

# Sustainment and the Army Operating Concept

This Q&A with the commander of the Army Training and Doctrine Command highlights how sustainment training and operations will support the future fight.

■ By Julianne E. Cochran

**P**ublished in October of last year, the U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World 2020–2040 describes how future Army forces will prevent conflict, shape security environments, and win wars. It envisions a future military that is more adaptive, more collaborative, and more innovative.

Gen. David G. Perkins, commander of the Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), briefed the Army Operating Concept to lieutenants, captains, and majors attending the Army Logistics University on Feb. 2, 2015.

During his visit, *Army Sustainment* took some time to ask Gen. Perkins about how the Army Operating Concept (also known as TRADOC Pamphlet 525–3–1) applies to sustainers. Here are his responses.

**Army Sustainment:** Can you describe how the Army Operating Concept addresses developing adaptive leaders for a complex world and how this will affect training sustainers?

**Perkins:** In the world I grew up in, we tended to optimize the Army for known problems—whether it was the Soviet Union, the central plains of Europe, or whatever. So we were looking for people who could really execute known problems in a known environment.

[In the Army Operating Concept] we say the future is unknown, unknowable, and constantly changing. So I have to have leaders who are very good at understanding a very

complex environment and are very adaptive to the problem at hand, but they're also very innovative.

When I take a look at sustainers, part of the issue of being adaptive and innovative is saying, "There may be different ways to provide sustainment, and can I collaborate with the maneuver folks and say, 'If you ma-

is, "What is the enemy going to do?" They are going to come at us in an asymmetrical manner. So we've got to build a force that doesn't have asymmetrical weaknesses.

So our force has to be very adaptive. In other words, we have to say, "Look, this is a very quick rate of change with the enemy. They change very quickly,

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neuver like this, you are going to create a demand that I cannot sustain, but if you maneuver differently, I can meet your demand." So it's much more collaborative. So when you say people are more adaptive, that also means they're more collaborative, so we can't have stovepipes.

**Army Sustainment:** How have the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan shaped Army leader development and education?

**Perkins:** As we wrote the Army Operating Concept, we wanted to be informed by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but not captive to it. We said that may give us a glimpse into the future. One is that we learned that you can't predict where you're going to fight. Nobody in their wildest dreams on 9/10 would have predicted 9/11 or would have thought a few months later we'd be in Afghanistan.

What you need to focus on is describing the enemy, not predicting them. So, one of the things we said

so we have to train leaders to change quickly."

We have to have organizations that are built to learn and change in combat, and then we have to have an acquisition process that can deliver changing materiel as the tactics are changing.

So, what Iraq and Afghanistan did was enlighten us to the fact that the rate of change is going to increase dramatically, and therefore we have to build an Army to change, innovate, and adapt very quickly.

The other thing is they [our enemies] generally are not going to go toe to toe with whatever we are very good at. So we have to present multiple dilemmas to the enemy. We have to have multiple capabilities that they try to avoid. So we can't build sort of one-trick ponies.

**Army Sustainment:** When you say the rate of change has changed, what does that mean? Does that

mean the amount of effort put into projects is going to be smaller?

**Perkins:** In a known world, when you looked at innovation, you would talk about level of differentiation. So you'd spend effort on getting a huge difference between the capability you buy and what the enemy has. What I'm saying is that, in the future, you don't know what the enemy is going to have. It's not that it takes more effort. It is focused differently.

using now [are] only going to last for a little while and then eventually the enemy is going to figure them out. So, are they already thinking about the second and third [moves]?

**Army Sustainment:** How does the Army Operating Concept shape the future of sustainment, given the complex environment?

**Perkins:** Our Army is becoming a more CONUS-based Army. I just

the rate of human interaction is going to increase, so actually we may have more periods that we have to deploy than less.

Since the [Berlin] Wall came down, we've been all over the world. So, it's really a more volatile world, a more chaotic world, which means the requirements for our sustainers are more difficult because you don't have that huge base of support you used to have in Europe. You've got to do it very quickly, very rapidly, and you've got to leverage a very immature infrastructure. The challenge is only getting much greater for our sustainers, not less.

**Army Sustainment:** How would you say logistics enables the strategic Army?

**Perkins:** One of the key capabilities that specifically the United States has is the ability to deploy and conduct expeditionary maneuver and sustain ourselves almost indefinitely in any part of the world. And that is primarily because of the multifunctional logisticians and the sustainment capability of the Army. They don't only sustain the Army; they sustain the joint force as well as our coalition partners.

In many ways, they are what makes the Army strategic because we can project national power anywhere in the world. And there's really not any other country out there that can do it to the level that we can deploy anywhere in the world and stay as long as we want to based on our national command authority.

I come from a maneuver background, infantry/armor, and so what we generally bring is tactical and operational capability to the Army. What our logisticians bring is our ability to strategically deploy and sustain ourselves. So they are really what make our United States Army strategic.



*Gen. David G. Perkins, commander of the Army Training and Doctrine Command, explains the U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World, to majors attending Intermediate Level Education at the Army Logistics University at Fort Lee, Virginia, Feb. 2, 2015. (Photo by Adam Gramarossa)*

While you're in war, situations are going to change rapidly and you are going to have to innovate to keep up with them. So that means, for instance, when you buy a vehicle, you can update it very quickly. What are the things that change most quickly? The sensors, the electronics, etcetera. So you'd better not hardwire them in; you'd better make them modular so you can update that.

Your leaders, they have to understand that whatever tactics they're

spent last week in Europe. When I was there as a lieutenant, we had hundreds of thousands of Soldiers, and now we're down below 50,000. And so since we're becoming a CONUS-based Army, we're going to have to deploy and execute expeditionary maneuver from the United States, which means we have to have a great sustainment capability to do that.

In some ways, we are relying more upon the sustainers because we are not forward-positioned yet. We see

For more on the U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World, visit the related links to this article online at <http://1.usa.gov/1zy1oI5>.