SPOTLIGHT 20-4

# Expanding Multi-Domain Operations to Win Moral Competition

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In war, moral factors account for three quarters of the whole; relative material strength accounts for only one quarter.

-Napoleon Bonaparte

To win in the competition continuum, unified land operations call for dominance in both the moral and the material dimensions. The U.S. Army has adopted Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) to drive change "to ensure that the intellectual precedes the physical in the development of the future force, enabling the United States to win in competition and conflict in the future."

At the same time, the Army must address its cognitive incapacity for MDO support of Joint All-Domain Operations (JADO) to "prevail in competition . . . penetrate and dis-integrate enemy anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) systems and exploit the resultant freedom of maneuver to achieve strategic objectives (win), and force a return to competition on favorable terms." It must do this to stay on the winning side of a constant, multi-dimensional power struggle—power being the demonstrated capacity, ability or will to change or influence behavior or the course of events.

MDO describes the operational continuum as continuous competition vice the binary notion of conflict as war or peace. The Army needs "to actively compete *left* of conflict in order to enable winning *in* conflict" and "to expand the battlefield" beyond physical domains to cognitive capacities, developing full-spectrum capabilities to engage and influence the strategic and operating environment in decisive ways.<sup>3</sup> **These capabilities are as essential to war-winning as combat forces and do not exist merely to set conditions for victory in conflict or return to competition.** The Army's ability to influence populations and leaders through an effective narrative, combined with unified actions and informational power, are critical to holistic MDO.

## Expanding from the Material to the Moral

The premier challenge in this expansion is conceptual. In this era of strategic competition, contested norms and persistent disorder, there is a requirement for "the seamless integration of multiple elements of national power—diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement,

#### **ISSUE**

The U.S. Army needs to expand its cognitive capacity to compete left of conflict.

#### SPOTLIGHT SCOPE

- Describes both the material and moral imperatives of Multi-Domain Operations (MDO).
- Addresses the imperative of reorganizing the Army's engagement-related functions—Civil Affairs (CA), Psychological Operations (PSYOP) and Information Operations (IO)—into a multi-component, competition-winning capability.

#### **INSIGHTS**

- The Army should manage its capabilities for competition in the moral dimension with the same rigor that it does for capabilities in the material dimension to succeed in conflict.
- To integrate military-civilian physical and informational power and organize all associated forces and activities, the Army should establish an engagement or influence warfighting function and a center of excellence.

and military."<sup>4</sup> This is regardless of when or where in the competition continuum, and it is not a new idea. Competition is "older than warfare itself; it is the original politics."<sup>5</sup> War is its extension, entailing a violent contest of wills, and is fundamentally political, human and psychological.

Conflicts since 9/11 have shown clearly that "to wage war effectively, civilian and military leaders must operate as successfully on political battlegrounds as they do on the physical," and that "integrating efforts across those battlegrounds is essential to success in war." They also revealed that "military power alone is insufficient to achieve sustainable political objectives, and there are limited means to achieve integration across the instruments of national power." This requires expansion beyond the physical domains that form almost all of MDO to concepts that are better aligned with inter-

organizational activities prescribed in the *Stabilization Assistance Review* and DoD Directive 3000.05, *Stabilization*.<sup>8</sup>

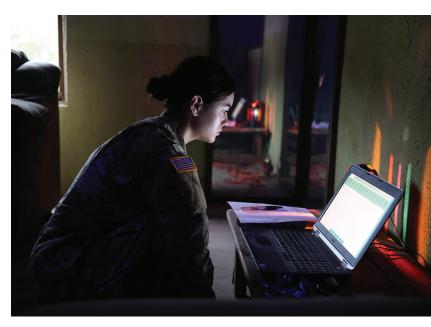
#### ■ The Information Environment

The information element of power is a paramount operational and strategic consideration. In modern war and competition, "the information domain determines winners and losers and the best weapons do not fire bullets." The Joint Concept of Operations in the Information Environment (JCOIE) concedes that the U.S. military has "failed to maximize the potential of informational power." It also states the core military problem of JADO: "How will the Joint force integrate physical and informational power to change or maintain the perceptions, attitudes, and other elements that drive desired behaviors of relevant actors in an increasingly pervasive and connected information environment to produce enduring strategic outcomes?" In this environment, civil and cognitive reconnaissance are essential, and synthesizing the civil and information components with military considerations is key in joint intelligence preparation of the operational environment.

# Winning in the Information Environment

In order to win in the information environment, the joint force must have "the ability to understand the perceptions, attitudes, and other elements that drive behaviors that affect joint force objectives; the ability to characterize, assess, synthesize and understand trends of relevant actor activities and their impacts on the information environment throughout cooperation, competition and conflict; the ability to execute integrated physical and informational activities designed to achieve psychological effects; and, the ability to assess and modify informational power with the same level of competency as physical power." Information-related capabilities to shape and influence the human geography can give the Army decisive advantage.

Operationalizing integrated physical and informational power requires institutionalizing it. Informationally-driven MDO and JADO are inherently strategic. Strategy "seeks to influence and shape the future environment as



A student assigned to the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School conducts document digitization while attending the Special Operations Forces Site Exploitation Technical Exploitation Course (SOFSE TEC) on Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 22 October 2019. The SOFSE TEC enables operators to conduct specialized SOFSE activities designed to exploit sensitive-site materials (U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sergeant Keren-happuch Solano).

### **CAPABILITIES NEEDED TO WIN**

- Understand perceptions, attitudes and other elements that drive behaviors that affect joint force objectives;
- characterize, assess, synthesize and understand trends of relevant actor activities and their impacts on the information environment throughout cooperation, competition and conflict;
- execute integrated physical and informational activities to achieve psychological effects; and
- assess and modify informational power with the same level of competency as physical power.

opposed to merely reacting to it."<sup>12</sup> To institute a "competitive mindset," the *National Defense Strategy* emphasizes greater strategic thinking, even at lower levels of military leadership, to win modern wars. Understanding complex and dynamic strategic conditions is critical to successful competition. An update to the Officer Professional Military Education Policy lists strategic thinking and communication first among joint learning activities. <sup>13</sup> This, however, is only the first step in solving a more systemic problem.

# Beyond Information to Influence

To expand MDO from the physical to the psychological, the Army's view of informational power must go beyond conventional Information Operations (IO) messaging of selected target audiences. It must defeat more sophisticated use of information

in support of strategic aims. As noted strategic thinker Brigadier General Huba Was de Czege, USA, Ret., observes:

Our opponents mean to fracture our alliances, partnerships, and resolve. They intend to influence our home and Allied publics. They mean to create ambiguity, slow our recognition of danger, confuse our policy decisions, and block or misdirect our reactions. This would be a clearer statement of the problems we must address: Just how does the Army contribute to this political, military, and economic realm of international affairs?<sup>14</sup>

Tactical actions have direct political consequences.<sup>15</sup> Soldiers compete on complex human terrain, often overmatched by adversaries with a superior understanding of that terrain, cultural interior lines and greater leeway to manipulate local dynamics in order to achieve holistic effects.

Despite the allure of technology, the Army remains the premier force for human interaction. "Cyberwar's real power in modern warfare is influence, not sabotage. Using the internet to change people's minds is more powerful than blowing up a server." The United States is considering expansion of Army Cyber Command to an information warfare (IW) command that will include IO and IW, as well as cyber and electronic warfare. But is that enough?

As with "competition," the Army lacks a clear definition of integrated influence operations. RAND, however, does provide a definition: "[Integrated influence operations means] the coordinated, integrated, and synchronized application of national diplomatic, informational, military, economic, and other capabilities in peacetime, crisis, conflict, and post-conflict to foster attitudes, behaviors, or decisions by foreign target audiences that further U.S. interests and objectives." The U.S. Army should work with the Joint Staff to get this approved as a DoD definition.

Regarding the narrative, strategist Dr. Ajit Maan explains it as "the telling of a story in a certain way for a certain purpose. The way is identification. The purpose is influence. Through narrative, we construct our personal and



Private Blake Lapel, Command Sergeant Major Don Samuelson, and Captain Shannon Woodman with the Army Reserve's 432nd Civil Affairs Battalion of Green Bay, Wisconsin, discuss a training event, 8 February 2019, at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, during Command Post Exercise-Functional 19-10. Approximately 300 Soldiers with CA, PO, and IO units trained in the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command-centric exercise (U.S. Army Photo by Scott T. Sturkol).

cultural identities. Ideas and beliefs result from those identities, and actions follow." Narrative warfare is a thus a strategic struggle over the meaning of information, less about facts or truth and more about the beliefs that they may underwrite. Narrative concepts of strategy or warfare, as cognitive visualization tools (versus physical operations measures and evaluations) are not integral to the current concept of MDO.

# Getting Back to Engagement

The Army may already have an integrative, unifying concept of applied informational power in the warfighting functional concept it introduced in 2014. MDO describes engagement as "the combination of physical, informational, and psychological actions taken to influence actors' decisionmaking." Because war is fundamentally and primarily a

human endeavor, the 2018 MDO Concept stresses that the joint force "must address the cognitive aspects of political, human, social, and cultural interactions to achieve operational and national objectives." Inherently offensive, engagement expands the competitive space through conflict and return to competition, including gray-zone unconventional or irregular warfare. As a core competency, commanders and statesmen should "offer competitors and adversaries an outstretched hand, open to opportunities for cooperation but from a position of strength and based on our national interests."

Engagement builds partner institutional and governance capacities and joint, interorganizational and multinational (JIM) networks in order to see, understand, shape and influence the operating environment. Engagement grows strategic capital to draw from in response to unanticipated non-linear attacks and hybrid warfare. The U.S. Army should use engagement not just to mitigate adversary influence operations, but to regain the initiative, to lift the fog of competition and to accelerate response decision cycles to win without decisively committing combat forces, as Sun Tzu would have it.

"We have to *continually* be countering information warfare and unconventional warfare," Deputy Commanding General of Army Futures Command Lieutenant General Eric Wesley urged. "That requires day-to-day coordination among the U.S. military, U.S. civilian agencies and allies [through] operational headquarters that are conducting competition every single day in an aggressive and rapid manner." Despite legal and bureaucratic hurdles, the Army cannot ignore this challenge. "This can't be done agency-by-agency or even country-by-country," he added. "One of the reasons we struggle with it is we see it as an afterthought. We do it episodically, anecdotally."<sup>23</sup>

More than strategic economy-of-force, comprehensive, continuous and consistent engagement is a scaled-up version of General Stanley McChrystal's "collaborative warfare." Joint Publication 3-08, *Interorganizational Cooperation*, describes collaboration as "a process where organizations work together to attain common goals by sharing knowledge, learning, and building consensus." As an employment of a strategic narrative of inclusion, a collaborative warfare approach to engagement enables the United States



Soldiers from Bravo Company, 418th Civil Affairs Battalion, 308th Civil Affairs Brigade, 1st Infantry Division Forward, 353rd Civil Affairs Command, work with Polish forces from 1st Brigade, Territorial Defense Force, to distribute food to local authorities and medical facilities, 28 April 2020, in Monki, Poland.

The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.

-Sun Tzu

and its partners to stay ahead of the power curve, seize strategic initiative and shape the competitive space, rather than being shaped by it.

The current MDO Concept adds that engagement enables the joint force to "outmaneuver an adversary cognitively as well as physically and virtually to deter, counter, and deny the escalation of violence in competition, and defeat the enemy if armed conflict cannot be avoided." As such, engagement forces are essentially maneuver forces, beneficial both for decisive strategic action and for setting operational conditions in the cognitive spaces that make up expanded MDO and competition.

To enable the strategic benefits of engagement, combatant and service component commanders and their unified action partners must "build campaign plans that integrate, converge, and leverage national elements of latent, indirect, and direct powers" in

the highly complex and dynamic environments of especially urban areas of competition and A2/AD. Such politico-military decisionmaking support requires integrated civil-military planning teams at theater and joint force commands. They serve as a competition mechanism for civil-military convergence and for interorganizational stabilization; they also consolidate military and security gains into desired political and civil outcomes. Commanders and interorganizational partners require a full range of integrated moral and material options for executing simultaneous and sequential operations across all domains. If these capabilities are not optimized at the institutional level, they will most assuredly not be optimized at the execution level.

# Organizational Challenges

To expand MDO from the material to the moral, the JCOIE says that the joint force must have "the ability to organize, train, equip, and maintain organizations that deliberately leverage information and the informational aspects of military activities." It must also be able to integrate actions, organizationally and operationally. The Army provides most of these capabilities in the following arenas: Civil Affairs (CA); Psychological Operations (PSYOP) and IO/IW; Foreign Area Officers; and Public Affairs. It also has broad access to unified action partners to bring additional (and often more appropriate and effective) capabilities to bear. For competition, the Army maintains numerous security cooperation activities—beyond its overwhelming focus on train-and-equip and including International Military Education and Training—with the goal of establishing "rapport between the U.S. military and the country's military to build alliances for the future."<sup>26</sup>

Many of these programs leverage reserve forces capacities. The National Guard's State Partnership Program, a highly-effective, low-cost training and institution-building program, builds relationships that can generate strategic and operational capital. Similarly, the U.S. Military Observer Group, a joint program run by the Army, provides United Nations field missions with staff augmentation and military observers who act as "strategic scouts" and "strategic enablers."<sup>27</sup> In addition to benefits to readiness and emergency



A Soldier assigned to the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School participating in the Civil Affairs (CA) Course walks through a wooded area while taking part in Sluss-Tiller, the culmination exercise for CA students, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 9 June 2020. The Soldiers were trained in culture, language, social sciences, civil analysis and planning in complex ambiguous environments in order to carry out CA operations in the special operations community (U.S. Army photo by K. Kassens).

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-TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028, 6 December 2018 response, the Army Reserve Command's Private Public Partnership (P3) program helps to leverage America's commercial power. Another promising initiative is regionally aligned Security Force Assistance Brigades, focused on improving "the capability and capacity of partner nations' or regional security organizations' security forces" to conduct combat operations.<sup>28</sup> The relationship-building benefits of these programs are unmistakable.

The Army, however, does not holistically manage its capabilities for competition in the moral dimension with the same energy that it does for those capabilities in the material dimension. Nested among disparate commands, components and functional authorities, with disjointed mission focus, organizational cultures and force development and management priorities, their institutional disaggregation complicates the ability of theater, operational and tactical commands to calibrate and converge them to conduct MDO and JADO in either competition or conflict.

The U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), or USACAPOC(A), is a clear example of both the problem and much of the solution. With the overwhelming majority of DoD engagement capabilities (over 82 percent of its CA capabilities, 83 percent of its PSYOP capabilities and 71 percent of its IO capabilities), it is the ideal core for a more robust Army command to manage and deploy integrated information-related capabilities, in part because of the unique civilian-acquired knowledge and skills sets of its members. It is an Army reserve organization that the Army should designate as a multi-component command with active component, information-related capability forces. <sup>29</sup> With its seven-year Force 2025 strategy, USACAPOC(A)'s "harnessing collective influence" approach looks to integrate CA/PSYOP/IO and grow functional specialist and other human capital in partnership with private sector and non-governmental organizations. This is good, but not enough.

USACAPOC(A) constitutes 5 percent of the Army Reserve, yet accounts for over 20 percent of its deployed operations tempo. Continued high demand presents unique challenges for Army and joint commands that need CA/PSYOP/IO more than ever for competition missions. The Army and the joint force have difficulty accessing them, short of partial or full-scale mobilization, due to cumbersome Cold War-era mobilization authorities and budgetary mechanisms. This, and USACAPOC(A)'s force, training and readiness management practices, follow a conventional big-war model, ill-suited for continuous competition. Rather than functioning as a much-needed operational integration command, USACAPOC(A) is a force provider of small teams and personnel to tactical and operational commands for exercises and operational support.

USACAPOC(A) is not optimally structured for success in the competition continuum. And if it is not optimally structured to integrate physical and informational power, then neither is the Army nor the joint force.

# Securing the Victory in Competition

Addressing this critical vulnerability calls for changes at the wholesale as well as retail level. For starters, to expand MDO beyond its predominantly physical domains requires institutionalizing an informational, human or cognitive domain. For General Robert Brown, former commander of U.S. Army Pacific, the cognitive is the most important of all domains.<sup>30</sup>

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# KEY RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING INITIATIVES

- National Guard's State Partnership Program;
- U.S. Military Observer Group;
- Army Reserve Command's Private Public Partnership (P3) program; and
- Security Force Assistance Brigades.

To integrate military-civilian physical and informational power, the Army should establish an engagement or influence warfighting function, with its own unified command structure, such as a U.S. Army Engagement Command. It should also establish a center of excellence to organize all the forces and activities—with strategic direction from the Defense Security Cooperation Agency—that should be able to maneuver in competition the same way that infantry and armor do in combat.

The conceptualization, organization, command and control, development, management, equipping, deployment and employment of Army engagement forces must be done with the same rigor as is done for combat forces. In addition to their own domain and command, they need representation on the Army and joint staffs—e.g., the Army G9 covers installation management, while the Joint

Staff J9 is now an advanced concepts and technology directorate. Any use of the "9" staff designation should be for the engagement function to coordinate related forces and activities in a command area of responsibility.

To operationalize moral-material integration and win in competition, the Army should: institutionally converge and calibrate its engagement forces and activities; foster a learning organization within and beyond military structures; and seize opportunities to be a greater force for engagement and influence through collaboration in national strategic initiatives, such as the *Stabilization Assistance Review* and the Global Engagement Center. It must build an industrial base in applied social sciences, related individual and organizational learning technologies, and political and civil information management and human terrain mapping and analysis systems. **Above all, it must invest in people more than platforms.** It should cultivate strategic and operational capital through its recruiting and talent management initiatives. This will enable the Army to gain and maintain strategic initiative and optionality, to win left-of-bang and to preserve blood and treasure. These actions can enable the Army, borrowing from the Civil Affairs motto—Secure the Victory—to dominate in strategic competition.

Much is already afoot. The Army must move quickly, however. As 88th Readiness Division Commanding General Major General Darrell Guthrie cautioned in his 2019 guidance to his former Civil Affairs command: "We must become an adaptable, agile learning organization or we will be replaced by one that is."<sup>31</sup>



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Students assigned to the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School sit in the JFK auditorium during the Civil Affairs Specialist and Psychological Operations Specialist Graduation at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 18 December 2019 (U.S. Army photo by K. Kassens).

#### **MORAL-MATERIAL INTEGRATION**

- Invest in people more than platforms;
- converge and calibrate engagement forces and activities;
- foster a learning organization;
- seize opportunities to be a greater force for engagement; and
- promote an industrial base in applied social sciences.

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#### **Notes**

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