

Institutional Organization and Military Adaptation

by Lieutenant Colonel Bryan J. Quinn, USA



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In Brief

- Warfare is changing faster than the Army's institutional bureaucracy has been able to adjust. U.S. Army Training and Transformation Command (T2COM) must close that gap, which requires more than delivering new technology faster.
- Militaries adapt through the interaction of three fundamental elements: concepts, tactics and materiel, rather than through technology alone.
- The U.S. Army's institutional history is a cyclical struggle to keep these three elements integrated under effective executive control.
- Using Lieutenant General McNair's Army Ground Forces as a blueprint, T2COM can increase the speed of building the Army if it establishes itself as the Army's single institutional executor, integrating concepts, tactics and materiel into coherent formations.

Institutional Organization and Military Adaptation

“It should be kept in mind that no reorganization, or refinement of organization, in itself, will solve the problems which . . . face the Army today. A correct organizational alignment makes an effective and efficient operation easier to achieve and control, but does not automatically achieve it.”

—U.S. Army Comptroller, Re-Evaluation of Army Reorganization, 1966¹

Introduction

In a recent briefing to U.S. and NATO senior leaders, U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) staff acknowledged that the command was undergoing its seventh effort in a decade to transform into a warfighting organization.² During the meeting, the staff described the command’s ongoing shift from an organization focused on security cooperation to one prepared to command and control joint forces in conflict, requiring different processes, structure, tools and expertise.

USEUCOM’s most recent transformation effort began after Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine. But its origins can be traced back further: the 2021 Afghanistan withdrawal, Russia’s 2014 Ukraine invasion and Crimean annexation, the war on terror, the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991, and the Cold War before that. Each event fundamentally changed the command’s mission and its activities, altering its focus and the structure required to execute its new responsibilities.

USEUCOM’s attempts to adapt are not failure; rather, they are a reflection of its effort to compensate for its environment. They reveal a larger truth about warfare and human interaction. Because the environment is constantly reshaped by technological innovation, evolving enemy tactics and shifting resource realities, militaries must continuously evolve or risk being outpaced.³

The most powerful catalyst of change is the deadly interaction between adversaries on the battlefield. In Ukraine and other parts of Europe, this contest unfolds in real time. In the air, one-way attack drones have surged in importance; in the Black Sea, uncrewed surface vehicles have decimated Russia's fleet; across the Donbas, sensors and automated systems dominate the battlefield. Each adaptation demands a corresponding change in *materiel*, *tactics* and *concepts* by the opposing force.

Operational commands, like USEUCOM, feel the pressure to adapt first. Their proximity to the fight makes them early warning indicators of the widening gap between how fast warfare changes and how slowly military bureaucracy adjusts. The institutional Army, the part of the Army that develops and delivers the operational force, is not immune to the requirement for change. Current transformation and reform efforts are an acknowledgment that the institutional Army has failed to deliver fast enough.

The activation of Transformation and Training Command (T2COM), the Army's acquisition reform and other Headquarters Department of the Army (HQDA) modernization efforts are critical steps toward closing this gap. However, to succeed, the focus of these efforts must extend beyond simply delivering new materiel faster. To frame what effective adaptation requires, this paper makes three assertions.

First, militaries adapt through the interaction of three fundamental elements: *concepts*, *tactics* and *materiel*, not technology alone. Without evolving the way militaries think, operate and organize to deliberately integrate these functions, even the most advanced technologies will fail to deliver battlefield success.

Second, the U.S. Army's institutional history is a cyclical struggle to keep these three elements integrated under effective executive control. Conflict and crisis drive centralization while peace permits fragmentation. When authority decentralizes, the seams and bureaucratic layers between *concepts*, *tactics* and *materiel* proliferate, hindering the ability to integrate these elements, thereby stifling adaptation.

Third, T2COM can increase the speed of building the Army, but only if it establishes itself as the Army's single institutional executor, integrating *concepts*, *tactics* and *materiel* into coherent formations. This requires building effective administrative coordination across subordinate organizations to align authority with function, enabling the Army to rapidly accept battlefield feedback and adapt with the operational environment.

T2COM is almost a year old. Yet, key questions about authority and process remain unsettled. The Army continues to redefine how it operates, and T2COM is not yet fully operational. The question is not simply where to place boxes and lines on organizational charts, but how to align institutional organization with authority, process and accountability to field capable formations at speed.⁴ Without addressing how the Army itself is organized to integrate and employ new capabilities as part of a coherent warfighting formation, current reform efforts risk being another exercise in rearranging an organizational chart with little actual change.

Assertion One: Military Adaptation in Concepts, Tactics and Materiel

“Technology alone never transformed war. The tank, the airplane, the drone—none changed battlefields by themselves. It required new tactics, new concepts, and new organizations to integrate them into coherent warfighting systems.”

—General David Hodne, T2COM Commander⁵

In 1961, Colonel William DePuy observed that “There have been only two modes of life in the Pentagon: preparation for the next reorganization, and recovery from the last.”⁶ Over the past 70 years, the Army has conducted 39 major organizational studies and undergone five major cycles of reorganization, each driven by changing geopolitical realities, technological advancements and evolving warfare.⁷

A single question underpins each of these reform efforts: *How does the Army update and field formations at a pace that keeps up with changes in the operational environment and surpasses the enemy?*⁸ Or, put another way, how does the Army reform its systems and bureaucracy fast enough to adapt the weapons Soldiers go to war with—and adapt how they’re employed—before the enemy can? The problem the Army faced during World War I was the same it would face before entering World War II in 1940, and again after Vietnam, and again following the Global War on Terror. At its core, the challenge in question is one of institutional adaptation.

Addressing this problem depends on the Army’s ability to manage and coordinate change across three interdependent elements of adaptation: concepts, tactics and materiel.⁹ Concepts are the articulation of coherent military strategy, or an overarching grand theory of how an Army intends to defeat an adversary in future conflict. Tactics are the detailed techniques and procedures that describe the specifics of how Soldiers and formations operate together on the battlefield, consistent with concepts. Materiel refers to the design and fielding of the weapons, equipment, vehicles and other technology necessary to carry out the functions of war. Together, these core elements distill ideas, action and physical objects into a simple framework for understanding change.¹⁰

These three elements do not evolve on their own or in a linear fashion. Each interacts with and shapes the others in a continuous cycle of adaptation.¹¹ The interwar development of the tank illustrates this dynamic. The tanks’ emergence as a weapon system (materiel) failed to produce meaningful battlefield adaptation on its own. Throughout much of the interwar period, many in the U.S. military regarded the tank as an auxiliary weapon system for infantry troops rather than as a revolutionary battlefield capability.¹² True adaptation required more than new equipment. It depended on the evolution of combined arms tactics and the development of operational concepts such as deep maneuver and exploitation.

At the same time, the modern tank was shaped as much by battlefield demands and its interaction with enemy forces as by technological advancements that improved speed, protection and range.¹³ The inadequacy of the M4 Sherman’s weapon system and the superiority of German armor forced a dependency on discrete antitank units.¹⁴ This, in turn, placed constraints on U.S. tank doctrine and the organization of U.S. combat divisions.

In short, the tank did not transform warfare on its own, nor was it the product of technological advancement alone. True adaptation required integrating the tank into a broader tactical

and operational framework and a battlefield feedback loop that shaped how the weapon was employed as well as its physical characteristics.

Where armies failed to integrate all three adaptation elements, the consequences have been severe. The French army's defeat in 1940 remains a definitive example of this oversight, as their superior tanks proved ineffective when paired with outdated tactics and concepts rooted in static defensive doctrine.¹⁵

The Army's Future Combat Systems (FCS) program, which ran from 2003–2009, provides another example of the risks of overly focusing on a single element of adaptation. Despite substantial investment in new technology, FCS projects lacked a clear connection to any overarching concept or operational use case; they failed because the Army pursued technological solutions divorced from concepts and tactics.¹⁶

The recent cancellations of the Future Attack Reconnaissance Aircraft, the Robotic Combat Vehicle and the M10 Booker light tank further underscore that new technology, divorced from operational feedback loops or a broader concept of how it integrates with other weapon systems, is insufficient.¹⁷

But current high-profile materiel failures are symptoms of a more fundamental disconnect within the Army's institutions. More than three years after fully adopting Multi-Domain Operations, tactical doctrine remains misaligned with the concept's central tenets.¹⁸ Field Manual 4-0, *Army Sustainment Operations*, illustrates this gap. Though recently revised, its sustainment framework remains unchanged from its 2019 version, which itself relies on principles unchanged since 2009.¹⁹

Sustainment manuals should provide a tactical sustainment framework suited to dispersed operations, changing the way Soldiers train and interact with maneuver forces. Fires manuals likewise should provide an updated fires overlay that accounts for the layered effects of modern munitions, helping identify potential gaps coverage at echelon.²⁰ Absent the cognitive connection between ideas and action, programs of instruction stagnate, Soldiers train according to decades-old ideas, capabilities like the M10 Booker listed above are delinked from battlefield realities, and the gap between how the Army thinks about war and how it prepares Soldiers to fight widens daily.²¹

These shortcomings underscore the centrality of the Army's institutional organizations that manage the complex, real-time interaction between materiel, concepts and tactics. The organization and its physical outputs, whether doctrinal, training, materiel or organizational, cannot be separated; one is a reflection of the other. After all, it was Army senior leaders' interwar decisions regarding the tank's role, made within its institutional structure, that most hindered the fielding and employment of an effective armored force in World War II.²² To avoid repeating these mistakes with current efforts, such as Future Long-Range Assault Aircraft (FLRAA) or Next-Generation Command and Control (NGC2), the Army must ensure these elements evolve together rather than in isolation by minimizing organizational seams and empowering a single organization to integrate them deliberately.

Assertion Two: Historical Cycles of Organizational Change

“The Army better be sure it knows what’s wrong before we make changes.”

—Lieutenant General John Norton,
Combat Developments Command, Commander²³

For more than a century, the Army has wrestled with how best to organize itself to develop and deliver the right force for the right fight at the right time. When confronted with the threat of battlefield defeat, its default response to slow adaptation has been to reshuffle ownership and executive control over the elements of adaptation (concepts, materiel and tactics). Each reorganization has resurfaced a similar conflict between centralized authority and autonomy, driving repeated cycles of consolidation and disaggregation of responsibility for doctrine and materiel, resulting in a persistent gap between the two.²⁴

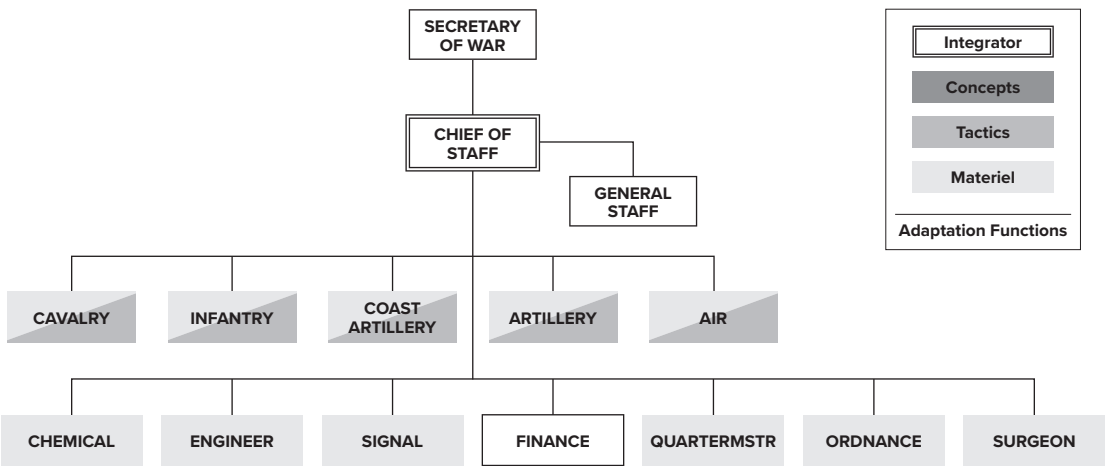
Since transitioning from a constabulary force, the modern Army has evolved through four organizational models: a decentralized federation of branches and bureaus; a centralized, purpose-built command empowered to design and deliver the operational force; a “holding company” arrangement that aggregated functions without centralized control; and a system of accumulated bureaucracy that diffused accountability across headquarters, function and time.

Decentralized

Before World War I, the Army’s bureau system operated with considerable autonomy, each largely controlling both combat technique and materiel acquisition within their specialty areas (See Figure 1).²⁵ This arrangement provided a high degree of specialized control but lacked unity of command, relying on the Chief of Staff to mediate disagreements between branches. While bureaus were empowered, they often acted according to internal biases and with little concern for other combat arms, resulting in conflicting priorities, overlapping efforts and an uncoordinated approach to force development.

Figure 1

National Defense Act of 1916



**Organizational chart is simplified for display*

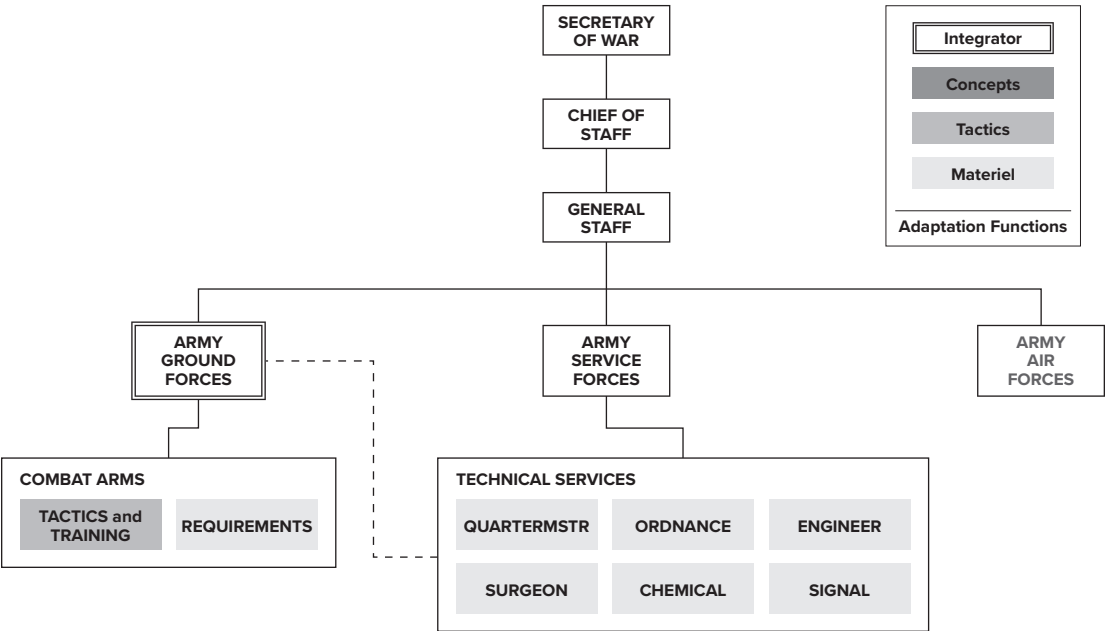
This largely autonomous structure was adequate in peacetime, but it fell short under the pressures of conflict and demands for closer executive control.²⁶ Independent technical and combat bureaus were unable to manage the rapid emergence of new technologies, including the tank, airplane and radio. Meanwhile, the Army Staff lacked the capacity to simultaneously support rebuilding the defense industrial base, to plan and resource a two-theater war and to modernize the Army.²⁷

Centralized Authority

Recognizing the institutional Army’s inefficiencies and lack of preparedness for large-scale conflict, Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall ended the legacy bureau system and subordinated the combat and technical services under new organizations. Rather than centralizing authority within the Army staff, he consolidated it first within the General Headquarters (GHQ) and eventually within two major commands: the Army Ground Forces (AGF) and Army Service Forces (ASF), thereby unifying the functions of doctrine and materiel.

Branch-specific commands were redesignated as centers and were then assimilated and administered centrally through the AGF headquarters to “subdue the spirit of branch independence” and to achieve balanced and effective resource allocation.²⁸ By dissolving the combat arms as independent power centers, Marshall empowered the AGF to serve as the authoritative integrator, ensuring unity of effort in fielding new capabilities and tactical doctrine (See Figure 2).²⁹

Figure 2
General Marshall Reorganization 1942³⁰



**Organizational chart is simplified for display*

The AGF’s centralized authority nature allowed for the rapid identification, development and fielding of hundreds of major combat systems across multiple domains.³¹ Innovations such as the M4 Sherman tank, the P-51 Mustang fighter aircraft and the T5 parachute were rapidly prototyped, tested and integrated into operational formations.

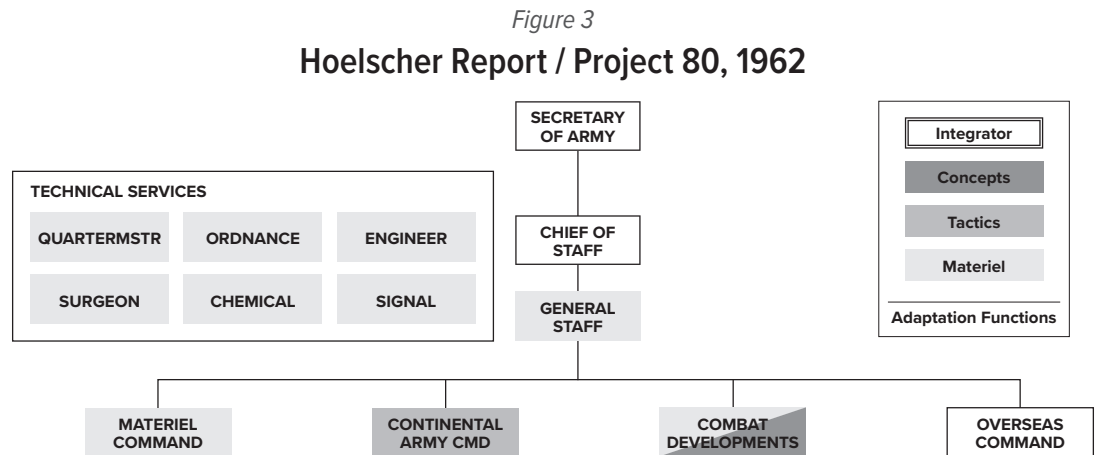
Yet, following victory in World War II, and with no immediate existential threat, the necessity to centralize control declined. Consistent with its cycle of centralization and disaggregation, the post-war Army abandoned Marshall’s reforms, merged the AGF’s functions within the Army Staff, and reverted to a more fragmented, semi-autonomous structure.

Holding Company

As the Cold War deepened, a more complex security environment, coupled with declining Army resources, required the Army to again strengthen executive control. In response, the Army created the Continental Army Command (CONARC) to oversee its Field Armies, readiness and other housekeeping functions.³²

Unlike the AGF, CONARC was not designed to synchronize tactics, concepts and materiel. Instead, its primary purpose was to free Army senior leaders from the day-to-day management of operational forces.³³ As a result, combat developments (i.e., the advancement of materiel requirements) remained distributed across parts of CONARC, the General Staff, and the technical and administrative services. This structure resulted in enormous time and coordination to reach decisions on new weapons and equipment and on research and development.³⁴

Lacking the necessary structure and authority to design and develop the Army needed to win the Cold War, CONARC functioned as an unempowered holding company and passthrough for administrative management. In 1961, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s reforms challenged this arrangement. In response, the Army established the Combat Developments Command (CDC) to reconsolidate modernization functions once held by the AGF, namely, concepts and doctrine, experimentation, analysis and detailed specifications for new weapons.³⁵ Simultaneously, Army Materiel Command (AMC) reconsolidated acquisition and sustainment functions once held by the ASF. While these changes restored some coherence in force design, they also reinforced institutional separation between concepts, materiel and tactics, underscoring the Army’s persistent struggle to integrate the core elements of adaptation. (See Figure 3).



**Organizational chart is simplified for display*

With the establishment of the CDC and the transfer of force development responsibilities, CONARC became even less capable of integrating doctrine and materiel or of leading Army-wide change. By the end of the Vietnam War, it was evident that CONARC's expansive but administratively focused structure was insufficient.³⁶ Much like the Army's position in 2025, its organizational structure in 1970 was inadequate for an Army needing, first, to refocus on large-scale conflict in Europe and, second, to strengthen the relationship between doctrine and materiel.³⁷

Accumulated Bureaucracy

In 1973, Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) was activated with the mandate to professionalize the all-volunteer, post-Vietnam Army, to deliver the "Big Five" systems, and to develop a coherent concept to defeat the Soviet Union. In these efforts, TRADOC overwhelmingly succeeded, culminating in military success in the Gulf War. However, with the Cold War eventually won, the demands of the Global War on Terror, both in resources and intellectual distraction, as well as the competing demands of proliferating policy initiatives and administrative requirements, crowded out force development and design responsibilities.

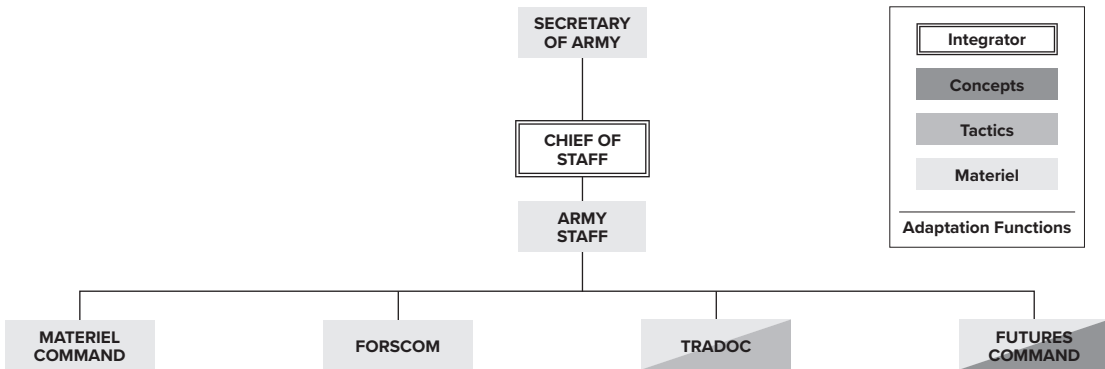
Finding itself out of position once again, the Army established Army Futures Command (AFC) in 2018 to accelerate materiel modernization, effectively recreating the CDC.³⁸ Despite introducing a new four-star headquarters, this move did not by itself increase the pace of modernization; rather, it overlaid a new command over half a century of accumulated bureaucracy. Structures, processes and authorities had now fragmented across multiple organizations, including acquisition program offices, cross-functional teams, Capability Development Integration Directorates, TRADOC Proponent Offices and Centers of Excellence (COEs).³⁹

While aligned on paper, these entities now answered to three different headquarters: TRADOC, AFC and ASA(ALT) (i.e., the office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisitions, Logistics and Technology), each with different authorities and priorities. This arrangement resulted in a bureaucratic entanglement that dispersed responsibility for fielding the future force and extended the time required to deliver new capabilities.

Without a single executive, integrating doctrine and materiel became a problem that only Army senior leaders could resolve. Because neither TRADOC nor AFC could synchronize these elements on their own, senior leaders had to adjudicate the seams between doctrine and materiel. Seven years after this last major reform, the 2018 decision to operate multiple headquarters to manage concepts and doctrine again resulted in unmanageable organizational seams—leading to the establishment of T2COM in October 2025. (See Figure 4).

Figure 4

Army Organizational Structure, 2018



**Organizational chart is simplified for display*

***With the transition of RDECOM to AFC, AMC transferred most materiel development functions (R&D/S&T)*

Across these four organizational models, the Army repeatedly responded to adaptation failures by shuffling roles on the organizational chart and rearranging responsibilities over force design and development, without solving the underlying challenge of integrating these functions. Structural adjustment, by itself, falls short absent mechanisms that deliberately integrate concepts, tactics and materiel into a coherent warfighting system.

Assertion Three: Integration and the Central Executive

“The alternative to [centralized control] is an Army in which individual systems are developed on a largely piecemeal basis, with fads and personal preferences predominating, and with a high frequency of program shifts.”

—Lieutenant General John Norton, Commander, CDC⁴⁰

T2COM represents a departure from previous organizational constructs and is arguably the most expansive institutional command in the Army’s history. It consolidates a wide range of capabilities that had previously been separated, including research labs, Combat Training Centers, branch schools, concepts and requirements development, and CoEs.

Yet T2COM is not immune to the integration challenges that undermined past organizations. Scope and scale alone do not automatically result in integration, nor do they mend the fragmented processes and structures that have emerged over decades of reorganization. Currently organized around three major subordinate commands—U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC), Combined Arms Command (CAC) and Futures and Concepts Command (FCC)—T2COM does not by itself resolve either the enduring problem of executive control or the requirement for vertical integration; neither does it eliminate the risk of stove-piped efforts.

To succeed where legacy structures have fallen short, T2COM must avoid becoming another bureaucratic layer or passthrough. Capitalizing on its unprecedented span of control requires

T2COM to establish itself as the Army's central executive and to tighten its loose federation of functions into a unified system of management to deliberately integrate fundamental elements of adaptation.

This requires: first, building effective administrative coordination among the organizations responsible for concepts, tactics and materiel, unburdening subordinates from performing this function on their own; and second, anchoring command efforts to the formations most closely oriented on the operational environment and enemy, ensuring that institutional outputs remain responsive and relative to battlefield realities.

The AGF provides an instructive example of what a central executive can accomplish when effectively organized to vertically integrate the institutional Army in support of operational commanders. The AGF delivered capabilities rapidly by closely managing subordinate combat arms and deliberately integrating doctrine and materiel through centrally developed tactics. Rather than relying on subordinate organizations, its headquarters developed doctrine and training publications that provided a central mechanism to translate operational needs into synchronized training requirements and materiel demands.⁴¹

The M1 Bazooka, a World War II-era antitank weapon, illustrates how quickly this system could move. In 1941, the Army identified the need for a shoulder-fired rocket, developed and tested prototypes, and then it approved the design within months.⁴² By June 1942, the Ordnance Board had standardized the M1, and by November, Soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division carried the Bazooka ashore during *Operation Torch*.⁴³ The entire process was directed through the relevant branch boards under the AGF and its headquarters' Requirement Division in direct coordination with ASF's Ordnance Department.⁴⁴

By the end of the war, battlefield techniques and tactical doctrine updates circulated in near real-time, demonstrating the power of a single organization that could connect operational learning, doctrine and materiel. Not since World War II has the Army fielded and integrated new capabilities at a comparable scale or speed.

The power of the AGF was its ability to quickly integrate cross-cutting functions that spanned subordinate combat arms and the ASF's technical services, resolving complex adaptive problems through effective organization and processes that vertically integrated institutional functions. The underlying challenges that have been left for T2COM to solve are similarly cross-cutting. Materiel responsibilities are divided across both CAC and FCC. Training and recruiting span CAC and USAREC. And doctrine, including training circulars, tactics and concepts, cuts across all three organizations. Only T2COM, positioned above these functional boundaries, can pull them together to deliver integrated capabilities to the operational force.

A centralized executive also enabled the rapid response to battlefield reporting and adaptation of combat formations in contact. In 1942, Lieutenant General McNair and the AGF headquarters resolved a significant Army debate on the role of armored formations, deciding that tank destroyers (TDs), rather than tanks, would directly engage enemy armor formations.⁴⁵ The AGF's concept had cascading effects. It reshaped tank and TD roles and employment, altered the balance of weapon systems and platforms across combat formations, influenced the size and caliber of tank and antitank weapon systems, and informed the doctrine determining how ground forces would fight together to destroy German forces.

The AGF's TD concept faced its first test in North Africa, where it performed poorly. In response, the AGF directed doctrinal changes, experimented with new materiel, and adjusted the ratio of self-propelled and towed artillery based on field commander feedback.⁴⁶ As Army-wide information accumulated regarding the performance of TD and armored doctrine and weapon systems, the AGF reduced TDs, increased the M4's firepower and shifted tactics in favor of tank-on-tank engagements.⁴⁷

Centralized organization enabled a tight loop of battlefield experience and doctrine.⁴⁸ As massed German armor engagements declined into 1943 and the demand for TD units fell, the AGF was able to quickly adjust by further reducing TD mobilization and production while increasing higher priority units, including tank battalions, engineers and artillery.⁴⁹ As the war progressed, the battlefield continued to evolve. The threat from German aircraft decreased while the number of ground targets continued to grow, resulting in a greater demand for firepower. In response, the AGF expanded the capability of the tank and antitank weapons beyond conventional direct fire roles, providing ground commanders with greater flexibility and additional indirect fire platforms.

This expanded indirect fire role was only possible through an organization capable of connecting the field artillery, TD and armored centers, enforcing doctrinal guidance and mandating training requirements.⁵⁰ As a single centralized executive, the AGF possessed both the authority and scope to rapidly react to battlefield changes and influence battlefield behavior through doctrinal publications, training, organization and materiel.

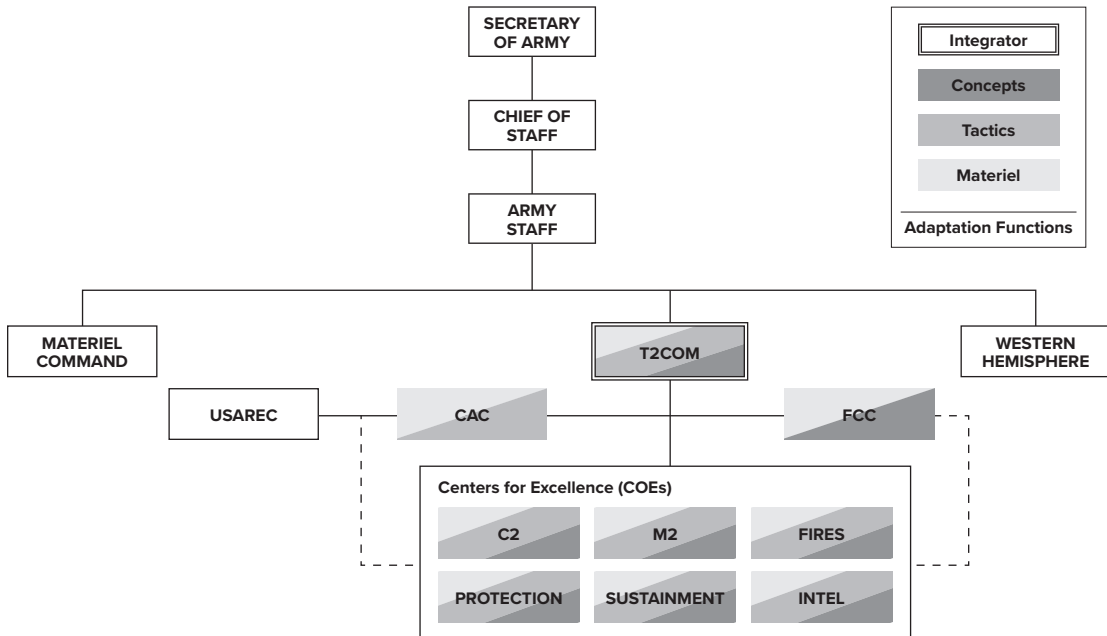
The AGF's success relied heavily on the remnants of the bureau system, a legacy organizational construct, for functional expertise. Today, COEs similarly sit at the intersection of materiel and doctrine, and they now possess expanded acquisition authorities, increasingly resembling pre-World War II bureaus: capable, but prone to fragmentation without centralized executive control.⁵¹ Organized around warfighting functions, COEs generate requirements, write doctrine and ensure that solutions are identified, developed and integrated within their respective functions.

Recent reforms corrected some of the challenges created through accumulated bureaucracy by consolidating legacy requirement-generating organizations. However, COEs now answer to even more headquarters, including FCC, CAC, T2COM, USAREC and ASA(ALT). But while COEs may have more potential power than ever, this power is constrained by overlapping chains of command and inefficient organization.

Unity of command demands more than consolidating materiel acquisition and doctrinal functions within individual warfighting systems. It requires a single authority capable of integrating each function into a coherent fielded army consistent with a unified warfighting concept and capable of rapidly adapting to changes in the environment. (See Figure 5).

Figure 5

Centralized Executive Model



**Organizational chart is simplified for display*

T2COM cannot solely rely on horizontal integration or ill-defined coordination lines between COEs and major subordinate commands. Past organizational structures demonstrate the inherent weakness of coordinating authority. Dividing or delegating the function of integration across multiple subordinate and adjacent organizations risks fragmentation. Absent a central integrating authority and enforcement, decentralization merely recreates the bureau system, producing parallel development and institutional drift and forces that are optimized for parts rather than a whole, risking the delay and stove-piping that plagued TRADOC and AFC.

A new tank may be designed, developed and fielded more quickly with greater autonomy when fewer stakeholders exist to veto or vote. Yet, speed does not guarantee relevance on the battlefield or coherence with concepts and other weapon systems. As the inter-war Army demonstrates, branch-centric perspectives can constrain what is built. The Chief of Infantry may struggle to imagine a tank outside of its defined role in infantry support, just as aviation or intelligence organizations may default to seeing UAVs as merely reconnaissance platforms.⁵²

Yet the tank demanded by Arracourt in 1944 differed as radically from the infantry's inter-war light-tank concept as the RQ-7 (Shadow) differs from the One-Way Strike (OWS) and First-Person View (FPV) drones that dominate war today. Both examples demonstrate the need for a top-down authoritative integrator to overcome individual and institutional biases and ensure equity in capability development.⁵³

Like the AGF, T2COM must fill a similar role as the Army's single integrator, effectively organized to allocate resources, enforce integration and prioritize operational needs based on a singular, comprehensive vision of combined operations for tomorrow's battlefield.

The Risks of Change

In 2025, Secretary of the Army Daniel Driscoll stated that maintaining “the status quo [was] unacceptable.”⁵⁴ At the same time, even successful organizational adaptation carries real risk. Based on past reorganizations, T2COM must guard against three primary challenges: losing momentum, overextension and marginalization.

First, there are significant and often underreported costs to repeated structural change. Between 1961 and 1966, the Army executed over 200 organizational changes.⁵⁵ The result was a loss of core warfighting proficiency and an inward organizational focus, both of which consumed valuable time and momentum.

Momentum is fragile, slow to build, and only increases as people and organizations become familiar with roles, processes and authorities. Every disruption and reorganization resets that momentum. Thus, repeated reorganizations do not just cost money; they cost time, coherence and effectiveness. In an environment where many claim that the U.S. Army is already behind, it cannot be ignored that change itself comes at the cost of time and organizational momentum.

Second, combining multiple functions under a single command may strain effective command and control and risk overextension. Organizational focus naturally follows command priorities, and an overly broad mission risks subordinating force design and development efforts to the immediate demands of current operations.

In 1973, Lieutenant General Norton similarly warned that layering training responsibilities on top of a future-focused command would dilute its ability to drive meaningful change or deliver the future force required. In a memorandum to then Chief of Staff of the Army General Creighton Abrams, Norton argued that “Large-scale, concrete, near-term activity drives out small-scale, more complicated, thought-oriented work on future issues, whatever their relative importance. The reasons for taking the combat developments out of the school system in the early 1960’s are the reasons that they should not be returned to that position.”⁵⁶ Fifty years later, and on the heels of recombining AFC and TRADOC, it remains unclear if the Army has fully accounted for the risk of overextension.

Lastly, if T2COM is expected to deliver and integrate capabilities effectively at speed and scale, it must control the levers to do so. Under 2018 and 2020 directives, AFC maintained broad control and authority over modernization and experienced increased influence across modernization activities. When this authority was returned to ASA(ALT) by then Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth, AFC experienced a loss of influence and power across budgetary and acquisition processes, reducing effectiveness and the ability to achieve modernization goals.⁵⁷

The Army’s new Portfolio Acquisition Executives (PAE) structure, which tightens the relationship between operational and acquisition leads, is a step in the right direction.⁵⁸ Yet, acquisition authority remains solely with the Secretariat, resulting in major procurement decisions being made outside of T2COM. As a result, key science and technology and research and development functions do not ultimately answer to the COEs, FCC or the four-star integrator, violating the principle of unity of command.

Without solidifying its role in materiel acquisition decisions, T2COM risks becoming a nominal holding company, responsible for modernization outcomes yet unable to truly

affect them.⁵⁹ The result would resemble earlier failed organizational arrangements, such as CONARC, and would leave critical design and development functions unempowered under subordinate commands.⁶⁰

With clearly defined, enforceable roles and responsibilities, T2COM can close the doctrinal-to-materiel gaps that hobbled programs like FCS and can ensure that the next materiel modernization efforts, including long-range fires, robotic combat vehicles, the Cheyenne II (MV-75), and NGC2 arrive as integrated capabilities with training and doctrine already developed.

Concluding Remarks

“Remember, there’s two parts of the Army. . . . There’s the part of the Army that fights, and there’s the part of the Army that builds the part that fights. . . . You’re on the assembly line.”

—General David Hodne⁶¹

In 1945, General George Marshall observed that “[Since the passage of the National Defense Act, the Army] lost track of the purpose of its existence. It had become a huge, bureaucratic, red-tape-ridden operating agency. It slowed everything down.”⁶² Marshall’s assessment remains as relevant today as when he delivered it 80 years ago; the institutional structures designed to manage complexity can become obstacles.

The Army’s long history of organizational change reflects the persistent challenge of aligning institutional structure with the demands of adaptation. While it is appealing to focus on the obvious aspects of adaptation—the failed tank, high-tech plane or new rifle—materiel success or failure is a symptom of institutional alignment and dysfunction. Thus, success on the battlefield will continue to depend on the institutional Army’s ability to integrate concepts, tactics and materiel into coherent warfighting capabilities.

This will not be the Army’s final reorganization effort, and it cannot afford to continue to treat reorganization as a substitute for actual change. Strategic, technological and operational conditions will continue to evolve, but the core problem remains unchanged: how to develop, integrate and field future capabilities (concepts, tactics and materiel) at a pace commensurate with changes in the operational environment.

To succeed, T2COM must tighten the relationship between how the Army imagines, teaches and equips, establishing end-to-end ownership of concepts, tactics and materiel so that the same command responsible for writing the next warfighting concept also oversees the schools that teach it, the organizations that prototype it, and the processes and authorities that lead to its creation.

Notes

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