Multi-Domain Operations:
The Latest Evolution of Operational Doctrine

By Captain Carlos J. Valencia

Doctrine represents the total collection of U.S. Army knowledge gained over 247 years of war, uneasy tensions, and peace. Over the past 40 years, the world and the operational environment (OE) in which we find ourselves have significantly changed, as various advancements have been made by peer threats. Loitering munitions, electronic warfare, unmanned systems, and nonnation state actors (among other technologies and factors) have revolutionized how war is now fought and how the Army must adapt to meet these threats. After a nearly 20-year focus on counterinsurgency operations, the Army began shifting its doctrinal focus back toward large-scale combat operations (LSCO) in 2017, with the publication of previous Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*.[1] Now, a 2022 edition of FM 3-0 introduces a new Army operational concept that retains the focus on LSCO, builds on the importance of integrating joint and multinational capabilities, and expands on the combined arms approach—with an emphasis on creating complementary and reinforcing effects with capabilities from multiple domains.[2]

Multi-domain operations (MDO) refers to the combined arms employment of capabilities from all domains that creates and exploits relative advantages to defeat enemy forces, achieve objectives, and consolidate gains during competition, crisis, and armed conflict. MDO constitute the Army contribution to the joint fight. All operations are MDO, regardless of joint force capabilities contributed at each Army echelon. This is because Army forces employ organic capabilities in multiple domains and continuously benefit from capabilities that they do not control; examples include benefits gained from the Global Positioning System and from combat aviation support from the U.S. Navy or the U.S. Air Force. MDO demand a mindset that focuses on how Army forces view the OE and threats. But what does the modern OE look like, and how do the domains fit in?

An OE is a composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities that bear on the commander's decisions. Within the context of an OE, a domain is a physically defined portion of the OE that requires a unique set of warfighting capabilities and skills. The OE includes portions of the land, maritime, air, space, and cyberspace domains as impacted through three dimensions (human, physical, and information). The land, maritime, air, and space domains are defined by their physical characteristics, and cyberspace—a manmade network of networks—connects them, as represented by the dots shown in Figure 1.

Leaders must understand how these three dimensions impact the OE. From a simple machine gun team crew action to a major offensive campaign, all operations affect the physical world, the humans who reside in it, and the information by which it is conceptualized. Additionally, MDO aim for Army leaders to think beyond previous planning considerations and emphasize the integration of the Army capabilities across the five domains in order to compound effects with sister Services and deter and defeat peer threats at the lowest cost.

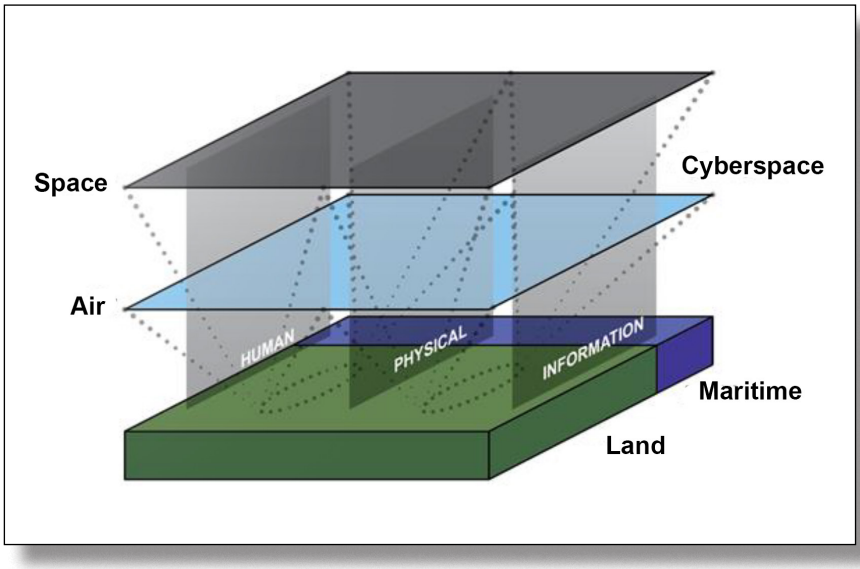


Figure 1. The OE

An additional change to the updated version of FM 3-0 is the introduction of the strategic situation, which stems from the competition continuum introduced in Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*.[3] The strategic situation describes how the Army conducts itself across the range of military operations in three strategic contexts—competition below armed conflict, crisis, and armed conflict. Together, these three strategic contexts form a progressive continuum along which the Army must be prepared to proceed in order to match an adversary's escalating violence and increases in U.S. national interest. In competition below armed conflict, nation or nonnation states with unaligned interests use various peaceful and malicious methods to compete with one another in order to gain an upper hand. The traditional Army contribution to unified action during this strategic context of competition below armed conflict consists of military engagement and security cooperation while preparing for armed conflict. As events or incidents that threaten U.S. national interests occur, the strategic context gradually moves toward crisis; this may require Army intervention, and Soldiers may be deployed to forward locations to deter conflict and prepare for war. If all else fails, then nation or nonnation states may begin using lethal force to achieve their goals; and in response, the Army conducts combat operations, exploiting its preparations from the competition and crisis strategic contexts to defeat the adversary. Competition below armed conflict, crisis, and armed conflict are not terribly foreign concepts, but the strategic situation helps leaders better conceptualize operations as the Army operates in different strategic contexts all across the world.

Along with the previously mentioned updates to FM 3-0, additional major updates and changes include—

- Establishing the dynamics of combat power—leadership, information, mobility, and survivability—which are generated by the warfighting functions.
- Identifying the four tenets of operations: agility, convergence, endurance, and depth. These tenets are attributes that should be built into all plans and operations, and they are directly related to how the Army operational concept should be employed. The new FM 3-0 introduces convergence as the concerted employment of capabilities from multiple domains against combinations of objectives to create effects against a system, formation, capability, or decision maker.
- Describing the nine imperatives as actions that Army forces must take to defeat peer enemy forces and succeed in operational environments extended through all domains.
- Providing an update to the operational framework. The update—
  - Expands assigned areas, introducing and defining zone and sector areas.
  - Removes consolidation area, as the consolidation of gains now occurs throughout the entire operation, regardless of location.
  - Reintroduces main effort, supporting effort, and reserve, which replace decisive, shaping, and supporting efforts.
- Adding informational considerations to the mission variables, which are aspects of the three dimensions that affect how humans and automated systems derive meaning from, use, act upon, and are impacted by information.
- Introducing influence as a ninth form of contact.
- Adding the theater strategic level as the fourth level of war.
- Adding chapters on Army operations in maritime-dominated environments and leadership during operations.

Similar to events of the past, the 2022 version of FM 3-0 will drive an evolutionary change across Army doctrine, including updates and changes to Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-37, *Protection*,[4] and the family of associated publications that falls under the protection warfighting function—the warfighting function that enables the commanders to maintain force integrity and combat power through the integration of protection capabilities during competition below armed conflict, crisis, and armed conflict. Protection consists of the related tasks, systems, and methods that prevent or mitigate detection, threat effects, and hazards to preserve combat power and enable freedom of action. As the Army doubles down on its focus on LSCO, FM 3-0 should serve as a reminder that protection results from many factors, including the protection warfighting function primary tasks, operations security, dispersion, deception, survivability measures, and the way in which forces conduct operations. Planning, preparing, executing, and assessing protection is a continuous and enduring activity.

Commanders and their staffs must understand the operational environment; be aware of their protection capabilities; and know how to coordinate, integrate, and synchronize protection capabilities to reduce risk, mitigate identified vulnerabilities, and create windows of opportunity throughout all Army operations. Emerging protection doctrine will raise additional questions and considerations for commanders, leaders, and staffs:

- How does the protection warfighting function complement and reinforce other warfighting functions and Service capabilities across each of the domains?
- How do the 16 primary protection tasks create effects through the different dimensions?
- How does the protection warfighting function contribute to competition below armed conflict, crisis, and armed conflict?
- How can protection measures prevent and mitigate disruptive effects that may occur while at unit home stations, at ports of embarkation, in transit to the theater, and upon arrival at ports of debarkation?
- How do commanders and staffs identify, prevent, and mitigate gaps and seams in the protection posture of friendly forces during LSCO?
- How does the Army prevent and mitigate enemy capabilities to conduct operations within the homeland, against power projection capabilities, in support areas, and into the deep maneuver and fires areas of the battlefield?
- How do commanders and staffs prioritize critical capabilities, assets, and activities?



Protection, which is not limited to a specific branch of the Army, is essential for preserving critical capabilities and mitigating risk across all domains. It will always be a key consideration when operating in multiple domains and during competition, crisis, and armed conflicted. Protection starts with each individual Soldier, but protection staffs must be forward-thinking, predicting hazards and threats that may not be readily apparent. Protection leaders must understand their place within the staff and must transcend from solely being subject matter experts in their particular field (policing, air defense, health services) to becoming protection experts. Without a comprehensive protection mindset, staffs may overlook risks to the force and open themselves up to the enemy ability to deny, degrade, or disrupt their advantages and limit their freedom of action. Protection staffs must embrace the protection principles (comprehensive, integrated, layered, redundant, and enduring) in order to contribute to the dynamics of combat power at the highest level. Only then will it be possible to complement other effects to deliver a powerful blow to the enemy and drive friendly momentum. If one warfighting function is lacking and does not synchronize with the others, a unit may lose its ability to enforce its will on the enemy.

The new FM 3-0 is a critical piece of doctrine that leaders must read in order to understand Army operations and the ways in which each warfighting function and every branch of the Army contribute to the fight. Protection doctrine will subsequently be updated and distributed throughout the Army for review. As drafts of the various publications begin to appear in e-mail inboxes, I implore each leader to read them and provide feedback; this is the only way that our doctrine can be improved.

Endnotes:

[1]FM 3-0, *Operations*, 10 June 2017 (now obsolete).

[2]FM 3-0, *Operations*, 1 October 2022.

[3]JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, 12 July 2017.

[4]ADP 3-37, *Protection*, 31 July 2019.

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