Military Review

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A 15-kiloton nuclear artillery round is fired from a 280-mm cannon 25 May 1953 at the Nevada Proving Grounds. Hundreds of high-ranking Armed Forces officers and members of Congress were present to observe the test. In future large-scale combat operations against enemies who possess nuclear weapons, doctrine needs to stipulate detailed planning required to preclude enemies from employing such weapons effectively against friendly forces. (Photo courtesy of the National Nuclear Security Administration/Nevada Field Office)

Emerging U.S. Army Doctrine

Dislocated with Nuclear-Armed Adversaries and Limited War

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In October 2017, the U.S. Army released the new Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, and other related doctrine for future conflicts.[1] Military doctrine is an important component of any national grand strategy means-ends chain, conceptually designed to achieve national objectives.[2] Doctrine focuses on the military means a state expects to employ and how it expects to employ them, and often centers on the preferred mode of fighting wars.[3] Because military doctrine drives concepts about what military means are required and how to employ them, the doctrine must be integrated with the political grand strategy. Without coherent and integrated doctrine, the Army and other services are unlikely to be an effective means of achieving national military objectives.[4] Ineffective military means either inhibit the options of political authorities, result in catastrophic failure, or increase costs and risks.[5]

FM 3-0 serves as the principle doctrine addressing tactics and procedures for conducting large-scale ground combat operations against peer and near-peer enemies, and supports many Army leaders' inherent preference toward conventional war and decisive battle.[6] However, FM 3-0 fails to adequately address the problem that three of America's four potential peer or near-peer adversaries—Russia, China, and North Korea—possess nuclear weapons.[7] In the past, nuclear weapons have typically limited war, as the alternative was to escalate to a nuclear exchange.[8] Considering most American peer adversaries possess nuclear weapons, decisive victory will likely prove elusive in the future, and limited war and stability operations appear far more likely.

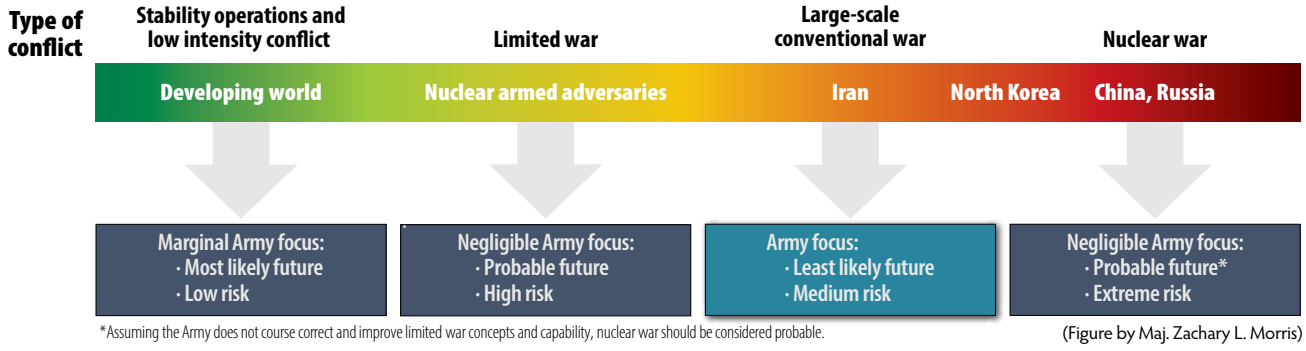
The U.S. Army and its allies should resist the urge to focus on large-scale military operations or, at a minimum, frame their approach to large-scale operations in a manner commensurate to the operational environment. The Army should also amend emerging doctrine to address the current gap related to nuclear weapons and include a discussion of operational approaches necessary for success against nuclear-armed adversaries. The Army is becoming too focused, doctrinally and conceptually, on large-scale war and requires more emphasis on smaller, limited conflicts. The figure (on page 29) depicts the U.S. Army's focus on conventional military operations in the conflict spectrum and its limited attention on other more likely and more dangerous potential future conflicts. As the figure displays, it is arguable that the current FM 3-0 is only useful for a conflict against Iran since it is a potential large-scale threat without nuclear weapons.

Ivan Bloch foresaw many of the realities of World War I in *La Guerre Future*.[9] He predicted that, because of technological advancements, war would become extraordinarily lethal and prevent armies from achieving decisive victory. He essentially argued that because of the current conditions, war—and by extension the military—was temporarily obsolete for resolving political disputes.[10] Ignoring the more likely and dangerous potential future conflicts increases the risk that the Army will commit operational or strategic errors resulting in nuclear escalation, or, once again, make the service obsolete for resolving political disputes.

The Future Near-Peer Environment and Limited War

FM 3-0 is primarily focused on large-scale ground combat operations, conceptually centered on fighting Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley's 4+1 threats: Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and violent extremist organizations. While FM 3-0 does many things exceptionally well—including developing the concepts of consolidating gains, shaping operational environments, and preventing conflicts—the three core chapters are dedicated to defeating peer and near-peer enemies during large-scale ground combat operations.[11] However, these chapters fail to take into account the reality that these combat operations will happen against nuclear-armed opponents and thus either remain extremely limited (i.e., not large-scale) or probably result in a nuclear exchange.

Wars between nuclear-armed powers have been, and will likely remain, extremely limited because of the risks nuclear escalation poses to both sides. Many scholars have discussed the limiting impact of nuclear weapons, and how any defeat that threatens core interests dramatically increases the risks of inadvertent escalation.[12] Each historical direct conflict between nuclear powers, such as the 1969 Sino-Soviet border conflict and 1999 Indo-Pakistan conflict, has remained limited in scope, time, forces employed, methods used, and desired objectives.[13] Even though these conflicts remained extremely limited, serious escalation risks and concerns arose. Any attempts to achieve decisive



(Figure by Maj. Zachary L. Morris)

Figure. Potential Near-Future Conflict Spectrum and Army Focus

victory concerning vital interests for either opponent would almost certainly result in nuclear escalation.[14]

If the United States seeks a decisive victory, often by altering an adversary's government, there would be little reason for an adversary to avoid using nuclear weapons.[15] China, Russia, and North Korea are all highly centralized states that view internal stability and control as a vital interest of the government. All three states also have historical narratives that see themselves as victims of aggression by foreign powers and are extremely sensitive to potential oppression. Even if the United States avoided regime change, these potential adversaries would probably view any type of decisive military defeat as an existential threat to their internal stability and control. Further, miscalculation and misunderstandings in a large-scale conflict are likely and could easily lead to accidental escalation.[16] Thus, in a conventional war, escalation would be likely due to either miscalculation or a U.S. adversary removing restraints on nuclear use because of an existential crisis.[17]

A future conflict against a nuclear-armed adversary should be characterized by managing escalation and focusing on limited objectives and means; if not, the United States should expect, and prepare for, nuclear war. Escalation management implies fighting—at all levels of war—in a manner designed to prevent inadvertent escalation to the nuclear exchange threshold. This threshold is difficult to determine but would most likely be crossed by causing an existential threat for one side. Because Army doctrine emphasizes the use of overwhelming force to achieve decisive results, the United States could easily cause an adversary to cross the nuclear threshold. Rather, future war may require returning to President Woodrow Wilson's conception of "peace without victory," because the threat of nuclear escalation makes it politically and strategically impractical to achieve a total victory.[18]

American peer and near-peer adversaries are likely to employ nuclear weapons in a large-scale conflict. These states are thinking about the use of nuclear weapons and how to operate in a difficult future environment. Russia, for example, has exercised nuclear concepts extensively. During Zapad 2009, Russia reportedly ended the exercise with a nuclear strike on Warsaw, Poland. Further, in October 2016, Russia conducted a massive exercise evacuating the government from Moscow after a simulated nuclear attack.[19] These exercises reflect conceptual changes in Russia about the utility of nuclear weapons. A 2012 U.S. National Intelligence Council report recognized that American and Russian nuclear ambitions have evolved in opposite directions, and while America is reducing the role of nuclear weapons, "Russia is pursuing new concepts and capabilities for expanding the role of nuclear weapons in its security strategy."[20]

While Russia clearly advocates the use of nuclear weapons in an existential crisis, leaders have also begun exploring the concept of escalate to deescalate. Russian doctrine explicitly states that nuclear weapons are useable in a conflict that threatens the existence of the Russian Federation.[21] In a large-scale conflict, the use of nuclear weapons would likely become a viable option because conflict against overwhelming U.S. force would threaten the Russian Federation's survival. In 2009, the commander of the Strategic Missile Troops, Lt. Gen. Andrey Shvaychenko said, "In a conventional war,

[nuclear weapons] ensure that the opponent is forced to cease hostilities, on advantageous conditions for Russia, by means of single or multiple preventive strikes against the aggressors' most important facilities."[22] Unless conflict with Russia remains extremely limited, it appears likely Russia would escalate to nuclear use.

While China has a no first use policy for nuclear weapons, many experts have begun debating if China *would* employ nuclear escalation in a conventional war with the United States.[23] Caitlin Talmadge, an assistant professor of political science and international affairs at the George Washington University, argued that nuclear escalation is plausible but not inevitable. She argues the danger comes primarily from China's concern about broader U.S. intentions once war has begun—such as regime change or decisive victory that threatens vital Chinese interests—rather than the threat a U.S. conventional campaign would pose to China's nuclear arsenal.[24] These fears are well-founded, given U.S. history and military focus on decisive victory, as well as American predisposition to fight by disrupting an adversary's command-and-control functions. A major war between China and the United States—if fought the way the U.S. Army desires as reflected in FM 3-0—would likely result in conditions that could encourage China's use of nuclear weapons. Finally, North Korea, and its leader Kim Jong Un, have demonstrated even less restraint, more explosive rhetoric, and extensive nuclear testing; the United States should assume large-scale conflict against North Korea would result in a nuclear exchange.

FM 3-0 and Emerging Doctrinal Problems

FM 3-0 fails to adequately bridge the tactical and strategic levels of war because of the logical disconnect created by focusing on near-peer adversaries possessing nuclear weapons, without attempting to account for how to fight in a limited and highly constrained environment. While FM 3-0 mentions considering the risks of escalation in a few passages, the doctrine does not explain how the U.S. Army will, or should, operate in a limited war environment.[25] Beyond stating that escalation is a concern of the joint force commander, the doctrine provides little discussion or concept development for how nuclear escalation might affect operations. Much of the discussion related to nuclear weapons focuses downward toward the tactical level of war and emphasizes the tactical measures necessary to manage consequences after use or to protect the force.[26] The doctrine essentially focuses on enabling operations rather than on creating a concept for realistic military action designed to achieve political and strategic objectives in a constrained environment. There is also no discussion about how operations may occur or may look after the exchange of nuclear weapons. Both tactical and strategic nuclear weapons are a vital and influential aspect of any war against a nuclear-armed adversary. Ignoring the probable realities created by these weapons does not improve the odds of avoiding their use. Rather, not understanding or not thinking about the effects of these systems on future operations degrades the value and utility of FM 3-0 and inhibits the potential future effectiveness of U.S. Army combat operations.

Rather than develop potential tactics, techniques, and procedures that could limit or control escalation in a future war, the new doctrine espouses many escalatory tactics. The doctrine advocates the traditional aspects of modern American war such as attacking a host of potentially dual-use capabilities, including command-and-control functions, integrated air defense systems, and integrated fire commands.[27] Attacking these systems, especially if they reside within the borders of the nuclear-armed state, would be escalatory, as these are considered a precursor to disarming a first strike or enabling a decisive victory—increasing a "use it or lose it" mentality in the target state.[28] FM 3-0 also encourages directly targeting nuclear weapons, facilities, and delivery capabilities.[29] Explicit targeting of nuclear capabilities would almost certainly escalate conflict and significantly threaten to achieve strategic objectives. The doctrine also espouses many concepts that are indirectly escalatory, such as deep and rapid advances, and exploitation operations, which could threaten conflict stability.[30] Rapid advances and exploitation could be escalatory depending on the context. Deep penetration into an adversary's territory, which threatens vital interests such as political stability or the loss of significant ground forces, could cause an adversary to consider using nuclear weapons to stabilize the situation. These concepts reflect the Army's fixation on the tactical and operational levels of war rather than appreciating

the probable challenges and limitations that will occur at the strategic and political level.

Instead of the large-scale conflicts that U.S. doctrine addresses, future peer and near-peer conflict will have significantly different characteristics. These conflicts will be severely restricted in size, scope, and location, and they will probably fought by proxy or in locations distant from either states' home borders. Warfare in a nuclear-constrained environment may exhibit some characteristics of high-intensity warfare but with severely limited ends, ways, and means. These conflicts could involve combat between highly capable forces operating under stringent political and strategic limitations such as forces restricted from exploiting maneuver opportunities, destroying an enemy force, or achieving a decisive victory. Additionally, these conflicts could involve proxy wars or limited conflicts distant from significant national interests to reduce the threat of miscalculation or escalation. Limited conflict in these conditions could resemble prolonged siege warfare designed to slowly exhaust the enemy nation, conceptually resembling Russia's efforts in Ukraine. In fact, Russia's conflict in Ukraine is probably a better picture of future war than most other conflicts. It depicts combat between lethal adversaries that cannot achieve decisive military victory for strategic and political reasons. Because of these limitations, strategy and operations will probably require indirect methods to exhaust the enemy's will to resist.

These wars might resemble the stalemate in Korea between 1952 and 1953, not because the United States is incapable of breaking the deadlock but because military success is politically and strategically inadvisable. Limited conflicts will require much greater synergy between the political, strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war than previous conflicts to achieve objectives and prevent accidental escalation to nuclear conflict. Further, this environment would likely require utilizing an indirect approach to achieve marginal objectives, deter adversaries, or simply deny adversaries' objectives using strategies of exhaustion or attrition. The United States has struggled in the past in these types of conflict due to the historical American power advantage and desire for decisive victory, and the new doctrine does little to help prepare the U.S. Army for a limited war future.

Conclusion

The United States should alter emerging doctrine to focus on limited war concepts and address the current flaws necessary for success against nuclear-armed adversaries. As three of the four potential American peer or near-peer adversaries already possess nuclear weapons, war will become increasingly constrained due to escalatory risks. Strategic and political constraints created by potential nuclear escalation makes decisive victory, and large-scale combat, unlikely. FM 3-0 does not adequately address these risks or challenges and fails to bridge the tactical and strategic levels of war. The emerging doctrine's focus on peer adversaries without properly addressing the impact of nuclear weapons on war sets the military up for strategic failure and could force adversaries to escalate the conflict. Further, the new doctrine demonstrates flaws due to its inherently escalatory tactics and methods of war. Rather than large-scale conflict, a future war between peers will require focusing on limited war and managing escalation. Without this limited and controlled approach, current adversaries are incentivized with the threat to use nuclear weapons.

If the U.S. Army cannot develop concepts and operational methods for the limited warfare environment of the future, then the service risks losing its utility to resolve many political conflicts. Without realistic potential solutions, U.S. political leaders should avoid employing the Army unless the interest in question is so vital that a nuclear exchange is an acceptable risk. Without limited tools, the United States should expect nuclear war, not large-scale ground operations. The problem FM 3-0 depicts is that Army doctrine

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continues to advocate the use of overwhelming force and decisive victory as the primary and, arguably, the only way to achieve success for the Army against a peer or near-peer adversary once war erupts. Unless nuclear capabilities are nullified, nuclear weapons serve as a deterrent to war but also prevent decisive victory. ■

The opinions expressed here are the author's and do not represent the U.S. Army or the Department of Defense.

Notes

1. Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 2017); Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2017), 1. Operations bridge tactics and military strategy and are defined as "a sequence of tactical actions with a common purpose or unifying theme."

2. Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 13.

3. Ibid., 13–14; ADP 1-01, *Doctrine Primer* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2014), 1-2. The U.S. Army defines doctrine "as fundamental principles, with supporting tactics, techniques, procedures, and terms and symbols, used for the conduct of operations and which the operating force, and elements of the institutional Army that directly support operations, guide their actions in support of national objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application."

4. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, 25.

5. Ibid.

6. FM 3-0, *Operations*, foreword; Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 240; Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 40, 49, and 62.

7. Nick Routley, "How Many Nuclear Weapons Each Country in the World Has," Business Insider, 14 August 2017, accessed 31 August 2018, http://www.businessinsider.com/how-many-nuclear-weapons-each-country-in-the-world-has-2017-8.

8. Numerous authors argue that nuclear weapons limit and constrain war and that in a conflict between nuclear powers, escalation is a significant risk. Several prominent sources include: Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 20; Matthew Kroenig, *Exporting the Bomb: Technology Transfer and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 18; Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: An Enduring Debate*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), 9; Barry R. Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation: Conventional War and Nuclear Risks* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

9. Michael Howard, *War in European History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105.

10. Ibid.

11. FM 3-0, *Operations*, foreword.

12. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 20; Kroenig, *Exporting the Bomb*, 18, 20, 180, and 185; Sagan and Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, 9 and 15; Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation.*

13. Kroenig, *Exporting the Bomb*, 25 and 124.

14. Sagan and Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, 6.

15. Ibid.

16. Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation*.

17. Ibid., 20. Posen discusses the fog of war and how it can impact the risk of escalation by making it harder for civilians to control military operations and creating conditions of heightened fear. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 92–125. Schelling discusses the manipulation of risk and the inherent danger of miscalculation extensively, and also highlights how opposing nations may increase risk and ambiguity to try and achieve success while simultaneously increasing the risk of escalation.

18. Gideon Rose, *How Wars End: Why We Always Fight the Last Battle* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2010), 19.

19. Matt Payton, "Russia Launches Massive Nuclear War Training Exercise with '40 Million People,'" *Independent* (website), 5 October 2016, accessed 31 August 2018, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-nuclear-weapon-training-attack-radiation-moscow-vladimir-putin-a7345461.html.

20. National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds* (Washington, DC: National Intelligence Council, December 2012), 69, accessed 31 August 2018, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/GlobalTrends_2030.pdf.

21. Embassy of the Russian Federation in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, "Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation," press release no. 2976, 29 June 2015, sec. III, para. 27, accessed 31 August 2018, http://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029; also discussed in Olga Oliker, *Russia's Nuclear Doctrine: What We Know, What We Don't, and What That Means* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2016), 3.

22. Mark B. Schneider, "Escalate to De-escalate," *Proceedings* 143, no. 1,368 (August 2017), accessed 31 August 2018, https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2017-02/escalate-de-escalate.

23. Caitlin Talmadge, "Would China Go Nuclear?: Assessing the Risk of Chinese Nuclear Escalation in a Conventional War with the United States," *International Security* 41, no. 4 (Spring 2017): 50.

24. Ibid., 51.

25. FM 3-0, *Operations*, 4-1, 4-18, 4-21, 5-3, and 7-3. The references to escalation on these pages constitute the extent of guidance provided for managing nuclear escalation.

26. Ibid., 5-3 and 5-7.

27. Ibid., 7-8, 7-45—7-46.

28. Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation*, 65-67. Posen discusses the conclusions and analysis of a possible air interdiction and suppression of enemy air defenses campaign against the Soviet Union.

29. FM 3-0, *Operations*, 2-51, 7-8, and 7-45.

30. Ibid., 7-46.

Saratoga Campaign

13 June to 8 November 1777

The Combat Studies Institute is pleased to announce publication of the *Staff Ride Handbook for the Saratoga Campaign, 13 June to 8 November 1777*, a detailed treatment of a significant series of events during the early phase of the American Revolutionary War. This handbook details the significance of various locations on Lake Champlain, along the Mohawk River, and across the border in Vermont, and concludes with the final, decisive actions along the banks of the Hudson River. This handbook enables a detailed campaign study, highlighting the importance of logistics and terrain, as well as a shorter, more focused study of the individual Saratoga battles themselves. The handbook also highlights the importance of incorporating capabilities from across the total force, from regulars to militia, as well as the vital importance of skilled leadership, command relationships, and the principle of unity of command in order to achieve victory on the battlefield. The Saratoga Campaign was the turning point of the American Revolution and served as a model for revolutionaries in later eras detailing how to defeat hegemonic imperial powers, thus remaining a highly relevant case study for future practitioners of modern warfare. To view this publication, please visit https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/educational-services/staff-rides/Staff-Ride-Handbook-Saratoga-Campaign.pdf.