



American Terrestrial Doctrine of the Future Or the Art of Dangerous Strategic Betting

Pierre Dugué

Published on 01/01/2019

Engagement opérationnel

In October 2017, the U.S. Army published a new edition of its Field Manual 3-0 [1]; a fundamental document that regulates the training and doctrinal direction of U.S. land forces. This new edition supports a choice of redirection in doctrine after several years of non-linear operations (counter-terrorism, counter-interference, etc.). Indeed, the U.S. Army wants to orient its capabilities to be able to conduct high-intensity operations against 'peer-competitors'. However, this refocusing can be dangerous. Why is this dangerous? Because this document evaluates the capabilities, the mission and the future opponents of the army in a too restrictive way. In the long term, this risks limiting the usefulness of land forces as an instrument of the country's overall strategy. Moreover, some concepts developed by the army doctrine centres - such as the Multi-Domain Battle Concept or Army Vision 2028 - espouse an incorrect vision of future warfare by asserting its predictability. These bets will not only be futile, but can prove dangerous.

[1] <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-0.pdf>

The doctrinal shift

U.S. operational manuals. Army operational manuals regulate the action, maneuvers, and command of land forces in war, provide a framework for joint operations, and offer a common military language within the U.S. Army. For more than a decade, land doctrine has adapted to the context of the asymmetric wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and has adopted counter-interference as its modus operandi [1].

1) At the end of 2016, the Chief of the Army Staff General Mark Milley ordered a new edition of FM 3-0 in order to re-establish the doctrine of counter-interference, assess the geopolitical environment of the decade and adapt the army's capabilities and operability for future conflicts. The new edition of FM 3-0 described the strategic environment as

being defined not by the asymmetric threats of terrorists or insurgents but by the conventional threats of China, Russia and Iran; states that can challenge the United States in linear confrontations. Thus, the military is committed to orienting its doctrinal paradigm towards high-intensity operations, or linear warfare [2]. Linear warfare is historically characterized by battle, a symmetrical opposition between two military forces with the aim of neutralizing enemy defenses.

This approach is commendable, but is far from sufficient. High-intensity operations deserve to be studied and implemented, however, it is clear that FM 3-0 was built exclusively in opposition to the counter-insurgency doctrine that has been widely criticized. The military has pointed out the incompatibility of this approach with the kinetic military culture of the US land forces. This, however, exposes it to an incomplete approach to the spectre of armed conflict, and it would not be surprising to see counter-interference treated as doctrine for military operations other than war [3]. 3] A land component that specialises in linear operations is undoubtedly a lethal force, yet unable to engage in lower intensity operations, which are characteristic of the strategic environment of the early 21st century. The US military should integrate its doctrine on non-linear operations into FM 3-0 and rebalance its approach to the spectrum of conflict.

However, Colonel Rich Creed, co-author of FM 3-0 and director of the Office of Joint Doctrine, has stated that the sole purpose of this new edition of the manual is to fill a doctrinal void:

'We're not giving up on counter-interference and this type of operation in general simply because we've issued new doctrine on high intensity operations. We have filled a doctrinal void. We had no doctrine for operations involving large scale, large units since the last publication of FM 3-0 in 2011.

Indeed, this logic can be seen in the fact that the FM 3-24 operational manual on counter-intelligence operations published in 2006 by Lieutenant General David Petraeus is still in use by US ground forces [5]. However, Colonel Creed should not compare the FM 3-24 manual with FM 3-0.

FM 3-0 has unique normative significance within the US Army for two main reasons. First, it regulates land forces operations at the highest level of unit: at the division and corps level. Finally, this manual is not confidential and is therefore accessible to the American public, both allies and adversaries of the United States. What it describes therefore plays a crucial role in the evaluation of the capabilities and objectives of US land forces by the above-mentioned parties [6].

6] Such an important document, when it does not produce a comprehensive approach to the spectrum of conflict, may suggest that the US military is specialising in the area of land forces. A document of such importance when it does not produce a comprehensive approach to the spectrum of conflict may suggest that the US military is becoming deeply specialised and therefore no longer a force relevant to overall US strategy, whose interests can only be protected by high-intensity operations.

From doctrine to strategy

The rhetoric developed by the U.S. military is attempting to de-emphasize how that its forces do not disengage from non-linear operations, as proven by the document Army Vision 2028[7] :

'The Army in 2028 will be able to deploy, fight and win decisively against any adversary, anywhere, anytime, through high-intensity, inter-service and inter-domain operations; while maintaining its ability to operate in irregular situations'.

In spite of this statement, the section on non-linear operations seems to have been added hastily because it seems less elaborate, showing a hierarchy in what the army considers to be its main missions. Furthermore, there is no doctrinal reaffirmation of the importance of irregular operations. FM 3-0 may have developed the concept of 'Stability Operations', however, they only intervene after a high-intensity phase and aim to effect the political transition necessary for the stability of the local environment.

Moreover, the concept of Multi-Domain Battle, a contemporary revision of the AirLand Battle Doctrine [8] shows that the US Army is becoming more and more specialised and moving away from non-linear operations. Developed in parallel with FM 3-0, the concept advocates the long-term modernization of land forces' capabilities and operability in order to be able to practice high-intensity operations in a conventional environment. The concept sets out topics to be prioritised in order to be able to decisively neutralise opposing armed forces: precise and deep fire, higher generation combat vehicles, strategic airlift and vertical airlift, and increased tactical lethality of soldiers. Going hand in hand with these themes, the concept calls for the army to make effective use of the different areas (air, sea, land, space and cyber) available in order to maximise the impact of military pressure on the enemy, as illustrated in the adjoining image above.

Lieutenant General Michael Lundy, Director of the Combined Arms Centre, explained why Multi-Dimensional Battle is a key concept [10] : 10] "The focus on counter-insurgency operations from static bases against enemies with limited capabilities and weapons has created a military mentality that does not match the realities of high-intensity combat against equally powerful adversaries. The relevance of this concept to the current strategic environment is undeniable, argues General David Perkins - former director of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command. He wrote in 2017 that 'the transformation of the military in a post-Vietnam context took more than a decade and was achieved through AirLand doctrine. For the years to come, the Multi-Dimensional Battle is our concept of transformation' [11].

No one could doubt the ability of the US Army to learn from its military history and thus quickly and decisively apply the counter-interference techniques learned in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq and regulated by FM 3-24. The way some regiments train shows us that the Army is capable and not averse to the ideals of the "war on terror. The way some regiments train shows that the army is able and does not shy away from the ideal of practicing irregular operations - such as the Jungle Warfare School in Equatorial Ghana [12]. 12] The obvious problem with the above-mentioned concepts lies in what they communicate. These documents set out for all to see what the army sees as its main mission in the future, the entities it considers dangerous. These documents therefore act like defence white papers written by the military, white papers being political documents. Indeed, declaring that Russia, China and Iran are going to become powers that will be able to challenge the United States on conventional ground is undeniably a political statement, not a military analysis.

This statement has enjoyed considerable popularity within the Pentagon, with the National Defense Strategy 2018 [13] - a political document - appropriating FM 3-0 analyses:

Interstate competition, not terrorism, has become the priority for US national security [...] In this environment there is no room for complacency - we have to make hard choices and prioritize in order to create a lethal, resilient, joint and ever-adapting force.

Counter-interference may now be synonymous with human, financial and material disaster for the United States, but not to include non-linear operations - humanitarian, counter-terrorism, counter-interference, security - in a document as inclusive as FM 3-0 is not only a military failure, but a strategic failure. The US military seems to want to engage only in linear conflicts, and US strategy could suffer as a result. If strategy is the link between military operations and political objectives, then defence policies will adapt to the doctrinal transformation of land forces. Thus, espousing a land doctrine that excludes non-linear operations may damage the usefulness of land forces as a viable political instrument.

The US military's specialization in high-intensity operations may also undermine military cooperation with allied forces. Most doctrine documents among allied forces, such as NATO,[14] the United Kingdom[15] and France,[16] reflect a more inclusive understanding of the character of future warfare and its unpredictability. Increased specialization could thus undermine joint operations and the interoperability of forces engaged in common theatres of operations.

Prioritizing is crucial, however, the global nature of US interests requires an inclusive military doctrine that allows land forces to protect against threats from across the spectrum of conflict. For example, some potential failed states such as Venezuela - whose oil reserves are strategic[17] - Mali - whose uranium reserves are critical[18] - or Pakistan - armed with nuclear weapons[19] - may facilitate the emergence of non-linear adversaries that may eventually require non-linear intervention by US ground forces. If this specialisation continues, US military doctrine risks developing in parallel with - and not synergistically with - overall US strategy[20].

The future of war: anticipating or predicting?

The current doctrinal reversal may suggest that the American army is betting on the character of the future war. The military argues that not only will inter-state competition cause tomorrow's conflicts, but also that high-intensity operations will characterise them.

Undersecretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy announced in late 2017 the creation of a new operational command, the Future Command, whose mission will be to "develop and implement a new military strategy for the future". Its mission will be to support the modernisation of land forces' capabilities in order to anticipate the high-intensity conflicts predicted by FM 3-0[21]. In addition, Secretary of State for the Army Dr. Mark Esper has endorsed this forecast, as described in Army Vision 2028 [22]. [22] Contrary to his earlier statement that committed ground forces to non-linear operations, he stated:

The army that landed on the beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944 is relatively similar to the army of today.... They fought in a joint, multi-service, multi-dimensional manner with strong air and naval support. It is this type of combat, once the space and cyber components have been integrated, that our 'Army Vision' is looking for'.

The army may not be able to predict the character of tomorrow's conflicts, but it seems to want to influence them. This would imply the ability to impose preconceived rules on its adversary - notably that all operations must be linear and high-intensity. The US Army seems to think - and this would not be new [23] - that its capacity to concentrate firepower over the entire inter-service spectrum can force its adversaries to adopt the same conventional posture. However, some theoretical and historical clues may lead us to reconsider the viability of this logic [24].

24] Attempting to predict the future character of war may prove not only futile, but also dangerous. Clausewitz can guide our reasoning on this subject, as he is considered to be a reference even by the American army [25]. 25] One can refer to his maxim that commanders must 'establish the character of the war in which they are embarking, and under no circumstances should they turn away from its real nature'. Thus, Clausewitz could oppose the logic of trying to anticipate the character of a future conflict, because 'every war is rich in unique episodes' [26].

26] Clausewitz also wrote: 'War is not the exercise of a living force on a dead mass, but the collision of two living forces'. Interaction is the hallmark of war, which makes it even more unpredictable, as described by Alan Beyerchen:

War is not a game of chess; some opponents do not respect certain rules, and very often, in their quest for victory, they may alter them. That is why the conduct of war can - and often does - change its character and why the structure of any war is unstable.[27]

Hoping to influence the behaviour of its adversaries on the battlefield, the US military ignores the principle of reciprocity as the guiding force in any conflict. Will Russia, China and Iran respect the rules decided by the United States? Neither North Vietnam, nor the Taliban nor Al-Qaeda respected the rules decided by the US military, precisely because they gave the Americans a substantial advantage. Instead, they preferred to opt for non-linear tactics that allowed them to counterbalance the technological advantage of the United States. General McMaster wrote: 'There are two ways to fight the US military: asymmetrically, or stupidly' [28]. 28] It is thus highly likely that Russia, China and Iran will opt for asymmetry.

Conclusion

The objective of the doctrinal shift in the US land forces is to be able to outperform its adversaries in all conventional areas. Thus, it is clear that such adversaries will not risk confronting an army that has completed its doctrinal and capability transformation process. Although Russia, China and Iran may be relatively equal-powered adversaries, their current non-linear engagements in Eastern Europe, East Asia or the Middle East respectively show that the development of such operations is an inherent part of their capability. Thus a conflict against the United States is more likely to involve special forces, proxy actors (proxies), disinformation and cyber and denial-of-access actions. The rise in conventional US power may discourage the use of conventional forces as a viable option against its forces, thus encouraging the use of non-linear forces. This could mean that the current doctrinal shift may prove both futile and dangerous.

Mr Pierre DUGUE is a student in Master of International Security at Sciences Po, Paris. He is a graduate of the War Studies Department of King's College London, United Kingdom. He is particularly interested in the military doctrine of the American armed forces and transatlantic defence issues. After working with the US Embassy in Paris and the American think-tank American Enterprise Institute (Washington D.C.), he will be an intern in NATO's Strategy and Concepts Section in 2019.

1] <http://www.aei.org/publication/the-surge-of-ideas-2/>

[2] <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/July-August-2018/Large-scale-combat-operations/>

- [3] http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/others/jp-doctrine/jp3_07.pdf
- [4] <https://taskandpurpose.com/whats-wrong-withfm-3-0/>
- [5] <https://usacac.army.mil/cac2/repository/materials/coin-fm3-24.pdf>
- [6] <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a147039.pdf>
- [7] https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/vision/the_army_vision.pdf
- [8] <https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/multi-domain-battle-tonight-tomorrow-and-the-future-fight/>
- [9] <https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech-View/Article/606661/army-war-college-strategy-conference/>
- [10] <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/November-December-2017/The-Return-of-US-Army-Field-Manual-3-0-Operations/>
- [11] <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/November-December-2017/Multi-Domain-Battle-The-Advent-of-Twenty-First-Century-War/>
- [12] <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/revealed-the-us-army-just-signed-jungle-warfare-school-16976>
- [13] <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>
- [14] <http://www.act.nato.int/images/stories/media/doclibrary/ffao-2015.pdf>
- [15] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/605298/Army_Field_Manual_AFM_A5_Master_AD_P_Interactive_Gov_Web.pdf
- [16] <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/514655/8664340/file/Revue+stratum%C3%A9agency+of+d%C3%A9defense+and+of+s%C3%A9curity%C3%A9+national+2017.pdf>
- [17] <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/12/world/americas/trump-venezuela-military.html>
- [18] <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/12/world/africa/africa-us-military-aid-france.html>
- [19] <https://www.cfr.org/interview/behind-pakistans-taliban-war>
- [20] <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2017/12/6/multi-domain-battle-the-need-for-integration-with-national-strategy>
- [21] <http://www.c4isrnet.com/digital-show-dailies/global-force-symposium/2018/03/24/army-futures-command-taking-charge-of-conjuring-up-new-capability/>
- [22] https://www.army.mil/article/206488/army_secretary_esper_announces_army_vision_for_2028
- [23] <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2002-05-01/transforming-military>
- [24] <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/27/mcmasters-4-fallacies-of-future-warfare-vampires-marlin-perkins-and-much-more/>
- [25] <https://ideas.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/02/24/the-u-s-militarys-german-fetish/>
- [26] [http://home.sogang.ac.kr/sites/jaechun/courses/Lists/b7/Attachments/30/\(week%20_%20week%20\)%20Clausewitz%20On%20War%20Longer.pdf](http://home.sogang.ac.kr/sites/jaechun/courses/Lists/b7/Attachments/30/(week%20_%20week%20)%20Clausewitz%20On%20War%20Longer.pdf)

[27] <https://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Beyerchen/BeyerschenNonlinearity2.pdf>

[28] <https://qz.com/915438/the-four-fallacies-of-warfare-according-to-national-security-advisor-hr-mcmaster/>

Title : Pierre Dugué

Author (s) : Pierre Dugué

Release date 15/08/2018

DOWNLOAD DOCUMENT
