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COMMAND AND CONTROL CHALLENGES FOR ENABLER UNITS IN THE TRANSITION TO MOBILE BRIGADE COMBAT TEAMS

By Captain Nicholas Maule

The U.S. Army is undergoing a structural transformation designed to increase the flexibility, mobility, and scalability of combat forces. Central to this evolution is the transition from brigade combat teams (BCTs) to mobile brigade combat teams (MBCTs). This realignment is part of the broader Army Modernization Strategy, which seeks to prepare the force for future large-scale combat operations (LSCO) in contested, multidomain environments.

As part of this shift, enabler units—military police companies; explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) companies; military intelligence companies (MICO); and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) companies—are being removed from their habitual placement under the brigade engineer battalion (BEB). In the MBCT model, they are reassigned either directly to brigade headquarters for tasking or pushed upward to division as theater-level assets. This shift, while intended to make enabler capabilities more flexible and available across formations, has introduced a significant and under-addressed challenge: command and control (C2) ambiguity.

This article outlines the core issues related to C2 ambiguity, evaluates the brigade-level solutions currently in use, and presents recommendations to ensure that enabler units remain tactically relevant, administratively supported, and properly employed in the MBCT structure. It is intended to give leaders, planners, and doctrine developers the context and clarity needed to bring informed ideas to the table.

The Role of Enabler Units in the BCT/MBCT Construct

Enabler units provide essential capabilities that support combat operations across the range of military tasks. Military police companies manage detainee operations, route security, and law-enforcement functions. EOD companies conduct explosive-hazard clearance and technical-intelligence tasks. MICO units collect, analyze, and disseminate tactical intelligence, while CBRN companies detect, identify, and mitigate chemical and biological threats. These units are highly technical, tactically specialized, and must be closely integrated with maneuver forces to be effective.

Under the traditional BCT model, enabler units typically fell under the BEB, which allowed them to train, plan, and operate alongside the elements they supported. This structure gave them a clear battalion-level chain of command, centralized mission planning and prioritization, direct representation in synchronization and targeting meetings, and fully integrated logistical and administrative support. The BEB not only served as their operational headquarters but also provided a stable and familiar administrative foundation that reinforced unit identity, cohesion, and readiness.

Command and Control Ambiguity in the MBCT

With the MBCT transition, enabler units are increasingly detached from the BEB without being formally realigned under another functional headquarters. This creates a breakdown in

MILITARY POLICE | Command and Control

command and control that affects nearly every aspect of their operations.

One major challenge is the lack of clarity in tasking authority. A MICO team, for example, may technically belong to the division but be expected to support the brigade's operations. Brigade staff may assume operational control and issue taskings, while the division retains formal authority over the unit's priorities and commitments. This leads to conflicting guidance, delays in execution, and underutilization of capability. Additionally, operational integration suffers when these units are left out of planning cycles. Without representation at military decision making process (MDMP) sessions, targeting meetings, or synchronization conferences, enabler units often receive late taskings or none at all. Their specialized capabilities are not effectively woven into the brigade's operational framework, diminishing their impact.

Sustainment and administrative support are also degraded under the current model. Enabler units without a parent battalion struggle to receive timely logistical support, coordinate maintenance, or manage personnel actions. Readiness tracking, training scheduling, and unit evaluations become inconsistent across echelons. A CBRN company, for example, may need equipment calibration and specialized training events that fall outside the brigade's logistics plan and therefore may be delayed or neglected. Furthermore, without a battalion-level leadership structure, these units face leadership and professional-development challenges. Junior officers and noncommissioned officers lack mentorship and guidance, while commanders are limited in their ability to advocate for Soldier needs, performance evaluations, or awards. This lack of structure undermines both operational effectiveness and Soldier morale.

Brigade-Level Solutions

To address these issues, brigades have implemented local adaptations. While creative and often necessary in the absence of doctrine, these solutions vary in effectiveness and sustainability.

One common approach is the formation of an ad-hoc enabler task force, tracked and managed by the brigade's current operations (CUOPS) section. This construct allows the brigade to maintain direct visibility over enabler units and deploy them as needed for immediate support tasks. It provides flexibility and responsiveness, particularly in fast-moving operational environments. However, it lacks the formal leadership structure needed to oversee training, sustainment, and long-term readiness. CUOPS personnel, already overwhelmed with managing day-to-day operations, are not equipped to handle administrative tasks such as counseling, supply tracking, or training validation. Enabler units placed under this model frequently find themselves without advocacy, cohesion, or proper integration into the broader operational plan.

Another approach involves placing enabler units under the brigade support battalion (BSB). This solution restores battalion-level leadership and provides a framework for personnel tracking, logistical support, and administrative processes. It gives enabler units

a sense of belonging and ensures consistent oversight. However, the BSB is primarily a logistics-focused organization and is not designed to plan or employ technical-enabler capabilities. As a result, units such as MICO or EOD may be administratively supported but excluded from operational planning efforts. BSB staff are generally not trained to integrate intelligence analysis, EOD procedures, or CBRN operations into tactical planning, leading to potential misemployment or underutilization. Additionally, enablers may be deprioritized when competing with core sustainment elements for resources or mission attention.



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Recommendations for Institutional Solutions

To resolve the persistent command and control ambiguity, the Army should pursue deliberate organizational and doctrinal reform. First, a formal doctrinal framework is needed to clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and support relationships of enabler units within the MBCT. This includes specifying which echelons retain operational control, administrative control, and tasking authority for each type of enabler company.

Second, the Army should consider establishing a dedicated enabler support battalion within each MBCT. This formation would consolidate military police, EOD, MICO, and CBRN companies under a unified command that understands their functions and

MILITARY POLICE | Command and Control

integrates them into brigade operations while also managing administrative and logistical requirements. Such a structure would provide both tactical relevance and stability.

Third, even without organizational realignment, enabler units should be habitually aligned with specific brigades or maneuver battalions. These habitual relationships foster familiarity, streamline planning, and enhance mutual trust. Leaders on both sides of the relationship would better understand each other's capabilities, limitations, and requirements.

Fourth, enabler representation must be guaranteed within brigade planning and operations processes. Officers or noncommissioned officers from each enabler function should participate in MDMP, synchronization meetings, and targeting boards to ensure that their units are considered in planning and effectively employed.

Finally, brigades must deliberately integrate enabler units into their training plans. Exercises should validate not only maneuver tasks but also enabler-specific, mission-essential task lists. MICO units should lead intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance planning and analysis efforts, military police should conduct detainee operations and tactical site exploitation, CBRN elements should be exercised in Weapons of Mass Destruction detection and decontamination scenarios, and EOD teams should train on route clearance and Improvised Explosive Device neutralization in conjunction with maneuver units.

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Conclusion

The Army's transition to MBCTs is an essential step toward preparing for future conflict, but the realignment of enabler units has created significant command and control challenges. The current structure leaves many of these units without proper leadership, administrative support, or operational integration. Brigade-level solutions, while innovative, are inconsistent and ultimately insufficient to ensure enabler effectiveness in sustained operations.

Addressing this issue will require more than temporary fixes. The Army must institutionalize solutions through doctrine, structure, and leadership engagement. By doing so, it will ensure that enabler units—those critical, technical-force multipliers—are positioned to support MBCTs effectively in complex, high-tempo combat environments. ~~X~~

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