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U.S. Army Leaders Chart New Course for Armored Warfare in Drone-Dominated Era

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At a recent defense summit in Wiesbaden, Germany, top U.S. Army commanders outlined a transformative vision for American armored forces as warfare shifts toward precision strikes, electronic warfare, and unmanned systems. Speaking at the LANDEURO (Land Forces Europe) conference, leaders from the 1st Armored Division (1st AD) and 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division (1st ABCT, 3rd ID) emphasized the urgent need to adapt to battlefield realities shaped by drones, surveillance, and rapidly evolving technology.

Major General Curtis Taylor, Command Sergeant Major James Light, and Colonel Bryan Bonnema presented their outlook during a panel titled "Reforging the Armored Spearhead: Transforming in Contact (TiC) 2.0 and the Evolution of Large-Scale Combat Operations." Taylor pointed to Ukraine's December 2024 drone and robotic assault near Kharkiv as evidence that the era of traditional armored warfare is being fundamentally challenged. He noted that more than 70% of armored vehicle losses in Ukraine resulted from First-Person View (FPV) drone strikes, underscoring the need to restructure and redeploy armored formations.

Four Battlefield Imperatives:

Drawing from ongoing conflicts and field rotations, the commanders identified four key imperatives shaping future operations:

1. Integrated Strike and Reconnaissance: Units from squad to brigade level must be equipped with the ability to detect and engage targets across varying ranges using drones and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) tools.
2. Multi-Layered Drone Defense: As drone threats increase, Army formations will need to include organic counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) technologies, creating the land equivalent of carrier strike groups.
3. Decentralized Electronic Warfare (EW): Future brigades must include robust EW teams to jam and disrupt adversary communications and systems while maneuvering through the electromagnetic spectrum.
4. Robotic Breach Capabilities: Assaulting fortified positions will increasingly depend on unmanned breaching vehicles and systems, drawing lessons from Ukrainian tactics against Russian trench defenses.

While embracing advanced robotics, Taylor was quick to reaffirm that Soldiers remain irreplaceable."Humans still have to hold ground," he said, stressing the Army's responsibility to protect and sustain personnel in increasingly dangerous and dynamic combat environments.

Sergeant Major: Innovation Starts on the Ground

Command Sergeant Major Light highlighted the discipline and resourcefulness of the modern Soldier, stressing the need for innovation at the noncommissioned officer level. "Our

formations are strong, but we've been operating the same way for over a decade," he said. Light encouraged junior leaders to push boundaries and modernize within their current capabilities, a philosophy he dubbed "innovation by requirement."

He pointed to recent U.S. victories in NATO's Strong Europe Tank Challenge as proof that mastering fundamentals such as gunnery and crew coordination remains critical for success.

TiC 2.0: Redesigning How Brigades Fight

Colonel Bonnema detailed how the 1st ABCT is reshaping its operations through TiC 2.0, a pilot program focused on tech integration, adaptive training, and organizational transformation. During their rotation at Germany's Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC), the brigade made major strides in three areas: mission efficiency, sustained enemy pressure, and increased lethality.

Key adaptations included:

- Modernized Command and Control: Camouflage, virtual tools, and secure communications enabled commanders to make timely decisions while avoiding detection.
- Electromagnetic Warfare Teams: Small EW units worked on the front lines to disrupt enemy sensors and communications, setting conditions for maneuver units.
- Task-Specific Units: New "FAAT" teams, integrating FPV drone pilots, forward observers, and anti-armor experts, proved especially lethal in constrained terrain.
- UAS Defense Across All Zones: From frontlines to rear support, integrated UAS defense allowed safe maneuvering for troops and sensors alike.

Logistical and Training Challenges Remain

Despite progress, Bonnema and Taylor acknowledged ongoing limitations: short drone battery life, environmental performance issues, and lack of integrated launch platforms. Taylor urged defense industry partners to develop under-armor drone launch systems to reduce risks.

Currently, FPV drone operators are drawn from existing military occupational specialties, such as UAS operators (15-series) and cavalry scouts. Extensive simulator training is being

used to build up experience before live missions.“Flying an FPV drone is difficult. It takes hundreds of hours to master,” Light explained.

Bonnema echoed this, reporting that Soldiers in his unit had logged over 660 hours of flight simulation in preparation for live fire training.

Europe Deployment Accelerates Innovation

Taylor closed the panel by crediting the division’s forward deployment in Europe as a driver of innovation, thanks to its proximity to the ongoing war and collaboration within the NATO alliance. “Being here gives us a chance to learn, adapt, and move faster than we ever could back home,” he said.

The 1st Armored Division and the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, are leading efforts as the U.S. Army prepares for the next generation of combat. Their efforts underscore a clear message: the battlefield is evolving rapidly, and America’s armored spearhead must evolve with it, while never losing sight of the Soldier at its core.