



Soldiers with the 3rd Infantry Division load the .50-caliber machine gun of an Abrams tank during a combined arms live-fire exercise at the Joint Multinational Training Center in Grafenwoehr, Germany, on Nov. 19, 2015. The exercise was the culminating event for Combined Resolve V. (Photo by Markus Rauchenberger)

Shaping the Force: Do Regionally Aligned Forces Fit the Bill?

The Army should make the overarching principles of the regionally aligned forces concept more enduring in order to deter conflicts and stabilize regions.

■ By Lt. Col. (Ret.) Jack T. Judy

Modernization is a crucial element in any successful venture. When it comes to fighting wars, it is essential. The challenge is to determine how to best shape the force with the resources available.

In his 2010 National Security Strategy, President Barack Obama pronounced that the United States “will continue to underwrite global security,” and “deter aggression and prevent the proliferation of the world’s most dangerous weapons.”

The military services have conquered this task through the past decade, but shrinking resources add a layer of complexity. Budgetary constraints and force reductions require the services to derive new strategies.

A Plan for the Future

After more than a decade of war and changes in the world’s threats, the Army developed a new strategy to meet the future. According to the 2013 Army Strategic Planning Guidance, the Army is moving from

“a force focused on counterinsurgency operations to one that is operationally adaptable and able to meet the full range of combatant commander requirements.”

The Army’s solution for the future is to regionally align its forces to combatant commanders. The intent is to leverage regional expertise and experience to make up for reduced funding.

Under the regionally aligned forces (RAF) construct, units will operate within the same region for an ex-

tensive duration, which will provide them with opportunities to partner with other nations, understand the language and culture, and forge relationships to help strengthen and stabilize the region.

Essentially the alignments will allow combatant commanders to conduct stability operations as a proactive measure to preclude unconventional warfare. Regional alignment is a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to deterrence. It enables the Army to engage with the smallest force necessary to preclude hostilities.

How RAF Was Born

The Army Force Management Model is a cyclic approach to modernization and relevancy for the future. Change begins with determining strategic and operational requirements published in documents such as the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy; those requirements are eventually distilled into The Army Plan.

The president publishes the National Security Strategy to focus the efforts of all federal entities and provide a common direction. Each agency analyzes the strategy to determine how it will support national policy and subsequently provides its own strategic guidance and direction. The Army publishes The Army Plan to translate the requirements from the higher level strategy into implementation guidance and priorities.

From there, the Army balances existing capabilities with strategic requirements to determine what the force can accomplish and what shortfalls it expects. The challenge is how to meet the shortfalls. Force managers look at several options, including changing organizations' structures, fielding new equipment, and training the force.

Constraints like strength ceilings and budgetary restrictions all affect the outcome. While the Army is currently shrinking in manpower because of the drawdown and the declining military budget, increasing troop strengths in the geographic

combatant command regions is not a viable option, so the optimal solution is to regionally align forces on a rotational basis and keep them garrisoned stateside.

The Need for Stability

The Army has learned a valuable lesson in the past 13 years of conflict: it must establish a stable environment after hostilities cease. The strategy of RAF will provide opportunities to establish a long-term presence and forge relationships regionally throughout the world; however, the Army must emphasize the importance of stability skills.

Achieving stability is the most important and most difficult task. Units should train both to a baseline level of competence for decisive action and to accomplish tasks required by the combatant commander. The dilemma commanders will face is what to train with the limited resources available.

Determining the optimum mix of warfighting competencies to field a well-rounded force that can achieve the desired outcome is the focus. The Army should maintain a strong emphasis on training and hold it as a top priority.

By establishing a credible presence in a region, the Army can help prevent destabilizing activities and reduce the potential for conflict. Working with other nations, building partnerships, and understanding an area's culture will help the Army remain stable and help the partner nation establish a positive influence within the region.

A Solution at All Levels

The RAF construct provides a resource-conscious solution to preventing conflict by demonstrating U.S. resolve along the strategic, operational, and tactical continuums.

At the strategic level, it provides combatant commanders with a tailorable force to focus on a specific region. Geographic combatant command requirements fluctuate depending on the area of responsibility, current level of turmoil in the region,

and competing demands worldwide.

Some commands have a relatively long-standing permanent structure, such as the U.S. European Command and the U.S. Pacific Command. Other commands, such as the U.S. Africa Command, do not have any large long-standing or permanent force.

Base realignment and closures throughout the world have placed more troops on U.S. soil from overseas theaters. The return of stateside basing, the drawdown, and a declining defense budget limit the options available to fill resource demands.

RAF is a solution that provides the now stateside units with unique training opportunities and the ability to specialize in a region, demonstrate resolve in that region, and provide commanders with extra forces at limited cost.

At the operational level, the construct enhances integration and interoperability between services, other agencies, and host nations. Some military schools provide opportunities for interagency and interservice personnel to collaborate, but operational training collaboration is rare across the force.

Alignment will increase the opportunities to integrate with other agencies and services. This will provide opportunities to learn and understand how each agency operates, increasing competencies throughout the organizations.

Working with host nations will allow commanders to establish lasting partnerships, share best practices, and split the burden for security with the host nation. The National Guard has demonstrated success in this area for the past several decades through the State Partnership Program. The program has a low cost and a small footprint and has built relationships in more than 71 nations.

Tactically, regional alignment increases the force's understanding of an area's culture, improves relationships, and provides a better situational understanding. Combined efforts can help avert conflict, and if the strategy does not prevent conflict,

it at least provides knowledge and a network of relationships to build on if tensions escalate.

Commanders must educate their Soldiers on the culture, region, and language of the specific area to avoid potential faux pas and help foster relationships on a personal level.

The Army has provided combatant commanders with additional resources to support the unique requirements of the region, combine regional opportunities to establish long-lasting relationships, and train units, all in a cost-effective way that supports the national strategy and prevents conflict.

Unconventional Warfare

The RAF concept will provide opportunities to establish a long-term presence and forge relationships regionally throughout the world. However, the Army must emphasize the importance of unconventional warfare skills.

Through the years, the Army has used a wide variety of military strategies, from nuclear arsenals in the early 1970s to large armor formations aimed at preventing a Soviet invasion of Europe. But unconventional warfare has never been a pre-dominant focus.

Prior to 9/11, the Army's primary training focus was on offensive and defensive operations. Training centers did not have the facilities or cadre to support unconventional warfare training for the conventional force, and commanders, most likely, did not want to practice it.

But throughout history, an undercurrent that has always been below the surface of war is unconventional warfare. From the jungles of Vietnam to the deserts of Iraq, terrain often dictated the operational approach, yet the one constant was unconventional warfare.

War is an event in which two opponents are pitted against each other and victory is gauged in captured terrain or the attrition of the enemy force. It is an endeavor in which generals out-maneuver other gener-

als with formations of soldiers and equipment. The last force on the field of battle is the victor.

Unfortunately history does not support this definition. The past century has seen several major conflicts that remain in the forefront history, including World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Operations Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom. However, 71 insurgencies have begun and ended since World War II. Insurgencies are more common than high-intensity conflicts.

Many historical examples demonstrate that insurgencies are a primary and often effective strategy employed by many adversaries. Success does not always hinge on winning large battles but on the will of the people.

During the Revolutionary War, victory was partially attributed to Paul Revere's ride and the Boston Tea Party. Minutemen uncivilly sniped British formations from behind rocks, walls, and trees instead of using the traditional Napoleonic line formations.

The Civil War saw the emergence of skirmish lines. The terrain in Vietnam made it easy for small elements to melt into the countryside. Outmatched by the superior technology, firepower, and resources of the United States, North Vietnam's General Vo Nguyen Giap's independent fighting method (using a small number of troops to defeat a larger force) proved to be quite effective during the Tet Offensive.

Unconventional warfare is the primary strategy in the Middle East. The ground war in Operation Iraqi Freedom lasted approximately three months, from March to May of 2003, yet 13 years later, the United States is still embroiled in conflicts in the region and facing an emerging threat, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

Of the 4,491 U.S. combat fatalities in Operation Iraqi Freedom, only 176, or about 4 percent, resulted from the ground war; the remaining fatalities occurred while fighting

the insurgency.

Equipment Modernization

The Army Equipment Modernization Strategy recognizes that there is "no clear and unequivocal primary threat" to the United States. Training scenarios at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, are currently focused on insurgent tactics, but will it endure?

Recognizing the need to address small-scale, unconventional warfare has endured, but modernization strategies still focus on conventional equipment. Years ago, part of the Army's training focus was known as operations other than war, which essentially focused on low-intensity conflicts, to include insurgency.

In 1970, then Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird's Strategy for Peace was one of deterrence. Part of that strategy was the effort to make security the responsibility of the host country. The United States would primarily assist but also deploy to provide a presence and a quick response if needed.

U.S. strategy has recognized unconventional threats for decades, yet most of the budgetary expenditures support conventional systems. Granted, the strength of the U.S. military is unmatched worldwide and absolutely needs modernization to remain that way, so those expenditures must be funded.

In the 1980s, most modernization funding went to major combat systems like the Abrams tank, Bradley fighting vehicle, and multiple launch rocket system. Although some elements within the current modernization plan support the force in a wide variety of environments, most of the effort appears to remain focused on those major combat systems.

Some of the plan does address unconventional warfare. Weapons such as the XM25 individual semi-automatic airburst system allow Soldiers to engage targets hiding behind walls and in buildings and are ideal for unconventional warfare. However, the Army needs to have



Soldiers assigned to the East African Response Force, Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa (CJTF–HOA), fire M4 carbines during a live-fire exercise in Djibouti on March 2. The CJTF–HOA provides security force assistance, force protection, and military support to regional counter-violent extremist organization operations. (Photo by Tech. Sgt. Barry Loo)

substantial long-term investments in resources for combating unconventional tactics.

The Next Step

The RAF concept is a step in the right direction, but the strategy needs to extend well into the future and include resourcing and training for the entire force. The Army must make an enduring, concerted effort to develop and field capabilities to combat the threats identified in the national strategy.

One may dismiss the concept as a special operations focus. But special operations forces are finite, and history shows that the requirement can quickly outgrow the capability.

The strategy must have a champion. In the modernization plan there are many different champions, each with its own capability-based portfolio. Each portfolio has its select systems, which staff develop and modernize according to the strategic guidance. The portfolios support the Army's warfighting functions to pro-

vide focus.

Each of the areas work to field the best equipment, systems, and technology to support the field. While unconventional warfare is a consideration in all areas, it is not the primary focus of any.

When resources get tight and cuts need to be made, the secondary and tertiary systems tend to be the bill payers. So the solutions that are in the forefront today quickly fall by the wayside and are forgotten.

Unconventional warfare has been around for many years, and considering it does not take a lot of funding or high-tech weaponry to conduct, it will be around for years to come. Therefore, the Army should address and prepare for the conflict. It should establish a warfighting function, or at least a portfolio manager, that can focus on the future of this type of warfare.

The RAF strategy is a solid solution to approach the future operational environment. It is a cost-effective

solution and provides combatant commanders a resource to help stabilize a region.

But the Army needs to take the overarching principles of the concept and make them more permanent throughout the force. One common tactic the United States always tends to encounter is unconventional warfare, and it is costly in terms of lives. Therefore, the Army should have a champion to focus on continuous unconventional warfare modernization for the future.

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