

Chief of Armor's Hatch: Transitioning to Large-Scale Combat Operations

We are in the midst of a transition to large-scale combat operations (LSCO). We are working with the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, KS, on their study of LSCO to understand what this transition means for our branch in the future. While the Maneuver Center of Excellence has specifically examined reconnaissance and security (R&S) at echelons above brigade and brigade combat team (BCT) lethality and mobility as part of this study, there are implications across the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities and policy spectrum for our branch.

In April of this year, we conducted an R&S tabletop exercise focused on R&S capabilities and formations required at BCT and division level in support of LSCO. Two of our central findings were: (1) multi-domain-capable R&S formations and capabilities at echelon enable decision-making, shaping with deep fires, and the tempo and synchronization necessary for LSCO; and (2) a robust and capable ground-based R&S force develops the situation by forcing the enemy to commit forces and assets – disclosing his plan and capabilities earlier than he might otherwise intend. What does this mean for us? We must have the capability to understand, protect against and leverage effects in all domains while simultaneously retaining the ability to operate in a degraded mode with traditional ground-based formations.

These findings also have implications for other formations. We need traditional formations with multi-domain capabilities in the future operating environment. We must be able to operate on advanced satellite-communications-based navigation and computer systems but rapidly transition to a compass and map when required. We need advanced surveillance and reconnaissance systems extending our operational reach while retaining the only all-weather, all-conditions sensor we have: the scout.

What does this mean for our doctrine, organization, training and leadership and education? We need to adapt our doctrine to better account for operations across all domains, including techniques we have forgotten. We need to reorganize formations with added subject-matter expertise to enable understanding of the operational environment across all domains. This won't mean that every battalion or brigade has organic capability in every domain, but it does mean that these units will be able to understand, protect against and request effects in all domains. Maneuver and live-fire training must incorporate the effects of electronic warfare, space and cyber, including the steps to defend against them. Professional military education will require a more robust incorporation of multi-domain effects and knowledge of planning and synchronization for massing these effects.

We will continue to study the implications of this transition with the other centers of excellence in deliberate fashion with tabletop exercises, simulations and experiments. We can also learn a lot from our history on this topic and from current conflicts around the world. I am interested in your thoughts on this topic, especially from those of you currently on or recently returned from operational deployments. Please continue to contribute to the professional dialogue on this topic and what it means for our branch through this magazine and other means – it is important to our future.

Forge the Thunderbolt!

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Acronym Quick-Scan

BCT – brigade combat team

LSCO – large-scale combat operations

R&S – reconnaissance and security