

Special Operations Forces - Multi-Domain Task Force Integration: Lighter, Faster, Stronger...

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As part of the force structure transformation, the US Army embraced a bottom-up driven approach to transformation. Historically the analytical framework utilized to modernized change is the Functional Solution Analysis (FSA). This operationally based assessment of potential Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership / Education, Personnel, Facilities and Policy (DOTMLPFP) approaches to solving (or mitigating) one or more of the capability gaps identified in the Functional Needs Analysis (FNA). However, the lengthy lab tested and based technology would be outdated before it even arrived in the user's hands. The significance of a Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF) was a result of Congress expressing concern about the threat to US national security posed by Russia and China. (Congressional Research Service, July 2024).

In the Army's Chief of Staff Paper #1: Army Multi-Domain Transformation Ready to Win in Competition and Conflict dated March 16, 2021, the Army described the MDTF as "theater-level maneuver elements designed to synchronize precision effects and precision fires in all domains against adversary anti access/area denial networks in all domains, enabling joint forces to execute their operational plan-directed roles." (Chief of Staff Paper #1, March 2021) As part of the force structure and the unpredictability of the environment today the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) is continuously evolving to support the Joint Force.

The current environment is volatile, uncertain, complex, and carries ambiguity. USASOC is primarily responsible for the organization, training, and deployment of the US Army's special operations forces. To address these challenges, this paper argues that USASOC must develop a comprehensive Special Operations Force - Multi Domain Task Force (SMDTF) task force and strategy, leveraging the unique capabilities of the Special Operation Forces (SOF) Triad (space, cyber, and special operations) and focusing on Irregular Warfare (IW) activities to effectively deter strategic competition and enhance the capabilities of the Joint Force. Where there is limited Joint Force presence, SOF will be important in setting the theater to include the extended deep. Therefore, USASOC's SMDTF task force and strategy would provide the Army and policy makers more options to meet strategic objectives.

SOF-Multi Domain Task Force & Strategy

The National Security Strategy (NSS) provides a strategy that is defined by, "modernize the joint force to be lethal, resilient, sustainable, survivable, agile, and responsive, prioritizing operational concepts and updated warfighting capabilities." (NSS, 2022). By designing an SMDTF specific that is expeditionary and agile USASOC could impose effects across geographical combatant commands. This would provide the US an SMDTF that is a theatre-level element capable to prevail in competition and conflict further securing strategic objectives. Therefore, the Global Force Management Implementation Guidance (GFMIG) would have to provide the Special Operations Command (SOCOM) an MDTF and then SOCOM would provide operational control (OPCON) to USASOC.

USASOC's SMDTF modernization strategy would require a critical review of its – FSA funded under major force program 2. Additionally, doctrine would have to be produced to support an SMDTF compared to traditional IW activities executed by SOF. Organizational Modified Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE) tables would be updated to reflect personnel and order of battle structure. Training efforts in combined training centers such as the Joint Readiness Training Center or National

Training Center would have to update their decisive action training environments to reflect traditional IW activities with a bolted on SMDTF maneuver element in an INDOPACOM scenario. Materials could be procured from existing fire support units. Leadership and education would be drawn from those existing conventional forces. However, USASOC would have to provide SOF doctrine and education to prepare new leaders while conventional leaders would have to reciprocate the same efforts. Personnel across conventional and SOF leadership would foster a better relationship further developing both organizations, creating a mutually blended relationship. Policy makers could now develop new policy for an SMDTF that is expeditionary and agile in nature ready to deploy across the globe in a timely manner. And rightfully so, all DOTMLPF-P components would have to be prioritize based on Army force structure transformation initiatives. "On February 27, 2024, the Army released a white paper, Army Force Structure Transformation, outlining plans to transform the force." (Congressional Research Service, Jul 2024) The white paper did not provide any details regarding USASOC. Therefore, USASOC's SMDTF strategy along with USASOC's 2030 strategy needs to be updated for our policy makers to determine where to allocate funding and resources.

Leveraging the SOF-Triad

The SMDTF would attempt to solve how to enable sensor-to shooter capabilities in the deep and extended deep of an adversary (i.e., physical, information, human) in a denied environment. A method to solve this problem would be to leverage the SOF-Triad. "Space, cyber and special operations leaders said America and its allies continue to integrate capabilities in a triad intended to influence multi-domain and full-spectrum operations and provide the joint force with an enhanced capability to see, sense, stimulate, strike, and assess across the spectrum." (Cutshaw, 2023) In November 2021 LTG Braga, Commanding General USASOC, proposed a strategic concept that leverage space, cyber and special operations, commonly referred to as the SOF-Triad. The result of this relationship was to deliver effects across the competition continuum, cyber and space. To truly understand the space domain a leader would have to understand the interlaced dynamics across all domains and dimensions. Therefore, USASOC embraced its own operational art and design to build the framework necessary to meet strategic goals. This effort continues and was a result of the rapid developments by peer adversaries in the cyber and space domain. This has created opportunities for Irregular Warfare (IW) activities in the cyber and space domains that could enhance the capability of the Joint Force.

Enhance the capability of the Joint Force

It is safe to assume that the Joint Force has transformed since the departure from Afghanistan to meet the future challenges across an operational environment composed of five domains (land, maritime, air, space, and cyberspace). Understood through three dimensions (physical, information, human) (FM 3-0, 2022). The SMDTF's new role would provide operational concepts for employment of SOF to enhance the capability of the Joint Force. With its expeditionary and agile ability across geographical combatant commands, the SMDTF could also augment a standing MDTF to extend the fight. The SMDTF would be designed to increase the depth and scale at which Army forces can protect Joint and Coalition forces, conduct intelligence gathering and synchronization, deliver non-kinetic space and cyber effects to shape operations, and deliver long-range fires in support of joint force maneuver.

The benefit of the SMDTF is that SOF already has a continuous presence across the geographical combatant commands with partnered forces that has access and placement. This would also demonstrate the value of SOF in Large Scale Combat Operations. For example, how does SOF enable the delivery of joint long range precision effects to disrupt, delay, deny adversaries in a denied environment? Lessons learned from the incursion of Ukraine have identified SOF's capability to set the theatre in a unique way

by fostering enduring partnerships with our allies. Of course, the SMDTF would focus on NSS priorities but also share updates to optimize current MDTFs further demonstrating SOF's value proposition.

SMDTF and Irregular Warfare

The IW annex to the National Defense Strategy (NDS) states, "IW includes the specific missions of unconventional warfare (UW), stabilization, foreign internal defense (FID), counterterrorism (CT), and counterinsurgency (COIN). Related activities such as military information support operations, cyberspace operations, countering threat networks, counter-threat finance, civil-military operations, and security cooperation also shape the information environment and other population-focused arenas of competition and conflict." (IW Annex, 2020) The annex completely summed up USASOC's missions, however; there is no consideration in Army Force Structure Transformation. So how does USASOC leverage the SOF-Triad to support the Joint Force? An example would be "targeting of enemy space enabled infrastructure" (SEI) as described in, Reframing the Special Operations Forces, Cyber-Space Triad Special Operations' Contributions to Space Warfare. (Hamel, 2024)

Rapid developments in the cyber and space domain across the private and military sectors has created opportunities for IW activities to support the targeting of adversary space enabled infrastructure in the periphery. Targeting SEI is critical for the US to achieve positions of competitive advantage in cyber and space under IW missions. Cyber and Space assets require the use of physical and human dimensions to operate these systems creating critical requirements and critical vulnerabilities of the adversaries SEI. An SMDTF asset is in the best position to conduct decisive operations against SEI. Furthermore, preparation of the environment is also recommended to assist in mapping and networking SEI for future targeting, which supports all other methods of space negation.

Conclusion

To address these challenges, this paper argues that USASOC must develop a comprehensive Special Operations Force - Multi Domain Task Force task force and strategy, leveraging the unique capabilities of the Special Operation Forces Triad and focusing on Irregular Warfare activities to effectively deter strategic competition and enhance the capabilities of the Joint Force. Where there is limited Joint Force presence, SOF will be important in setting the theater to include the extended deep. The transformation in contact must provide SOF inclusion in the MDTF model to provide the Joint Force with an expeditionary and agile theater level asset.

Recommendation

Align the 5th MDTF that is to be stationed at Fort Liberty, NC under USASOC. "The 5th MDTF is currently planned to be fully operational by FY2028." (MDTF, July 2024) This minimizes the scale to details/time of, Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel, Facilities, and Policy.



References

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