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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 believes that in order to address this 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 designed 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 individual 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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

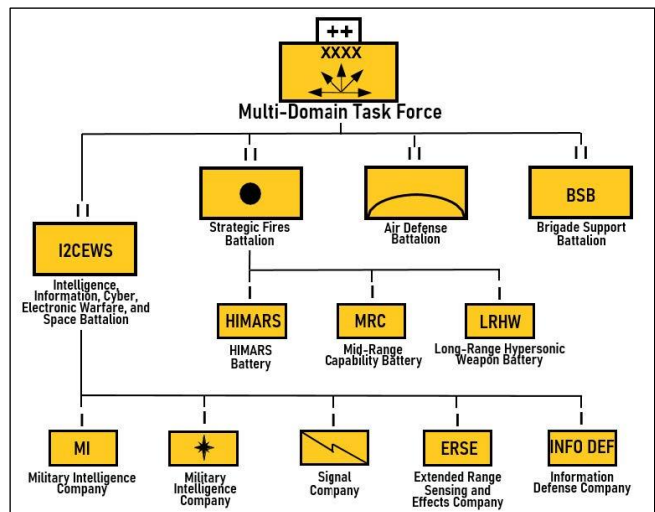
units to be included as part of the MDTF force design. According to the Army, the MDTF’s purpose is

- 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:** 1) HIMARS: High-Mobility Artillery Rocket System presently in use by the U.S. Army and Marine Corps. 2) 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. 3) Mid-Range Capabilities (MRC) Battery is now known as the Strategic Mid-Range Fires (SMRF) Battery.

The Army notes each MDTF will be tailored to Combatant Commander requirements, so it is possible 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. The Strategic Mid-Range Fires (SMRF) Battery (formerly known as 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 SMRF and LRHW units by the end of FY2023.

### Army Plans for MDTFs

The Army originally planned 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. The 1<sup>st</sup> MDTF is headquartered at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, and aligned to the U.S. Army Pacific.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> MDTF

Since its 2017 activation, the 1<sup>st</sup> MDTF has participated in a variety of exercises. In February 2023, the 1<sup>st</sup> MDTF's long-range fires battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 3rd Field Artillery Regiment, deployed a LRHW system over 3,100 miles from Joint Base Lewis-McChord to Cape Canaveral, Florida during Thunderbolt Strike, a full rehearsal of expeditionary hypersonic launch capabilities.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> MDTF

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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> MDTF

The Army activated the 3<sup>rd</sup> MDTF at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, in September 2022. The 3<sup>rd</sup> MDTF is to support the U.S. Army Pacific as a component of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM). The 3<sup>rd</sup> MDTF participated in its first exercise May 4-19, 2023, as part of exercise Northern Edge 23-1.

### MDTF Participation in Indo-Pacific Exercises

Reportedly, from May 2022 through October 2022, the 1<sup>st</sup> MDTF deployed 16 cells across 10 time zones to support exercises. During the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2022 exercise, the 1<sup>st</sup> MDTF simulated using space assets to shut down satellites, used electronic warfare (EW) to jam enemy communications, and simulated launching a long-range strike against an enemy ship. In 2023, the Army reportedly plans for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> MDTF to participate in more than

15 exercises in eight different countries, as well as adding more than 1,400 soldiers from 39 different branches to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> MDTFs.

### A Third MDTF for the Indo-Pacific?

According to a March 15, 2023, *Defense News* article, "U.S. Army Chief Wants Three Multidomain Task Force Units in the Pacific," the Chief of Staff of the Army reportedly would "like to see three multidomain task force units in the Pacific region." He further noted:

I can see three in the Pacific and then one other one. We have one in Europe and then one probably in a contingency-type place where it can go wherever it needs. So, I think that's how those five [MDTFs] are going to play out.

In June 2023, Japanese press reported the United States had started discussions with Japan about hosting a third MDTF (presumably the 4<sup>th</sup> MDTF) in Japan.

If three MDTFs are allocated to the Indo-Pacific and the remaining MDTF (presumably 5<sup>th</sup> MDTF) is earmarked for global response, this suggests an Arctic-focused MDTF might not be created. The *Defense News* article further notes:

In recent years, the Army has placed less emphasis on a permanent MDTF in Alaska, after directly stating it wanted to do so in its strategy for the Arctic published in 2021.

### Possible Oversight Issues for Congress

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

- According to the Army, the 2<sup>nd</sup> MDTF is to support U.S. Army Europe and Africa. While much has been said regarding the 2<sup>nd</sup> MDTF's role in Europe countering Russia, what, if any, type of role does the Army envision for the 2<sup>nd</sup> MDTF in relation to operations in Africa?
- If the Army does opt to designate the 4<sup>th</sup> MDTF as an U.S. Army Pacific asset and the 5<sup>th</sup> MDTF as a global response MDTF, does the Army plan to establish a sixth MDTF aligned to the Arctic region or has the Army decided not to field an Arctic-focused MDTF?
- 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?

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