

Mission Analysis: Getting It Right

By Major Joey Wytke

With the battle rhythm in place, the brigade staff initiates planning for an upcoming deliberate attack. The brigade S3 tries to keep to the established timeline. He rips annexes from the division operations order and passes them to his staff, instructing them to "conduct your mission analysis and provide your input to the battle captain." With annex in hand, the brigade engineer returns to his work station, gives the annex a cursory look, conducts his mission analysis, and passes his input to the battle captain. The time spent was less than 15 minutes.

At the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), Fort Polk, Louisiana, task force engineers at brigade and battalion levels often experience difficulties with providing mobility/survivability input to the military decision-making process (MDMP). Due to the MDMP's logical sequence, engineer planners must get it right from the beginning. This means they must correctly identify and integrate the specified and implied mobility/survivability tasks during their initial mission analysis.

Engineer Planning

Engineers who participate in the MDMP usually rely on tasks specified in the higher headquarters operations order as the primary source of input for their mission analysis and seldom focus on the mobility/survivability battlefield operating system (BOS). Our maneuver counterparts, who facilitate the MDMP, often say, "How are you going to get your dog in the fight?" This phrase tends to focus

engineer planners on engineer-specific tasks rather than mobility/survivability tasks. Understanding the difference between the two will ensure that critical tasks are identified and integrated into the overall plan.

The question isn't how to get "your" dog in the fight as much as it is how to get "the" dog in the fight. Instead of viewing the MDMP as a function of a particular BOS, engineer planners (as well as other BOS representatives) see the "dog" as a specific unit. Hence, task force engineers at the JRTC often provide the same generic input, which is directed entirely at engineer units. The result is a one-sided approach to identifying tasks.

Table 1 shows common phases of an operation and helps illustrate the input routinely provided by engineer planners. Because the MDMP is sequential, the lack of detailed input directly influences other steps of the decision-making process, including the staff's ability to fully synchronize courses of action (COAs). An insufficient mission analysis normally leads to an incomplete COA. Therefore the engineer planner must analyze the mission from a mobility/survivability perspective. Although Table 1 addresses critical mobility/

survivability tasks, it doesn't fully identify those that maneuver units must accomplish. Experience at the JRTC shows that when critical mobility/survivability tasks are not specified—either from a higher headquarters operations order or as a result of mission analysis at the brigade or battalion level—those tasks are not incorporated into the COA. This subsequently leads to critical tasks not being included as an event during the "action, reaction, counteraction" drill of wargaming. The end state is a desynchronized plan that often leads to disastrous results for the unit and the "dog" never making it to the fight.

Table 2, page 32, highlights the multiple mobility/survivability tasks that can be associated with any operation, regardless of the mission, and the type or level of maneuver unit responsible for executing them. This method of analysis stresses the function of the mobility/survivability BOS and is not limited to a specific type of unit. Analyzing the mission from this perspective creates several ways to get the "dog" in the fight. The input does not address only engineer tasks but identifies tasks the brigade and battalions must execute as a combined arms team.

Table 1. Generic mission analysis input directed at engineer units

Phase I (Reconnoiter and Set Conditions)	Phase II (Conduct Air Movement)	Phase III (Attack)	Phase IV (Consolidate and Reorganize)
☐ Conduct precombat checks and inspections. ☐ Rehearse battle drills.	☐ Conduct air assault.	☐ Conduct assault breach.	☐ Provide countermobility support.

Table 2. Mobility/survivability tasks associated with any mission.

Phase I (Reconnoiter and Set Conditions)	Phase II (Conduct Air Movement)	Phase III (Attack)	Phase IV (Consolidate and Reorganize)
☐ Identify possible main and alternative routes (MSR and ASR). ☐ Recon MSR/ASR. ☐ Recon axis of advance. ☐ Locate and identify enemy obstacles along MSR. ☐ Identify enemy battle positions and supporting tactical obstacles. ☐ Identify and locate possible bypasses. ☐ Recon landing zone (LZ) and pick-up zone.	☐ Conduct air assault. ☐ Secure primary LZ. ☐ Clear alternate LZ.	☐ Confirm or deny the presence of obstacles along MSR and axis of advance. ☐ Conduct in-stride breach and bypass obstacles. ☐ Conduct assault breach. ☐ Conduct route clearance. ☐ Employ scatterable mines to isolate and fix counterattack.	☐ Employ hasty protective obstacles. ☐ Prepare hasty fighting positions. ☐ Establish tactical command posts. ☐ Upgrade minefield-marking systems on reduced obstacles.

Engineer and maneuver staff planners must realize that a mobility/survivability task does not necessarily equate to an engineer-specific task. The brigade has at its disposal a variety of assets—such as scouts, long-range surveillance detachments (LRSD), and aviation and maneuver companies—to help accomplish the mobility/survivability tasks. For example, scouts and LRSD are tasked to confirm or deny enemy obstacles, while aviation assets conduct aerial recons to determine the suitability of main supply routes (MSRs) and planned axes of advance.

By applying the methodology in Table 2, engineer planners focus on the function of the BOS and ensure critical mobility/survivability tasks are identified, addressed, and synchronized in the tactical plan. This forces the brigade and battalion staffs to consider using a wide variety of assets without relying solely on engineer units. The end result equates to a more detailed maneuver plan and highlights the necessity for proper implementation of limited engineer assets.

Engineer Annex

A product of the MDMP, and closely associated with mission

analysis, is the engineer annex. A developing trend at the JRTC revolves around how input to the engineer annex is addressed. Engineer staff planners continue to use the annex as the primary means to task engineer units (versus maneuver units) with specific engineer tasks. The engineer annex is where maneuver units should go to seek additional information and tasks related to the mobility/survivability BOS that are not covered in the base operations order. However, the engineer annex is consistently viewed as a source of information useful only to engineer units. To compound the problem, engineer leaders view the engineer annex as their version of an engineer operations order. Hence, they use this as an excuse for not issuing detailed operations orders at company and platoon levels. This shortcut fails to use the annex as the primary tool for addressing specified mobility/survivability tasks for maneuver units, as identified during mission analysis.

Key to Success

Success of the MDMP—and the unit—depends on a complete mission analysis. If we persist in

viewing our piece strictly from an engineer perspective, critical mobility/survivability tasks will continue to be overlooked and will be absent during the MDMP. As task force engineers and staff planners, we must learn to distinguish between the need for engineer advice and the need for advice pertaining to the function of the mobility/survivability BOS.

To ensure our success as members of a combined arms staff, engineers must gain a better working knowledge of the MDMP and understand the importance of comprehensive mission analysis. This includes broadening our vision and providing input based on the function of the mobility/survivability BOS. If we overcome the temptation to see the fight just from an engineer viewpoint, then the “dog” stands a better chance of not only getting to the fight but also of winning. 

Major Wyte is the Chief, Engineer Plans and Operations Section, and served as the Engineer Company Senior Observer/Controller at the Joint Readiness Training Center. He has completed tours with the Royal Australian Engineers, 10th Mountain Division (Light), and the 9th Engineer Battalion (Corps, Mechanized).