

The U.S. Army and Multi-Domain Operations

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What Are Multi-Domain Operations (MDO)?

[According to the Army:](#)

Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) describes how the U.S. Army, as part of the joint force [Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines] can counter and defeat a near-peer adversary capable of contesting the U.S. in all domains [air, land, maritime, space, and cyberspace] in both competition and armed conflict. The concept describes how U.S. ground forces, as part of the joint and multinational team, deters adversaries and defeats highly capable near-peer enemies in the 2025-2050 timeframe.

MDO provides commanders numerous options for executing simultaneous and sequential operations using surprise and the rapid and continuous integration of capabilities across all domains to present multiple dilemmas to an adversary in order to gain physical and psychological advantages and influence and control over the operational environment.

Why Did the Army Adopt MDO?

MDO is described in detail in "[The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028](#)." MDO was developed in response to the [2018 National Defense Strategy](#), which shifts the previous focus of U.S. national security from countering violent extremists worldwide to confronting revisionist powers—primarily [Russia and China](#)—who are said to "want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model—gaining veto authority over other nations' economic, diplomatic, and security decisions." The Army [contends](#):

China and Russia exploit the conditions of the operational environment to achieve their objectives without resorting to armed conflict by fracturing the U.S.'s alliances, partnerships, and resolve. They attempt to create stand-off through the integration of diplomatic and economic actions, unconventional and information warfare (social media, false narratives, cyber-attacks), and the actual or threatened employment of conventional forces. By creating instability within countries and alliances, China and Russia create political separation that results in strategic ambiguity reducing the speed of friendly recognition, decision, and reaction. Through these competitive actions, China and Russia believe they can achieve objectives below the threshold of armed conflict.

Army leadership believes that if the Army—in conjunction with the other Services—prevails in these "competitions" in

all "domains," that U.S. national security objectives should be achieved.

How MDO Is Intended to Work

The Army's central idea is to prevail by competing successfully in all domains short of conflict, resulting in deterrence of an enemy. If deterrence fails, Army forces—along with the joint force—are to:

- **"Penetrate"**—enemy [anti-access and area denial systems](#) [layered and integrated long-range precision-strike systems, littoral anti-ship capabilities, air defenses, and long-range artillery and rocket systems] to enable strategic and operational maneuver of U.S. forces.
- **"Dis-integrate"**—disrupt, degrade, or destroy enemy anti-access and area denial systems to enable operational and tactical maneuver of U.S. forces.
- **"Exploit"**—the resulting freedom of maneuver to achieve operational and strategic objectives by defeating enemy forces in all domains.
- **"Re-compete"**—consolidate gains across domains and force a return to competition on favorable terms to the United States and allies.

How Will MDO Change the Organization of the Army?

[Reportedly](#), organizationally, specific Army echelons will be given different "problems" to address under MDO. Existing Divisions and Corps will be tasked with fighting and defeating specific components of the enemy's system. As such, the Army will no longer organize or center itself on Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) as it did under previous National Defense Strategies. Under the previous BCT-centered organizational construct, Divisions and Corps had a limited warfighting role, but under MDO, Divisions and Corps headquarters are to return to their historic warfighting roles where they employed subordinate units and allocated Corps- and Division-level assets to support subordinate units. MDO also [reportedly](#) calls for the creation of Field Armies, an intermediate command level between already established Theater Armies—such as U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) or U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR)—and Corps. While one Field Army currently exists—the U.S. 8th Army in Korea—it is not known how many more Field Armies are envisioned under MDO, where they would come from within Army force structure, and where they might be stationed. These Field Armies would supposedly be capable of commanding multiple Corps against near-peer threats.

The Way Ahead

Army leaders [reportedly](#) note that MDO will not only have an impact on Army organizations and operations; it will drive Army modernization efforts as well, in terms of development and acquisition of supporting capabilities and systems. The Army plans to issue a 2.0 version of MDO about a year after a series of war games and exercises in 2019 with the other Services. Army leadership hopes that eventually MDO will become a joint, multiservice concept instead of an Army-focused one.

Potential Issues for Congress

Some potential issues for Congress include the following:

- In terms of the new roles for Divisions and Corps headquarters under MDO, what new resources in terms of personnel, equipment, and training will be required?
- Will Divisions and Corps require the establishment of new division- and corps-level units to fulfil their envisioned role under MDO? If so, what types of units and how many units will be required? How will MDO affect Army logistical requirements and structures?
- How many new Field Armies will be required under MDO? Will they be created from existing units or will entirely new units be needed?
- Will Field Armies require the establishment of Field Army-level units to fulfil their envisioned role under MDO? If so, what types of units and how many units will be required?
- What types of resources—personnel, equipment, and training—will be required for the establishment of Field Armies?
- At all echelons—BCT through Theater Army—how will these units "compete" with revisionist powers? What are

the types of "problems" that various echelons will be required to "solve"?

- Under MDO, are there plans to station any Corps or Field Army headquarters and subordinate units overseas?
- How many and what types of MDO-related new headquarters and units will be created in the Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve?
- What is the Army's timeline to fully establish its planned organizational construct—both Active and Reserve—envisioned under MDO?
- Will MDO be compatible with U.S. allies' current and future concepts of operation?