

# Multidomain Operations in Large-Scale Combat: A Cavalry Perspective

by CPT J.A. Perkins

The Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) Paper 1, “Army Multidomain Transformation: Ready to Win in Competition and Conflict,” presents the following military problem: “In conflict, how does the Joint Force fight operational campaigns across all domains to defeat state adversaries by winning first battles and avoiding global and strategic escalation?”<sup>1</sup>

In response to this problem, by 2035 the Army will provide the Joint Force with a multidomain Army able to “penetrate complex, high-end adversary defensive systems.”<sup>2</sup> Conducting multidomain operations (MDO) as part of the Joint all-domain operations (JADO), the Army will exercise dominant land power to “sustain the fight, expand the battlespace, strike in-depth across domains, gain and maintain decision dominance, create overmatch and prevail in large-scale combat.”<sup>3</sup>

## Identifying problem

In 2017, GEN David Perkins, then-commanding general of U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), hosted a discussion as part of TRADOC G-2’s “mad scientist” initiative. During the presentation, GEN Perkins said that to understand a military problem, try to reformulate the problem statement to determine if the subject is properly understood.<sup>4</sup>

“We [U.S. Army] actually usually solve the problems we define,” said GEN Perkins. “We just define the wrong problems. Therefore the solution becomes irrelevant because it’s not the solution to the problem we have.”<sup>5</sup>

With the Joint Force problem and the Army MDO response in mind, this article reformulates the military problem from a Cavalry perspective to assess the Cavalry’s preparedness for its role during conflict as part of the Army’s MDO force. Is the Cavalry providing the proper solution to the right problem? I offer an initial assessment to that question.

The Army provides a multidomain Army to the Joint Force capable of penetrating and operating inside the enemy’s anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) zones to “provide credible, survivable capabilities that undermine area-denial stratagems.”<sup>6</sup> What is the Cavalry’s role?

Here is a distillation of the problem:

- How does the Cavalry enable the commander to understand the operational environment (OE) (reconnaissance)?
- How does the Cavalry provide reaction time and maneuver space for the commander that prevents the penetration force from becoming fixed by a fires-centric adversary to build combat power for the “inside force” (security)?<sup>7</sup>

Further, how does the Cavalry put the commander in a position of relative advantage in a multidomain penetration, increasing the commander’s understanding of the OE during an initial penetration of an adversary’s A2/AD?

This article focuses on the penetration of the adversary’s A2/AD as an acknowledgment of the designation of 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division as the Army’s penetration division and the ongoing efforts to integrate the division Cavalry (divcav).

First, the commander’s reconnaissance formation must aid the commander to understand and visualize the OE so the commander can describe his/her understanding to staff and subordinate commanders. Once shared understanding is achieved, the commander can direct forces within the OE.<sup>8</sup> The Cavalry unit increases the commander’s ability to progress through the decision-making cycle based on the unit’s ability to conduct reconnaissance missions and answer priority intelligence requirements (PIR) rapidly and accurately while remaining conscious of the latest time information is of value. Consequently, Cavalry enables the commander to gain and maintain decision dominance by getting inside an adversary’s decision cycle.

This can be addressed directly by ensuring corps and division commanders have the appropriate Cavalry formations to conduct the necessary reconnaissance and security (R&S) missions. Specifically, the return of Cavalry regiments and the divCav squadron to be the eyes and ears of the corps and division commanders. If these formations are to execute their R&S missions in MDO successfully, they must adhere to the tenets of MDO: calibrated force posture, multidomain formations and convergence.<sup>9</sup>

## **Calibrated force posture**

The Army's Regionally Aligned Readiness and Modernization Model (ReARMM) ensures forward-presence forces lay the foundation for a calibrated force posture.<sup>10</sup> Capacity, capability, position and the ability to maneuver across strategic distances are the four factors used to determine if a calibrated force posture has been achieved.<sup>11</sup>

Strategic distances and position can be achieved at higher echelons and through ReARMM. Capacity is most readily achieved in expeditionary forces if the Cavalry formation is scalable. Cavalry regiments at corps level and Cavalry squadrons at division level provide scalability, especially if there is a habitual relationship between the Cavalry regiments and the multidomain task force (MDTF), the divCav and its cross-domain troop. Scalability and habitual relationships will maximize the capability to operate in multiple domains, and it reinforces the ability to maneuver across strategic distances.

Also, in reference to capabilities, forward-presence forces provide mission command and intelligence, among other advantages.<sup>12</sup> The bridge between mission command and intelligence is the Cavalry. Cavalry operations enable mission command by answering PIR developed by the G-2/S-2, G-3/S-3 and the commander. Answered PIR enable the commander to execute decisions captured on his/her decision-support matrix. Cavalry operations put the commander in a position of relative advantage on the battlefield.

For the identified Cavalry problem statements, a calibrated force posture would allow the commander to conduct reconnaissance to understand the OE. The commander's capabilities and capacity to operate in multiple domains at the appropriate scale will provide him/her with the reaction time and maneuver space to prevent becoming fixed by a fires-centric adversary to build combat power and employ forces.

## **Multidomain formations**

To truly allow for MDO, the value of the MDTF cannot be understated. However, there is one gap within the current MDTF task organization. Specific to the People's Liberation Army Ground Force (PLAGF), the MDTF should include Cavalry forces to present land-domain dilemmas for PLAGF because the goal of the PLAGF is to fix the penetration force to destroy it with indirect fires.<sup>13</sup>

Positioning physical platforms operating at the front line of troops and using a scalable formation that can maneuver as part of a military deception or as a tactical deception, enables enhanced MDO because it leverages the land domain.<sup>14</sup> The current MDTF force structure does not have a true maneuver element to operate in the land domain in the reconnaissance fight.<sup>15</sup> This does not mean that the MDTF must be restructured to include a Cavalry element. Creating a habitual relationship among the MDTF, a theater/corps asset and the corps commander's Cavalry regiment, with a liaison officer on the MDTF staff, would suffice.

Inside forces must persist inside the adversary's A2/AD networks, and an essential attribute for the inside force is resiliency.<sup>16</sup> Resiliency for land forces is the combination of "mobility, cover, concealment and deception."<sup>17</sup> These are key attributes of a Cavalry organization.

Avoiding the maneuver component is an unnecessary limitation because the use of a Cavalry formation will help sell the deception and force a reaction. For example, if the PLAGF know that the MDTF does not contain maneuver elements capable of executing reconnaissance missions and the adversary is spoofed, they may not react because they understand the MDTF force-structure limitation. The most straightforward manner to inject friction into the opposing commander's plan is to force him to maneuver – especially considering the PLAGF's desire to maintain "a four-to-one advantage in maneuver forces, between five-to-one and seven-to-one advantage in artillery firepower, and three army antitank systems for each anticipated enemy armor system."<sup>18</sup>

Fires-centric forces that rely on overwhelming numbers to overcome their inability to conduct combined-arms maneuver present opportunities to be seized by theater commanders. The larger the force of the deception

operation, the larger the adversary's response to maintain those ratios. Ultimately, it is difficult for a fires-centric force to conduct combined-arms maneuver.

There are many opportunities to leverage a habitual relationship among the MDTF, Cavalry regiment, divCav and the cross-domain troop within the divcav. The CSA's Paper 2 states, "In an era of limited resources, the Army must maximize capabilities, activities and investments that contribute to the multiple dynamics of competition (narrative, direct and indirect) and that have tactical, operational and strategic benefits."<sup>19</sup>

This habitual relationship among all these formations is the driver for capabilities leverage, synergy and interoperability. As each formation begins to take shape and develop the threshold of their capabilities, tactics, techniques and procedures, etc., they can do so together in a collaborative way that allows for the maximum level of convergence.

As future locations for MDTF are determined, a natural part of the selection process can include locations of Cavalry regiments returning to corps commanders, e.g., III Corps, especially because the Army's penetration division has already been identified as 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division. There is also an opportunity to align the MDTF, Cavalry regiment and divCav against the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center (JPMRC). As the Pacific becomes more of a focus, JPMRC will allow these organizations to operate in an environment that more closely replicates what they will encounter in future conflict.<sup>20</sup>

At the Mad Scientist Forum in 2017, retired GEN Perkins said, "We [the Army] can't tell them [tactical leaders] where they're going to go in the world. We can't tell them who their coalition members are. We can't tell them who the enemy is. We can't tell them any of that. The only thing we can tell them [is] you're not going to go there every 90 days and recon it. In fact, probably the first time you're going to deal with that problem is when you are there in combat."<sup>21</sup>

Lastly, there is an opportunity to be realized in personnel management: create key-development positions within the MDTF and the cross-domain troop to leverage talent to be shared at different echelons to the benefit of both the MDTF and the cross-domain troop. Both can work toward what is being discussed as the kill-web vs. the kill-chain.

An illustration of this concept is when a reconnaissance system, like a scout's Long-Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System, identifies a ZTZ-99A (Chinese third-generation main battle tank) formation and that is cross-referenced by a digital vehicle identification artificial intelligence program which connects directly to a Navy, Virginia-class vessel that fires a Tomahawk cruise missile or the MDTF strategic-fires battalion to destroy the enemy vehicle formation.

## Convergence

The opening paragraphs of FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*, describe the role of Cavalry in unified land operations that are perfectly synchronized with the concept of convergence in MDO. TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multidomain Operations 2028*, defines convergence as "rapid and continuous integration of capabilities in all domains, the electromagnetic spectrum and information environment that optimizes effects to overmatch the enemy through cross-domain synergy and multiple forms of attack all enabled by mission command and disciplined initiative."<sup>22</sup>

If convergence is underpinned by mission command and disciplined initiative, the Cavalry's R&S missions enable the commander to understand OE by answering the commander's critical information requirements, making contact under favorable conditions, identifying opportunities and preventing surprises.<sup>23</sup>

Historically, one of the primary roles of the Cavalry is to restore command and control, especially for the corps and division commanders.<sup>24</sup> The Cavalry can do this by reestablishing physical contact or with the use of unmanned aerial vehicles that can move from unit to unit to pass messages to subordinate commanders. In the context of penetrating A2/AD zones, restoring mission-command capabilities will be vital to prevent enemy forces from fixing and isolating U.S. forces.

The potential for the relationship between the MDTF, Cavalry regiment, and divCav to achieve convergence is high. The cross-domain troop and divCav squadron can present the enemy with dilemmas in multiple domains, including counter-reconnaissance.

They can also increase the effects of the MDTF capabilities. The regiment and squadron can create cross-domain dilemmas, amplified by the MDTF, to force the enemy to react, which necessarily induces friction into their operations since they are a fires-centric force and not a combined-arms maneuver force, thereby creating opportunities for the commander to achieve positions of relative advantage in a noncontiguous battlefield. Deception operations and convergence allow a commander to disintegrate an adversary's A2/AD to enable exploitation, and this is a role well suited to the combination of the regiment, squadron and MDTF working in tandem.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

The Army must be scalable in both operational framework and maneuver formations, and to simplify and clarify MDO at a scale appropriate to the Cavalry's mission. The intent is to contribute to the conversation in the hopes that others may refine the problem even more accurately and that Cavalry leaders might reach a shared understanding of what our contributions to MDO are and what they can be.

MDO and JADO cannot be reached through one organization or one formation. However, there are several critical contributions only the Cavalry can make that, without its inclusion, unnecessarily limit the ability of the corps and division to understand their OE, and protect their forces through early and accurate warning. The Cavalry can provide a calibrated force posture, multidomain formations and convergence. Therefore, this answers the two original problem statements and demonstrates that the Cavalry can conduct R&S operations as part of MDO.

Recommendations for further study as new publications become available are Joint Publication 3-0, FM 3-0, FM 3-98, FM 3-90-2 and evaluations of the divCav post-combat-training-center rotations as the divCav force structure matures.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> CSA, "Army Multidomain Transformation: Ready to Win in Competition and Conflict," Department of the Army, March 16, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> TRADOC G-2 OE Enterprise, "TRADOC Mad Scientist 2017 Georgetown: Multidomain Battle w/ GEN Perkins," YouTube, Aug. 8, 2017, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Xcq-Ok0mO8A>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> CSA, "Army Multidomain Transformation: Ready to Win in Competition and Conflict."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*, Department of the Army, January 2023.

<sup>9</sup> TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multidomain Operations 2028*, TRADOC, Dec. 6, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> CSA, "Army Multidomain Transformation: Ready to Win in Competition and Conflict."

<sup>11</sup> TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Army Technical Publication (ATP) 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, Department of the Army, Aug. 9, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> FM 3-13.4, *Army Support to Military Deception*, Department of the Army, Feb. 26, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> "The Army's Multidomain Task Force (MDTF)," Congressional Research Service, May 31, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11797>.

<sup>16</sup> CSA, "Army Multidomain Transformation: Ready to Win in Competition and Conflict."

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> ATP 7-100.3.

<sup>19</sup> CSA, "The Army in Military Competition," Department of the Army, March 1, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> GEN Charles A. Flynn, "The Most Consequential Adversaries with GEN Charles A. Flynn," The Convergence – An Army Mad Scientist Podcast, May 19, 2022, <https://theconvergence.castos.com/podcasts/5043/episodes/57-the-most-consequential-adversaries-with-gen-charles-a-flynn>.

<sup>21</sup> TRADOC G-2 OE Enterprise.

<sup>22</sup> TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1.

<sup>23</sup> FM 3-98.

<sup>24</sup> FM 17-95, *Cavalry Operations*, Department of the Army, Dec. 24, 1996.

<sup>25</sup> TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1.

## Acronym Quick-Scan

**A2/AD** – anti-access/area-denial

**ATP** – Army technical publication

**CLC** – Cavalry Leader's Course

**CSA** – Chief of Staff of the Army

**DivCav** – division cavalry

**FM** – field manual

**JADO** – Joint all-domain operations

**JPMRC** – Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center

**MDO** – multidomain operations

**MDTF** – multidomain task force

**OE** – operational environment

**PIR** – priority intelligence requirement

**PLAGF** – People's Liberation Army Ground Force