



## THE IMPACTS OF CAVALRY FORCE RE-DESIGN IN 2030

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### JCSP 50

#### Service Paper

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# THE IMPACTS OF CAVALRY FORCE RE-DESIGN IN 2030

## Aim

1. The future of cavalry operations within the U.S. Army is rapidly changing to keep pace with great power competition. While developing solutions based on a zero-growth Army, creating a requirement will reduce a capability in another.<sup>1</sup> We continue examining the anticipated changes in reconnaissance and security at the Division and Brigade levels, particularly within the Army Aimpoint Operating Concept 2030 context.<sup>2</sup> The current proposal to reduce organic cavalry squadrons across the United States Army needs further testing and examining as we determine what the future holds for Infantry and Stryker units. It will assess the importance of cavalry operations to Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) and the potential need to address critical personnel gaps and mitigate manning shortfalls. This paper will comprehensively examine the complexities surrounding the future of cavalry operations in the Army of 2030.

## Background

1. Threats posed by near-peer adversaries across multiple theaters of operations are rapidly changing the operating environment throughout every domain. Reconnaissance is critical for a commander to develop the situation and understand the terrain and enemy to make timely, accurate, and, most importantly, informed decisions.<sup>3</sup> As we transition to division-centric operations, we must look at how we maintain the ability to conduct information collection, survivability, and lethality to maintain flexibility in operations at the Brigade level, as they will remain a primary fighting force.<sup>4</sup>

2. It is undeniable that modern warfare requires mobility, speed, survivability, and flexibility. All things intrinsic to Armor or Cavalry units enable the commander to rapidly employ forces to close with and destroy an enemy.<sup>5</sup> Likely, before this has happened, a commander must conduct shaping fires and intelligence collection. The Cavalry Squadron, no matter the formation type, is the unit that will always answer the call to cross the line of departure before the main body to enable the completion or confirm a course of action for their higher headquarters.<sup>6</sup> Within the last 12 months, the Army has decided to initiate the de-activation of the Cavalry Squadron in Infantry Brigade Combat Teams in the continental United States. It is unsure how far this will spread, and currently, it is unknown when the new operating concept is expected to be fully operational. As we look into the Army of 2035, I feel it is essential to understand the strategic vision provided by the US Army Chief of Staff, GEN McConville, who stated, “By 2035, the Army will transform the way we fight to: Sustain the Fight, Expand the Battlespace, Strike in Depth Across Domains, Gain and Maintain Decision Dominance, Create Overmatch, and prevail in Large-Scale Combat at speed & scale.”<sup>7</sup> Throughout this paper, we will focus on the updated

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<sup>1</sup> Vazquez, Daniel. “Is the Infantry Brigade Combat Team Becoming Obsolete?” War on the Rocks, April 17, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Army. “The Army’s AimPoint Force Structure Initiative.” Congressional Research Service, May 8, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Army. “FM 3-98 Reconnaissance and Security Operations,” 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Army. “FM 3-98 Reconnaissance and Security Operations,” 2023.

<sup>7</sup> GEN McConville, James. “2019 Army Modernization Strategy: Investing in the Future.” Army Publishing. U.S. Army, 2019.

force design and structure of Cavalry formations to better understand how we accomplish the strategic end state during a time of decreased recruitment and retention.

## Discussion

### Army Aimpoint Force Structure and Re-Design

1. The move in operating concept to Multi-Domain Operations is primarily based on historical doctrine between Air-Land Battle and Maneuver Warfare.<sup>8</sup> This doctrine was developed during the Warsaw Pact of 1981 to counter the threat posed in Eastern Europe.<sup>9</sup> This doctrine is, however, antiquated with the addition of increasing space and cyber capability where attribution becomes challenging to determine amongst military and civilian enterprises. This previous doctrine did, however, allow us to attach enablers and force multipliers to Brigade Combat Teams during the Global War of Terror as they were the force integrator for the Army.<sup>10</sup> However, with the transition to multi-domain operations, divisions have become our tactical formation, providing additional horsepower to position ourselves in all five domains.

2. As we look at the currently proposed and approved re-design, the Army will see the creation of five new Division sets. These are Armor (Reinforced), Armor, Light Infantry, Airborne Division, and an Air Assault Division.<sup>11</sup> Only Armor Reinforced or the Penetration Division is new. However, the capability and structure will change drastically from what we've seen over the last two decades. Brigades could rapidly deploy as we deployed to contingency operations and training rotations. The Brigade Combat Team became the unit of action for the Army.<sup>12</sup> Brigades will continue to deploy; however, with the reduction in force size, there will be an increased number of units deploying to support operations, and the integration of forces will become more critical under a Division or Corp construct. This means the Corps becomes the lowest tactical echelon; it will also be the integrating force for all strategic and joint-level multi-domain capabilities to defeat enemy-integrated Anti-Access/Area Denial systems and constructs.<sup>13</sup> This is based on a recent study from the Combined Arms Center that found to succeed in large-scale combat operations, Brigades do not possess the combat power to achieve penetration of a prepared enemy defense.<sup>14</sup> The Division Cavalry Squadron or an Armored Cavalry Regiment is critical in properly setting the conditions to succeed. Additionally, the Division Cavalry or Armored Reconnaissance can assist the Division with rapidly securing, exploiting, and consolidating gains to isolate objectives to prevent the enemy from conducting refit and re-posturing operations or committing a reserve.<sup>15</sup>

3. While the Army seems to be transitioning to focus on a near-peer threat, Armored Brigades will no longer be able to self-support themselves as Cavalry and Artillery are being consolidated at echelons above them. No longer will there be a direct support Artillery battalion organic to

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<sup>8</sup> U.S. Army. "The Army's AimPoint Force Structure Initiative." Congressional Research Service, May 8, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Vazquez, Daniel. "Is the Infantry Brigade Combat Team Becoming Obsolete?" War on the Rocks, April 17, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> McEnany, Charles. "Multi-Domain Task Forces: A Glimpse at the Army of 2035." AUSA, March 2, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas, BG Feltey. "Armor 2030 Update." Edited by Lisa Alley. Maneuver Center of Excellence, April 2023.

<sup>15</sup> COL Weikert, Thomas P., LTC Andrew S. Partin, LTC John P. Dolan. "Division Cavalry and Its Role in Army of 2030." April 2023

the brigade.<sup>16</sup> Instead, they will have general support from the Division Artillery until they become the main effort or decisive operation.<sup>17</sup> It is similar to that of their Cavalry in Infantry and Stryker organizations, where they will only possess a Reconnaissance Troop of Company size with what appears to be minimal enablers. In Infantry units, they are expected to possess the capability to conduct motorized or dismounted reconnaissance operations.

## **Importance of Cavalry**

1. The Ukraine conflict has provided many lessons learned and helped propel our modernization based on tangible facts. The targeting of aerial assets and the electromagnetic spectrum only increases in intensity and frequency.<sup>18</sup> This factor will limit Divisions and Brigades' ability to collect information from unmanned assets or aerial attack and reconnaissance squadrons until the suppression of enemy air defense or air superiority is achieved.<sup>19</sup> These constraints demand the use of ground reconnaissance forces like a cavalry squadron.
2. The significance of cavalry units within infantry brigade combat teams (IBCTs) cannot be overstated, as they provide essential reconnaissance, security, and mobility support crucial for operational success. These units excel in gathering vital intelligence through reconnaissance missions, meticulously tracking enemy movements, identifying terrain complexities, and assessing potential obstacles. This intelligence serves as the bedrock for IBCT commanders' decision-making processes, enabling them to formulate informed operational plans tailored to the specific circumstances on the ground.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, cavalry units are pivotal in bolstering force protection measures for IBCTs. Through rigorous area security patrols, establishment of observation posts, and meticulous route reconnaissance, they enhance the brigade's overall security posture, effectively mitigating the risk of surprise attacks and ensuring the safety of personnel and critical assets.<sup>21</sup>
3. Furthermore, cavalry units significantly augment the mobility and maneuverability of IBCTs. Equipped with advanced armored vehicles and helicopters, these units can swiftly deploy to strategic locations, exploit enemy vulnerabilities, and execute flanking or enveloping maneuvers, thereby gaining a decisive tactical advantage over adversaries.<sup>22</sup> In addition to their primary reconnaissance roles, cavalry units are adept at conducting counter-reconnaissance operations, actively disrupting enemy intelligence-gathering efforts to safeguard IBCT assets and maintain operational security.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, some cavalry units possess direct-fire weapons systems, providing invaluable firepower support to IBCTs when engaging enemy armored or fortified positions. Their adaptability across diverse mission sets and environments further underscores

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> MG Richardson IV, John B., and MAJ John T. Pelham IV. "The Division Cross-Domain Task Force: Re-Imagining Division Reconnaissance & Security for 2030."

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Army. "FM 3-0 Operations," October 2022

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Army. "FM 3-96 Brigade Combat Team," January 2021.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Army. "FM 3-98 Reconnaissance and Security Operations," 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

the versatility of cavalry units, enabling seamless integration into various operational scenarios, ranging from high-intensity combat operations to stability and support missions.<sup>24</sup>

4. In essence, cavalry units bring a unique blend of capabilities to IBCTs, ensuring effective reconnaissance, security, mobility, and maneuverability, thus enhancing overall combat effectiveness and contributing significantly to mission success on the modern battlefield.

## **Manning**

1. Those still standing will welcome more soldiers throughout cavalry formations. Dismounted reconnaissance will become a more prevalent task for Armor Cavalry Squadrons. In the six vehicle by 36 personnel concept the force is lucky to have the manning for one long duration observation point. With the increased number of personnel, this would provide two long duration and one short duration for each Cavalry Troop. That is a substantial multiplier for the ground commander to use for local security and clearing ground but can also extend a zone reconnaissance or security mission to meet the enemy on our terms to seize initiative and shape the battle space at all echelons.

## **Counter-Arguments**

### **Relevance of the Infantry Brigade Combat Team**

1. The Infantry Brigade Combat Team was the primary fighting force used during the War of Terror; however, they faced a stark reality to ensure their relevance in the Great Power Competition.<sup>25</sup> The additional factor is that the recommended changes only affect the Infantry Brigade, not Armor or Stryker units.<sup>26</sup> Infantry and armor will require support from cavalry, air defense, engineers, and electronic and information warfare to seize and hold key objectives in multi-domain operations.<sup>27</sup> The importance of ground reconnaissance will increase as operations in contested environments become more prevalent, capable of disrupting, delaying, and destroying communications and unmanned aerial vehicles.<sup>28</sup> Infantry Brigades, however, rely on external support for rapid mobility and lack the lethality to control large areas like Armor or Stryker Brigades.<sup>29</sup> As we extend the range of conflict and engagements, it is apparent that Infantry Brigades are quickly overmatched, and their efforts should be focused on enabling tasks to allow the main effort freedom of maneuver.

### **Increased Queue for Key Development**

1. While the force is seeing a lack of recruiting and retention. There has been an 8% increase in Armor Officers.<sup>30</sup> While we deactivate and transition units, there will be an influx of personnel in those that remain. This will get us closer to operating at authorized numbers and provide

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Vazquez, Daniel. "Is the Infantry Brigade Combat Team Becoming Obsolete?" War on the Rocks, April 17, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Army. "The Army's AimPoint Force Structure Initiative." Congressional Research Service, May 8, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Congress. "Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) Mobility, Reconnaissance, and Firepower Programs." Congressional Research Service. United States Congress, July 8, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

additional leadership to units. While this is great in theory, we already have a 6-12 backlog of lieutenants waiting on platoon leader time and captains waiting on their key development time as commanders. While this is minimal in the grand scheme, there will be a substantial increase in queue duration, limited leadership time, and prolonged promotion.

## **Recommendations**

1. Within an Infantry Brigade Combat Team, there are currently three infantry Battalions: a Cavalry Squadron, a Field Artillery Battalion, an Engineer Battalion, and a Support Battalion. Reduce the Infantry to a 2 Battalion set, opening 700-750 positions for a mobile protected firepower company or Battalion and retaining the cavalry squadron, air defense, information operation, and electronic warfare.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, we must develop motorized infantry brigades to deploy and maintain speed internally. This additional mobility will demand the Cavalry Squadron.
2. The practice of task organizing based on mission requirements remains valid. However, as we look at how a Division Cavalry Squadron will be pulled from organic brigades, this could significantly impose constraints and limitations that are unforeseen by Brigade Commanders and Staffs. Suppose we have to answer the nation's call in large-scale combat. In that case, it will be imperative to establish this command support relationship early in the planning process if conducted before establishing the Armored Cavalry Squadron.<sup>32</sup> I came to this recommendation based on current trends of warfighter exercises that show units being pulled up to operate as a division cavalry to provide a critical asset to the commander.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, however, they are untrained in integration and do not have the required habitual relationship with the commander or staff to succeed. However, I recommend using the Armored Cavalry Squadron as a Division and Corps-level asset if this time comes after. This is doctrinally sound based on historical evidence and will enable two functions. The subordinate leadership and staff will have a relationship, a constant and sound understanding of their standard operating procedures, and reduce the workload and strain placed on the Brigade Combat Team.
3. As we look at how this will affect Infantry and Stryker Brigade Combat Teams, developing doctrine for when and how we will train and fight as an integrated team has become increasingly important. We currently conduct this at the Division Level during Warfighter Exercises. This is done through a task-organized Division typically constructed of 2 Armor Brigade Combat Teams, 1 Stryker Brigade Combat Team, and 1 Infantry Brigade Combat Team. We must develop constructed exercises that allow all adjacent units or different types to establish a supported or supporting relationship to fight effectively alongside each other. This should start in simulation, like a warfighter exercise. But to succeed, this must be conducted on a large scale in Europe and the Pacific theater through a constructed exercise or training center rotation. This, coupled with a Division providing C4ISR and Sustainment, is how we test expeditionary deployments and operations.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> LTG Lundy, Michael D. "Meeting the Challenge of Large-Scale Combat Operations Today and Tomorrow." Army University Press, February 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

4. The information requirements do not change for a brigade commander with a limited Cavalry presence. This is why training dispersion in all environments will become critical to their success. In today's Army, pushing leaders and vehicle commanders to find comfort in operating with supporting vehicles out of sight is increasingly rare. We need to understand better and identify the level of risk being assumed and by whom and ground it in how we want them to operate doctrinally.

5. The development of Division Cross Domain Task Forces is a force multiplier in my mind. While cross-domain task forces may be developed years later under a new name, their capability is available now. While we may not give them a name, they can and should be built for Division operations. This can be done using the tasked Division Cavalry Squadron, Aerial Attack Squadron, Division Military Intelligence Battalion, and Joint Enablers. We can provide the Commander with long-range intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance through these effects.<sup>34</sup> The Division Cavalry Squadron is a required formation to successfully confirm information gained through the means mentioned above to operate when the environment is time-constrained or contested, as we may not achieve air dominance, and air superiority is expected to be episodic, providing limited duration convergence windows.<sup>35</sup>

## **Conclusion**

1. In summary, the United States Army continues transitioning from counterinsurgency to large-scale combat operations. We make this transition during a time when the world is an ever-changing, technology-based, hyper-sonic that revolves around multi-domain operations. It is uncertain how tested the operating environment will be during the next conflict, but one thing holds true we will find a solution. To effectively do this, we must understand the effects of our terrain and enemy. Manner, ground-based reconnaissance assets are truly the only way we can ensure continuous reconnaissance. I hope the major takeaway is as a branch and, more importantly, a force; we need to rapidly update our doctrine to reflect new concepts, train integration at echelon and scale, and, most importantly, maintain our ability to collect, process, and synthesize information for the commander. We must use cavalry as the eyes and ears to gain and maintain information and decision dominance to create the overmatch needed to control our land domain.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> LTG Lundy, Michael D. "Meeting the Challenge of Large-Scale Combat Operations Today and Tomorrow." Army University Press, February 2022.



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