



RIDING INTO THE FUTURE: EXPLORING CAVALRY'S ROLE IN THE DEEP FIGHT

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Service Paper

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AIM

1. This paper aims to make recommendations to the Canadian Army (CA) towards improving its ability to integrate force elements into the divisional deep manoeuvre space as part of large-scale combat operations (LSCO). It will do so by examining the changing character of the modern battlespace and outlining ongoing allied initiatives to perform deep operations. Subsequently, it will consider the utility of similar CA trials, centered on medium cavalry with improved capabilities and critical enablers. While this paper will not offer explicit structures, it aims to provoke further conversation by outlining certain force elements and capabilities that could be grouped to augment medium cavalry for a similar CA initiative.

INTRODUCTION

2. Developments in military technology and tactics during recent conflicts have forced armies to consider new concepts and structures to achieve success. This development is particularly evident in the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK), where they have commenced theoretical and practical studies towards modernizing their doctrine and force structures. Certainly, the importance of combined-joint integration and synchronizing effects across multiple domains have been important overarching themes, which form the foundation of these studies. However, the attention on cavalry's potential utility towards enabling tactical success within these studies can be seen as somewhat unexpected, particularly from a CA perspective.

3. While cavalry's employment within the CA has been a topic of relative uncertainty over the past decade, its potentially restored relevance should not come as a surprise. Theoretically, cavalry's inherent flexibility gained through mobility, firepower and protection makes a compelling case for valued force employment within LSCO. Despite this potential, cavalry's role in the future fight risks being misinterpreted or neglected if its areas of responsibility remain undefined. Similarly, its effectiveness can be easily overstated if failing to appropriately emphasize its reliance on enablers to achieve its desired effect. As such, the value proposition of cavalry to the CA must be realistic and harmonized with current force structure limitations and procurement. Finally, future operating concepts and force structures endorsed at the CA level must be tested to enable further development.

DISCUSSION

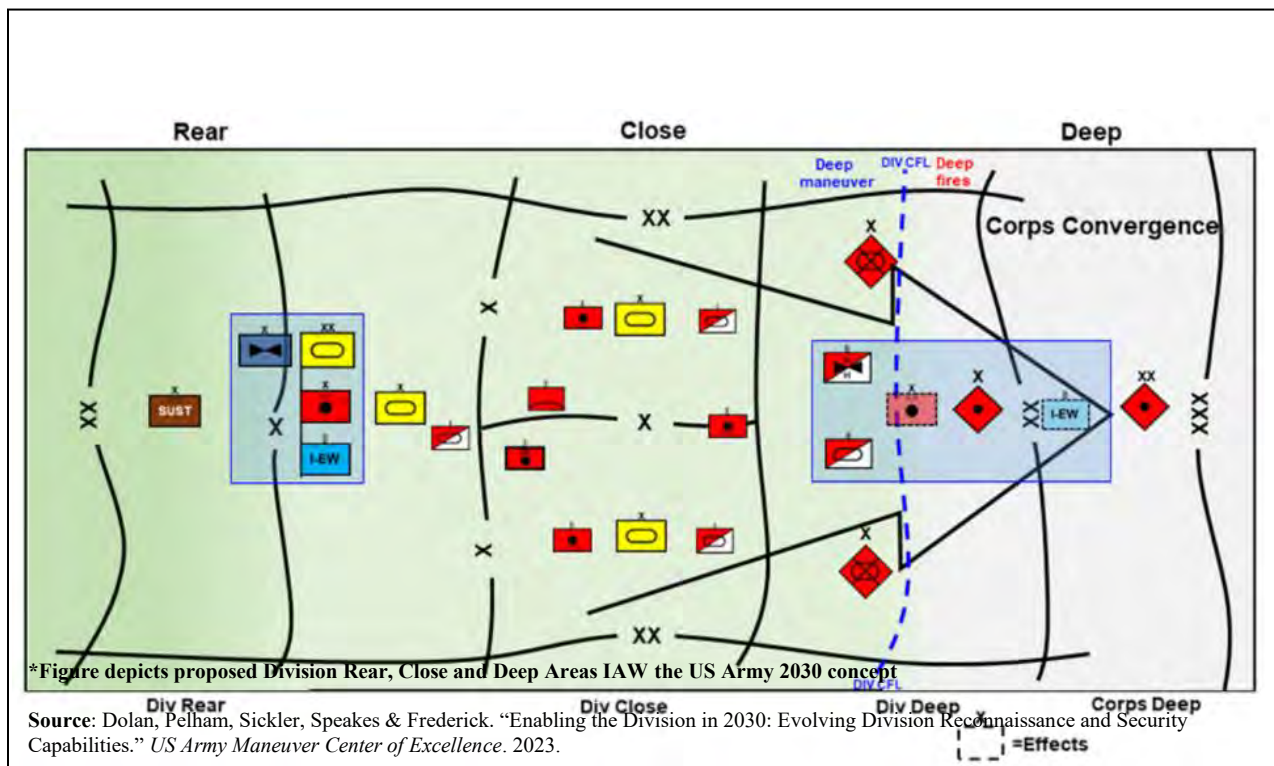
A Changing Battlespace

4. The increasing threat of western militaries becoming involved in LSCO, along with the changing nature of combat has placed pressure on western militaries to evolve. Ongoing conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Yemen, Gaza, and others, underline this point. However, the Russian-Ukraine conflict arguably provides the most sufficient scale and level of complexity for the

formulation of relevant deductions. In this case, both sides have deployed and altered similar technologies for prolonged periods with the aim of defeating their enemy at a very large scale.¹

5. Undeniably, the prevalence of the “deep fight” has been a major lesson gleaned from this conflict. The close correlation between intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms and fires has led to significantly reduced timelines between target identification and strike.² Additionally, synchronizing fires to create windows of opportunity have enabled the Ukrainian Armed Forces to execute deep strikes, allowing them to attack Russian high value targets.³ Unmanned aerial surveillance (UAS), indirect fires, and electronic warfare (EW) platforms have played major roles in achieving success in this respect.⁴ Given the importance in producing increasingly rapid effects within this evolving battlespace, the requirement for agile ground forces with enhanced survivability is vital towards achieving success. This is particularly important when considering how to effectively integrate ground forces into the deep fight.⁵

6. As defined in *Land Operations*, deep operations extend the area of battle with regards to time and space and generally aim to shape the close battle by disrupting the enemy. Generally,



¹ Harry Halem. “Ukraine’s Lessons for Future Combat: Unmanned Aerial Systems and Deep Strike.” *The US Army War College Quarterly*: Volume 53, Article 4, October 20, 2023: p.23.

² *Ibid.* p.22.

³ Halem. “Ukraine’s Lessons for Future Combat: Unmanned Aerial Systems and Deep Strike.” p.27.

⁴ Rebecca Bensen. *Trends in Warfighting and Implications for Canada*. Briefing delivered to JCSP 50 on February 3, 2024.

⁵ Nathan A. Jennings, Amos C. Fox, Adam L. Taliaferro, David W. Griffith, Kyle T. Trottier. “The Return of Cavalry: A Multi-Domain Battle Study.” *US Army Maneuver Centre of Excellence*. 2017.

https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/09/08/the_return_of_cavalry_a_multi-domain_battle_study_112261.html.

the extent of which a commander can execute deep operations is dependent on their means to gain information and engaging relevant targets.⁶ Similarly, *US Field Manual 3-0 Operations* describes deep operations as tactical actions “out of direct contact with friendly forces” which aim to shape future operations in the close area and protect the friendly rear area.⁷ While it clearly outlines the relevance of certain capabilities such as ISR, long-range fires, EW and cyber, it also highlights the importance of ground forces possessing the ability to conduct reconnaissance, interdiction or deception as an important component to deep operations.⁸ Importantly, ground forces need to be carefully structured with inherent capabilities and integrated with joint enablers to ensure they can reinforce all other action in deep operations and the broader multi-domain battle.⁹

Allied Initiatives Related to Deep Operations

7. Ongoing initiatives from some of Canada’s closest allies have underlined the importance of development regarding approaches to deep operations. For example, the British Army has formed the 1st Deep Reconnaissance Strike (1 DRS) Brigade Combat Team (BCT) which combines cavalry, artillery, signals intelligence and EW with the goal of enhancing their deep-strike capability.¹⁰ Armed with the new AJAX fighting vehicle, 1 DRS BCT can leverage multiple sensors to identify the enemy, and quickly manoeuvre to strike the enemy with direct fire, supported by integral artillery and long-range multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS). By weighting these capabilities forward, the intent is to degrade the enemy before it is engaged in close operations by the division’s main body.¹¹ First introduced in July 2022, this new formation took part in its first major field exercise in October 2023. Despite some ensuing positive rhetoric regarding this concept, there has been some internal criticism regarding the use of cavalry in the absence of a sufficient anti-armour capability.¹² While some of the cavalry units within 1 DRS BCT currently possess this capability, this will undoubtedly be a major factor that needs to be

⁶ Department of National Defence. *Land Operations*. Kingston, ON. Army Publishing Office, 2008: p. 4-16 & 4-17.

⁷ *Field Manual 3-0 Operations*. Washington, D.C. Department of the Army, October 1, 2022: p. 3-29.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Amos C. Fox. “Looking Toward the Future: the U.S. Cavalry’s Role in Multi-Domain Battle.” *US Army Maneuver Centre of Excellence*. 2017.

¹⁰ Andrew Salerno-Garthwaite. “Agile approach: British Army Deep Recce Strike.” *Global Defence Technology*. August, 2023.

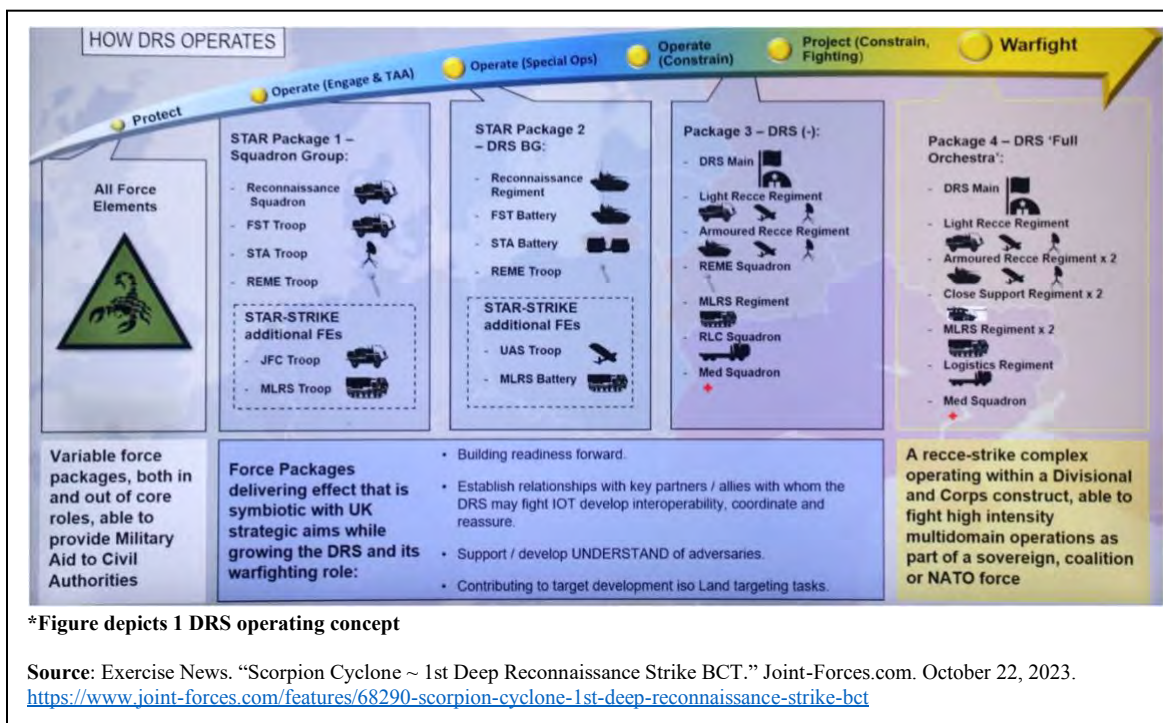
<https://defence.nridigital.com/global-defence-technology-aug23/revolutionising-nato-s-land-forces-the-british-armys-agile-approach-with-deep-re>

¹¹ Exercise News. “Scorpion Cyclone ~ 1st Deep Reconnaissance Strike BCT.” *Joint-Forces.com*. October 22, 2023. <https://www.joint-forces.com/features/68290-scorpion-cyclone-1st-deep-reconnaissance-strike-bct>

¹² Martin A. Smith. “The STRIKE Brigade: The Army’s Battlecruiser for the 21st Century?” *The British Army Review* 178, Summer 2020: p.36.

continuously reassessed moving forward.

8. The US Army has taken a comparable approach with the Army 2030 framework, where divisions have resurfaced as the Army's most significant tactical echelon operating within LSCO. In response to a major gap identified through the US Army's Combined Arms Center LSCO study in 2019, 1st Cavalry Division was tasked to participate in a two-year reconnaissance and security (R&S) force design development trial in October 2022. To specifically test its R&S



capability, the 1st Cavalry Division formed its division cross-domain task force (D-CDTF).¹³ Similar to the development of the British Army's 1 DRS BCT, the D-CDTF is centered on the armoured division cavalry squadron (ADCS), which incorporates additional enablers to provide time and manoeuvre space to the division, allowing it to exploit windows of opportunity.¹⁴ Specific enablers within the D-CDTF include an inherent intelligence and electronic warfare (IEW) battalion and an air cavalry squadron (ACS) with close support from division artillery and a combat aviation brigade (CAB). In essence, the combination of its three inherent elements

¹³ Dolan, Pelham, Sickler, Speakes & Frederick. "Enabling the Division in 2030: Evolving Division Reconnaissance and Security Capabilities." *US Army Maneuver Center of Excellence*. 2023.

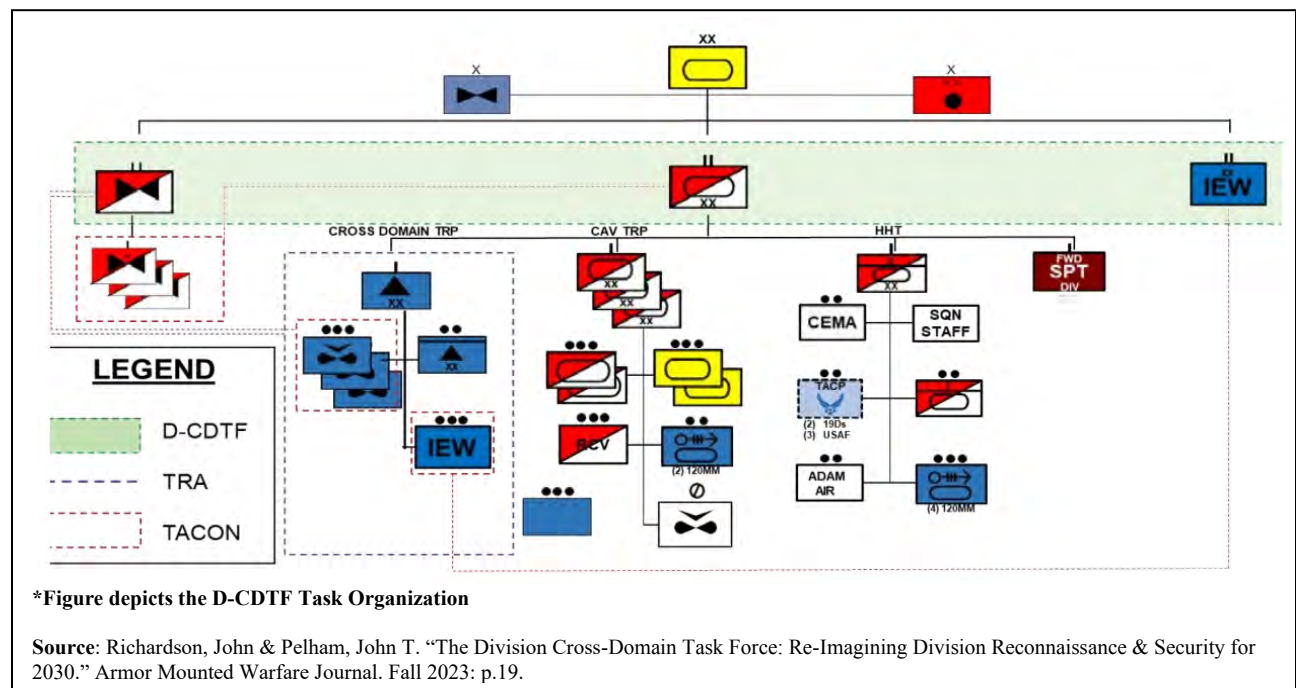
¹⁴ John Richardson and John T. Pelham. "The Division Cross-Domain Task Force: Re-Imagining Division Reconnaissance & Security for 2030." *Armor Mounted Warfare Journal*. Fall 2023: p. 18.

combined with the division-level attack aviation and artillery enables D-CDTF to effectively sense, shape and secure through several domains.¹⁵

9. Within the D-CDTF, the ADCS has a critical role to play by not only providing the Division with an all-weather R&S capability, but also allows to D-CDTF to fight for information, secure terrain and allow the division to engage the enemy on its own terms.¹⁶ Maybe even more importantly in the near term, the D-CDTF serves as an excellent testing area for new structures, technologies and capabilities that are directly linked to US Army 2030 and 2040 initiatives. A company sized element within the ACDS is solely purposed to receive, incorporate and employ new equipment and technology.¹⁷ This assists the US Army in identifying how it will implement modern equipment and create the necessary force structures required for its employment.¹⁸

Canadian Army Considerations – Cavalry’s Relevance

10. If a CA project resembling the trials conducted by its allies were to be initiated, it would be impossible to execute it at a similar level of magnitude. *Advancing with Purpose: The CA*



Modernization Strategy, highlights the brigade group as “the level at which the CA trains to fight

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Todd Smith. “The Army’s Transformation Begins with These New Units.” *Army Times*. April 11, 2022. <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2022/04/11/the-armys-transformation-begins-with-these-new-units/>.

¹⁷ Dolan, Pelham, Sickler, Speakes & Frederick. “Enabling the Division in 2030: Evolving Division Reconnaissance and Security Capabilities.” *US Army Maneuver Center of Excellence*. 2023.

¹⁸ Harry Halem. “Ukraine’s Lessons for Future Combat: Unmanned Aerial Systems and Deep Strike.” *The US Army War College Quarterly*: Volume 53, Article 4, October 20, 2023: p.30.

in order to execute pan-domain operations.”¹⁹ Additionally, it also states that the CA will achieve interoperability with the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand by 2027, specifically focusing on the brigade operating within a multinational division.²⁰ Consequently, any comparable CA experimentation would likely be focused at the brigade level, with an enabled battle group tasked to operate in the divisional deep manoeuvre space. Due to the US and UK’s current reliance on cavalry to operate within this space, this invites the CA to explore a similar employment concept for its cavalry.

11. In 2022, the Director Royal Canadian Armoured Corps (RCAC) outlined cavalry’s role by highlighting its requirement “to shape and define the battlefield by informing and protecting the commander’s manoeuvre.”²¹ This bears a striking resemblance to the missions of both the D-CDTF (US) and the 1 DRS BCT (UK), bolstering the conceptual relevance of cavalry being at the core of any future CA concepts regarding the deep fight. However, it is important to distinguish the specific type of cavalry best suited to perform this role.

12. Proposals distinguishing the categories of cavalry within the RCAC have recently differentiated heavy, medium and light cavalry as separate classifications that prioritize protection, firepower and mobility in distinct ways. Heavy cavalry’s linkage to the Leopard 2 platform makes its identity relatively clear-cut, but the difference between medium and light cavalry from a CA standpoint, is not as obvious. While some argue that the key difference is related to weight, others emphasize firepower as being the defining factor.²² Regardless of this debate, both medium and light cavalry will require some inherent anti-armour capability for deep operations. Canada’s procurement announcement of new portable anti-armour missile systems may be a step in the right direction, provided there are an adequate number of systems allocated to the RCAC for employment.²³

13. It is also encouraging that there has been development within the RCAC towards broadening the roles of its medium and light cavalry units. While continuing to focus on the reconnaissance and tactical security tasks that dominated its role in Afghanistan, the RCAC has outlined the requirement for medium and light cavalry to also execute more overt tasks, such as pursuit, raids and penetrations.²⁴ Given the current situation in the Ukrainian-Russian War, the employment of medium cavalry in this capacity is not unreasonable. While there have been situations limiting its employment possibilities, there have also been circumstances where defences are poorly prepared, shallow and accompanied by inadequate reserves and support

¹⁹ Department of National Defence. *Advancing with Purpose*. 4th ed. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Army HQ. December 2020: p. 17.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 47.

²¹ Robin Dove. “Armoured Corps Modernization: An Overview of the Cavalry Concept.” *The Canadian Army Journal* 19.3, 2022: p. 7.

²² Chris Hunt. “Defining Cavalry within the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps.” *The Canadian Army Journal* 19.3, 2022: p. 33.

²³ Government of Canada. “Minister Blair Announces Measures to Strengthen Canada’s Military Presence in Latvia.” *Department of National Defence*, December 15, 2023. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2023/12/minister-blair-announces-measures-to-strengthen-canadas-military-presence-in-latvia.html>.

²⁴ Bryce Simpson. “A Perspective on Cavalry: Re-Examining the Mounted Arm for the Future.” *The Canadian Army Journal* 19.3, 2022: p. 10.

elements.²⁵ Given the requirement to perform both reconnaissance tasks and aggressive direct fire roles, medium cavalry becomes an essential asset when attempting to maximize land-based effects in the deep fight.

14. This is not to say that heavy cavalry cannot be employed in deep operations. However, given its short supply within the CA, one would assume that it would typically be retained for the brigade's close fight. While heavy cavalry's employment in the deep manoeuvre space would bring additional complexities, especially considering extended lines of communication to perform maintenance and recovery, it is important not to discount its potential relevance provided a particular enemy threat scenario.

15. As seen through the US and UK concepts, the necessity to coordinate enablers becomes even more critical when operating in deep operations. The integration of capabilities such as artillery, UAS and EW, along with attack aviation have all been essential towards improving operating capability. For the CA, it is equally important for a medium cavalry unit to integrate critical enablers, albeit at a reduced scale in comparison to the US and UK examples. While some of these enablers are inherent within a Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group (CMBG), there are others that would likely have to be reorganized under the medium cavalry unit for training and subsequent force employment purposes.

16. For example, many of the enablers currently found within 6 Canadian Combat Support Brigade (6 CCSB) would bring increased advantages for medium cavalry units if grouped appropriately for deep operations. Elements such as medium range radar and the CU172 Blackjack would add an increased sense capacity, extending the battle groups operational range and target acquisition capability. Similarly, the capabilities held within 21 EW Regiment and Influence Activities Task Force would provide additional effects to enable success in the deep fight.²⁶ In short, the principal focus of employment of certain enablers inherent to 6 CCSB should be geared towards supporting at the battle group level, particularly a medium cavalry battle group focused on conducting deep operations.²⁷

17. While the appropriate grouping of existing capabilities is a step in the right direction, there are procurement initiatives that need to be initiated. This is not only relevant to improving a medium cavalry's survivability in the deep fight, but also ensuring the CMBG can effectively operate alongside its allies. In addition to an anti-armour capability, urgent operational requirements in Counter Uncrewed Aircraft Systems and Air Defence Systems have recently been identified by the Department of National Defence.²⁸ While these procurement initiatives bring a sense of cautious optimism, further acquisitions in capabilities such as a MLRS or self-

²⁵ Stephen Biddle. "Back in the Trenches: Why New Technology Hasn't Revolutionized Warfare in Ukraine." *Foreign Affairs*. August 10, 2023: p. 6.

²⁶ Government of Canada. "6 Canadian Combat Support Brigade." *Department of National Defence*. August 26, 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/army/corporate/5-canadian-division/6-canadian-combat-support-brigade.html>.

²⁷ Department of National Defence. *Advancing with Purpose*. 4th ed. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Army HQ. December 2020: p. 18.

²⁸ Government of Canada. "Minister Anand updates National Defence stakeholders on progress to modernize the Canadian Armed Forces for tomorrow's security challenges." *Department of National Defence*. March 9, 2023. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2023/03/minister-anand-updates-national-defence-stakeholders-on-progress-to-modernize-the-canadian-armed-forces-for-tomorrows-security-challenges.html>.

propelled artillery would allow the CMBG to be less reliant on allied support when attempting to operate within a multi-national division such as the D-CDTF (US) or the 1 DRS BCT (UK).

18. Despite the absence of the newest equipment, the US Army still attempts to improve its ability to execute LSCO. This includes considering the roles of divisions and brigades, adjusting their force structures and testing them in training.²⁹ Similarly, the CA does not have the luxury of waiting for updated equipment to begin development. The CA needs to initiate efforts to enhance force employment structures and institute deliberate training plans to improve their ability to fight and win the deep fight. This includes ensuring medium cavalry units train as battle groups within a brigade context, enabled to operate in the divisional deep manoeuvre space.

CONCLUSION

19. As key allies continue to develop their understanding of the modern battlespace, it is important that the CA considers how it can improve its ability to execute LSCO within a multi-national division. While the procurement of new capabilities and improving existing equipment is a critical part of this, it is also important to consider future force employment structures to facilitate interoperability. As observed through the US and UK initiatives, both armies have begun to seriously consider how to optimize effects in the deep fight. Coincidentally, medium cavalry has formed the bases of force structures utilized in these studies. Similarly, if the CA wishes to develop its ability to operate in the deep manoeuvre space in line with its allies, it should consider prioritizing the development of its medium cavalry. This includes prioritizing the allocation of newly procured equipment, developing potential force employment structures for medium cavalry led battle groups and implementing deliberate training as proof of concept. While there has been an abundance of narrative attempting to define medium cavalry in a Canadian context in recent years, it is likely that it finds its true value proposition by generating and coordinating effects in the deep fight, while allowing the remainder of the CMBG to retain its combat power for decisive operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

20. The CA should begin to develop a force employment concept for conducting deep operations. In line with its allies, its structure should be centered on a medium cavalry battle group combined with key enablers from 6 CCSB.

21. Medium cavalry units' inherent direct fire capability must be improved through appropriate resource allocation. This includes prioritization of newly acquired anti-armour systems, as well as increased allocation of Light Armoured Vehicles.

22. If pursued, a deliberate training plan for the enhanced medium cavalry battle group should be developed. This plan should include phased development towards operating in a brigade context and the gradual incorporation of external enablers. Training opportunities explored could include foreign exchanges with the US or UK, or reciprocal multi-national training events held in Canada.

²⁹ Todd Smith. "The Army's Transformation Begins with These New Units." *Army Times*. April 11, 2022. <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2022/04/11/the-armys-transformation-begins-with-these-new-units/>.

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