

TARGETING IN THE MANEUVER BRIGADE: FIGHTING FOR RELEVANCE

By CW2 Jared M. Grindstaff

Introduction

Emerging from the Cold War, the U.S. Army maintained a division-centric structure that did not optimize the brigade-level unit use for combat deployments. In 2003, the Army began a major reorganization to meet the challenges of the 21st century and the Global War on Terrorism. “The Modular Army” was built around the brigade combat team (BCT) as the primary unit of action and was focused on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. The BCT concept created two significant advantages by increasing the rotational pool of available units and allowing for a more predictable rotation cycle. It also meant the right personnel and resources were allocated to the BCT.¹ The modularity enabled the BCT to see and shape beyond what would have been a brigade’s area of operation under the division-centric structure while also enabling it to conduct targeting.

The Army is currently undergoing another transformation that focuses on the division as the unit of action. The current restructuring aims to enhance operational effectiveness and strategic mobility but removes enablers and other resources from the BCT, which would now be more appropriately called a maneuver brigade.²

Despite the shift towards the division as the unit of action, the maneuver brigade must maintain a targeting process. Through the Army’s targeting methodology—decide, detect, deliver and assess (D3A), the maneuver brigade can still support division objectives by identifying and engaging high-payoff targets.³ When properly executed and nested within the division’s priorities, this will improve the division’s operational flexibility. Maintaining a targeting process within the maneuver brigade is essential to both the synchronization and integration of Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) and success in Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO).

Impacts of Army Structure 25-29

The Army Structure 25-29 has significantly impacted the sensor capabilities organic to a maneuver brigade. Historically, the cavalry squadron served as the primary all-weather organic terrestrial sensors available to the brigade commander. Once a critical component for reconnaissance and surveillance, the squadron is now removed from both Infantry and Stryker brigades with only the Armored brigade cavalry squadrons

remaining organic to their organizations.^{4,5} This creates a significant capability gap for those brigade commanders to obtain real-time collection beyond the preponderance of their forces.

Additional structural changes have led to the removal of critical organic assets within the maneuver brigade, such as the RQ-7B Shadow, RQ-11B Raven and the Military Intelligence (MI) companies.⁶ Removing the Shadow and Raven further diminishes the brigade’s capability to gather real-time intelligence and conduct persistent surveillance beyond the forward line of troops. The disbandment of the brigade’s MI company, which provided critical analytical support such as processing, exploitation and dissemination (PED), only increases the challenge of maintaining situational awareness and targeting accuracy at the brigade level. This will significantly increase the required support from the division’s intelligence team. The reduction in organic sensors and focused analysis severely challenges the brigade’s ability to conduct effective targeting.⁷

Another substantial change under Army Structure 25-29 is the transition of direct support Field Artillery battalions from the brigade to the division artillery (DIVARTY). The doctrinal implications of this change are profound. Brigades may be in situations where they now rely completely on division-level support for fires. Also, maneuver brigades will need to adapt their approach to targeting to ensure they can still effectively support maneuver operations and achieve their objectives within the constraints of their new structure.

To address these challenges, revisiting and updating current doctrine is essential. Field Manual 3-09 (FM 3-09) and other relevant doctrinal publications must be revised to reflect the new realities of brigade-level operations.⁸ Specifically, there must be an emphasis on the brigade’s ability to conduct targeting independently, even with reduced organic capabilities. The simplest adjustment at the unit level is for the brigades to divorce themselves from the 72-hour air tasking cycle (ATC). Maneuver brigades have always struggled to assess where they will be in 72 hours, much less how the enemy situation will look. The brigade targeting efforts must focus on critical events rather than 24-hour periods or phases of the operations. With this approach, the risk presented by the lack of organic capabilities can be mitigated by requesting focused support from the division.

to efficiently acquire the most appropriate systems.¹⁴

Crucial to the maneuver brigade's success is the effective use of available resources. If the division follows the principles of fire support planning and execution, then the appropriate resources will be allocated to the brigade. This may come in the form of attack aviation from the combat aviation brigade, distribution of close air support sorties, allocation of a collection asset, a direct support FA battalion or general support depending on how the division weighs their efforts. With this support from the division, the brigade's priorities would be nested within the division's priorities.

However, brigades must prioritize their organic assets to focus on high-payoff targets that support their scheme of maneuver. Due to the loss of the cavalry squadrons, Infantry and Stryker brigades must find a new all-weather terrestrial sensor to provide real-time information and answer priority intelligence requirements. This gap can be filled—to some extent—by leveraging the scout platoons within the maneuver battalion's headquarters company.

One of the remaining fires elements organic to the maneuver brigades are the Infantry mortar platoons within each maneuver battalion. The range of targets that a 120mm mortar can engage will be vastly different from what the maneuver brigade is accustomed to with their direct support 105mm or 155mm cannon artillery. This is where the expertise of the targeting team in the brigade staff will be crucial. A typical BCT high-payoff target list might have included air defense artillery, fire support, engineers and maneuver. Now, without allocated support from the division, a maneuver brigade high-payoff target list may look more like air defense (focusing on short-range, more vulnerable targets), light maneuver formations and equipment and command and control vehicles.

For the maneuver brigade to succeed, the staff needs to have a thorough understanding of the operational framework and a battle rhythm that facilitates the commander's ability to understand, visualize and describe their objectives and intent.¹⁵ A flexible targeting process not tied to a 24-hour ATC is part of that answer. Another part is most likely tied to developing or educating the staff; one of the consistent deficiencies, which was identified during multiple Warfighter exercises, is a convoluted understanding of fire support coordination measures versus operational and maneuver graphics.¹⁶

Conclusion

Despite the shift towards the division being the unit of action, which included some significant structural changes, the maneuver brigade must maintain a targeting process. By using the Army targeting

What is Now Expected of the Division

With the shift towards the division as the unit of action, the expectations placed on them to conduct operations have heightened significantly. In LSCO, the responsibility of a division to conduct deep shaping fires, gather intelligence and coordinate MDO has now drastically increased. This expanded role requires divisions to manage more resources held at their echelon to support overall division operations.

The correlation of forces becomes a critical factor in this context. Divisions must assess their capabilities and limitations to ensure they can meet the demands of shaping operations while providing adequate support to brigades.⁹ If the brigade lacks the capability to continue shaping the enemy beyond what the division has already accomplished, then the brigade commander risks their battalions facing an unfavorable friendly-to-enemy ratio.¹⁰ This balancing act will be challenging, as divisions must manage their assets to address operational needs in their deep, close and rear areas.

Divisions' increased responsibilities raise concerns about their capacity to support brigades effectively. As they take on more tasks, there is a risk that their efforts may become overstretched, leading to gaps in support for brigade-level operations.¹¹ This is particularly concerning in LSCO, where timely and effective support is crucial for mission success.

If the division applies the principles of fire support execution, or AWIFM-N, appropriately, then they can reduce their workload significantly. The first two of these principles are to ensure adequate fire support for the committed units and to weigh the main effort. Also, one principle of fire support planning is to use the lowest echelon capable of furnishing effective support.¹² This is an opportunity for the division to leverage the talent of the maneuver brigades rather than surge the division staff. When faced with a critical event and understanding the division commander's guidance and intent, the division's main effort can be allocated the appropriate resources.

What the Brigade Can Still Provide in Large-Scale Combat Operations

The maneuver brigade's staff still have the capacity to conduct targeting in support of their subordinate battalions. However, they no longer have the standard organic assets, such as the RQ-7B Shadow and a direct support artillery battalion, to detect, deliver and assess. Maneuver brigades across the Army are currently searching for commercial unmanned aerial systems to augment the loss of organic sensing capabilities.¹³ The Joint Capabilities Integration Development System (JCIDS) process—doctrine, organization, training, matériel, leadership, personnel, facilities and policy, also known as DOTMLPF-P—will influence their ability

methodology, the brigade can still support division objectives by engaging high-payoff targets, enhancing divisional operational flexibility. Maintaining a targeting process within the maneuver brigade is essential for synchronizing and integrating MDO. Success in LSCO depends on divisions and brigades adapting to changing or increased roles, managing resources and understanding operational objectives. Doctrinal fire support and FA principles will help overcome challenges and ensure mission success.

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Endnotes

1. Congressional Research Service: The 2024 Army Force Structure Transformation Initiative (2024)
2. Ibid.
3. HQDA: FM 3-60, Army Targeting
4. US Army Fort Moore: Focused and Lethal Post Army Structure 25-29
5. HQDA: Army Structure (ARSTRUC) Memorandum 2025-2029
6. US Army: Shadow UAS Retires After Decades of Service
7. CRS: The 2024 Army Force Structure Transformation Initiative
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13. Flight Global: Griffon and Textron advance to flight stage in competition to replace RQ-7B Shadow
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15. Mission Command Training Center: FY 23 Mission Command Training in Large-Scale Combat Operations
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