A drone swarm operated by the Threat System Management Office takes off from a training area during Marne Focus 2024 at Fort Stewart, Georgia, on 7 April 2024. Modern warfare is waged in every domain. Frontline soldiers must remain flexible and agile while improving their lethality by leveraging technology and integrating all warfighting functions against current and future threats. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Jacob Slaymaker, U.S. Army)

Continuous Transformation

Concept-Driven Transformation

Gen. James E. Rainey, U.S. Army

If you don't like change, you are going to like irrelevance even less.

—Gen. Eric Shinseki

The focus of this article is concept-driven transformation, which provides the broad avenue of approach for long-term change. Earlier articles address how the Army manages change in the near- and midterm—the *transformation in contact* and *deliberate transformation* periods.

The Long-Term Vision

The purpose of the forthcoming Army Warfighting Concept is to drive Army transformation.[1] Transformation is everything we do to turn the Army we have into the one we need by making changes across doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTMLPF-P). This involves the entire Army, which presents a coordination challenge. People in different organizations who focus on different time horizons are working through different processes to solve

A soldier assigned to 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, operates a drone to observe opposing force movements at South Range, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, on 6 November 2023. The Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center is the Army's newest combat training center and generates readiness in the environments and conditions where the Hawaii-based forces are most likely to operate. The U.S. Army must be ready for a full range of military operations involving multiple threats and across varied geography. (Photo by Sgt. Samantha Cate, U.S. Army)

interrelated problems. The Army Warfighting Concept provides the common, long-term vision that unites those efforts.

Because we cannot perfectly predict the future, our long-term vision is not fixed. The Army Warfighting Concept is a living document, based on a continuously updated running estimate of the future operational environment.[2] This process includes intelligence assessments, observation of ongoing conflicts, research, wargaming, experimentation, and innovation by operational units deployed forward in their operational environment.

The Role of the Army

The purpose of the Army is to dominate the land domain. Ground forces do this as a part of the combined joint force, employing capabilities from the sea, air, space, and cyberspace in the land domain while simultaneously giving joint force commanders land-based capabilities they need to control other domains.

The broader purpose of all military forces is to deter aggression. With the right capabilities, capacity, and positioning, our military causes adversaries to question whether they could prevail by force. If that fails, the mission becomes to defeat enemy forces in the field, allowing a political resolution favorable to the United States and its allies.

Once political authorities commit military forces in pursuit of political aims, military forces must win something, or else there will be no basis from which political authorities can bargain to win politically. Therefore, the purpose of military operations cannot be simply to avert defeat but, rather, it must be to win.

—Gen. Donn Starry[3]

Military Implications of the Future Operational Environment

We live in a dangerous world, increasingly subject to the disruptive effects of new technologies. We have every reason to expect that by 2030 China and Russia will retain advantages in mass and magazine depth. They will also have closed capability gaps that restrain them today. At the same time, Iran, North Korea, and other adversaries—including nonstate actors that wield significant military power—will prevent the Army from focusing exclusively on the greatest threats.[4]

The combination of ubiquitous sensing and precision strike has significant implications for the conduct of warfare. The most obvious is that it pushes operational and strategic support area activities—logistics, staging, and higher-echelon command and control (C2)—further away or into distributed nodes. But the combination of sensing with precision also changes the close fight.[5] The density of sensors and effectors—lethal and nonlethal—will only increase as forces approach forward lines. Commanders will not achieve surprise by the same methods they do today. They will also not mass forces for the close fight without

deliberate condition setting to break the enemy's ability to sense and strike.[6]

Precision remains an effective counter to mass, but it is a poor substitute for it ... the U.S. is probably over-indexed on long-range precision, versus adjusting to and dealing with proliferation of short-range precision on the battlefield ... UAS have democratized precision in the close-in battle. They made it cheap, they made it accessible. So now you have mass precision.

—Michael Kofman[7]

The major driver of change at the tactical level of war will be the employment of AI-enabled robotic systems at scale. This will not displace traditional weapons, like tanks and tube artillery, but it will change how ground formations operate. At the operational level, the convergence of domains—land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace—will place a premium on joint force integration. The net effect of the above is an exponential increase in the complexity of modern warfare on par with the emergence of combined arms early in the last century.[8] This only raises the stakes for the decisions we make about training and leader development.

Two-Part Problem Statement, Three-Part Theory of Victory

The Army Warfighting Concept has a two-part problem statement. These include the warfighting problem and the institutional problem. The warfighting problem is how to succeed in the future operational environment described above. The institutional problem is how to build an Army as a warfighting *institution* that can do that across all time horizons.

The Army Warfighting Concept is based on three primary notions. These are C2 and counter-C2, expanded maneuver, and cross-domain fires. The Army does all these today, but not to the degree that it could, even with technology that already exists. The concept also clearly states a three-part theory of victory. First, the Army must sustain and build upon advantages it already has—its people and its competence in combined arms maneuver. Second, we must develop the ability to integrate new technology and adapt faster than any adversary. Third, we must significantly enhance endurance—capability and capacity within the Army and in the industrial base to prevail during protracted conflict.

A Break from the Past

The Army Warfighting Concept is a break from the past in both content and form. It challenges assumptions about warfighting that have become so engrained in Army culture in recent decades that they are rarely questioned today. These include the relative importance of preparing to win the first battle versus preparing to win a long war, the primacy of the offense, and even the notion that fires serve primarily to enable maneuver.

The concept also breaks with a tradition of Army concepts that specifically described how commanders should fight. AirLand Battle was first published over forty years ago.[9] Since then, a succession of Army concepts sought to furnish a theory of victory for the operational-level commander in the field. That was sound during the Cold War when the Army's organizational strategy was to optimize for one threat in one region.[10] However, we face multiple threats today, in multiple geographies, across the full range of military operations. No single, operational-level theory of victory would be practically useful in all those scenarios.[11]

For this reason, while the concept addresses tactics and operations, the theory of victory for the Army Warfighting Concept centers on how the Army as a warfighting *institution* remains the dominant land force in the world. Beyond that general theory of victory, the concept provides a list of imperatives for Army transformation. These point to a need for bold shifts with significant implications for Army doctrine, force structure, and talent.

The Next Level of Detail

The Army can posture for multiple threats and still get to the next level

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Spc. Dylan Horak, a network communication systems specialist with the 44th Expeditionary Signal Battalion–Enhanced, reacts to a drone swarm attack during Saber Junction 23 on 11 September 2023 at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center near Hohenfels, Germany. U.S. Army soldiers and NATO troops train with drones that simulate modern weapon systems to help their militaries update doctrine and training for combat against developing and future threats. (Photo by 1st Sgt. Michel Sauret, U.S. Army Reserve)

of detail on how to fight in different scenarios. To do that, we will conduct a series of wargames. Scenarios will vary by threat, geography, and time frame. Some will involve China-Taiwan crises. Others will pit the combined joint force against the People's Liberation Army in broader Indo-Pacific scenarios, with different combinations of coalition partners and different political objectives. There will be scenarios involving competition and conflict with Russia, North Korea, Iran, and other adversaries. Some scenarios will involve protracted contests that test strategic endurance. All will stress contested force projection, contested logistics, defense of the homeland, and the human and information dimensions of war.

Who participates in these wargames matters as much as their content. The Army's best warfighters are in our divisions, corps, and the Army Service component commands. And we will wargame the same way that we fight—as part of the combined joint force. Scientists and engineers will participate to help warfighters understand what technology could make possible and people from industry will join to help explore the implications for industry.

What we learn will allow the Army to develop concept "applications," or annexes, for specific scenarios, threats, or geographies. When appropriate, these annexes will describe context-specific, operational-level defeat mechanisms. When a lesson applies across a wide range of scenarios, we will incorporate it into the main body of the Army Warfighting Concept.

2040 Is Sooner Than You Think

If a soldier who was discharged from the Army shortly before 11 September 2001 returned today, they would be more surprised by how the Army is the same than by how it is different. We are much closer to 2040 than we are to 2001. The world is changing too quickly for the Army to be changing that slowly.

Concept-driven transformation is implemented *through* transformation in contact and deliberate transformation. It is not a separate activity. While the

primary function of the Army Warfighting Concept is to provide direction for the long-term, this necessarily also sets the broad avenue of approach for the near- and midterm. To have a capability by 2040 requires that it be in fielding by 2035, which means it must exist as a prototype by around 2030. The Army will submit its initial budget request for that year in 2025. And new materiel is not even the slowest part of DOTMLPF-P. The longest lead times are for personnel and leadership.

The challenge of the last two decades was how to develop leaders who could echelon fires for a combined arms breach as adeptly as they could negotiate with a tribal elder. The challenge of the next two decades will be the same, only technology is adding to the list of required competencies. The best commanders will be—among other things—experts in the physics of combat, data fluent, and as attuned to the information and human dimensions as they are to the physical dimension of their operational environment.

Since we only have one Army, we do not have the luxury of choosing between being ready to fight tomorrow and ready to fight tonight. The Army Warfighting Concept describes two kinds of changes: changes the Army can make now and changes the Army can only make if it starts now. When the concept is published, leaders across the Army must study it to determine the implications for DOTMLPF-P in their areas of responsibility and start necessary movement. The question is not whether to prioritize current readiness or future readiness, but how to account for uncertainty and manage continuous transformation across all three periods of time. ■

Notes

Epigraph. Eric Shinseki, quoted in James Dao and Thom Shanker, "No Longer a Soldier, Shinseki Has a New Mission," *New York Times* (website), 10 November 2009, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/11/us/politics/11vets.html. One of Gen. Eric Shinseki's earliest public employments of this admonition may have been on 24 May 2001 during remarks at the Armor Conference at Fort Knox, Kentucky. In attendance were several retired officers who had been critical of Shinseki's initiative to field lighter weight, more deployable combat vehicles. U.S. Army Col. Jonathan S. Dunn, who was then a junior officer, witnessed the remark.

1. The Army Warfighting Concept is an internal document under development by Army Futures Command. This article serves to introduce the concept and some of its key ideas.

2. The *Future Operational Environment Running Estimate* is a continuously updated, classified assessment maintained by Army Futures Command but informed by and accessible to the wider intelligence community. The point of contact is Dr. Jacob Barton, jacob.e.barton.civ@army.mil.

3. Donn Starry, "Extending the Battlefield," *Military Review* 61, no. 3 (March 1981): 32, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/online-publications/documents/1981-mr-donn-starry-extending-the-battlefield.pdf.

4. The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, October 2022); U.S. Department of Defense, *2022 National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 2022). The *National Security Strategy* and *National Defense Strategy* identify China as the pacing challenge, Russia as an acute threat, and North Korea, Iran, and violent extremist organizations as persistent threats.

5. Michael Kofman, "Keynote" (conference presentation, Army Applications Lab Vertex: Air-Ground Littoral, Austin, TX, 17 June 2024).

6. Jack Watling, *The Arms of the Future: Technology and Close Combat in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 99.

7. Kofman, "Keynote."

8. Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2–4.

9. Field Manual 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 20 August 1982). This was the first version of AirLand Battle doctrine. The final version was published in a 1986 revision of the same manual.

10. David Johnson, *Shared Problems: The Lessons of Airland Battle and the 31 Initiatives for Multi-Domain Battle* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 13 September 2019), 5–6, https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE301.html.

11. Andrew Krepinevich Jr., *The Origins of Victory: How Disruptive Military Innovation Determines the Fates of Great Powers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023), 439.

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