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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 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 described 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 composed 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 commanders. MDTFs also provide supported commanders the ability to plan, integrate, control, track, and assess the effectiveness of joint counter-A2/AD activities.

What Is the Purpose of MDTFs?

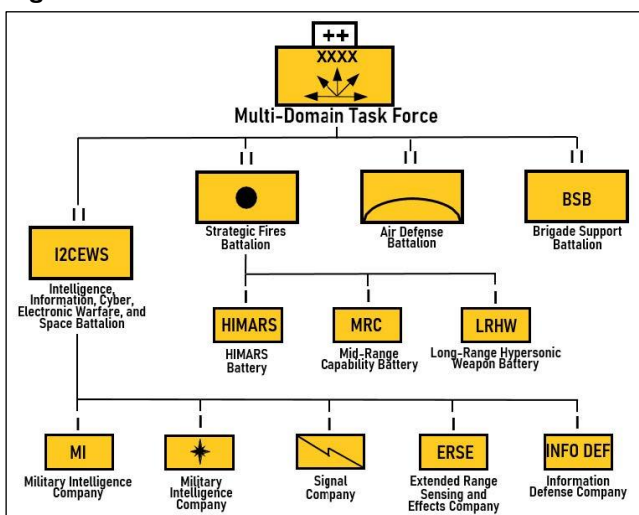
The 1st MDTF was created in 2017 as an experimental unit at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA, and participated in a variety of experiments and exercises to both test its capabilities and develop requirements for equipment and units included as part of the MDTF force design. According to the Army, the MDTF's 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 Systems. (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 is to 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.

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

1st MDTF is headquartered at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA and aligned to the U.S. Army Pacific.

1st MDTF

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

2nd MDTF

On April 13, 2021, the Army announced it would station its 2nd MDTF in Germany. The Germany-based MDTF is to support U.S. Army Europe and Africa. On September 16, 2021, the Army activated the 2nd 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.

3rd MDTF

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

Split Stationing of the 2nd MDTF at Fort Drum, NY

On December 13, 2023, Senator Charles Schumer and Representative Elise Stefanik announced in 2025 Fort Drum, NY, would become the home of 1,495 soldiers and personnel from the 2nd MDTF's Long-Range Fires Battalion, Brigade Support Battalion (BSB), and Air Defense Battalion. The 2nd MDTF's Headquarters and Effects battalions, activated in 2021, would remain in Germany.

2024 Army Force Structure Transformation Initiative and MDTFs

On February 27, 2024, the Army released a white paper, *Army Force Structure Transformation*, outlining plans to transform the force. The white paper noted the Army intended to "complete the build out of the Army's five MDTFs" and that

Three task forces will be assigned to U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC); one will be assigned to U.S. Army Europe-Africa (USAREUR-AF); and another will be service-retained with a likely focus on the CENTCOM area of responsibility [AOR]. One MDTF headquarters is already in Germany and another is stationed in Hawaii. As discussions with allied countries progress over time, the Army will likely forward station elements of the MDTFs permanently, such as the multi domain effects and long-range fires battalions, to strengthen deterrence.

April 2024 Update on MDTF Alignment and Stationing

According to an April 2024 *Defense News* article, the Army has updated MDTF pre-decisional plans. The Army

reportedly plans to consolidate Mid-Range Capability and Long-Range Hypersonic batteries under a Long-Range Fires Battalion (LRFB) and complete programming of the remaining Indirect Fire Protection Capability (IFPC) battalions over the next five years. The Army also plans to convert all brigade support companies to battalions. In terms of specific MDTFs:

- The 1st MDTF is to be fully established in FY2024 with a Multidomain Effects battalion (MDEB), an IFPC battalion, a BSB, and a LRFB.
- The 2nd MDTF is to be headquartered in Germany with an MDEB and other elements stationed at Fort Drum, NY, with an IFPC battalion, a BSB and an LRFB. The 2nd MDTF is to be fully operational in FY2025 with the addition of the LRFB in FY2026. The 2nd MDTF is to focus on supporting the European theater.
- The 3rd MDTF, headquartered in Hawaii with an MDEB, will have an IFPC battalion, a BSB and an LRFB stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA, and is to be fully operational by FY2026.
- The 4th MDTF is to be stationed at Fort Carson, CO, but focused on the Indo-Pacific theater, and is to be fully operational by FY2027.
- The 5th MDTF is to be stationed at Fort Liberty, NC, and is to concentrate on regions as determined. The 5th MDTF is to be fully operational by FY2028.

Possible Oversight Issues for Congress

Possible oversight issues for Congress include the following:

- In view of the Army's 2024 Force Structure Transformation announcement and April 2024 update, it now appears the Army has changed its original MDTF alignment plans, which included an Arctic-focused MDTF and a CENTCOM-focused MDTF. Does the Army's February 27, 2024, announcement and April 2024 update now constitute the Army's official MDTF alignment plan? If so, how does the Army intend to address Arctic and CENTCOM-based MDTF capabilities requirements?
- According to the Army white paper, three MDTFs are to be assigned to USARPAC, one to USAREUR-AF, and the final under the control of the Army but "likely[to] focus on the CENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR)." If this is the case, does the Army consider A2/AD in the CENTCOM AOR less of an operational consideration than other AORs? Is the CENTCOM commander supportive of the Army's apparent decision to not directly align a MDTF to the CENTCOM AOR?
- The Arctic region is the responsibility of three Combatant Commands: U.S. Northern Command, U.S. European Command, and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. How does this shared responsibility affect the alignment, command and control, and responsibilities of the Army's MDTFs?

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