



A farm at dawn in Myrtle Point, Coquille River valley, Oregon. (Photo from Adobe Stock)

FM 3-0 Obstacles to Implementation

A Dialectic Between Old and New



Maj. McLeod William Wood, Australian Army

Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate, and doubt to offer a solution everybody can understand.

—Gen. Colin Powell

July 2023, Tiffin Farm, Virginia

It was a beautiful 82 degrees, the sun was shining, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky as Capt. Richard (Rich) Turner drove into his family's property. The farm was an oasis that provided a needed getaway. He had been implementing the new changes to Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, which had come into force in October 2022.¹

He still had many questions. Were multidomain operations (MDO) new? Were they different from what we've done before? What does convergence mean actually? In his own mind, he couldn't help but feel that FM 3-0 raised more questions across the force than it resolved. Moreover, in his exercises, there appeared to be no actual change in how the division, brigades, or companies fought. What had changed, though, was people using the term multidomain operations constantly.

Richard had just completed his company command time with the 82nd Airborne and was about to take up a broadening assignment as an observer controller/trainer at the National Training Center. He needed to understand FM 3-0 for this role. At this moment, he was grateful to be on leave and to discuss these problems with his father, Lt. Gen. Charles Turner, the commander of V Corps.

Charles Turner was like any other three-star general. He was straight-backed, had one of the tightest haircuts around, and exuded a confident air that was accompanied by a gruff and dour demeanor. As he sat on his porch, sipping an ice-cold sweet tea, he was happy to be on leave and smiled as he watched his son pull into the driveway. His first twelve months of command had been some of the most challenging in his career. The Russo-Ukrainian War had consumed much of his time, including Finland and Sweden into NATO consumed yet more, and the threat of large-scale combat operations in Europe and the Indo-Pacific was consuming not only his remaining capacity but also that of his senior commanders and political leadership. Exercises like European Defender allowed his command some

opportunity to exercise the new FM 3-0, but he was looking forward to discussing his son's experiences.²

The Conversation Begins: Is Multidomain Operations New?

The sun beamed over the treetops as Richard and his dad set off in their side-by-side TrailMaster UTV. There was still a thin layer of white fog just above the ground as they set off to check on the boundary fences. The cool morning air passed quickly over their faces as they started their patrol.

The general was the first to break the morning's silence as they bounced around in the cab. "Well, Rich, I'm looking forward to checking out these new fences, and I'm glad we finally get a bit of time together. It seems like time with our families is becoming harder these days."

Richard responded, "You're not wrong, Dad. I just hope these fences are newer than multidomain operations!"

The general scoffed loudly. "Son, what makes you think MDO is new?" he said.

"To be really straight up, Dad, it's because everyone says it *is* new," said Richard. "I mean, even General McConville has said that MDO is a fundamental change in the way we fight.³ But, a fundamental change to me means that it will feel and look different, but does it? Really? Also, Defense News published an article that claimed MDO is the first *new* doctrine in 40 years!"⁴

"Hold on, hold on," decried the general. "I may not be the brightest spark around, but I've been around! Now, remember that when I joined the Army, we were using AirLand Battle. This had been developed off the

Maj. McLeod Wood, Australian Army, is currently working within strategic force design at the Australian Defence Force Headquarters. He has operational experience on three combat tours in Afghanistan (2011 and 2013) and Iraq (2019) and has served in a wide array of command and staff appointments from the troop to division level. He holds a BA, an MPM, and an MB from the University of New South Wales. He also holds a MMAS and MAMO from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. He is a distinguished graduate from both the CGSC Art of War Scholars Program and the Advanced Military Studies Program (SAMS).



USS LST-386 unloads troops onto a causeway at Licata, Sicily, in July 1943. Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily, involved planning and executing operations in multiple domains; is the doctrine new? (Photo courtesy of the U.S Army Signal Corps)

back of the highly controversial Active Defense concept, which General DePuy introduced in the early '70s. Then, it was updated to become AirLand Battle by General Starry and released in 1981.⁵ I mean, most people in uniform who joined before the Y2K bug were brought up on AirLand Battle. It's what they know, it's their frame of reference, and it lasted until Full Spectrum Operations was introduced in 2001.⁶ This was then followed in 2011 by another operating concept called Unified Land Operations.⁷ What's interesting throughout all this, Rich, is that several underlying themes continue through the various operating concepts." He stopped abruptly as Richard had interrupted him.

Richard was waving his hand to stop the general's momentum, and it worked. "Dad, what does this have to do with MDO being new or not? I mean, if General McConville sees us fighting in a fundamentally different way than before why am I being given a history lecture?"

The general was getting frustrated. Hadn't he taught his son better? He'd made him read about the

importance of understanding history in width, depth, and context, but maybe Sir Michael Howard's lessons hadn't sunk in.⁸

The general started back up, "As I was saying, there are underlying themes that continue through to MDO. The first is an understanding that the battlefield continues to be extended by ever-increasing weapon ranges and cyber capabilities. The second is the understanding that forces can be doing offensive, defensive, stability, and support operations simultaneously. And the last one is that we continue to conduct land operations with greater synchronization, coordination, and integration with other services, multinational partners, and other government agencies; from memory, this was called unified action. These points are acknowledged in the new FM 3-0, in fact. I think it's even in the first paragraph!"⁹

Richard's head was spinning. He was trying to make sense of his dad's connections with previous operating concepts and how they have led to MDO. He was also trying to process the contradiction between the top

brass's message that we are fighting in a fundamentally new way versus his dad's, and the doctrine's, explanation that MDO isn't new but rather builds on incremental changes over time.

"Okay, Dad," said Richard. "I can see that MDO isn't completely new. It's just confusing that we are told it's a fundamentally new way to fight. It makes it even more confusing when the definition of MDO is about the combined arms employment of joint and Army capabilities. I mean, we've been doing this for years right? In fact, here's a question for you, Dad. Do you fight your corps differently now than you have done before? Or are people just using new words around you?"

The general slowly stopped the UTV. He looked out over the fields of Tiffin Farm. His son's question was valid. Had he changed the way he fought his corps? Were his divisions fighting differently? Did the joint enterprise fight differently? He knew that FM 3-0 had only been in circulation since October 2022, but he began to wonder. Was the Army introducing a new operating concept, or was it introducing a new lexicon that described the way we were already fighting? Did the new lexicon make things easier to understand, or did it make things more confusing and complex?

The talk of MDO died down within the UTV. Richard and the general continued thinking about their experiences implementing FM 3-0 thus far. As the fog gave way to another beautiful day in Virginia, both men were happy to be outside and enjoying the company of the other.

A Confusing Concept: Convergence

Richard and the general had just finished dinner. They were sitting on the porch, enjoying a glass of bourbon and watching the sun set over Tiffin Farm. The air was cooling down and it was pleasant just sitting back, overlooking the fields and the animals that were in them.

"I'm really happy with how dinner came together, Rich," remarked the general. "I always enjoy a good BBQ. That said, this bourbon is the *pièce de résistance*! The notes and flavor are superb."

"Dinner was great, Dad, I agree. But sipping your insanely good bourbon is even better!" Rich started to smile. "It's nearly like all of these notes and flavors have converged to provide the perfect sipping bourbon, wouldn't you say, Dad?"

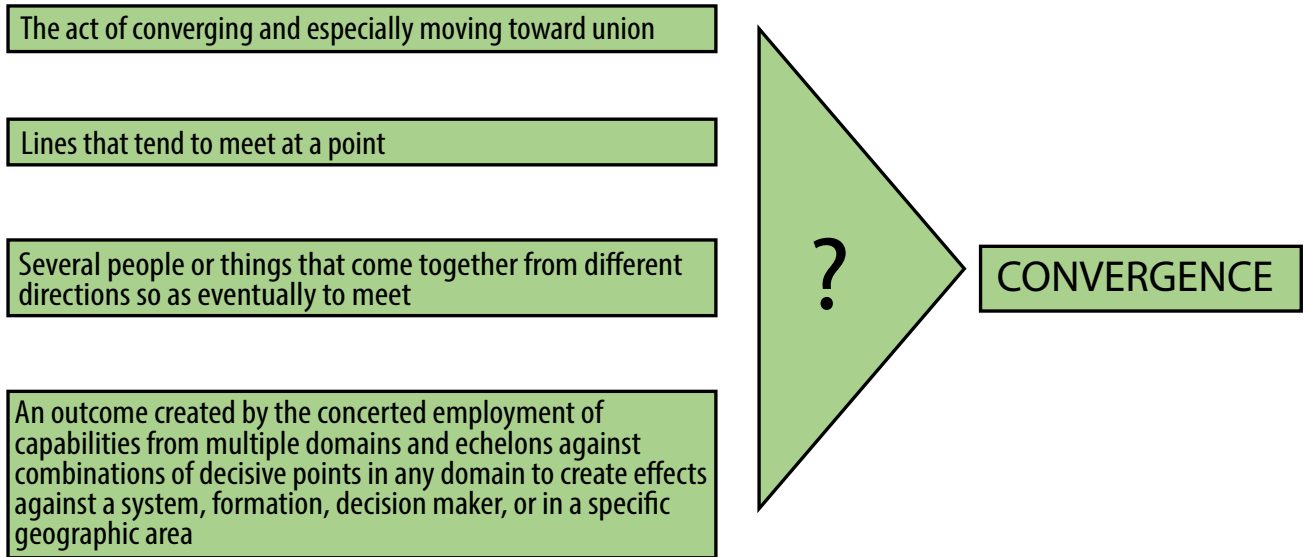
The general was confused. He paused for a moment and sipped on his bourbon. He took in the sweet toffee and woody aromas that emanated from his glass. "Converging flavors? What in the hell are you talking about, Rich?" he said. Then, he started laughing at his son's absurd statement.

Rich smiled wryly. He knew his dad well and how to get him talking. Normally, the general was deep in his own thoughts, and it took a lot of prodding to get the conversation started; that was, unless he was baited into it! Rich had set the bait and now launched into what he wanted to talk about. "Dad, surely you don't think convergence is absurd?" he said sarcastically.

The general now recognized the trap. He stopped to think. The idea that bourbon could be used to describe convergence was undoubtedly creative—that said, it was a bridge too far for him. "Son, I see where you're going but convergence isn't about bourbon. It's about creating an outcome through the concerted employment of capabilities from multiple domains and echelons against combinations of decisive points in any domain to create effects against a system, formation, decision-maker, or in a specific geographic area."¹⁰ He had to stop to draw breath. Even for the general, he thought the Army definition was wordy and contained many new buzzwords. "Go on then son, explain how this bourbon relates to convergence. I can't wait to hear it!"

The two men knew that they were now locked into a discussion about convergence and how it was being implemented. The general was vividly aware that whilst his corps staff were using the term, he was uneasy about explaining how it either changed how he fought or if it was something new. Conversely, Rich was eager to discuss convergence. At his level, convergence was intensely confusing. It sounded incredibly like the effect generated by designating a main effort, weighting it with resources, and then sustaining it. To add more confusion, it sounded a lot like the definition of combined arms—the synchronized and simultaneous application of arms to achieve an effect greater than if each element was used separately or sequentially—but with new buzzwords added in (see figure).¹¹

Rich, now given the opportunity to explain, got started. "Dad, I think the Army now has three ways of explaining the same thing. Combined arms, main effort, and now convergence all have one thing in common; they want to achieve an effect on the enemy. I'll



(Figure by author)

Figure. Different Definitions of Convergence: Which Is Applicable?

admit that the similarity between combined arms and convergence is probably greater than that with main effort but I'm sure you can see my point. Let me explain."

Continuing his train of thought, Rich went on: "I think bourbon is an apt metaphor for how the new FM 3-0 explains convergence. I mean any bourbon company uses the concerted employment of capabilities from across their domains to achieve an effect. In our case, the effect has been perfectly balanced flavors. Their coopers pick specific wood to make the barrels and then char them to produce exactly the right flavor. Their master distillers choose yeast profiles, grain type and mash bill, aging time, and warehouse storage techniques, all just to create the effect of the perfect bourbon for you—the decision-maker! And let's not forget there is also a marketing team that gets you to buy the product!" Rich could see that the general was deep in thought and following his words. Maybe his metaphor was getting traction in the old man's head.

The general was indeed thinking. "Okay, Rich, your metaphor between bourbon and convergence makes perfect sense to me. Bringing capabilities from multiple domains to create an effect is what convergence is about. I don't understand your point though. Why is this confusing?"

Got him! thought Rich. "I'm glad you asked, Dad. Because this is where the others at my level get a bit

lost. If I were to use the same metaphor to explain combined arms, we would also nod our heads in agreement. In combined arms, we would also need to synchronize the work of the cooper, the distiller, and the marketer to have an effect. And, if we used these people individually, they wouldn't achieve the desired effect."

The general was now starting to understand. What is the difference between combined arms and convergence, and why are they distinct? "Son, you are asking a good question."

Richard interrupted his dad. "So, what is the difference, Dad? Do we consider combined arms to be about synchronizing the application of arms within the Army only? I mean others use the term 'arm' to make a distinction between what we call services. I've heard people ask, 'What arm of the military are you from?' with responses varying from the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and even the Marines. Doesn't this indicate to us that combined arms is broader than just the Army? Dad, it seems to me that convergence is trying to include joint capabilities when we already have a method of doing so."

The general was quietly impressed. His son had a damn good argument on his hands. What was the difference between convergence and combined arms? Was it simply that Army was trying to get its people to think at a more joint level? If this was the case, did introducing a new term and arguably a new technique help this



Soldiers move out to their next objective during a platoon-level live-fire exercise at the 7th Army Training Command's Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, 19 March 2018. (Photo by Gertrud Zach, U.S. Department of Defense)

along? “Alright, Rich, I see your point. And it is a good one. Personally, I think Army wants us to function as a joint force and it is attempting to broaden our thought beyond just what the Army can do on its own. Now that you’ve explained it, I can see why people might be struggling with convergence as a term. Especially if they are already thinking from a joint force perspective. But remember, it’s about how we also put all of this together. The art of linking these things into a coherent and relevant plan isn’t easy.”

Rich didn’t expect his dad to have understood his point and definitely not to have calmly agreed with him. Maybe the bourbon was having an effect. “Dad it’s refreshing to hear someone understand why we are confused. I also get your point about the art of stitching it together. I just read a fantastic article from a British guy who used cooking and culinary skills to explain operational art.¹² You should read it—or at least get your staff to read it—as it makes a ton of sense and simplifies what I think is a difficult concept for the uninitiated.”

The general, who was a problem solver rather than a complainer, wanted to get to the solution. “So, Rich. How do you think the Army should go about implementing FM 3-0 then?”

Moving Out: Obstacles to Implementing FM 3-0

Richard had been contemplating the question his dad had asked him for a while. “Dad, I don’t envy TRADOC and their role in implementing FM 3-0. But I do think there are a few things that would help. First, I think the Army needs to have a consistent message. Is this new or is it a reframing of what we already do? The doctrine itself clearly tells us that it is a continuation. So, why do we persist in telling people it is brand new as if pulled from plastic wrappers at Christmas? Second, FM 3-0 clearly articulates how Army forces contribute land power to the joint force and integrates joint capabilities.¹³ So, rather than invent new words we should use existing terminology to aid simplicity. Finally, I think combined

arms warfighting, which incorporates joint assets, needs to be introduced into our schools at a much earlier point. We cannot afford to have people believing that either a single branch or the Army can do things independently. It is literally a combined joint effort. The only way we can combat this problem is to introduce planning serials and courses that integrate doctrinal concepts and joint scenarios at the lowest possible level.”

The general looked up at Richard. “Rich, these are major obstacles to implementing FM 3-0, I agree.

We do need a consistent message, our terminology is confusing to the point where it detracts from achieving clarity and purpose, and joint warfighting should be introduced earlier. But I would leave you with this—the U.S. Army has released a new FM 3-0 every five years on average. Our own doctrine tells us that it takes one to three years to disseminate a change and another five years for it to permeate the force.¹⁴ We would appear to be our own worst enemy at implementing change.” ■

Notes

Epigraph. Colin Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 383. Gen. Colin Powell paraphrased this quote, which is originally from book publisher and editor Michael Korda.

1. Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 2022).

2. “DEFENDER-Europe Fact Sheet,” U.S. Army Europe and Africa, last updated 3 May 2022, <https://www.europeafrica.army.mil/Portals/19/documents/Infographics/DE22%20Factsheet%20.pdf>.

3. “AUSA Interview: Gen. James McConville on MDO Doctrine,” Defense News, 16 October 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/video/2020/10/16/ausa-interview-gen-james-mcconville-on-mdo-doctrine/>.

4. Jen Judson, “U.S. Army Adopts New Multidomain Operations Doctrine,” Defense News, 10 October 2022, <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2022/10/10/us-army-adopts-new-multidomain-operations-doctrine/>.

5. Grant Fawcett, *History of US Army Operating Concepts and Implications for Multi-Domain Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, 2019), 12–14.

6. FM 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001 [obsolete]).

7. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2011 [obsolete]).

8. Michael Howard, “The Use and Abuse of Military History,” *Parameters* 11, no. 1 (1981): 14, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1251&context=parameters>.

9. FM 3-0, *Operations*, ix.

10. *Ibid.*, 3-3.

11. *Ibid.*, 248.

12. Chris Adams, “Everyone Is a Chef: Cooking as an Analogy to Explain Operational Art,” *Military Review Online Exclusive*, 19 April 2023, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2023-OLE/Everyone-Is-a-Chef/>.

13. FM 3-0, *Operations*, v.

14. ADP 1-01, *Doctrine Primer* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2019), 2-5–2-6.