

## Chapter 4

### Defensive Operations

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## **Section 1. General.**

### **4101. General.**

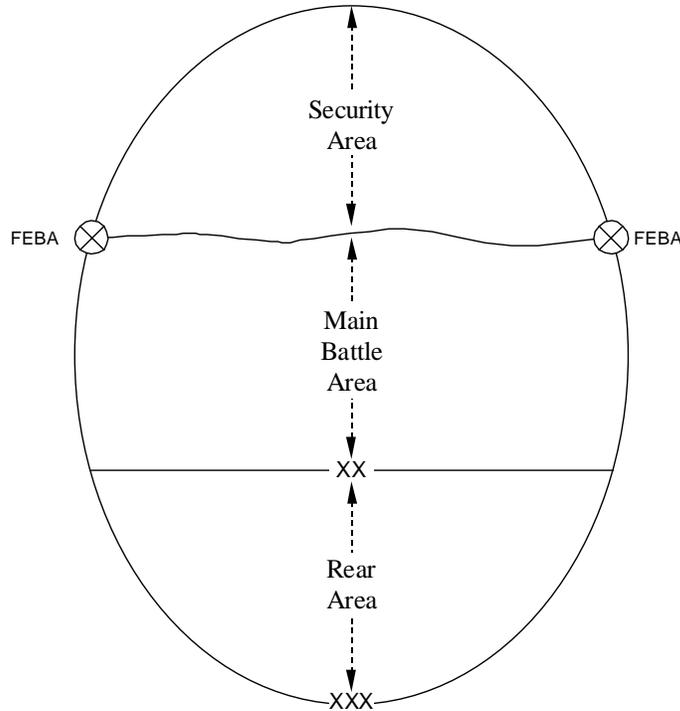
The purpose of the defense is to force the attacker to reach his culminating point without achieving his objectives, to gain the initiative for friendly forces, and to create the opportunity to shift to the offense. The essence of defensive tactics is to place the enemy into position that permits his destruction through the intelligent use of terrain and firepower, thereby creating favorable conditions for counterattack and resumption of the offense. Defensive operations achieve one or more of the following:

- Destroy the enemy.
- Weaken enemy forces as a prelude to the offense.
- Cause an enemy attack to fail.
- Gain time.
- Concentrate forces elsewhere.
- Control key or decisive terrain.
- Retain terrain.

In the defense, tank units are employed to take maximum advantage of their inherent, speed, mobility, armor-protected firepower and shock effect. Tank units are ideally suited to conducting spoiling attacks and counterattacks, thereby providing offensive action during a defensive battle. They also provide long-range direct fire capability into engagement areas and have the capability to engage both ground and air targets.

### **4102. Organization of the Battlespace**

During defensive operations, the commander organizes his battlespace into three areas in which the defending force performs specific functions. (See figure.) These areas can be further divided into sectors. A defensive sector is an area assigned to a subordinate commander in which he is provided the maximum latitude to accomplish assigned tasks in order to conduct defensive operations. The size and nature of a sector depends on the situation and the factors of METT-T. Commanders of defensive sectors can assign their subordinates their own sector. The three areas are the: Security Area, Main Battle Area, and the Rear Area.



**Organization of the battlespace.**

**Security Area**

The security area is that area that begins at the forward edge of the battle area (FEBA) and extends as far to the front and flanks as security forces are deployed, normally to the forward boundary of the area of operations. Forces in the security area conduct reconnaissance to furnish information on the enemy and delay, deceive, and disrupt the enemy. The commander adds depth to the defense by extending the security area as far forward as is tactically feasible.

Actions in the security area are designed to cause the enemy to prematurely deploy into their attack formations and disrupt the enemy’s plan of attack. Slowing the enemy’s attack enables our forces, particularly Marine aviation, to strike the enemy critical vulnerabilities (i.e., movement, resupply, fire support, and command and control).

**Main Battle Area**

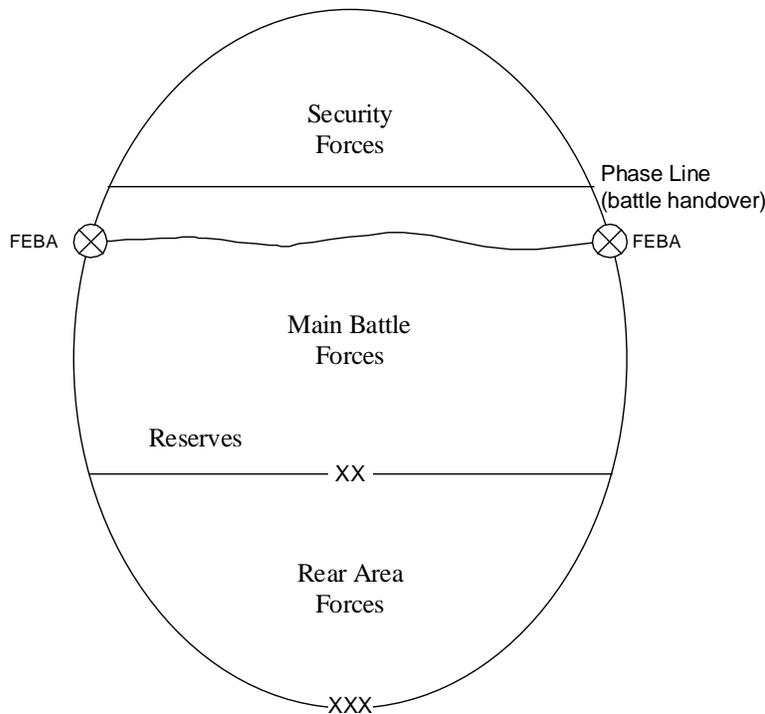
The main battle area is that portion of the battlespace in which the commander conducts close operations to defeat the enemy. Normally, the main battle area extends rearward from the FEBA to the rear boundary of the command’s subordinate units. The commander positions forces throughout the main battle area to defeat, destroy or contain enemy assaults. Reserves may be employed in the main battle area to destroy enemy forces, reduce penetrations, or regain terrain. The greater the depth of the main battle area, the greater the maneuver space for fighting the main defensive battle.

**Rear Area**

The rear area is that area extending forward from a command's rear boundary to the rear of the area of responsibility of the command's subordinate units. This area is provided primarily for the performance of combat service support functions. Rear area operations include those functions of security and sustainment required to maintain continuity of operations by the whole force. Rear area operations protect the sustainment effort as well as deny use of the rear area to the enemy. The rear area may not always be contiguous with the main battle area.

**4103. Organization of the Force**

During defensive operations, the commander organizes his force as follows:



**Organization of the force.**

**Security Forces**

The commander uses security forces forward of the main battle area to delay, disrupt, and provide early warning of the enemy's advance and deceive him as to the true location of the main battle area. These forces are assigned cover, guard, or screen missions. Operations of security forces must be an integral part of the overall defensive plan. To ensure optimal unity of effort during security operations, a single commander is normally assigned responsibility for the conduct of operations in the security area. The element of the MAGTF assigned as the security forces is dependent on the factors of METT-T.

The commander seeks to engage the enemy as far out as possible. Suppression and obscuration fires are employed to facilitate maneuver of the security force. Maximum use may be made of all fire support assets to disrupt and destroy enemy formations as they move through the security area approaching the main battle area. Obstacles and barriers are positioned to delay or canalize the enemy and are covered by fires to destroy him while he is halted or in the process of breaching. The commander may assign the following missions to security forces:

- **Screen.** A security element screens a stationary force by establishing a series of positions along a designated screen line. The positions are located to provide overlapping observation. Areas that cannot be observed from these positions are normally patrolled. Screening forces report any sightings of enemy activity and engage enemy forces with fires. Maintaining contact, the screen falls back along previously reconnoitered routes to subsequent positions. Screening forces should avoid becoming decisively engaged.
- **Guard.** A security element guards a force by establishing a series of mutually supporting positions. The guard may establish a screen line forward of these positions. These positions immediately report any enemy contact and engage with fires at maximum range. The guard defends in place, attacks, or delays to rearward positions. Routes and subsequent positions should have been previously reconnoitered.
- **Cover.** Covering forces compel the enemy to deploy prematurely; confirm the direction and strength of the enemy attack; conduct counter-reconnaissance; destroy the enemy advance guard; canalize the enemy advance in accordance with the commander's plan; and provide the main force time to react. A covering force should be a self-sufficient combined arms force that is large enough to convince the enemy that they are the main battle force.

The security force engages the enemy first, screening, guarding, and covering as ordered. Normally, the commander designates the security force as his initial main effort. This force maintains contact with the enemy while falling back under pressure. At a predetermined location, normally a phase line designated as a handover line, control of the battle is transferred to the main battle force. A handover line is a control feature; preferably following easily defined terrain features, at which the responsibility for the conduct of combat operations is passed from one force to another. The transfer of control must be carefully coordinated. The main battle force supports the disengagement of the security force as it withdraws in preparation for its subsequent mission. The commander may shift the main effort to the appropriate element of the main battle force. As the enemy's advance force approaches the main battle area, execution of the defensive battle becomes increasingly decentralized.

At some point, the defending commander must plan for the enemy force breaking through the security forces and approaching the main battle area. This requires transitioning friendly forces and control of the battle from security forces to the main battle force. Whenever the battle is transitioned, it requires coordination from the highest common commander.

## **Main Battle Forces**

Main battle forces engage the enemy to slow, canalize, disorganize, or defeat his attack. The commander positions these forces to counter the enemy's attack along the most likely or most dangerous avenue of approach. As in offensive operations, the commander weights his main effort with enough combat power and the necessary support to ensure success. When the enemy attack has been broken, the commander executes his plan to exploit any opportunity to resume the offensive.

Main battle forces engage the enemy as early as possible unless fires are withheld to prevent the loss of surprise. Commanders make maximum use of fires to destroy and disrupt enemy formations as they approach the main battle area. As the enemy closes, he is subjected to an ever-increasing volume of fires from the main battle area forces and all supporting arms. Again, obstacles and barriers are used to delay or canalize the enemy so that he is continually subjected to fires.

Combat power that can be concentrated most quickly, such as fires, is brought to bear while maneuver units move into position. The defender reacts to the enemy's main effort by reinforcing the threatened sector or allowing the enemy's main effort to penetrate into engagement areas within the main battle area to cut him off and destroy him by counterattack. Main battle forces maintain an offensive spirit throughout the battle, looking to exploit any advantageous situations.

A counterattack is an attack by part or all of a defending force against an attacking enemy force, for such specific purposes as regaining ground lost or cutting off and destroying enemy advance units, and with the general objective of denying to the enemy the attainment of his purpose in attacking. In many cases, the counterattack is decisive action in defensive operations. It is the commander's primary means of breaking the enemy's attack or of regaining the initiative. Once commenced, the counterattack is the main effort. Its success depends largely on surprise, speed, and boldness in execution. A separate counterattack force may be established by the commander to conduct planned counterattacks and can be made up of uncommitted or lightly engaged forces and the reserve.

The reserve is the commander's tool to influence the course of the battle at the critical time and place to exploit opportunities. It is the force that provides flexibility to the commander by allowing him to strike the enemy at the time and place of the commander's choosing. The commander uses his reserve at the decisive moment in the defense and refuses to dissipate it on local emergencies. It is a designated force, as robust and mobile as possible, that exploits success, conducts counterattacks, contains penetrations, and regains the initiative. The less that is known of the enemy or his intention, the greater the proportion of combat power that must be held in reserve. The reserve is usually located in assembly areas or forward operating bases in the main battle area. Once the reserve is committed the commander establishes or reconstitutes a new reserve.

Reserves are organized based on the factors of METT-T. The tactical mobility of mechanized and helicopterborne forces make them well suited for use as the reserve. Mechanized reserve forces are best employed offensively. In suitable terrain, a helicopterborne reserve can react quickly to reinforce the main battle area positions or block penetrations. However, helicopterborne forces often lack the shock effect desired for counterattacks.

Timing is critical to the employment of the reserve. As the area of probable employment of the reserve becomes apparent, the commander alerts his reserve to have it more readily available for action. When he commits his reserve, the commander must make his decision promptly and with an accurate understanding of movement factors and deployment times. If committed too soon or too late, the reserve may not have a decisive effect. The commander may choose to use security forces as part or all of his reserve after completion of their security mission. He must weigh this decision against the possibility that the security forces may suffer a loss of combat power during its security mission.

### **Rear Area Forces**

Rear area forces protect and sustain the force's combat power. They provide for freedom of action and the continuity of logistic and command and control support. Rear area forces facilitate future operations as forces are positioned and support is marshaled to enable the transition to offensive operations.

The security of the rear area is provided by three levels of forces corresponding to the rear area threat level. Local security forces are employed in the rear area to repel or destroy *Level I* threats such as terrorists or saboteurs. These forces are normally organic to the unit, base, or base cluster where they are employed. Response forces are mobile forces, with appropriate fire support designated by the area commander, employed to counter *Level II* threats such as enemy guerrillas or small tactical units operating in the rear area. The tactical combat force is a combat unit, with appropriate combat support and combat service support assets, that is assigned the mission of defeating *Level III* threats such as a large, combined arms capable enemy force. The tactical combat force (TFC) is usually located within or near the rear area where it can rapidly respond to the enemy threat. When facing a threat equipped with heavy armored vehicles the TCF maybe required to be tasked organized with tanks.

### **4104. Preparing for the Defense.**

*Deliberate Defense.* A deliberate defense is normally organized when out of contact with the enemy or when contact is not imminent and time for organization is available. A deliberate defense normally includes fortifications, strongpoints, extensive use of barriers, and fully integrated fires. The commander normally is free to make a detailed reconnaissance of his sector, select the terrain on which to defend, and decide the best distribution of forces.

*Hasty Defense.* A defense normally organized while in contact with the enemy or when contact is imminent and time available for the organization is limited. It is characterized

by improvement of the natural defensive strength of the terrain by utilization of emplacements and obstacles. The hasty defense normally allows for only a brief leader's reconnaissance and may entail the immediate engagement by security forces to buy time for the establishment of the defense.

*Use of the Reserve in the Defense.* The reserve is the commander's tool to influence the course of the battle at the critical time and place to exploit opportunities. It is a designated force, as robust and mobile as possible, that exploits success, conducts counterattacks, contains penetrations and regains the initiative. Its primary purpose is to retain flexibility through offensive action. Reserves are organized based on the factors of METT-T. The tactical mobility of mechanized forces makes them well suited for use as the reserve.

General planning considerations include:

- Enemy's strength and mobility.
- Initial disposition, assembly areas, coordination measures, and routes or axis.
- Coordination with frontline units- key considerations includes frontline unit obstacle plans and passage lanes.
- Communications/signals.
- The tank unit coordinates, reconnoiters, rehearses, and prepares for the priority reserve missions as time allows.

## **Section 2. Types of Defense**

### **4201. General.**

Every defense contains two complementary characteristics; a static or positional element, which anchors the defense to key terrain, and a dynamic or mobile element, which generates combat power through maneuver and concentration of forces. The positional element is characterized by use of battle positions, strongpoints, fortifications and barriers to halt the enemy advance. The mobile element is characterized by the use of offensive action, supplementary positions, planned delaying actions, lateral shifting of forces and commitment of the reserve. Conceptually, this results in two defensive extremes; the position defense and the mobile defense. However, neither type can be used exclusively in practice. Although these descriptions convey the general pattern of each type of defense, any defense will include both positional and mobile elements. Commanders may conduct position and mobile defenses simultaneously to take advantage of the strengths inherent in mechanized organizations. Mechanized forces possess the mobility required to conduct mobile-type defenses or may be tasked to be the reserve given the situation and terrain within their assigned sector.

### **4202. Position Defense.**

The type of defense in which the bulk of the defending force is disposed in selected tactical localities where the decisive battle is to be fought. Principle reliance is placed on the ability of the forces in the defended localities to maintain their positions and to

control the terrain between them. The tank battalion is typically used as the reserve in a positional defense. As a reserve, tank units are normally employed to add depth, to block penetrations, or restore the battle position by counterattack.

The position defense is conducted to deny the enemy access to critical terrain for a specified period of time. The position defense is seldom capable of achieving the outright destruction of the attacking force due to its limited mobility. The attacker may disengage when dealt a tactical setback or take advantage of other opportunities to maintain the initiative. Thus, the position defense relies on other simultaneous or subsequent operations by adjacent or reinforcing forces to achieve decisive results. Circumstances may require or favor the conduct of a position.

#### **4203. Mobile Defense.**

The mobile defense is an area or position in which maneuver is used together with fire and terrain to seize initiative from the enemy. The mobile defense requires depth and focuses on the destruction of the enemy by permitting him to advance into a position that exposes him to counterattack by a strong mobile reserve. Tank units will not normally conduct a mobile defense as a separate maneuver element. Usually, they are employed as part of a mechanized force within a MAGTF mobile defense. Mechanized pure units are normally assigned to the main battle area while units task organized with tanks (teams or task forces) are often assigned reserve roles.

The positional defense is normally used to retain key terrain while the mobile defense is used to destroy the enemy force. Clearly, the positional defense weights its forces forward while the mobile defense weights its forces toward its reserve or counterattack force. The position defense normally uses its reserve to reestablish the FEBA following penetration by the enemy. In the mobile defense, the reserve or counterattack force is used to destroy the enemy. Although the mobile defense has inherent risks, it stands a greater chance of inflicting a decisive defeat and complete destruction of the enemy force than does the area defense.

### **Section 3. Defensive Maneuver**

*Sectors.* Sectors are areas designated by boundaries within which a unit operates and for which it is responsible. Assignment of a defensive sector provides tank units with maximum latitude to accomplish assigned tasks. It is the most common method of defending with a mechanized force and prevents the enemy from concentrating overwhelming firepower on the bulk of the defending force at one time. The strength of this defense comes from its flexibility and focus on the enemy, rather than terrain. This depth must come from the initial positioning of units throughout the sector, and a viable reserve/counterattack force. The extent of the sector is METT-T dependent. Forces deployed in depth must confront the enemy with effective fires from multiple, mutually supporting locations as the enemy tries to maneuver. The sector is organized around many dispersed, small units, which attack the enemy throughout the depth of his formations.

*Battle Position (BP).* A battle position is a defensive location oriented on the most likely avenue of approach from which a unit may defend. Battle positions should be positioned to achieve depth, surprise, mutual support, and to allow for maneuver. They effectively concentrate combat power into an engagement area, while preventing the enemy from isolating any one part of the unit. Units of platoon to battalion size may be assigned a battle position. The use of on-order battle positions adds flexibility and depth to the defensive plan. Tanks units are normally tasked to provide security outside of a battle position, overwatch a battle position, or serve as a spoiling attack or counterattack force.

*Strongpoints.* Strongpoints are heavily fortified battle positions, tied to a natural or reinforcing obstacle to create an anchor for the defense or to block a key piece of restricted terrain. A strongpoint typically locates on key or decisive terrain. A commander will also establish a strongpoint when he anticipates that enemy actions will isolate a defending force retaining terrain critical to the defense.

The strongpoint requires significant engineer support. Positions are prepared for all weapons systems, vehicles, Marines, and supplies. Positions are prepared for all-around defense when they anticipate being surrounded. Once isolated, unit movement will be restricted within the confines of the strongpoint position.

Before assigning a strongpoint mission, a commander must ensure that the strongpoint force has sufficient time and resources to construct the position.

*Alternate and Supplementary Positions.* The alternate position is a position given to a weapon, unit, or individual to be occupied when the primary position becomes untenable or unsuitable for carrying out its task. Alternate positions provide additional lines of sight into the same engagement area or sector of fire and are sited to fulfill the original task. Alternate and supplementary positions should be designated and prepared as time permits. They increase the survivability of a weapons system by enabling it to engage the enemy from multiple positions. Supplementary positions provide the means to accomplish a task that cannot be accomplished from the primary or alternate positions. They allow a unit or weapons system to engage enemy forces approaching from another direction such as the rear or flank.

#### Planning Considerations:

The following are common considerations in defensive plans:

- Security plan
- Movement into the defense (deliberate defense only)
- Location/grids for tactical and fire control measures (e.g. boundary, sectors of fire, target reference points, engagement area, passage lanes, and counterattack routes, on order or event oriented fire control)
- Priority of Engagement (e.g. target precedence)
- Methods of Engagement-( e.g. HAW-MAW-LAW or Massed Surprise Fires)

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- Engagement and disengagement criteria and instructions (e.g. maximum engagement line, trigger line, disengagement line)
- Priority of work in improving positions e.g. security, positioning of weapon systems, fields of fire, hull down, turret down, and hide positions.
- Obstacle plan integrated with fire plans and scheme of maneuver
- Fire plan integrated direct and indirect fire plans with scheme of maneuver and obstacle plans
- Reporting requirements
- MOPP levels
- Stand- to beginning and end
- Movement within position
- Timeline