



SMALL WARS JOURNAL

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The Impact of Incorporating MRAPs into BCT's

by Joe Parker

The Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle had a highly publicized entry into the military ranks of vehicles, first with the Marines in 2004, and then eventually filling requirements with the Army to provide a dramatic increase in IED and blast protection than the ill-suited HMMVW for combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Rushed in to production by as many as nine separate contractors¹, the endstate resulted in an accelerated production of multiple variations of the MRAP, with the types roughly categorized as Category I, II, and III and based on number of occupants and mission specific mine/IED clearance operations² Now, as the combat mission in Iraq has completed and leaders begin to discuss life beyond Afghanistan, the MRAPs usefulness is in question. The Department of Defense is actively pursuing a replacement for the HMMVW with the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle program³, and the MRAP is facing an identity crisis. Is it a troop transporter or a combat system? What capability beyond the blast protection does it bring and how does that translate into future utilization? It would appear that the MRAP does have a future beyond our current conflicts as Defense Secretary Robert Gates instructed the military to incorporate it into the Army Brigade Combat Team Modernization (BCTMOD) plan. What is yet to be seen is how well the MRAP incorporates itself into the BCTMOD plan, what role and capability it fills in the Brigade Combat Team, and what additional requirements it places on existing force structure.

The 2010 Army Modernization Strategy outlines the plan to repair the stress placed on the Army after nearly a decade of combat. The objective is "...to bring the Army back into balance to meet current and future challenges by transforming into a force that is versatile, expeditionary, agile, lethal, sustainable, and interoperable to give our Soldiers a decisive advantage".⁴ Key to this is the Army Brigade Combat Team Modernization plan. As mentioned, Secretary Gates has already mandated that the MRAP be included in all future planning. From strictly a budgetary standpoint, this makes perfect sense. The Department of Defense has already spent over \$26 billion dollars for over 15,000 vehicles since 2006.⁵ It was not apart of the Future Combat Systems (FCS) program, cancelled by Secretary Gates, and filled a critical requirement in ongoing combat operations. There is no indication that the need for a vehicle like the MRAP will be diminished on future battlefields, as any enemy will certainly look at actions taken against our conventional forces at the onset of Iraq and Afghanistan and attempt to exploit vulnerabilities in legacy systems. All indications point towards hybrid warfare, combining counterinsurgency with Full Spectrum Operations. The Center for Army Lessons learned at Fort Leavenworth is already developing doctrine and capturing lessons learned from Soldiers in the

¹ Eisler, Peter. "The truck the Pentagon wants and the firm that makes it". USA Today

² Center for Army Lessons Learned. [MRAP Vehicles Handbook](#), April 2011

³ PM JLTV. [PEO CS&CSS](#). April 2011

⁴ Department of the Army G8. [2010 Army Modernization Strategy](#)

⁵ Woodhouse, Dale B. "MRAP's Future With the Army." Mar-Apr 2011. [Army Sustainment](#)

field in order to incorporate tactics, techniques, and procedures into current and future doctrine.⁶ MRAPs are being allocated for stateside training on the operation and maintaining of the vehicle, and leader training programs such as officer and noncommissioned officer basic and advanced courses are undergoing modifications to include the MRAP into their formations.⁷ While there is a concern that the MRAP does not fulfill any one specific role initially set forth in the cancelled FCS program, the BCTMOD plan will identify areas that the MRAP can bridge a gap between current and future requirements.

The MRAP, while not without its faults, has the potential to fill a number of requirements in the BCT. Given that the MRAP has 28 separate types of vehicles capable of fulfilling a multitude of missions and that we currently have over 15,000 on hand, the argument is easily made that it can fill a requirement in any number of roles. The Army Tactical Wheeled Vehicle Strategy notes that in the Army Campaign Plan DP147, MRAPs are allocated to fill requirements in units including Sustainment Brigades, Medical Brigades, Route Clearance and EOD units.⁸ Plans are already in motion through the formation of Task Force 120 at Fort Bliss to identify the replacement for the ancient M113 and ageing M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle.⁹ The MRAP can easily fill the role of personnel carrier, armored ground ambulance, or C2 vehicle left vacant by the M113. Currently, there are over 40 systems that in the Army that utilize the HMMVW platform as a prime mover that require a waiver due to exceeding the HMMVW payload.¹⁰ A CAT I MRAP could easily fill the role of a RETRANS vehicle, maintenance contact truck, or wheeled ambulance while providing the additional protection require accomplishing their respective missions, but that the HMMVW chassis failed to provide. The MATV, currently in use in Afghanistan, is a suitable replacement for M1025/M1151 and M2 Scout and Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition (RSTA) platforms. While the Army works to find the next Ground Combat Vehicle, the MRAP, possessing the required survivability, mobility (in most variants), and the ability to carry medium weapon and TOW missile systems, can serve as the interim solution until the GCV hits production in the next seven to ten years¹¹. The question now turns from what roles and capabilities the MRAP is able to provide to which roles and capabilities does the Army want it to fill.

Once the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics develops, resources, and executes a plan for the MRAP Family of Vehicles to achieve Full Materiel Release and Type Classification “Standard” before actual force integration and the final decision to include the MRAP into BCT formations is made¹², the identification of what additional requirements it places on the force has to be determined. Comprehensive evaluation utilizing DOTMLPF¹³ will show that the MRAP fits in with existing doctrine, tactics, and leadership abilities, and organization, training, materiel, personnel, and facilities can easily be modified or already fit into existing capabilities and structure. Sustainment has already been executed in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan with existing military occupational specialties (MOS); most 91B Wheeled Vehicle Mechanics are able to transition from existing platforms to MRAPs with nothing more than on the job training. Contractors are transitioning maintenance to

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ Department of the Army G8. *The Army Tactical Wheeled Vehicle Strategy 2010*

⁹ Cox, Matthew. “*US Army Details Ground Combat Vehicle Plans*” 2009

¹⁰ Department of the Army G8. *The Army Tactical Wheeled Vehicle Strategy*

¹¹ Department of the Army *2011 Army Posture Statement*

¹² Department of the Army G8. *The Army Tactical Wheeled Vehicle Strategy*

¹³ Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership, Personnel, and Facilities

Army support units and Class IX parts are already available in the Army supply system and Standard Army Retail Supply System (SARSS) catalogs. MRAPs will be entering CONUS based formations as a part of future Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) cycles, falling in line with existing fleets of equipment.¹⁴ In addition, MRAPs will be prepositioned in existing Army Pre-Positioned Stocks (APS) regional storage sites to fill requirements for future operations. The bottom line is that the MRAP has already integrated itself into existing Army force structure and brigade footprints with little to no change in daily operations.

While detractors of the MRAP will point out issues with its integration into the BCT's and argue that it doesn't support combined arms operations in a full spectrum environment¹⁵, or that its very design presents challenges when given anti-tank or reconnaissance missions¹⁶, the reality is that the MRAP is a viable, capable platform that the Army *already has* in its existing fleet. It has the ability to bridge the gap between current requirements that combat vehicles like the M113 and Bradley Fighting Vehicle fill and provide enough of their capability to allow the Army to design and field the next Ground Combat Vehicle. The versatility of the MRAP family of vehicles will not pigeonhole brigades into security and assistance missions or detract from successful full spectrum operations¹⁷, but rather provide them a combat proven, effective platform with a record for survivability and easy integration into existing formations.

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¹⁴ Casey, George W. "Army Brigade Combat Team Modernization: Versatile Capabilities for an Uncertain Future"

¹⁵ Kranc, Ryan T. "MRAP Future Discussion Paper"

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ *ibid*

http://www.bctmod.army.mil/news/pdf/Army_Brigade_Combat_Team_Modernization_Versatile_Capabilities_for_an_Uncertain_Future.pdf>

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