have enough properly outfitted units that specialize in stability operations? Would we not want to prioritize their equipment and manning?

The *United States Army's Modular Redesign: Issues for Congress*, updated 5 May 2006, states that “while the Army's modular redesign may be adequate for rapid, decisive combat operations, it is inadequate to conduct stability operations.” The report suggests that the MEB may be the unit to adequately conduct stability operations, and further suggests concerns over plans to have only three active duty MEBs.³ According to Colonel Risberg, an infantry, Stryker, or heavy BCT that is eight months from deployment in the Army Force Generation cycle will get priority manning and equipping over an MEB that is just two months from deployment in the same cycle.⁴

This is a major problem. The MEB is more ideally fitted to conduct stability operations and security operations than any other BCT. Field Manual 3-90.3, *The Mounted Brigade Combat Team*, states that “MEB operations contribute significant combat power, both lethal and nonlethal in nature, to all of the components of full spectrum operations.... The unique design of the MEB, based on the factors of METT-TC [mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, civil considerations], postures it to be a potential unit of choice when conducting stability or civil support operations.”⁵ The MEB is well-provided with engineer, explosive ordnance disposal, and military police Soldiers, exactly the forces needed to support stability operations. It also has the staff expertise to support it. With 180 authorized positions, the MEB headquarters staff is the largest modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) staff of any brigade in the Army. It essentially has the same staff as a BCT, plus a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosive (CBRNE) staff section; an engineer staff section; and a military police staff section. These three sections provide added planning and command and control capabilities to the MEB that the other BCTs just don't have.

Additionally, 1st MEB has proved that MEBs—in a stability and counterinsurgency environment and commanded by an engineer commander—can not only be a “land owner” conducting full spectrum operations (with an emphasis on stability operations), but can do it well. So why is the BCT's priority for manning and equipment greater than that of the MEBs? The only risk in raising the manning and equipment priority of the MEB is to reduce the ready status of a BCT, but we have enough BCTs to fight decisive combat operations. What we need is more specialized units to fight the “long fight”—the stability operation. We need MEBs with manning and equipment priorities higher than, or at least the same as, those of the BCTs.

In conclusion, given the generally accepted fact that the majority of fights in the near future will be in stability operations, and the arguable notion that the MEB is the best-suited unit to conduct stability operations, the MEB should have at least the same priority of manning and equipment as the BCTs. Perhaps the MEB should be redesignated as the fourth BCT—the ME-BCT.



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Endnotes

¹Colonel Robert H. Risberg, “Brief to Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Class A302,” Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 21 April 2009.

²Thomas P.M. Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century*, Putnam Adult, New York, New York, 22 April 2004.

³Andrew Feickert, “U.S. Army's Modular Redesign: Issues for Congress,” CRS Report for Congress, Updated 5 May 2006.

⁴Risberg.

⁵Field Manual 3-90.3, *The Mounted Brigade Combat Team*, 26 February 2009.