

Updated March 25, 2024

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 in order 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 describes 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. The Army intends for MDTFs to have an All-Domain Operations Center (ADOC) to enable 24/7 monitoring of adversary activities in all domains.

What Is the Purpose of MDTFs?

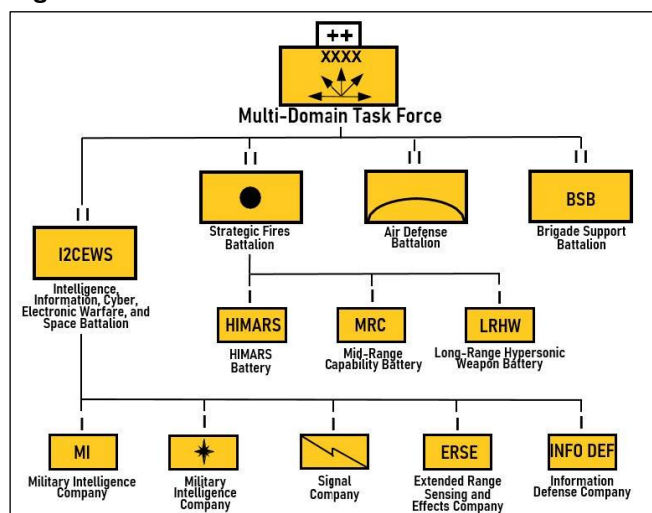
The 1st MDTF was created in 2017 as an experimental unit at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, and participated in a variety of experiments and exercises to both test its capabilities and develop requirements for equipment and units included as part of the MDTF force design. According to the Army, 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 System presently in use by the U.S. Army and Marine Corps. (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 will 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. The Strategic Mid-Range Fires (SMRF) Battery (formerly known as the Mid-Range Capabilities (MRC) Battery) and the Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW) Battery depicted in **Figure 1** are not, at present, fully established and equipped units.

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.

A 3rd MDTF for the Indo-Pacific?

According to a *Defense News* article, the Chief of Staff of the Army reportedly would “like to see three multidomain task force units in the Pacific region,” reportedly stating, “I can see three in the Pacific and then one other one. We have one in Europe and then one probably in a contingency-type place where it can go wherever it needs. So, I think that’s how those five [MDTFs] are going to play out.” In June 2023, Japanese press reported the United States had started discussions with Japan about hosting a 3rd MDTF (presumably the 4th MDTF) in Japan.

If three MDTFs are allocated to the Indo-Pacific and the remaining MDTF (presumably 5th MDTF) is earmarked for global response, this suggests an Arctic-focused MDTF might not be created. The *Defense News* article further noted, “In recent years, the Army has placed less emphasis

on a permanent MDTF in Alaska, after directly stating it wanted to do so in its strategy for the Arctic published in 2021.”

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 would become the home of 1,495 soldiers and personnel from the 2nd MDTF's Long-Range Fires Battalion, Brigade Support Battalion, 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. Regarding MDTFs, 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.

Possible Oversight Issues for Congress

Possible oversight issues for Congress include but are not limited to the following:

- In view of the Army’s 2024 Force Structure Transformation announcement, it now appears the Army has changed its original MDTF alignment plans, which included an Arctic-focused MDTF and a MDTF aligned for global response. Does the Army’s February 27, 2024, announcement now constitute the Army’s official MDTF alignment plan? If so, how does the Army intend to address Arctic and contingency-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.” If this is the case, does the Army consider A2/AD in the CENTCOM AOR less of an operational consideration than other MDTF AORs? Is the CENTCOM commander supportive of the Army’s apparent decision to not assign a MDTF to the CENTCOM AOR?

Andrew Feickert, Specialist in Military Ground Forces

IFI1797

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.