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Strategic Landpower for the Company Commander

Leading the U.S. Army into the 21st Century

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In Iraq and Afghanistan, a generation of officers grew up solving strategic dilemmas at the company and platoon levels. Well-versed in the requirements and responsibilities of an Army at war, this generation must guide the Army into an ever-evolving and uncertain future. In order to navigate through the complexities in front of us, the Army needs capable, adaptable leaders now more than ever who champion the Army's strategic purpose and goals. With that, one of the most important discussions over the next few years will be how company commanders understand and implement the Army's central role in strategic landpower.

Over the last two years, the Army has put a lot of great people to work examining every facet of our training, doctrine, and warfighting capability. We did not do this to examine where we stand today. Rather, all of this effort was aimed at figuring out two things: what kind of Army we will need to meet future challenges, and what we have to do to build that Army even as we continue fighting in Afghanistan and remain engaged throughout the world. Much of what we concluded is available in a single brief document – *TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-0, The U.S. Army Capstone Concept*, <http://www.tradoc.army.mil/tpubs/pams/tp525-3-0.pdf>. If you have not read it yet – please do so.

We won't summarize an already brief document in this article. Instead, we will discuss how the newest and most vital ideas relate to the execution level – the company. While things have been written about strategic maneuver, nothing has been written about its application at the tactical level. Although some ideas may be new, much of what must be done remains the same – training, standards, and understanding the human environment. This is a result of the unchanging character of the Army's basic strategic problem and mission. As in prior eras, as part of the joint force, our Army must retain its ability to protect U.S. national interests, execute any mission assigned to us, and win on any battlefield around the world.

Given our national strategy, we are required to field an Army capable of waging war decisively. Fielding a ready and responsive force with sufficient depth and resilience to wage sustained land combat is central to our mission, and that force must be able to conduct both combined arms maneuver and wide area security. A ready, robust, responsive force deters adversaries, reassures allies, and, when necessary, compels our enemies to change their behavior. Maintaining such a force requires high levels of adaptability throughout each echelon of the Army. Only Soldiers with tactical skill and operational flexibility can effectively respond to changing tactical situations in support of our nation's strategic goals and interests.

This is where the company commanders fit into the concept of strategic landpower. Much like company grade officers did in Iraq and Afghanistan, the company commander of the future must be mentally agile enough to thrive within the parameters of mission command. Developing leaders who can do so, while providing clear task and purpose to their subordinates, will be critical to the success of any mission across the range of military operations. Effective Army commanders, including those at the company level, do not use fiscal constraints as an excuse for failing to develop the best possible mix of training, equipment, and regional expertise they can within their formations. Rather, they motivate their people and guide their units in a way that makes optimal use of available resources to create adaptive, effective forces.

Our Army has three primary and interconnected roles: prevent conflict, shape the international environment and win the nation's wars. The company commander has important responsibilities in each of these.

Prevent Conflict

It is prudent here to define what a conflict is. Since the term gets thrown around a lot and attached to a lot of different situations, it is easy to misunderstand the doctrinal meaning. Conflict is an armed struggle or clash between organized groups within a nation or between nations in order to achieve limited political or military objectives. Irregular forces frequently make up the majority of enemy combatants we face now, and may continue to do so in the future. Conflict is often protracted, geographically confined, and constrained in the level of violence. Each one also holds the potential to escalate into major combat operations.

Many of the contingencies to which the United States responded militarily in the past 50 years have been appropriately defined as “conflicts.” The same can reasonably be expected in the future, but with the addition of cyberspace.

As was true during the Cold War, many of our greatest successes in the future will not occur on the battlefield; rather, maintaining peace may be our greatest achievement. This will be no easy task, as global tensions and instability increase in ungoverned or weakly-governed spaces around the world. History has taught us that without a capable, highly trained land force the United States has little influence in many of those spaces. That land force, our Army, must remain the best equipped, best trained and most combat ready force in the world if it is to have the strategic effect we seek. That readiness is built from the bottom up.

This is the first critical point where company commanders must help shape the future. As owners of the training schedule, commanders have the critical role in developing team, squad, and platoon skills. Commanders ensure that broadening training like language, geographical and cultural familiarization is done effectively, in a rigorous manner. Soldiers from the generation that fought in Iraq and Afghanistan will not be satisfied with training focused on artificial scenarios and made-up adversaries, so their commanders need to be innovative about preparing well-coordinated, realistic training. Subordinates must be challenged, and they have to feel their challenges have a direct linkage to future operations. In order not to lose 12 years of combat-proven leader development, company grade officers must find a balance between building an Army prepared for the range of military operations and succumbing to pressure to “get back to the way it used to be.”

Unfortunately, possession of such a trained and ready force is useless if it cannot affect regions where trouble is brewing. As units reposition from overseas bases and return to the United States, it becomes more crucial than ever for the Army to adopt an expeditionary mindset and improve its expeditionary capability. To do so the Army is aligning units to specific geographical regions and arranging them into scalable and tailored expeditionary force packages that meet the needs of the Joint Force Commander across the range of military operations. In short, our Army will be better postured to generate strategic influence anywhere in the world, and as part of the joint force, deter aggression.

In this construct, company commanders must conduct operational environment training specific to their region. Becoming familiar with the people, cultures, and languages of the region in which one's unit will operate is critical to the success of a CONUS based Army.

Conventional-force companies learned much over the past 12 years as they executed missions historically reserved for Special Forces. War is fundamentally a human endeavor, and understanding the people involved is critically important. Company Commanders cannot now ignore the hard-won lessons of their predecessors by ignoring one of the Special Forces' key tasks of understanding the operational environment. Those who meet this intent and enforce standards during this training will ensure we pay those lessons forward to the next generation.

Shape the Operational Environment

During peacetime, the Army is continuously engaged in shaping the global environment to promote stability and partner nation capabilities. We do this for several reasons, the most important of which is maintaining peace in pursuance of American national security interests. Where conflict has already broken out, engagement helps keep it contained and may even lead to a peaceful resolution. By helping to build partner capacity and trust, forward engaged Army units greatly add to regional and global stability. Moreover, by building strong relationships of mutual trust we facilitate access and set the conditions for success in any future combined operation in a particular region or country.

But what are shaping operations, and how are they executed at the company level? Shaping operations are defined as those operations, occurring at any echelon, that create or preserve conditions for the success of the decisive operation. Thus, engagement by regionally aligned forces positively shapes the environment in which the Army operates throughout the range of military operations. This aligns with the notion of the "strategic corporal," which recognizes that in the information age the actions of individuals and small groups can have widespread impact well beyond what was intended at the time. Every action has a reaction, and it is necessary for junior officers to be aware of the role their Soldiers and unit play in the overall strategic goals of our nation.

As part of regionally aligned shaping operations, the Army will employ a careful mix of rotational and forward-deployed forces, develop relationships with foreign militaries, and

conduct recurring training exercises with foreign partners to demonstrate the nation's enduring commitment to allies and friends. Where we share mutually beneficial interests with an ally, the Army enhances that partner's self-defense capacity and improves its ability to serve as a capable member of a future military coalition. More capable allies generate a stabilizing influence in their region, and tend to reduce the need for American military interventions over time.

Shaping operations do not end with planned training engagements by forward deployed units. Other actions the units or even small groups of individual Soldiers take can have a shaping effect. Those actions will run the gamut from brigade - or division - sized assistance after a natural disaster to a single act of kindness to a foreign student in an Army school who later rises to high levels in his nation's armed forces. Regardless of the specific activities that have a shaping effect we conduct, all should convey to our intended audiences the clear message that while we are committed to peace, our nation protects its friends and defends its interests. Instilling this understanding among our Soldiers and junior NCOs is one of the vital roles the company grade officer plays in the execution of strategic landpower.

But there is a caveat. What may be the standard for us is not necessarily useful or welcomed with our host nation partners. So, shaping also entails tailoring our delivery of security assistance to our counterparts in ways appropriate for their culture and military capabilities. Company commanders can gain great success here by applying key interpersonal skills to know, understand, and be humble when dealing with officers, NCOs, and Soldiers from other armies.

Win the Nation's Wars

Despite our best efforts to shape a stable global environment and prevent conflict, violence is likely to remain endemic to the human condition. As it has been said, "Only the dead have seen the end of war." While we do everything possible to prevent the outbreak of war, we must ensure there never will be a day when the U.S. Army is not ready to fight and win wars in defense of our nation.

What is a war? Historically, war has been defined as a conflict carried out by force of arms, either between nations or between parties within a nation. However, as we consider hostile acts in cyberspace, the definition of war and acts of war will continue to evolve. For example, large-scale cyber attacks against government operations or critical infrastructure – such as in the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict – can reasonably be considered acts of war. Leveraging the technological savvy of today’s Soldiers requires leaders with an engaged interest in their development. This will require junior leaders from the same generation who are as adept at leader development as they are technologically competent.

To defend our Nation, the Army must maintain the capacity to conduct strategically decisive land operations anywhere in the world. Though we will always conduct such operations as part of a joint force, we also acknowledge that war is a clash of wills that requires the ethical application of violence to compel change in human behavior. Here, Company Commanders make a dramatic contribution to the application of strategic landpower by being tactically and technically proficient in the execution of combined arms maneuver and wide-area security. Without successful tactical execution, the best strategic concepts are doomed to failure.

The U.S. Army Capstone Concept lays out the details of what capabilities the Army must sustain, as well as provides some guidance on how the force may be employed in the future. But it all boils down to one crucial point; an Army that cannot win on the battlefield is of little worth to the security of the nation. As everyone is aware, we are facing austere times ahead. This fiscal reality cannot be an excuse for not doing our duty or losing sight of our purpose. In the final analysis this country will one day - maybe soon - ask us to deploy to some distant land, close with and destroy an enemy, and then build a secure and lasting peace. Our Army is uniquely qualified to ensure the training necessary to make those things happen, thanks to the strength of our NCO Corps. Commanders must leverage the experience of their senior NCOs and find creative ways to properly train the fundamentals, despite resource constraints. We’ve successfully done it before in our Army, and we are counting on our young leaders to do it again.

Conclusion

It was often platoon and company leadership who took the lead solving strategic issues in Iraq and Afghanistan. It will continue to be platoon and company leaders who keep the Army

the well-trained and globally-responsive force our Nation needs to deter our adversaries, protect our friends, and defeat our enemies in the 21st Century. The U.S. Army must have company commanders who understand Strategic Landpower and their role in it. Seek out opportunities to ingrain your training events within the framework of Strategic Landpower. Write articles on your branch's professional journal discussing the impacts of Strategic Landpower for your specialty. You can find the Strategic Landpower White Paper on the TRADOC internet homepage at http://www.arcic.army.mil/app_Documents/Strategic-Landpower-White-Paper-06MAY2013.pdf , and on Company Commander discussion forums. This White Paper is the primary reference for Strategic Landpower concepts and the one jointly approved by the Army Chief of Staff, the Marine Corps Commandant, and the Commander of United States Special Operations Command.

It is the responsibility of senior Army leaders to set the conditions to make you, and our Army, successful. Your senior leaders appreciate what you do every day. These will be challenging, but exciting times, and I thank you for your service and sacrifice as we move towards making the Army of 2020 and beyond the best in the world.