

Multi-Domain Battle: Tonight, Tomorrow, and the Future Fight

Robert Brown and David Perkins
August 18, 2017

People like to talk about how the future of warfare will be different, but it has already started to arrive. For some years now, the beginnings of major shifts in the character of warfare have been visible in places like eastern Ukraine and the Middle East. Across these battlefields, rival powers made investments and developed doctrine, providing ample evidence that future wars promise extreme lethality not seen since World War II. The hybrid warfare underway in the Middle East and eastern Europe is a small-scale preview. The next fight will be defined by a violent intensity that will test the U.S. military's might in the cauldron of battle. As leading scholars and policymakers have discussed, revisionist and increasingly belligerent actors are working to erode the pillars of the global political and economic system that evolved since World War II and reached a high point after the Cold War. In attempting to remake the global order, these actors are developing and employing technologies and tactics that offset America's military dominance on land, at sea, in the air, and in space and cyberspace.

North Korea's intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of reaching the United States territory are the most immediate threat. Its strategic military advances have refocused Washington on the harsh realities of nuclear proliferation. Over the longer term, peer and near-peer revisionism promise a greater challenge to American power and its security, as well as that of its allies. As peer-level powers rise economically or near-peer adversaries demonstrate disregard for sovereign borders, the risks of a confrontation with the United States grow. These peer-level adversaries further complicate the United States' position by combining their military buildup and modernization efforts with posturing against international norms.

In facing these adversaries, the U.S. military has a serious problem. Specifically as Commanders of U.S. Army Pacific and U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, we are working to ensure the U.S. Army undergoes significant and sobering changes, as a directive from the Chief of Staff of the Army, to effectively deter rivals and, if and when necessary, achieve victory.

To be ready for the next war, the U.S. Army and the other services must effectively innovate and adapt concepts, equipment, and training. The future battlefield will be one where integration into joint and multinational forces is a prerequisite for victory. To get there, we must establish a clear path to prepare the force for the fight tonight, tomorrow, and in the future. A concept many *War on the Rocks* readers have read about before — Multi-Domain Battle — is key to getting the U.S. military into shape for that fight.

The Concept of Multi-Domain Battle

The U.S. Army is concept-based and doctrine-driven. It uses concepts to change the Army for the future, while doctrine establishes frameworks and guidance to run the Army in the present. As the Army's "architect," Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) is charged with the responsibility to craft both concepts and doctrine. To arrive at the future prepared and ready to dominate the fight, we need a concept to guide convergence and integration of capabilities across air, land, sea, space, cyber, and electro-magnetic spectrum.

Today, the Army employs the doctrinal approach of Unified Land Operations as an integral and interdependent member of the joint force. Our systems and capabilities, derived from this concept and those that preceded it, have been developed as interdependent programs of record managed by separate warfighting functions. But as our relative strengths, especially in technology, are challenged by near-peer adversaries, domains become contested and communications are no longer assured. The U.S. Army must drive towards a new concept — to identify, along with our joint and multinational brethren, converged and integrated solutions to achieve cross-domain effects, fires, and maneuver.

Our adversaries are adapting at a pace of development and implementation that has outpaced the primacy the United States has enjoyed since Desert Storm. The processes utilized to change the U.S. Army are inadequate. The U.S. Army cannot wait for a concept to feed capabilities that will drive new doctrine. It should pursue concurrent and cumulative efforts, bringing the concept to reality for the fight tonight, tomorrow, and in the future.

Multi-Domain Battle Tonight

First, there is the near term. If a war breaks out anytime in the next five years, we must look at how the U.S. military can employ existing forces, capabilities, and operational designs. Battlefields are growing ever more complicated, from pervasive information warfare in social media, to applying multi-functional and multi-domain military capabilities below the threshold of armed conflict or the coupling of economic power with militia and irregular forces. To counter these challenges, the U.S. Army needs a proponent, focused on the fight tonight, to lead, and quickly move concept to doctrine in a way that guides technologically advanced weapons, systems, and modernized facilities with which to train.

U.S. Army Pacific leads the effort in testing, experimenting, and refining the ideas behind Multi-Domain Battle. As an operational command in an increasingly challenging area of operation, U.S. Army Pacific must ensure not only future capabilities to deter — and if required, defeat — four out of the five Department of Defense global threats, but guarantee the readiness of Army forces in the Pacific to fight tonight. Multi-Domain Battle provides the opportunity to both build up military readiness through realistic training while also preparing today's force to evolve into the future force.

To do this, U.S. Army Pacific has broken down the near-term challenge into three main components: mindset, joint integration, and technology. These components focus on what can be done today to improve America's strategic situation around the world. First, the U.S. Army should build partnerships across the Department of Defense with those who share a desire to change our cultures to one of inclusion and openness — thinking “purple first.” Second, with these partnerships, we must address

joint integration by shifting from a model of interdependence to one of integration. A model that includes flexible command and control designs, better integrated communications systems, development of tailorable and scalable units, and in key areas the provision of flexible policy. Finally, the U.S. Army should address technology by repurposing current technology to providing greater capability, improving future acquisitions across the Department of Defense, and most importantly developing integrated sensor-to-shooter networks that allow joint forces in the fight to be sensor and platform agnostic. Any person or platform that sees an enemy should be able to share the information for any capability to either track, disrupt, or destroy it. It is through these partnerships focused on the fight tonight that we will maximize the impacts on tomorrow and the future.

If the U.S. Army is to integrate capabilities, achieve lethal information dominance, and epitomize a vision of what it means to be a joint force, the Army must apply unique changes to how it fights, trains, and equips the current force. How the Army fights is defined through doctrine and especially through its operations manual, Field Manual 3-0. This manual must remain relevant to how the force will fight. The Army will take the multi-domain lessons being learned on today's battlefield and through exercises and incorporate them into current doctrine to inform training.

As the Army refines its doctrine, efforts to provide cutting-edge access to training and equipment is just as important. The U.S. Army Asymmetric Warfare Group is supplied with the knowledge of first-hand observations from their operational advisors and can prototype the cross-domain training environment for the U.S. Army. While not yet truly multi-domain, this training environment mirrors lessons learned from recent and ongoing conflicts around the world matched to the latest tactics, techniques, and procedures for emerging technologies and their potential impact on the future character of warfare. As a way of supporting local installations, the Asymmetric Warfare Group will provide a comprehensive instruction package outlining how to create and equip their own cross-domain training environments.

Multi-Domain Battle Tomorrow

Next, there is tomorrow's fight, forecasting just beyond the horizon from 2022 to 2030. In this time frame, America's major nation-state competitors will fully emerge as peers on the battlefield. Simultaneously, limited interests and increased suspicion will dominate international relationships, creating an environment more vulnerable to miscalculation and ripe for war. In response, the U.S. Army's capabilities of today will not be adequate enough to provide assurances to allies facing tomorrow's fight. The Army needs to reinforce and strengthen our ability to project and sustain elements of national power readily across the globe. However, the enemy gets a vote, and they will respond by improving their ability to disrupt the U.S. military's strengths as a joint force, deny access to critical modes and nodes, and try to stop the U.S. military from using its greatest strength — maneuver.

Ultimately, the multi-domain task force will pave the way for the U.S. Army to counter-anti-access/area denial challenges as part of a wider joint effort. Identifying how and where the task force will fit into the larger joint effort will require experimentation and adaptation to leverage capabilities including, but not limited to, long range fires, air and missile defense, electronic warfare, force protection, and sustainment. This will be an essential tool that proactively counters adversary attempts to disrupt, deny, and fix U.S. military strengths. The task force will balance offense and defense. Offensively, they will strike critical enemy targets with a combination of lethal and non-lethal means. Defensively, the task force will protect friendly forces and critical nodes. In addition to executing these missions and supporting the joint task force commander's strategic objectives, the multi-domain task force should integrate organic and joint capabilities to ensure the U.S. military's freedom of action. In working towards this achievement, the Army will initiate a pilot program to test the multi-domain task force under the operational control of U.S. Army Pacific and build the organizational structure at Fort Bliss, Texas.

Multi-Domain Battle Future

Finally, there is *the future fight*, looking beyond the horizon of 2030, where the U.S. military's ability to remain the greatest military in the world is not defined by who we are, but by our ability to anticipate changes in the operational environment and propose innovative solutions. Beyond 2030, we can be certain that adversaries will

continue to challenge U.S. primacy, if they have not already surpassed it in one way or another. Both technological and political developments over the next decade will continue to shape the changing character of warfare through violent activity, as well as an increase in technological dependency and complexity. To answer this challenge, we must break our interdependence of today with a concept that builds a future force as an integrated system.

In the future fight, we must evolve from a system defined by stovepipes and parochialism. Future commanders will have a profound breadth and depth of information and access to capabilities providing cross-domain effects, maneuver, and fires. Provided in a federated package of solutions, however, no matter how well executed, our joint capabilities will be vulnerable to a peer adversary with a more united solution. Now is the time to establish a shared visualization and understanding of what the future U.S. military will look like. The U.S. Army is committed to being part of an integrated solution across the services. A solution built on testing, experimentation, and clearly articulating the lessons and subsequent requirements derived therefrom — thus, setting the conditions to design the transformation of the Army from the one that will fight tonight, tomorrow, and in the future.

Risk

Risk is the arbiter of the future; left unmitigated it provides windows of opportunity for the enemy. Today, we manage the consequences of more than 15 years of modernizing forces for the here and now. All the while, our potential adversaries modernized and instituted changes to specifically disrupt U.S. military strengths. The opportunity costs and utility of our previous efforts have run their course. If we want to win the future fight, we must disinvest in the present to invest in the future.

The immediacy of our future threats and challenges are real. The Middle East remains chaotic, Europe faces threats not seen since the fall of the Berlin Wall, North Korean actions and technological developments increasingly threaten its neighbors and the United States, and critical shipping lanes in Asia are shaping into flash points for militarily peer-level conflicts. With each of these challenges, adversaries will employ increasingly modernized capabilities via cross-domain means to counter U.S. military

strengths. In turn, the U.S. Army's response is Multi-Domain Battle, which will assist in organizing our efforts to arrive at the fight as a cohesive force ready to reinforce our allies and make our adversaries take pause.

To put Multi-Domain Battle into action, the U.S. Army is committed to making considerable strides by the beginning of FY 2018. These achievements will include incorporating current capability with concept requirements, developing doctrine to guide today's force, and detailing a full concept by which we can frame future discussions and efforts. By conducting this journey in stride with our partners in the Joint Force, we will ensure transparency, cohesion, and shared understanding. Ultimately, it is our intent that our future efforts will provide the conceptual foundation to design and field the most capable multi-domain combat forces and serve as a collaborative point of departure for shared initiatives across the joint force.

Gen. Robert B. Brown, U.S. Army, is the commanding general of United States Army Pacific (USARPAC). He has served over twelve years with units focused on the Indo-Asia Pacific region, including as commanding general, I Corps and Joint Base Lewis-McCord; deputy commanding general, 25th Infantry Division; director of training and exercises, United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) J7 (now J37); executive assistant to the commander, USPACOM; plans officer, USARPAC; and commander, 1st Brigade Combat Team (Stryker), 25th Infantry Division. Assignments in the generating force include commanding general, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, and commanding general, Maneuver Center of Excellence.

Gen. David G. Perkins, U.S. Army, is the commanding general of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. He holds a BS from the United States Military Academy, an MS in mechanical engineering from the University of Michigan, and a master's degree in national security and strategic studies from the Naval War College. He previously served as commander of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.