

REDEFINING LETHALITY:

Building Overmatch in the Mobile Brigade Combat Team

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In today's Army, "lethality" is everywhere — it's the centerpiece of speeches, strategy papers, and training guidance. But ask 10 leaders what lethality means, and you'll get 10 different answers. Most will say it's about building lethal teams — teams that shoot, move, and communicate with precision. Yet the real question is simpler and more important: How do we create overmatch? Overmatch is the condition in which a force can impose its will on an adversary faster, more accurately, and with less risk to itself, producing decisive effects at the time and place of the commander's choosing. Creating overmatch requires building lethal teams, mastering the fundamentals, and relentlessly institutionalizing integration and redundancy so formations can seize and sustain the initiative under stress. For the mobile brigade combat team (MBCT), true lethality is about integration — the ability to sense, decide, and strike faster than any adversary, even under degraded or denied conditions. This discussion explores how the Army can redefine lethality for the MBCT, drawing on lessons from recent operations and training to make it measurable, practical, and real.

Look past the buzzwords and you see an urgent operational problem: Modern battlefields punish single-point failures. During recent Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) rotations and forward deployments, units that lost a single sensor or suffered a communications blackout immediately lost initiative, exposed themselves to fratricide risk, or saw sustainment timelines collapse. Lessons from Operation Atlantic Resolve and the war in Ukraine underscore this reality — small unmanned aerial systems (UAS), resilient sustainment, decentralized command, and simple redundancy have a decisive impact on the battlefield. Senior leaders may speak of "making teams lethal," but the test is whether those teams can create overmatch when fragmentation, electronic warfare (EW), and attrition are the norm rather than the exception.

This article seeks to accomplish three key objectives: to refine the MBCT's operational definition of lethality into a measurable concept of overmatch; highlight where current practices fall short by drawing on real-world training and

Soldiers assigned to 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Mobile Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), shift fire during a live-fire exercise at Novo Selo Training Area, Bulgaria, on 10 August 2025. (Photo by SPC Breanna Bradford)

combat lessons; and present a single, actionable path forward — the Integrated Lethality Resilience Package (ILRP). These will show us how concrete changes in metrics, equipment mixes, doctrine, and training — not slogans — will let commanders turn the abstract promise of “lethality” into a reliable advantage on tomorrow’s battlefields.

A New Definition of Lethality

The following is the recommended new definition for lethality for the MBCT: “Lethality in the MBCT is the measurable ability to achieve and sustain overmatch by integrating sensors, decision-making, and effects across all domains — combining resiliency, tempo, and adaptability to remain decisive under the strain of disruption.”

This definition focuses on adaptability and synchronization, shifting the conversation from “more fire” to “better integration.” Lethality becomes less about weapons and more about the systems and leaders that enable precision and survivability.

It must be solidified and institutionalized within the MBCT because, without a common understanding, “lethality” risks becoming just another hollow term in the Army’s lexicon. The MBCT is built for agility — bridging the gap between heavy and light formations — and that agility demands a shared framework that measures how healthy units sense, decide, and strike, not just how hard they can hit. A clear, measurable definition of lethality aligns every warfighting function toward a single purpose: achieving and sustaining overmatch. When leaders understand what “lethal” truly means in the MBCT context, they can align training, resource allocation, and modernization to improve the systems and human decisions that deliver combat advantage.

Moreover, codifying this definition in doctrine and training will drive consistency across echelons. At the platoon and company levels, it will shape how Soldiers train and rehearse under degraded conditions; at the battalion and brigade levels, it will guide commanders in assessing readiness and prioritizing modernization. The enemy will not measure lethality by how many rounds we fire but by how quickly we regain initiative after disruption. The MBCT must therefore define and own lethality as its operational currency — the ability to stay synchronized, adaptive, and lethal even when friction, fog, and chaos dominate the battlefield.

Lessons from the Field

The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment’s performance

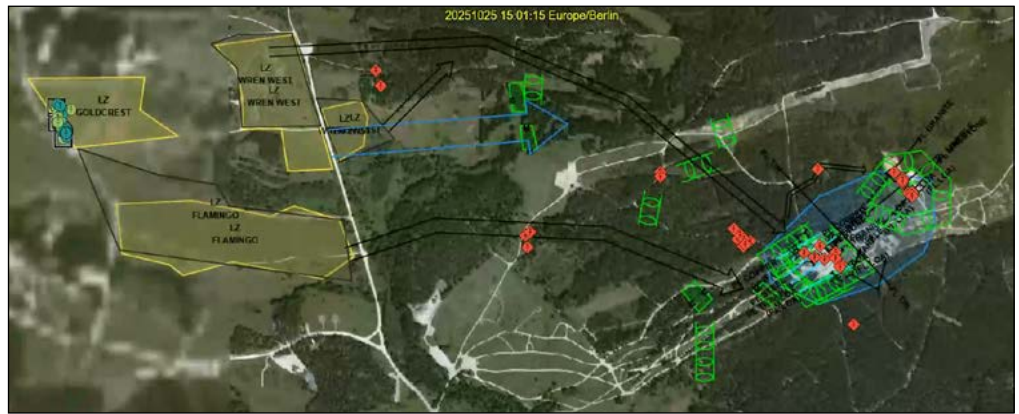


Figure 1 — Friendly and Enemy Initial Set During the Out-of-Sector Mission

Direct Fire Lethality —Total				
	Friendly	A/1-26 IN	C/1-26 IN	Total
1	Friendly Killed	75	63	138
2	Friendly Available	105	99	204
3	% of Friendly Killed	71.4%	63.6%	67.6%
Enemy				
1	Enemy Killed	31	23	54
2	Enemy Available	54	54	54
3	% of Enemy Killed	59.2%	44.4%	100%

Figure 2 — Direct fire lethality accounted for the successful seizure of the OOS mission during JMRC Combined Resolve 26-01.

during the out-of-sector (OOS) mission and across JMRC Combined Resolve 26-01 clearly demonstrates that lethality in the MBCT is not about massed firepower — it is about integration, adaptability, and tempo. During the OOS assault (see Figure 1), two companies each cleared fortified objectives while sustaining significant attrition — 54 enemy killed, with 136 friendly casualties, an average engagement range of 85.6 meters, and the longest confirmed kill at 470 meters (see Figure 2). Historically, assaults on this objective have either failed or left units culminating under heavy losses, but 1-26 IN broke that trend — seizing the objective despite significant attrition and sustainment challenges. This success, though costly, provided critical data proving that integration, adaptability, and resilience enable true lethality and will shape future MBCT tactics and ILRP development.

Additionally, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) denial (due to weather, no UAS employment) necessitated reliance on line-of-sight reconnaissance and indirect fire, highlighting the degradation in tempo and situational awareness resulting from the absence of layered sensing. Six fratricide incidents and movement delays averaging 6 to 8 hours further proved that when fires, sensors, and logistics operate independently, combat effectiveness erodes.

This data matters because it provides tangible proof that lethality is more than the sum of fires and effects — it is the

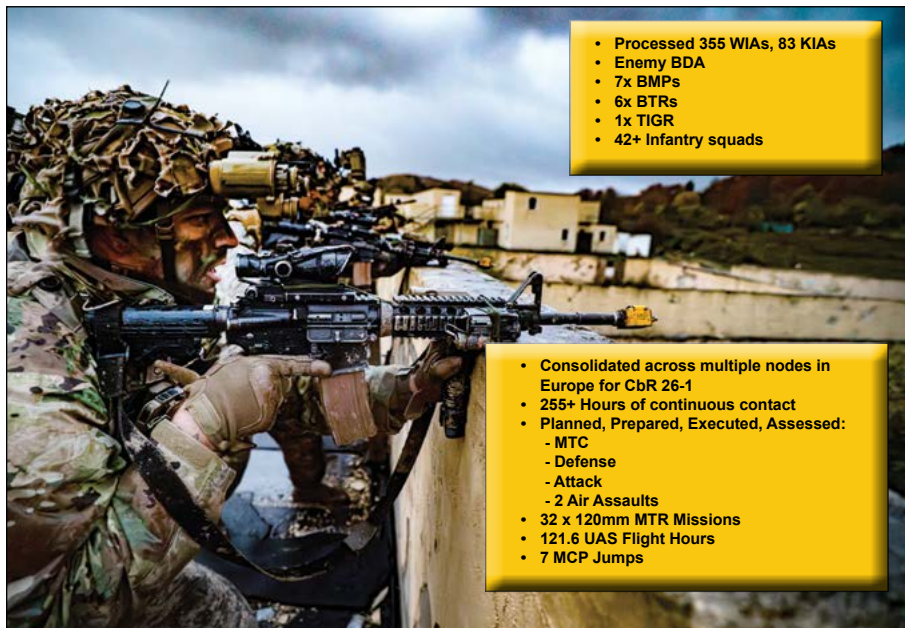


Figure 3 — 1-26 IN Lethality Data from JMRC Combined Resolve 26-01

ability to sustain integration under pressure (see Figure 3). The rotation's metrics show that the MBCT's combat power depends on its ability to integrate ISR, fires, and sustainment to maintain decision speed and tempo over time. The sustained ISR coverage, high volume of mortar fire, and continuous command post mobility enabled the battalion to adapt faster than the enemy, recover from friction, and maintain overmatch despite prolonged contact (see Figures 4 and 5). These results directly reinforce the new definition of lethality as the measurable ability to generate overmatch through the integration of sensors, decision-making, and effects across all domains, proving that resilience and synchronization — not just firepower — are what make the MBCT truly lethal in modern warfare.

These outcomes validate the new definition of lethality as the measurable ability to generate overmatch through integration under stress — redundancy, disciplined fire control, and agile sustainment — not simply more munitions, which produced tempo and survivability at JMRC. The data from 1-26 IN's OOS mission shows integration is measurable, repeatable, and scalable, so we must codify it across MBCTs. To do that, I recommend

the ILRP — a compact, fieldable toolkit of layered ISR, digital fire-deconfliction/identification friendly or foe (IFF) guardrails, EW-resilient fallback communications, and sustainment analytics for forward nodes — all piloted, measured, and then scaled to make lethality a consistent, provable advantage.

The Integrated Lethality Resilience Package

Modern battlefields no longer reward the strongest force — they reward the most resilient one. The days of equating lethality solely with firepower are over; success now depends on a unit's ability to adapt, integrate, and fight through disruption. The ILRP provides the MBCT with a means to achieve exactly that. It's not a new weapon system or a fleeting initiative; it's a proven, data-driven approach born from field experience at JMRC and designed to keep the

MBCT lethal when everything else is contested. In short, the ILRP turns the idea of "lethality" from a buzzword into a battlefield advantage you can measure, refine, and trust.

ILRP is designed to transform lethality from a concept into a measurable, repeatable capability for the MBCT. Rather than focusing on simply increasing firepower, the ILRP strengthens the MBCT's ability to fight and win when conditions are contested. When ISR is denied, communications are degraded, and sustainment is under pressure. The ILRP integrates doctrine, technology, and training into a single, scalable data-driven framework built around five key components: redundant ISR layers for continuous overwatch; digital fires deconfliction and identification, including IFF

Figure 4 — 1-26 IN Mortar Missions during Combined Resolve 26-01 (X11 does not account for 60mm mortar missions in support of OOS mission)

Mortar Missions													
	D4	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	X9	X10	X11	X12
# of Missions		4	6	1	4	3	5	2	1	2		4	
# of Rounds		80	160	20	150	74	82	55	10	50		40	
Tanks													
BMPs													
BTRs					1								
Dismounts										1			
FRAT		0			3			2		5			

Figure 5 — UAS Flight Data (SRR Data is Based on OC/T Reporting)

UAS TRACKER X12 DATA ROLL UP																			
	A CO			B CO			C CO			MPC			HHC			Rollup			
SYSTEM	OH	# FLIGHTS	# MINS	OH	# FLIGHTS	# MINS	OH	# FLIGHTS	# MINS	OH	# FLIGHTS	# MINS	OH	# FLIGHTS	# MINS	# FLIGHTS	# MINS	# ENGAGEMENTS	BDA
PARROT	6			3			3												
GHOST X										4									
SKYDIO	4			2/3			6			11			2						
C-100										4									
TOTAL LAST 24														0	0				
TOTAL EXERCISE				7	122		10	141		170	7035			0	0				

systems to prevent fratricide; resilient mesh communications for EW-contested environments; and real-time sustainment analytics to maintain tempo. Together, these elements institutionalize redundancy and resilience as fundamental components of combat power, turning lethality into something a commander can assess, improve, and sustain.

To capture and validate this data, observer-coach/trainers (OC/Ts) at combat training centers (CTCs) such as JMRC and JRTC will play a central role in executing ILRP assessments. They will gather quantitative metrics — such as ISR coverage rates, sensor-to-shooter times, resupply delays, and fratricide incidents — using standardized data collection tools embedded within unit training evaluations. This data will then be compiled into post-rotation lethality assessment reports (LARs), presented in dashboard format to commanders at all echelons. These visual, data-driven feedback products will enable leaders to identify trends, compare results to previous rotations, and prioritize resource investments where lethality gaps are most significant.

To implement the ILRP across the MBCT, a phased approach should begin with a pilot at battalion levels, such as 1-26 IN, which recently validated the lethality definition at JMRC. The pilot phase would integrate new ISR platforms, fallback communications, and sustainment dashboards while aligning training events around degraded-network and EW-denied conditions. Data collection on ISR availability, sensor-to-shooter time, fratricide rates, and sustainment delays would allow leaders to quantify results and compare them with baseline rotations. Success should be measured in outcomes, not rhetoric: a 75-percent reduction in fratricide, a 30-percent decrease in sensor-to-shooter time, and a sustainment delay window reduced to less than two hours. Once validated through training and rotation data, the ILRP could be scaled to brigade and division levels through standard operating procedure (SOP) annexes, leader development programs, and targeted modernization investments.

The way forward is easy but essential: Codify the ILRP as an MBCT standard and make lethality a measurable command responsibility. Doing so will ensure every formation trains and fights to the same definition of overmatch — one based on integration, not just firepower. The JMRC lessons demonstrated that when ISR, fires, and sustainment work as a synchronized system, lethality multiplies even under degraded conditions. By institutionalizing the ILRP, the Army can equip MBCT commanders with the tools to quantify, enhance, and sustain lethality across future operations. In this sense, the ILRP is more than a concept — it's a blueprint for building resilient, data-informed formations capable of dominating on the complex, multi-domain battlefields of tomorrow.

Implementing the Definition

We must make the definition real with a short, practical plan that commanders and staffs can execute. First, publish the MBCT lethality definition as official guidance and require every brigade and battalion training plan to refer-

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ence it. Require units to capture a handful of clear, routine performance measures — such as ISR availability, sensor-to-shooter time, fratricide occurrences, and sustainment/resupply timelines — during exercises, so leaders can see trends, not impressions. Utilize upcoming CTC rotations to pilot the ILRP, collecting both before-and-after data during realistic stressors (such as weather, EW, and degraded communications) to assess its operational impact.

When the pilot proves that the ILRP delivers measurable gains, codify what works by writing ILRP elements into brigade/battalion SOPs, adding degraded-network lanes, and prioritizing procurement for the small, high-impact capabilities validated by the pilot. The goal is straightforward — shift lethality from a mantra to an accountable standard so MBCT formations can demonstrate and sustain overmatch through repeatable training, significant results, and doctrine-backed practice.

Closing Comments

Lethality is not a slogan — it's a promise to achieve overmatch the moment the fight begins. For the MBCT, that promise rests on three key elements: the ruthless integration of sensors and shooters, built-in redundancy to prevent a single failure from collapsing the kill chain, and decision speed that converts information into instant, accurate effects. Adopting the ILRP and measuring performance — not platitudes — lets commanders turn that promise into practice. This is urgent: Our peer competitors are already testing our networks, sustainment, and tempo. True lethality isn't more ordnance; it's smarter formations that keep fighting when systems break, move faster than the enemy can respond, and sustain the fight until victory is decisive. Implement the ILRP now, and the MBCT will not only survive the future fight — it will dominate it.

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