# Transformation and the Modern Army

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## Abstract

The United States Army must be able to adapt to challenges it faces on the battlefield. This adaptation commonly referred to as agility, can be expressed in personnel and material decisions. While most military decisions are based on historical occurrences leaders must remain flexible and able to react to enemy actions if victory is to be achieved.

# Outline

Thesis: The Army must be able to transform itself quickly during peace time and combat operations if victory is to be achieved.

1. The history of the United States Army is littered with examples of meaningful transformation during combat operations.
    1.1. The ingenuity of the Soldier has been paramount in overcoming battlefield challenges.
        1.1.1. A substantial tank obstacle was defeated during World War II by a simple invention of an NCO.
        1.1.2. The lethality of the improvised explosive device during Operation Iraqi Freedom was minimized by strap-on supplemental armor.
    1.2. Soldiers have proved to be adaptable to changing roles.
        1.2.1. Non-combat arms soldiers have proved successful for traditional Infantry tasks.
        1.2.2. Female soldiers have been utilized for search teams supporting infantry units.
2. The Army has transformed from a Cold War behemoth to an agile force.
    2.1. During the Cold War the Army focused on the threats posed by the former Soviet Union.
        2.1.1. Vast resources were expended building the nuclear stockpile.
        2.1.2. Weapon systems were developed to counter the threat doctrine.
    2.2. After the collapse of the Soviet Union leaders were forced to predict future threats and adapt the military to them.
        2.2.1. Smaller combined arms teams were developed to be more lethal and agile to allow for increased force projection.
        2.2.2. Unmanned aerial vehicles were developed in anticipation of increased intelligence requirements.

# Transformation and the Modern Army

The United States Army is an amazing fighting force and arguably the premier army of the world. To maintain this superiority the Army must be able to anticipate and adapt to ever evolving threats. History has shown that a fighting force incapable of adapting to the fluid environment of war will not secure victory without paying a high price in casualties and equipment. These threats are not always foreseen and even the best military planners cannot envision every battlefield scenario an adversary may push upon them. The only counter to the inevitable surprises of the modern battlefield is agility. The Army must be able to transform itself quickly during peace time and combat operations if victory is to be achieved.

The United States military has been involved in no fewer than thirty armed conflicts dating back to the War of Independence and culminating with the present day operations in Iraq and Afghanistan (Murray, 2005). During these conflicts the Army has been met with numerous challenges that required a quick and fluid transformation of personnel and material to remain relevant and effective.

During World War II the First Army was stymied in France by hedgerows known as bocage that were several hundred years old. Military planners were aware of the bocage before the invasion of France but did not fully realize the impact the obstacles would have on the combined arms teams. In fact, General Gavin of the 82d Airborne Division stated “although there had been some talk in the U.K. before D-Day about the hedgerows, none of us had really appreciated how difficult they would turn out to be.” (Andidora, 2002).

The primary armored vehicle in France after D-Day was the M-4 Sherman. Unfortunately the M-4 was not able to plow through the bocage but would only ride up and over exposing the unarmored underbelly to waiting German anti-armor teams firing powerful panzerfaust rockets (Carafano, 2006). The Army had to find a solution if the invasion was going to continue.

After trying Sherman dozer tanks and explosively breaching the bocage, neither of which was sustainable due to scarcity of materials, a new method was devised. Sgt. Curtis G. Culin of the 2d Armored Division's 102d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron developed a cutting device that was welded onto Sherman tanks (Doubler, 1994). Using scrap metal from German road blocks meant to slow the American's advance, Sgt. Culin was able to construct an implement, easily attached to scores of Sherman tanks, which possessed unmatched effectiveness against the difficult terrain. Utilizing the modified Sherman tanks along with combined arms the Army was "well on its way toward solving the riddle of the hedgerows" (Andidora, 2002).

During Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom the improvised explosive device (IED) was used by the enemy to marginalize the tremendous firepower advantage the Army possessed. Since the summer of 2003, Iraqi insurgents have utilized the IED with great effectiveness. The Army was unprepared for guerilla style attacks in depth and did not have an armored utility vehicle deployed in any great numbers. Convoys were easy targets and the United States sustained over 210 IED casualties in the first year of combat alone (Joint IED Defeat Organization, 2009)

The Army did not anticipate wide spread attacks against lightly armored vehicles post invasion. Soldiers were left with the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle or HMMVW to conduct patrols and logistics convoys. As the casualties began to pile up and the Army was slow to respond, soldiers took matters into their own hands. Motor pools country wide began to weld steel panels to their vehicles in an attempt to protect the occupants. While the Army did eventually respond to the IED threat by fielding the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle in the summer of 2007, the transformation was deemed late by critics.

Since the fielding of the MRAP casualties have been reduced significantly from a high of 90 in June 2007 to just 3 in April 2009 (Iraq coalition casualty count, 2009). The MRAP was delivered nearly four years after the IED debuted in OIF. The Army was slow to transform to meet the threat and many soldiers paid with their lives.

The need for transformation does not end at equipment. The Army must be able transform the manner in which it uses personnel as well. While soldiers are arguably more efficient when utilized for their trained specialties, unforeseen challenges can often time be met by an adjustment of how combat power is applied.

During Operation Iraqi Freedom the Army has found itself short of the necessary infantry soldiers needed to conduct operations especially cornerstone tasks such as search and clear and vehicle check points. To ease the burden on infantry units and deepen the pool of available units the Army has changed its philosophy. Beginning with basic training, new soldiers are taught they are infantryman first. This ethos is also echoed in pre-deployment training. The 1-7 Field Artillery completed infantry training consisting of

"several basic infantryman tactics such as clearing a building, proper operation of a vehicle security check point, dismounted foot patrols and operations in an urban terrain" (Alger, 2006) before deployment to Iraq. Cross training provided the Army another pool of soldiers to conduct historically infantry tasks.

The need to search women on the battlefield in Iraq has become even more critical as of late. Numerous female suicide bombers have been encountered and their use as a weapon has been fully realized by the enemy. Due to cultural sensitivities male soldiers can cause more harm than good by searching Arab women. In response to these issues the Army trained female soldiers and local Iraqi women on search procedures (U.S. Soldiers Train Iraqi Female Security Volunteers for Police Assistance Work , 2009). Although these are inherently infantry tasks, the Army had to adapt and develop a new solution.

Transforming during time of war is unquestionably paramount. Failures are immediately paid for in blood but transformation during peace time may negate the need for war time transformation.

During the height of the Cold War the United States was primarily focused on countering the threat from the Soviet Union. From 1970 to 1990 the US spent 11% of its annual defense budget on nuclear weapons alone (Karp, 1992). Huge divisions of armor were built and staged in Europe. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the Army was left to ponder what future threats held. In 1991, Operation Desert Storm seemed to prove that the current arsenal of men and machines was relevant to the modern battlefield but all of

that was quickly disproved in 1993 and Somalia when several units endured heavy casualties at the hands of a ragtag militia (Bowden, 2001).

Army leaders have slowly transitioned the Army away from the large division organization to the smaller, brigade focused structure. The Brigade Combat Team, or BCT, can be quickly moved around the world in response to a threat. The BCT allows the Army to be more agile and lethal on the modern battlefield (Vick, Pirnie, & Orletsky, 2003). It is this structure that has proven so effective in Iraq. The Army has been able to reposition forces to counter the flare-ups so common with an insurgency.

While the exact date is classified, the Army has been developing Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, or UAVs, since at least the early 1990s and fielded the Hunter UAV in early 1995 (Pinkas, 1995). The decision to develop tactical UAVs would prove to be a master stroke of military decision making. It would not be until the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan that the true potential of these machines would be realized. Fortunately for soldiers the systems were already flying and the Army was able to deploy them with very little delay. A system as sophisticated as a UAV could not possible be developed and fielded in response to an imminent need. It must be in the inventory and ready for duty.

The Army will continue to be challenged by adversaries around the world. Leaders must be students of history but also realize that victory on the battlefield is often secured by the force that displays agility. The Army can prepare for future battles by analyzing previous engagements but leaders must be ready to adjust to an unpredictable enemy. The ability to transform is what wins the day.

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