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The Army’s Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF)

The Significance of the Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF)

Congress has expressed concern about the threat to U.S. national security posed by Russia and China. The Army contends in order to address the threat, it must be able to operate in a multi-domain (air, land, water, space, cyber, information) environment, requiring new operational concepts, technologies, weapons, and units. The Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF) is the Army’s self-described “organizational centerpiece” of this effort.

What Is a Multi-Domain Task Force?

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 describes the Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF) as “theater-level maneuver elements designed to synchronize precision effects and precision fires in all domains against adversary anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) networks in all domains, enabling joint forces to execute their operational plan (OPLAN)-directed roles.”

What Is Anti-Access/ Area Denial (A2/AD)?

Anti-Access is defined as any action, activity, or capability, usually long-range, designed to prevent an advancing military force from entering an operational area. Area Denial is defined as action, activity, or capability, usually short-range, designed to limit an adversarial force’s freedom of action within an operational area. In terms of weapon systems, threat A2/AD defenses are envisioned of being comprised of layered and integrated long-range precision-strike systems, littoral anti-ship capabilities, air defenses, and long-range artillery and rocket systems.

MDTFs are intended to support freedom of action of U.S. forces. MDTFs are to be scalable from operational to strategic level and can be modified to support the needs of Joint Force Commanders. MDTFs also provide supported commanders the ability to plan, integrate, control, track, and assess the effectiveness of joint counter-A2/AD activities.

The Army intends for each MDTF to have an All-Domain Operations Center (ADOC) to enable 24/7 monitoring of adversary activities in all domains.

What Is the Purpose of MDTFs?

The first MDTF was created in 2017 as an experimental unit at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington and participated in a variety of experiments and exercises to

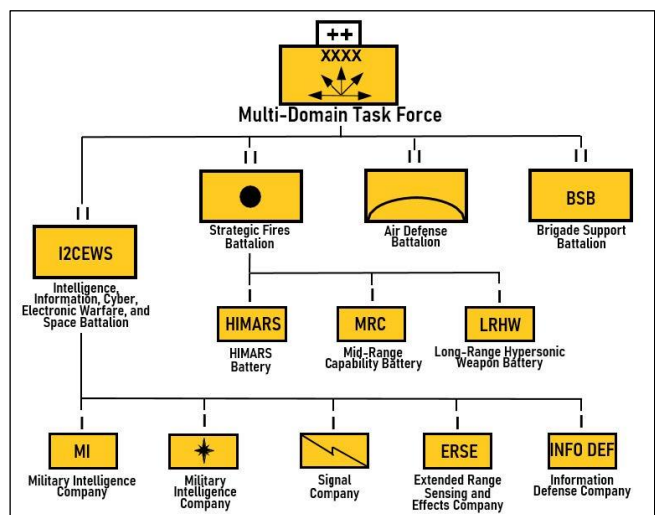
both test its capabilities and develop requirements for equipment and units to be included as part of the MDTF force design. According to the Army, the MDTF’s purpose is

- during competition, to “gain and maintain contact with our adversaries to support the rapid transition to crisis or conflict”;
- during a crisis, to “deter adversaries and shape the environment by providing flexible response options to the combatant commander”; and
- if conflict arises, to “neutralize adversary A2/AD networks to enable joint freedom of action.”

MDTF Organization

The diagram at **Figure 1** depicts a notional generic MDTF:

Figure 1. Notional Generic MDTF



Source: *Chief of Staff Paper #1 Army Multi-Domain Transformation Ready to Win in Competition and Conflict*, March 16, 2021, p. 12.

Notes: HIMARS: High-Mobility Artillery Rocket System presently in use by the U.S. Army and Marine Corps. While not explicitly stated, the first Military Intelligence (MI) Company depicted is assumed to be terrestrially focused, while the second Military Intelligence Company, based on its military symbol, is assumed to be space-focused.

The Army notes each MDTF will be tailored to Combatant Commander requirements, so it is possible that the notional MDTF in **Figure 1** may contain more, fewer, or other types of units depending on the requirements of its assigned theater of operations. In addition, the Mid-Range Capabilities (MRC) Battery and the Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW) Battery depicted in **Figure 1** are not, at present, fully established and equipped units. The Army currently plans to field its first MRC and LRHW units in FY2023.

First LRHW Unit Equipped

On October 7, 2021, the Army announced it had started to equip its first LRHW unit—the I Corps' 5th Battalion, 3rd Field Artillery Regiment, 17th Field Artillery Brigade—at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington. Equipment delivered included a battery operations center, four transporter erector launchers, and modified trucks and trailers. The fielding of the battalion is planned to be completed in FY2023. The delivery of this initial equipment set will permit soldiers to train on the equipment and create doctrine for the system, as well as develop systems-related tactics, techniques, and procedures.

Army Plans for MDTFs

The Army plans to build five MDTFs: two aligned to the Indo-Pacific region; one aligned to Europe; one stationed in the Arctic region and oriented on multiple threats; and a fifth MDTF aligned for global response. MDTF-1 is headquartered at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, and aligned to the U.S. Army Pacific.

Army Announces 2nd MDTF Stationing in Europe

On April 13, 2021, the Army announced it would station its second MDTF in Germany. The Germany-based MDTF is to support U.S. Army Europe and Africa. The Germany-based MDTF is to be composed of field artillery units; composite air and missile defense units; intelligence, cyberspace, electronic warfare, and space units; and aviation and brigade support elements. Soldiers assigned to the Germany-based MDTF and their accompanying family members are to be part of U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden. On September 16, 2021, the Army activated the 2nd MDTF at Clay Kaserne in Wiesbaden, initially consisting of a headquarters element; an intelligence, cyberspace, electronic warfare, and space detachment; and a brigade support company.

Third MDTF

The Army plans to activate the 3rd MDTF at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, in FY2023. The 3rd MDTF is to support the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), and the Army has not yet decided if the 3rd MDTF will be permanently based at Schofield Barracks or somewhere else in the region. The initial tranche of 383 soldiers for the 3rd MDTF is to begin arriving in Hawaii in the summer of FY2022, and decisions are pending as to when the 3rd MDTF's LRHW battery, MRC battery, and other subordinate units will be stood up and made operational.

Potential Issues for Congress

Potential issues for Congress include but are not limited to the following.

- How many soldiers will be assigned to a generic (as depicted in **Figure 1**) MDTF? Will the Army request additional end strength to create MDTFs? If not, how will the Army acquire the soldiers needed for these new units? Will the other Services have personnel assigned to MDTFs?
- With the 1st MDTF currently operational at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington, the 2nd MDTF in Wiesbaden, Germany, and the 3rd MDTF being stood up at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, when does the Army intend to “stand up” the two remaining MDTFs?
- According to the Army, the 2nd MDTF is to support U.S. Army Europe and Africa. While much has been said regarding the 2nd MDTF's role in countering Russia and China, what, if any, type of role does the Army envision for the 2nd MDTF in relation to operations in Africa?
- Will any of the remaining two MDTFs be created in the Reserve Components (Army National Guard and Army Reserve)? If not, what is the Army's rationale for not doing so?
- With Hawaii possibly only being a temporary location for the 3rd MDTF, where does the Army plan to permanently station the remaining MDTFs?
- Are there any political considerations/impediments affecting MDTF stationing—including both MDTFs currently activated and those awaiting activation? What, if any, are the associated military construction (MILCON) requirements for all five MDTFs?
- As a theater and Combatant Command asset, how will the MDTF operate in support of the Joint Force?
- Assuming that future operations could also involve allies, how does the MDTF support allies and coalition partners?

Additional References

- CRS Report R46721, *U.S. Army Long-Range Precision Fires: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Andrew Feickert
- CRS Insight IN11019, *The U.S. Army and Multi-Domain Operations*, by Andrew Feickert
- CRS Report R46725, *Joint All-Domain Command and Control: Background and Issues for Congress*, by John R. Hoehn

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