IN SEARCH OF CERTAIN VICTORY:  
THE UNITED STATES ARMY’S QUEST TO BECOME A BALANCED FORCE

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Abstract

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 changed the world. These changes affect every part of the United States, from domestic security measures to its foreign policy. In October of that year, American forces invaded Afghanistan, where the plot for the attacks originated. This began a decade plus of irregular war that would strain the United States Army to the breaking point. On 2011, after fighting in Iraq, Afghanistan and other far-flung places around the world, the United States Army was fundamentally altered from the organization it had been in 2000. Responding to the counterinsurgency nature of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan the Army changed the way it trained, fought, and equipped itself. Once focused almost solely on conventional war, the Army made significant changes. Today the Army is at a crossroads. With limited resources to address diverse threats and missions around the world, the Unites States Army must develop a long-term strategic concept that places the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in the proper context. This will enable it to project its manning, equipment and training needs for the coming decade.

This thesis examines the results of this eleven-year evolution of the Army as a fighting force. It examines the current capabilities the Army maintains, those that it acquired as well as those in which it no longer has proficiency. Lastly, it makes recommendations to help ensure the Army is capable of meeting its requirements as directed by the civilian National Command Authority; these include conventional deterrence and full-spectrum dominance.
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I. Introduction

The United States Army is fundamentally different today than it was in 2000. Over the past decade, the Army focused on a single prize: victory in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Army has reinvented itself to bring about victory in the current conflicts. In reinventing itself to win, the Army had to sacrifice certain capabilities as it re-trained and re-equipped itself for a very narrow aspect of war it found itself fighting. This thesis will seek to answer the question:

Over the past decade, has the Army lost too much of combined arms warfighting capability to be considered a well rounded ground force?

It will test the hypothesis that the Army has sacrificed too much of its conventional combined arms capability to be full-spectrum dominant.

Parameters & Assumptions

This thesis is set within a number of parameters and assumptions. It will examine only the United States Army. It will look at the service in a vacuum, with no consideration to the Air Force, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, or allies. The intent is to analyze the Army’s current capabilities absent any force multipliers or capabilities supplied by sister services or allied nations. Therefore, the Army’s ability to fight joint and/or combined operations will not be a subject discussed in this paper.

This thesis will set a number of assumptions as well. It assumes that current budget reduction efforts will continue and that the base defense budget (outside any additional function for overseas contingency operations) will increase at a rate of no more than 1% above inflation for the next 5 years.

It assumes that the future of war will be hybrid war. Hybrid war is defined below in Section II: What Type of War? This theoretical war is assumed to take place quickly, leaving the

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1 The word Soldier will be capitalized throughout the paper.
Army little ability to ramp up for the conflict, change equipment layouts, manning and training. The Army will be judged on how it currently stands.

Lastly, this thesis will not name a specific threat. As opposed to putting a name to a potential enemy (i.e. China, Russia, India, etc), it assumes the enemy the United States may face will be a tier-1 or tier-2+ county. A tier-1 country is a hypothetical country with capabilities similar to the United States Army in 1991, which was the height of its conventional capability, based on size, equipment, and training. A tier-2+ country is a hypothetical country with capabilities somewhat less than that of the United States Army’s. Both countries would have little to no counterinsurgency experience. Both countries would be armed with refurbished Soviet-era equipment, supplemented by modern Russian and Chinese weaponry.

Sources and Methods

The research methods used include both qualitative and quantitative analysis.

- This thesis will look at the individual and collective training that Soldiers and units receive from their basic entry training up to when they deploy.
- This thesis will look will do a comparative analysis of the 1991 United States Army and the 2010-11 United States Army. The 1991 Army represented the height of its conventional capabilities having trained for nothing else since Vietnam. The 2010-11 Army best exemplifies the opposite of that, having conducted mostly irregular war training and operations, specifically counterinsurgency. This comparison will create a metric to gauge the changes in capabilities over the past two decades.
The hypothesis of this thesis is that the Army has sacrificed too much of its conventional capability to truly allow itself to be full-spectrum dominant. The independent variable is training. The dependent variable is the level of vulnerability.

The sources used will include articles published in reputable journals and magazines, such as *Foreign Affairs*, *Armed Forces Quarterly* and various journals of the Army branches such as *Armor Magazine*. Studies done for and by the Army are used, including several conducted by Fort Leavenworth and RAND. Interviews are not included, as anecdotal evidence would not further the hypothesis being tested. Army doctrine, manuals, training, equipment, and weapons allocation are also considered.

**Definitions**

Certain words and phrases are used throughout this thesis and defined below.

- **Full Spectrum Operations (Old Definition):** The Army defines full spectrum operations as “the range of operations Army forces conduct in war and military operations other than war.” These include major theater war, smaller-scale contingencies, and peacetime military engagement. The full spectrum operations operational environment is composed of six dimensions, threat, political, unified action, land combat operations (and supporting Army air operations), information and technology dimensions.\(^2\) It is shown graphically below:

- **Conventional Warfare**: The Army defines conventional warfare in *FM 3-05.130 Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare* as a form of warfare between states that employ direct military confrontation to defeat an adversary’s armed forces, destroy an adversary’s war-making capacity, or seize or retain territory in order to force a change in an adversary’s government or policies. The focus of conventional military operations is normally an adversary’s armed forces with the objective of influencing the adversary’s government. It generally assumes that the indigenous populations within the operational area are nonbelligerents and will accept whatever political outcome the belligerent governments impose, arbitrate, or negotiate. A fundamental military objective in conventional military operations is to minimize civilian interference in those operations.4

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- *Irregular warfare* is a violent struggle among state and nonstate actors for legitimacy and influence over relevant populations. Irregular warfare encompasses a wide range of activities, to include:
  
  o Insurgency
  
  o Counterinsurgency (defined below)
  
  o Unconventional War (defined below)
  
  o Terrorism
  
  o Counterterrorism
  
  o Foreign Internal Defense
  
  o Stability, security, transition and reconstruction operations
  
  o Strategic Communication
  
  o Psychological Operations
  
  o Civil-military Operations
  
  o Information Operations
  
  o Intelligence and counterintelligence activities
  
  o Transnational criminal activities, including narco-trafficking, illicit arms dealing, and illegal financial transactions that support or sustain IW
  
  o Law enforcement activities focused on countering irregular adversaries

- *Unconventional Warfare*: The Army defines unconventional warfare as operations conducted by, with or through irregular forces in support of a resistance movement, an insurgency, or conventional military operation.

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- **Counterinsurgency (COIN)** is a subset of irregular war and is those political, economic, military, paramilitary, psychological, and civil actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency.\(^7\)

- **Hybrid War** is a blending of the lethality of state conflict “with the fanatical and protracted fervor of irregular warfare. In future conflicts, future adversaries (states, state-sponsored groups, or self-funded actors) will exploit access to modern military capabilities… as well as promote protracted insurgencies that employ ambushes, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and coercive assassinations.”\(^8\)

There is no polar-opposite to conventional war. Irregular warfare takes place side-by-side conventional war and as well as being based on the same elements. The chart below visually manifests this difference:

![Conventional vs. Irregular Warfare Chart](chart.png)

\(^{7}\) *Ibid.*


\(^{9}\) FM 3-05.130, *Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare*, 1-6.
As noted, both focus on the government but conventional war has a stronger focus on the military aspect while irregular war focuses more extensively on the population. However, there are elements of conventional and irregular war in both categories. Conventional warfare and irregular warfare are not bookends to military operations.

Pertinence

Today, there is an ongoing debate on the effect the past decade of conflict on the Army’s capabilities. In addition, many articles argue about what the future of warfare will look like. Both topics are further explored below. What is lacking is a fundamental study on the status of the United States Army after the past decade linked to what the future of war will look like. Past articles, studies and white papers dealt only with one of the two topics. A failure to link the two topics together negates the arguments of both. One cannot argue the Army’s loss or gain of capabilities is relevant if, at the same time one does not project what the future of war will look like. No study has completed a comparative analysis of the Army of the past to the Army of today, instead they use other conflicts (2006 Israel/Lebanon, the Interwar Period) etc, to show what could theoretically happen if an Army allows certain skills to atrophy. Lastly, no writer as of yet has analyzed the past of the Army to identify common threads that might prohibit it from truly being an effective force. This thesis will fill that gap. It looks at the current state of the Army, and compares it to the Army of the past. It defends a position on what the future of war will look like. It takes the results of this analysis and provides decision makers recommendations as to what the Army of the future should look like based on lessons learned over the past conflicts.

The question this thesis will answer (At what point has the Army sacrificed too much of a certain capability in fighting the current wars?) is very pertinent today. As discussed above,
most writers fail to link all components of these arguments together and only offer incomplete solutions to the problem of developing a long-term strategic outlook and strategy the Army so desperately needs. In 2009, one writer warned that “aside from a handful of critical articles by firebrand writers, not much has been written that fundamentally questions current Army doctrine and where it is going.”

This study is important to the field of U.S. National Security, both in policy development and implementation around the world. As long as the Army touts itself as being able to fight in full-spectrum operations, then it must be able to do so. Policy makers will assume that it is ready. The Army’s ability (or inability) to engage in certain types of operations will alter what the United States is able to do to deter aggression or support allies. In conjunction, if the current state of the Army is misunderstood, there will be severe consequences if unrealistic policies are put into place by policy makers. The status of the Army not only affects the policy of the United States but the policy of its allies and adversaries as well. The ability to project unmatched conventional combat power has deterred enemies from facing the Army since 1991 with the victory in Operation Desert Shield/Storm. If the Army has lost so much conventional capability that it can no longer conventionally deter the adversaries of the United States, those actors may be more inclined to be expansionist and/or aggressive in their respective policies. The United States’ conventional capabilities have also forced potential adversaries to look to asymmetrical means as a way of combating the United States, these methods range from IEDs to cyberwar. However, the pendulum can easily swing the other way and in a few year’s time, conventional war may become the ‘unconventional’ way to deter the United States. At the same time, the Army’s combat overmatch has given America’s allies a sense of security as they enjoy the

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protection this affords them. If the Army’s ability to defend its allies has changed, these allies may be tempted to form alliance outside those with the United States or bandwagon with upcoming powers to stave off a perceived threat.

II. Debate: What type of War?

“The categories of warfare are blurring and no longer fit into neat, tidy boxes. One can expect to see more tools and tactics of destruction -- from the sophisticated to the simple -- being employed simultaneously in hybrid and more complex forms of warfare.”

--Robert M. Gates, U.S. Secretary of Defense11

There are myriad works on the current strategic operational environment and what future conflict will look like. Writers as well known as Thomas Ricks (Fiasco and The Gamble) to simple, unknown Soldiers on blog sites bring the current wars to life for many Americans. They diligently report on the conflicts as seen through the eyes of the infantryman or the policy makers themselves. At another level, many writers concentrate their works on what the future of war may look like. Robert Kagan argues that conventional war will return. Michael Klare states that future wars will be primarily resources driven, “Gone will be the days of war waged for ideology. In its place will emerge a battle of economic interests with the earth’s natural recourses as the ultimate trophy.”12 There is talk about hybrid wars, combined wars, cyberwars, and economic wars. Some, like Martin Van Creveld believe that major wars between nation-states are a thing of the past stating, “Large scale warfare between states, fought by armies,


separate from populations (the Clausewitzian trinity) [is] on its way out.”

Another subset of this analysis seeks to answer, “Who will the United States fight next?” Numerous theories have been put forward with potential adversaries ranging from the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) to smaller regional actors such as Turkey, Iran, or North Korea. Some argue that the next conflict will be against non-state actors. They all seek to answer two basic questions: “Who is the next enemy the United States will face?” and “What tactics will they employ?”

As shown, there is significant disagreement as to what the future of war or the Army should and does look like. For the purposes of this paper, it is assumed that the future of war will be hybrid war as current trends in warfare move in that direction. Dr. Frank Hoffman argues that the future of war will involve a volatile blend of traditional conventional (military focused) operations with more irregular war (population focused) operations, where “Tomorrow’s conflicts will not be easily categorized into conventional or irregular.”

These two disparate types of wars will be combined, necessitating that forces involved be trained and equipment to handle many scenarios. Doctrine writers for the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) foresee what they term “unrestricted warfare” (read: hybrid warfare) that includes conventional warfare, but also financial-, drug-, international law-, resource- and ecological- warfare.

As Max Boot explains

“…the boundaries between ‘conventional’ and ‘unconventional,’ ‘regular’ and ‘irregular’ warfare are blurring. Even nonstate groups are increasingly gaining access to the kinds of weapons – from missiles and land mines to chemicals and perhaps even atomic bombs – that were once the exclusive preserve of states. And even states will increasingly turn to unconventional strategies to blunt the impact of American power.”

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16 Ibid., 472.
Kenneth Coons and Glenn Harned further expound this hybrid war view in their article “Irregular Warfare is Warfare.” In it they argue that the “danger of interstate war has not passed. The United States must maintain its dominance in interstate warfighting capabilities in order to deter and, if necessary, win such wars.” Coons and Harned also hypothesize that conventional war and irregular war is combining to create hybrid war. They posit that in any interstate war, the opposing side will most likely possess some sort of WMD and delivery means, anti-access capabilities, irregular capabilities for escalation (i.e. state sponsored terrorist groups) and populations mobilized to resist U.S. military intervention. For them, the US Army must have both the conventional means to fight as well as the ability to project irregular warfare dominance of its own. This is because they believe that future campaigns “will be population oriented, not adversary-oriented and will emphasize winning support.”17

This thesis acknowledges that there is disagreement as to what the term hybrid wars means and if it is pertinent today. Writers such as Dr. Russell Glenn with RAND state that the term ‘hybrid war’ may help inspire debate, but it fails to define the new type of warfare emerging in such places as the Israeli/Lebanese conflict. He believes that hybrid war is merely a subset of irregular warfare, not a separate entity. He concludes his thoughts by stating:

“…hybrid conflict is ultimately a concept whose character is better described in terms of other constructs that offer superior clarity and will be better understood by students of conflict. ‘Hybrid’ in its several forms … should not attain status as part of formal doctrine.”18

His analysis while compelling, fails to take into account that irregular warfare (as currently defined) does not have a category for conventional combat. The two models exist side by side and hybrid war theory bridges the gap.

17 Kenneth C. Coons and Glenn M. Harned, Irregular Warfare is Warfare, *Joint Forces Quarterly (JFQ)*, Issue 52 (1st Quarter), 99.
III. Debate: What type of Army?

There is certainly no consensus either within or outside the Army as to what the Army should look like to meet this future threat, as there is no consensus on what the future threat is. There are two distinct themes in literature on the topic of the future of the Army. Weighing in on this debate are names such as John Nagl, Tom Donnelly and COL Gian Gentile. Each author comes at the issue from a different point of view such as former practitioner and theorist such as Dr. Nagl, current practitioners like COL Gentile or academics like Dr. Donnelly.

The first theme argues that the Army must concentrate fully on fighting the current wars, even at the detriment to its ability to respond to other types of scenarios. In the words of Dr. Nagl, “it is irresponsible to devalue irregular warfare adaptations needed on the battlefield today in favor of other capabilities that might be useful in a hypothetical conflict later.”19 The opposing side argues that the Army must be prepared to fight all types of conflicts and must not myopically focus on just one. This view is espoused by COL Gentile as he states “if a rifle company commander reads the Army’s high-profile doctrinal manuals, he learns to be an occupier, a policeman and an administrator – but not a fighter” and warns that if this isn’t fixed, “… then most of the blood and guts [in the next war] will be ours.”20

Theme A: The Army needs to focus on the current conflict (irregular war)

There are those who argue that the Army needs to focus on the wars it is fighting now. As Dr. Nagl points out, “A close look at the historical record reveals that the United States engages in ambiguous counterinsurgency and nation-building far more often than it faces full-scale war.”21 Historically this is true. Proponents of this theory acknowledge that conventional war is a possibility, but a significantly remote one. The more extreme supporters of the COIN-

19 John A. Nagl, Let’s Win the Wars We’re In, Joint Forces Quarterly (JFQ), Issue 52 (1st Quarter), 26.
20 Gentile, Let’s Build an Army to Win All War, 27, 33.
21 Nagl, Let’s Win the Wars We’re In, 24.
only theory believe that conventional war is outdated and a contingency the Army no longer needs to prepare for.

The foremost proponent of the “fight the wars we are fighting” theme is Dr. John Nagl, a former Army Lieutenant Colonel, president of the Center for a New American Security and author of the book *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. In his article, “Let’s Win the Wars We’re In” he clearly states his hypothesis by saying “… it is irresponsible to devalue irregular warfare adaptations needed on the battlefield of today in favor of other capabilities that might be useful in a hypothetical conflict later.” He argues that the Army risks losing the current conflicts because its institutional culture demands it prepare for conventional war. It is irresponsible, he argues to “assume that current and future foes will play to America’s strengths by fighting conventionally.” While he believes that future conflicts are “important,” current conflicts are critical and the Army must devote “the last full measure of its devotion to winning the wars it is in.” Dr. Nagl cites prominent figures, such as Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who stated that the Army was “unprepared” to fight the type of conflict it found itself fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan (as did this author in a 2004 thesis: *Mission Unaccomplished: The U.S. Army and the Failure to Prepare for the Right Conflict*). Additional backing came from a Fort Leavenworth study that indicated that 85%-88% of common core task are common to all operations, either combat or irregular war. This means that almost all tasks performed during combat training are applicable to irregular warfare. It was seen as proof to the idea that the ability to carry out irregular warfare operations (both lethal and non-lethal) was a byproduct of preparing for global conventional war.

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22 Bill Flavin, interview by Robert Calhelha, 07 FEB 02.
Theme B: The Army needs to focus on all types of wars

The ying to Dr. Nagl’s yang are those who argue that the United States should have an Army that is capable of fighting and winning all types of wars, to include both conventional and irregular conflict. These writers are worried that the Army has become solely an irregular fighting force at the detriment of its conventional warfighting capabilities. Many in the Army complain that certain perishable skills such as artillery, armor and air defense operations have atrophied, replaced by an Army that parks its big guns and tanks and builds schools instead. They worry that should the United States find itself facing an enemy across a conventional battlefield, it will be too late to realize this mistake.

COL Gian Gentile is one of the leading advocates of this point of view. He is the current Director of the Military History Program at the United States Military Academy at West Point and visiting fellow at The Council of Foreign Relations. His essay, “Let’s Build an Army to Win All Wars” is a direct rebuttal to Dr. Nagl’s “Let’s Win the Wars We’re In”. In his article, COL Gentile states that “Nationbuilding, rather than fighting, have become the core function of the U.S. Army” and that this is “not simply dangerous; it potentially neglects key aspects of U.S. national security.” He argues that the Army needs to focus on winning the current wars; however, it should not forget that its core mission is fighting. He states that the Army must prepare for conventional war and that it can do this with the knowledge that “it can more easily shift to nation building and counterinsurgency as it has done in Iraq.” He cites historical examples, such as the British in the interwar period and the 2006 Israeli-Lebanon war, where nations who focused disproportionately on COIN met with strategic failure.

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24 Nagl, Let’s Win the Wars We’re In, 26.
“We can expect to face competitors who will employ all forms of war and tactics, perhaps simultaneously” claims Frank Hoffman in his article “Hybrid Warfare and Challenges.” He argues that the Army must not develop a myopic preoccupation with either pure conventional war or straight COIN. Citing the 2005 National Defense Strategy, he states that in the future, “the most capable opponents may seek to combine truly disruptive capacity with traditional [conventional], irregular, or catastrophic [WMD] forms of warfare.” This is a chilling revelation and leads to the conclusion that the U.S. Army must be capable of operating across all forms of warfare. The Army must be able to move between these types of conflict much quicker than it has had to do recently. In analyzing hybrid wars Dr. Hoffman cited the historical precedents the Army must look at. Disputing those, like Dr. Nagl who claim that COIN and the softer approach is here to stay, Hoffman concludes that both these conflicts “required more military resources and greater combat capabilities than classical counterinsurgencies and Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency would suggest.” Hoffman states that while hybrid wars offer greater complexity there are ways to address these issues. He believes the first step is to ensure a strong professional military foundation that relies on cognitive skills needed to adapt to new threats, both in the individual and systems level. The United States Army must look past the “outmoded and dated bifurcation of war forms” and truly prepare itself to address the realities of hybrid war, meaning building an Army to win all wars. He used ancient Greece as a backdrop to his article and one can see the relevancy. Sparta was able to win the Peloponnesian War because of its ability to “take the enemy’s plans into consideration and adapt into a more multidimensional or joint force.” The Spartans set the example and now the Army must follow it.

A second article by COL Gentile, “Freeing the Army for the Counterinsurgency Straightjacket” brings up an interesting point. One aspect of COIN doctrine is the need to be
adaptable and flexible, for as Marine GEN (ret) Krulak stated in his ‘3-Block War’ analogy, in COIN you must be prepared to switch from irregular to conventional operations rapidly. However, it seems that only applies to the tactical level. COL Gentile points out that when one reads the writings of Dr. Nagl and others, it seems that they have figured out what the future of warfare will look like. In COL Gentile’s words, “one might even conclude that COIN experts have no intention or possibility of really learning or adapting because they seem to presume to know what the wars of the future will be.” The second point COL Gentile makes in this article is that there seems to be little intellectual debate within the Army as to not only the wisdom of COIN doctrine, but also how much of a COIN based focus the Army should have. He acknowledges that “Seriously debating and challenging current operational doctrine” while fighting two wars is hard, but not only is it not impossible but it is also necessary for the health of the American Army and the national security of the United States.26

IV. Debate Settled

The two opposing views are thus laid out. One espousing that the Army must focus solely on the war it is fighting, even if that means unused capabilities atrophy. On the other side are those arguing that the United States must have an Army that balances current and future needs, even if some are not used.

The view that the United States must have an Army that is adaptable and flexible enough to fight all types of wars is the stronger position of the two. The Army’s lack of ability to fight the current COIN-centric conflicts resulted from a position that is argued for by Dr. Nagl and others. The Army has always been myopically focused on one type of war and trained almost solely for that. For this reason, the American Army has a sad history of expending its blood and

26 Ibid., 26.
treasure trying to learn how to fight and win the wars it is engaged in. The book “America’s First Battles: 1776-1965” clearly lays out that the first battles in the nine wars studied resulted in great losses because of a lack of preparedness. “Won or lost, the first battle [in the American way of war] almost guarantees that inexperience will be paid for in blood.”27 By focusing only on a single conflict and convincing itself that it knows the future of war, the Army would be playing to its historic strength of only focusing on one type of warfare. This resulted, with one exception (Desert Storm), of some very disappointing first few battles and a very steep learning curve. Or as Secretary of Defense gates put it, while discussing the Iraq War in 2008, “In Iraq, we’ve seen how an army that was basically a smaller version of the Cold War force can over time become an effective instrument of counterinsurgency. But that came at a frightful human, financial, and political cost.”28

Gates also stated, “I must tell you, when it comes to predicting the nature and location of our next military engagements, since Vietnam, our record has been perfect. We have never once gotten it right, from the Mayaguez to Grenada, Panama, Somalia, the Balkans, Haiti, Kuwait, Iraq, and more – we had no idea a year before any of these missions that we would be so engaged.”29 The recent unrest in the Middle East and Northern Africa can be added to that, as the entire world was caught off guard by the ferocity and speed of the revolts. To have a viable Army, the United States cannot focus on any single type of combat. It must restore the strategic flexibly it lost over the last decade, as stated by outgoing Army Chief-of-Staff General George

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Casey.\textsuperscript{30} This loss of flexibility was brought on by an Army culture that makes it impossible to focus on more than one threat at a time. This culture has presented itself in every conflict the Army has fought. In 2007, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, invoking Vietnam, said:

“In the years following the Vietnam War, the Army relegated unconventional war to the margins of training, doctrine, and budget priorities… This approach may have seemed validated by the ultimate victory in the Cold War and the triumph of Desert Storm. However, it left the service unprepared to deal with the operations that followed: Somalia, Haiti, the Balkans, and more recently Afghanistan and Iraq – the consequences and costs of which we are still struggling today… We can expect that asymmetric warfare will remain the mainstay of the contemporary battlefield for some time.”\textsuperscript{31}

It is easy to see how in a decade, a future Secretary of Defense will start out a speech with “In the years following the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army relegated conventional war to the margins of training, doctrine, and budget priorities…”

V. The Myopic Army

After nearly a decade of fighting a counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Yemen, Somalia, and numerous other locations around the world, the United States Army is in danger of losing its ability to fight and win a conventional war. Displaying a remarkable break from its conventionally focused past, the Army has dedicated itself to figuring out how to win the war it is currently fighting. It has realized that revamping how it thinks, trains and fights, in the midst of fighting a war, is a significant undertaking. Its ability to stave off defeat in Iraq is a testament to its success in reorienting itself away from a conventional mindset and dusting off the ideas of Templar, Gulula and other counterinsurgency thinkers.


However, the Army runs the risk of making a similar mistake it made after Vietnam. Namely, the Army ignored the lessons of Vietnam and chose to pretend that it did not represent a form of war it needed to worry about, that is was merely an aberration to the traditional way of conventional war. Today the Army risks focusing so intently on the lessons Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Overseas Contingency Operations, that is has forgotten it must fight across the whole spectrum of war.32

As the Army begins to study the requirements for it to meet the needs of the United States, its historical myopic nature needs to be taken into account. An analysis of Army training, starting with the Vietnam War and moving to present day, allows us a lens for how the Army deals with different types of conflict. This will indicate a systemic problem in how the Army prepares itself for war.

The United States military entered Vietnam with a “military structure, equipment, school systems, and doctrine” that was focused solely on the defense of Western Europe.33 This attrition resulted from the inertia created by operations in World War II and a failure to adapt in Korea. At the time of Vietnam, the Army’s senior leadership were the tactical commanders during the previous two wars. There they learned the value of conventional operations focused around an armor-infantry team. After World War II, this focus on conventional war was only strengthened by the emerging new threat, the Soviet Union. It was impossible to argue focusing on another type of war when myriad divisions of the Red Army were massed on the border between Eastern and Western Europe. As, such the Army continued the development of conventional tactics and weapons created for the express purpose of defending Western Europe

from a Soviet invasion. This conventional thinking dictated how the Vietnam War would be fought. Specifically this meant the application of massive amounts of firepower and large conventionally oriented infantry/armor battalion sized operations. This, it turned out, was not a recipe for success in an irregular war.

As a result of its ignominious retreat from South-East Asia, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the Soviet military build-up, a decreased budget and the realization the Army was in no shape to protect American European allies, “the post-Vietnam army intentionally turned away from the painful memories of its Vietnam experience to focus on the kind of wars it knew how to fight and win: conventional warfare in Europe against the conventional armies of the Soviet Union.”34,35 It did so with gusto. Under the leadership of GEN William E. DePuy the Army transformed itself into a conventionally oriented force trained and equipped to defend Western Europe. These systems were specifically designed to fight against a Soviet invasion of Western Europe and had little applicability in a Vietnam-type conflict. The change in doctrine and training was just as substantial as the changes in hardware. As explained by Dr. Nagl:

“The 1976 edition of FM 100-5 Operations, prepared under DePuy’s direction, did not mention counter-insurgency. Training was also shifted from unconventional warfare back to the arm’s conventional-warfare comfort zone; the Command and General Staff College cut the forty-hour Low Intensity Conflict curriculum to just nine hours in 1979.”36

This trend in military training continued into the 1990’s. With the creation of the Combined Training Centers (CTC), the Army took a huge step in training itself only for conventional war. The National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin was established in 1979, solely to train armored forces. The first light unit did not train there until 1985; the first urban

34 Ibid., 206.
training did not take place until 1993. In 1991, Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM put the Army’s new doctrine to the test and in almost every way validated it. Saddam Hussein placed his country directly in the type of war the Army always wanted. The outcome was obvious, after a five-week aerial campaign and a 100-hour ground war the American-led coalition succeeded in ousting Saddam from Kuwait. This represented the only time the Army was ever right about the future of war, but the Army simply got lucky.

The following chart outlines Army operations from 1991-1999.

As is seen, since the end of the Persian Gulf War the number of non-conventional combat operations skyrocketed, resulting in a ratio of at least twenty-five irregular war operations to every combat mission. It is also important to note that every operation, even Desert Storm, involved some elements of irregular war. Even today, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) identifies no less than eighty-three ongoing conflicts in their Armed Conflict

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Database, the vast majority of which are not conventional, but irregular wars.\(^{39}\) Yet the Army continued to be myopically focused on conventional war, best summed up in a statement by GEN John Shalikashvili, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1993 to 1997, when he declared, ‘Real men don’t do MOOTW [Military Operations Other Than War].’\(^{40}\) The Army simply refused to believe that operations other than war were important in its strategic concept.

The Army’s weakness is its myopic approach to war. The Army touts itself as a “full-spectrum” force but has rarely been able to put its money where its mouth is. The Battles of Long Island, Bull Run, Kasserine Pass, Task Force Smith, Chosin Reservoir, Ia Drang, and the first few years in Iraq and Afghanistan show the pattern of the Army’s unpreparedness. Each one of these battles took place at the beginning of a conflict and each provided the Army years to train beforehand. In each case, the Army was either soundly defeated or brought to near defeat. Both outcomes resulted in huge losses in lives, equipment, and money.

This distain for irregular war would come back to haunt the Army in the coming years. Throughout the 1990’s, two things became certain; the Army was training extensively for events that had a very little probability of happening and the Army was being used more than it ever had before in irregular war. Though this was the strategic reality, the Army continued to focus almost exclusively on conventional war. For a long time, there was severe resistance to doing anything that might entail something different, read irregular war. The unofficial position of the Army held, “that intervention in operations other than war results in a \textit{de facto} reduction in readiness for actual high-intensity combat.”\(^{41}\) Even defeats failed to kick the Army out of conventional mode, as the Army continued to look at the application of firepower and heavy

\(^{39}\) The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), \textit{Armed Conflict Database}, [database on-line], available through Georgetown University Library, internet, accessed, 16 MAR 11.


\(^{41}\) Binnendijk, 7.
maneuver forces as the way of conducting war. The American retreat from Somalia in 1993 and the embarrassment of being ill prepared to deploy Soldiers and equipment to Kosovo (Task Force Hawk) put into harsh relief that the Army was unable to attain the United States’ strategic goals when the means towards those goals were anything but conventional war. The Army went so far as to try to close the U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI) on the eve of the invasion of Iraq. The primary missions of PKSOI was to study and compile the lessons learned from irregular warfare, to advise senior Army commanders on the conduct of such operations as well as to train and to “educate the next generation of Army leaders on the importance of stability operations and how to conduct them.”\textsuperscript{42} While eventually forced to keep it open by Congress, the Army drained its budget so in FY05 PKSOI enjoyed a budget of $1.4 million, which is about the cost of a single Stryker Infantry Carrier Vehicle.\textsuperscript{43,44} It believed that training for high-intensity conventional warfare would prepare it for any eventually.\textsuperscript{45} Many, including Bruce Nardulli disagreed with that conclusion and claimed that the Army,

> “has discovered that while it is already a full-spectrum force in terms of having the capabilities needed for a diverse array of OOTW [Operations Other Than War] located somewhere in the warfighting structure, these capabilities do not readily emerge from that structure, and their use in OOTW can impose a heavy burden on the warfighting force. Conversely, the Army has discovered that forces well designed and prepared for wartime operations can find themselves deficient in OOTW”\textsuperscript{46}

These words proved prescient.

Soon after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, the Army found itself embroiled in an irregular war in Afghanistan. At first, the synergy between conventional forces, Special Forces, and local

\textsuperscript{44} Department of the Army, “Army to retain and expand Peacekeeping Institute,” [article on-line], available from \url{http://www4.army.mil/ocpa/read.php?story_id_key=5355}, internet, accessed 25 MAR 04 (Link no longer active).
\textsuperscript{46} Binnendijk, 104.
militias seemed to guarantee victory and was a major boost to those who claimed that conventional training allowed all types of operations. The 2003 invasion of Iraq proved otherwise.

In Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), few Iraqis deployed and fought U.S. forces in conventional combat. This surprised the Army, as V Corps Commanding General LTG William Wallace commented, “The enemy we’re fighting is different from the one we’d war gamed against.”47 Due to the power imbalance between the U.S. and any potential enemy, the Army no longer fights a traditional enemy soldier, but “erratic primitives of shifting allegiance, habituated to violence, with no stake in civil order.”48 Though the Army was surprised at this, no one who had been on an Army deployment during the 1990’s should have been. The Army CTCs set up a level of comfort in terms of what types of units they would fight against, i.e. the Soviet Army. “Outside the box” thinking generally escaped military commanders who war-gamed and maneuvered against the same type of template enemy for decades. As a result, they found it hard to conceive of a different type of enemy and situation altogether. In every U.S. military intervention over the past twenty years, “U.S. forces have been faced with the same sorts of criminal behavior, including widespread looting” seen in Iraq, however the ‘only combat matters’ mindset still pervaded.49 Simply stated, the Army felt that, “If you can't go in big, with all guns blazing, don't go in at all.”50 However, in 2005-2006 the Army looked defeat in the face.

50 Traub, internet.
Having failed to put down a growing insurgency with Vietnam-style “clear and search” operations, the Army began a monumental change in how it trained, equipped itself and fought. Under such thinkers as GEN David Petraeus, BG H.R. McMaster, Dr. John Nagl and others in the COIN field, the Army began to revamp its training, equipment, and doctrine. The Army and Marine Corps published the joint FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency Manual. Overlooking the fact that most of the tactics and strategies it lays out were proven decades ago during America’s robust small-wars involvement, it was a seminal work and proved the Army was serious about relearning how to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is well documented how the Army’s change in doctrine from kinetic-based operations to more population-based tactics changed defeat in Iraq to a tentative success. With ‘The Surge’ successful in Iraq, President Obama ordered a similar surge in Afghanistan and put the same man in charge, GEN Petraeus. The outcome there is still uncertain, but it looks as if things are slowly improving. However, while that Army was able to adapt itself to its new conditions it went too far and found itself in the exact same position it was in before; namely a disproportionate focus on a narrow aspect of war.

**VI. Certain Victory**

To understand the change in the Army it is necessary to do a comparison. This will compare the 1991 Army to the late 2010 Army. The reason for these two ranges is that the 1991 Army represented the height of the Army’s proficiency in conventional combined arms operations. This will be compared to the conventional tactical proficiency of the 2010 Army still fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan and attempt to prove the Army has lost a significant portion of its conventional capabilities. The analysis will also attempt to prove the notion that both armies displayed a blatant myopic focus to one aspect of war.
The American Army coming out of Vietnam did everything it could to forget about irregular war and turned its focus solely to conventional war. GEN DuPuy, commander of the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) personally wrote most of the first version of FM 100-5 Operations, which “sought to define the fundamental of land warfare.” It gave little or no attention to irregular warfare, but focused on “the liberal use of suppressive firepower to paralyze an enemy.” The 1982 version of FM 100-5 specifically stated as its core concept that the Army needed to fight outnumbered. Stated more bluntly, “The manual acknowledged the armored battle as the heart of warfare, with the tank as the single most important weapon in the Army's arsenal.”

Enamored by the success of the Navy’s Top Gun School, MG Paul Gorman (Deputy Chief of Staff of TRADOC) sought an Army version. This training center would be dedicated to training Army heavy and mechanized infantry units in high intensity combat. This idea culminated in the creation of the Army’s National Training Center (NTC) in Ft. Irwin, CA. NTC was designed to train soldiers “for war in a setting as close as possible to the reality of combat. Training exercises included highly realistic force-on-force engagements against an opposing force schooled in Warsaw pact tactics and doctrine.” The emphasis was solely on “Full combined arms operations”. The opposing forces (OPFOR) were incredibly proficient in Soviet tactics; with no focus on operations others than conventional force-on-force combat. The controversies surrounding NTC at this time did not include incorporating operations other than

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52 Ibid., 13.
54 Scales, 22.
56 Ibid., 19.
57 Ibid., 19.
war, but what type of conventional war training would focus on. The four major debates centered on, Brigade Level, Heavy/Light, Light/Heavy/Contingency, and motorized rotations. Moreover, contingency operations were merely “military operations conducted on short notice with forces rapidly deployed into an area of operations.” An example would be Airborne Rangers parachuting in and capturing and airfield for follow-on armored forces.

The first battalion rotated through NTC in 1981. The first light unit did not train there until 1985; the first urban training did not take place until 1993. One artillery officer commented that at NTC during the 1980’s, "It was pure force on force… It was purely our Army and our Air Force is going to destroy your army and your air force and your equipment. And when we do that, we win and we go home." A typical rotation during the 1980’s followed a predictable timeline:

- **D + 0** – Unit arrives at NTC
- **D + 4** – Two battalion (BN) tasks forces deploy to the field and conduct force-on-force engagements with OPFOR
  - **D + 8** – One BN was released from force-on-force engagements to participate in live-fire exercises
  - **D + 12-20** – BN returns to force-on-force engagements

Concurrently, the other BN spent nine consecutive days participating in force-on-force engagements, followed by five days of live-fire exercises. Each fourteen-day training period was broken down into six to ten mission periods focusing on conventional force-on-force engagements and BN live fire exercises. The OPFOR were equipped with ‘procured’ Soviet equipment and American equipment modified to look like their Soviet counterpart. To erase any

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59 Department of the Army, *Fort Irwin History* [article on-line], available from http://www.irwin.army.mil/Post/Info/Pages/FortIrwinHistory.aspx, internet, accessed 02 APR 11.
uncertainty of who the enemy really was, the OPFOR’s insignia was a large red star.62 A list of the equipment the NTC OPFOR possessed in the early 1990’s is below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQUIPMENT</th>
<th>QTY</th>
<th>SIMULATOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IR SAM (SA-9)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>HMMWV (NO RADAR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF SAM (SA-6)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>HMMWV (RADAR EMISSION)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZSU-23.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>HMMWV (RADAR EMISSION)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>HMMWV (RADAR EMISSION)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2S6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>VISMOD M551 (NO RADAR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA-14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>STINGER (HMMWV CARRIED)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-60</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>VISMOD M551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-72</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>VISMOD M551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMP-2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2-OSV; 1-VISMOD M551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMP-1P</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>VISMOD M551 (NO TROOP CAPACITY)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMP-1</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>VISMOD M551 (NO TROOP CAPACITY)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMP-1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>VISMOD M113 (NO OFFENSE CAPABLE)</td>
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<td>44</td>
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<td>BRDM-2 W/AT-5</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRDM RKH</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>VISMOD HMMWV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRDM TDA-M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>VISMOD HMMWV</td>
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<tr>
<td>MT-12, 100MM GUN</td>
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<td>VISMOD HMMWV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2S1, 122MM SP HOW</td>
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<td>VISMOD M551</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMR</td>
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<td>CEV</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTK-2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>ACE</td>
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<td>OG-181 JAMMER</td>
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<td>VISMOD HMMWV W/PPS-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI-24 HIND</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>VISMOD UH-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These rotations were not just comprised of armor units. The intent was to train the Army in combined arms warfare, bringing together the strengths of each branch. This was a basic tenant of Air-Land Battle Doctrine, the driving force behind the Army’s training scheme. AirLand Battle relied on four tenets, all of which were trained for extensively in the 1980’s and

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63 Ibid., 166.
1990’s, initiative, depth, agility and synchronization. The doctrine’s sole purpose was to give the Army the ability to slow, stop and eventually defeat a multi-echelon Soviet attack into Western Europe. To accomplish this, the Army introduced the idea of the operational level of war, “as an intermediate level between tactics and strategy.” To implement AirLand Battle, the doctrine stipulated two methods of attack. First, distant fires (long range artillery, MLRS, etc) and electronic warfare would slow, weaken and confuse the Soviets. Fires became not only a way to attrit the enemy, but also shape the battlefield; therefore, it was given heavy emphasis. The second part of the equation was the lighting-fast attacks by armored and mechanized units to exploit the weakness the first part of the attack created. Synchronization was the key to this complex choreographed maneuver. Due to this, rotations rarely just included armored and mechanized units, but “…infantry, armor, artillery, aviation, chemical, logistics, air defense, engineering, military police, electronic warfare, and intelligence units” which all came together to form a task force. This is combined arms warfare, defined as “the application of the elements of combat power in unified action to defeat enemy ground forces; seize, occupy and defend land areas; to achieve physical, temporal, and psychological advantages over the enemy; and to preserve freedom of action.” This synergy takes place when armor units know how to coordinate logistics, when infantry units can call in fire from artillery and air defense artillery and engineer units clear the battlespace. In all the references of the time, from Fort Leavenworth Studies to NTC documents, there was no mention of irregular warfare, counterinsurgency, MOOTW or stability and support operations (SASO). One is reminded of the previously quoted

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64 Scales, 25.
65 Ibid., 14.
66 Ibid., 26.
67 Scales, 26.
68 Chapman, The National Training Center Matures, 133.
sound bite, “Real men don’t do MOOTW.” Logistic units also played a very important part of NTC rotations. All logistics were provided in austere environments by Army logisticians. Contractor support did not factor into the rotation scheme. The methods logistic units developed during NTC rotations such as the use of Logistic Packages (LOGPAC) to supply BN-sized units was so successful, the Army as a whole eventually adopted them.70

This training created an Army that dominated the conventional security environment. This absolute overmatch was demonstrated in the extremely conventional Persian Gulf War. After weeks of airstrikes, a ground war was launched against Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi Army. Only 100 hours of combat ensued, causing a relatively minor 848 casualties out of a force of 500,000 deployed Soldiers.71 The bulk of this force was the United States Army’s heavy armored units; the 1st Armored Division, the 2nd Armored Division (1st Brigade), the 3rd Armored Division, the 1st Infantry Division, the 3rd Infantry Division (3rd Brigade), the 1st Cavalry Division, the 24th Infantry Division, the 2nd Cavalry Regiment and the 3rd Cavalry Regiment.72,73 These units, all comprised of tank-mechanized infantry task forces, had trained over the years at NTC, learning the nuances of Soviet tactics and how to defeat them in the deserts of Fort Irwin. Coincidently, the Iraqi Army was not only armed with Soviet equipment, but also trained and fought roughly the same. The Persian Gulf War was won at NTC as much as it was in the Iraqi desert. An officer who participated in the Battle of 73 Easting replied to the question, “How do you explain your great success in your first battle?” by saying:

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70 Chapman, The National Training Center Matures, 212.
“Sir, this was not our first battle. This was out fifteenth battle. We fought three wars at the National Training Center… Yes Sir, we had been ‘shot at’ before. Many times. This war was just like our training.”

Because all the CTCs are under the same command, conventional war training also dominated the other two Army CTCs, the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) and the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC). In 1998, the JRTC Commander’s guidance stated that units that rotated through must leave proficient in the following areas; combat leader training, small unit drills, battlefield techniques, crew served weapons qualification and staff training. In quick read through the required and related publications for an incoming unit include, ARTEP 7-10-MTP Missions Training Plan for the Infantry Company, FM 7-8 Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad and FM 7-10 Infantry Rifle Company: Airborne, Air Assault, Ranger. No mention is made of SASO or MOOTW FMs or references. The NTC training also enabled logistic units to fully support the Army on their own with little contractor help. In fact, only 998 US and 2,900 foreign contractors deployed to combat areas in support of Desert Storm, since Army logistics was still the main mission of its organic units.

VII. To the Victor Goes the Spoils; to the Loser Goes the Next War

In military history, the victorious side in combat rarely adapts itself to account for changes the last war brought on. This was evidenced by the Army’s response to the victory in Desert Storm. The Army felt the victory validated its training, and as a result, it continued to focus on conventional war. The republished FM 100-5 Operations retained its focus on decisive

74 Chapman, The National Training Center Matures, 176.
75 Formerly the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC).
77 Ibid., 16.
land combat, as “Desert Storm confirmed that the nature of war [had] not changed.” But it had. The years after Desert Storm saw the Army engaged in places most people had never heard of before. Those the locations varied, these smaller operations all had one thing in common, they were not conventional war but stability and support, peacekeeping/peace enforcement and humanitarian assistance operations.

Throughout the first half of the 1990’s, two things became certain. The Army was training extensively for events that had a very little probability of happening and the Army was being used more than it ever had before. Based on Cold War doctrine, the mentality of the Army was that it would train for high-intensity warfare and then “train down” to prepare for missions other than warfighting. By training down the Army meant that it considered high-intensity warfare training the corner stone to all other training. Thus, it merely had to tone down the same type of training to meet SASO training requirements. During a tour of American peacekeeping forces in Kosovo, GEN Henry Shelton, Army Chief of Staff from 1997-2001, commented that “Our forces are fully prepared for peacekeeping operations,” and that if the Army trained and was ready to fight high intensity conflicts, there would be little difficulty in transitioning from combat operations to peacekeeping operations. However, conditions and events on the ground showed the flawed nature of that statement. GEN Shelton, as well as the rest of the military command was trying to place a combat template over a very different mission, that of SASO. The mentality of the military was that its role was the application of violence. For a long time, there was severe resistance to doing anything that might entail something different, such as SASO or peacekeeping. The unofficial position of the Army held, “that intervention in

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79 Scales, 385-388.
operations other than war results in a *de facto* reduction in readiness for actual high-intensity combat, which the Army considered its primary mission.”82

**VIII. The reality of OIF and OEF**

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan proved the Army was unable to win the nation’s wars. The training it had consumed itself with had little applicability on these battlefields. In fact, conventional methods often proved counterproductive when used in irregular warfare, specifically counterinsurgency. This, as mentioned, the Army worked hard to fix, revamping its training, methods and equipment.

As the wars progress, fueled by tentative success in Iraq and fighting off pending defeat in Afghanistan, the Army became myopically focused on fighting and winning irregular warfare. The Army devoted more time to language and cultural training, crowd control, non-lethal operations, population engagement, foreign national assistance and disaster relief. With only a finite amount of time to train, the Army neglected important aspects of high-intensity conflict such as, prolonged combat, large unit logistics, combined arms operations (i.e. Infantry, Armor, artillery synergy), and individual Soldier skills and technical abilities (i.e. the proficiency of artillery and air defense artillery (ADA) units at their jobs). These capabilities were the primary focus of CTC rotations during the 1980’s and 1990’s. Caught between a rock (fighting and winning the current wars) and a hard place (being able to face full-spectrum threats), the Army slowly lost its ability to fight and win a conventional war and within a small community, alarm bells began to ring. As Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen stated:

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82 Binnendijk, 7.
“We’ve converted from a conventional force to focus on counterinsurgency. That said, I think we’ve got to broaden our training and readiness with respect to full spectrum conflicts, but in balance the counterinsurgency requirement, which is very much in evidence in Iraq and Afghanistan, and preserve the capability to prosecute a conventional war.”

During this period, the Army made COIN its primary focus, dictating training and equipping of Soldiers. In 2009, rotations continued at NTC. However, where-as in the 1990’s the training focused on force-on-force engagements and battalion level tank exercises, in 2009 there were none. In fact, due to a critical shortage of deployable units and with the Army nearing its breaking point, the previously non-deployable 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (11 ACR) received orders to deploy to Iraq. The 11th ACR is the sole OPFOR unit at NTC. Not only did this deployment require the OPFOR to retrain in COIN but also significantly complicated rotations into NTC for a lack of a dedicated OPFOR.

Time was also a critical factor in the training the Army provided deploying Soldiers. Often with less than twelve months between unit deployment cuts needed to be made. LTG William Caldwell, commander of the Combined Arms Center for the Army stated that "The reality is we really only have enough time to prepare soldiers for the next mission they're going to face. Then as time permits, we'll operate across the whole continuum of intensity of ops." A good visual example of this abandonment of conventional operations and training is shown in a random sampling of the covers of Armor and Fires, the official branch journals of the armor and field artillery branches respectively.

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83 D. H. Gurney, Executive Summary, Joint Forces Quarterly, Issue 52 (1st Quarter), 13.
84 Sutherland.
86 Sutherland.
There is no hint of tanks or artillery on the covers and it is hard to find article about conventional tactics within the pages. In fact, flipping through the pages of the May-June 2010 *Fires*, there is not one picture of an artillery piece, but many of population engagement and ‘infantry’ patrols. These journals, instead of stressing the fact that the branches had lost their core competencies, applauded the fact they were able to transition to an irregular role. In addition, where there had been less than 4,000 contractors deployed to Iraq in 1991, in 2010 there were 207,600 contractors supporting operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, or 54% of the Department of Defense workforce in those two countries. At the time, there were only 175,000 deployed uniformed personnel deployed. Logistic units had moved away from vehicle maintenance, food and laundry services, big-unit logistics and LOGPAC operations and turned these duties over to contractors.

As this shift began to take hold, a debate began to rage within the Army as to the imbalance of training. The heavy emphasis on COIN lead many to believe the Army was losing

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87 Moshe Schwartz (Congressional Research Service), *Department of Defense Contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan: Background and Analysis*, 7-5700 (R47064), 02 JUL 2010.
its ability to project conventional power. MAJ Neal Smith, the operations office of the Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Center says "The risk we run as a force is that we have a generation of officers [who] have spent five to six years [at war] that never have done their conventional competency, and if we were expected on short notice to fulfill that conventional competency, we would struggle very hard to do it as well as we did in 2003 during the attack to Baghdad." Empirical evidence tends to support these claims. A 2007 white paper published by three Infantry Brigade Commander cited some chilling statics from the CTCs and TRADOC. These are specifically directed at the artillery branch and its inability to support the other branches with its wartime mission of fire support.

CTC metrics include:

- FIRES Annex in Operations Orders (OPORD) only present 20% of the time
- No FIRES net is maintained and if there is one, it is not monitored.
- 90% of fire supporters are serving outside of their Military Occupational Specialty (MOS)
- 90%+ of available fire supporting are uncertified
- No knowledge on how to create a FIRES plan prevented effective Close Air Support (CAS) application
- Multiple firing incidents during every rotation
- Crew drills are slow and any type of friction halts operations
- Key leader shortages, 2 of 9 13B40’s and LTs per battalion is typical
- Units no longer understand how to calibrate artillery pieces or correctly use Meteorological (MET) data to plan fires

CTC Trend Analysis includes:

- It will take the average artillery unit 6-12 months to retrain in proper artillery procedures, assuming the unit is protected for this purpose and not tasked with COIN missions/deployments
- Current deployment schedule has prohibited most units from completing Exercise Evaluations (EXEVAL), with most units most recent EXEVAL completed in the 1990s.
- Units are seriously challenged conducting Combined Arms Live Fire Exercises in support of maneuver due to poor level of Forward Observer (FO) training, fire direction and gunnery skills

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88 13B40 Senior Leader Course is designator for the course designed to train field artillery cannon platoon sergeants to perform in the rank of Sergeant First Class
- No longer any competent higher Field Artillery headquarters to coordinate resources, enforce standards and maintain institutional memory and individual skills.

When asked if conventional training was taking place at the three CTCs, an officer formerly assigned to JMRC stated, “not a whole lot of conventional training going on (metal-on-metal)”. Another officer currently assigned to NTC reported that units heading to Iraq or Afghanistan received an all COIN rotation. More interesting is the current rotation timeline for units going through NTC when contrasted with the 1991 timeline. One of the biggest changes is that there is no longer any training above the company-level, the rotation only includes company- and platoon-level Situational Training Exercises (STX) lanes. The typical rotation as of 2010-2011 has 6 days of Company and Platoon STX lanes followed by 8 days of force-on-force. COIN is the focus throughout. There is one or two days of live fire, that is considered STX. The 11th ACR has one Squadron (SQDN) replicate host nation forces and another SQDN play the role of insurgents. There are no more tank-on-tank battles. A recent rotation included 11th ACR squads incorporated into the live fire as host nation forces fighting with American forces. Also in a previous rotation, there was a replicated third nation border incursion, resulting in the 11th ACR (host nation forces) fighting the 11th ACR (3rd nation bored incursion) with the rotational unit supporting as required. A look through the pictures displayed on the JRTC webpage show insurgents, Soldiers taking part in “cultural meals” and other COIN based simulations. There were no pictures displayed of any conventional training.

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90 Compiled from e-mail discussions with currently serving officers at JMRC and NTC.

IX. The Truth on the Ground

The Army is in the process of answering the question “Over the past decade, has the Army lost too much of combined arms warfighting capability to be considered a well rounded ground force?” The answer it has come up with is yes, it has. In addition, the Army has decided to start preparing of hybrid-war. These sentiments come out in two areas; *Army Concept 2016-2028* and the Full Spectrum of Operations (FSO) Doctrine.

*Army Concept 2016-2028* was published in August of 2010. It outlines the “employment of Army force in the 2016-2028 timeframe with emphasis on the operational and tactical levels of war.”\(^{92}\) This is a departure from the previously mentioned FM 3-0 *Operations* that focused almost exclusively on the operational level of war. As planned, *Army Concept 2016-2028* will guide “revisions in Army doctrine, organizations, training, material, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities.”\(^{93}\)

*Army Concept 2016-2028* (AC 16) was the brainchild of GEN Martin Dempsey, the Army Chief of Staff. His starting point was to answer the question, “What do you do with this magnificent Army of ours when Iraq and Afghanistan are in the rear view?”\(^{94}\) This brought about much debate and angst over where TRADOC would lead the force over the coming decades. The consensus was that as the COIN-centric fights in Iraq and Afghanistan wound down, the Army would need to get back to basics and start expanding its training. Specially, this brought about a reevaluation of the term full spectrum operations. The Army determined that the term full spectrum operations had been so overused that it no longer had any meaning. It was used simply to describe the range of threats the Army faces and missions its tasked to undertake. It was determined that while the term would remain, it would no longer stand-alone. It would

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\(^{92}\) TRADOC Pam 525-3-1, *Army Concept 2016-2028*, iii.

\(^{93}\) *Ibid.*, iii.

\(^{94}\) Brannen.
now be a sub-set of two new ideas, combined arms maneuver and wide-area security. This leads to the idea that, “The U.S. Army provides combatant commanders training and ready forces whose core competencies are combined arms maneuver and wide-area security exercised through full-spectrum operations.”

AC 16 defines combined arms maneuver as for the purpose of gaining “physical, temporal, and psychological advantages over enemy organizations” using the inherit firepower the Army possesses in conjunction is “a wide array of related civil and military capabilities to defeat enemies and seize, retain, and exploit the initiative.” Wide Area Security Operations are focused on consolidated “gains, stabilize environments and ensure freedom of movement and action.” These operations “protect forces, populations, infrastructures, and activities, predominantly in protracted counterinsurgency, relief, and reconstructions efforts, and sustained engagement focused on the development of partner capabilities.” Wide area security and combined arms maneuver are depicted below:

![Wide Area Security & Combined Arms Maneuver](image)

This is essentially a definition of an Army that can do all things, much as COL Gentile has argued it should be able to. AC 16 goes on to identify “Army Operations” as full-spectrum operations.
operations, homeland defense and civil support, sustained engagement, entry operations, preventing proliferation and counter WMD, cyberspace operations, space operations and foreign humanitarian assistance.  

These revisions have created the condition for a new outlook on training. Appropriately entitled Full Spectrum Operations (FSO), it seeks to implement the doctrinal changes outlined in AC 16. The Army is moving towards a balanced force. In early 2011, 3rd Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division conducted the first FSO rotation at JRTC (Rotation 11-01). As quoted in the rotation after action report (AAR), “What is different about FSO is it allows the BCT to synchronize capabilities, weapons systems, and effects in time in order to accomplish the mission across the spectrum of operations.” While there will certainly be changes to the FSO training concept as lessons learned are collection, distributed and adjusted for, a typical FSO rotation is both longer and more intense than the traditional Mission Readiness Exercise (MRE) rotations units conducted up until this time. A traditional MRE was a fifteen-day operation, with 8 days of STX lanes, 14 days of live fire (LF), 4 days of Command Post Exercises (CPX) and 6 days of Force-on-Force (FOF). Over the past ten years, a JRTC rotation focused almost solely on COIN, now with the introduction of FSO the emphasis will be on developing the versatility to move seamlessly between offense, defense, and stability operations. An FSO rotation is eighteen days of operations broken down into 5 days of STX lanes (-3 from MRE), 15 days of LF (+1 from MRE), 3 days of CPX (-1 from MRE) and 8 days of FOF (+2 from MRE).

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99 Ibid., 3.
101 3/82nd ABN/JRTC AAR, Rotation 11-01
102 Ibid.
103 A CPX is a medium-cost, medium-overhead training exercise that may be conducted in garrison or in the field. It is the most common exercise used for training the battalion staff, subordinate, and supporting leaders in order to successfully plan, coordinate, synchronize, and exercise C2 over operations during mission execution. –
There were some important lessons learned and changes incorporated in this FSO rotation. First off, there was a realization that many units had forgotten their primary mission. For instance, after a decade of COIN operations and being deployed as infantry, the reconnaissance SQDN had a hard time backing away from that. The brigade commander commented, “I don’t want recon to fight, I want them to see.” The AAR stated that the recon SQDN’s “muscle memory is to own the land versus seeing the land.” In addition, the enemy projected was a hybrid force as described above. They were given air and unmanned aerial systems, forcing American forces to operate while under surveillance themselves. This entailed incorporating air defense artillery (ADA) into operations, a task that most officers have never had to do over the past 10-15 years. The operations tempo (OPTEMPO) was significantly higher during the FSO rotation. GEN Casey believed that “decisions come faster in FSO,” and the training reflects that; “What takes months for conditions to set in COIN, takes hours in FSO.” The OPFOR represented all stages of hybrid war. Phase I (D-day to D+1) the OPFOR acted as insurgent and special purpose forces. They were armed similar to Hezbollah, with RPG-29’s, SA-18 surface to air missiles, mortars, sniper teams, and UAVs. Phase II (D+1 to D+4) OPFOR operated in a more traditional role fielding two mechanized infantry companies, equipped with BMPs, RPG-29s, attack aviation, and GPS Jammers. Phase III (D+5 to D+7) had the OPFOR operating as remnants from Phase I and Phase II in platoon-sized elements. This is a direct turn away from the conventional-only OPFOR faced at the CTCs during the 1980’s and 1990’s, as well as a change from the insurgent-only focus over the past ten years. Lastly, the operating environment was austere, moving away from the comfort of huge Forward Operating Bases (FOB) with a bevy of contractors. Logistic units had to relearn how to secure themselves and

supply a brigade-sized unit with only organic equipment. As reported by one of the units that participated, one of the biggest blocks was the “mental transition from COIN.” These changes have not come soon enough.104

**X. Conclusion**

Over the past decade, the Army lost too much of combined arms warfighting capability to be considered a well rounded ground force. In retraining itself to win in Iraq and Afghanistan it was forced to move away from its comfort zone of conventional war. From the end of the Vietnam War until 2006, the Army revolved around AirLand Battle or its close derivates. It trained on the concept that the application of firepower was the key to victory. Conventional war was the priority and all other forms of warfare were of secondary importance. During this time, rotations at the CTCs were solely conventional rotations, and the Army became incredibly proficient at this type of warfare, employing the full power of its combined arms doctrine. The world saw its efficacy during the Persian Gulf War. For the first time, the myopically focused Army was trained for the right war, at the right time. It is not realize it would be the only time. Repeating its past, it soon found itself engaged in operations it had not trained for. During the 1990’s the Army was deployed on myriad operations that were anything but conventional war. Though faced with a reality that its training was not matching its operations, the Army nonetheless continued to pound a round peg into a square hole. Come 2005-2006 when conventional-focused operations were not enough to win in Iraq did the Army adapt. Throwing itself into the task of re-learning how to fight a counterinsurgency, within months Iraq came away from the edge of defeat. These same tactics are now being used in Afghanistan to good effect. However, as Iraq has wound down, and the United States prepares to withdraw from

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Afghanistan, the Army faces the uncertain future. The research presented above indeed shows that that the Army has sacrificed too much of its conventional combined arms capability to be full-spectrum dominant. It no longer possesses the combined arms and logistic capabilities it once did to meet a near-peer competitor on the field of battle. The story of Task Force Smith in 1950 should sober anyone who believes that the American Army can afford to let its conventional capabilities atrophy.

Task Force Smith II?

“It was not their fault that no one had told them that the real function of an army is to fight and that a soldier’s destiny – which few escape – is to suffer, and if need be, to die.”

_T.R. Fehrenbach_105

In 1950, only five days after the North Korea invasion of South Korea, the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment (Task Force Smith) deployed from Japan with the mission to stop the North Korean Army. Task Force Smith became a case study in unpreparedness. The Soldiers were fighting a war they did not understand. They did not know how to place or coordinate their artillery support. The artillery was unable to communicate with the infantry. They had grown soft, undisciplined and weak during occupation duty in Japan.106 There was a pervasive lack of understanding of conventional warfare that resulted in the unit shipping over without a lot of its organic weaponry.107 Ordered into combat in only five days, the Army fought with what it had on hand, in terms of training and equipment. By 1945, the United States Army, the Army that fought and won World War II had attained a proficiency in combined arms conventional war without peer. However, in only five years, it was outclassed in that exact category by a country that fielded only 150 World War II-era medium tanks. Tanks that Task Force Smith could not

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105 _Ibid_.
106 _Ibid_.
107 _Ibid_.
stop with antiquated weaponry and non-existent training.\footnote{Ibid., 4 & 69.} Today’s Army faces comparable dangers as Task Force Smith. In a similar operation, an observer would expect today’s Army to fall short in the parallel ways to Task Force Smith. Due to a heavy emphasis on COIN training, units are not proficient in how to supply and maintain themselves in austere environments without heavy contractor support. Today’s ‘war hardened’ units are used to being based out of luxurious FOBs; replete with contractors to pump gas, repair vehicles, and provide security, air conditioning, showers, dining facilities, barbers, PX’s selling big screen TVs, local vendors offering bootleg DVDs and leather jackets, every type of fast food imaginable, tailors, Ford Explorers to get around the base, telephone banks and internet cafes. Infantry, armor, and artillery units have not synchronized themselves in fluid combined arms warfare training. Artillery units are used to doing 1-2 round fire missions, instead of massed fire missions. Many units, such as logistic, NBC, air defense artillery, and field artillery units have been employed as infantry for almost a decade, with little training in their core competences. Coordination between units and different branches has not been trained on for many years. Centralized operations (necessary in conventional warfare) have given way to a decentralized method of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, where units as small as platoon act almost autonomously. These are all the problems that beleaguered Task Force Smith, a myopically focused force that was ill-trained, equipment or prepared to fight the type of war it found itself fighting in. Today, with only five days to respond, the Army would be unable to stop a similar attack that befell Task Force Smith. Time is not a luxury the Army can take for granted.

In 2010, the Army was not prepared to fight and win a hybrid war without massive costs in personnel and equipment as it relearned the lessons of conventional war. While this thesis proves that due to a monumental change in the way the Army trains and operates it has lost its
conventional edge, the Army has also seen that as well. Reflecting on its unbalanced nature, skewed towards COIN the Army has begun the process of retraining itself for the future. Having determined that the nature of war will be a hybrid threat, the Army is beginning a training doctrine designed to encompass this new reality. Called Full Spectrum Operations and based on the tenants of *Army Concept 2016-2028*, it seeks to train units to be versatile and agile. In essence, it seeks brigades that are jacks-of-all-trades…

**XI. …But Masters of None: Policy Recommendations**

While it is commendable the Army has turned away from those who argue that the Army needs to focus on only one type of warfare, it is not necessarily enough. Primarily, the Army needs to have the majority of its Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) trained under FSO, called Flex BCTs. This will allow the main force to be able to responsive enough to respond to any conflict. However, at the same time the Army needs BCTs that are not trained in FSO. These BCTs should be training on two primary missions; conventional war and irregular war.

Within the current force structure of 45 BCTs, the Army needs at least six BCTs that train for nothing but conventional operations. These BCTs would be two Heavy BCTs (HBCT), two Stryker BCTs (SBCT) and two FIRES BCTs (FBCTS). These units, encompassing main battle tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, Strykers, and tube and missile artillery units would train for nothing but conventional operations. These units would not be deployed in support of anything else. This set-up would maintain the institution knowledge of force-on-force engagements. Should the United States find itself in a high intensity conflict, these units would be the building block for the Army’s response. They would be easily deployable and allow the flex BCTs to hone their conventional war fighting skills that would then deploy as follow on
forces. This would avoid the problems with rapid response deployment, such as those that befell Task Force Smith. The United States will not always enjoy the luxury of a six-month build- and train-up prior to a conflict. The Army may be called upon to fight as it stands now, and these BCTs would allow it to do just that.

At the same time the Army needs to stand up at least four permanent Irregular War BCTs (IWBCT) that train for nothing but irregular warfare and all its subcomponents. The IWBCTs would be based around five battalions, each with specific skills and missions. The battalions and the BCT itself would be modular, allowing it to be broken apart and tailored to specific contingencies. The battalions would consist of a civil affairs unit, civilian/military Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT), both vertical and horizontal construction engineer companies and MP units. Security would be provided with small internal elements (MPs) as well as partnered BCTs. The main effort force would be the civil affairs units, with the others in support roles. Furthermore, the PRTs would be composed not just of Soldiers, but also civilian member of the State Department, DEA, FBI, Department of Agriculture, Department of the Treasury and/or any other organization that would be pertinent in nation building. This would increase civil-military interaction as well as cross-department communication. In would be impossible for four IWBCTs to be able to fulfill the entirety of the non-conventional missions the United States is involved with now. However, by having these assets already in place and trained, like the six conventional BCTs, it not only allows the Army to have an immediate deployable capability, but if the need arises the BCTs would provide the institutional knowledge core needed to move other BCTs in that direction. Their secondary mission would be to do just that, teach other BCTs as well as allies to operate in the irregular warfare environment. A key
benefit of this would be to free up Special Forces for their primary advise and assist mission, while converting the flex BCTs to a more irregular war mindset.

This thesis was correct in hypothesizing the Army has lost too much of its combined arms capability to be considered a well-rounded ground force. However, research shows that the Army also reached this conclusion. The Army has identified its weakness in conventional capabilities and is taking steps to remedy it. It is beginning a training regime unlike any other in its history, attempting to leverage all types of warfare to create a force that is versatile and able to respond to any threat across the whole spectrum of operations. However, this is not in the Army’s myopic nature and only time will tell if it is able to accomplish this all-important mission.
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