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The Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and Its Role in Stability Operations—Part I

By Colonel Todd R. Wood

This is the first of a two-part discussion of the maneuver enhancement brigade (MEB) as the best stabilization force to meet the United States Army's future postconflict needs.

The evolution of the U.S. military to embrace stability operations has been characterized by policy decisions that internalize lessons learned from Afghanistan and Iraq and projections of future conflicts. The United States Army continues to learn and adapt lessons from the last seven years of sustained operations. The importance of stability operations in the overall operational success in today's environment has emerged as one of the largest lessons. The result has been a new doctrinal approach that emphasizes the role of stability operations. Consequently, new combat organizations are needed to achieve our nation's goals and protect its people. The MEB may be the correct stabilization force, with the potential to meet the challenges of future postconflict security environments.

The U.S. military's major combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq were initially quick, effective, and successful, while follow-on phases have been challenging. Winning the war was relatively easy; establishing the peace has proved to be much more difficult because of the rapidly changing nature of war and the specific problems this dynamic environment imposes on the organization of the U.S. military. While the U.S. military had experienced conflict short of major combat operations—such as peacekeeping operations, stability operations, and civil support operations—it was organized and trained to win major wars against nation-state opponents. For example, the military force used in Operation Desert Storm was created to succeed against opponents on the plains of Central Europe. The overwhelming success of this force against Iraq validated the Cold War model of military operations, which subsequently influenced the military training, doctrine, and force structure that entered into combat operations after 11 September 2001. Military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq did not fit the traditional ideas of offensive and defensive operations. The U.S. military needed to adapt and change to achieve our national aims in both countries by embracing stability operations in planning and execution.

Joint doctrine defines stability operations as various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside

the United States with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment and provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.[1] The lack of stability operational planning and execution began to affect overall mission success at the conclusion of major combat operations. In Afghanistan and Iraq, "Failure to establish area security concurrent with destruction of the enemy control set back plans to restore essential services and emboldened opponents of U.S. occupation."[2]

Battalion and brigade commanders noticed the tactical effects of not rapidly following up security success with efforts to meet the needs of the local population. Leaders quickly realized that establishing public services such as trash collection, power, potable water, hospital administration, and public education was necessary to meet the basic needs of the population, begin the transition to stability, and prevent further violence. In both theaters, the basic force used to conduct these stability operations was brigade combat teams (BCTs) composed of traditional combat forces from infantry, armor, cavalry, and artillery units. These units were designed to establish security and were not focused or resourced to perform stability tasks. The other brigade-size units that did have stability and reconstruction focus—such as divisional engineer brigades and civil affair brigades—were very few and operated mostly at the national level in major cities such as Baghdad. The result was a deficient and inconsistent stabilization effort throughout the country that created a permissive environment for insurgency. The factors of poor postconflict planning and lack of critical stabilization forces caused the U.S. military to lose the initial security successes achieved through regime change and opened a door of opportunity for enemy forces to further destabilize the countries.

Policy Shift

As insurgencies in both Afghanistan and Iraq gained a foothold, the policies and strategies at the national level began to shift. In turn, this changed the military approach to stability operations in both theaters. The president, through the National Security Strategy, gave the military and the rest of the government clear direction on postconflict operations: "Once peace has been restored, the hard work of postconflict stabilization and reconstruction must begin. Military involvement may be necessary to stop bloody conflict, but peace and stability will last only if follow-on efforts to restore order and rebuild are successful."[3] The President's emphasis on stabilization directed the military to reshape policy and strategy. It also paved the way for Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 3000.05, which states that stability operations are a core U.S. military mission that shall be given priority comparable to combat operations, addressed and integrated into doctrine, organizations, training, education, exercises, material, leadership, personnel, facilities, and planning.[4]

This clear guidance, and events on the ground, focused joint and Army doctrine on the importance of stability operations to the current security environment in the War on Terrorism. DODD 3000.05 placed stability operations on equal footing with combat operations and elevated their level of importance to gain adequate attention and resources. Two specific results of the U.S. military's embrace of stability operations are:

- A different doctrinal approach to military operations, emphasizing the role of stability.
- The formation of new organizations that will allow the Army to better achieve our nation's goals and protect the American people.

The MEB was designed to "enable, enhance, and protect the operational and tactical freedom of action of the supported force," to meet the specific needs of commanders, and to support full spectrum operations—with the additional caveat of including stability operations as one of its core missions.[5] This new organization has tremendous potential, and to understand its significance for current and future stability operations it is important to understand the evolution and organizational adaptation that occurred in the U.S. military concerning the role of stability operations.

Doctrinal Changes

Historically, the Army has participated in stability operations far more often than conventional wars.[6] Recent analysis, however, suggests that an institutional and ideological bias in the leadership existed against this activity. The focus on stability doctrine has been blurred because "the U.S. military … viewed these activities as separate and detracting from its primary warfighting mission… The result has been an inability to train, equip, and plan for these operations properly."[7] The events in Afghanistan and Iraq have begun to change this attitude and culture, and the senior leadership in the Department of Defense (DOD) has emphasized the military's role in stability. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates stated in a recent speech:

> *Whether in the midst of or in the aftermath of any major conflict, the requirement for the U.S. military to maintain security, provide aid and comfort, begin reconstruction, and stand up local government and public services will not go away. Even with better funded State Department and USAID [United States Agency for International Development], future military commanders will no more be able to rid themselves of these tasks than Eisenhower was.*[8]

Leaders and Soldiers on the ground were rediscovering some of the same lessons that their predecessors learned in previous stability operations. When these leaders rotated back from combat zones, they sparked Army doctrinal transformation from within by introducing changes at the training centers to merge doctrine with tactical and operational needs. In the 2008 Army Posture Statement, the Army said it had—

- Incorporated stability operations tasks and scenarios for units training to deploy.
- Established a stability operations division within the Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans, G3.
- Expanded the mandate of the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute to serve as the center of excellence for mastering stability, security, transition, reconstruction, and peace operations.
- Established the Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance to serve as the center of excellence for DOD and the focal point for the U.S. military for international security force assistance missions.

In 2008, the Army published its newest version of Field Manual (FM) 3.0, *Operations*, to inculcate the idea of full spectrum operations—offensive, defensive, and stability operations—into the vernacular of Army culture. The doctrine states in the introduction:

> *Success in future conflicts will require the protracted application of all the instruments of national power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic. Because of this, Army doctrine now equally weights tasks dealing with the population—stability or civil support—with those related to offensive and defensive operations. This parity is critical; it recognizes that 21st century conflict involves more than combat between armed opponents.*[9]

The idea of full spectrum operations also addressed the relationships and interaction with the population, friendly forces, and enemy forces in a complex, dynamic environment. This doctrine forces us to take a holistic approach to conflict and postconflict operations. America benefits from peace and globalization, and "The challenge … is gradually to bring such areas of the world that exist beyond the pale of the globalized world into the modern integrated structures of planetary civilization."[10]

In October 2008, the Army released a new doctrinal manual, FM 3-07, *Stability Operations*, that underscored the close connections among offensive, defensive, and stability operations.[11] The 2008 doctrine merely stated ideas that had already been embraced by the tactical forces operating in both combat theaters. Commanders at all levels recognized early in their operational deployments that success hinged on understanding and mastering the fundamental tasks associated with stability operations. These key tasks properly identified in the doctrine are:

- Establish civil security.
- Establish civil control.
- Restore essential services.
- Provide support to governance.
- Support economic and infrastructure development.[12]

Further study by Binnendijk and Johnson echoed these points, claiming that military units must simultaneously suppress, defeat, or destroy elements that resist the emergence of a new society or simply promote anarchy; establish law and order; repair damage to infrastructure that is essential to the emergence of a new social order; and establish an effective interim government.[13]

There are three critical points worth noting:

- *Simultaneity.* There can be no conceptual or practical gap between combat and stability operations.
- *Cooperation.* The Army must use the resources and support the efforts of other interagency and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).
- *Self-reliance.* In the absence of supporting organizations, commanders must be prepared to address the task with internal means.

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Doctrinal changes affect the way the Army views stability operations and organizes for missions. Identifying the key set of stabilization tasks allowed the Army to focus on developing an organizational structure to meet these demands. In Afghanistan today, the five core stabilization tasks are being carried out by several different organization models and units. These different organizations were individually developed to achieve specific tasks during stability operations. To understand the potential of an organization such as the MEB, it is important to examine the evolution of these prior organizations.

Development of Stabilization Forces

Three organizations—BCTs, provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), and military transition teams (MTTs)—are fulfilling the majority of stability tasks, and it is important to understand their contributions as well as their deficiencies. Each has made significant contributions to their specific tasks, but none has proved versatile enough to address all aspects of stability operations adequately.

BCTs. Initial stability operations in Afghanistan and Iraq were conducted by BCTs, the combat forces that are the building blocks of the modular Army. They are generally formed from combat forces and augmented with combat support enablers such as military police, civil affairs, or

other forces as needed. BCTs are best suited for traditional warfighting tasks, but the realities of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have forced them to shoulder tasks associated with stability operations. Two common criticisms of the stabilization capabilities of conventional forces are that they focus too much on the lethal approach to security operations and have insufficient numbers of specialized troops to conduct other necessary stabilization and reconstruction tasks.

The doctrine of relying on combat units for stability and reconstruction operations as they complete their combat missions served us well in the past, but for rapid, decisive operations it is an unsatisfactory ad hoc approach. Combat commands need a unit tailored specifically for postconflict operations that is readily deployable and available for planning, training, and exercising.[14]

Getting the right force to the correct place on the battlefield has always been the challenge of military planners. The BCT's greatest contribution to stability operations is its ability to establish security. But often in stability operations the force best suited for providing security is not optimal for the other long-term stabilization tasks. Current doctrine states: "The BCT is designed for combined arms combat. However, as a versatile and flexible force, it also can conduct stability operations very effectively. The BCT will likely have to focus on simultaneous combat and stability operations."[15] This doctrine speaks more to what BCTs could become in the future than to what they are accomplishing in Afghanistan and Iraq today. Army leaders have mitigated the difficulty of stability operations through planning, task organization, training, and creation of new organizations to ensure that the BCT has the right force for its mission set. One such organization to emerge out of the need for more effective stability forces is the PRT.

PRTs. BCTs struggled to be an initial invasion force and a stabilization force. In Afghanistan, the U.S.-led coalition decided to develop and deploy PRTs in 2002 to respond to stabilization needs in the provinces, which had little contact with the limited number of Internal Security Assistance Forces.[16]

The PRT is a combined civil-military organization designed to operate in semipermissive environments at the conclusion of major combat operations.[17] Its primary objectives are to extend the authority of the Afghan central government, improve security, and promote reconstruction.[18] PRTs are multinational and have become the model used by the United States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and other coalition members for postconflict reconstruction, security, and development tasks in Afghanistan and Iraq. Today there are 26 PRTs in Afghanistan—12 led by the United States and the rest by NATO's International Security Assistance Force. Military personnel lead most of the U.S. PRTs and report to the BCT that controls the area where they operate. The nonmilitary members of the PRT and PRTs that are not guided by military personnel report to their respective agencies.[19] U.S. PRTs receive direction from the State Department, USAID, and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), but the PRT commander, operating at the provincial level, has primary authority over security decisions.[20]

PRTs have been instrumental in fulfilling the critical need of furthering the influence of the Afghanistan government through election support, infrastructure improvement, and conflict mediation, but the organization is not without problems. The initial PRT idea showed great potential in theory, but from the beginning it had organizational and conceptual flaws. As one expert observed, "The impression [given by the coalition headquarters] was that the PRTs were to be observing and facilitating everything—being all things to all people—but not actually accomplishing anything vital to the political or military missions."[21] Criticism of the PRT approach to stability operations included a disjointed and ad hoc approach to restoring civil control, essential services, support to governance, and economic and infrastructure development; military and civilian operators who lacked training or skills for essential tasks; lack of a long-range focus on development; inconsistent mission statements; unclear roles and responsibilities; and limited resources. All of these have directly limited the potential contributions of PRTs.[22]

In Afghanistan, Lieutenant General David W. Barno saw the need for an organization like the PRT in 2003 and sought to change the unit's attitude that PRTs were a "civil affairs thing." To rectify the PRTs' shortcomings, he increased their number and sought to change their strategic context by enforcing unity of command and placing the PRTs under the brigade commander.[23] While his efforts alone were not enough to fix the PRT, this type of thinking identified an organizational need required by the military for stability operations. In 2004, Charles L. Barry, a senior research fellow at the Center for Technology and National Security Policy at the National Defense University, said the U.S. military needed dedicated, tailored commands to execute postconflict stability and reconstruction operations—readily deployable units to establish control and combat and prevent lawlessness and anarchy.[24]

MTTs. These teams, often referred to as the advisory training program, were deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq with the mission to train, advise, equip, and mentor security forces. In certain cases, they work for the BCTs; in others, they simply operate in the BCTs' operational environment. MTTs are the long-term solution to security issues in Afghanistan. Their ability to train the military and police force is critical to establishing societal peace and order. The MTT actions in training host nation security forces directly address the core stability task of security. However, the small number of trainers available, many who are specialists in training police or military, is a disadvantage. In September 2007, a team of Army officers evaluating the advisor training program concluded that the wrong Soldiers were being chosen for advisor training and that their training was poor, "seriously undermining the effectiveness" of the overall training mission and "fundamentally detracting from the U.S. strategy for transition in Iraq."[25] While the need for host nation security force training is essential—and the

MTT concept has great potential for fulfilling that critical need—it represents another ad hoc organization that exists outside the current forces' structure and doctrine.

The optimal force for conducting stabilization operations in Afghanistan will combine the BCT's security capacity; the MTT's training capacity; and the PRT's capacities for government, infrastructure, and economic development. One possible stability force described by Richard L. Kugler calls for "a set of four battalions of military police, construction engineers, civil affairs, medical support, psychological operations, and other assets that commonly are needed for the tasks," which he believes would require "about 11,300 personnel."[26] This description describes the possible task organization of the MEB and highlights the potential of this new organization.

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