

The Operational Art

The concept of the operational level of warfare was introduced to the US Army with the publication of the 1982 version of US Army Field Manual 100-5, Operations. The requirement for more jointness in service operations was mandated by the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, when another version of FM 100-5 was published. Since Operation Desert Storm and the ensuing drawdown of the Army by about one-third, coalition or combined operations have also become the norm.

The concepts of operational art, jointness and combined operations are not new. In the mid-1800s, Carl von Clausewitz recognized the operational level of war. Since World War II, the Army has conducted a host of joint operations with the Navy and Air Force. Moreover, US involvement in the Korean War and numerous regional conflicts has clearly exhibited the concept of combined operations.

During the past few decades, all the services have clamored for more “jointness”; however, Congress has had to force the real changes. The uniformed side has also noted the need for more combined training for coalition operations, but again, the politicians had to force the military into that arena on a more permanent basis. Combined operations are especially important today with more and more emphasis on UN mandates for action and a downsized US military that can no longer afford to go it alone.

This section’s four articles—two from just after World War II and two from the early 1990s—offer somewhat similar views about operational art in a joint and combined environment. All four authors, representing a total of 17 stars, penned these thoughts late in their careers. They learned the operational art and the importance of jointness and coalition operations the hard way—by doing it. Their observations and conclusions remain as relevant today as they were when they were recorded.

