



A soldier from 123rd Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, provides security 11 April 2016 during Decisive Action Rotation 16-05 at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California. (Photo by Pfc. Esmeralda Cervantes, U.S. Army)

# The Maneuver Enhancement Brigade is the Support Area Command Post

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## The Necessity of a Mission Command Node in the Support Area

The *Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* describes how the Army will conduct Unified Land Operations as part of a joint force in support of unified action.<sup>1</sup> The complexities of tomorrow's operational environment may include contested domains and create conditions for overmatch. Multi-domain operations include peer and near-peer capabilities such as long-range artillery, integrated air defense, and counter unmanned aircraft systems technology.

In order for the Army to fight and win against this type of enemy, land component commands will need to plan and execute large-scale combat operations that include tactical tasks such as passage of lines and encirclement operations. These tactical tasks enable land component commands to secure objectives and seize key terrain throughout the operational framework, which includes the deep, close, support, and consolidation areas. As the division's maneuver brigades get further away from the line of departure, the bigger the support area and consolidation area becomes. For the division's maneuver brigades to maintain momentum, a dedicated mission command node is required to control and assess operations in the support and consolidation areas.

According to the recently released Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, the support area is defined as the "portion of the commander's area of operations that is designated to facilitate the positioning, employment, and protection of base sustainment assets required to sustain, enable, and control operations."<sup>2</sup> The concept of preventing the enemy from disrupting friendly sustainment operations is not new. From ancient Roman times to today's fight, history has provided countless

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lessons learned on the importance of protecting and enabling sustainment operations. Furthermore, Army doctrine emphasizes sustainment as a shaping operation for generating and maintaining combat power through logistics, personnel services, and health service support.<sup>3</sup> An inability to synchronize and control operations in the support and consolidation areas significantly degrades operations occurring in the close and deep fight.

## History of the Support Area

Dating back to the days of the War Department, the Army has redefined and modified its doctrinal battlefield geometry (now noncontiguous and nonlinear) and operational framework as potential threats have continued to modernize. As an expeditionary force, the Army continues its transformation today to remain ready to fight and win against peer and near-peer enemies in complex operational environments. As part of this transition, the area between the close and joint security area has undergone multiple name changes, though the concept has remained relatively the same. In the late 1980s, this aforementioned area was known as the rear area and designed to provide freedom of action and continuity of operations, logistics, and battle command.<sup>4</sup> By 2008, the terms "rear area" and "security area" were rescinded as the Army transitioned to the "support area" and eventually added the "consolidation area" (see figure 1, page 118).<sup>5</sup> Regardless of the name change, the concept of the corps and division's support areas has remained the same. The purpose is

codified in FM 3-0 and is required to facilitate

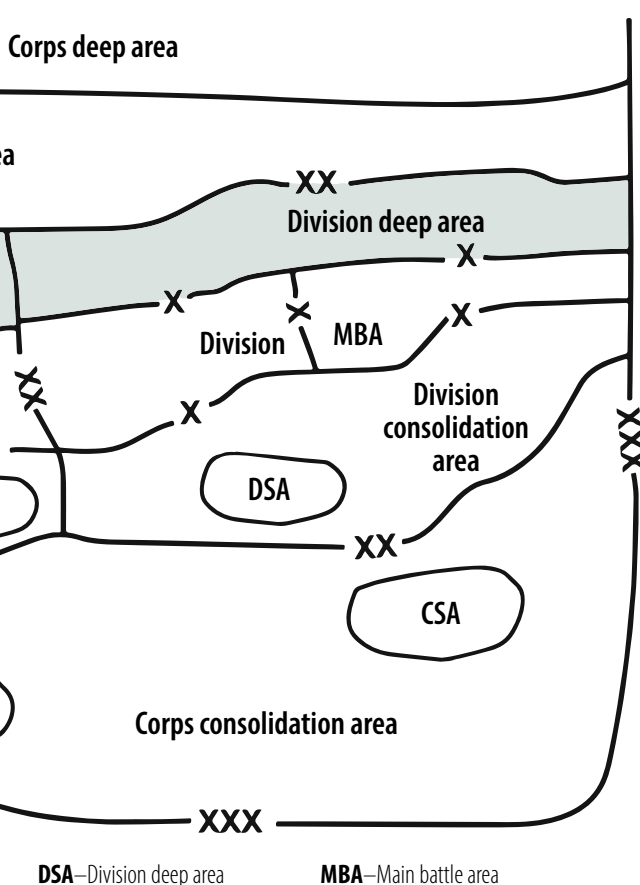
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sustainment, security, and protection operations.<sup>6</sup>

The capacity to execute sustainment and protection operations in a division's support area varies in complexity, and depends on the scope and nature of the large-scale combat operation. For coordination and synchronization of support activities, the Army has been employing command posts since even before the 1940s, an enduring acknowledgment of the importance of structuring a forward headquarters that is capable of controlling and assessing operations.<sup>7</sup> Effective support area operations require some centralization of dedicated personnel, mission command information systems, and leadership. To meet the current need, FM 3-0 established the support area command post (SACP) for corps and division headquarters. However, the SACP is not resourced and must be formed from organic equipment and personnel from within the main and tactical command posts. The primary functions of an SACP include "planning and directing sustainment, terrain management, movement control, and area security."<sup>8</sup> With or without augmentation from a division staff, the Army already has a unit within its formations capable of performing these functions: a maneuver enhancement brigade (MEB).

As with other division command posts (main, tactical, early entry, mobile command group), the SACP provides the MEB with the facility and structure for



(Figure from Field Manual 3-0, Operations)

**Figure 1. Main Battle Area**

exercising mission command in the support area. In close communication with the division's deputy commanding general for support (DCG-S), the MEB commander synchronizes processes and procedures through the alignment of personnel, equipment, information systems, and networks. Mission command is imperative for a division's support area as it has direct implications for shaping deep area operations for maneuver forces. As maneuver and fires elements advance, the consolidation area grows in size and is occupied by multiple sustainment and protection units, which include multiple sustainment brigades and a theater/expeditionary sustainment command. Depending on the task organization of a joint task force or combined joint forces land component command, these units may not have command and support relationships and thus will operate independently of each other. For this reason, the presence

of an MEB serving as the unifying mission command node in the support area is paramount.

## Historical Context

A prime historical example on the importance of the support area is Operation Chromite, the Inchon landings during the Korean War. North Korean forces conducted a massive surprise attack in June 1950 against South Korean

forces to secure Seoul, capture over 125,000 enemy prisoners of war, and forced remaining North Korean units to retreat north.<sup>11</sup>

## Why Maneuver Enhancement Brigades?

The origins of MEBs date back to 2006 and were created to conduct operations in the support area.

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and U.S. forces. This onslaught forced South Korea and the United States south, where they established a perimeter along the Naktong River to defend the port at Pusan, which became known as the Pusan Perimeter.<sup>9</sup>

Gen. Douglas MacArthur was aware that the main effort of the North Korean army focused on operations along the Pusan Perimeter. The North Korean leadership did not believe that an amphibious assault along Inchon was possible due to the restrictive terrain. As a result, it failed to provide adequate security to communications and logistical lines of support. Due to this, MacArthur and his staff developed Operation Chromite, a plan designed to conduct an amphibious landing to attack the North Korean rear area at Inchon to destroy supply and communication lines while allied forces pushed north from the Pusan Perimeter.<sup>10</sup>

Chromite began on 14 September 1950 when naval gunfire engaged North Korean military forces at Inchon, and the following day, U.S. Marines landed at the Inchon waterfront to destroy any remaining North Korean defenders. Because the main North Korean focus was on the Pusan Perimeter, they were unable to conduct proper counterattacks to defend their rear area. Within four days, U.S. forces seized the Kimpo airfield, and by 20 September, they crossed the Han River and began attacking North Korean forces in Seoul. U.S. forces seized Seoul by 26 September and had cut off North Korea’s supply and communication lines. North Korea’s inability to properly defend communication and logistical lines in their rear area resulted in disastrous defeat. Chromite allowed allied

At one point, the Army had multiple MEBs as part of the active duty force. Today, there a total of nineteen MEBs within the Army, with sixteen residing in the Army National Guard and three in the Army Reserve.<sup>12</sup> Each MEB was originally commanded by a brigadier general; however, the commander’s grade plate was downgraded to colonel by 2013.

The preponderance of today’s nineteen MEBs have deployed in support of contingency operations within the Middle East and other theaters. Although MEBs only have a brigade support battalion and a network support company organically assigned to each, they are often augmented with myriad capabilities depending on the nature and scope of the mission and operational environment. This augmentation is similar to the augmentation provided to a division artillery commander and staff as needed such cannon and rocket battalions. In the case of MEBs, their added capabilities often include one or more battalions of engineers, military police, chemical, explosive ordnance disposal, air defense, civil affairs, and infantry (see figure 2, page 120).

According to FM 3-94, *Theater Army, Corps, and Division Operations*, the division often identifies and assigns the support area as the MEB’s area of operation.<sup>13</sup> The added support area and maneuver support capabilities allow the MEB to cover the entirety of the division’s support area (depending on the size) that is not already assigned to an adjacent or tenant unit.

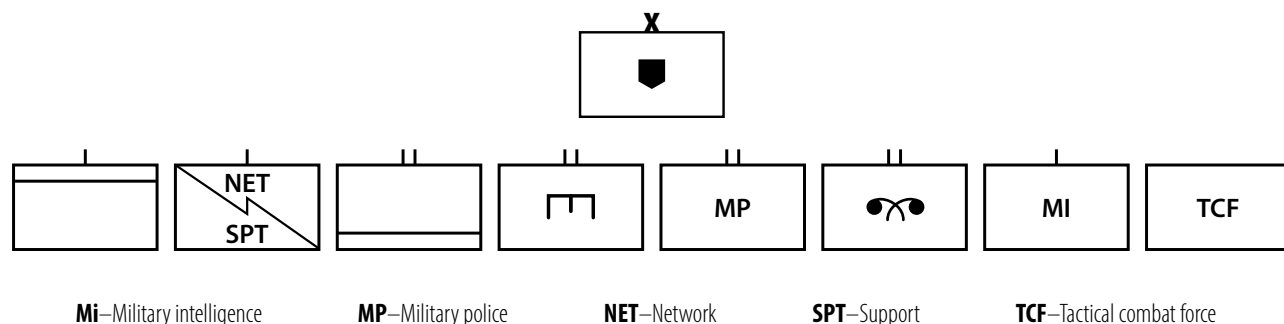
As the MEB’s higher headquarters, it is important for the division to resource the MEB with enough



capabilities to provide mission command of the entire support area, not just base clusters and main supply routes. The added maneuver capability serves as the MEB's tactical combat force (TCF) for close combat operations. The TCF allows the MEB to conduct limited offensive and defensive operations in the support area and the capability of defeating

and area security operations in the division's support area.<sup>16</sup> These aforementioned tasks and responsibilities are consistent with historical doctrinal tasks that were assigned to the rear command post in FM 7-100-2, *Infantry Division Operations*.<sup>17</sup>

A MEB is resourced for main and tactical command posts. Between the two command posts, a MEB



(Figure from Field Manual 3-81, *Maneuver Enhancement Brigade*)

## Figure 2. Sample Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Organization

bypassed enemy units and special purpose forces. If a bypassed unit exceeds the TCF's capability, or if the enemy has established a level of control, the division can create consolidation areas and coordinate for additional maneuver capability through the time-phased force deployment data. Though the existence of the MEB does not predate the Global War on Terrorism, its purpose and capability are often misunderstood and therefore underutilized by commanders and senior leaders. Failure to properly resource a MEB degrades its operational reach and span of control in the support area. FM 3-0 describes a unit's operational reach as a "culminating point" and should be considered during mission analysis when determining resources based on mission requirements and the size of the area of operation.<sup>14</sup>

The origins of the MEB's employment and design can be traced back to a period when the Army was focused on transforming to a modular force.<sup>15</sup> The MEB's doctrinally tasks and responsibilities are defined in FM 3-81, *Maneuver Enhancement Brigade*, and FM 3-0, and include terrain management, information collection, movement control, protection operations (personnel recovery and base cluster defense),

typically consists of a current operations cell, area operation cell, intelligence cell, command and control information systems cell, plans cell, protection cell, fires cell, and sustainment cells (logistics, personnel, staff judge advocate, and medical); and is resourced with approximately two hundred soldiers.<sup>18</sup> The number and structure of the MEB closely resembles the rear area command post from the early 1990s. The MEB's assigned personnel and staff organization is designed to execute its doctrinal tasks of conducting support area operations and maneuver support. Whether referred to as the division rear area, security area, or the support area, the MEB was designed to serve as the mission command node.

As the SACP and mission command node for the support area, the MEB must integrate with the division in order to synchronize operations and lines of effort with the close and deep fight. The division's support area will typically have multiple tenant brigades that are supporting the operations across the operational framework. These tenant brigades will consist of company-level or above elements from combat aviation, field artillery, division artillery, sustainment, military police, and engineers. The

majority of these units are division enablers and have a command and support relationship with the division. These units do not, however, have a command and support relationship with the MEB. From a mission command perspective, this makes it difficult

and space between the support, close, and deep fight. Based on the MEB's key tasks within support area operations, the division's protection, sustainment, intelligence, information collection, and targeting working groups are among the most key to synchro-



The *Army Operating Concept* characterizes tomorrow's potential harbingers of future conflict as Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.



for a MEB to plan, control, and assess operations without the needed seniority or procedural control to do so. In addition to integrating the DCG-S into the SACP, the MEB's role and authority should be clearly articulated, communicated, and codified in the division's orders production process.

When possible, and at the discretion of the division commander, the division's DCG-S must operate out of the SACP in order to facilitate and reinforce the MEB's role as the division's support area mission command node. The permanent integration of the DCGS-S into the SACP has proven effective as observed during past warfighter exercises (WfX) (dating back to WfX 16-04) by the Mission Command Training Program and the Center for Army Lessons Learned. According to the FM 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*, the presence of the DCG-S in the SACP helps "control the execution of all division operations" and SACP roles and responsibilities should be codified in terms of a reference memorandum.<sup>19</sup> The integration of the DCG-S into the SACP, along with any additional needed resources from the division, allows the MEB to synchronize all warfighting functions across the three planning horizons (current operations, future operations, and plans). The MEB's ability to effectively operate the SACP as a mission command node for the division's support area is largely predicated on its ability to integrate into the division's battle rhythm events.

Integrating into the division's boards, bureaus, chairs, cells, and working groups (B2C2WGs) provides an increased shared understanding between the SACP and the main command post, and better allows for the synchronization of operations in time

nizing division operations. As an enabler and extension of the division, the MEB's B2C2WG participants represent the division's support area tasks and planning priorities by each warfighting function. Being an active participant and sometimes lead for the division's B2C2WGs allows for the MEB to exchange running estimates and provides the division commander with a common operational picture of the support area. This allows the MEB to leverage division processes, procedures, and resources such as intelligence collection platforms to enable support area operations. In his or her role within the SACP, the DCG-S assists the MEB during B2C2WGs and participates or chairs as required.

### **The Division is the Unit of Action in Decisive Action**

Seventeen years of counterinsurgency operations and the Global War on Terrorism has influenced the Army force design and capabilities. To fight and win against transregional terrorist organizations, the Army formulated the brigade combat team as the Army's unit of action, sacrificing capability and capacity for modularity. Secretary of Defense and retired Marine Corps general James Mattis characterized the shift in force design as "strategic atrophy."<sup>20</sup>

The *Army Operating Concept* characterizes tomorrow's potential harbingers of future conflict as Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.<sup>21</sup> In order to exploit temporary windows of opportunity in a contested fight against these regional and competing powers, land component commanders will heavily rely on the division as the primary unit of action in a decisive action operational environment. As the Army continues



(Left to right) Col. Mario Diaz, I Corps chief of staff; Brig. Gen. William Graham, I Corps deputy commanding general; Sgt. Maj. Victor Ballesteros, I Corps operations sergeant major; and Canadian Brig. Gen. Michel-Henri St-Louis, deputy commanding general for operations, receive a briefing on the current status of a battle simulation during Warfighter Exercise 19-1, a tactical command post exercise that was held 2–10 October 2018 at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington. The authors of this article recommend integrating the deputy commanding general for support into the support area command post to "facilitate and reinforce the maneuver enhancement brigade's role as the division's support area mission command node." (Photo by Sgt. William Brown, U.S. Army [classified materials in this photo are blurred for security purposes])

to revolutionize AirLand Battle as multi-domain operations, the capabilities that the division and its enablers bring to joint forces will greatly assist with optimizing large-scale combat operations. As with the division's other organic enablers, the MEB needs to be part of the solution and division force design.

Each of the division's functional and multifunctional brigades offer unique capabilities to the land component commander. Combat aviation brigades provide reconnaissance, security (screen or guard), air assault, and air movement of troops. Division artillery (or a field artillery brigade) supports joint fires, counterfire, and reinforcing fires for brigade combat teams. The sustainment brigade delivers supplies, field services,

and sustainment maintenance. The fact that these brigades are organic to the division allows for the formation of habitual relationships, which entails a level of trust and increased opportunities for combined arms rehearsals. Though none of today's MEBs are part of the active-duty Army, the MEB's employment and planning would be optimized if it were permanently added as a division enabler. This would allow the MEB commander to establish a habitual relationship with the division commander and other brigade commanders. The MEB and the capabilities they bring should be viewed in the same manner as combat aviation, division artillery (or field artillery brigade), and sustainment brigades. As the Army's unit of action for



decisive action, divisions should not deploy in support of contingency operations without an attached MEB.

## Examining the MEB through the Lens of Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel, and Facilities

Army Doctrine Publication 1-01, *Doctrine Primer*, describes Army doctrine as the “language of our profession” and is intended to provide all soldiers with the same fundamental principles.<sup>22</sup> In the case of the MEB, a gap in doctrine caused a misunderstanding across the Army on the role and purpose of the MEB. Prior to the publication of FM 3-94 in 2014, the last doctrinal publications for division operations was FM 71-100, *Division Operations*, in 1996.<sup>23</sup> This meant that there was an eighteen-year gap in doctrine for division operations. Since then, MEB specific doctrine was published with FM 3-81 and 3-90.31, *MEB Operations*, in 2014 and 2009, respectively.<sup>24</sup> As this article was written, the Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate is currently drafting Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-90.3 *Support and Consolidation Area Operations*, which will provide commanders and senior leaders with a common understanding of the MEB’s role and responsibilities within the division’s support area.<sup>25</sup>

ATP 3-90.3 will be a good compliment to ATP 3-94.2, *Deep Operations*, which was published in 2016, for synchronizing operations in a sometimes non-linear and noncontiguous operational framework.<sup>26</sup> However, though the newest release of FM 3-0 introduces the consolidation area, it fails to mention any new tasks associated with the area. ATP 3-90.3 will provide clarity on the difference in tasks assigned in the support area and the consolidation area.

A MEB is authorized many of the mission command information systems (MCIS, previously referred to as Army Battle Command Systems) that are used for battle tracking, running estimates, and functional processes by each warfighting function. A MEB’s MCIS authorizations include the Command Post of the Future, Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System (AFATDS), Air and Missile Defense Workstation, Distributed Common Ground System-Army (DCGS-A), and the Tactical Airspace Integration System (TAIS).<sup>27</sup> The suite of

MCIS allow the MEB to control operations within the support area. For example, the presence of AFATDS and TAIS in the command post allows the MEB to synchronize the clearance of fires and airspace management process.

The presence of DCGS-A enables the SACP to synchronize intelligence operations between the deep, close, and support area fights; and also provides commanders and senior intelligence officers with a common understanding of the enemy composition, disposition, and strength. Collectively, MCIS allows each of the MEB’s warfighting functions to integrate with division and adjacent units for achieving a common operational picture.

Commanders, staff, and planners at all levels need a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a MEB. This shared understanding is particularly important at the Army service component command, corps, and division echelon. From a leaders training perspective, this can be overcome through training and education within the institutional domain (Captains Career Course, Pre-Command Course, etc.) and professional military forums. This training, coupled with early staff integration through parallel and collaborative planning during the military decision-making process will ensure the MEB is employed as designed. Otherwise, the MEB will continue to be at risk of being misused in large-scale combat operations.

## Posturing for Success and Exercising Mission Command during Warfighter Exercises

The WfXs provide echelons at corps and below to train on mission command in Unified Land Operations. There are five WfXs each fiscal year. Nine MEBs participated as a training audience in the past three fiscal years (FY 2016-18), consisting of fifteen possible WfXs. During the same time frame, fourteen MEBs participated as a response cell as either a corps or division enabler. Over the next three fiscal years (FY 2019-21), consisting of fifteen possible WfXs, eight MEBs will participate as a training audience and nineteen MEBs will participate as a response cell as either a corps or division enabler.

According to Training and Doctrine Command Regulation 350-50-3, *Mission Command Training Program*, response cells replicate subordinate units



in order to stimulate and interact with the training audience.<sup>28</sup> They do not represent a training audience nor are they a training audience themselves. When participating as a response cell, MEBs are unable to properly exercise mission command and the planning process with division in the same manner that they would as a training audience. For this reason, looking beyond fiscal year 2019, it would be optimal for

MEBs to participate more as a training audience and less as a response cell. This would facilitate an opportunity for the Army to better understand MEBs and their role as the mission command node in the division's support area. ■

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## Notes

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