

BREAKING TACTICAL FIXATION

The Division's Role

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PHOTO: U.S. Army SSGT Brian Dawson participates in a cache search mission in Baghdad, Iraq, 9 October 2009. (U.S. Army, SPC Benjamin Boren)

CAMPAIGNING OVER THE LAST HALF DECADE has left an indelible mark on Army professional discourse and doctrine. When it comes to counterinsurgency operations, we are a small-unit Army. Tough fighting and persistent nonlethal operations both in the streets of Baghdad and on other fronts for the last five years has proven just how critically important it is for tactical leaders and Soldiers to reside directly with their host nation forces, among the very population that they protect. In contact with opposing forces, the Army has transformed. Modularity provided a means and a way to meet the strategic requirement of rapid response and intervention, yet the chosen strategic solution caused Army leaders to refine tactics for the modular, deployable formations. Combat and transformation have caused America's land-power leaders to make the tactical level of war their focus for close to a decade.

The Army has virtually ignored the divisional headquarters role in today's modular force. This, with the past decade's tactical orientation, will likely prove detrimental to the current counterinsurgency mission and to fighting and winning decisive campaigns. Doctrine development verifies this point. The current division field manual, *Division Operations*, was published in 1996. The most current field manual, FMI 3-91, is currently only a draft, dated early 2006. The successful execution of full spectrum operations in a modularized force that operates on a fully committed rotation cycle requires the full advantage of division headquarters capabilities and roles. We may overlook this point if we remain fixated on the tactical elements of counterinsurgency.

Attention to the tactical level—specifically the brigade combat team and below—has unnecessarily diverted attention away from the operational level of war. The division headquarters bridges the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of complex, full spectrum military operations. In an era of persistent conflict and evolving doctrine, the Army must aggressively address the division headquarters' organization, functions, and roles.

Division Headquarters Redefined

Today's division headquarters has broken the ties to Cold War structures. The Army sprinted to modularize brigade combat teams, but the division headquarters evolved more slowly. Operational success increases with favorable outcomes at the tactical level, but not exclusively. Many view

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the division commander as a provider who allocates resources to teams. This is tactical myopia. Divisions do manage enablers—true. However, the division commander and his staff provide other critical functions to the modular forces, especially in counterinsurgency. The division brings coherence to tactical efforts: combined planning and operations across vast operational environments, interagency coordination, and commander and key leader engagements that shape the future operational environment for months and years.

Acknowledging the power and limitations of brigade combat teams is a critical first step toward redefining the division headquarters. In today's modularized force, it is the division commander and his staff—no others—who combine the capabilities of brigades and key enabling units to coherently fight widely scattered battles and engagements. The modular brigade is a very powerful organization, but it is the division commander who pulls together these brigades—all trained at disparate locations—and provides them a unifying vision. The commander focuses everyone on the end state that extends beyond unit rotational time lines and changing task organizations. The commander's staff then plans and directs actions, creating solutions to achieve the desired future, in concert with other units and agencies, coalition partners, and host nation leaders. Lacking a robust and more experienced staff, brigades simply cannot take on such scope or touch on all the elements of power. The teams have limits, and they best serve the Army when the teams' leaders acknowledge these limitations candidly.

For example, a brigade combat team commander can track and

engage insurgents who operate in his battlespace, but live in another team's operational area and receive supplies through a third. Combat teams simply cannot effectively fight that effort alone. Further, highly acclaimed fusion cells—organized, resourced, and run largely by the division and special operations—enable the team commanders and their staffs to see across their boundaries, yet they cannot direct cross-boundary action. Only the division commander, by guiding and empowering his key staff officers, can coordinate this effort across team boundaries. While some may reply that the division faces the same problem with adjoining divisions, division operational environments span hundreds of linear kilometers, while the combat teams' operational environments, though still large, are far more limited. Counterinsurgent targeting gains much more coherence inside the division's operational environment. The division's staff can also better manage the combined special operations efforts that coincide in time and space with the team's tactical efforts and direct the over-arching campaign—with lethal and nonlethal elements against larger threat groups and networks. The division extends the effectiveness of companies and battalions, synthesizing their myriad tactical efforts over time and across organizational, national, and regional boundaries.



U.S. Navy, Petty Officer 2d Class Todd Frantom

U.S. Soldiers direct Iraqi civilians to stay orderly during a medical outreach and medicine delivery to Iraqi civilians at Iraqi National Police Headquarters in the Aamel community of southern Baghdad, Iraq, 2 December 2008 .

This also applies in nonlethal operations such as civil affairs, information operations, and command group and key leader engagements. Brigade combat teams are critically important and perform each of these functions superbly, but they also require everything that a division commander, his deputy commanders, and staff can provide. Brigade commanders and their staffs must stretch to meet non-standard missions. In Iraq, the division, with the assistance of its partnered provincial reconstruction team, supports tactical efforts by engaging leaders at the provincial and large city level. Issues such as budget execution and planning, essential service redistribution and rebuilding, and engagement with ministry level officials begin at the division level. Results of these engagements and efforts then flow down to the teams.

In today's operating environment, the division is the juncture of complex tactical actions and operational and strategic efforts. The division commander and his staff identify, create, or enable exploitation of tactical opportunities and link them to stated campaign goals. Corps headquarters cannot do this effectively, because they are too far away from the tactical efforts. Battalions and brigades may see and act on certain opportunities, but they cannot carry the effort very far. The division, however, takes the corps' broader complex view of the operational environment and translates that into tactical applications. Most importantly, the division commander's headquarters is the first echelon of command that can combine interagency and multi-national lethal and nonlethal efforts to achieve unified action. Brigades, even when resourced with enhanced provincial reconstruction teams and other nonlethal enablers, cannot bring sufficient capacity or depth to the interagency or multi-national arenas. They simply are not designed for these tasks. Attempts to hang more and more enablers onto the brigade structure overburden the brigade staff and exceed

the brigade commander's span of control. Such an approach requires the brigade combat team to do what a division staff does, a requirement that the team cannot accomplish.

The division headquarters overlaps the operational and strategic levels of war in new ways. The commander in the operational environment in Baghdad makes critical decisions with operational and strategic implications unique to his level of command. A strong division headquarters empowers modular teams enhanced with appropriate key enablers to accomplish their missions in a coherent, synchronized manner. The division brings unique, robust enablers and the ability to coordinate lethal and nonlethal efforts. By synchronizing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; public affairs and media engagement teams; funding sources; legal depth; and intelligence structures, the division controls a host of functions to enable effective division-wide efforts. Further, only the division has the authority to place liaison office cells at host nation government, police, and military organizations to unify these efforts.

Seeing the problem with a deeper and longer view sets the stage for the division in its operational context. Commanders, staffs, and flags rotate in and out of operational environments, but the mission remains nearly the same. Before the 4th Infantry Division deployed to Baghdad in November 2007, its staff researched earlier Multi-National-Division Baghdad mission statements and commander's intent statements dating to November 2004. The similarities were striking. Each successive division flag that assumed Multi-National-Division Baghdad's mantle consistently focused on securing the population, enabling the host nation security forces, and transitioning to civil governance. The conditions continue to change, but the mission and end state have proven reassuringly consistent.

While most division commanders and their staffs figure out the requirement for the extended operational view, they often expend a lot of energy up front by writing new operational plans prior to deployment. Indeed, we did this ourselves. After about three months of experience in theater, the newly arrived division staff discovers that its mission and desired end state were similar to those of the division headquarters they replaced. In the end, they adapt their operational efforts to the ongoing

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campaign plan and end state from corps and higher, updating them around the margins and realigning priorities, allocations, and focus. This takes nothing away from the commander and his power to influence, command, and direct those within his command structure.

The commander continues to be the critical factor. His will carries major operations from concept through execution. While a division commander's decisions range from the tactical through strategic level, he uniquely shapes the operational level of war. There is something to be said for a newly formed commander-staff team conducting a thorough review of prior divisional operations and the corps' campaign plan. Unless the operational environment, strategic mission, or end state have changed substantively, the incoming division's operational framework will closely resemble that of the division headquarters it is about to replace.

Upon deployment, division commanders and their staffs fall in on campaigns orchestrated by corps and force level commands. The rotational division headquarters conducts one long-running operation in that campaign. The division's subordinate units—as they move through their rotation cycles—continue to fight the battles and engagements and sustain other full spectrum efforts. Such a construct seems simple. Adopting it in practice has proved challenging.

Part of that challenge is accounting for operational-level dynamics. While always involved in the tactical realm, the division commander consistently considers the campaign plan provided by his higher headquarters, the assets and enablers, and the dynamics of the division's operational environment. His aim point, as he sorts through the daily and weekly challenges, remains the end state. He focuses and refocuses himself and his team on it, despite the tyranny of the urgent, the pressures of the news cycles, or the targeting tempo. Masters of battalion and brigade leadership, division commanders resist being drawn too far into the tactical sphere. Although tactical issues clearly deserve the commander's and division staff's attention, the division commander deliberately commits to

the end state. The tension of the tactical is never fully resolved—Army leaders are experienced and successful at this level, and tactics are undeniably important. Resisting the tactical pull and remaining in the operational sphere is decisive.

The division staff, almost more than its commander, must start and finish securely planted in the operational realm. Each staff team must be committed to creating the conditions and aligning the resources to produce the desired future—the one inherited through the campaign plan and the operational framework and directed with higher fidelity and focus by the division commander. Yet the long view cannot be the staff's sole focus. It must foster relationships with the modularized brigades and enablers ready to respond to opportunities that emerge from tactical developments.

The staff must anticipate and remain responsive to the dynamic situation as the division progresses toward the end state. By also establishing and strengthening working relationships with other agencies, host nation forces, and coalition headquarters, the division staff will leverage these strategic partners

to create conditions for long-term progress and prevent strategic reversals. In Baghdad, a division staff coping with insurgent sanctuary in Sadr City is an example of a staff working to accomplish a long-term mission to achieve the end state. Together with tactical and strategic partners, the divi-

sion commander and his staff account for the rapidly shifting political, social, and military dynamics.

Setting the conditions for secure provincial elections is another division effort that spans the levels of war and requires synchronization across them, especially in working in partnership with Iraqi Security Forces. Brigade combat teams simply cannot and should not handle the full scope of the synchronized effort. This is not to minimize the fact that success, in large measure, hinges on the teams' efforts. An operational approach enables the division staff to span the tactical through the low-strategic levels of modern war. By synchronizing the tactical efforts while remaining focused on the extended view, the division more effectively operates with higher and other headquarters, agencies, and partners.

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Renewed emphasis on the division headquarters does not necessarily make that echelon of command effective. Performance in three broad areas dictates a division's effectiveness:

- The division commander's ability to span the tactical operations through strategic conditions over time.
- The staff's ability to organize and act to create the conditions that lead to realizing the commander's vision.
- The ability of the division commander and his staff to gain unified action with other agencies and partners as they move toward a common end state.

Success begins with the division commander. His communicated will and vision provide the staff, brigade combat teams, and key enabling units a common focus. In Baghdad, the principles found in FM 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*, are bearing out, despite the complexities and uncertainties of the operating environment. Modularized brigade combat teams and enablers conducting full spectrum operations across vast distances thrive under a commander-centric system. The division commander sees his world differently than team commanders see theirs.

Viewpoint

Army doctrine articulates the environment of military operations as complex but linear: see yourself, see the enemy, and see the terrain. In counterinsurgency, we ask which enemy insurgent groups are inherently shadowy, ill-defined, and overlapping. What about terrain? The variables of terrain now include the physical, environmental, social, political, infrastructure, and cultural. The division commander must mentally grasp this vastly expanded environment in all its nuances and make sense of incredibly chaotic events. His staff assists, but ultimately it is the commander who must "see" the division's environment at the sufficient level of detail and then effectively communicate his vision to his team, interagency, and host nation partners.

By design, division headquarters evolve into nonstandard formations. Currently, Multi-National Division-Baghdad controls six maneuver brigades [September 2009]. At one point, ten operated in the province. The headquarters leadership also integrates into the division efforts and controls key enablers envisioned in doctrine: a military police brigade, an

engineer brigade, a combat aviation brigade, and a civil affairs battalion. What we did not anticipate, though, were the myriad of extras required of a modular division headquarters.

The span of influence extends well beyond coalition forces. The division commander will become partners with a host nation corps headquarters, three army and two police divisions, and two area commanders that resemble corps commanders in purpose. The division commander attaches advisory teams to these organizations and augments them with personnel from the division staff. He also supports and integrates these organizations with a State Department-led provincial reconstruction team and coordinates with other government agencies, private voluntary organizations, and nongovernmental organizations to improve security and reconstruction efforts across the province. The staff must extend itself and its processes by enabling the commander to coordinate effectively with these agencies. Coordination among these disparate agencies is complex and often conflicting, but a well-integrated and mutually supporting division staff greatly enhances the division commander's span of control and influence.

Other organizations that support the division are frequently attached to the division special troops battalion. This catch-all organization provides command and control for such organizations as the mobile public affairs detachments, the psychological operations company, and other key enablers that do not have a large enough footprint to be self-sustaining. Multi-National Division-Baghdad's division special troops battalion has expanded to the size of a small brigade. Built for flexibility, the battalion allows the division commander to both control and support these smaller key enablers across the division and among our interagency partners.

Expanding the division's span of control and influence among units, attachments, and interagency partners is challenging enough, but the division must also extend its planning time horizons while it coordinates current operations. The division commander's mind must consider the day's leader engagements with host nation civic leaders as well as the immediate security crisis while gauging the division's progress toward long-term campaign objectives. Matters of immediate importance incessantly pull energy to the near-term, largely because

today's events shape tomorrow's potentials. The division commander uses the staff to force extended operational-view thinking, not only in planning, but more importantly in assessments. The division commander and staff must coordinate efforts with host nation forces and other agencies who share different views on time. While brigade combat teams and their partnered Iraqi units provide security for the populace day to day, and brigade combat teams with their enhanced provincial reconstruction teams engage local governance leaders routinely, the challenge of time is magnified at division. Instead of days and weeks, divisions deal with months, yet easily become caught in the crisis of the day. We have found that division commanders and staffs must operate with the tensions created by dealing with current crises while moving toward end state on extended time horizons.

Span of control and influence, coupled with broader time horizons, leads to the challenge of operating at all levels of war simultaneously. A common critique of Army senior leaders is that many revert to "Squad Leader 6." As the division commander walks the ground and drives the same routes as his Soldiers do, day in and day out, he sees the operational environment through a tactical lens. The commander then applies his operational and strategic lens to the very same view; but rarely do subordinate commanders see this, often because those commanders engage the division commander almost solely on tactical issues. Through his staff and engagements with his higher headquarters, the division commander also functions regularly in the operational and strategic realm. The commander keeps this extended operational view through regular plans updates, operational plan reviews, and frank discussions with his key leaders on the long-term outlook in light of the immediate situation. At the end of the day, though, the division commander fights to retain the operational perspective, while regularly communicating with the tactical

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and strategic worlds. The division commander and staff are the only elements that regularly span all of these levels and synchronize the efforts across them.

Experience bears out the truth that the division commander requires able deputies and senior officers to extend his vision and influence more than the standard organizational chart allows. The "Deputy Commanding General" model works well, especially when additional colonels operate in key positions to extend the division commander's vision into action and provide him key information for critical decisions. The commander's success rises and falls, in large measure, on the cohesiveness and effectiveness of his senior leader team. He empowers these senior officers and provides them with a clear frame of reference with which to work. This team exists both inside and outside of the headquarters in important areas beyond the practical reach of the brigade combat teams. This senior leadership



U.S. Air Force, SSGT Luke P. Thelen

Members of the Salah ad Din Provincial Reconstruction Team, local provincial sheiks, and U.S. Army leaders eat together on 23 August 2009, during an Iftar dinner. The Iftar dinner is the traditional evening meal during the Islamic month of Ramadan.

team clearly distinguishes the division effort from the brigade combat team effort.

This leadership team, with its experience and authority, empowers the division-wide key leader engagement plan. Much energy is expended training company, battalion, and brigade leaders how to engage the key leaders at their local level. In today's form of warfare, the ability of the Army's junior leaders to engage actively with the local population is essential to their tactical success. However, brigade combat teams are limited in their capacity to actually reach and engage with key leaders at the city and provincial level. Their areas of operation are densely populated and extremely complex both culturally and physically, demanding the attention of a brigade commander and his deputy. Only the division brings seniority that other social, political, religious, and military cultures respect at the operational level. The division's four general officers (including the engineer brigade commander) not only control many aspects of doctrinal divisional functions, they also engage city and provincial key leaders regularly. In many ways, the generals have become diplomats in uniform, integrating their engagements with, and in many cases in support of, newly created provincial reconstruction teams from the State Department.

Enabling these key engagements requires staff commitment and work. The division in Baghdad has addressed this in two ways. First, three experienced, handpicked colonels work as empowered division commander representatives.

One works directly with the host nation corps commander and chief of staff and has a team of coalition officers and senior NCOs assisting him and liaising with the division staff. He works directly with the deputy commanding general for maneuver and the division's G3 to coordinate operations and develop and support host nation forces.

Another colonel serves as the senior uniformed officer on the provincial reconstruction team, functioning as its deputy director. In close coordination with the division G9 and civil affairs battalion commander, this senior officer spans the interagency gap. He must see both short- and long-term, helping to coordinate the immediate humanitarian support and ensuring that the division's civil-military efforts do not conflict with long-term plans to reconstruct the city and province.

A third colonel serves in a forward capacity, close to the host nation government, and is the first line for coordinating key leader engagements with the community. Skilled in the host nation language and experienced by serving within the current operational environment, he has essential relations and connections with the provincial and city leaders. Augmented by a small forward team and a robust engagements cell in the division headquarters, this colonel does a lot of the front-end work for the division commander and deputy commanders in the host nation political realm.

Limitations

The current way of fighting divisions presents three problems. First, we are overly fixated with the tactical level. Proper balance between small-unit and brigade combat team efforts with the division fight does much to alleviate that problem and actually improves the tactical performances of the brigades and battalions. Second, the division commander and his staff must continually reevaluate their thinking about the operational environment and its complexities. They must expand their vision of the operational problem in terms of time, geography, and population. Multi-National Division-Baghdad is working to do that in several ways. Finally, to be effective, the division staff must reorganize to engage communities outside of the Army organization. The commitment of robust liaison teams led by senior officers is a solution that worked for us.

Modern war levies ever-increasing demands on the division commander and his staff. Yet, our current emphasis on small-unit counterinsurgency risks ignores the division's role in full spectrum operations. Giving serious, professional consideration to the division headquarters organization and employment effectively bridges the tactical with the strategic application, thus empowering the tactical efforts of small units and brigades.

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The division level headquarters does so much more than just provide and allocate enablers. While today's brigade combat teams are super-empowered compared to their Cold War predecessors, they can only accomplish so much. The division commander and his staff can operate in the tactical through strategic realms and get the division to fight right.

In the near term, the Army must adjust the Human Resources Command's current manning goals and requirements for division headquarters to fill the modified table of organization and equipment requirements in theater. Contractors are part of the solution, but military leaders are a necessity. At a time when the Army is looking to draw down deployed forces, the need for capable and robust division staffs is actually increasing.

Division headquarters that are slated for deployment must work both early and quickly to orchestrate manning requirements, fill duty positions, develop staff interrelationships, and conduct external processes. These deploying headquarters will gain situational understanding of their new operational environment quite early. They accomplish this through networked communications with forward units and shared knowledge portals, through collaborative operational planning to cover the overlap of units, and by engaging with Center for Army Lessons Learned and Battle Command Training Center representatives. Division headquarters preparing to deploy must resist the urges to rewrite the operational plan from scratch and to bring their divisional patch to the fight. We learned the hard way. Unit pride has its place, even when deployed, but it takes a back seat to serving as a multi-national division headquarters with a non-standard task organization.

In both the mid- and long-term, the Army must relook how it staffs, equips, and employs its division headquarters. Current organizational and conceptual frameworks have proven insufficient for the demands levied by FM 3-0 and our operational needs.

The Army can overcome this by—

- Allocating the required personnel and resources *before* deployment for interagency and host nation military liaisons and senior military transition teams at the host nation division and corps headquarters.

- Allocating and training sufficient personal security detachments, thereby enabling the expanded division staff to provide their key leaders with the mobility the operational environment requires. The current structure simply does not provide this critical enabling element.

- Investing in the education and competencies of division staff officers and creating a separate career path for service on division staff. The School of Advanced Military Studies and similar programs are moving in this direction, and the U.S. Army Training and Doctrinal Command recently supported this initiative. It must continue on a broader scale.

In the realm of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, education, personnel, and facilities, we can get the doctrine and organization close, but preparing our personnel requires that we provide them with the proper training, leader development, and incentives to continue to serve. Intermediate level education provides some grounding in division staff work, but not enough. We must invest in division staff officers and reward their continued service at this echelon.

Best practices are emerging from the field, and our table of organization and equipment must account for what we are learning now or risk being whittled away by those tasked to reduce resource demands.

The Army is at a crossroads. Do we continue to remain fixated on brigade combat teams? Or do we expand our thinking to include not only combat teams but also divisions operating in complex and dynamic environments? We will continue to build, train, and deploy extremely capable brigade combat teams, but the Army must now give division-level operations their due by resourcing and shaping the modern division headquarters for full spectrum operations. **MR**