



# 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 "organization centerpiece" of this effort.

## What Is a Multi-Domain Task Force?

The Army's *Chief of Staff Paper #1: Army Multi-Domain Transformation Ready to Win in Competition and Conflict* dated March 16, 2021, describes the 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."

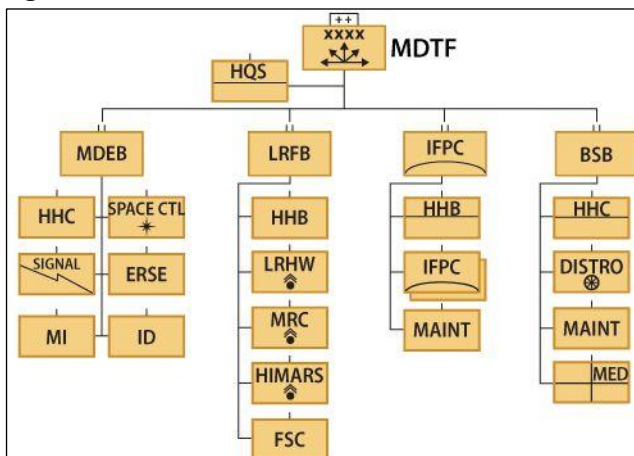
### What Is Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD)?

Anti-Access is any action, activity, or capability designed to prevent an advancing military force from entering an operational area. Area Denial is any action, activity, or capability designed to limit an adversarial force's freedom of action within an operational area. Threat A2/AD defenses are composed of layered and integrated long-range precision-strike systems, littoral anti-ship capabilities, air defenses, and long-range artillery and rocket systems.

## Updated MDTF Organization

Figure 1 depicts a generic MDTF.

Figure 1. Generic MDTF



Source: Army Information Paper provided to CRS, April 10, 2025.

**Notes:** MDEB = Multi-Domain Effects Battalion; HHC = Headquarters and Headquarters Company; MI = Military Intelligence; ERSE = Extended Range Sensing Element; ID = Information Dominance; LRFB = Long-Range Fires Battalion; HHC = Headquarters and Headquarters Battery; LRHW = Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon; MRC = Mid-Range Capability (also referred to as Strategic Mid-Range Fires [SMRF]); HIMARS = High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems; FSC = Forward Sustainment Company; IFPC = Integrated Fire Protection Capability; BSB = Brigade Support Battalion.

The Army has stated that each MDTF is to be tailored to Combatant Commander requirements, so it is possible the generic MDTF in **Figure 1** may contain more, fewer, or other types of units depending on the requirements of its assigned theater of operations.

## Army Initial Plans for MDTF Development

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.

### 1<sup>st</sup> MDTF

The 1<sup>st</sup> MDTF is headquartered at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA, and aligned to the U.S. Army Pacific. Since its 2017 activation, it has participated in a variety of exercises.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> MDTF

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

### Split Stationing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> MDTF's Long-Range Fires Battalion (LRFB), Brigade Support Battalion (BSB), and Air Defense Battalion. The 2<sup>nd</sup> MDTF's Headquarters and Effects Battalions, activated in 2021, would remain in Germany.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> MDTF

The Army activated the 3<sup>rd</sup> MDTF at Schofield Barracks, HI, in September 2022. The 3<sup>rd</sup> MDTF is to support the U.S. Army Pacific as a component of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM).

## 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 an 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 1<sup>st</sup> MDTF is to be fully established in FY2024 with a Multi-Domain Effects Battalion (MDEB), an IFPC battalion, a BSB, and an LRFB.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> MDTF is to be fully operational in FY2025 with the addition of the LRFB in FY2026. The 2<sup>nd</sup> MDTF is to focus on supporting the European theater.
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> MDTF, headquartered in Hawaii with an MDEB, is to consist of an IFPC battalion, a BSB, and an LRFB stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA, and is to be fully operational by FY2026.
- The 4<sup>th</sup> MDTF is planned to be stationed at Fort Carson, CO, but is to focus on the Indo-Pacific theater and is to be fully operational by FY2027.
- The 5<sup>th</sup> MDTF is planned to be stationed at Fort Bragg, NC, and is to concentrate on regions as determined. The 5<sup>th</sup> MDTF is to be fully operational by FY2028.

## MDTF Concerns

In a March 2026 article “How to Kill a Multidomain Task Force,” published by the Modern War Institute at West Point, concerns were raised regarding what the authors perceived as MDTF “vulnerabilities,” including as follows:

- “The most effective way to neutralize the MDTFs is not to target its sensors, shooters, or networks, but to overwhelm it with process. The central challenge to an MDTF ahead of a conflict—and the one that would prove especially dangerous during one—is the institutional tendency to pile on structure and staff, stifling the very agility that makes it effective.”
- “Forcing them [MDTFs] to conform to legacy force design models would neutralize their very purpose. Re-segmenting an MDTF’s functions back into stove piped, single-capability organizations would also erode their utility to the joint force. When the MDTF is forced through established approval chains, acquisition timelines, and validation mechanisms designed for traditional formations, its ability to innovate is stifled.”
- “MDTFs are not break-glass-in-case-of-war formations built for rapid response deployment into theater; placing them in a reserve status in the continental United States over three thousand miles away from the friction zone negates their primary function and undermines the denial defense in the First Island Chain outlined in the recent National Defense Strategy.”
- “Perhaps the most insidious way to defeat an MDTF is to sever its connection to the global conversation. This is achieved through information calcification: a hardening of the bureaucratic arteries that slows the release of information to a crawl, rendering it irrelevant upon arrival and allowing our adversaries to define our actions before we can ... Equally damaging, however, is suppressing the MDTF’s voice internally within the Army, which stifles the service’s own evolution.”

The authors seemingly suggest that bureaucracy, the tendency to add additional structure and staff to new units, and conformity to established Army practices might be more of a threat to the MDTF than enemy actions. The authors argue that such actions by the Army could restrict the MDTF’s agility and utility and make it less effective.

## Possible Oversight Issues for Congress

Possible oversight issues for Congress include the following:

- Is the Army’s reported April 2024 update on MDTF alignment and stationing still valid, or have there been changes to alignment, basing, or operational dates?
- The Army has described the MDTF as the Army’s organization centerpiece, particularly when it comes to operating in an A2/AD theater of operations, such as the Middle East. Have MDTFs or subordinate elements of MDTFs played an operational role in Operation Epic Fury? If so, what are some of the emerging lessons and how might they influence future MDTF development and alignment?
- Given concerns raised about MDTF vulnerabilities to Army cultural tendencies and bureaucracy, what actions are being undertaken by Army leadership to ensure that MDTFs are being “set up for success” and not being

- overly regulated and staffed in order to maximize their innovativeness, agility, and effectiveness?

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