For the last 18 years, the United States and its allies have been embroiled in the Global War on Terror. A near-boundless war that has primarily taken the shape of counter insurgency operations (COIN) in the Middle East and Central Asia. Now, as the United States Department of Defense moves away from COIN and into a new era of multi-domain operations, America and its partners must move away from training only up to the brigade level. In order to win a large-scale war in a multi-domain battlefield, America must be able to fight at the division or corps level, must be
rapidly expeditionary, capable of fighting both jointly and as part of a coalition, and must have a robust logistical force capable of sustaining a prolonged fight. The need to train for this impending fight goes beyond the directives of the FM 3.0, and this article will highlight why it is critical to train for and win that fight. It will also articulate a solution for training to win that looming fight.

From Capitol Hill and combatant commanders to brigade and battalion commanders, there is a lot of talk about methods to tackle the new problems of the next fight. There is, however, little more than talk. This paper goes beyond a list of problems and offers as a solution, one way to address all four of these challenges. Mastering these four challenges will allow America and its allies to be successful in a multi-domain battlefield.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014 shocked many Western leaders. Their integration of both lethal and non-lethal Fires contributed significantly to their success. As such, it has been and continues to be studied with great vigor by the U.S. and its NATO partners because of the threat Russia poses. Caught blindsided by a renewed Russian threat, multiple Ukrainian brigades were destroyed. Perhaps more concerning was Russia’s incursion into the Syrian civil war as this action showed two key things: Russia’s ability to be expeditionary at the strategic level and their ability to set up a formidable air defense system. The latter has driven the significant sales of surface-to-air missile platforms in that region and has become very concerning to Western leaders.

Russia’s power projection along its borders and in the Middle East prove that they have not been idle in the past 18 years while NATO has been entangled in COIN operations. They have been quite the opposite, developing new technology and reversing the drastic cuts made by Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s. Vladimir Putin has made and continues to make great effort to modernize and bolster the strength of the Russian military.

Additionally, in the far East, there is another looming threat: China. It continues to improve its military across a broad spectrum including building multiple carrier groups for the navy, constructing new advanced land-based surface-to-surface and surface-to-ship missiles as well as increasing both its jamming and hacking capabilities. All of these pose a clear threat to both the regional and global status quo and emphasize President Xi’s goal of making the People’s Liberation Army a world-class fighting force by 2050.

Additionally, operating quietly, almost in the shadows of the world stage, China is buying, or negotiating for the use of ports around the globe. While its economic importance for the establishment of a Chinese trade route is paramount, the military aspect of this cannot be overlooked. Each port that China controls provides a logistical base of support for its military in a time of war.

It could be and perhaps should be argued that while over the past 18 years that the U.S.’s foreign policy has been focused on counterinsurgency and global terrorism, Russia and China have moved from the status of a near-peer competitor to that of a peer adversary. Both continue to actively flex their military muscle in the forms of large training exercises, weapon sales and outright military incursions. While Russia seems to be focused on military actions, the importance of China’s actions perpetrating their long-term strategic goals cannot be overlooked. The time for passive soft diplomacy has passed. America and its allies now must actively deter these potential peer adversaries from upsetting the status quo.

American military leaders at all levels are still fighting with some
semblance of a COIN mentality, and in order to be successful in the next big fight, they must break away from their COIN hangover now. They must immediately transition their focus from a COIN environment to one against a major power peer threat. This starts with reading, understanding and internalizing, the Army’s new FM 3.0. However, merely reading and discussing is not good enough. The American Army must implement the FM 3.0 into all levels of training. Now.

A method to accomplish this for the Army is by training to fight from the corps and division levels, training to be rapidly expeditionary, training joint integration or as part of a coalition, and training the logistical capabilities of its forces.

During the 2019 Fires Conference at Fort Sill, senior leaders continuously harped on the point that the next substantial conflict would most likely start in an area where the United States and its allies were not expecting it to happen. This highlights two essential items: first, the U.S. military will be reactionary; and second, it must be expeditionary on a large scale. In order to win a large-scale conflict across multiple domains, the United States Army must build up its capacity to fight over vast tracts of land, sea and air, and be able to manage that fight from the division or corps level. In order to train this, the headquarters elements must train to be expeditionary and to fight a sustained fight. If America and her allies go to war with a peer competitor, they will not be able to win the fight at the brigade level. It will require a corps or division headquarters to manage the battlespace and to direct units. In order for America to dominate in the next conflict, the corps and division headquarters elements must be actively involved in training and preparing for this next fight.

This must go beyond the warfighter exercises that are currently being done. It is not enough to post corps and division staffs in air-conditioned buildings for 12-hour shifts while they move pieces around on a map or on a virtual battlefield. Exercises must bind the corps and division staffs to the field for extended periods and must be done in a variety of environments to include a chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological (CBRN) contested environment. If American forces are to be prepared for a large-scale armed confrontation commanders and staffs at every echelon must get used to fighting, living and making decisions in an environment outside of forward operating bases, without tactical internet and with little sleep or information. There is no way to replicate the conditions of an austere or contested environment, without being in that environment. And as America looks to the next fight, it must train for the conditions that it will most likely find itself in.

This can be done in a variety of ways rotating the entire corps or division to combat training centers (CTCs) like the National Training Center or the Joint Readiness Training Center and fighting at a division level or by sending a corps to fight at the White Sands Missile Range against another corps can accomplish this. This idea is nothing new, the Louisiana Maneuvers of 1941, were designed to test the Army’s ability to fight over a large area from a higher headquarters in preparation for a war in Europe or the Pacific. Renewing this training will give America’s senior leaders the repetitions that will build experience and ultimately allow them to be successful in a multi-domain operation against a peer competitor. In a fight where it is expected that America will lose entire battalions in sustained operations, it is not enough to simply certify its brigade combat teams. It must actively train its divisions and corps to continue to fight even with that type of loss. Logistically, this may mean cutting the number of ro-
tations to the CTCs but making them longer and bigger. Instead of doing 10 brigade-level rotations to NTC per year, the Army could conduct six division-level exercises at White Sands Missile Range or training from NTC in the south to Twentynine Palms in the north. These exercises, though mainly focused on training division staffs, could also act to certify the brigades.

Additionally, emergency deployment readiness exercises (EDREs) are another excellent way for the corps and division levels to prepare for this large-scale conflict. This is something that America has been doing at the brigade level and must now begin to flex its muscle through its division-level headquarters. Though it is a step in the right direction, brigade-level EDREs as part of Operation Atlantic Resolve or ‘surprise’ rotations to the CTCs are not enough if we are to truly prepare for a conflict with a peer competitor.

EDREs accomplish two tasks; they test the readiness of a large unit to be deployed rapidly while also acting as a threat deterrence in whatever theater they deploy to. Deterrence is yet another reason that the United States must conduct EDRES at the division level as stated above, the next conflict will not be one which is fought or won at the brigade level. In order for it to indeed be a preventative measure, a potential adversary must see that the United States has the capability to rapidly mobilize its forces for conflict. By deploying an entire corps or divisions on an EDRE the United States sends a clear message that our forces at every echelon stand ready to deploy, something that will become paramount when the next conflict begins.

When the next conflict begins, it will stretch over vast tracts of land, sea and air. In order to maintain momentum in that environment, the American military must have a robust sustainment plan and forces that are trained and ready to exercise it. The only
way to train this is to actively ac-
tion it. This means deploying di-
isions by rail to CTC and or port, 
and training to sustain them in 
the field for extended periods. 
The first few times will be a si-
ificantly painful event. However, 
it is the only way to develop 
the muscle memory from the officer 
in charge at the port or railhead 
on up to the division command-
ner that will allow us to rapidly 
project and sustain our power in 
a contested area. The U.S. mili-
tary as a whole must move away 
from their COIN hangover where 
dining facilities and USO lounges 
are par for the course. The mili-
tary must train to feed, fuel and 
equip its fighting forces in austere 
environments, and it needs to 
 happen now. The next fight, if it 
is a peer fight, will not be one with 
forward operating bases (FOBs) 
rather it will be a one with stag-
gered front lines where corps and 
divisions need to be sustained and 
and massive logistical packages must 
be pushed forward to the lines 
to sustain them. Because our po-
tential adversaries have invested 
heavily in their anti-aircraft sys-
tems resupply will most likely be 
done via ground. This may mean 
a greater emphasis on prestaged 
sustainment packages that are 
rapidly accessible to the maneu-
ver elements or a greater reliance 
on logistical trains keeping pace 
with maneuver elements. Victo-
ry in the next conflict may very 
well be decided by which force 
can sustain the fight the longest. 
America must now begin to fo-
cus its sustainers on being able 
to sustain multiple echelons si-
multaneously, moving away from 
the COIN hangover and the FOB 
mentality.

Much like the corps headquar-
ters elements, a way to train sus-
tainers and test or stress their abil-
ity is to practice at the CTCs or in 
the form of EDREs. Similar to 
the corps and division headquar-
ters, no warfighter exercise will 
actively stress the capabilities of 
America’s sustainment forces. By 
actively practicing the massive lo-
gistical movement that deploying 
and sustaining a corps or division 
requires and capturing the lessons 
learned, America’s military will be 
able to train to a standard where 
they will be ready to sustain a pro-
tracted conflict over a vast land-
scape. It is something that must 
be done now, and something that 
must be practiced over a variety 
of different environments.

There is continuing talk at both 
the tactical and strategic level 
about fighting jointly and as part 
of a coalition against an adver-
sary. However, outside of Europe 
and Korea, there has been little 
emphasis placed on fighting with 
our partners as part of a coalition. 
Additionally, there has been lit-
tle to no partnership between the 
U.S. Army and other branches of 
our military, specifically the Na-
tional Guard. This must change, 
and rapidly, in order for America 
to prepare for the next large-scale 
conflict. This is a problem that 
very many officers seem willing 
to address, yet we have seen very 
little action.

The American military is 
good at conducting training with 
like-minded countries. For the 
most part, NATO shares like sys-
tems, similar doctrine and a simi-
lar way of war. In order for Amer-
ica to prepare for a coalition fight, 
it needs to actively train to fight 
as part of the large multinational 
team. This must go beyond the 
scope of NATO. America must 
look at building partnerships with 
militaries that think differently 
or are in likely areas of potential 
conflict. For example, the Kuwaiti 
military is much smaller than the 
United States and is postured for 
defense only. Could the United 
States Army learn something from 
deploying a corps headquar-
ters there to conduct a three-week 
training exercise with the Kuwaiti 
equivalent of a corps headquar-
ters? In addition to a great train-
ing event, what message would it 
send to the rest of the world (par-
icularly China) if the American 
Army deployed a divisional head-
quartes to the Socialist Republic 
of Vietnam for a training exercise? The American military must shift 
its focus from thinking that coun-
tries who do things differently are 
wrong and find ways to capitalize 
on their strengths and forge new 
partnerships in areas we have ne-
glected in the past in order to pre-
pare for the next fight.

The proposed multinational 
training must go beyond the tacti-
cal level. To prepare for a conflict 
with a near-peer competitor, the 
United States military must focus 
on the operational and strategic 
levels of multinational training. 
In a near-peer fight, America may 
have the most significant percent-
age of ground forces. However, 
that does not mean that the other 
forces can be overlooked or dis-
counted. The time to train with 
them is now. The time to con-
duct a large-scale exercise with 
the Japanese, the Australians and 
the Vietnamese is now, not when 
a conflict with China is imminent.

The importance of coalition 
training cannot be overlooked; 
it projects a powerful statement; 
one which says that America does 
not stand alone in its resolve. It is 
paramount for leaders at all lev-
els to understand the importance 
of this; for a potential adversary, 
it is understood that if a conflict 
is started, it will be between mul-
tiple nations and much harder to 
fight. More importantly, it allows 
the United States to foster rela-
tionships in areas that we have 
perhaps overlooked in the past. 
The time to build and foster these 
relationships is now -- not in the 
fase of impending conflict.

In addition to forging partner-
ships with forces abroad we must 
continue to build our interser-
vice partnerships here at home. 
We must train our forces to fight 
jointly now. This is a point that is 
harped upon with robust rho-
tic but is very rarely actioned. As 
a military, we must quit talking 
about it and actually action it. 
This starts with interservice in-
tegration at the tactical level and 
builds to the operational and stra-
tegic level. Training to fight joint-
ly can be as simple as augmenting 
an Army light infantry battalion 
with a company of U.S. Marines 

who have light assault vehicles. For the infantry, they will be able to conduct training with a 25 mm chain gun, which is a powerful force multiplier, but the Marines will be able to showcase their capabilities for their Army brethren. Often at the CTCs, there are simulated aircraft that are shot down due to contested airspace. However, there are no Pararescuemen that are allocated to search for them. In a large near-peer conflict, the United States Army is not going to be able to flex a company to secure the crash site or pilot. We must train for that environment now, and that may look like sending an element or flight of Air Force personnel to train at the CTC with their Army counterparts.

Additionally, the active duty component of the Army must get better at incorporating National Guard and Reserve units during field problems at home stations and rotating them into training at the CTCs. By training together in simulated combat situations, the military as a whole will function better as cohesive understanding and trust between multiple echelons are built. It could be pointed out that while the training would benefit the units at the tactical level, the functions of different units would allow the commanders at the operational levels to think outside the box providing everyone with a valuable training event.

National Guard Soldiers bring to the table a wealth of skill sets from the civilian side, which are not usually found in an active duty military unit. These skill sets range from mechanical to medical and from carpentry to information technology. By integrating these skill sets into its forces during training, America stands to build a better force at the tactical level. These skills cannot be overlooked and must be fully leveraged if America is to be successful in their next war.

Currently, there is an overwhelming emphasis on the new concept of multi-domain operations. From the Joint Chiefs of Staff all the way down to the battalion level, units are preparing for the next large-scale confrontation with Russia or China. As of now, there has been much talk about the proposed problem sets. However, the problem set needs to be framed and solutions must be presented. This article presents a solution. Now it must be understood that there are a lot of different ways to solve these problems and that there is a large pool of very highly intelligent Soldiers and civilians looking into ways to fix these problem sets. However, the fact that this article formulates solutions for tackling these problems is what separates it from the rhetoric. This article provides a way to tackle four vital aspects of a large complex multi-domain fight in which America will have to fight from the corps and division level with partners while sustaining that fight for an extended period. This article provides a solution for the integration of U.S.
forces both as part of interservice training and coalition training. The intent of this article is not to undercut those who are working on these and similar problem sets, instead it serves to formulate discussion and stimulate thought on the problem sets listed previously as we continue to train to fight a peer competitor.

One thing remains certain: China and Russia are continuing to make large bounds forward as peer adversaries, and rogue nations like Iran and North Korea are quickly trying to close the gap that stands between them and the West. With all that, it must be understood that the time for passive diplomacy is over, America and its allies must now actively deter this war from happening. In order to be preventive and to counter this aggression America must actively train its forces to fight from a corps or division-level headquarters, to fight jointly, and to be sustained as a means to prepare for potential conflict but also as a means to send a clear message to its potential enemies that the United States and its allies stand ready to rapidly deploy at every echelon.

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