

Authorities and the Multidomain Task Force Enabling Strategic Effect

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As the operational environment evolves, the integration of advanced capabilities at the operational level in areas such as information and electronic warfare must remain firmly linked to the political and strategic-military authority. Within this evolving strategic landscape and with the emergence of the concept of multidomain operations (MDO), aligning a multi-domain task force (MDTF) with a theater army provides a conduit to access political authorities, linking strategic effects to operational formations. Retaining the MDTF at the theater army level enables the corps by ensuring the authorities of the geographic combatant commander are closely linked to the strategic capabilities within the MDTF. The aim of this article is to explore the command relationships and authorities necessary to fully operationalize the capabilities of the MDTF. By analyzing historical precedents and current frameworks, it seeks to enrich senior leader discussions and underscore the significance of strategic political-military alignment in modern military operations.

What Is the MDTF?

MDTFs are fires-based formations specifically designed to focus on the penetration and disintegration of threat antiaccess/area denial (A2/AD) systems (see figure 1). They are theater level, multidomain maneuver elements that synchronize long-range precision effects—such as electronic warfare, space, cyber, and information—with long-range precision fires.¹ MDTFs occupy strategic ground to employ high-technology weapon systems to create strategic advantages across

large distances.² As part of a theater army, an MDTF ensures that highly capable organizations can gain and maintain access during competition to achieve effects of deterrence, and if deterrence were to fail, leverage positions of relative advantage as the joint force moves into crisis and conflict.

Authorities

The changes to the character of warfare naturally have an impact on the nature of political decision-making. As stated by Carl von Clausewitz, war is a “continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.”³ When political leaders decide on the use of force, they naturally must decide on the use or nonuse of available means to accomplish the strategic ends. This fundamental decision applies to whether the 101st Airborne Division is deployed or nonlethal effects are employed from the MDTF. At the strategic level, the linkage between political and military strategic leadership exists in the relationship and the authorities granted from the president and the secretary of defense (SECDEF) to the geographic combatant commanders (GCC) through the assignment, allocation, and apportionment of forces to their respective geographic areas (see figure 2).⁴

Assignment refers to service-provided forces that the GCC retains combatant command over. Combatant command is defined in the *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* as “nontransferable command authority, which cannot be delegated, of a combatant commander to perform those functions of command over assigned forces involving organizing and

employing commands and forces; assigning tasks; designating objectives; and giving authoritative direction over all aspects of military operations, joint training, and logistics necessary to accomplish the missions assigned to the command.”⁵ This authority means that the GCC retains, and cannot delegate, ultimate authority over all forces assigned to the subordinate component commands. When discussing the MDTF, the GCC is therefore only one echelon from direct control of the MDTF and the MDTF is only two echelons from the SECDEF.

The Pentomic Division

The strategic nature of the MDTF’s stated capabilities and effects parallels that of nuclear weapons. One metaphorical case study to the command relationship and associated authorities’ discussion is in the post-World War II Pentomic Division. Gen. Maxwell Taylor, the Army chief of staff from 1955 to 1959, led an effort to adjust the structure and capabilities of the army division into a highly mobile, nuclear-armed fighting force in preparation for war against the Soviet Union in Europe.⁶ Described as the first offset, the stated purpose of arming the military with tactical nuclear weapons was to compensate for the smaller size of the U.S. formations with more destructive fires capabilities.⁷ While the U.S. Army was smaller and more dispersed than the Soviet horde, it could deal much more damage by employing tactical nuclear weapons. The Pentomic Division structure consisted of five small battle groups per division, each armed with tactical nuclear weapons including the Honest John nuclear-armed rocket.⁸

1st Multi-Domain Task Force electromagnetic warfare specialist Staff Sgt. Orlando Varela demonstrates the wear of the Versatile Radio Observation and Direction (VROD) manpack system at Aibano Training Area, Japan, 18 July 2024. The VROD detects electronic frequencies and creates a virtual map of the electronic environment to enable an electronic attack on unauthorized transmissions. (Photo by Capt. Jamie Cottrell, U.S. Army Reserve)



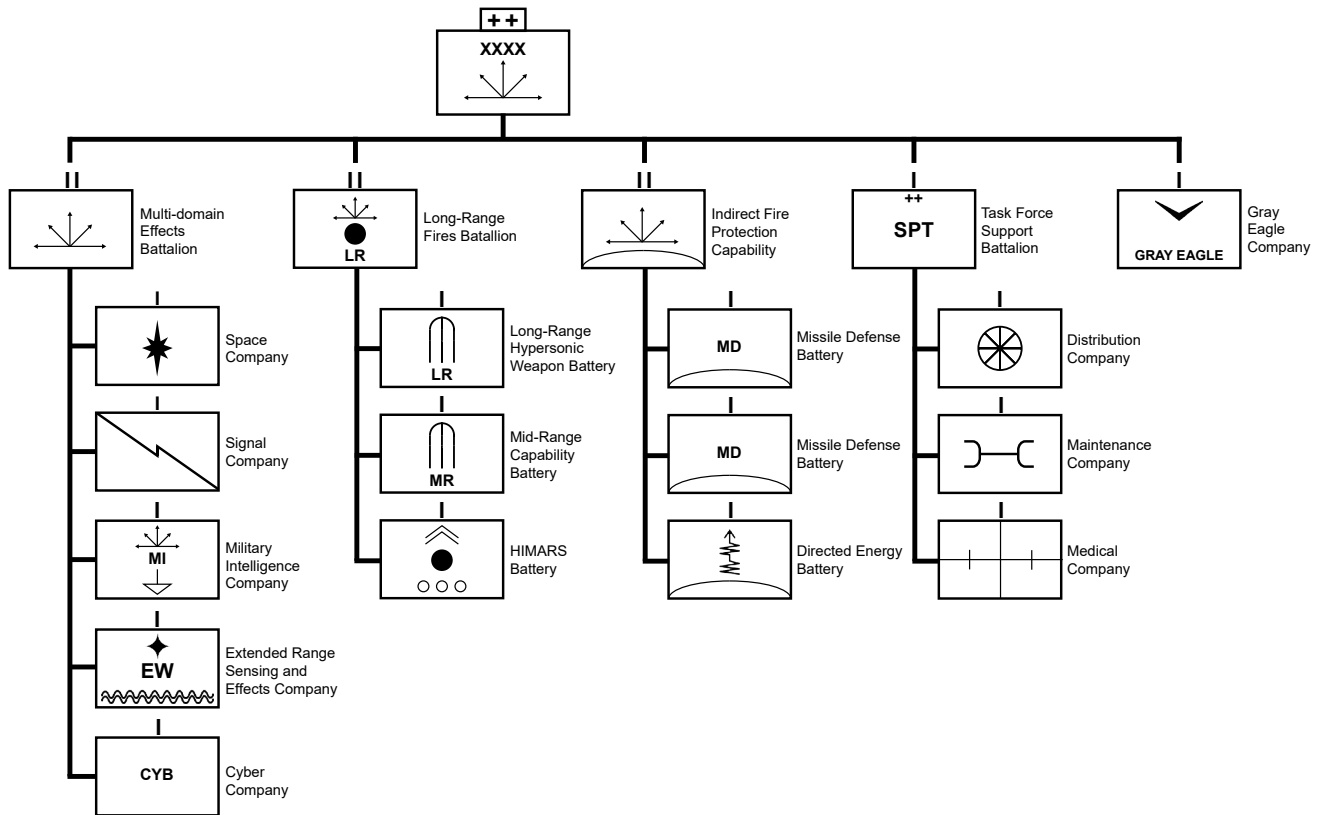


The pentomic force structure enabled greater mobility by cutting roughly five thousand personnel from each division to roughly fourteen thousand and reduced the unit of employment from the World War II regiment to the pentomic battle group. Smaller divisions and smaller units of employment also allowed fiscal and personnel feasibility due to ongoing budget cuts and recruiting challenges. The adjustment to a nuclear-capable force to fight an unlikely nuclear war stood in contrast to the narrative that conventional warfare would remain.⁹ In essence, the pentomic division was an atomic fighting force with striking power, but it lacked the mobility, flexibility, and communications means required for the more likely and politically suitable character of future, limited wars. Taylor's decision to push atomic capabilities down to the division level constrained the entire operational army from using military force in any scenario due to the political unwillingness to employ nuclear capabilities.

Shown here at the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland in March 1961, a U.S.-developed M-388 Davy Crockett nuclear weapon is mounted to a recoilless rifle on a tripod. It used the smallest nuclear warhead ever developed by the United States. The division was armed with tactical nuclear weapons to offset the Soviet Union's numerical advantage during the Cold War. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Department of Defense)

What's So Strategic About the MDTF?

Several parallels exist between the MDTF and the Pentomic Division, including fiscal and personnel constraints affecting the modern fighting force, the relatively rapid nature of the fielding of capabilities, and the nature of the discussion surrounding the decision-making. However, as with the Pentomic Division's reliance on the authorities to employ their nuclear capabilities, the present operational environment requires political willingness to use advanced intelligence, information, cyberspace, electronic warfare, and space capabilities from



(Figure adapted from Requirements Integration Division, "Multi-Domain Task Force [MDTF], Intelligence, Information, Cyberspace, Electronic Warfare, and Space [I2CEWS]")

Figure 1. Multi-Domain Task Force Organization

within the multi-domain effects battalion, among other highly consequential offensive capabilities. As opposed to the Pentomic Division’s prolific assignment of nuclear capabilities across the force, the MDTFs are the only formations receiving the most advanced capabilities.

The Cyber Center of Excellence describes these capabilities as instrumental in enabling penetration of advanced enemy capabilities: the multi-domain effects battalion “as part of the MDTF, is a unique formation that is designed to be forward postured to employ MDO fires in support of the Joint Force Commander’s (JFC) strategic objectives in multiple domains to penetrate enemy anti-access and area denial (A2AD) defenses and enable joint force freedom of action.”¹⁰ The decision to keep the MDTF aligned with the theater army and not assigned or attached to the corps is emblematic of both the requirement to employ advanced MDO capabilities and the echelon at which risk decisions must be held. The MDTF can potentially cause significant damage to civilian infrastructure with its multiple gray-zone warfare capabilities—including

targeting foreign civilian networks, among other cyberspace and information capabilities—which pose an associated risk of inadvertent escalation.

The MDTF requires a decision cycle that can employ strategic assets to generate effects without going through multiple layers of command. Likewise, the theater army provides a link for the MDTF to directly participate in joint planning and targeting processes.¹¹ The theater army enables the MDTF to open and exploit windows of opportunity by actively integrating in the GCC-level Bureaus, Boards, Centers, Cells, and Working Groups (B2C2WGs).¹² The theater army functions as the element that translates the joint desired future state and integrates the capabilities and means of the MDTF into those processes. As shown in figure 3, the alignment enables the requests for authorization up to the GCC commander and, as needed, to the SECDEF and president in an effort to unleash the power of the MDTF in a timely and effective manner. The corps-level staff does not have the bandwidth for integrating into the four-star-level joint planning staff as the theater army,



Global Force Management – The Four A's

Assignment – Service Secretaries assign forces to CCMDs per SecDef direction – C2 mechanism to distribute forces to CCMDs

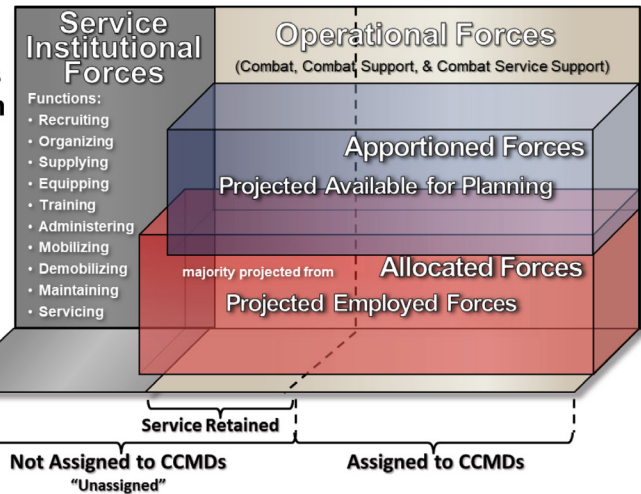
- Available for employment unless allocated to another CCMD (COCOM authority)
- Annual SecDef direction in Forces For Assignment Tables “Forces For”
- JS J-8 lead

Allocation – forces transferred from the assigned CCMD or Service by SecDef – C2 mechanism to temporarily adjust the distribution of forces to CCMDs

- Command relationship specified (normally OPCON)
- In fiscal year GFM Allocation Plan (GFMAP)
- Available for employment during specified dates
- JS J-3 lead

Apportionment – estimate of quantities of forces “reasonably expected to be available” globally

- CJCS planning guidance; no C2 relationship
- Estimate of quantities, not units
- Updated quarterly on JS J-8 SIPRNET page
- JS J-8 lead



Assessment – analysis of proposed or executed outcomes

- Inputs to strategic/force development guidance and Congressional readiness reporting:
 - NDS, DPG, Posture, POM/PBR, Semi-annual Readiness Report to Congress (SRRC), etc

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(Figure courtesy of the U.S. Army War College)

Figure 2. Global Force Management: The Four As

nor should it. The corps exists to synchronize and enable multiple divisions in a broad range of military operations, and that is what the corps needs to focus on. Likewise, the theater army works to employ the MDTF and enable the corps unless augmented as combined joint force land component command, in which case the land component command works to employ the MDTF in support of, and as part of, the joint force.

Battlefield Geometry

The second reason the MDTF must be retained at the theater army or higher level of authority is because of the operational framework and the range of effects the MDTF generates in time and space (see figure 4).

A command's deep area, as defined in Army Doctrine Publication 3-0, *Operations*, “generally extends beyond

subordinate unit boundaries out to the limits of the commander's designated area of operations.”¹³ Deep operations, as defined in Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, are “tactical actions against enemy forces, typically out of direct contact with friendly forces, intended to shape future close operations and protect rear operations.”¹⁴ Army Techniques Publication 3-94.2, *Deep Operations*, defines deep operations as “combined arms operations directed against uncommitted enemy forces or capabilities before they can engage friendly forces in the close fight.”¹⁵ The corps deep area is generally defined by the limits of the capabilities within the corps and the effects the commander can feasibly generate. The corps commander seeks to conduct effective deep operations to disrupt and interdict enemy forces, but the size of the deep area is defined by geography and capability. The

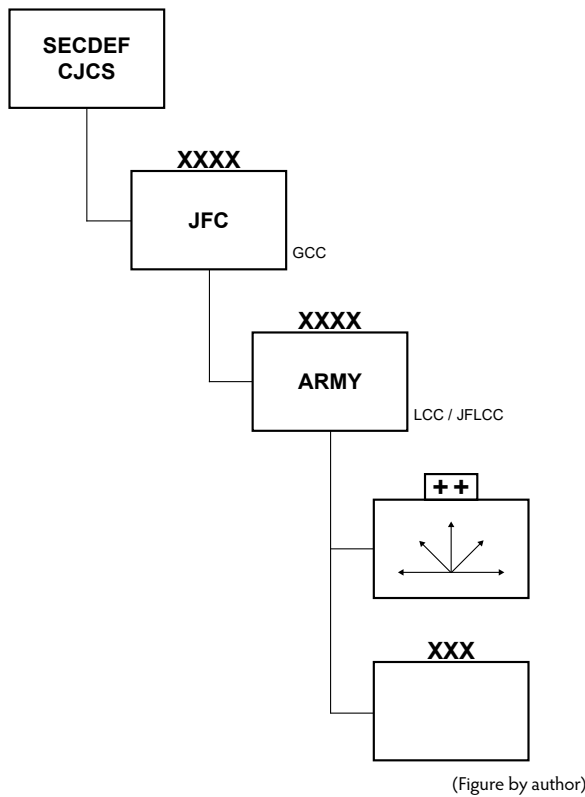


Figure 3. Task Organization from the Secretary of Defense to MDTF

measures of the deep area in FM 3-94, *Theater Army, Corps, and Division Operations*, are “based on friendly indirect fires systems, the ability to observe fires, and the ability to detect enemy forces.”¹⁶ The theater army commander, on the other hand, generally has a deep area that is constrained only by the limits placed by the GCC commander. This relationship thus enables the MDTF, when assigned to the theater army, to execute deep operations across the entire theater, targeting multiple enemy capabilities or formations through a convergence of multiple individual effects (see figure 5). With the MDTF conducting deep operations beyond the corps deep area, the opportunities for exploitation by the corps become much more practicable.

The MDTF alignment to the theater army is a seeming juxtaposition with the FM 3-0 emphasis on the corps and divisions as the forces fighting in large-scale combat operations.¹⁷ Because of the way FM 3-0 is written, the argument can be made that the MDTF should be aligned with the corps. While the division is described as the principal tactical warfighting

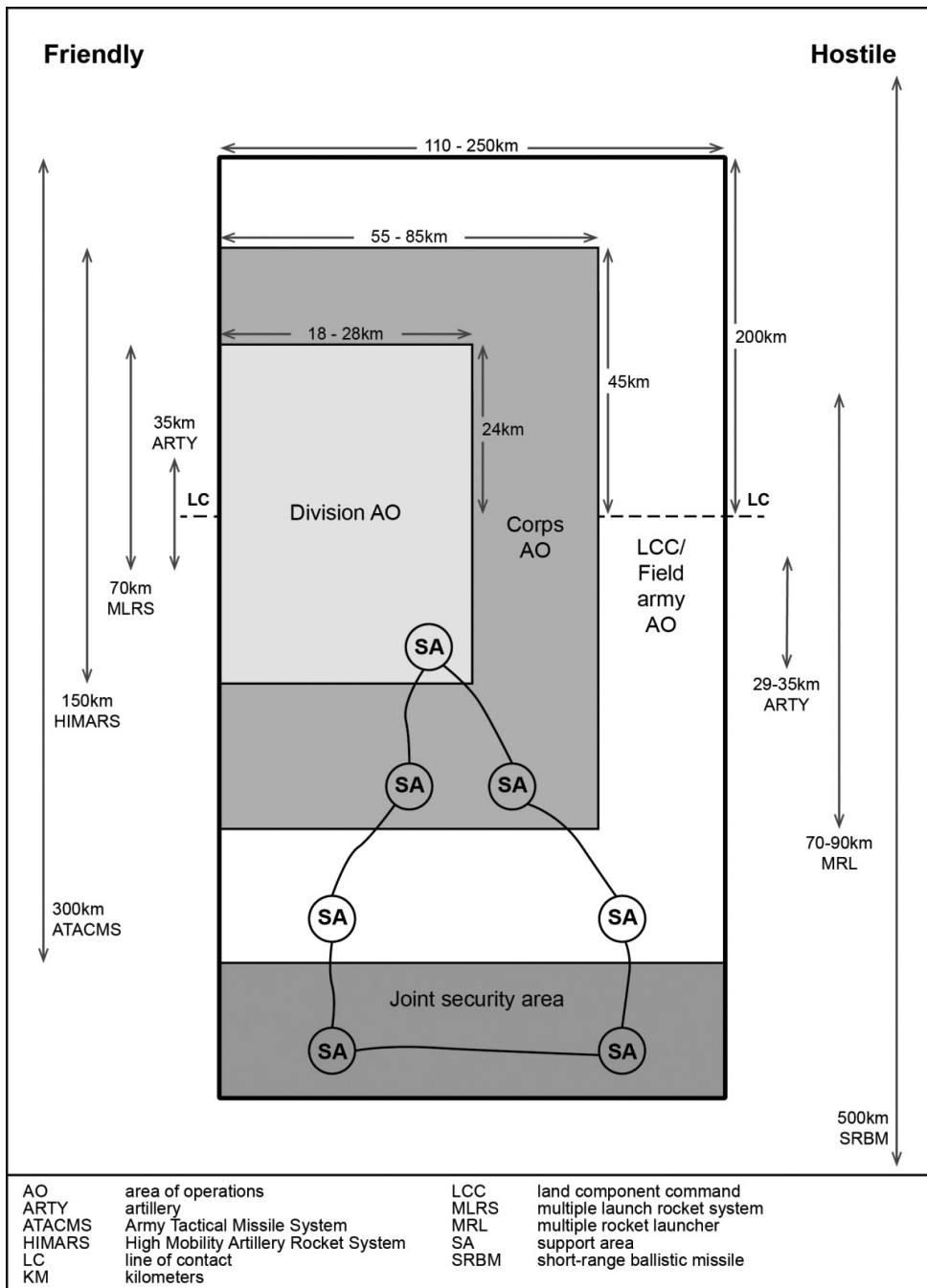
formation during large-scale combat operations, the corps is described as the echelon best positioned to be resourced to achieve convergence with Army and joint capabilities.¹⁸ Additionally, FM 3-0 states that “Army forces must account for constant enemy observation, including the threat from unmanned systems that saturate the operational environment,” and “Army forces take measures to defeat the enemy’s ability to effectively mass effects while creating exploitable advantages to mass effects against enemy capabilities and formations.”¹⁹ While the corps is described as the echelon to achieve convergence and MDO effects, the corps does not actually possess the capabilities to deliver the effects as described in FM 3-0. Instead, the corps is the Army echelon that would plan and request MDTF effects to deliver windows of convergence.

The divisions cycling through the U.S. Army’s National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, and Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Johnson, Louisiana, are training for the environment characterized by MDO, but without the capabilities to defeat the adversary’s advanced A2/AD systems. Those capabilities reside echelons above the division at the theater army level and within the MDTF. The unit of execution is no longer the brigade or division or even the corps, but instead any warfighting element that is constructed to fight any conflict across the range of military operations, whether in a joint or combined task force setting. The Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center exercises stand as the premier training opportunity for the MDTF due to its multinational character and the stress placed on operational-level headquarters to test interoperability and staff processes.²⁰ In

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Getting the Most Out of the MDTF

Rehearsing MDTF integration is a key challenge. Exercising the MDTF to truly enable the corps requires a high level of integration upward from the MDTF to the GCC more so than the integration from the MDTF down to the corps. The actions required at echelon to successfully generate convergence and exploitable gaps are more dependent on the MDTF to GCC linkage than from the MDTF to the corps. However, those systems and processes that grant the authorities for the MDTF to generate an effect for the joint task force must be rehearsed continually. While acknowledging the nature of the modern operational environment as being one of constant contact across all domains, the MDTF can best support the corps or any other warfighting element through real-time operations. Constant contact means that there are no operations in which the enemy is not observing or

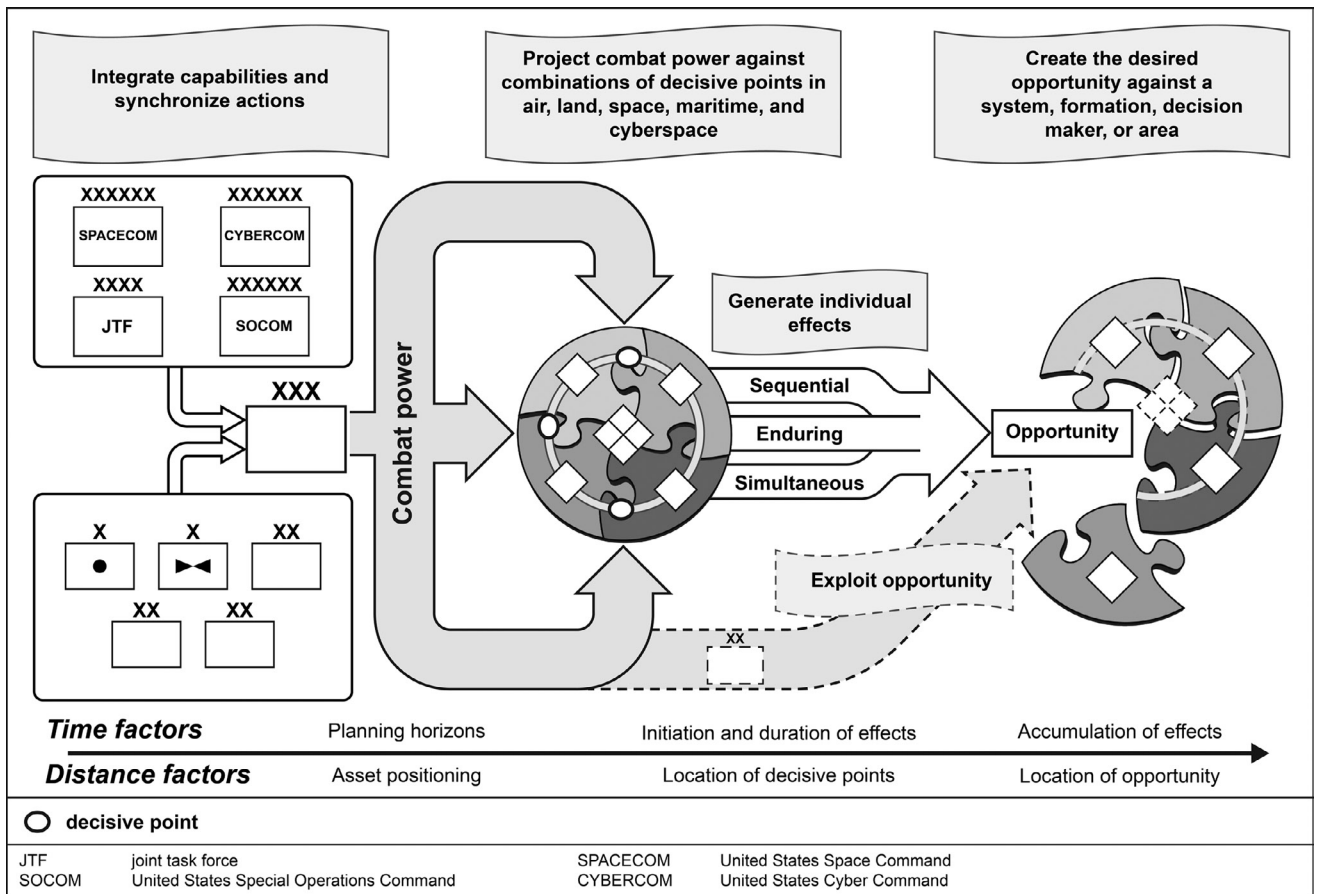


(Figure from Field Manual 3-94, *Armies, Corps, and Division Operations*)

Figure 4. Doctrinal Template of Depths and Frontage

theory, the MDTF, while aligned with the theater army, enables any unit regardless of echelon, size, or composition to generate effects and to achieve exploitation. Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center-like events provide the opportunity to test the division and corps in an MDO environment with the MDTF as the key enabler.

interacting with the MDTF. The challenge is integrating the corps, division, or joint force into actual operations and determining a way forward for how to simulate the types of massed effects the MDTF can provide for escalated operations. The size and dimensionality of modern warfare necessitate a different kind of testbed—one in which the ranges of National Training



(Figure courtesy of the Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate)

Figure 5. Convergence

Center include cyber and electromagnetic targeting opportunities that are associated with the physical dimension. The size and scope of the current training environment likely requires some degree of expansion if the MDTF is to truly test and refine its processes for integrating up to the GCC to receive the authorities and then generate massed effects on the battlefield.

Another opportunity exists in leveraging the MDTF's position as an echelon-above-corps organization to test and field new concepts and capabilities. As noted previously, the division possesses limited tools necessary to fight in the MDO environment. The MDTF has the unique opportunity as the organization armed with exquisite capabilities that may, in the future, push proven capabilities down to the division when appropriate. In general, it is easier and less costly to prove the effectiveness of a capability in the testbed of the MDTF than it is to field it to an entire corps or division and then iterate at that scale.

Likewise, the MDTF as a future-focused organization has linkages to the Army's forward-looking acquisition and concepts organizations in the Army Futures Command and the Combined Arms Center. This enables a greater degree of testing, adjusting, and re-testing of concepts and equipping to speed up the pace of adaptation in warfare.

The MDTF is purpose-built to address the primary threat of its aligned GCC, which is to create and open windows of opportunity for joint capabilities into contested environments. In a sense, while the corps and divisions are built to address any number of challenges across the spectrum of conflict and are built around their respective capabilities, the MDTF is focused on one specific problem within the *National Defense Strategy*—adversaries with advanced A2/AD capabilities—and are thus purpose-built organizations.²¹ The linkage of the MDTF to the theater army creates the necessary access to authorities at the political-strategic

level in order to enable the massing of strategic effects to enable operational-level formations.

Subordinating the MDTF as a purpose-built organization under a capability-oriented organization would dilute its capabilities, slow its authorities granting

time, and thus degrade its ability to enable the corps. Ultimately, the decision to link the MDTF directly to the intersection of political/military strategic leadership prevents the dilemma that was experienced by the Pentomic Division. ■

Notes

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2024 ANNUAL ESTIMATE of the STRATEGIC SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Strategic Research and Analysis Department



Strategic Research Topics

Strategic Research and Analysis Department



A Compendium to the 2024 Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment

This list of strategic issues offers insight into the particularized matters impacting defense organizations. Senior leaders across the highest echelons of US Army and Department of Defense (DoD) organizations provided input. This list and the narrative found in the Strategic Studies Institute's (SSI) 2024 Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment will help focus the research community on topics important to the Army.

CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE ARMY

1. Fighting Echelons (War Fighting)

Examines the operational concept of organizing and engaging combat forces at different echelons. This concept includes the tactics, strategies, and organizational structures employed by Army units to conduct operations effectively across various echelons, from small-unit engagements to large-scale multidomain operations. Explores the command and control, logistical support, and communication aspects vital for successful combat operations at different echelons. This research topic aims to investigate the dynamic nature of modern warfare, emphasizing the need for adaptable and agile military forces capable of operating effectively at various echelons. It seeks to understand the complexities involved in coordinating and synchronizing operations across different levels, highlighting the implications for force structure, training, and interoperability.

- Emphasis on the evolution of tactical operations and the impact on force employment given what we are seeing in Ukraine and Gaza
- Analysis of technological advancements and their influence on echelon-based warfare
- Consideration of historical case studies and contemporary scenarios to draw insights into effective echelon operations
- Examination of the role of Joint and multinational operations in echelon-based warfare
- Examination of the role of enablers and the appropriate echelon for their employment



2024 Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment A Compendium to the 2024 Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment

"Chief of Staff of the Army General Randy A. George has called on the force to revitalize professional discourse. The *2024 Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment* supports this initiative by setting the foundation for cutting-edge research to understand the ever-evolving security environment domestically and internationally. The subsequent collective research inspired by this estimate informs military strategy and decision making and contributes to overall national security discussions. This framework ensures aspiring researchers are well equipped to assess emerging threats with informed perspectives and challenges them to propose innovative solutions to complex problems."

—Maj. Gen. David C. Hill, foreword to
2024 Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment

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