

# **Transforming an army in combat**

W C Mayville

## **INTRODUCTION**

The military coalition that invaded Iraq in March 2003 was arguably the most militarily powerful formation fielded in recent history. The crushing defeat of the world's tenth largest military in 14 days, the seizure of the enemy's capital and the collapse of a regime during the early phases of Operation Iraqi Freedom were significant accomplishments. The purpose of this paper is not to examine the early success of the campaign, but rather to report on the United States Army's response and adaptation to the challenges it has faced in the period from the initial invasion to the present.

This paper will look at the efforts of an extremely competent, offensive force to transform itself while in contact with the enemy. Transformation means a wide range of things to members of the profession of arms. For the US Army, transformation has meant more than the acquisition of new equipment and technology. It is the recognition that the character of warfare itself has been transformed by sundry political, social and strategic factors. It is here, in the context of new-found political, social and strategic conditions, that the US Army is discovering new ways to equip, organise, train and develop leaders to be more effective in combat and to wage war in a manner that wins the peace.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENTS**

The US Army conducts self-assessments using a framework consisting of six elements: doctrine, organisation, training, leader development,

materiel and soldiers. These critical components are interrelated and indeed parts of a whole rather than separate and distinct entities. Shortcomings in one area have a clear impact on the others, just as the efficiencies and improvements of one have benefits for all.

Like any professional military organisation, the US Army relies on doctrine to frame its approach. The use of doctrine is not intended to stifle initiative or dictate strict, dogmatic prescriptions for organisational behaviour. It is, however, intended to shape the conceptual groundwork for sound operations and is always evolving.

For example, airland battle doctrine and its evolution to operational doctrine were born of lessons learned in the Cold War and resulted in the way the army conducted operations in Operation Desert Storm and, to some extent, the initial invasion of Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom. That doctrine focused primarily on high-intensity combat. However, in the subsequent battles against insurgents and networked extremists, the army identified the need for and developed a new doctrinal manual on counter-insurgency. The new manual is illustrative for several reasons. First, the fact that counter-insurgency was not covered in doctrinal manuals as recently as 2003 provides insight into the lack of emphasis placed on this type of warfare prior to Iraqi Freedom. The second, and more important, factor is how it was developed. Realising the doctrinal void that existed, the US Army and US Marine Corps convened a joint working group of military and educational experts and developed new counter-insurgency doctrine in one-fifth of the time normally allocated to a major doctrinal effort. The value of applying relevant tactics and the ability to adapt them rapidly during a conflict is an important transformational characteristic of the US Army today.

Similarly, while army formations were organised optimally for a 300 km penetration of Iraq and the destruction of the enemy's Republican Guard Divisions, following the initial invasion it was apparent that organisational changes were required for the security and stability operations the army now faces. The US Army has broadened its range of core competencies to address stability and support tasks while maintaining its offensive capabilities against a committed enemy force. It has sought to double the size of Special Operations forces and placed enabling forces such as military police, civil affairs and psychological operations forces in each of its brigade combat teams. Its doctrine encourages tailorable formations against diverse threats and environments and enhanced tools for ground commanders at the tactical level.

## **TRAINING AND LEADERSHIP**

A rotational method for providing units to Iraqi Freedom affords the army the opportunity to rapidly adjust its training methodology and emphasis for units preparing to deploy. Cultural training and basic language skills are now part of unit preparation. A larger portion of small unit training is dedicated to dismounted patrolling in an urban environment. Leader development programmes retain essential war-fighting skills, but increasingly seek to integrate lessons in reconstruction and public service capacity. The realities of the media on the battlefield, and its potential to impact operations positively or negatively, are accounted for in both education and exercises. Targeting methodologies and processes have been modified to encompass non-lethal capabilities and focus on assessments that result in organisational learning and new solutions to non- standard target sets. Essentially, commanders and the staffs are taught to adapt to their environment and to factor social and cultural aspects into their military decision-making processes.

Counter-insurgency warfare requires leaders who are adaptive, confident and well studied in their environment. Of the major transformational enterprises underway in the US Army, there is none more pronounced than the transformation in combat leader development. Officer and non-commissioned officer schools have been modified to incorporate counter-insurgency as a main focus. At every level of officer development, from pre-commissioning education to senior leader education at service and national level war colleges, leaders are challenged with new insights and ideas about recent changes in the characteristics of warfare. Education programmes and forums include inter-agency participation with representatives from various governmental agencies such as the FBI and the Departments of State, Agriculture, Treasury and Homeland Defense providing valuable perspectives.

## **MAIN EQUIPMENT**

The army has also transformed its equipment acquisition and soldier training programmes. The lethality of major weapons systems such as the M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle and M1 Abrams Main Battle Tank in conventional operations is a matter of record. These systems have also proved themselves extremely effective in urban terrain in both stability and security roles as

well as in high-intensity operations. In addition to retaining and sustaining these weapons systems, the army has developed and acquired capabilities in response to new threats and requirements. Vehicle and individual soldier protective equipment has been greatly improved and advanced technologies employed to counter the significant threat posed by improvised explosive devices. The development of an innovative material solution to equipping individual soldiers, the Rapid Fielding Initiative, was also undertaken. This initiative circumvents acquisition bureaucracy and purchases the latest available 'off-the-shelf' technology and distributes it directly to soldiers in the field. Online language courses have been purchased and implemented to mitigate the cultural gap presented by a shortage of qualified linguists. Great improvements in command and control and situational awareness have been attained through the acquisition and fielding of unmanned aerial vehicles and improved computer technologies. These are but a few of the numerous ongoing efforts to improve precision, performance and intelligence qualities that are organisational imperatives for the current and future battlefield.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF SOLDIERS**

The last and most important aspect of the US Army's transformation while in contact is soldier development. It is essential that the army produce and develop soldiers who are lethal, disciplined and well trained and who possess core values that reflect the citizens of their country and their national values. Exhaustive efforts are undertaken to ensure the individual warriors are not only well trained in specific skills associated with their specialty, but also that they are mentally, physically and morally prepared for the tasks they are expected to perform in combat. To this end, cultural training is conducted to increase understanding of the environment and of the people they will interact with on a daily basis. In addition, values and ethics are reinforced and embedded into all training events. The goal is to create individual soldiers who are agile thinkers with the confidence and competence required to react to roadside bombs, hostile crowds and the local populace with professionalism and effectiveness.

## **CONCLUSION**

Rarely, if ever, has a military organisation been perfect at the beginning of an operation. The realistic expectation is that it gets things basically

correct at the onset of hostilities, but also possesses the capability to adapt faster than its opponent as the conflict progresses. The nature of the current global 'war on terror', as well as future regional conflicts, will require armies and other military services to transform while remaining in contact with the enemy. The force that can assess itself and its operations while transforming across a wide range of activities and capabilities will be the one that places its soldiers in a position of advantage on the battlefield and ultimately achieves its desired end state – winning the peace.