



SMALL WARS JOURNAL

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The US Army's Shift to Irregular Warfare

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Part of today's challenges within the US Army are the ongoing debates of whether future conflict will require us to continue to develop more robust COIN and irregular warfare capabilities or to maintain our edge in conventional warfare expertise. To settle these debates we must examine the nature of today's wars. Unlike the bi-polar world of our recent past we are now facing many smaller conflicts...conflicts that are not necessarily defined by war, but, rather run the gamut from engagements to confrontations to combat. And while new conflicts aren't necessarily growing at an alarming rate, the old ones are not going away. This presents us an era of conflict, of persistent conflict, where our combined capacity to engage will be greatly challenged. Our solution is to focus on developing our officer and NCO leadership.

The Army needs agile and adaptive leaders capable of handling the challenges of full spectrum operations in this era of persistent conflict. These leaders must be creative and critical thinkers; they must be confident and competent communicators; and they must be capable of operating with a comprehensive approach to meet these emerging challenges. Leaders will be required to contend with offensive, defensive, and stability operations simultaneously as well as integrate combined arms and host nation forces.

This article asserts that successful counterinsurgency relies on an equally developed irregular warfare mindset. Fueling this mindset is change...lots of it...and in various forms and venues. Using the framework of DOTMLPF (Doctrine, Organizations, Training, Materiel, Leadership, Personnel, and Facilities) and combining it with a resource- informed, integration-focused, and outcomes oriented approach, a formal holistic effort can be made to confront today's and tomorrow's hybrid threats. Let's examine what the Army has done in the last few years to prepare adaptive leaders for the complexities of irregular warfare and full spectrum operations.

Global Trends

To initiate the discussion, one must consider the already much discussed strategic context. This view of the strategic environment is particularly important as it influences the way in which we develop capabilities. Current global trends indicate that events of the last eight years of conflict are but harbingers of the emerging security environment.

The character of 21st Century warfare is more complex and change is exponential. This increased pace of change does not mean that modernization is futile ... it means that we must fight even harder to maintain our edge using a purposeful "balance" of short term capabilities

“off the shelf,” while also changing doctrine, educating adaptable leaders, and pushing our deliberate, long term materiel development efforts... but evolving from known points, based on data, as opposed to leap ahead dependence on unproven technologies.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently stated “the defining principle of the Pentagon’s new National Defense Strategy is **balance** ... balance between trying to prevail in current conflicts and preparing for other contingencies; between institutionalizing capabilities such as counterinsurgency ... and maintaining the U.S.... technological edge; and between retaining cultural traits that made U.S. armed forces successful and shedding those that hamper their ability to do what needs to be done.”

Similarly, our Army Chief of Staff, General George Casey put it well in his statement, “Given the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of current and future strategic demands, **versatility** is the defining quality that must inform every dimension of our Army.” These two leaders have set our azimuth to provide a balanced approach to change and to deliver versatile formations able to contend with complexity. At the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), we are calling the ongoing effort “**Adapting our Aim.**” The goal is to develop a balanced Army to support a balanced strategy. What follows is how this change is expressed.

Doctrine

From the standpoint of doctrine, the Army has embraced the challenges of versatility and balance. Our capstone doctrine Field Manual 3-0: *Operations* emphasizes full spectrum operations – recognizing the unpredictability of the environment and hybrid nature of lethal and non-lethal threats.

There are **three key ideas** associated with this shift in doctrine. First, there has been a shift in thinking on the **emphasis placed on stability operations, at same level of offense and defense.** Second, while the “**whole of government**” approach was a part of this doctrine, greater emphasis has been placed on the “comprehensive approach.” Third, when operating in “**war among the people,**” the primary focus is to have **less direct U.S. involvement** in counterinsurgency -- and instead to focus on **capacity building for others.**

The emphasis is on providing security for the population and enabling the local government to better serve its population. Historically, these security tasks were accomplished primarily through Special Operations Forces. Today this mission is also being accomplished using the resources of the modular brigade combat team (BCT) augmented as necessary based on conditions and operational requirements. Working closely with the Army Special Forces community we’ve published a staff handbook as well as new doctrine, to describe GPF capabilities such as medical, lift, sustainment, security, and engineer organizations designed to support Security Force Assistance (SFA). This work has been war-gamed in our Future Army Study, Unified Quest (US Army Title X war-game) and is being practiced and refined by I Corps in Iraq today.

Organization

Next, in the area of basic design, our Army organizational structure has changed. Over the past several years we have taken steps to modify our basic organizational structure with an eye towards versatility and balance. Both force mix and force design have been an area of particular emphasis in regards to our effort to reflect this shift in aim. Force mix is laying out the logic and type of brigades necessary to give the Army and our Nation the right number of infantry BCTs, Stryker BCTs and heavy BCTs, as well as supporting brigade capabilities. We have developed a modular force structure that can be rapidly tailored to meet the new demands in the field.

Additionally, our Army has increased capacity and capabilities in Special Operations Forces, Civil Affairs, Contracting, and Electronic Warfare specialties. Furthermore, inside our BCTs, we have redesigned the force to reflect the planning needs of these small units with military police, civil affairs, and electronic warfare capabilities. Knowledge management cells have been placed on staffs. These cells have increased military intelligence structure with an emphasis on human intelligence, red teams (adversary), and operations research and systems analysis teams in our division and above headquarters.

Our lessons learned from the field and wargaming efforts have convinced us that the BCT, when augmented with necessary SFA capabilities, is the best organization capable of operating from this new point of aim and most able to flex up or down the themes of conflict inside a campaign. Establishment of organizations to conduct just stability operations are not only cost ineffective, but put mission and soldiers at risk – especially against a thinking and adaptive enemy who “has a vote”. As Lieutenant General Graeme Lamb, former British Field Army commander, said at a recent Unified Quest event, “oftentimes war chooses you.” We have just recently completed a review of our brigade and BCT organizations which could result in a great number spaces being realigned or reduced in the FY 11-12 time frame.

We have also established new organizations to provide Army-wide solutions to asymmetric challenges with such units as the Joint Training Counter-IED Operations Integrating Center (JTCOIC) – the JT-COIC is an organization and facility in the Ft Monroe area that provides direct access to theater data bases and connected to our Combat Training Centers, schools and other relevant centers and activities to facilitate a real time replication of the operational environment.

Training

In regards to training, we have created demanding programs to promote **adaptive decision making** and **creative problem solving** at all levels. These skill sets are important for an Army of junior leaders and soldiers confronted with uncertainty and ambiguity. **Balance is achieved** when soldiers can recognize competing priorities and create new solutions that mitigate both.

Our goal is to **train a campaign-quality Army** that is able to easily transition between operational themes in a complex environment. A key step is to replicate the **complex Operational Environment (OE)** across the entire Army. We’ve experienced over seven years of war and are bringing hard-earned experiences to all our training environments. Home-station

training as well as Maneuver Combat Training Center and other training programs are all being impacted by this common OE setting. Through a new facility, the JT-COIC, we will soon replicate the OE in Afghanistan and Iraq nearly simultaneously in our CTCs and in our classrooms, thus making training more relevant to the experienced soldiers and leaders of our Army.

Our training is becoming more focused. **Training is outcome-based** and driven by our Commanders – it exercises creative (adaptive) thought because it is an approach to force preparation that merges the benefits of training and education to create critical thinkers. It gets beyond the task, conditions and standards to focus on the outcome.

We need to expand and maximize our **Live-Virtual-Constructive training** opportunities, blurring the distinction today between L-V-C and moving toward an **integrated training environment** so that our soldiers can train wherever they are located on a 24/7 basis. With more of our Army being forward deployed, our training needs to be exportable, and coupled closely with combat developments, to maximize **full spectrum readiness** in theater.

Beyond our training centers, our Army is in the process of developing a **new training strategy**. In the past, we challenged our leaders and soldiers with “mass” and with “compressed time.” This made sense when the former threat was composed of large Soviet-style mechanized formations. Today, we are training soldiers who are capable of dealing with “ill-defined problems” and threats that are likely to transition rapidly between different tactics and operational themes. The new challenge is to train soldiers that are comfortable with “**complexity**” and “**extended time.**” We have raised the bar in our training events when we layer on the complexities of societal, religious, tribal and economic factors – and when we develop leaders who are much more capable of anticipating the adaptations and transitions which an adaptive and thinking enemy can make over an extended period of time. During an era of persistent conflict, complexity and extended time become the new factors in warfare and drive much of our mindset.

Materiel

In the area of materiel, our Army has made great strides in the rapid fielding of weapon systems for Iraq and Afghanistan. This quick turn ability to field relevant solutions through REF, RFI, RDECOM, and industry has demonstrated the growing versatility of our Army’s generating force. Our TRADOC Centers of Excellence (COE) have turned themselves into matrixes able to support multiple requests from multiple stakeholders in two theaters. The Army has fielded capabilities such as the MRAP vehicle; Counter Rocket, Artillery, and Mortar (C-RAM) system; and Task Force ODIN (Observe, Detect, Identify, and Neutralize).

While we have made rapid equipping changes to the force in contact, we still must continue to transform our generating force to get ahead of this adaptive adversary. Leveraging innovative ideas from our troops engaged with the enemy directly with our R&D Labs and industry and getting less than 100% solutions into the hands of our units while they are in reset phase of ARFORGEN - Linking not only the equipment, but proper training and leader development.

Our materiel solutions are striving to keep pace with demands of the warfighter. Thousands of UAVs and UGVs have been fielded and are transforming the conduct of reconnaissance, route clearance, and potential use of leader-followers to provide smart wingmen. We've improved ISR to better coordinate information from multiple systems. Innovative solutions to IED's, such as high powered jammers and robots, have mitigated the worst of the threat. We have updated our battle command systems to not only depict the enemy force and the physical terrain, but the human factors of the terrain as well. We have equipped the soldier with protection, lethality, and interoperability like never before in our history. Nonetheless, we must remember that while technology is important ... people matter most. With this in mind, let us discuss what we're doing to develop our People.

Leadership and Education

Leadership and education are at the **forefront of change** for a versatile and balanced Army.

Today, we our **adapting our leader development** to meet the challenges of the operational environment they will encounter. We are preparing our leaders for hybrid, networked threats and the mindset to deal with the full spectrum of operations. COIN requires continued **decentralization** of decision-making to lower echelons. Irregular Warfare is placing an increased challenge on small unit operations. Privates entering the Army now learn not just to shoot a rifle and march... but are schooled in the importance of culture and language. Our **non-commissioned officers are leading patrols**, engaging the population, and dealing with complex problems previously dealt with only by field grade officers or above. We have restructured our Non-commissioned officer educational system and officer educational system model - focusing them on how to think, not what to think.

Officer development will include provisions for broadening experiences between combat tours, increasing functional areas of expertise, and emphasizing "talent management" to ensure that highly skilled officers are effectively managed - **rebalancing education, training, and experience**.

We have adjusted our field grade officer training to focus on a warrior ethos and a joint, expeditionary mindset, grounded in Army full spectrum doctrine. Across all levels of individual leaders, the Army has just begun to implement a series called Battlemind Training, which is now part of the overall Comprehensive Soldier Fitness initiative. The components of Battlemind include: 1) Mental resiliency; 2) Suicide prevention, recognition, and intervention; and 3) Combat and operational stress control.

Personnel

In the area of personnel, we rebalanced all components of the force to include planning for increasing the overall end strength, both Active and Reserve, to support the Modular Army conversion while meeting increased requirements. We've created new military occupation specialties in the areas of electronic warfare and information operations (IO), as well as examining an off-shoot of IO - cyber warfare, to meet the certain demands of the irregular warfare environment.

Facilities

Facilities are needed to keep pace with our change and we are using Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC) decisions to assist in this shift - bringing together our fires communities at Ft. Sill and maneuver communities at Ft. Benning - similar to moves we made several years ago in maneuver support and sustainment - to integrate our combat developments with training, leader, and doctrine development reflecting our warfighting functions. In response to our IW challenges, we have constructed new, enhanced, and more realistic urban training sites at several home stations and the Combat Training Centers.

Resource-Informed

In managing the challenges of Irregular Warfare and the Operational Environment, our efforts need to remain **resource-informed**. The Army's primary focus continues to be combined operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Nonetheless, these operations are costly. Resources are finite – decisions are often made with an acknowledgment that many are a zero-sum gain. Hence, every decision we make needs to reflect a heightened sensitivity for balancing limited resources against long term commitments. So, while we will retain our thinking in an unconstrained environment, we will make recommendations and decisions based on available resources of time, people, and money in an integrated fashion, outcome based.

Our Way Ahead: Building an Adaptable Leader Mindset

The essential element of our Way Ahead resides in the human dimension. We need adaptable leaders with character and competence, who will lead us in this dynamic security environment of the 21st Century. As Charles Darwin noted “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent ... It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.” Briefly, TRADOC completed a **new Capstone operational concept** which will help us to drive our future focus and way to operate in this changing security environment. The insights that help to underpin this new operational concept are based on our **Comprehensive Lessons Learned** effort. While many units capture their own internal lessons learned, few have taken the time to look across the entire Army and joint, coalition, and interagency force - both from the operating and generating force perspectives - and to ensure that we generate the lessons based on actual data from the field. These two efforts along with the OE, direction provided from the CSA, and the new joint Capstone Concept for Joint Operations provides the underpinnings for our way ahead. Multi-service events in our year long future warfare study, Unified Quest, will take these LL, capstone concept and OE in this next year and wargame them to ensure we have it about right.

Conclusion

To conclude, over the past eight years, the United States Army has instituted some of the most dramatic changes in our history. Yet, the fundamental question is not whether we have changed, but whether we have changed enough. J.F.C. Fuller said it well, “It is absolutely true in war, were other things equal, that numbers, whether men, shells, bombs, etc., would be supreme. Yet it is also absolutely true that other things are never equal and can never be equal.” We think that

developing the right leaders – agile and adaptive – may give us the edge when other things are never equal. This is why we must continue to improve our effectiveness by investing in our leadership training and development programs to better meet and overcome the challenges of the 21st Century.

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