

Unified Quest: Exploring the Nature of Warfare

Introduction

The U.S. Army is providing relevant and ready landpower to combatant commanders as never before: deployed globally, at historic levels of operational tempo and committed to execution of a series of adaptations to a protracted conflict. Many have assumed—and others have worried—that the urgencies of the current fight will be all-consuming for the Army and joint leadership, leaving the force increasingly vulnerable to the next conflict, a conflict with the potential to be fundamentally different in its nature.

Given those concerns, the Army is experimenting, asking key questions about current and future conflicts and the relationships between them. This process, called “Unified Quest,” is one of the Army’s primary venues for exploring the nature of warfare. Even as it adapts to the current needs of the long war,¹ the Army is exploring alternatives and identifying the institutional, conceptual and experimental gaps that must be closed to prepare the force for future joint, interagency and multinational operations.

The Legacy of Army Wargaming

As the Cold War came to a close, the Army acknowledged the existence of continued strategic uncertainty and developed a process of experimentation and exploration to mitigate that ambiguity. The Louisiana Maneuvers of the early 1990s² led to the Force XXI concept and campaign plan. This was followed by the Army After Next wargames of the mid-1990s, the basis for the operational concepts of the future force.

With Army Transformation Wargames (1999–2002) the Army shifted focus to integrating its concepts with those of service and joint partners, recognizing that it needed to generate its concepts in a broader context. Broaching the idea for cosponsorship with Joint Forces Command in 2002, the Army set in motion a series of service-Joint Forces Command cosponsored wargames.

As the premier service wargame, Unified Quest has evolved into a valuable venue to develop and refine the Army’s Capstone Concept³ in a full-spectrum context. In 2004, the study period of Unified Quest was extended from one to two years, examining operational problems well past the initial combat phase and into the more intractable stability and reconstruction phase. Before 2004, the game stopped after the end of major combat operations. Said retired General William Carter, who directed the Blue (U.S./coalition forces) team, “We walked out and patted ourselves on the back and said ‘marvelous job.’ . . . We didn’t understand that what we were seeing in those games wasn’t victory.”⁴

Unified Quest 2005

As Unified Quest 2005 (UQ05) developed, the Department of Defense identified four interrelated challenges in the emerging security environment—irregular, traditional, disruptive and catastrophic—and two tough questions: Are the Army and the Joint Community on the correct path to exploiting asymmetric advantages in future warfare? Is the Army preparing for the emerging challenges and capability gaps envisioned in an irregular warfare environment?

The Army and the Joint Community

At the close of UQ05, the game staff developed key observations. Below are six of the 14 briefed to the Army’s senior leadership during the postgame Senior Leader Seminar.

The Consequences of Operational Method. *Gaming insight:*

An adversary’s acquiescence may be achieved through acceptance, exhaustion or enforcement. Quick, decisive military operations might rapidly collapse an adversary’s physical means of war, or even his political power center, but collapsing the popular will of the adversary may require a sustained, protracted campaign. A rapid collapse of an adversary’s power centers could shift the burden of achieving acquiescence from decisive combat to stability and reconstruction operations (SRO).

¹ Throughout the Defense Department’s 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report (February 6, 2006, online at <http://www.defenselink.mil/qdr/report/Report20060203.pdf>), the phrase “the long war” is used by Pentagon officials to describe the irregular nature of current operations that requires the U.S. military to adopt unconventional and indirect approaches to warfighting.

² The original Louisiana Maneuvers, upon which the 1992 concept was based, took their name from “several high-level, increasingly complex, experiment-based field exercises that the Army conducted, principally in Louisiana, during 1940 and 1941.” James L. Yarrison, *The Modern Louisiana Maneuvers* (Washington, D.C.: Army Center of Military History, 1999), p. 1.

³ U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-3-0, *The Army in Joint Operations, The Army’s Future Force Capstone Concept 2015–2024*, V2, April 2005.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Unified Quest 2005 Scenario

For UQ05, the Future Warfare Study Plan focused on four areas: conflict prevention, operational maneuver from strategic distances (OMFSD), shaping/entry operations and concurrent stability operations. The principal difference from previous games was the creation of an “alternative history” to define an adversary (known as “Redland”) on the Eurasian mainland equipped with 2015 technologies and weapons of mass destruction (WMD), yet representative of a potential regional power challenged by both external and internal tensions—cultural, ethnic, religious, world status, economic. This alternative adversary not only challenged the traditional understanding of combat operations but also pushed commanders into examining the impacts of strategy on the desired political and military endstates.

The UQ05 world of 2015 was rife with conflicts linked by economic and sociopolitical interests, energy concerns, international terrorism and crime. Redland turned to a radical Islamic path as it modernized its military with the goal of becoming a technology/WMD-enabled regional power. As tensions developed with Redland, Blue (U.S./coalition) concluded it lacked sufficient strategic lift and had insufficient forces positioned within the region to counter Redland objectives. Blue attempted to gradually increase its presence in the area of responsibility (AOR) through a series of exercises. Dubbed “Creeping Normalcy,” the strategy to overcome a lack of forces within the region was both transparent and provocative to Redland.

The inevitable road to war ended in March 2015 with Redland’s preemptive attack on Blue forces. Facing an opponent armed with WMD, Blue did not seek regime



change or complete control of the territory of Redland. Rather, Blue pursued an “enclave strategy,” capturing a significant portion of Redland but not so much as to provoke a WMD response. The intent was to use control of this enclave to compel Redland compliance with Blue objectives. Almost two months into combat, Blue’s operations became hampered by thousands of displaced persons. Blue was faced with significant humanitarian challenges and a continuing competition for resources between combat and stability/reconstruction operations. The UQ05 game ended in May 2015 with Blue forces stabilizing their initial lodgment positions.

Observation: The methods by which the joint force commander plans to defeat an adversary could dramatically impact stability within the region for years following a conflict.

Alternatives for Operational Art. A panel comprising students from the School of Advanced Military Studies, the Command and General Staff College and the Army War College explored the use of a systemic approach to the design of campaigns and operations. To enable operational commanders to cope with emerging strategic environments and evolving, adaptive forms of adversaries in protracted conflicts, the panel studied the relationships and rationales of the adversary, themselves and the strategic environment as an open, complex adaptive system.

Gaming insight: By beginning the planning process with system framing rather than problem definition, the panel developed a more holistic understanding of the strategic order beyond its military element. The systemic approach is an alternative or potential complement to the traditional

military decisionmaking process or the more linear, engineered approach of effects-based operations. As an example of the impact of the holistic approach, the system-framing panel members were more likely to consider nonmilitary means to achieve operational objectives.

Observation: The characteristics of systemic framing appear to offer a better means to plan for the dynamic nature of current and future operational environments, enabling better integration and application of all elements of national power.

Stabilization and Reconstruction. Gaming insight: Planning for decisive combat is militarily quantifiable, but stabilization and reconstruction planning demands knowledge of extra-military capabilities related to the cultural, political and social environments. Creating a separate military task force for stabilization and reconstruction enables early planning but represents only part of the potential solution for grappling with the complexity of SRO.

Shifting resources from decisive combat to SRO would begin to dictate the scope of military operational capability. Moreover,

the presence of WMD could easily lead to many international response systems refusing to participate, resulting in heavier reliance on military forces for SRO. A Multinational Transitional Authority (MTA), potentially formed around the State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, must also be ready to assume responsibility for governance.

Observation: Successfully executing a full-spectrum operation involves a degree of complexity and simultaneity that must be captured in the campaign planning process. The plan should include concurrent and subsequent SRO with the direct participation of interagency/international partners, and coordinate multiple efforts without adversely affecting the ability of all institutions to perform. In the end, U.S. military doctrine must take into account the roles of interagency/international organizations in forming coalitions that execute SRO in ways that delineate responsibilities, authorities and accountability.

Coalition Warfare. Gaming insight: Notwithstanding Blue's superiority at the operational level, Redland's flexibility and agility at both the strategic and tactical levels threatened the cohesion of the coalition. Redland's significant conventional and nuclear capabilities drove an operational approach based largely on attrition warfare. The "lodgment strategy" used by Blue produced neither the rapid, decisive victory nor the swift end to major combat operations expected by the coalition.

The protraction of the conflict increased political/military uncertainty among coalition partners and was exacerbated by Redland's nuclear capability. Moreover, most coalition nations could neither sustain large-scale ground force contributions for more than a year nor operate without host nation support. All coalition members accepted the overall political risk when they joined but brought with them different interpretations of political/legal issues as well as expectations for levels of influence over the strategic direction of the campaign.

Observation: Coalitions require a structure and mechanism for formulating strategic direction in protracted campaigns. This mechanism must take into account those who provide military forces and those who provide other support, e.g., basing rights or overflight authority. Whatever form the mechanism or structure takes, it must deliver coalition strategic political and military direction in a timely, effective and sustainable manner.

Multinational Interagency Coordination. Gaming insight: The character of coalition contributions led to civilian and military entities operating concurrently toward the same strategic end. Ideally the two should be fully integrated, but there was no integrating mechanism. This was especially evident when integrating the contributions of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations (IOs).

The Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG), a regional combatant command capability in the game, picked up the task on an ad hoc basis. Nonetheless, there was no integrated multinational interagency planning effort, and Blue did not adequately coordinate with NGOs/IOs. The JIACG design effectively accommodates the decentralized nature of U.S.

interagency execution; however, because the vast majority of coalition partners' national-level civilian efforts are more centrally directed, the JIACG may not be an appropriate framework for a multinational interagency cell.

Observation: An integrated, multinational interagency coordination group might enable the military coalition to leverage the entire spectrum of national, NGO and IG contributions while accommodating an individual organization's constraints and requirements. Such a group should be operationally focused on assessment, planning, coordination and implementation of civilian-like capabilities in support of the coalition objectives.

Irregular Warfare. Gaming insight: Both Red and Blue used irregular warfare and surrogates to achieve a wide range of strategic and operational effects. Strategically, they were used to fracture or shape coalition will, to influence enemy domestic morale and support for the war, to support global and regional information and psychological operations, and to economically threaten and/or punish the adversary and his allies. Events occurred in the U.S. homeland as well as throughout Europe. Operationally, irregular warfare was used to gain information and intelligence, to disrupt or impede force flow and sustainment, and to force the adversary to commit valuable resources to a counter-irregular warfare campaign.

Observation: Irregular warfare complicates the battlespace in time and depth, frustrates attempts to control operational tempo and complicates the strategic environment. The Army should acknowledge it as a permanent condition on future battlefields while considering incorporating both offensive and defensive irregular warfare into joint doctrine and training and leader development programs.

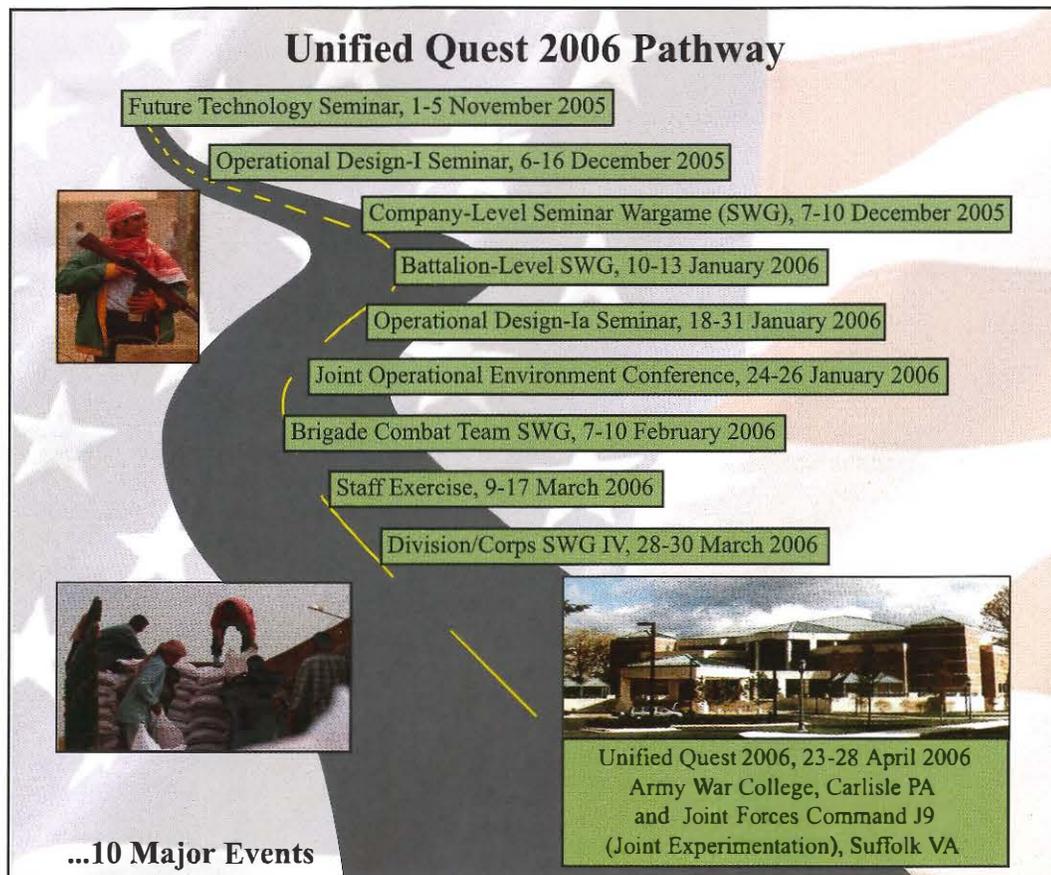
Implications

For the Army, the observations clearly point to a requirement to engage adversaries in all four future security challenges (irregular, traditional, disruptive and catastrophic) simultaneously as part of a joint, interagency, multinational force. Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, the nation's emphasis on homeland security is not only warranted but required. Yet, homeland security alone will not protect future U.S. national security interests. The ability of future adversaries to predominantly engage the national will via irregular, catastrophic or disruptive means dictates the necessity for a full-spectrum-capable force. Moreover, the ability to think in a more holistic view of the operational environment and effectively plan/leverage the capabilities of other nations, NGOs and IOs is paramount to future long-term success.

Unified Quest 2006

The Army Chief of Staff's guidance for the Fiscal Year 2006 Future Warfare Study Plan is to break free from the gravitational pull of current doctrine and concepts and to use Unified Quest as a professional discussion forum focused on refining proficiencies in irregular warfare.

Unified Quest 2006 Pathway



Source: HQ U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command

UQ06 will build upon last year's observations at the strategic level and focus on operational/tactical questions in a bottoms-up exploration of irregular warfare. The series of events comprising UQ06 will include smaller, quick-turn events incorporating the Army's best subject matter experts in irregular warfare—company and field grade officers with recent operational experience in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the second year of the two-year study, UQ06 will address the following issues:

- **Irregular Warfare:** Refine concepts and capabilities required at each echelon of command for addressing irregular challenges and chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive, or CBRNE (catastrophic)-capable adversaries in complex environments.
- **Strategic Agility:** Explore the future force's ability to rapidly deploy, employ, sustain and redeploy capabilities in geographically separated and environmentally diverse regions and how those forces transition from one type or phase of an operation to another, regardless of location.

- **Generating Force:** Identify implications for the Army Force Generation model and for the generating force in supporting the operating force.
- **Operational Design:** Explore definitions of success and alternative approaches for the design of campaigns and operations for addressing irregular challenges in complex environments.
- **Interagency, Multinational and Nongovernmental Operations:** Explore the need for expanded integration and participation of U.S. government, multinational and nongovernmental organizations.
- **Homeland Defense:** Identify the implications from addressing irregular challenges simultaneously with defending the Homeland.

Conclusion

Even as the Army adapts for the exigencies of the current conflict, planning for the conflicts of the future is already underway. The Unified Quest series provides a start to refining the concepts, doctrine and organizations that ensure the Army's success in joint operations well into the long war. The future is now.

**The Unified Quest Campaign of Learning:
Preparing the Force for Future Operations**