

Benefits of Blended Task Organizations: Techniques for Effectively Integrating Strykers with Armor

by CPT Galen King

During two recent rotations at the National Training Center (NTC), brigade combat teams (BCT) employed atypical, blended task organizations coupling Stryker and armored battalions. By capitalizing on the complementary and reinforcing capabilities of both formations, these two BCTs were highly successful in combining arms in the close fight. Moreover, by employing these blended task organizations, leaders built critical combined-arms proficiency that is integral for armored divisions of 2030.

Understanding, preparing for future OE

Codified in Field Manual (FM) 3-0, **Operations**, doctrine highlights that the operational environment (OE) is the aggregate “of the conditions, circumstances and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander.” It includes components of the five domains understood in the human, physical and information dimensions. Peer threats and adversaries seek to contest the joint force’s capability across these domains, dimensions and the threshold of conflict by using information warfare, systems warfare, preclusion, isolation and sanctuary.

Complemented by the proliferation of sensors, long-range precision fires and democratization of information, these methods create a hyper-lethal and transparent OE marked by “uncertainty, degraded communications and fleeting windows of opportunity.” Multidomain operations (MDO) define how the Army contributes to the joint force in this OE during large-scale combat operations (LSCO). MDO prioritizes the tenets of agility, convergence, endurance and depth in building and generating combat power across five dynamics: leadership, firepower, information, mobility and survivability.

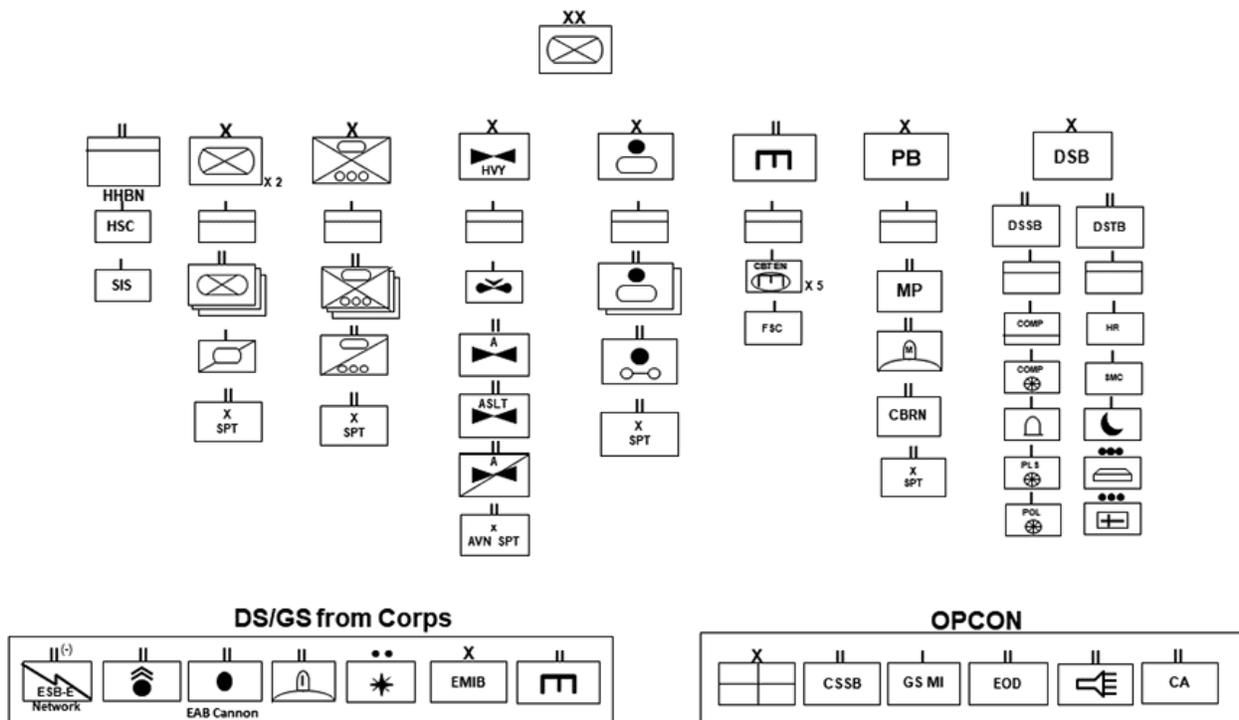


Figure 1. Army 2030 armored-division task organization.

Understanding the scope of LSCO, doctrine identifies the division as the Army’s principal tactical warfighting formation (PTWF). Waypoint 2028 (the Army’s coherent and holistic approach to fight and win within the

multidomain operations construct) and Army 2030 (latest update to warfighting doctrine) codify this shift, identifying five retooled division task organizations:

- The armored (reinforced);
- Armored;
- Light;
- Air assault; and
- Airborne divisions.

Projected to incorporate most of the Army's mechanized and motorized forces, the armored division is unique among the new force structures due to its combining two armored brigade combat teams (ABCT) with one Stryker brigade combat team (SBCT). The armored division's force structure is purpose-built to enable divisions and BCTs to combine arms by blending the capabilities of both formations to amplify the division's combat power.

ABCT, SBCT in LSCO

The armored division is built around its two ABCTs with three combined-arms battalions each. Per FM 3-96, *The Brigade Combat Team*, the ABCT optimizes mobility, protection and firepower to concentrate overwhelming firepower, speed and precision during offensive operations. The ABCT and its subordinate battalions, however, have notable limitations.

The infantry combined-arms battalion's (CAB's) table of organization and equipment (ToE) maintains 18 nine-Soldier infantry squads and 12 Javelin command launch units (CLU) to optimize speed and protection. Compared to a current Stryker battalion, this ToE contains nine fewer infantry squads and 15 fewer Javelin CLUs. This excludes the CAB's force structure increases its vulnerability to enemy antitank (AT) systems and prevents the CAB from clearing or retaining complex restrictive, wooded or urban terrain. The CAB's vulnerability is compounded by its lack of organic indirect fires with its four 120mm mortars instead of the Stryker battalion's 10.

Lastly, the ABCT's increased maintenance and logistical requirements present challenges to the formation's tactical endurance, especially with increasingly extended and contested lines of communication.

In contrast, the SBCT "is an expeditionary combined-arms force organized around mounted infantry," according to FM 3-96. While the Stryker battalion's reduced mounted protection and firepower limits cross-country tempo during the offense, its 27 nine-Soldier infantry squads, 27 Javelins and 10 mounted 120mm mortars enable the Stryker battalion to deliberately clear and retain complex terrain and population centers.

This capability is complemented by the formation's reduced logistical and maintenance requirement. As an expeditionary formation, Stryker companies maintain 72 hours of supply on hand and can travel about 300 miles before refueling. The Stryker battalion also maintains the capacity to transport 10,000 gallons of fuel via its forward-support company, tripling the formation's range and tactical endurance.

Stryker formations are also currently using a newer mission-command capability set than CABs. The SBCT's capability set includes the point-of-presence that is installed on select platforms at division, brigade and battalion echelons, enabling mobile mission command by providing on-the-move network connectivity via line-of-sight and beyond-line-of-sight, and it also includes Soldier Network Extension platforms. These capabilities enable a more accurate digital common operating picture and rapid digital fires processing from the battalion tactical-command post.

Stryker battalions also have two self-securing retransmission teams instead of one, as in a CAB. This added retransmission team enables increased line-of-sight communications for both lower and Upper Tactical Internet communication. Per their ToE, Stryker battalions also have more tactical-satellite systems, yielding redundant communication options at range.



Figure 2. A Soldier prepares to fire a Javelin missile. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Galen King)

Being built around mounted infantry, however, SBCTs lack the protected firepower, mobility and speed of the ABCT, especially over open terrain and during a combined-arms breach. Relative to the SBCT, an ABCT's two engineer companies feature three M2A3 mounted-engineer platoons, four Joint Assault Bridges (JABs), six Assault Breacher Vehicles (ABVs) and six T9/D7R dozers.

Comparatively, the SBCT features Engineer Squad Vehicle-mounted-engineer platoons, four Rapidly Emplaced Bridge Systems, six mine-clearing explosive line-charge trailers and six T5/D6 dozers.

Based on this difference, the ABCT engineer company is far more capable of providing protected local security and mobility during complex breaches in an LSCO environment.



Figure 3. Army engineers deploy a JAB. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Galen King)

Best practices for integrating Strykers, Armor

By better understanding both formations' capabilities and limitations, combining these two formation types can demonstrably increase units' ability to combine arms during close operations. When attacking into an urban area, FM 3-0, *Operations*, highlights the ubiquity and complexity of combat in LSCO.

Based on the SBCT's ToE, Stryker formations are well-suited to support joint campaigns in complex urban terrain. The Stryker battalion can execute all three components of the breach organization (support, breach, assault) when augmented with an ABCT engineer company's breach squad and combat-engineer platoons. With the ABCT's combat-engineer platoons, three ABVs, two JABs, 250 dismounted-infantry Soldiers and 10 120mm mortars, this battalion team is capable of breaching complex obstacles, rapidly clearing urban terrain and transitioning to stability operations.



Figure 4. Bradley Fighting Vehicle during urban operations. (U.S. Army photo by CPT Galen King)

Vignette 1: During an attack on Objective Dodgers (Razish) at the NTC, a Stryker battalion was augmented with one mechanized-infantry company (-) and one engineer company (-). It was tasked as the main effort to seize key urban sites within Razish.

Prior to its attack, the BCT's two CABs would seize Objective Iron and establish support-by-fire (SBF) to enable the battalion's combined-arms breach. During the BCT's attack, however, the two CABs were heavily attrited by dismounted enemy AT positions and armor, so they were unable to establish the SBF north of Razish.

Recognizing the loss in combat power and tempo, the Stryker commander deployed one dismounted company along Axis South to clear the rugged terrain west of Razish and destroy enemy north of Razish. Using its nine Javelin CLUs, the company destroyed one mechanized platoon (+) north of Razish and identified the enemy AT systems.

Prior to the battalion's combined-arms breach, the battalion commander initiated accurate and responsive mortar suppression from the battalion's consolidated mortar firing point. Synchronized with the battalion's 10 120mm mortars, the attached mechanized company (-) and engineers breached a wired anti-vehicle ditch with its JAB.

Having rapidly breached the enemy's obstacles and maintained responsive mortar suppression, the Stryker battalion massed 25 nine Soldier infantry squads along two axes to seize Razish and transition to a hasty defense. Due to the battalion's complementary use of its mechanized and motorized capabilities, it maintained tactical agility. Moreover, by optimizing its capabilities, the augmented Stryker battalion enabled the BCT to focus its field artillery (FA), army attack aviation (AAA) and other maneuver elements on attriting the enemy in depth and successfully transitioning to the BCT's deliberate defense.

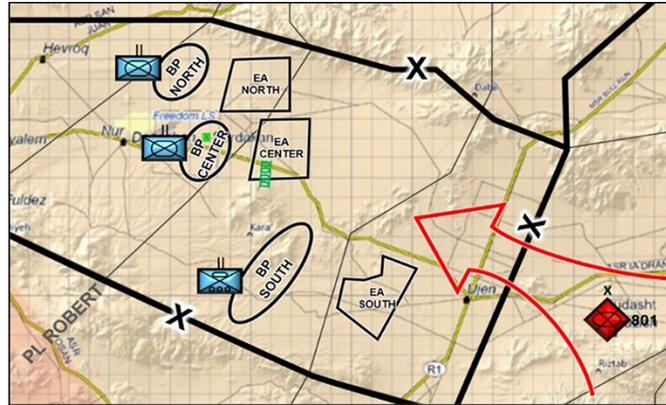


Figure 5. Map of attack on three objectives at NTC.

Movement-to-contact. Defined in FM 3-96 as an offensive operation designed to develop the situation and establish or regain contact, a successful movement-to-contact (MTC) relies on making “initial contact with small, mobile, self-contained forces to avoid decisive engagement.” To avoid making decisive contact with its main bodies, BCTs and battalions organize into an advance guard, flank, rear security and the main bodies.

Due to their increased density of infantry, dismounted AT systems, 120mm mortars and logistical endurance, Stryker companies and battalions are well-suited to gain and maintain enemy contact as an advance guard. By clearing restrictive or complex terrain as an advance guard, Stryker formations can reduce the threat of enemy AT systems and preserve the endurance of a larger armored formation.

Defend. As BCTs transition from an attack or MTC to a defense, motorized-mechanized teaming is again extremely effective. When augmented with an armored company or platoons, a Stryker battalion can effectively couple dismounted AT systems, tactical endurance and responsive mortar fire with the ability to engage the enemy at range, exploit or counterattack.

Vignette 2: During a recent rotation at NTC, a Stryker battalion deployed as part of an ABCT in place of one of its organic CABs. During the first phase, the ABCT conducted an eastward MTC that culminated in its defense along Phase Line (PL) Robert. During its defense, the Stryker battalion was augmented with a tank troop from the cavalry squadron and occupied the southern battle position to prevent the enemy brigade tactical group (BTG) from enveloping the BCT from the south.

As a supporting effort, the Stryker battalion would turn the enemy north into Engagement Area (EA) Center, where it would be destroyed by the BCT’s main effort. The Stryker battalion anchored its battle position on its centrally located tank troop. Concealed in a wash, the tank troop’s flanks were protected by three dismounted Stryker companies with 27 Javelin observation posts.

The BCT prioritized its FA, AAA and engineers to the main effort due to this control of restrictive terrain, protected, direct-fire lethality and organic mortar support. During the enemy’s attack, the Stryker battalion rapidly destroyed one motorized-infantry company through a combination of its mortars, tank troop and dismounted Javelins. As the enemy deployed toward EA Center, the Stryker battalion simultaneously launched a counterattack with its tank troop and continued to attrit enemy from its concealed AT positions.

At the conclusion, the enemy BTG was unable to penetrate the BCT’s northern battle positions, and the BCT initiated its attack on the city of Razish. Through its combined-arms employment of its blended task organization, the Stryker battalion enabled the ABCT to optimally prioritize key BCT assets to its weighted effort.

Techniques for effectively building blended battalion teams

Standardized processes. BCTs and battalions must codify their attachment/detachment procedures and checklists within widely known tactical standing operating procedures. Also, when units commonly operate together, codifying these habitual relationships enables subordinate leaders to rapidly execute task-organization changes.

Resourced enablers. Parent organizations must task-organize units with the requisite recovery, maintenance and sustainment support necessary for the unit to rapidly integrate into its new blended battalion or BCT team. Also, coupling armor and Stryker units requires persistent intra-brigade coordination between leaders at the brigade-support area, combat-trains command posts and maintenance-collection points to share commodities and field-service-representative expertise to regenerate combat power.

At the brigade, it is imperative that gaining units deliberately coordinate and plan for the accommodation of the task-organized element's common authorized stockage listing to their supply-support area. This coordination extends to units' mission-command systems as well. Here it is essential that task-organized units ensure critical Upper Tactical Internet terminals, services and accounts are validated and requested by their gaining headquarters to enable rapid mission command and digital-fires processing.

Integrated planning and effective rehearsals. After a unit completes attachment procedures with its gaining parent headquarters, it is essential that the unit's senior members heavily embed in the higher headquarters' planning. In addition to integrated planning, successful blended task-organizations also rely heavily on a variety of rehearsal techniques and types, focusing predominantly on rehearsing key complex actions like breaching, gap crossing and integration of mechanized vehicles and dismounted Stryker Soldiers.

Building combined-arms proficiency in preparation for an increasingly dynamic OE and the expanded role of the division as the PTWF, Regular Army (active component), National Guard and multinational Stryker and armored elements should increasingly train together during collective training. These opportunities train leaders to maximize the complementary and reinforcing capabilities of both formations while generating critical combined-arms proficiency now for the armored divisions of the future.

CPT Galen King is a maneuver planner at NTC, Fort Irwin, CA, where he extensively coaches combined-arms maneuver across all formation types. His previous assignments include task-force operations observer/coach/trainer at NTC, Fort Irwin; commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Stryker BCT, 2nd Infantry Division, 7th Infantry Division, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA; battalion S-3, 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment, 2-2 SBCT; commander, Company C, 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2-2 SBCT; brigade chief of plans, 2-2 SBCT; executive officer, Company C, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 3rd BCT, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Fort Campbell, KY; scout-platoon leader, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 3rd BCT, 101st Airborne Division; and rifle-platoon leader, Company B, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 3rd BCT, 101st Airborne Division. CPT King's military schools include the Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course, Ranger School, Airborne School, Air-Assault School, Pathfinder Course, Stryker Leader Course, Maneuver Captain's Career Course and Maneuver Leader Maintenance Course. He holds a bachelor's of arts degree in political science from Davidson College.

Acronym Quick-Scan

AAA – army attack aviation

ABCT – armored brigade combat team

ABV – Assault Breacher Vehicle

AT – antitank

BCT – brigade combat team

BP – battle position

BTG – brigade tactical group

CAB – combined-arms battalion

CLU – command launch unit

EA – engagement area

FA – field artillery

FM – field manual

JAB – Joint Assault Bridge

LSCO – large-scale combat operations

MDO – multidomain operations

MTC – movement-to-contact

NTC – National Training Center

OE – operational environment

PL – phase line

PTWF – principal tactical warfighting formation

SBCT – Stryker brigade combat team

SBF – support by fire

ToE – table of organization and equipment