

# Objective Force 101

By Captain Mark A. Winkler

Most of us have heard the term Objective Force. For many, this conjures up images of an Army that has done away with the very combat forces that have made us the premier military in the world. For some, it causes a sense of excitement, knowing they will be leaders in cutting-edge technology. For a few, it causes a glazed-over look of confusion and boredom. This Objective Force tutorial is written in an effort to clarify some misconceptions, introduce some new terminology, and lay a foundation of understanding concerning the intent of the Objective Force and the Army Vision. It is imperative that officers and noncommissioned officers have a basic understanding of the concepts, doctrine, and terminology so they can support the Army Vision and Transformation process.

## Army Transformation

The Army regularly undergoes transformation to meet current and future national military requirements. In the emerging asymmetrical combat environment, the Army—and the Corps of Engineers—are once again rethinking our strategies, equipment, and training doctrine to meet current and future national security contingencies. The environment has changed; therefore, we must change. Our current structure is a Cold War relic not designed to support the full spectrum of operations. Engineer units are not sufficiently responsive, deployable, and agile to meet the realities of the Objective Force.

The Army Transformation Plan is based on Army Chief of Staff General Eric K. Shinseki's Vision for the Army: "Soldiers on Point for the Nation...Persuasive in Peace, Invincible in War." The vision includes three primary components starting with an overriding requirement, key principle, and primary objective statement. Readiness continues to be the Army's top priority requirement. The principle recognizes that the Army's people are the centerpiece of Army capabilities and represent the most important element of change. The objective statement sets the tone for Army Transformation. It calls on the Army to create "strategic dominance across the entire spectrum of operations" with seven broad goals. They are to make the Army more *responsive, deployable, agile, versatile, lethal, survivable, and sustainable*. These goals underscore everything.

Army leaders contend that Army Transformation is one of the most sweeping institutional changes ever designed. It involves more than new equipment, vehicles, uniforms, basing, doctrine, tactics, training, or any other single or coupled aspects. Army Transformation is a complete paradigm shift in training, doctrine, equipment, and institutional thinking. Army Transformation has three key elements: the Legacy Force, the Interim Force, and the Objective Force. These will be separate initiatives for the first decade of the 21st century but will merge during the second decade to create the final product, which is envisioned as a whole new Army.

The term *Legacy Force* centers on current major weapons systems, principally combat maneuver vehicles and armored fire support and combat support vehicles. Known as the heavy force, it comprises the Army's mechanized infantry and armored divisions. The Army will continue upgrading the heavy force while developing other paths. The Legacy Force will still be the Army's primary warfighting maneuver force for the foreseeable future.

The plan for the *Interim Force* is to use available technology to reequip brigade-sized units to adapt them to meet many of the Army's missions. This will enable them to deploy more quickly than the heavy forces but have greater lethality, speed of mobility, and soldier

protection than the Army's light forces. Although Interim Force units will handle conventional missions, they will also be used to develop much of the doctrine and training aspects of the Objective Force.

The *Objective Force*, currently in the development phase, represents the vision of the future Army: what can be done to equip, organize, and train units to integrate the best aspects of the heavy, light, and interim forces. For example, the Army is conducting core research to create a new family of lighter armored fighting vehicles, called the Future Combat System, that offers equal or better protection for soldiers who will use them.

## Objective Force: The Big Picture

The Objective Force Model consists of two primary echelonments: units of employment (UEs) and units of action (UAs). UEs function primarily at the operational and strategic level of war and are concerned with the prosecution of campaigns and major operations. UEs have the headquarters structure to perform as a joint task force and are highly tailorable to mission requirements. UAs function primarily at the tactical level of war and are concerned with planning and fighting engagements and battles. They are semifixed organizations, capable of training and operating across the full spectrum of operations, and are inherently combined arms.

## Misconceptions

There are three major misconceptions about Army Transformation:

- *Misconception No. 1:* The plan is for the Army to divest its tanks and mechanized infantry fighting vehicles quickly in favor of lightly armored, wheeled vehicles. That is wrong. Abrams tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles will remain in the Army's inventory for decades.
- *Misconception No. 2:* Interim Brigade Combat Teams will replace light forces. That is not right either. Airborne, air assault, light infantry, and special operations forces will continue to be the Army's forced-entry team. The Initial Brigade Combat Teams are not being organized to be the tip of the spear.
- *Misconception No. 3:* The Interim Brigade Combat Teams are just peacekeeping forces. Wrong again. They will have major wartime missions in addition to being able to handle operations other than war. They are combat formations first and foremost and will have a substantial amount of firepower. There are a number of roles for them on the battlefield.

## Machines That Perform; Soldiers Who Think

Objective Force equipment will have vastly increased capabilities, but soldiers will have a larger responsibility to interpret information that the systems provide. The Stryker Brigade Combat Teams at Fort Lewis, Washington, are focusing on training individual soldiers to maximize the use of the information they receive. Meanwhile, leadership training that emphasizes flexibility and adaptability starts at the lowest level and continues up the chain of command. The goal is to prepare soldiers to assume a leadership role at one or two echelons above their own and to be better prepared for those jobs when they are promoted to them. Soldiers will utilize live-virtual-constructive training venues in both classroom and field environments. Simulations and enhanced situational training exercises will develop their leadership potential and technical capabilities.

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