

The Army's Training Environment

Enabling Indo-Pacific Integrated Deterrence

Jennifer Dunn

For the better part of the last fifteen years, U.S. Army training and education has been immersed in a fictitious world. That world is known as the Decisive Action Training Environment (DATE) and is the Army's unclassified training environment, which has played a key role in ensuring operational readiness for soldiers since its inception.¹ Despite being fictitious, DATE is used throughout a soldier's career, starting with initial military training, for live, virtual, and constructive training and education events to provide *realistic* and *relevant* operational environment (OE) conditions.² The use of DATE across these venues enables the Army to train and understand diverse OEs in which it may find itself operating and future threats it may face.

In recent years, as part of broader Army transformation initiatives and to better prepare the U.S. Army for future conflict, the Army's training environment has substantively transformed to reflect the changing global environment and the security challenges that strain the defense enterprise. The 2022 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) identifies these challenges as shifts in global military capabilities, emerging technologies, new rival doctrines that threaten the U.S. homeland and global stability, increased coercive activities in the "gray zone," and transboundary challenges.³ Specifically, the NDS highlights how U.S. competitors like the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia are exploiting these challenges to erode deterrence,

exert economic coercion, and endanger political autonomy.⁴ It is crucial that Army training reflects these security realities, and DATE is the tool that provides the enabling environment.

The ability for trainers to create realistic security and intelligence informed training scenarios through DATE has led to an expansion of users. DATE, originally designed with the U.S. Army in mind, has expanded across the entire joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) spectrum. This expansion has resulted in an unforeseen phenomenon: DATE has transformed from being a tool to enable Army operational readiness to a versatile training tool that ensures regional readiness, enhances partner capacity, and fosters interoperability across strategic theaters of concern for the United States.

This article presents an introduction to DATE and details elements of its development over the past decade, highlighting ongoing modernization efforts. Additionally, this article outlines the evolution of DATE, from a training tool to support collective unit training for Army brigades and below to a tool that continues to support not only Army unit training but also training and operational readiness across the JIIM spectrum. This article concludes with a discussion of how this expanded utilization of DATE has not only served to improve operational readiness for U.S. forces but has also enhanced partner capacity and interoperability, demonstrating its utility as an enabler in



The Decisive Action Training Environment (DATE) provides the U.S. Army training community with a detailed description of the operational environment characteristics and conditions found in multiple regions around the globe: Africa, Caucasus, Europe, the Indo-Pacific, and the Arctic and Antarctic polar regions. DATE provides trainers with a foundational narrative that can be used as is or adapted to fit the training needs of a specific scenario. (Graphic from OE Data Integration Network, TRADOC G-2)

supporting theater integrated deterrence efforts, most notably in the Indo-Pacific theater.

What Is DATE?

DATE is the U.S. Army's official mandated tool for scenario development that enables training for all essential tasks through a singular, unified, scalable training environment. DATE, while intelligence informed, is an unclassified foundation that resembles real-world OEs and threat militaries and is institutionalized across professional military education and training. It provides relevant and realistic conditions, and adaptive adversaries for the training community and supports the education continuum from the most junior to the most senior education venues.

DATE presents conditions across four geographic regions: Eurasia, Indo-Pacific, Africa, and the polar regions to support Army training requirements to counter and deter threats in any theater. DATE comprises twenty-four notional countries, all informed by real-world conditions and characteristics while complying with Army Regulation 350-2, *Operational*

Environment and Opposing Force Program.⁵ These real-world analog countries represent both threats and regional-security partner nations. They also include competitor nations, which allows Army training developers to create scenarios featuring pacing, acute, and persistent threats.

DATE depicts OEs using the framework of operational variables.⁶ Real-world countries influence the variables and offer a diverse landscape that supports all variety of missions, from stability operations to irregular warfare and large-scale combat operations. These variables are regularly updated to stay relevant and support Army training objectives. For example, the Army's pivot to great-power competition and near-peer threats like China has increased the prioritization of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense training, triggering a DATE update.⁷ DATE's physical environment replicates existing geographical features and man-made infrastructure, facilitating the use of existing maps and integrating with Army mission command information systems. However, due to altered country identities, political boundaries have shifted and

been renamed. Training audiences using DATE can further move boundaries and modify the operational variables to accommodate their training objectives.

Why DATE?

After 11 September 2001, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) prioritized antiterrorism and counterinsurgency mission support. For nearly a decade, Army training, once wholly focused against a near-peer Soviet threat, shifted to predominantly mission rehearsal exercises in advance of deployments to combat theaters where the Army was conducting large-scale counterinsurgency operations. However, *NDS* in 2008 the DOD shifted focus. While counterinsurgency operations continued, defense strategy identified the PRC as an “ascendant state with the potential for competing with the United States” and stated Russia’s “retreat from openness and democracy could have significant security implications for the United States.”⁸ These watershed statements solidified what the Army had anticipated—large-scale counterinsurgency operations were ending, and the Army’s training focus needed to shift from counterinsurgency to preparing to counter the growing threat represented by China and an increasingly belligerent Russia.

To prepare for these new threats, the Army published an updated training concept in 2010, describing the training requirements and capabilities needed to conduct full-spectrum operations (FSO) in a JIIM environment.⁹ The Army training concept drove the development of the Army training strategy, creating synergies across the training domains to achieve the Army force generation objectives.¹⁰

The Army stressed the necessity to train simultaneously for combined arms maneuver and wide area security to balance combat power in tactical actions for offensive, defensive, and stability operations.¹¹ To support these initiatives, the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) G-2 was tasked with developing a product to support FSO training environments across all combat training centers (CTC), thus, creating the Full Spectrum Training Environment (FSTE).¹² Although FSTE was a great step forward in supporting FSO training, it was clear the Army needed to do more to set the table for successful training events.

In 2011, the TRADOC G-2 improved upon FSTE and created what is now known as DATE. At the

time, DATE consisted of one region and five countries, and it served as a single source for creating exercise scenarios. DATE was not intended to serve as a scenario but rather a detailed representation of multiple OEs with the necessary conditions and characteristics to enable trainers to develop scenarios that stimulate essential tasks in Army training. The 2011 DATE supported modern training concepts and Army force generation objectives, and enabled Army readiness for any operation.

Transformation and Modernization

From 2011 to 2013, DATE was primarily used for specific training requirements at CTCs. While it met the training requirements for those centers, it was not widely adopted across the Army in other soldier education venues. This limited usage was due to its restricted regional representation and its ineffective support to understanding real-world OEs and threats.

However, over time, TRADOC G-2 recognized the limitations and began expanding DATE, an expansion effort that was reinforced with guidance from the Army’s chief of staff in 2018. The chief of staff recognized the need to broaden Army training to encompass more regions worldwide to better prepare for potential deployments to any theater of operation. This insight led to DATE’s first major expansion, incorporating multiple global regions and establishing its role in supporting both Army training and education.

Today, DATE is a flexible and dynamic tool that provides an accurate representation of current OEs, emphasizing key conditions and potential threats. It has evolved to adapt to changing OEs, aligning with the DOD’s overall strategy and the Army’s training and modernization goals. To keep DATE up to date, TRADOC G-2 actively identifies, collects, and integrates recent observations of OEs, threats, and conflicts into the training environment.¹³ The primary aim of this effort is to enhance understanding of threats and improve training for multidomain and large-scale combat operations. In a time of shifting geopolitical dynamics, threat-informed training is essential. National security and defense strategies identify specific countries that pose challenges for the DOD, and DATE aligns with this paradigm. DATE facilitates realistic, threat-informed training to prepare for these evolving security challenges.



An example of the DATE Indo-Pacific operational environment. DATE Indo-Pacific has a long history of political, military, and civilian instability and conflict, which includes ethnic, political, and religious factionalism. The region is centered on maritime concerns and is dominated by Olvana's military and economy. North Torbia threatens the entire region with nuclear ICBM ambitions. Himaldesh asserts itself as a global player and alternative to Olvana, while Sungzon serves as a foil to the latter's maritime dominance. The many, smaller nations seek international partnerships to advance their development and provide stability. Belesia, Gabal, Khorathidin, and Bagansait all vacillate between juntas and democracies. Complicating these regional dynamics are outside actors who grow increasingly involved in the economies. DATE Indo-Pacific thus represents an environment where highly localized conflict can spill over into widespread unrest or general war. (Map from OE Data Integration Network, TRADOC G-2)

Current initiatives to modernize DATE include updating OEs to accurately reflect the following conditions:

- ◆ a pacing challenge in the Indo-Pacific theater (Olvana);
- ◆ an acute challenge in the European theater (Donovia);
- ◆ persistent challenges in Pacific (North Torbia) and Central Asia (Ariana);
- ◆ adversaries with the capability and intent to challenge the U.S. homeland; and

- ◆ adversaries with the capability and intent to deploy chemical, biological, nuclear, and radiological weapons.

These modernization efforts have created a realistic, relevant, and intelligence-informed training environment that effectively supports training for multi-domain and large-scale combat operations, all while remaining unclassified and publicly releasable. This feature has gained the attention of joint and multinational partners. Over the past two years, DATE's usage has expanded beyond the U.S. Army to include joint,



A screenshot from "ADF OBA Road to Crisis," a video used in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) DATE scenario titled Operation Bronze Achilles (OBA). This training scenario is designed to enable individual training in a joint environment utilizing DATE Indo-Pacific. The OBA scenario sees Australia operating as part of a U.S.-led multinational force against a near-peer adversary (North Torbia) fighting in South Torbia. The campaign plan provides enough detail to enable exercise designers and instructors to develop specific scenarios. (Screenshot from Battle Lab Training Adversary Cell, Australian Army)

multinational, and interagency partners, addressing their respective training needs.

DATE User Expansion

Because of the focused modernization efforts to ensure DATE can support training in all domains from sea, land, and air to space and cyberspace, DATE is now able to support training for joint all-domain operations. As a result, DATE is being used to support more training and education venues than ever before, serving as a vital tool in the training kit for not only Army soldiers but also marines, sailors, airmen, intelligence analysts, foreign service officers, and multinational partner militaries.

U.S. Army and Marine Corps. The original, intended users of DATE were the U.S. Army's CTCs, where unit training takes place. Over time, its use has expanded across the entire Army training and education community. Today, DATE not only supports collective training at the CTCs but also home station training

and individual training at the centers of excellence. Soldiers engage with DATE from the beginning of their careers in initial military training and throughout their educational experiences, including senior-level education aimed at developing general officers.

Beyond the Army, DATE is also being adopted by joint partners, notably the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC). While relatively new to DATE, USMC's usage is growing among various Marine organizations to enhance its training and education. The first USMC user was the Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group, which provides advanced individual training for operations and intelligence personnel in the ground combat element of the Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF).

Recent modernization efforts have expanded DATE's capacity to support multidomain operations, facilitating the Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group's implementation of the tool. A key application is from the Tactical Training and Exercise Control Group, which has begun to employ DATE for service-level training exercises. These exercises sustain and evolve live-fire and maneuver combined arms tactics, simulate combat conditions for improved decision-making, and integrate emerging capabilities to enhance the MAGTF's adaptability across various military operations.

Other USMC organizations, such as the Marine Corps University Command and Staff College and the Marine Corps Intelligence Schools, are also exploring

DATE for individual educational purposes. The Command and Staff College offers graduate-level education aimed at developing critical thinkers and ethical leaders for roles in the MAGTF and beyond, while the Marine Corps Intelligence Schools coordinate the training requirements for all USMC intelligence fields and promote intelligence language training and military occupational specialties. For both institutions, DATE will serve as the platform for scenario-driven practical exercises tied to their curricula.

ABCANZ Armies Program. DATE has long been used by international partners of the United States, most notably by the partners that make up the Army, British, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand (ABCANZ) Armies Program, which have similar training requirements for their ground forces. In fact, ground forces from all ABCANZ partners were early adopters of DATE, and all countries have a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) with TRADOC on the use of DATE, demonstrating DATE's utility as an enabler to ensure operational readiness for ground forces. ABCANZ has used DATE for either individual or collective training in some capacity since DATE's initial inception. However, in recent years, its application by these partners has expanded, in a similar way to its expansion in the U.S. Army and the USMC.

- The Australian use of DATE is more prolific than even the United States' use. This is because the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has formally directed that DATE will be used for training across all its services. As such, DATE is the foundation for individual and collective training across the ADF and is pervasive throughout its training community.
- New Zealand's application of DATE is like Australia's in that New Zealand Defense Force leadership would like DATE to support training across its entire force for individual and collective training; however, it is not yet as pervasive as in the ADF.
- Canada, one of the earliest adopters, extensively uses DATE in support of army training. While not pervasive across its joint forces, Canada's DATE use expands across collective and individual training for its ground forces.
- The United Kingdom, much like Canada, was one of the earliest adopters and extensively uses DATE across ground force collective training. While not

used by the joint services, DATE is expanding into individual training in the UK.

A new initiative among all ABCANZ members is to integrate staff college scenarios. To date, staff colleges from the U.S. Army, the USMC, Australia, and New Zealand are operating in one DATE-based environment, each addressing operations unique to the education objectives for each respective staff college but all part of the same theater-focused campaign.

The use of DATE by all ABCANZ partners for individual and collective training not only supports readiness individually for those forces but also enables training interoperability among all countries.

Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force. In 2024, the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) approached TRADOC about its interest in pursuing a formal MOU agreement for the use of DATE like the agreements TRADOC has with ABCANZ partners. While the JGSDF has not fully implemented DATE, JGSDF's Training-Evaluation, Education, Research and Development Command and TRADOC are refining the details of an MOU, which will cover JGSDF's use for individual and collective training. As the JGSDF implements DATE, it will no doubt support training interoperability in the same way it has with ABCANZ partners.

Interagency. DATE's versatility has extended beyond the military domain and now includes organizations from within the intelligence community and the Department of State (DOS), both leveraging DATE to meet their unique training objectives. As a member of the intelligence community, the Defense Intelligence Agency uses DATE as part of its Professional Analyst Career Education (PACE) Essentials curriculum. PACE Essentials is a training course designed to orient new intelligence analysts to core analytic tradecraft concepts and processes while giving them an opportunity to practice essential analytic skills. DATE is used to complement this curriculum by giving students a realistic, immersive, and interactive scenario in which analysts apply their skills to prepare them to support national security and intelligence missions.

Similar to the Defense Intelligence Agency, the DOS has begun using DATE to support training and education, but in this case, it is used with partners and also supports interoperability. In 2023, the DOS hosted the Quad Counter Terrorism Working Group, which

includes representatives from four regional partners—the United States, Australia, India, and Japan.¹⁴ The Quad working group is designed to make tangible progress on pressing challenges within the Indo-Pacific theater. As part of this working group, those assembled conducted a DATE-based tabletop exercise to explore enhancing Quad cooperation in response to an overwhelming terrorist incident in the Indo-Pacific. The DATE-based event allowed participants to explore what capabilities and support the Quad could offer, and how the Quad might coordinate to support the existing capacities of Indo-Pacific countries.

Operational exercises. While expansion across the training and education communities is a compelling story on the utility of DATE as a capable training tool and intimates its utility for developing partner capacity and interoperability, it is applying DATE in support of major theater-level operational exercises that brings this story full circle. Three exercises demonstrate how DATE is not only developing partner capacity and interoperability but is also additionally contributing to greater U.S. DOD-integrated deterrence efforts.

Yama Sakura. Yama Sakura is an annual command-post exercise between the United States and Japan that is designed to strengthen readiness and hone planning capabilities between partners. In 2023, the exercise expanded to include Australia and became the largest iteration of the exercise in its history. The key focus of Yama Sakura is exercising interoperability between nations and for the first time in 2024, it leveraged a DATE-based scenario.

Talisman Sabre. Talisman Sabre is the largest bilateral joint exercise between the United States and Australia, and it includes multinational participation from over thirteen countries. For the first time in 2023, the exercise was DATE based and included more than thirty thousand participants deployed across the Australian continent.¹⁵ With every iteration, the exercise increases in numbers and country participants, and it is described as the “Olympics of military exercises” as it presents an opportunity to execute dynamic activities across all domains.¹⁶ Planning for the 2025 iteration is ongoing, and it has been determined that it will also be DATE based. According to the lead U.S. planner for Talisman Sabre 2025, “Our collective goal for Talisman Sabre 2025 is to build combined joint warfighting capabilities with Allies and partners” and to support

theater integrated deterrence by contributing “toward maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific.”¹⁷

Rim of the Pacific. The Rim of the Pacific exercise is the world’s largest multinational maritime exercise and involved twenty-nine nations and twenty-five thousand personnel in 2024.¹⁸ While the 2024 exercise did not use DATE, current planning discussions for its next iteration are exploring the use of DATE. Themed “Partners: Integrated and Prepared,” the purpose of Rim of the Pacific is to build relationships, enhance interoperability, and contribute to the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific.¹⁹ Leaders across the U.S. military have highlighted this exercise as a way to remind our allies and partners about the importance of sticking together and to demonstrate to the region the United States’ commitment to Indo-Pacific deterrence.²⁰

DATE: An Enabler for Indo-Pacific Theater-Integrated Deterrence

The 2022 NDS defines integrated deterrence as “using every tool at the Department’s disposal, in close collaboration with our counterparts across the U.S. Government and with allies and partners, to ensure that potential foes understand the folly of aggression. The Department will align policies, investments, and activities to sustain and strengthen deterrence—tailored to specific competitors and challenges and coordinated and synchronized inside and outside of the Department.”²¹

In the Indo-Pacific theater, the importance of U.S. deterrence efforts is underscored by the region’s complex security environment, which is characterized by rising military capabilities and

Jennifer Dunn is a career intelligence professional serving as the deputy, Operational Environment Integration Directorate, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command G-2. She holds a BA from Hartwick College and an MA from the University of Kansas. Her extensive experience includes applying intelligence in support of Army training and education, particularly in implementing the Decisive Action Training Environment across training, education, and leader development programs. Dunn leads a diverse team of analysts in integrating intelligence-informed operational environment and threat conditions into Army training and education initiatives.

challenges to the rules-based order from countries like the PRC. The U.S. Army plays an essential role in achieving integrated deterrence in this theater because it is uniquely postured as a forward physical presence and is a key enabler in improving military readiness and interoperability among partner nations—supporting a key tenet of Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth’s approach to the region.²² Improving readiness and interoperability only happens through joint and combined training, which is increasingly supported with DATE.

DATE emerges as a key tool in the U.S. Army and the DOD by fostering training interoperability and

building partner capacity. Furthermore, DATE exemplifies and supports integrated deterrence, bolstering the collective defense posture of the United States and its allies.

The exponential growth of the use of DATE heralds a paradigm shift in military training, characterized by improved threat and OE understanding, and driven by transformation in contact. As DATE continues to evolve and expand its reach, it underscores the U.S. Army’s commitment to staying on the leading edge in delivering the OE in an ever-changing global security landscape, solving problems and seizing opportunities today for victories tomorrow. ■

Notes

1. “DATE: Decisive Action Training Environment,” U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) G-2, accessed 21 April 2025, <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/date-decisive-action-training-environment/>.
2. The operational environment (OE) is a “composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that [shape] the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the [unit] commander.” Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Operations* (U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 2019), 1-1.
3. Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), 2022 *National Defense Strategy* (U.S. Department of Defense [DOD], October 2022), <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1-1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.
4. OSD, 2022 *National Defense Strategy*.
5. Army Regulation (AR) 350-2, *Operational Environment and Opposing Force Program* (U.S. GPO, March 2024). AR 350-2 provides guidance for the Army’s Operational Environment and Opposing Force Program and includes requirements related to scenario development in support of Army training.
6. Army Techniques Publication 2-01.3, *Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment* (U.S. GPO, March 2019), 1-2. Military organizations describe the OE using eight operational variables: political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time (PMESII-PT).
7. Todd South, “As the Army Pivots to Battle Peers, Chemical, Biological Threats Loom,” *Army Times*, 12 October 2022, <https://www.armytimes.com/home/2022/10/12/as-the-army-pivots-to-battle-peers-chemical-biological-threats-loom/>.
8. OSD, *National Defense Strategy* (U.S. DOD, June 2008), 3, <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nds/2008NDS.pdf?ver=WEYyBjnf6UkNioPqfkSr3Q%3d%3d>.
9. CAC-T for STAND-TO!, “The Army Training Concept,” U.S. Army, 15 May 2010, https://www.army.mil/article/39205/the_army_training_concept.
10. CAC-T for STAND-TO!, “The Army Training Concept.”
11. ADP 3-0, *Operations* (U.S. GPO, 2011).
12. Penny Mellies, “Full Spectrum Training Environment (FSTE),” *Red Diamond* 2, no. 2 (February 2011), 1, https://community.apan.org/cfs-file/_key/telligent-evolution-components-attachments/13-15195-00-00-27-91-12/OEE-Red-Diamond-FEB11.pdf?forcedownload=true.
13. TRADOC G-2 maintains a running estimate of observations that is accessible by U.S. Army users. Interested parties can learn more online at <https://oe.tradoc.army.mil/china-landing-zone-how-china-fights/#china-landing-zone-observations>.
14. “The First Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Counterterrorism Working Group Meeting,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan, 26 December 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/is_sc/pagewe_000001_00015.html.
15. Jimmy Sheehan, “Talisman Sabre 2025 Planning Begins at Conference in Australia,” U.S. Army, 17 April 2024, https://www.army.mil/article/275417/talisman_sabre_2025_planning_begins_at_conference_in_australia.
16. Sheehan, “Talisman Sabre 2025.”
17. Sheehan, “Talisman Sabre 2025.”
18. Commander, U.S. 3rd Fleet Public Affairs, “RIMPAC to Begin June 27,” Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, 12 June 2024, <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3804692/rimpac-to-begin-june-27/>.
19. “U.S., Partners Showcase Impact at RIMPAC,” U.S. DOD, 2 August 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/Article/3849912/us-partners-showcase-impact-at-rimpac/>.
20. Joseph Clark, “DOD Remains Focused on Deterring Conflict in Indo-Pacific,” U.S. DOD, 5 October 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3549903/>.
21. OSD, 2022 *National Defense Strategy*, iv.
22. “Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth Joint Press Conference with Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani in Tokyo,” U.S. DOD, 29 March 2025, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/4139247/secretary-of-defense-pete-hegseth-joint-press-conference-with-japanese-defense/>.

ARMY UNIVERSITY FILMS PRESENTS A 29 PIXEL STUDIOS PRODUCTION "THE HIGH GROUND" EDITED BY SARA CARLSEN EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS BG DAVID FOLEY COL TODD SCHMIDT LTC MARK CLEVELAND DON WRIGHT PRODUCER RANDY MASTEN ASSOCIATE PRODUCER SARA CARLSEN DIRECTED BY CHRIS CAREY

A NEW DOCUMENTARY
ABOUT THE 10th MOUNTAIN DIVISION

The
HIGH
GROUND

[YOUTUBE.COM/@ARMYUNIVERSITYPRESS](https://www.youtube.com/@armyuniversitypress)

