

COMMENTARY ON “THE US ARMY IN MULTI-DOMAIN OPERATIONS 2028”

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Any response to Russian or Chinese aggression from the United States and its Allies requires military operating concepts, materiel solutions, and forward deployed forces in well-planned and prepared defenses to deter these adversaries credibly and, if necessary, defend the status quo. These concepts must rely on sound military theories and testable hypotheses that yield a logical theory of victory. Unfortunately, the central ideas in United States Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations, 2028* (MDO), inherits foundational flaws from its preceding concepts (such as the AirLand Battle and the Operational Context); thus, the pamphlet fails the challenge.

Cold War requirements for deterrence and defense provide more relevance to these challenges than recent conventional combat operations. Then, we assessed the Warsaw Pact armies as capable of a “blitzkrieg” conventional attack that would overwhelm Allied defenses and NATO’s nuclear deterrent. The AirLand Battle concept provided NATO with logical and validated means to win the “first battle” decisively through the systemic defeat of Warsaw Pact armies. The concept’s maturity required planners to gain a holistic understanding of the adversary to develop a campaign-quality set of ideas with testable lines of operations and objectives before identifying the methods or means to apply in an asymmetric way. The development of effective tactical ways and means for operational concepts requires credible analytical testing, gaming, and scientific rigor to

avoid the risk of validation on the battlefield. Today’s adversaries’ behavior and technological capabilities require the same approach.

A synthesis of the unclassified *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* and TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 yields the following concept objective (mission) and principal supporting (task) objectives for the US Army.

Mission: Contribute to the Joint Force’s principal task to deter and defeat Russian and Chinese aggression in both competition and conflict.

Task 1: Contribute to the Joint Force’s defeat of Russian and Chinese layered standoff tactics in political, military and economic realms without risking armed conflict.

Task 2: Defeat Russian and Chinese technological adaptations and multiple layers of standoff in all domains (air, land, sea, space, cyber, and information) that threaten coherence of operations.

Task 3: Modernize our obsolete *way of war*, by adapting to the revolutionizing impact of the technology of war, to succeed against the militaries of “post-industrial, information-based states like Russian and China.”

This logic cryptically implies that *when* we can defeat Russian and Chinese *layered standoff* tactics in the political, military, and economic realms; *when* our warfighting techniques have evolved and adapted to defeat defenses arrayed in multiple layers of stand-off in all domains (air, land, sea, space, cyber, and information); and *when* we can successfully *compete* against, *penetrate*, *disintegrate*, and *exploit* the aggressive military operations of our adversaries, then our new American way of war can deter and defeat Russian and Chinese aggression in both competition and conflict. Unfortunately, this foundational logic is flawed and the perception about the problem set and mission and situation is incomplete.

Chapter 2 of the MDO, "The Operational Context," does not articulate a well-developed *theory of the problem*. This chapter should answer questions such as the following: (1) Given the Army's mission, what problems arise; (2) What are the *cluster of problems* within the situation that help the aggressor achieve objectives without risking armed conflict; (3) What military weaknesses and disadvantages need to be overcome; (4) Why are the adversaries not deterred, and what would deter them; and (5) What are the "problems" in the defense that facilitate an enemy's early fait accompli occupation of a US ally? Without such a clear line of inquiry, readers must infer a complex leap of logic to grasp the concept's *military problem*.

Likewise, MDO's chapter 3, "Multi-Domain Operations," fails to articulate a clear solution to the military problem. Instead, the concept offers a flawed *central idea* that is insufficient as an understandable theory of victory supported by testable hypotheses and scientific inquiry. As such, it will likely fail to deter potential adversaries' attacks against allies that we are treaty-bound to defend. To deter credibly, the MDO must clearly define the military problem and articulate a theory of victory that is understandable and logical to Allies and adversaries alike.

Compounding these logical challenges, the MDO's use of vague language confounds the reader's understanding of the concept. For example, the frequent use of ill-defined terms such as *standoff* and *domain* confuse the already thin logic of the concept. The evolution of MDO must use common English words to provide clarity as it informs Army, Joint, and Allied doctrine.

A revised MDO concept must clearly articulate its mission purpose. To "deter and defeat Russian and Chinese aggression in both competition and conflict" is vague and lacks a meaningful purpose. We should clearly explain what Russian and Chinese behavior is intolerable and why and the consequences such behavior will likely incur. The key idea requires us to deter war as the overriding purpose. Aggressors must believe they cannot credibly succeed. Doubt invites a test. Therefore, defensive alliances are so important.

Unfortunately, the MDO concept advocates that we symmetrically counter these adversaries by framing *conflict* as a contest between their ability to deploy advanced air defense and area denial defenses and our ability to overcome them. This normalizes and legitimizes the coercion and subversion of our allies as mere competition.

The MDO concept for responding to and winning conflict is also symmetrically conceived. It assumes that an adversary's surprise attack will overwhelm an unidentified allied forward defense and then immediately array multiple layers of defenses in depth in all relevant dimensions (air, land, sea, space, cyber, and information). The pamphlet seemingly overlooks the very demanding task of defending an ally's territory under armed attack. Subsequently, the United States and our allies would conduct a counteroffensive campaign of reconquest in the form of a strategic movement to contact, which plays right into the strong conventional and nuclear defensive posture of our adversaries. We can and must avoid this asymmetric choice.

The MDO asserts that the biggest military challenge we face against adversaries like Russia and China is "maintaining the coherence of our operations." Such thinking limits our choices. We need more than the technological capability to defeat the defenses Russia and China can erect over their assault formations. We need to organize a forward stationed and rapidly deployable air, land, sea, space, cyber, and information defense of allied territory. This will require sustainment at the scale of the military enterprise and the successful practice of mission command initiative for us and with our allies.

The following argues for a revised theory of victory: deterring Russian and Chinese aggression against allies that we are treaty-bound to defend. Having to defeat Russian and Chinese aggression is

a distant second place, even when we are successful in achieving a stable and advantageous peace afterward. The real test of sufficiency is proving that the Army can succeed along all lines of operations and adapt the warfighting means and methods necessary to enable that mission. Although some very essential lines of effort in the concept may not be in the Army's power to initiate, they are vitally important to strategic success, and they are within the Army leadership's power to advocate.

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