



Members of the 442nd Troop Carrier Group plan missions into Europe during World War II. U.S. Army doctrine was focused primarily on the European theater until the transition to multidomain operations codified in Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*. (Photo courtesy of the 442nd Fighter Wing)

FM 3-0

A Step Forward in Approaching Operational Art



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The Army in 2023 finds itself in a unique position. The 2022 *National Defense Strategy* prioritizes China as the number one pacing

threat, with Russia as the number two acute threat.¹ This represents a seismic shift for the Army, which, since the end of World War II, calibrated its doctrine

for the European theater despite the near-constant conflict in other operational environments (OE).² The Army could have used this shift in the *National Defense Strategy's* focus from Europe to the Pacific to justify using an Army Pacific forces multidomain concept as the basis for the newest edition of Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*. However, Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine awakened the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to the Russian threat and sparked changes to ensure the alliance could effectively respond.³ The Army recognized that a future joint force commander, whether in Europe or the Pacific, must use similar tools to build their campaign and operations.

The Army's decision to use multidomain operations (MDO) as the conceptual basis for FM 3-0 shifted the Army from tradition. Historically, militaries focused on a single existential operational problem as the basis for their doctrine.⁴ Militaries handle this operational problem by building operational concepts, which are subsequently validated through testing and codified into doctrine.⁵ For example, the Soviets built the concept of deep battle to respond to the threat posed by Germany in the early twentieth century.⁶ The U.S. Army created AirLand Battle during the Cold War to respond to the Soviet threat in Germany.⁷ The U.S. Marine Corps is undergoing Force Design 2030, implementing the concepts of stand-in forces and expeditionary advanced base operation. The Marines intend to be a joint force enabler able to operate inside threat antiaccess/area de-

denial locations within the Pacific.⁸ These concepts attempted to balance the objective with the operational factors of time, space, and force.⁹ These solutions are not easily exportable to other OEs with different operational factors.

In 2023, the U.S. Army operates in multiple distinct OEs against unique threats. Despite some commonalities, each OE requires concepts that appropriately balance the operational

factors. The Army cannot create a single concept that is one-size-fits-all because it poses too much risk. Soviet deep battle would fail if applied to the Pacific, where at least initially, the land forces were a supporting force instead of a supported force. Similarly, the Army could not re-create AirLand Battle because that doctrine was tailored explicitly for a Soviet threat in Germany. The Army, unlike the Marines, cannot only choose to focus on one OE due to different mission sets. FM 3-0 succeeds because it provides commanders with a doctrinal approach to operational art. Unlike operational concepts designed for a single OE, the Army's MDO can and must be tailored by the commanders to succeed in diverse OEs.

Deep Battle

Gen. Georgii Isserson, a Soviet military thinker, wrote about the most pressing operational problem facing the Soviet Union post-World War I, the German mechanized threat in Eastern Europe, and the emergence of extended depth on the battlefield. Isserson contributed to the thinking about the operational level of war and the concept of deep battle. He recognized that if an army does not think about the operational problem, it will ignore how the operational factors evolve over time and only consider the factors as they once were during execution.¹⁰ These mistakes are routinely paid for through stalled progress or defeat and high casualty counts. Isserson attempted to understand the OE and think through how to balance the operational factors and the objective properly. Balancing operational factors prevents disaster and is vitally important.¹¹ The Soviet deep battle doctrine proved successful during World War II, and it balanced time, space, and force: the operational factors of Eastern Europe in the 1930s.

Isserson recognized a time-space-force imbalance that previously did not exist. The flank, primarily due to mechanization, no longer reigned supreme, and instead, depth and the ability to reach deep into the enemy's rear mattered most.¹² The Soviets, with deep battle, faced a singular threat that needed to be dealt with systematically. Soviet planners believed they could apply deep battle during a potential conflict against NATO during the Cold War in West Germany.¹³ However, deep battle is not one-size-fits-all; if the Soviets had attempted to apply deep battle to a Pacific island-hopping campaign, they would not

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U.S. Army M-60 main battle tanks train in the Fulda Gap, West Germany, where the United States and NATO expected Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces to attack first if a “hot war” began during the Cold War in Europe. Concerns over the Soviet threat led to the development of U.S. Army AirLand Battle doctrine. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

have achieved the same results.¹⁴ It is not one-size-fits-all because the operational factors change based on who, when, and where they choose to fight. Deep battle requires depth and suitable terrain for mechanized warfare; not every OE contains that terrain type. The Soviets did not develop a universal solution. They attempted to solve the problem with an operational concept tailored to their threat, physical space, and time period. MDO avoids the pitfalls of a one-size-fits-all solution and allows commanders to recognize their unique OE.

The U.S. Army, unlike the Soviets, faces multiple OEs, each with distinct operational factors. The U.S. Army must balance the respective operational factors toward the objective for each OE it currently faces.

MDO enables operational commanders because even though it is not built for a single OE, it provides tools for approaching OEs. The Army cannot ignore Russia for China because the Army exists to deal with all peer threats, not individual ones.¹⁵ The Army could not turn a Pacific-oriented operational concept into doctrine and expect it to work for the Army in Europe. Failing to balance the European theater’s operational factors against the objective could result in catastrophe.¹⁶ The Russian invasion of Ukraine only reinforces that the Army cannot ignore the European OE for the Pacific. A concept like deep battle, designed for a specific OE, would fail in other contexts, but MDO provides a framework for approaching an OE and conducting operational art.



Air Force F-16, F-15C, and F-15E aircraft from the 4th Fighter Wing fly over Kuwaiti oil fires set by the retreating Iraqi army during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. The overwhelming defeat of the Iraqi forces validated U.S. Army AirLand Battle doctrine. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Air Force)

AirLand Battle

Gen. Donn A. Starry, as the V Corps commander in Europe, faced a similar problem as Isserson in the 1970s. He needed a concept that would work for his singular OE. He understood how the Soviets expected to fight in Germany, and he understood his objective, but he needed to figure out how to balance the operational factors. Starry was deeply concerned about the Soviets' depth of forces and the short time for their employment.¹⁷ These are operational factor concerns because, relative to the USSR, his factors were not balanced. Starry understood that one could overcome the space and time imbalance through superior trained and equipped forces.¹⁸ Starry developed the operational concept, which eventually became AirLand Battle. The unique insight of Starry was how the corps commander could create conditions the Soviets were not expecting by striking across the depth of their offense.¹⁹ AirLand Battle balanced the Army's operational factors and imposed an imbalance for which the Soviets were unprepared. Like deep battle, AirLand

Battle is not a universal solution but was designed for a specific problem at a specific time.

AirLand Battle created a lasting impact on the Army due to its success in the Gulf War. The impact appeared as AirLand Battle transcended a single OE, but AirLand Battle served as a concept for the Cold War context and the Soviet threat.²⁰ Many adversaries, like the Iraqi army in Operation Desert Storm, operated Soviet weapons and used Soviet tactics.²¹ AirLand Battle articulated well how to achieve victory given the specific context of the problem faced.²² AirLand Battle worked well in the Gulf War because the context and mission aligned with the Cold War context. The mission and context for the pacing threat, China, and the acute threat Russia, is too different for a single operating concept. The MDO tenets are not tied to a specific context but instead frame how to develop a concept for an operational problem and balance the operational factors. This "tailoring" requirement is the Army's challenge today, and Army leadership is taking it on similar to Isserson and Starry.



Force Design 2030

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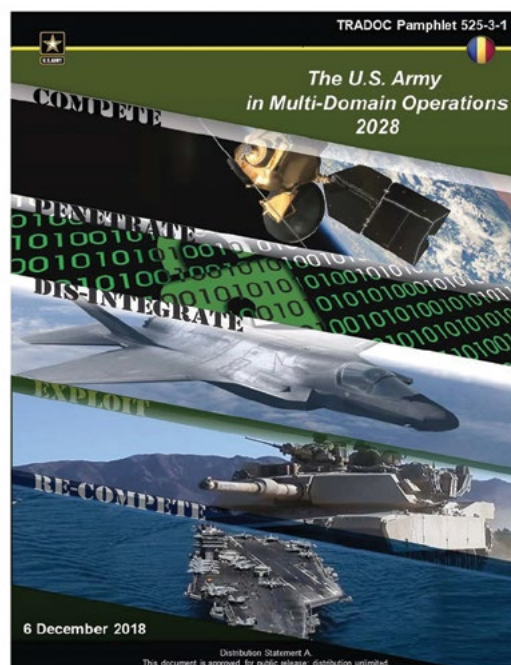
The *Force Design 2030 Annual Update* can be found online at https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Docs/Force_Design_2030_Annual_Update_June_2023.pdf.

U.S. Army Pacific commander Gen. Charles A. Flynn and I Corps commander Lt. Gen. Xavier T. Brunson published articles in 2023 describing concepts for fighting as part of a joint force in the Pacific context. Flynn recognized the Army's supporting role and showed how the Army could aid in convergence by creating opportunities for the Air Force and Navy as opposed to the concept of AirLand Battle, where the Army was the supported force.²³ Brunson's concept, distributed command-and-control nodes, addresses how to win given I Corps' mission and context.²⁴ Brunson's concept embraces all the tenets of MDO, but like Flynn's concept, it inverts how the Army is comfortable operating. I Corps is not training to fight as a mass of infantry and armor arrayed against an objective. I Corps, as just one example, is prepared to support the creation of those interior lines and support the joint force through its multidomain task forces. Commanders should think outside the box and build operational concepts given their current organization and what might be possible based on what will soon be online.²⁵ In both cases, MDO directly enabled their approach to operational art. Leadership within U.S. Army Europe should also develop and disseminate

unclassified concepts for the Army in Europe using MDO as a framework for operational art. These concepts are better than the Army could achieve with the doctrine based on theater-specific threats.

The Marines and Force Design 2030

The U.S. Marines, unlike the Army, can prioritize a single operating concept for a specific context and mission because the Army complements the Marines in those other contexts. The May 2022 update to Force Design 2030 does not refer to Russia, but states, "The pacing threat for our Force Design, as directed by the current and two previous presidential administrations, is the Armed Forces of the People's Republic of China (PRC)."²⁶ While not wholly changed, the Marines are undergoing massive formation updates as they prioritize efforts to respond to the pacing threat of China. The Marines are currently testing these new formations and will build supporting doctrine as they advance toward Force Design 2030. One-size-fits-all approaches do not work for the Army, but the Marine Corps could afford to divest its heavy armor, for example, because it understood the Army would provide armor to the joint force as required by a joint force commander.²⁷



The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028 can be found online at https://www.army.mil/article/243754/the_u_s_army_in_multi_domain_operations_2028.

The Marine Corps is taking a different approach than the Army. Their prioritization of a singular threat is closer to what the Army accomplished with AirLand Battle against the Soviet threat.

Force Design 2030 complements the Army's efforts to embrace MDO. However, because the Army is positioned to respond effectively to multiple threats, the U.S. Marine Corps can prioritize a singular threat. The context and requirements for the Army in the Pacific will result in a different use of the Army.²⁸ At its core, the Marines do not have this same issue, as they can prioritize a singular threat and write a capstone doctrine supporting that effort. The Marines can balance the priority of a single concept with maintaining a whole world perspective and how to operate across the globe.²⁹ The Marines mitigate the risk posed by prioritizing a single OE by not completely transforming as they still retain the Marine air-ground task force structure for a sizeable portion of the corps. This is similar to how the Army prioritized AirLand Battle but remained capable of responding outside the European theater. The Army requires a flexible doctrine, so operational commanders can account for their specific OE.

Counterargument

The counterarguments are that FM 3-0 is inadequate and impractical as a doctrine. It does not provide a specific answer on how to win in any given context. All doctrine must be tailored to the specific circumstances of a given context and objective. Retired Brig. Gen. Huba Wass de Czege, an infantry officer instrumental in the writing and development of AirLand Battle, wrote a commentary on "The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028," where he critiqued MDO. He claimed that MDO does not outline the problem nor how MDO can successfully address that problem in a way that friend and foe both understand.³⁰ He compares MDO and AirLand Battle, showing how AirLand Battle successfully outlined the problem for the force and could deter a threat.³¹ In this view, MDO fails because it is not a solution.

This is a reasonable observation; however, the comparison is unfair given the different strategic contexts of 1982 and today. Both theaters contain some similarities, but the operational factors are too different. The proper balancing will end with the Army as part of the joint force doing very different things in each scenario.

While suitable for its context, an operating concept like AirLand Battle would struggle in other contexts. Operational commanders would be left with nothing but their thoughts on how to win. Commanders need a guiding framework for approaching operational art, which MDO, through the tenets, addresses. The commander is provided with the tools necessary for building successful campaigns and operations.

One could also argue that all doctrine must be tailored to unique situations. Gen. David Berger, when speaking to congressional defense committees, highlighted that the Marine Corps, even when focused on the pacing threat of China, is still prepared and better suited to respond to many mission sets across the globe.³² The Army should focus on a single concept for winning in a specific context and tailor it as needed for other contexts. This does not recognize that the Marines have entirely different mission sets than the Army. The Marines complement the joint force by remaining focused on expeditionary operations.³³ The Army's focus remains broader focused on both peer threats. These roles look different in execution. Flynn noted that the Army in the Pacific needed to create interior lines that it already possessed in Europe.³⁴ These are not minor changes for a given OE. They are different approaches, but the tenets of MDO inform different approaches.

Conclusions and Recommendations

FM 3-0 succeeds because it provides operational-level commanders with a doctrinal approach to operation art that they can tailor to their diverse OE. These commanders are not given a complete concept that needs minor adjustments on the ground like previous generations were with AirLand Battle because this is no longer possible. These commanders need to address the operational problem within their OE, informed by the tenets of MDO, and develop a concept for winning. Since the publication of FM 3-0, these concepts have been emerging and are nested as part of a joint force. A prefabricated solution, a modern incarnation of deep battle in the twenty-first-century context, cannot correctly balance the operational factors. The interplay of space, force, and time will not be the same, and the objectives for each theater are not the same. Concepts that bind operational-level commanders to a single approach

are potentially dangerous. Commanders need support in approaching their operational problem; that is what FM 3-0 and MDO provide the force. The tenets of MDO are positive traits a commander should seek in operations or campaigns but not the answer to the problem.

Leaders can find MDO uncomfortable because it recognizes the multipolar nature of the world and how old methods may not work in new situations. Still, MDO is the right direction for the Army because it forces all leaders to think deeply about their respective OEs and roles. One should not let service identity become a roadblock or an impediment to change.³⁵ The Army must get comfortable that the capstone doctrine accepts that, at times, the Army will not have primacy within the joint force. The Army needs leaders supported by doctrine who can

develop solutions even when the Army is the supporting force.

FM 3-0 provides the necessary tools to the commander, but describing what winning looks like requires the publication of joint operational concepts. This is key to deterrence and showing the force what victory looks like.³⁶ Unclassified joint operational concepts will assure allies and partners, deter adversaries, and promote common understanding within the joint force. Army concepts must nest within the joint concepts; the context matters. AirLand Battle was an outstanding piece of doctrine that served the Army well in the context of the Cold War with enduring lessons for the modern day, but it was a solution to a specific problem. The Army faces specific global problems, and MDO provides operational-level commanders with the essential doctrine supporting their efforts. ■

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