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The State of the Cavalry: An Analysis of the U.S. Army's Reconnaissance and Security Capability

by

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Introduction

The United States Army is currently in a position in which its ground reconnaissance and security capabilities are inadequately skilled at conducting their inherent mission. This erosion is largely due to committing reconnaissance and security operations forces[1] to counterinsurgency and stability operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and other parts of the world. Ground reconnaissance and security capabilities are critical for successful ground combat operations. The Army must address the inadequacies of its ability to execute ground reconnaissance and security operations to fight and win the next major ground war, which is likely to be hybrid in character. This essay examines deficiencies of the Army's reconnaissance and security capability through the lenses of DOTMLPF[2] and provides recommendations to effectively move forward.

Doctrine: Reconnaissance and Security (R&S) Operations in the Warfighting Functions

The purpose of doctrine is to clarify thought in order to reduce the friction in an organization through streamlining and nesting the interconnected tactical and operational concepts a unit must address.[3] However, the manner in which the Army's doctrine addresses reconnaissance and security operations and the functions of a cavalry formation in relation to the warfighting functions neither clarifies thought nor reduces friction. Army doctrine complicates the process by putting the cavalry formations' tasks (i.e., to conduct reconnaissance and security operations) in one warfighting function, while putting their purpose (i.e., to facilitate understanding of the enemy, terrain and civil capabilities) in another warfighting function.

Further driving a wedge between purpose and use is the manner in which commanders have employed their cavalry formations during the past 15 years. In almost every case, brigade combat team (BCT) commanders have employed their cavalry squadrons as battlespace owners. The effect of this decision has trickle-down consequences as cavalry troops are then employed as battlespace owners as part of the squadron and BCT footprint. This approach reinforces cavalry formations' view of themselves as part of the movement and maneuver warfighting function.

Compounding this problem is that the intelligence warfighting function is largely composed of intelligence personnel. Those Soldiers are not intimately familiar with the functions and capabilities of the cavalry squadron, much less its role on the battlefield. Further exacerbating this problem is that most intelligence personnel have been supporting their organizations while deployed across the world, not in planning and

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executing decisive action. In these instances, intelligence personnel see the cavalry formation not as a part of the intelligence collection plan but instead as a battlespace-owning formation.

Yet the Army defines a warfighting function as "a group of tasks and systems (people, organizations, information and processes) united by a common purpose that commanders use to accomplish missions and training objectives."[4] It further states that the warfighting functions are employed to help commanders exercise command and their staffs to exercise control of their respective organizations.[5] The essence of the definition of warfighting function is at odds with the purpose, function and capability of a cavalry formation.

The definitions of the movement and maneuver and intelligence warfighting functions muddy the water even further:

- The movement and maneuver warfighting function is defined as "the related tasks and systems that move and employ forces to achieve a position of relative advantage over the enemy and other threats."[6] Additionally, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, states that the warfighting function includes conducting reconnaissance and security operations.
- The movement and maneuver warfighting function, predominantly ground focused, is led and managed by combat-arms officers.[7]

However, the intelligence warfighting function is defined as "the related tasks and systems that facilitate understanding the enemy, terrain, and civil considerations."[8] Furthermore, the intelligence warfighting function includes tasks to support force generation, support situational understanding, provide intelligence support to targeting and information capabilities and collect information.[9] The intelligence warfighting function is a multi-domain warfighting function.

The intelligence warfighting function is inherently tied to the experience of those personnel who reside under its umbrella. The background of intelligence officers drives how they think about intelligence collection. If they have been primarily focused on employing multiple airborne intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets, they are likely to overlook planning for collecting information at named areas of interest (NAIs) through the employment of cavalry formations.

The intelligence warfighting function infringes upon the movement and maneuver warfighting function, while cavalry formations are required to straddle both warfighting functions. In doing this, the Army has indirectly created a chasm in many organizations by which the information collection plan is desynchronized from the information collection capability.

Organization: R&S Capabilities Above the Brigade Combat Team

At the most elementary level, reconnaissance and security operations are conducted on the ground and in the air. Therefore, all echelons of command must maintain organic ground and air reconnaissance and security capabilities. At the battalion level, the commander has a scout platoon and organic unmanned aerial system (UAS) capabilities. At the BCT level, the commander has the cavalry squadron and the UAS platoon. Yet, at the division and corps levels of command, no organic ground reconnaissance and security capability exists. However, as the echelon of command increases, so too does its need for multidimensional reconnaissance and security assets. The Army must not become consumed with the idea that UAS and other aerial platforms will eliminate the need for ground reconnaissance and security operations; unmanned aerial platforms are easy to deceive and do not replace the need for or the value of the human eye.[10] As Colonel John Rosenberger stated in "Breaking the Saber,"

> If we ignore the rich body of historical and contemporary experience that justifies the critical importance of cavalry organizations . . . and instead place our faith in the promise of unrealized technology, we may undermine . . . our ability to develop our full combat potential in the 21st century.[11]

Likewise, if the Army puts a division in the field to fight major ground combat operations, regardless of the task organization of BCTs within the division, the division will fight as a cohesive team. The division will not serve purely as a tasking and resourcing conduit; it will have Priority Information Requirements (PIRs)

that require answers. The division will require capabilities to serve as its eyes and ears to collect information that will enable decisionmaking and understanding of the operational environment. Because of this, the division will require a ground reconnaissance and security capability.[12] Yet, current division structures do not provide a ground reconnaissance and security capability organic to the division.

Thus, the division must make a choice from among three options: It can pull a cavalry squadron from one of the BCTs to serve as the division's reconnaissance and security capability; it can task a force untrained in reconnaissance and security operations to fill the capability gap; or it can elect to not pull a force—a cavalry squadron or another asset—and instead push down the collection of information on specific PIRs and NAIs to BCTs. There are many problems associated with each of those courses of actions.[13] One problem in each of these situations is that pulling reconnaissance and security capabilities from subordinate echelons deprives them of their ability to conduct local, tactical reconnaissance and security operations. It is imperative for tactical-level commanders, using their organic reconnaissance and security assets, to be able to act immediately, visualize, understand, adjust and decisively finish.[14] In today's come-as-you-are environment, the no-organic-R&S approach is insufficient and must be remedied.[15]

Recent historical examples of ground combat highlight the need for effective division- and corps-level reconnaissance and security capabilities. During Operation Desert Storm in 1991, the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment (2ACR), operating forward of U.S. VII Corps, destroyed approximately a division's worth of Iraqi combat power while answering information requirements for higher echelons of command and enabling successful ground combat operations. The stunning success of 2ACR in shaping the fight for VII Corps and U.S. Central Command demonstrates the vital role cavalry formations play for the Army and the joint force.[16]

Additionally, 3d Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment (3-7 CAV) operations during the invasion of Iraq in 2003 highlight the role of division-level cavalry in enabling decisionmaking and in fostering situational understanding for the division commander. 3-7 CAV, attacking forward of the 3d Infantry Division (3ID), fought for information, eliminated lead echelon threats, recommended courses of action and helped in shaping the division fight. They were critical to the division's success in reaching Baghdad.[17] The 3ID would have been less successful in its drive to Baghdad if it had not possessed a forward ground reconnaissance and security capability.

Moreover, reconnaissance and security capabilities at the division and corps level will play a critical role in hybrid warfare, as adversaries will seek to defeat or disrupt advancing ground forces through the employment of conventional, irregular, deception and cyber capabilities.[18] Recent Russian operations in Georgia (2008), Crimea (2014) and Ukraine (2014–present) demonstrate the evolving character of war. Capable and formable reconnaissance and security capabilities are essential to succeeding against the looming threat of hybrid warfare.

Training and Education: R&S Operations in Professional Military Education

The Army still approaches reconnaissance and security operations training and education as it did before modularity (2005), when the split between cavalry and armor was approximately 30 percent to 70 percent, respectively. Since modularity, this paradigm has shifted and the split is now approximately 65 percent cavalry to 35 percent armor.[19] Prior to modularity—when most armor officers ended up in tank platoons, companies and battalions—using additional schools to train and educate the small minority of students headed to cavalry assignments was sufficient. That approach, based on force structure and position coding, is no longer sufficient and is detrimental to the long-term health of the Army's ability to execute effective ground combat.

Currently, an economy-of-force approach is applied to the training and education of armor officers in relation to the functions of cavalry formations. The Armor Basic Officer Leaders Course (ABOLC) allows only a small amount of time in the Program of Instruction (POI) dedicated to teaching and training reconnaissance and security operations. Furthermore, the course uses only light cavalry[20] operations during the course, leaving the discrete differences of motorized and mechanized cavalry operations to be learned on the job.

The Army Reconnaissance Course (ARC), while a fine program, is not the answer. ARC is a finishing school, designed to polish and refine the training and education of its attendees. This would be a sufficient

approach if not for the fact that ABOLC does not educate and train their students to a high enough standard in relation to the reconnaissance and security operations mission. Additionally, ARC attendance is not mandatory for all armor officers.

Furthermore, not all assigned scout platoon leaders are required to attend ARC. There are numerous instances in the operational force in which a lieutenant, whether armor or infantry, has been put in charge of a scout platoon without having attended ARC. In situations such as this, Army leaders indirectly undercut the standing of those Professional Military Education (PME) courses by putting institutionally uneducated and untrained leaders in charge of those formations. This approach discredits the idea that cavalry formations require formal, institutional education and training.

The problem continues at the captain level. The Maneuver Captains Career Course (MCCC), in its integrated, one-size-fits-all approach, further dilutes the education of armor and infantry officers not only in relation to the nuanced differences in armor and infantry operations but also in respect to cavalry formations and reconnaissance and security operations. The overly integrated POI forces curriculum developers and MCCC leaders to assume risk in a multitude of reconnaissance and security operations in which captains will be required to lead as troop commanders and plan as staff officers.[21]

Much like the situation with ARC, the Cavalry Leaders Course (CLC) is not mandatory, nor are there sufficient seats for all students who are required to attend (i.e., every armor officer from every MCCC class).[22] Like ARC, the CLC is a finishing school through which the Army seeks to further develop leaders to plan troop- and squadron-level reconnaissance and security operations to enable tactical maneuver operations.

Similar to the Maneuver Center of Excellence's offering of ARC and CLC, the Command and General Staff College offers a BCT reconnaissance and security operations elective—not mandatory for any officer. Furthermore, competing academic pursuits during the electives cycle can negate the ability of officers to participate in the reconnaissance and security operations elective.[23]

The summative effect of the Army's ill-conceived approach to educating and training leaders for command and staff assignments in the operational force—in relation to the role and purpose of reconnaissance and security operations—is to provide inadequately prepared leaders to those formations. These leaders often fail to understand the purpose of the formation in which they find themselves. They often lack understanding of the capability for which they are to plan and lead. Furthermore, many lack the specialized experience and depth of knowledge needed to lead these organizations due to the Army's preference for broadening leaders through diverse assignments.

Leadership: Position Coding in Cavalry Formations

As mentioned previously, cavalry formations are not effectively manned in regard to professional experience and education. Field-grade positions are coded 02B—combat-arms immaterial. This approach can provide cavalry formations with leaders and staff officers wholly unprepared for the billets to which they are assigned.[24] One could equate this approach to coaching football; a head coach would not send his defensive coordinator to call the offensive plays and, conversely, he would not send his offensive coordinator to call defense. Specialization and the associated training and education are vitally important to getting the right people, with the right skill sets, in charge of the right formations. Otherwise, regardless of how talented they might be, they are going to be fighting an uphill battle. Furthermore, this approach undermines the various means of institutional training and education for cavalry leaders.

Moreover, this approach is shortsighted in regard to the Army's long-term well-being. Specifically, it undercuts the professional development of Soldiers and leaders within those organizations by placing leaders without the requisite knowledge and experience to lead those formations, thus teaching and training incorrect methods. Additionally, this approach undercuts professional development by assigning leaders with inappropriate experience to mentor, advise and develop subordinates with their long-term professional well-being in mind. Finally, this approach, if left uncontested, will continue to erode the Army's ability to conduct proper reconnaissance and security operations through the cumulative effects of having inappropriate leaders

in key positions within those formations. Instead of leading, teaching and mentoring the ideas and approaches required for future cavalry leaders, this approach will create an "echo chamber" of failure as senior leaders continue the mistakes and improper approaches they learned as junior leaders.

Recommendations

First, the Army must make a concerted effort to better professionalize cavalry organizations throughout the Army. The critical components to increase the professionalism of cavalry organizations reside in properly staffing the formations and then properly training and educating those individuals. The modular, one-size-fits-all approach to staffing cavalry formations is insufficient and detrimental to the long-term health of the Army's ability to conduct effective reconnaissance and security operations. The Army must change the position coding of command and S3/XO[25] positions within those formations to cavalry-specific coding.

Furthermore, the Army must develop requisite training, education and experience for those positions. A leader should not be assigned to a cavalry formation without previous reconnaissance and security training in PME. Going back to a football analogy, putting a leader into a cavalry formation without the requisite training, education and experience would be like putting an offensive tackle in to play quarterback and then justifying it by saying that "playing on offense . . . is playing on offense." Specialization exists for a reason and the Army should not run from it at the company- and field-grade officer levels.

Next, the Army must examine the utility of separating reconnaissance and security operations from the movement and maneuver warfighting function to create a stand-alone warfighting function. In removing the reconnaissance and security operations from movement and maneuver and creating a reconnaissance and security warfighting function, the potential exists for commanders and staffs to better integrate reconnaissance and security operations into the information collection element of the intelligence warfighting function. The benefit of this would be more thoughtful, effective intelligence-collection plans, enabling the commander to make better decisions for the organization. However, if the Army corrects its reconnaissance and security forces manning, this recommendation will likely cease to be a concern.

If the Army intends to continue with the modular, one-size-fits-all approach to filling these formations, then it must adjust PME to bring armor and infantry officers to the same degree of high-quality training and education of cavalry tactics to ensure there is no disparity in their effectiveness in the force. This will also allow better mentorship and professional development of future cavalry leaders.

Finally, as the Department of Defense and the Army continue to assess what is required in terms of force structure and the correct mix of forces,[26] the need for division- and corps-level reconnaissance and security formations must not be overlooked. The Army must provide division- and corps-level commanders with ground reconnaissance and security formations with the capability to fight for information.

Conclusion

The Army's reconnaissance and security capability is in need of an overhaul. As it currently stands, the Army is in a position where its ground reconnaissance and security capabilities are inadequate to conduct their inherent mission. The Army's global commitments over the past 15 years are largely to blame. However, there are other critical failures exacerbating the problem, including the Army's approach to training and educating reconnaissance and security leaders; the manner in which leaders have been allocated to the R&S formations; the absence of division- and corps-level ground reconnaissance and security capabilities; and disjointed doctrine. The Army must take a deliberate approach to fixing those deficiencies to be able to fight and win during the next ground war.

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Endnotes

[1] "Reconnaissance and security operations forces" will be referred to as cavalry formations from this point forward. If a specific echelon, such as a cavalry squadron, is being discussed, it will be referred to as such.

[2] DOTMLPF (Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership & Education, Personnel and Facilities) is a problem-solving construct developed by the Army Capabilities Integration Center for assessing current capabilities and managing change. http://www.arcic.army.mil/AboutARCIC/dotmlpf.aspx. This essay will not assess material and facilities.

[3] Carl von Clausewitz, in Michael Howard and Peter Paret, ed., *On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 132.

[4] Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2012), p. 3-12.

[5] *Ibid*.

[6] *Ibid*., p. 3-3.

[7] *Ibid*.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 3-4.

[9] *Ibid*.

[10] Colonel John D. Rosenberger, "Breaking the Saber: The Subtle Demise of Cavalry in the Future Force," Association of the United States Army, *Landpower Essay* No. 04-1, June 2004, p. 6.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 2.

[12] *Ibid*., p. 8.

[13] The same paradigm holds true for the corps headquarters.

[14] Major Curtis D. Taylor, "Trading the Saber for Stealth: Can Surveillance Technology Replace Traditional Aggressive Reconnaissance," Association of the United States Army, *Land Warfare Papers*, No. 53, September 2005, p. 19.

[15] Douglas Macgregor, "War Makes Armies Stupid," *Defensenews.com*, 15 February 2016, http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/commentary/2016/02/15/commentary-war-makes-victorious-armies-stupid/80204146.

[16] Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), pp. 441–448.

[17] Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), p. 320.

[18] U.S. Army Special Operations Command, *"Little Green Men": A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare in Ukraine, 2013–2014* (Fort Bragg, NC: USASOC, 2015), p. 5.

[19] These percentages are currently based on the dispositions of troop-level commands in the armor branch. The numbers are inconclusive at the battalion level due to the position coding for cavalry squadrons and combined-arms battalions. Additionally, the author acknowledges that the percentages are approximations due to pending changes to force structure.

[20] High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV)-based and dismounted.

[21] Staff officers in combined-arms battalions will be expected to plan for the employment of the battalion's scout platoon; R&S planning in cavalry squadrons is an inherent function.

[22] One could also make the argument that every infantry officer should attend as well.

[23] Programs such as the Art of Wars Scholars, international exchange programs and directed electives for the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) can interfere with the ability of students to participate in the R&S elective.

[24] Captain Amos C. Fox, "Reconnaissance Training: A Time for Innovation," *Armor Magazine*, October–December 2013, p. 74.

[25] S3 and XO are acronyms for operations officer and executive officer, respectively.

[26] The National Commission on the Future of the Army, "*Report to the President and Congress of the United States*" (Washington DC: 2016), p. 54, http://www.ncfa.ncr.gov.

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