



U.S. Navy and Marine Corps aircraft fly over the amphibious assault ship USS Kearsarge, during an exercise with allied ships in the Baltic Sea, Sep. 4, 2022. Employment of formations across multiple domains, environments, and functions impacts the success of operational and tactical objectives. (U.S. Navy photo by MCS 3rd Class Taylor Parker)

NCOs' Roles in Multi-Domain Operations

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“The Army builds and sustains multi-domain formations through the selection, training, and education of the leaders, Soldiers, and teams in them. Employing multi-domain capabilities requires the Army to attract, retain, and employ leaders and Soldiers who collectively possess a significant breadth and depth of technical and professional expertise.”

(Department of the Army, 2018)

Soldiers are the Army's most important asset. As it goes through a doctrinal evolution to overcome new adversarial weapons and technologies; it is crucial Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs) understand their role in multi-domain operations (MDO), and develop essential competencies needed to prevail in Large Scale Ground Combat Operations (LSGCO).

Multi-Domain Operations

To succeed in LSGCO the Army will need to maneuver across strategic distances. Enemy anti-access and area denial (A2/D2) capabilities are obstacles that impede the Army from employing its forces (DA, 2021). Thus, domain integration across air, sea, cyber and space is necessary as MDO are operations "conducted across multiple domains and contested spaces to overcome an adversary's (or enemy's) strengths by presenting them with several operational and/or tactical dilemmas through the combined application of calibrated force posture; employment of multi-domain formations; and convergence of capabilities across domains, environments, and functions in time and spaces to achieve operational and tactical objectives," (DA, 2018).

The strategic objectives in MDO are Compete (defeat the adversary's efforts to achieve their strategic goals); Penetrate (neutralize enemy long-range systems); DisIntegrate (disintegrate the enemy's A2/AD systems); Exploit (exploit enemy's weakness to defeat them); and Re-compete (set conditions for a secure environment with a political advantage) (DA, 2018).

In the context of a multi-domain environment, the Army will need to fight in the operational level and must develop its leaders, mainly by training management, to

be assertive communicators who exercise strong leadership practices. They will need to be innovative, dynamic, and expand the reach of forces during offense, defense, and stability operations. This is in line with what Czege (2020) says when stating military operational success goes through "formulating and clearly transmitting the intent of operations and orders to subordinates; encouraging subordinates to act on unanticipated opportunities and unexpected dangers, without permission; and establishing a habit of expeditious information sharing with subordinates, superiors, and peers" (pp. 36). This requires fundamental changes to NCOs' roles during training to develop effective leadership communication and employment.

NCOs' Roles

MDO is about the developing, training, and employing new tools to converge capabilities across multiple domains. It means the Army needs formations trained, manned, and equipped to leverage available information. Furthermore, it is critical to invest in adapting and improving NCO competencies in assertive communication, training management, and leadership practices. As NCOs will need to be able to empower subordinate decision-making, decentralized execution, with subordinates capable of leading in the tactical and operational levels.

Assertive Communication

The ability to communicate is a critical competency NCOs must possess for MDO military missions to succeed. They will need to listen actively to really understand Soldier needs and communicate command intent effectively. The tactics and actions will be new in some cases. Novel practices, which will take place in more complex dilemmas and situations than before, need to be developed. NCOs must acknowledge their importance and learn to listen actively to succeed in MDO.

Communication encompasses shared understanding effectively. When commanders assign objectives, NCOs must understand the sphere, means, and limits to convey information properly. Through effective communication, they build trust outside the line of authority, which results in greater teamwork and cohesion across all domains.

Training Management

NCOs should also be proficient in training management. They are directly responsible for training individual Soldiers so they must be versed in risk management, training model preparation, conducting individual training, and organizational training from the squad to brigade levels (DA, 2020).



Soldiers from 1st Special Forces Group and members of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, complete airborne operations on Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, July 30, 2021. As the Army goes through a doctrinal evolution to overcome new adversarial weapons and technologies; it is crucial NCOs understand their role in multi-domain operations, and develop essential competencies needed to prevail in Large Scale Ground Combat. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Effie Mahugh)

NCOs, especially during training, must support Soldier professional and personal growth (NCOLCoE, 2019) which includes developing Soldiers to act in tough situations. NCOs must assess developmental needs, set conditions encouraging initiative, and take prudent risks to support professional growth. By doing so, Soldiers will learn new approaches to solve problems in MDO. This competence ties perfectly with the importance of leadership.

Leadership

Leadership in MDO is the ability to multiply and unify combat power elements and drive strategic readiness. It is about being prepared, competent, and able to show leader attributes and competencies across the range of military operations (DA, 2017).

NCOs who think critically and creatively will be better prepared to face and solve complex problems in MDO. Furthermore, they will continue to provide purpose and motivation; enforce standards; and model

characteristics of the Army profession. The ability to coach, counsel, and follow Army values, while building character, will always be the pinnacle of leadership. In LSCO, the skills, knowledge, and potential to lead is vital to the success in MDO.

Conclusion

The problems the Army will face in multi-domain operations demand leaders who think critically, communicate effectively, train Soldiers efficiently, and lead by knowledge and experience. NCOs must be ready for this mission. One important competence they must have is the ability to communicate clearly. Messages must be understood by everyone in the chain of command. NCOs must develop training management competencies which incorporate best practices and tactical problem solving into training to help Soldiers to prevail in a multi-domain environment. Moreover, leadership continues to be the key element in any human endeavor, it will be no different in MDO. ■

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