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Returning Context to Our Doctrine

Maj. Robert G. Rose, U.S. Army



Before Russia invaded Ukraine, many analysts saw Russian military doctrine as “clear, precise, well evidenced and conceptually elegant.”¹ They believed Russia posed a threat to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The RAND Corporation estimated that Russia could overrun the Baltics in three days.² Instead, when Russia tried such a lightning campaign to rapidly decapitate the

Ukrainian government by seizing Kyiv, it suffered an embarrassing defeat.

It failed because its military did not prepare to fight a war in such a context. In the 2000s, Russia had developed a doctrine of active defense that assumed a major war would involve full mobilization and a strategic defense.³ Instead, President Vladimir Putin threw his military into an offensive war without mobilization or

time for units to plan and rehearse operations. Russian military personnel, to include deputy heads of branches within the Russian General Staff, were unaware of the intention to invade Ukraine until days before the invasion. Tactical units did not receive orders until hours before they entered Ukraine.⁴

They faced an army that had been preparing for a Russian invasion since 2014. Ukrainian officers had developed a defense-in-depth concept and trained on it in detail. They rehearsed how they would fight on the very ground they would be called to defend. Their concept fully accounted for Russia's capabilities and likely operational approach. They also accounted for their country's terrain, capability shortfalls, and societal strengths. Having a theory of victory based in the appropriate context, they blunted Russia's invasion.

Similarly, in 2020, in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan had for two decades focused efforts on solving the problem of how to regain a specific piece of territory against a well-defined enemy. Even though Artsakh and Armenia had years to fortify the rugged terrain, Azerbaijan dominated them due to a warfighting concept based on a clear logic to solve a specific problem.⁵

During Israel's triumph in the Six-Day War, Israeli doctrine was also based on specifics. It was a practical doctrine using simple and concrete language. It provided clear guidance for all soldiers, and it was rehearsed in detail so that junior leaders knew exactly how they were expected to fit into brigade and division fights.⁶

However, after a period of focusing on counter-insurgency, Israel shifted back toward high-intensity conflict with an abstract doctrine that led to a debacle in the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War. It imported the techno-utopian ideas of John Warden's effects-based operations and mixed them into a convoluted cocktail with Shimon Naveh's systemic operational design.⁷ Naveh's ideas were based in postmodernism and systems theory; his book, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence*, is a tome of impenetrable thought. Naveh proclaimed that his doctrine was "not intended for ordinary mortals."⁸ Most Israeli officers could not comprehend his foggy concepts. In a theoretical haze, the Israeli military did not train above the brigade-level or in the specific context they would need to fight. Israel went into war with commanders who could not provide clear tasks and intent grounded in the specifics of the threat of a well-armed and highly innovative enemy. The once

dominating Israeli military suffered embarrassment in a conventional fight against a nonstate actor.⁹

The current state of U.S. Army doctrine parallels Israel's in 2006. As codified in 2022's Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, the Army's doctrine of multidomain operations (MDO) lacks the specificity to prepare the Army to win. It continues a trend since the end of the Cold War of doctrines that prioritize flexibility over specificity. Although it identifies Russia as "our acute threat" and China as "our pacing challenge," it is vague on their political objectives and the situation in which we would fight them.¹⁰ We need to replace vague thinking with clear thinking by returning context to our doctrine.

Huba Wass de Czege, a lead author of the AirLand Battle doctrine, was asked to write a commentary on the MDO concept. He identified many shortcomings in the concept stemming from its lack of grounding in a specific context: "An operating concept, like the logic of a campaign at war, needs to be the product of design based on a specific mission and context."¹¹ His advice was not a new revelation. A century ago, the Soviet theorist Aleksandr Svechin emphasized how theater-specific conditions and a deep understanding of the societies, politics, economics, and militaries of opposing sides were the basis of any concept of war. Such understanding provides military leaders with a working hypothesis to guide planning and preparation for a future war.¹²

MDO's Lack of Context

Instead of a context-specific theory of victory, MDO provides a vague, capabilities-based approach to war.

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According to FM 3-0, “Multidomain operations are the combined arms employment of joint and Army capabilities to create and exploit relative advantages that achieve objectives, defeat enemy forces, and consolidate gains on behalf of joint force commanders.”¹³ Stripped of inflationary jargon, we could rewrite this central idea as “multidomain operations uses stuff, advantageously, to do stuff.” It is hard to contest that we

Although A2/AD was the problem that drove the creation of MDO, FM 3-0 does not provide a consistent logic of how enemies use A2/AD to achieve a *fait accompli*. Employing stereotypes on past Chinese and Russian operations, FM 3-0 states that a defending enemy will sacrifice space for time, which goes against the entire logic of a *fait accompli*.¹⁶ Why would they willingly yield the very land they deem strategically essential to retain?

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should use stuff well, but it is not a useful hypothesis of how we should fight.

The vague central idea stems from a lack of clear context. While FM 3-0 makes references to China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, it mixes these four incredibly different adversaries into an illogical soup. It states,

Five broad peer threat methods, often used in combination during conventional or irregular conflicts, and below the threshold of conflict, include—

Information warfare.

Systems warfare.

Preclusion.

Isolation.

Sanctuary.¹⁴

Is there really a unified peer threat doctrine codifying these five methods?

A key concept attributed to the enemy that drove the initial MDO concept is antiaccess/area denial (A2/AD). According to those fearful of A2/AD, enemies were going to prevent us from coming to the aid of a beleaguered partner through long-range fires and effects after they seized a piece of territory in a *fait accompli*. Michael Kofman and Mark Galeotti have both pointed out that in the case of Russia, A2/AD plays no role in their doctrine. “Such terminology does not appear anywhere in Russian military writing.”¹⁵ It is an invention by Western thinkers. The West’s ability to resupply Ukraine has made Russia’s inability to deny access abundantly clear.

Separate from FM 3-0, the Army published Army Techniques Publication 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*. The publication provided a helpful departure from the generic opposing force doctrine that the Army trains against. However, it is an overly broad publication. It summarizes purported Chinese doctrine that is not necessarily pertinent for the specific context of an invasion of Taiwan. For instance, it highlights the importance of Mao Zedong’s People’s War concepts, which will play no role on the beaches of Taiwan.¹⁷ Analyzing threats requires a deep understanding of not just their published doctrine, which might just be propaganda their military tells themselves, but how they would actually fight to meet their political objectives. Russia’s misaligned doctrine for the invasion of Ukraine provides a clear case of the pitfall of a surface-level analysis of an enemy based on their purported doctrine.

Contrast with Active Defense and AirLand Battle

The Army used to have doctrine grounded in a specific threat. The authors of 1976’s Active Defense and 1982’s AirLand Battle doctrines used simple, lucid writing and based their work in a specific context. In reorienting the U.S. Army away from Vietnam and toward a conventional fight in Central Europe, Gen. William DePuy focused Active Defense on fighting the Warsaw Pact in Germany. He was upset when initial drafts were overly flexible and theoretical.¹⁸ He wanted an applied doctrine, not a thought piece. The FM

100-5 that emerged in 1976 was detailed and engaging to read. Based on the lethality of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, it emphasized winning the first fight and provided a clear understanding of how to effectively employ modern weapon systems. It stated, “Battle in Central Europe against forces of the Warsaw Pact is the most

the initiative and out-decide the Soviets, a U.S. Army brigade commander looking beyond the enemy’s first echelon to the second echelon forces had a planning horizon of about twelve hours, the division commander had twenty-four hours, and the corps commander had seventy-two hours.”²³

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demanding mission the US Army could be assigned ... this manual is designed mainly to deal with the realities of such operations.”¹⁹ The specificity of the doctrine ignited debate about its suitability.

Active Defense’s clarity set the terms for the lively debate that produced AirLand Battle. Demonstrating the importance of specificity regarding the terrain on which an army fights, in *Infantry* magazine, Capt. Adolf Carlson explained that the assumptions that Active Defense made on the lethality of antitank weapons in the Sinai Desert were not applicable to the terrain of Central Europe.²⁰ Philip Karber showed the value of analyzing an enemy in depth by observing that the Soviets had also learned from the Yom Kippur War and shifted from the concentrated breakthrough described in Active Defense to a dispersed attack focused on creating opportunities for a second echelon to exploit.²¹ Recognizing that Active Defense would struggle against such an approach, the Army, led by V Corps, which directly faced the Soviets in Germany, attempted to solve this problem with concepts that led to AirLand Battle.

The doctrine provided a central premise that “AirLand Battle will be dominated by the force that retains the initiative and, with deep attack and decisive maneuver, destroys its opponent’s abilities to fight and to organize in depth.”²² Unlike MDO, AirLand Battle had an encompassing theory of victory that drove how all echelons would fight and train. To aid units in understanding the requirements of AirLand Battle, it presented a clear battlefield geometry based on a close analysis of how Soviet echelons would mobilize and how fast they would act. To maintain

AirLand Battle provided a threat-grounded framework in contrast to today’s ungrounded framework. The latest FM 3-0 presents an example battlefield geometry with brigades acting within twelve to twenty-four hours, divisions in twenty-four to forty-eight hours, and corps in forty-eight hours to five days.²⁴ While these time frames are roughly equivalent to AirLand Battle, it is unclear what underlies them. What are the time horizons of Russian and Chinese units? Are we trying to act at a faster tempo than them as with AirLand Battle? We certainly are not training these time horizons. Instead of basing their planning timelines around enemy actions, divisions develop plans with enough time to feed the Air Force’s seventy-two-hour air tasking order.

A Contextually Appropriate Doctrine

As an alternative to MDO’s vagueness, I propose a doctrine grounded in context and providing a theory of victory analyzed through the lenses of defense versus offense, annihilation versus exhaustion, and maneuver versus attrition. These lenses are not absolutes, but they provide a useful mental framework. Using these lenses in the specific situation we would fight Russia or China leads to a doctrine based in *defensive annihilation through maneuver* (DAM).

It is critical to first understand the political context of a potential war. Our primary threats, Russia and China, share political similarities. While both have territorial claims, the claims are limited. China wants to finish its civil war by unifying Taiwan with the



U.S. Army Europe and Africa's V Corps and NATO's Multinational Corps Northeast, along with allies and partners, conduct exercise Griffin Shock 8–26 May 2023, at Bemowo Piskie Training Area, in Northeastern Poland. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

mainland. And Russia, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, established footholds in some of its neighboring countries to provide leverage over its former subjects. Recently, after a nationalist turn, Putin has sought to gather together the Russian people that he *argues* were divided by the creation of “unnatural” Ukraine.²⁵ Too often, commentators see Russia and China through the lens of the Soviet Union seeking world revolution or the fascist domination pursued by Germany and Japan. Such commentators are turning to simple historical allusions without understanding the unique political context that produced those regimes. Neither Russia nor China have such expansionist goals: the costs of conquest outweigh the benefits in the modern era, and their populations would not support such wars.

Russia and China are authoritarian regimes that rely on a sedate population, nationalism, and economic stability to maintain their control. Unlike twentieth-century totalitarian regimes, they do not attempt to mobilize their population for total war; doing so

would violate their social contract with their middle classes and risk unrest. Anne Applebaum explains that a modern autocrat like Putin seeks to convince people “not to participate, not to care, and not to follow politics at all ... the result is widespread cynicism ... Russians haven’t flocked to sign up to fight in Ukraine. They haven’t rallied around the troops in Ukraine.”²⁶

Both Russia and China seek limited ends and have limited means to pursue those ends. As Otto von Bismarck remarked, “The ways and means of waging war will always depend on the greater or lesser results which are trying to be achieved.”²⁷ Today, wars are not millenarian struggles of national or ideological survival, they are opportunistic endeavors to strengthen a regime and bring glory to its leader.

Defense versus Offense

The only realistic scenarios for a conflict with Russia would involve the United States defending the Baltic states. With China, the only feasible conflict

would involve us defending Taiwan. Wass de Czege criticized MDO as willfully forgoing the advantages of the defense. It does not acknowledge America's political context: we are a status quo power. We are no longer in the regime change business and are content with the current international system. He states that the concept "assumes that an adversary's surprise attack will overwhelm an unidentified allied forward

Annihilation versus Exhaustion

Svechin said that choosing between annihilation and exhaustion "is much deeper, more important, and fraught with more significant consequences than the contradiction between the defensive and the offensive."²⁹ He adapted these concepts from Hans Delbrück's commentary on World War I.³⁰

Annihilation seeks decisive battle. It focuses combat

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defense and then immediately array multiple layers of defenses in depth in all relevant dimensions ... The pamphlet seemingly overlooks the very demanding task of defending an ally's territory under armed attack ... [and] plays right into the strong conventional and nuclear defensive posture of our adversaries."²⁸ Why would we cede the advantages of the defense and allow an enemy to solidify a continuous, defense-in-depth as Russia has in Ukraine?

MDO does not attempt to defend our allies' land. It is a doctrine that sacrifices our allies and condemns forward-deployed forces to a fate like Task Force Smith in the Korean War. MDO hopes a future war plays out like the Persian Gulf War, in which a Desert Shield of building combat power for a counterattack leads to a Desert Storm. The doctrine provides hope to our opponents that we will not initially contest a fait accompli and may lack the political will for such a counterattack against an entrenched defender armed with nuclear weapons.

MDO does not acknowledge the one megaton gorilla of nuclear escalation. The long-range fires that MDO relies on to defeat an opponent's A2/AD approaches will strike deep into an enemy's sovereign territory at S-400 systems near Saint Petersburg or HQ-22s near Quanzhou that will expand a war beyond the limits of the contested territory and risk escalation. Implementing a doctrine that emphasizes winning the initially defensive fight would prevent such risks.

power on a decisive point to produce an extraordinary victory that demonstrates the futility of continued resistance. It directly targets the enemy's center of gravity, most commonly their primary field army. Everything is subordinate to achieving that victory. Annihilation provides strategic simplicity and clarity. Nations pursuing this strategy should minimize any efforts that do not directly apply to defeating the enemy's center of gravity.

Conversely, strategies of exhaustion are diverse, indirect, and prolonged. In exhaustion, defeating enemy armies are only a part of a path to victory. Strategies of exhaustion use military, political, and economic fronts to weaken any enemy's strength until they view their position as untenable, and they lose the will to resist.

Svechin argued after World War I that there were two limitations to the strategy of annihilation. The first came from the short operational reach of contemporary armies. Even if armies could achieve a penetration through enemy defenses like the Russians in the Brusilov Offensive in 1916 or the Germans in the Spring Offensive of 1918, armies could not achieve an extraordinary victory because of the slowness of advances.³¹ The second limitation laid in the continuous mobilization of society toward total war, meaning that even in the event of a decisive victory like the Germans at Tannenberg against the Russians, new armies would replace those lost. Extraordinary victory was impossible.

In the contemporary era, annihilation is again possible. Modern equipment has the mobility and lethality

to produce decisive victories, and today's states lack the mass mobilization that Svechin said provided resiliency to militaries. Much like in the eighteenth century, most major militaries are relatively small, at least semiprofessional, and armed with exquisite, hard to replace equipment. For example, Russia has only one tank factory that *Novoya Gazeta* reports produces just twenty tanks per a month.³² It does not have the capacity to rapidly replace losses. In the event of a major war, it would be much harder to convert a tractor factory into making tanks as during World War II, and the broad industrial workforce no longer exists to man such factories. Our adversaries also lack the mass base of reservists that allowed armies a century ago to rapidly put millions of men under arms. Russia in Ukraine is fielding less soldiers than Bulgaria in 1944. Though Ukraine lacked the combat power to exploit its successes in the first couple months of the war, Russia still has struggled to rebuild combat power after its initial losses. Neither Russia nor China will be able to rapidly resurrect forces lost in the opening battle of a war. The United States also lacks the reserves and industrial capacity to replace losses. With this current context, the first battle may be decisive in a future war.

Maneuver versus Attrition

To achieve annihilation at the strategic level, the U.S. Army should use maneuver warfare at the operational level. Maneuver warfare has become a confused term. It is often conflated with simple movement. Maneuver warfare should be defined by its intended effect on an enemy. It seeks the systemic disruption of an enemy. In 1989, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, *Warfighting*, provided the most succinct definition of maneuver warfare: "A warfighting philosophy that seeks to shatter the enemy's cohesion through a series of rapid, violent, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which he cannot cope."³³ It repeatedly out decides the enemy and exploits opportunities until they are in such chaos that they cease to provide effective resistance.

Maneuver stands in contrast to attritional as an operational approach. Attrition seeks the material wearing down of an enemy through the efficient and synchronized use of combat power that results in favorable loss ratios. It focuses on cumulative destruction and allows operational simplicity, provides relative

predictability, and reduces vulnerabilities.³⁴ Due to its strategic and military cultures, economic strength, and geopolitical safety, the U.S. Army has traditionally been pulled toward an attritional approach.³⁵ Gen. Dwight Eisenhower pursued a broad front strategy in Western Europe that synchronized America's material advantages to dependably grind down Germany while presenting few vulnerabilities for Germany to exploit.

Both approaches have their place. The Soviet theorist Georgii Isserson recognized that most conflicts open with a period of movement, which provides open flanks and gaps to exploit in a maneuver approach. Every major war in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries began with a period of movement, as the aggressor used strategic surprise to attack a defender before they had fully mobilized and established a continuous front. If one side does not suffer defeat in the opening phase of the war, wars have tended to ossify as both sides mobilize enough soldiers to create a continuous front. As witnessed in Ukraine, this transition from a war of movement to positions reduces the opportunities for maneuver as opposing sides shore up their vulnerabilities. Ukraine has recognized that overcoming the context of Russia's defense requires an attritional approach.³⁶ As Isserson wrote, "Maneuver actions from the line of departure will soon encounter a deployed front, at which time speed must yield to force."³⁷ When fronts are noncontiguous, armies can achieve maneuver using reconnaissance pull to identify vulnerabilities, and through decentralized decision-making, rapidly exploit them. When fronts solidify, armies tend to adopt a more centralized, attritional approach with less emphasis on rapid action. Svechin stated, "Command may be centralized to a much greater extent in positional warfare than in maneuver warfare. If important decisions must come from the top in maneuver warfare, they will invariably be very late and inappropriate for the rapidly developing situation."³⁸

Maneuver warfare is inherently high risk. Edward Luttwak explained, "The vulnerability of relational-maneuver methods to catastrophic failure reflects their dependence on the precise application of effort against correctly identified points of weakness. This in turn requires a close understanding of the inner workings of the 'system' that is to be disrupted."³⁹ An army using a maneuver approach must have an accurate understanding of the enemy's vulnerabilities and know the

tempo of enemy reactions so that they can consistently act faster than that enemy and create reinforcing disruptive effects. The generic and narrow overview of the enemy in MDO does not provide an understanding of how quickly units need to act.

Ukraine's defense of Kyiv in 2022 and Finland's defense in the Winter War provide examples of how a small, fast-acting force can defeat an aggressor through a maneuver defense. In both cases, dispersed and decentralized forces used ambushes, artillery, and counterattacks to destroy enemy logistics, artillery, and command posts, which produced havoc for the slower moving Russians and the Soviets that possessed greater combat power. Taiwan's Overall Defense Concept pursues a similar approach.⁴⁰ It avoids traditional symmetrical attritional approaches against the materially superior Chinese. Instead, it envisions large numbers of small, dispersed, and highly mobile units taking advantage of Taiwan's complex terrain to sow chaos amongst a Chinese landing force.⁴¹ The Army needs a doctrine that supports our partners' approaches. It needs a doctrine of defensive annihilation through maneuver.

Familiarity is Essential for Rapid Action

To conduct DAM, the Army will need to act faster than an opponent. However, the Army's decision-making speed has slowed considerably since the end of the Cold War. At the National Training Center, brigades have over ninety-six hours to act and take an average of fifty-seven hours just to publish an order, which is far slower than the example battlefield geometry in FM 3-0. Units take this long even when most abbreviate the military decision-making process (MDMP) by developing a single course of action, based on the coaching.

Since it was first codified as the commander's estimate in 1932, the Army's decision-making process has become increasingly detailed, process oriented, and labor intensive. The 1977 draft of FM 100-5 attempted to reverse this trend. It emphasized MDMP was a training tool and not a process for high-tempo operations.⁴² In 1989, Gary Klein criticized MDMP as based in analytical decision-making theories that were inappropriate for high-tempo operations. Officers did not follow the process when making decisions at NTC in the 1980s. They were using a more naturalistic method that leveraged their experience to abbreviate MDMP.

Klein proposed a recognition-primed decision model that aligned with how officers, firefighters, and pilots make high-speed decisions.⁴³ With the specificity provided by AirLand Battle, officers could use such an approach. Cold War brigades regularly issued orders within two hours of receipt of mission.⁴⁴ It was similar to how German division commanders regularly produced orders in two hours during World War II. But this approach to decision-making requires familiarity with a context so leaders can identify recognizable patterns to make decisions. While attending staff college in the 1930s, those German officers had conducted nearly seventy iterations of decision-making exercises emphasizing seizing advantages during high-speed maneuver warfare.⁴⁵ Units that have trained and developed appropriate standard operating procedures for that context can act with minimal guidance because they already have an appropriate mental framework for action.

Vague doctrine prevents units from developing such frameworks. Reporting on National Training Center rotations from 1989 to 2003, John Rosenberger found a significant decrease in units' abilities to perform rapid decision-making.⁴⁶ Based on the standard operating procedures collected by the National Training Center and the Mission Command Training Program, divisions, brigades, and battalions nearly all have generic standard operating procedures copied from doctrine or plagiarized from other units. They do not think through and codify the specifics of how they will fight within their echelon because they do not have a specific problem to solve at their echelon.

With staffs' constant personnel churn and the rarity of higher-echelon training events, units consistently reinvent templates and systems instead of building on an established science of war. Units can standardize many processes from much of intelligence preparation of the battlefield to attack guidance matrixes, to mortar round allocation, to sustainment forecasting when they have the familiarity gained by repetitions training for a specific context. Familiarity is how our opposing forces consistently out-decide training units at our combat training centers.

Aligning Units to Specific Problem Sets

To provide units with specific problems to train against to innovate, establish familiarity, and build

Table. Context-Specific Mission Essential Task List for Brigade Combat Teams

Current Generic METL	Example Context Specific Mission Essential Task Lists (METLs)			
	Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT)	5th ID IBCT Taiwan Focus	101st AAD IBCT Baltic Focus	1st CD Armor Brigade Combat Team Korea Focus*
Conduct an Area Defense	Defend against Amphibious Landing	Conduct Dispersed Defense in the Eastern Baltic	Conduct Urban Defense (Seoul)	Conduct Airfield Seizure
Conduct a Movement to Contact	Conduct Area Defense of Rice Paddies	Conduct Urban Defense (Baltic Urban Environment)	Conduct Penetration of North Korean Defenses	Defend Urban Area
Conduct an Attack	Conduct Urban Defense (Taiwanese Urban Environment)	Conduct Counterattack against Russian Penetration	Conduct Defile Drill through Mountain Passes	Conduct Stability Operations
Conduct an Air Assault	Conduct Counterattack against Beachhead	Conduct Lateral Air Movements in the Defense	Isolate Urban Objectives for ROK Seizure	Evacuate Noncombatants
Conduct Area Security	Conduct Deployment to Taiwan	Conduct Deployment to Baltic	Conduct Deployment to Korea	Provide Rapid Reaction Force for Worldwide Contingency
Conduct Expeditionary Deployment Operations	*The context of a fight against North Korea would be different than Russia and China. It would require developing a separate doctrine in coordination with South Korea that enables regime change.			

(Table by author)

standard operating procedures to enable DAM, the Army should align corps and their subordinate units with specific problem sets: I Corps on Taiwan; III Corps on Korea; V Corps on the Baltic; and XVIII Airborne Corps on rapid reactions against lesser threats elsewhere in the world and on keeping the lessons of counterinsurgency alive. Corps would then further delegate discrete problems to their divisions and brigades.

Brigades would then replace overly generic mission essential tasks that drive unit training and replace them with tasks specific to each units' context. For example, in Taiwan, there are fourteen beaches suitable for China to assault.⁴⁷ I Corps could assign the five southwestern beaches to the 25th Infantry Division to prepare to defend. The division would then subdivide beaches and the surrounding terrain to its brigades. In training for a defense, they would know that China has amphibious landing capacity for only about twenty thousand soldiers on the first day or two. They would develop training scenarios in Hawaii on similar terrain to those beaches based in a Chinese amphibious

combined arms battalion using a landing point width of 1.5 to 2 km.⁴⁸ They would develop their training calendar to achieve the highest states of readiness from late March to late April and from late September to mid-October because those are the ideal periods for amphibious landings.⁴⁹ They would drive development of techniques to target ships with artillery; request a capability for artillery delivered sea mines; test pairing unmanned aerial and subsurface systems; and dig positions, develop camouflage techniques, and emplace decoys to increase survivability against Chinese pre-assault fires.

Meanwhile, the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) would prepare to defend Latvia under V Corps. Its brigades would train on an urban defense to block Russian forces in the small cities of eastern Latvia, while bypassed units ambush Russian columns canalized by the forests and lakes near the Russian border. Fortunately, the Joint Readiness Training Center provides similar terrain for training. The 101st Airborne Division would develop a new concept of air assault focused on rapidly laterally moving units to defensive

positions. Knowing the terrain they would defend, the 101st Airborne Division could identify sites to prepare subterranean, hardwired command posts and to emplace decoy sites to tempt Russia to target and reveal its artillery for counterfire. These techniques are a century old but require a precise context to employ.

Context Will Drive Innovation

The Army is struggling to solve the problem of command post survivability, turning to unproven technologies such of quantum computing.⁵⁰ Such a capability-based solution is a symptom of our contextless doctrine. Across the Army, leaders have pursued the theater of innovation.⁵¹ However, we are not going to manifest innovation when we do not have a clearly defined problem to solve. A prime example of the importance of having a specific problem came from the Dragon's Lair innovation competition, which replicates the television show *Shark Tank*. The recent winning innovation was not a new weapon to fight the generic enemies of MDO, it was a *sensor* to fight the very specific threat of mold in barracks.⁵²

Contrast the pace of our innovation with the Ukrainian army's rapid improvements in the face of a clear problem. Svechin said the development of a clear concept for a future war can inspire an army, "Indicating a proper goal will lead to a feverish stream of ideas and will."⁵³ Providing specific problem sets for the Army could unleash the creative spirits of hundreds of thousands of battlefield entrepreneurs

In contrast to the robust debate in the period between Active Defense and AirLand Battle, the Army has been silent on MDO. Its very vagueness has made it difficult to critique. Since Training and Doctrine Command published Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, in February 2020, only two articles in *Military Review* have criticized MDO.⁵⁴ Between 1977 and 1981, *Military Review* published eighty articles criticizing Active Defense leading to the more context appropriate AirLand Battle.⁵⁵ The Army needs a doctrine grounded in the specific context of the next war so all echelons and soldiers are ready to win the first battle of that war. I hope this article will spur the debate needed to develop that doctrine. ■

Notes

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