

Army Operating Concept: Delivering the Future

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Experience teaches us that it is much easier to prevent an enemy from posting themselves than it is to dislodge them after they have got possession.

—Gen. George Washington

One of our most important missions in U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command is to deliver the future Army. This is not simply modernizing organizations, updating doctrine from the most recent fight, applying the latest technology to produce new equipment, or fixating on

a single potential adversary. We must first think clearly about the future with a grounded understanding of the continuities in war. War remains human in nature, and human conflict is a result of



Soldiers assigned to 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, prepare to assault their objective during training at Camp Roberts, Calif., in January.

Bradley Fighting Vehicles from 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, stand ready during a live-fire exercise at Clabber Creek Multiuse Range, Fort Hood, Texas.



a clash of wills instigated by competing cultural contexts, political opinions and friction due to a redistribution of power and competition for resources. From this understanding, we must engage in a professional discussion that establishes an intellectual framework for the future Army. Upon this framework, we can build the Army Operating Concept.

The Army writes concepts to address challenges. These challenges may arise from a change in the operational environment (foreign or domestic), national security guidance, or the need to address a known gap in existing capabilities. When faced with one or more of these challenges, we must adjust our capabilities to adapt for crisis and innovate for the future.



Gen. David G. Perkins assumed duties as the commander of U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command in March. Previously, he served as commander of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He also served as the commanding general of the 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized) and brigade commander of the 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized), during the invasion of Iraq; deputy chief of staff for strategic effects for Multi-National Forces-Iraq; deputy chief of staff for operations for U.S. Army Europe; and special assistant to the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. A 1980 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, Perkins was commissioned in the Armor branch. He holds master's degrees in national security and strategic studies from the U.S. Naval War College and mechanical engineering from the University of Michigan.

When AirLand Battle was published in 1981, its specific purpose was to deal with a known enemy—the Soviet Union; in a known place—the central plains of Europe; and with a known coalition—NATO. Because of the number of known variables, we were able to develop very specific weapons to fight this known enemy: the famous “Big 5,” the M1 Abrams Tank, Bradley Fighting Vehicle, Apache and Black Hawk helicopters, and the Patriot missile system.

The challenge AirLand Battle was addressing was how to “fight outnumbered and win.” Therefore, we developed the Big 5 to attack uncommitted echelons, maneuver to create mass, shoot on the move and win the battlefield calculus. In many cases, it became a math problem: trying to service as many targets as possible in as short a time as possible. The focus was on delivering firepower.

Today, we have a very different challenge. Our new Army Operating Concept (AOC) is being developed to deal specifically with the unknown. Not only is the future unknown, but it is unknowable.

Win in a Complex World

Our challenge today is to win in a complex world. Both the challenges of the 1970s and today can be described with these five words, but many of the similarities end there. We start with *win*, which is more than just the Army. It involves the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war and decisionmaking in a joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational environment. It requires a thorough understanding of the problem and the many facets, including cultural, economic, military and political; an understanding of all the players and the relationships between them; and an understanding of the variables that drive change. Our goal now is to deliver elements of national power.

Global Command and Control System-Army allows communication across the joint community.



All of this happens in a complex world in which coalitions, technology and positions of advantage change rapidly and possibly without warning. We must have soldiers, systems and institutions that get better and gain advantage operating in chaos and the unknown. The emerging trends comprise new and more robust challenges that include increasing momentum of human interaction; potential for enemy capability overmatch; proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; increasing importance of the cyberspace and space domains; operations among populations in dense urban terrain; ease of technology transfer to state and nonstate actors; and the transparent nature of operations due to ubiquitous media. We are seeing increased lethality in the close fight and improved long-range capabilities, the emergence of cyber and electromagnetic threats, and an ongoing effort to grow anti-access and area denial capabilities by multiple nations. Enemies are learning and will employ hybrid strategies in this complex environment to avoid and disrupt U.S. strengths and emulate successful tactics, techniques and procedures. They will steal, copy, and adapt technology and exploit proxies and criminal networks to expand their influence.

The new Big 5 for the future cannot be distilled into only weapons programs but they probably look something like this:

- Optimizing soldier and team performance.
- Developing adaptive and innovative leaders and institutions to understand and operate in complex environments.
- Ensuring interoperability.
- Building scalable and tailorable joint and combined-arms formations.
- Leveraging concepts and technologies to maintain capability overmatch while speeding deployment and reducing logistical demand.

We must also account for enduring Army missions. As part of the joint force, today's regionally engaged and glob-



Soldiers with 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, keep watch during a training exercise at the Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, La., in April.

Platoon leader 2nd Lt. Trevor Hanson, right, with 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, pauses during a joint patrol with Afghani police in Afghanistan's Kandahar Province in August.



ally responsive Army prevents conflict, shapes the security environment and wins wars. The Army maintains the foundational theater capabilities for the joint force commander that are required to assure and strengthen partners, deter adversaries, and sustain the ability to compel. To win wars, Army forces that are capable of expeditionary operations from strategic and operational distances must defeat and compel enemy forces and key actors, establish security, and consolidate gains.

Our concepts must also be grounded in lessons learned and historical insights. For example, the Army's efforts to "harness the electron" for a network-enabled force have led to significant improvements in our tactical network, even though our path to development included obstacles and setbacks. Another lesson learned from the previous decade of conflict is the importance of considering human factors when planning or conducting military operations. This requires developing military campaigns grounded in social and cultural realities. Military campaigns must be subordinate to the larger strategy, one that includes the diplomatic, political, economic, military and strategic communications efforts. Finally, we must not permit assumptions about transformational technologies to cloud our thinking about the nature of war. Many promising technologies have not arrived as early as originally projected or when they arrived did not become the "silver bullet" we had planned on. Although we continue in technology development, we cannot predict when tactically relevant weapons will arrive for land forces and cannot develop our concepts that are not grounded.

Army Operating Concept

The AOC provides a vision of future armed conflict based on grounded projections of the future operational environment, advances in technology, directed missions, emerging threats and adversary capabilities. The AOC aims to increase clarity and focus on how future Army forces will operate, articulates how the Army provides the joint force commander with options, and describes how the Army prevents conflict, shapes security environments, and wins wars.

The AOC describes tenets and core competencies that provide a foundation for the Army's approach to generating and applying combat power at the strategic, operational and tactical levels in the future. The framework reflects tenets that guide the generation and application of combat power to achieve operational overmatch at decisive points. Further,

commanders should consider the successful application of these tenets to achieve campaign objectives. In addition, the identified core competencies are the essential and unique capabilities the Army provides to the joint force.

The AOC describes how a commander, using military art and science, might employ the capabilities described in the concept. The document does not simply describe potential technologies; it also provides the basis for identifying and informing decisions about doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities. These proposed solutions to the aforementioned problem allow us to experiment and evaluate, and eventually develop the capabilities needed to implement a solution. In short, the AOC begins a cycle of examination to evaluate and prioritize resource-informed courses of action that take advantage of opportunities and solve problems critical to future force development.

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Revising our AOC is not the end of the journey. Rather, the AOC is only the start of the examination. Completing the task requires the Army to assess, experiment, evaluate and test proposed capabilities and innovative solutions described in the AOC as part of a continuous learning process in order to complement or replace our current capabilities. Turns and setbacks are sure to happen along this intellectual journey. We must embrace what we learn, challenge our assumptions and continue to work on delivering the Army that meets our nation's current and future needs. Moreover, we must assure that developing capabilities remain fiscally prudent, and we will adapt and innovate together with the joint and defense personnel and acquisition systems.

We may not know the specific enemy or challenges we will face in future decades, but you can be sure the strength and capability of our Army will continue to assure our allies of our commitment, deter potential adversaries from action and, if deterrence fails, enable us to compel our enemies away from aggression. ★