

Transformation of United States Forces

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The Middle East and national strategies have led to two transformations of United States forces through two wars with Iraq. During the 1991 Gulf War United States forces were in the middle of a transformation that would allow them to be more lethal and mobile. This lack of mobility to a theatre anywhere in the world almost led to a major defeat of forces in the early stages of the conflict. In the fifth year of Operation Iraqi Freedom US Forces continued with another transformation. This time transforming the Army into a more efficient fighting force by examining the contemporary operational environment (COE) and transforming the brigades and leaders to operate in a volatile, complex and ambiguous environment.

United States military forces constantly effect change on the battlefield by transforming into a more relevant and lethal force. Current trends have been to get to the fight faster, stay engaged longer, become more lethal, maintain a technological advantage and accomplish missions with fewer Soldiers on the ground. In order to understand how United States forces are transforming currently a look back at the last transformation attempt that was made to answer the call in the Middle East must be done.

In the years that preceded the 1991 Persian Gulf War the United States Army was engaged in securing a fighting force that was more mobile. The need to get to the fight faster was becoming more important. A light division that utilized technology and combined that with air deployability was the framework behind the transformation. In essence, Army planners wanted the deployability of a light infantry division with the firepower and mobility of a heavy division.

In the Saudi Arabian desert in late 1990 “the line was held for several weeks by only the lightly armed and relatively immobile 82d Airborne Division and a Marine

Expeditionary Force.” (Dunn, 2001) Iraqi forces to the north could have destroyed defensive positions, even with US air superiority. US forces were outnumbered and outgunned by heavy divisions of the Iraqi Republican Guard. The "window of vulnerability" closed after several weeks of United States and coalition reinforcements arriving by sea. The huge ships from ports in the United States and West Germany arrived and changed the defensive and offensive capabilities of United States forces. These reinforcements added the heavy division firepower needed to secure the defensive “line in the sand.”

The strategic situation that led to the need for transformation began years prior to the Persian Gulf War because of the political environment in the Soviet Union and the Middle East during the 1980’s. Due to turmoil in Iran and instability of the region in “January 1980 President Carter declared the Persian Gulf to be a US vital interest and warned that any Soviet attempt to gain control over the Gulf would be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.” (Dunn, 2001) This decision is known as the Carter Doctrine for the Middle East. The flow of energy in the form of crude oil would not be stopped by any government in the region. The Carter Doctrine made clear that the shipping lanes were a vital interest to the United States. United States forces were not welcome in the region and therefore, the addition of United States bases was not an option. The United States military would have to respond after a Soviet invasion had begun or other conflict. Due to time constraints, United States forces would have to be deployed by air. Military planners knew that deploying ground forces in response to an attack on United States interests abroad would take weeks to accomplish. 1980-81 General Meyer, then Chief of Staff of the Army set out to solve this problem. He

identified and attempted to solve the problem as a "force structure dilemma by creating a prototype light division that could be deployed in approximately 1,250 C-141B sorties." (Dunn, 2001) Gen Meyer insisted that this division would depend on "the latest high-technology precision-guided weaponry and advanced computer- supported command, control, communications, and intelligence" (Dunn, 2001) in order to deliver lethality unseen before on the battlefield.

TRADOC was given overall responsibility for General Meyer's vision.

Immediately the combat centers began to prefer approaches that were more conventional and question the Chief of Staff of the Army's vision. The Army's 9th Infantry Division at Ft. Lewis, Washington was integrated as "test bed" for the lighter more lethal division. Bureaucratic battles killed program in 1989, one year before it was needed in the Persian Gulf. The planned transformation never made it from vision to reality because of the battles on the banks of the Potomac River and throughout the Army. Each of the combat centers wanted certain elements changed and fought against TRADOC and resisted the recommendations to implement the transformation.

In Operation Iraqi Freedom another transformation has taken place. This is the Modular Force and Stabilization of Brigade Combat Teams through transformation. Due to the ever changing situation in Operation Iraqi Freedom the Army has suffered from "doctrinal deficit." The enemy has evolved over the conflict and Commanders began asking how they should command their units. The Army publishes a "white paper" to describe how units will fight. TRADOC's "white paper" states, "While it is impossible to predict the exact nature of future conflict, it is possible to determine those factors which will have the greatest effects on military forces and thus form the critical

variables in future military operational environments." The "white paper" described how the United States Army in Iraq should be structured, train and equip. The areas that overlap but were addressed were: "Command and Control, Combined Arms Operations, Joint Integration and Support, Deployment and Sustainment, Information and Knowledge." (Altieri, 2006)

In 2004 Combat Training Centers, combat veterans and branch schools collaborate to author Interim Field Manuals and Modular doctrine. The Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) was instrumental in using 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, the internet, to connect with Soldiers in the combat zone. Challenges in training led to a more robust pre-mobilization training schedule that was ever-evolving with the techniques, tactics and procedures (TTPs) of the enemy. Commanders must live and train as a combined arms team. An important element of the transformation is ensuring the enthusiastic embrace by leaders and supporting infrastructure. The leaders embracing the transformation headed off any bureaucratic fighting that happened in the 1980s. Rapid Fielding Initiative (RIF), Rapid Equipping Force (REF) brought the needed equipment to the individual Soldier and the units much faster than in previous wars.

Assessment of how the failure to transform in the 1980s has led to greater success in Operation Iraqi Freedom is evident through the use of technology and communication. The use of the internet to spread information from theatre to Combat Training Centers empowers trainers to adapt and Commanders on the ground to provide input from lessons learned and the situation on the ground. Difference in the mindset of the separate branch schools has kept the Army as a cohesive unit looking forward to the

future with a team mentality to defeat an enemy and provide the training and equipment to the Soldiers and units.

The conclusion is that leaders who live through the transformation in Operation Iraqi Freedom are the difference. The element of training and rapid fielding lends confidence to the force. Partnership with private sector for single goal instead of separate interests has been the difference in timing and the speed of initiating the transformation of the United States forces. The lessons learned are a big part of success. The ability to change doctrine and publish instantly using the internet has kept the Commander's knowledgeable and informed. When the United States Army is focused and determined without fighting for separate interests the impact on the battlefield can be seen and felt by opposing forces or insurgencies. Success is much closer to be attained when all the elements of the "white paper" are addressed and actioned.

## References

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