

Strategy Research Project

Are Brigade Combat Teams Relevant for the Future Operating Environment?

by

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Abstract

The United States Army (US) enjoyed an unprecedented advantage over its adversaries in large-scale, force-on-force engagements in open terrain since the end of the Cold War largely because of the Brigade Combat Team (BCT). However, the US Army is at a critical juncture. After more than 15 years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is undergoing similar challenges as those that occurred after World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Desert Storm. There is increased downward pressure on the budget, which inevitably leads to reduction in manpower and structure. In addition, Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran spent the past 15 years analyzing the Army's tactics, training methods, organization, structure, and command and control methods. Moreover, cyber hacking and the cheap proliferation of technology has made advanced military weapons, computers, and commercial electronics widely available in the world. Finally, it is widely believed that future wars will be fought in dense, urban areas. This paper analyzes the vitality of BCTs given the changing future operating environment, fiscal austerity, emerging technology, and increasing capability of adversaries.

Are Brigade Combat Teams Relevant for the Future Operating Environment?

The United States Army maintained an unprecedented advantage over its adversaries in large-scale, force-on-force engagements in open terrain since the end of the Cold War largely because of the Brigade Combat Team (BCT).

Field Manual 3-90.6, *Brigade Combat*, defines Heavy, Infantry, and Stryker BCTs as the “Army’s combat power building blocks for maneuver, and the smallest combined arms units that operate independently. These BCTs conduct offensive, defensive, stability and civil support operations and their core mission is to close with the enemy, to destroy or capture enemy forces, and to repel enemy attacks by fire, close combat, and counterattack.”¹

However, the reemergence of counter-insurgency and guerilla warfare that occurred in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan led defense experts to conclude the Army was ill prepared for the changing character of warfare. According to John A. Nagl, “this lack of preparedness was exacerbated by a failure to adapt fully and rapidly to the demands of counterinsurgency warfare.”² This occurred because the Army approached these wars as if they were large-scale conventional combat rather and was slow to recognize that it morphed into counterinsurgency. Why did this occur? Secretary Robert W. Gates suggested that after the Vietnam War, the Army abandoned unconventional war lessons learned and that this approach was validated by its success in Desert Storm. Doing so, left the service unprepared to deal with operations in Somalia, the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq—the consequences and costs of which the United States is still struggling with today.³

It appears that the Army’s initial shortcomings in Iraq and Afghanistan was its propensity to utilize BCTs as a more flexible organization. The service was oriented on fighting and winning large-scale conventional wars and not guerilla warfare and operations in urban areas. Instead of adapting its structure and organization to better

conduct a counter insurgency (COIN), the Army used its BCTs to conduct missions that it was doctrinally not designed to do. This caused uncertainty, delayed the adaptation to the current environment, and put leaders in situations that they were unfamiliar with—eerily similar to the mistakes made in Vietnam. In 2007, the Army recognized that it was not optimal to use BCTS to conduct all missions necessary in a COIN environment. The service underwent a multitude of changes to its force structure and re-organized to fight and win in the COIN environment and counter terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan.

According to the Brookings Institute, the first 4 years of the Iraq war demonstrated America's armed forces inefficiency and incompetence in counterinsurgency, but they became a learning organization that adjusted to near-defeat in Iraq with a turnaround in counterinsurgency operations.⁴

However, the United States Army is at a critical juncture. After more than 15 years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is undergoing similar challenges to those that occurred after World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Operation Desert Storm. There is increased downward pressure on the budget, which inevitably leads to reduction in manpower and structure. Today's strategic environment is more complex than after each of those conflicts because of increased demands on a force that is reducing, which is similar to predecessors. The Atlantic Council posits, "that threats have burgeoned in the last five years as great power politics have reasserted themselves, global terrorism and extremism is on the rise, and turmoil in the Middle East has replaced the hopes of the Arab Spring."⁵ The world has become a much more dangerous place.

Despite the benefits that BCTs have provided the Army for nearly three decades, they are not best suited for the complex, uncertain, and ambiguous environment of the future. Several indicators exist that support this assertion; demand for BCTs, declining budgetary environment, risk of near-peer competitors, and the future operating environment. Additionally, there is a growing tension as the Army faces inevitable tradeoffs between the requirements of current readiness and investment for future requirements exasperated by the United States' inability to pay for both in a declining budgetary environment. There is an ongoing debate within the Army if BCTs are best suited for the future operating environment. Recently, Army Chief of Staff (CSA), General Mark A. Milley stated, "the structure and organization of our Army, both operational and institutional, may change drastically, and we must be open-minded to that change. We may not have divisions, corps, tanks or Bradley Fighting Vehicles. We do not know yet. But, we are on a serious and deliberate campaign of learning to figure it out."⁶ The CSA's comments exemplify the assertion that the Army's current force structure may not be best suited for the future complex environment.

BCT Demand

According to the Army's daily operations brief for Army senior leadership, the Army has approximately 182,000 soldiers currently supporting Combatant Commands in more than 140 locations worldwide.⁷ Since 2012, the service has averaged roughly 180,000 soldiers deployed and 10 BCTs. According to the Army's daily operational update to the CSA, the number of BCTs that have been deployed is higher than 10, but seven are forward deployed to Pacific Command.⁸ Additionally, most of the BCTs operating outside of Pacific Command's area of responsibility are performing training, advising and assist missions, or theater security cooperation requirements. However,

the majority of individual units did not deploy to fulfill these missions. The senior leadership in these organizations deployed and the majority of the soldiers remained at their home station. Although it appears that BCTs are deploying because their “patch” is forward, only a small segment of them deployed. The Army does have two BCTs deployed to Europe in support of NATO deterrence following Russia’s invasion of Crimea. Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that the majority of the demands for these units actually affect a portion of the unit.

Recently, General Milley acknowledged that the Army was considering a proposal to build specialized battalions and brigades that will train and advise foreign forces.⁹

General Milley further stated that the Army sends train and advise teams to Afghanistan and Iraq—and has been doing this for years—those teams are in fact the leadership of brigades and battalions—we just rip them out and send them over. We are destroying the force structure of those units and reducing their readiness level by taking their chain of command out.¹⁰

Why is the Army consciously making these choices? The train-and-advise units require officers and non-commissioned officers because they are advising and training other country’s combat troops, not conducting direct combat. It is inappropriate for young soldiers (E1 – E4) due to their level of experience to train and advise coalition senior leaders. The Army is considering train-and-advise brigades that consist of only officers and non-commissioned officers.¹¹

Declining Budgetary Environment

The United States spent or obligated more than \$4.8 trillion on the wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq through 2016.¹² Congress passed the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011, which cuts \$487 billion from projected defense spending over the next ten years. “The act also paved the way for sequestration, which would slash an

additional \$495 billion from the defense budget, for an overall total of almost \$1 trillion in cuts.”¹³

The Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) of 2015 put a temporary stay on a half-trillion-dollar tranche of defense budget cuts, but the armed services must plan around the reductions for five more years if Congress fails to take action to avert them. The Army's FY16 base funding program is \$126.5 billion including overseas contingency operations. BBA caps provide only \$125.1 billion in FY17.¹⁴

While the budget affords a small amount of predictability, it is insufficient to rebuild decisive action readiness and modernize equipment simultaneously. After every major war or conflict, the US Army historically draws down. If Congress enacts sequestration-level cuts as planned in FY18, the active Army end strength will decrease to 420,000, the Army National Guard to 315,000, and the Army Reserve to 185,000. If these reductions occur, it will create unnecessary risk to the Army and the Nation. The Army G-3, LTG Joseph A. Anderson, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in April 2016, that current demand exceeds the Army's ability to supply units on a rotational basis to meet the Combatant Commanders' requirements.¹⁵

Sequestration will further exacerbate the capacity shortfall.

This declining budget environment forced the service to prioritize current readiness over infrastructure recapitalization and investment as well as modernizing to meet future threats. The deficit in modernization will decrease the United States' technological advantage over its potential adversaries and risk its military strategic advantage in the future.

Risk

Russia, China, North Korea and Iran spent the past 15 years analyzing the Army's tactics, training methods, organization, structure, and command and control

methods. There is a growing belief that America's adversaries are threatening its high-tech superiority over potential adversaries in a way unimaginable for decades.¹⁶

Potential enemies are developing and fielding technology and implementing tactics, techniques, and procedures that are designed to defeat American forces, particularly its global power projection capabilities. Simultaneously, cyber hacking and the cheap proliferation of technology makes it difficult to protect technical information, a fact that potential adversaries are exploiting. Potential adversaries have diminished the United States military technological superiority and will continue efforts to further degrade them. For example, Russia is developing a significant capability in several specific military areas such as the combination of Unmanned Aerial Systems and Offensive Cyber and advanced Electronic Warfare capabilities exhibit a high degree of technological sophistication that is a direct result of their modernization efforts.

Additionally, the Soviet Union developed a robust anti-access and area denial capability that includes advanced air defenses and mobile gun-missile systems that range out to 400 kilometers that enables Russia to challenge air superiority from the ground.¹⁷ The Army Capabilities and Integration Center (ARCIC) believes Russia has a booming stock of rockets and missiles that have greater range and more lethality than the United States' capabilities. It is evident that Russia studied the Army's capabilities while it was engaged in Afghanistan and modernized to mitigate America's technological advantage.

Lieutenant General McMaster testified to the Senate Armed Service Committee that China is developing offensive cyber and Electronic Warfare capabilities to jam the electro-magnetic spectrum that affect American communications and geospatial

precision, navigation, and timing.¹⁸ This severely mitigates the United States' technological advantage. In 2007, the *Washington Post* reported that:

China used a ground-based missile to destroy one of its satellites orbiting 500 miles in space last week—a high-stakes test demonstrating their ability to target regions of space that contain US spy satellites and space-based missile defense systems. The test of anti-satellite technology appears to be the first of its kind in two decades by any nation and raised concerns about the vulnerability of US satellites and a possible arms race in space.¹⁹

North Korea seeks to enhance its nuclear capabilities and missile technology. They continue to use the threat of force to persuade the U.S. to engage in unilateral talks. Although North Korea does not have the same technological prowess as Russia or China, they are developing capabilities that mitigate the U.S. technology superiority.²⁰

Iran counters and undermines America's' interests in the Middle East and seeks nuclear weapons. Iran is modernizing or attempting to purchases long-range surface to air missiles from Russia, unmanned aerial vehicles, cyber capabilities, ballistic missiles, and anti-tank guided missiles to reduce the US technological advantage.²¹

Future Operating Environment

The future operating environment will likely be different from today's environment. Potential adversaries have studied how and more importantly, where the United States military operated since 2001 to identify potential vulnerabilities. Complexity and uncertainty will be widespread because state, non-state, and hybrid threats will be more capable and have narrowed the' technological advantage in all domains.

The United States has enjoyed a competitive advantage in the air, sea, and land domains since the end of the Cold War. One could argue that land forces have benefitted most from the Department of Defense's dominance in the air domain.

Unfortunately, many adversaries identified their vulnerability in the air domain and focused their efforts to mitigate this weakness. The proliferation of affordable technology aided United States foes. The United States Army Training and Doctrine Command believes that potential enemy forces will employ layered air defense capabilities that consist of man-portable missiles that are resistant to electronic suppression and passive sensor technologies (such as infrared search and track) that deny air-ground integration for cross-domain maneuver.²²

The future operating environment will be more lethal than today. The advance in adversaries' effectiveness in the space domain has enabled them to disrupt the United States intelligence positional, navigational and timing capabilities by attacking spaced-based assets. For example, Air Force General John E. Hyten told the Senate Armed Services Committee, "That China and Russia are developing anti-satellite missiles and laser guns and maneuvering killer space robots that could cripple American strategic communications, navigation and intelligence satellites."²³ Foes are also developing "fires" capability that outnumber and exceed the range of Army indirect systems. According to the *National Interest Magazine*, "Moscow's new missiles leave Washington's in the dust—Russia is developing land based inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBM) that can carry multiple warheads whereas the United States' ICBMs can only carry one warhead."²⁴ These advancements in the space and air domain have the potential to impede America's ability to reinforce its forces or allies.

Today, more than half of the world's population live in cities, and the United Nations estimates this population trend will grow to 66% by 2050.²⁵ Many Defense experts believe that warfare in the future will primarily be in urban areas. The ARCIC

characterizes urban areas from villages with fewer than 3,000 people to megacities with more than 10 million inhabitants. The ARCIC identifies megacities as the extreme in urban environments coupled with dense populations.²⁶ Megacities present unique challenges because of the dense population within a confined area. The United Nations estimates that 29 cities have more than 10 million inhabitants and that is likely to increase to 41 cities by 2030.²⁷ This increases the likelihood that military operations in the future will occur in urban areas. Dense populations and confined infrastructure exponentially increases the operational risk for military operations. Additionally, ARCIC suggests that the explosion of social media and readily available means to transmit information and disinformation globally requires Army forces to operate in contested environments alongside the population.²⁸ Furthermore, the lack of indemnity within the population, improved adversarial capabilities, and proximity to noncombatants instrumentally increase the risk to military operations. These conditions will make it difficult to distinguish non-combatants from combatants, protect defense personnel, and allies. This convergence of risk, dense population and infrastructure, and improved enemy capabilities implies that future warfare will be more lethal than today.

These emerging trends correspond to four significant areas: near-peer adversaries, proliferation of social media and the internet, declining resources, and technological improvements. The first area is the rise of near-peer adversaries. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States military has enjoyed supremacy in the land, air, sea and space domain, and a competitive advantage in space and cyber domains. However, adversaries have improved their ability to operate in the cyber and space

domain enough to rival the United States' advantage and in some cases, exceed the United States capabilities.

Second, the proliferation of social media and the internet provides both state and non-state actors the capacity to collect information that they would not have been able to do previously. This condition of modern warfare allows actors to influence information and in some cases, operations across great distances at reduced costs.

Third, many Western nations are experiencing a decline in resources. However, China and India's economies are growing, which enables them to invest heavily in their defense capabilities.²⁹ More importantly, China and India's economic influence is increasing and could adversely affect security or bilateral agreements.

Lastly, technological improvements have increased global interconnectedness. Today, issues that occurred in remote areas in the past can impact or influence actions across the globe. This phenomenon creates new challenges because it was easier for nations to ignore problems in other parts of the world in the past than it is today. Nations will be forced to confront security concerns outside their borders and this will lead to a security environment replete with complex threats.

The Problem

The trends identified thus far indicate that the United States Army is at a strategic crossroad. Has the Army received the manning, training, and equipment and is it organized correctly for a future environment that is more complex and volatile and where adversaries have improved their capabilities? The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Dunford, framed the above problem in terms of how the future joint force will execute a full range of military operations in support of sustainable strategic outcomes in the context:

- of multiple, simultaneous, interconnected and trans-regional crises;
- increasingly capable enemies that can challenge the Joint Force in a multi-domain and multifunctional fight;
- broad demand with constrained resources;
- popular perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors that will significantly affect strategic outcomes; and diplomatic, informational, economic, and social challenges that will exceed purely U.S. military capabilities?³⁰

Furthermore, the CJCS is developing the Globally Integrated Operations (GIO) concept that describes how the joint force will seize, retain, and exploit the initiative to achieve military objectives in support of sustainable strategic outcomes in the future security environment. The GIO concept encompasses eight principles, global command and control, responsiveness, cross-domain synergy, integrated physical and information power, partner integration, competitive advantages, rapid and continuous adaptation, and resilience.³¹

The Army and the Marine Corps are developing a concept for land forces to operate in within the eight principles the CJCS outlined above. The concept is Multi-Domain Battle (MDB) for the 21st Century. The military problem identified in the MDB concept is that United States ground forces operating as part of the joint force are insufficiently trained, organized, equipped, and postured to deter or defeat near-peer enemies in future war.³²

The cornerstone of the MDB concept is the synergistic integration of information warfare with fires and maneuver. According to the MDB theory, information warfare includes military information, support operations, military deception, operations security, electronic warfare, physical attack, computer network operations, and civil-military operations.³³ The integration of deep fires, cyber and electronic warfare capabilities,

counter-fires, ground based fires, information warfare, air and maritime support create temporal windows of opportunity across all domains for ground forces (multifunctional teams) to close with the enemy, overcome enemy counter-measures, compel outcomes, and consolidate gains. Furthermore, the interim windows of opportunity facilitate ground forces ability to conduct forcible entry, strategic deployment, and sustainment operations.³⁴ The essence of the MDB concept is that momentary windows of opportunity are the creation of a concerted effort to attack multiple domains simultaneously to create a weak spot for land forces to exploit. Likewise, multi-domain battle teams will capitalize on those gains and seek ways to create greater advantages.

Although the MDB concept does not specifically address the feasibility of a BCT performing the multifunctional battle team role, it is apparent that they do not possess the necessary capability to execute this mission. General Milley posited that, "Army units are going to have to be combined arms, multi-domain capable that can fight and destroy land-based enemy units and seize terrain."³⁵ Furthermore, the Army may be required to operate outside the land domain executing things such as sinking ships and dominating the airspace above its formations to prevent hostile air or missile attack. This will require sophisticated capabilities that are not currently in the Army's inventory to destroy ships or maintain air superiority.³⁶

Augmenting BCTs with the prerequisite capability necessary to execute the multifunctional battle team requirements is unreasonable because they are too cumbersome to exploit provisional windows of opportunity and could create security and sustainment challenges, especially if the temporary window closes prematurely. Brigade Combat Teams require an extensive logistics tail for support. More importantly, it is

difficult for a BCT to protect or sustain itself when operating in a non-permissive environment because its size restricts freedom of movement, and makes it easy for adversaries to target sustainment forces. Additionally, it is economically infeasible to augment the BCT with the technology necessary to operate in multiple domains and simultaneously maintain their current capability. It is apparent that small, dispersed elements are more ideal for the MDB concept than BCTs. This continues the trend of leveraging technology to employ smaller, more flexible organizations on the future battlefield.

Rapid advancements in technology threaten the future utility of tanks, armored personnel carriers, and helicopters. Furthermore, the proliferation of unmanned aerial vehicles coupled with the declining resource environment in the United States further questions the future long-term utility of manned tanks and helicopters. According to Joseph Cafariello, drones can be equipped with exceptional capability for \$3 or \$4 million—half as much as an \$8 million Abrams tank and less than the \$15 million Blackhawk helicopter.³⁷ Moreover, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that an Armored BCT and Stryker BCT each cost \$500 million a year to operate and an Infantry BCT costs \$450 million a year to operate in fiscal year 2017. The annual operating cost of a BCTs rises to more than \$2.6 billion per year if support units and overhead activities are included.³⁸ There are 9 Armored and 7 Stryker BCTs, and 14 Infantry BCTs in the Army, which cost approximately \$30 billion annually to operate. Again, the annual operating expenses of active BCTs rises to more than \$61 billion when support units are included. Why does the cost soar when including support units? Because BCTs are the focus of ground combat operations, and most other units are designated

to support them directly or indirectly. Specifically, BCTs are the core unit of the Army where organizations are designed and organized to support them in forward areas.

The swift advancements in technology, the high operating cost of a brigade combat team, the changing operating environment and declining demand for BCTs illustrate that the BCT should not be the unit that other units are designed to support. The Army is currently exploring alternative organizations capable of operating in the future operating environment and is using the MDB concept as a framework for analysis. However, there are several assumptions that form the underpinning of the concept. First and most importantly, armored tanks and personnel carriers are necessary. Second, improved technological advancements will improve armor survivability and protection. Third, it is feasible to augment a BCT with the required capabilities to operate across multiple domains. Lastly, armored vehicles will enable forces that enter temporary openings in the land environment to perform independently and sustain themselves for an undefined period. The assumptions above are invalid based on several factors.

First, small disparate organizations are necessary to implement the MDB concept. Large formations such as a brigade combat team cannot deploy to an area protected by multiple layers of anti-access or anti-denial capabilities rooted in all domains without suffering extensive casualties and battle damage. Additionally, it is difficult for a BCT to take advantage of interim windows created by the integrated attack(s) via multiple domains. Furthermore, it will be difficult or impossible for a larger unit to successfully enter a theater through brief windows of opportunity and survive

when the window closes. These examples illustrate that brigade combat teams are not suited to operate in this environment.

Second, as previously noted, based on current United States superiority in heavy weapon systems, potential adversaries are likely to conduct operations in urban areas. Operations in Iraq proved that armored vehicles experienced significant difficulties operating in cities. Moreover, it was apparent that it was necessary for troops to dismount their armored vehicles to clear buildings, find human targets, gather intelligence, and provide security. Widely held conventional wisdom suggest a tank provide firepower, mobility and protection. However, urban environments greatly diminish armored vehicle's mobility and firepower. The discriminate rules of engagement prohibit tanks from engaging the public because of its difficulty to prevent injury to non-combatants. It is not surprising that forces experienced the difficulties above because armored vehicles are designed to combat other armor vehicles with the exception of armored personnel carriers. If the assessment that the majority of future populations will migrate to urban areas prove true, the more likely that tanks will become obsolete in this environment. Moreover, ARCIC suggests "that maneuver units must protect itself as it maneuvers through populated areas and that those units may encounter difficulty in protecting itself when dismounted beyond their vehicles—armor units require additional light infantry."³⁹

Finally, the Army Functional Concept for movement and maneuver notes that BCTs must operate semi-independently in the future. Operating independently means, they possess sufficient mobility, firepower, protection, intelligence, mission command, and sustainment capabilities to execute cross-domain maneuver at extended distances

for up to seven days.⁴⁰ MDB requires units to operate independently, dispersed and self-sustaining for a vast amount of time, which creates competing future force requirements. In addition, the Functional Concept posits that future combat vehicles must reduce logistics demand, and increase reliability, availability and maintainability. It is unlikely that technology will evolve rapidly enough to develop a future tank with the above capabilities.

As the United States decreases the size of deployed forces in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States Army is experiencing similar challenges as those that occurred after World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Desert Storm. After each of these wars, there was increased pressure to reduce the defense budget, which usually led to force structure reductions. The United States has a propensity to downsize the military after long periods of war. Although the American public's patience with increased war costs over several years of conflict diminishes severely and usually signifies impending change, the United States military tends to prepare for next war by improving how it fights the last war.

The brigade combat team served the Army well since the early 2000s, but the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001 illustrate the BCT's shortcomings in conducting counter-insurgency and guerilla warfare. These deficiencies were due to the Army's failure to adopt its structure, doctrine, and tactics, and its reliance on BCTs to execute missions and tasks that it was not doctrinally designed or trained to perform. This led to unnecessary loss of life and resources.

The demand for brigade combat teams has declined significantly since 2003 and it is apparent that future warfare will be different than today. William Matthews posits

that future wars will encompass guerilla warfare in dense, urban environments.⁴¹ United States adversaries have drastically improved their defensive capabilities in the air and space domains enough to prevent BCTs from entering potential area of operations. The budgetary environment in the United States is declining and will continue for the foreseeable future. Global budget environments have declined in the past few, but China and India's economy will continue upward. *The Thunderbird International Business Review* believes China and India's economies will continue to improve.⁴² However, most of Europe and Middle Eastern economies are declining. Declining economies coupled with the proliferation of economical technology ensure future warfare will be different than today.

The indicators above suggest that change is imminent. Brigade combat teams served the Army well for the past sixteen years, but it must change to keep pace with the increased capability of potential adversaries as well as prepare for the changing character of warfare. It appears that BCTs are unsuitable for the future operating environment because potential adversaries have changed the way the conduct warfare to mitigate the BCT's advantage. The Army and Marine Corps are developing a Multi Domain Battle concept. According to the MDB concept, land forces will operate in all domains, but fail to acknowledge that BCTs cannot receive augmentation with new capabilities for this requirement. BCTs with multi domain capabilities will experience difficulty in the future operating environment because units need to operate as small-dispersed elements to take advantage of provisional windows of opportunity created by synergistic and simultaneous affects in multiple domains. Although the MDB concept is still under development, the future operating environment requires land forces that are

multi-functional, capable of operating in small, dispersed teams in all domains. More importantly, the Army cannot afford to continue accepting risk in modernization to maintain its current capabilities. Future units will have superior technology than units today. Undoubtedly, the future Army will be vastly different from today's Army, BCTs will be insufficient to fulfill the future operating environment requirements. Small, dispersed, multi-functional teams that can operate in all domains across the spectrum of war is the future of the Army. These teams will be multi-domain battle teams that possess the ability to operate in all domains. Transitioning from BCTs to multi-battle teams will ensure the Army is prepared to operate in dense, urban areas while maintaining the ability to confront multiple threats.

Conclusion

The trends, emerging indicators, and factors above indicate the impending irrelevancy of brigade combat teams for the future operating environment. Units in the future will possess capabilities vastly different from units today. The Multi Domain Battle Concept will require organizations that can operate across multiple domains at the lowest possible echelon in an electronic warfare denied environment with ubiquitous sensors and targeting, while experiencing limited and/or hasty communication.

Future units will contain unmanned ground, aerial, maritime, and space vehicles as well as a host of intelligence sensors, and most important, soldiers. This assertion is predicated on several assumptions. First, future warfare will primarily be fought in urban areas and require innovative ways to deal with the complexities created by this phenomenon. Specifically, the Monch Publishing Group asserts that the development of new operational doctrines, especially in urban areas and asymmetric conflict, will require new equipment and systems to reduce the loss of soldiers and civilian lives.⁴³

Second, technology will evolve rapidly. Today, designers are developing smart unmanned ground vehicles that have high mobility and conduct reconnaissance surveillance and target acquisition missions, fire missions carrying a turret with missile and gun systems, and able to sense threats (mines, enemy weapon systems, etc.) for self-protection.⁴⁴ Additionally, these vehicles must acquire targets while on the move in real time to avoid detection, and neutralize the enemy using onboard weapons or command and control of other weapon systems.⁴⁵

Lastly, resources are available to support the adaptable technology. As eluded too previously, support and overhead are four times the annual operating cost for a brigade combat team. Unfortunately, during more than ten years of war, the Army funded BCTs to support a large array of missions. But, those days now are in the past, and “the Army (along with the rest of the Department of Defense) must face the reality of shrinking budgets and highly constrained resources for the foreseeable future.”⁴⁶ Given this paradigm, the Army will experience challenges in meeting current requirements while modernizing for the future. However, reductions in BCTs will lead to cuts in support units and overhead.

If the above assumptions prove true, it is in the Army’s best interest to replace brigade combat teams with Multi Domain Battle teams comprised of infantry, fires, electronic warfare, aviation, engineers, and information operation soldiers eventually. Additionally, the teams have the capability to operate unmanned ground, aerial, and maritime vehicles. The combination of new equipment and combined arms personnel enables the above teams to meet the requirements outlined in the Multi-Domain Battle concept. The first requirement is to be small and disparate. More importantly, teams

must operate independently and dispersed for an indefinite amount of time. Third, units must possess enough firepower to take advantage of temporary windows created with multi-domain effects. Lastly, teams must reduce the logistics demand, increase reliability, availability and maintainability. Additionally, units are diffused enough to be mobile, but capable of capitalizing on needed capability to operate in an urban environment with necessary firepower to overwhelm adversaries.

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