

USAWC Fellow Strategic Research Project

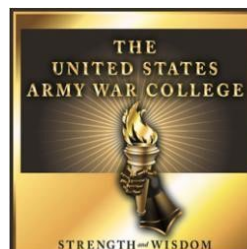
When the Killing Begins: Army Special Operations Forces support to the Army Conventional Force during Large-Scale Combat and Multi-Domain Operations

by

COL Chris Countouriotis

Under the Direction of:

COL Matt Gooding, BG Matt Ross and Professor Tim Nichols



United States Army War College

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT: A

Approved for Public Release

Distribution is Unlimited

The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

Information

Title: When the Killing Begins: Army Special Operations Forces support to the Army

Conventional Force During Large-Scale Combat and Multi-Domain Operations

Author: COL Chris Countouriotis

USAWC Faculty Mentor: COL Matt Gooding

Date: 7 APR 2025

Word Count: 4989

Abstract

The National Security Strategy of 2022 named Russia as an acute threat and the Peoples Republic of China as a pacing threat that the US Defense Department (DoD) needs to deter, or when required, defeat in combat. The Army now focuses on Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) and Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) against advanced adversaries. In this significant shift back to conventional warfare doctrine, Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) integrate with Army Conventional Forces (CF):

Conventional and special operations forces may operate in proximity to each other to accomplish the JFC's mission. These two forces help and complement each other with mutual support so they can accomplish an objective that otherwise might not be attainable. Extended or large-scale operations involving both conventional and special operations forces require the integration and synchronization of conventional and special operations efforts.¹

But an analysis of Army doctrine, future operating concepts and integrated training shows there may be a gap in making Army CF-SOF integration in LSCO/MDO reality. This paper explains the complex environment of MDO and LSCO and why it is important to the Army in answering the National Security Strategy. It will analyze current doctrine, publications and training center data. This paper provides perspectives from senior Army leaders on how ARSOF can best enable CF in LSCO/MDO. This paper will suggest ARSOFs most valuable role to CF in LSCO and identify obstacles and opportunities to improve Army CF-SOF lethality and cohesion in four areas: **doctrine, training, command relationships (COMREL), and professional military education (PME)**. The goal of this research is to determine how ARSOF can best support the CF Army to win in a large-scale conflict if diplomacy and deterrence fail.

Key Words: Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO), Large-Scale Ground Combat Operations, Multi-Domain Operations (MDO), Integrated Deterrence, Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF)

¹ HQs, Department of the Army. ADP 3-0: rations. July 2019. [Army Publishing Directorate](#)

Introduction

It is 2025, and the US Army is preparing for a conventional war against formidable adversaries² like Russia and China. The US Army has moved on from 20 years of Counter Insurgency, Counter Terrorism and Stability Operations that were central to the Global War on Terror. The Army now focuses on Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) and Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) against advanced adversaries like Russia and China who possess militarized capability across the Sea, Air, Land, Space and Cyberspace. General Randy George, the Chief of Staff of the Army has stated that “Warfighting” as one of the Army’s focus areas to ruthlessly prioritize time and resources to build lethality and cohesive teams³. But there seems to be a gap between the Conventional Force Army and Special Operations. The Army desires to cut ARSOF structure⁴, ARSOF doctrine barely mentions LSCO, Army publications barely mention SOF and just over half (63%) of major CF training events in the last three years include ARSOF. This research paper seeks to determine how ARSOF can best support the CF Army to win in a large-scale conflict and why gaps currently exist in building lethality and cohesion between the CF and ARSOF. This document will describe the current national security threat environment relevant to LSCO/MDO, explore current Army doctrine, analyze Army University Press publications and review Army Combat Training Center rotations. Additionally, this research will include interviews with 8 Army Senior Leaders to assess how they see Army CF and SOF integration during LSCO/MDO against an adversary like the PRC. These interviews will gather perspectives from active CF and ARSOF Senior Leaders on how Army SOF can best support CF during LSCO/MDO. Finally, this paper will make recommendations on

² Cooper, Helene. *New Vehicles, Face Paint and a 1,200-Foot Fall: The U.S. Army Prepares for War With China*. New York Times. October 2024. [The U.S. Army Prepares for War With China: New Vehicles, Face Paint and a 1,200-Foot Fall - The New York Times](#)

³ HQs, Department of the Army. The US Army’s Vision and Strategy. March 2025. [The Army's Vision and Strategy | The United States Army](#)

⁴ South, Todd. Personnel Cuts and Force Redesign ahead for Army Special Operations. The Army Times. November 2023. [Personnel cuts and force redesign ahead for Army special operations](#)

ARSOF most valuable role in supporting the CF in LSCO and the changes to doctrine, training, command relationships and education if diplomacy and deterrence fail.

The Current Environment: Evolution of Domains and Movement to Conflict

Since 2022, the DoD has shifted focus to the pacing and acute threats of the PRC and Russia⁵. The PRC increases military capacity⁶ and Russia learns daily fighting across multiple domains in their ongoing war in Ukraine. The US National Security Strategy of 2022 called for the DoD to modernize. During the two decades of the Global War on Terror, the US military fell behind in preparing, training, and equipping to deal with a near peer state adversary^{7/8}. Adversaries like China and Russia have robust Anti-Access Area Denial (A2AD) systems, sizable militaries, technologically advanced weapons and robust intelligence capabilities. Not since the Soviet Union during the Cold War has the United States militarily faced an adversary that has equal capability in firepower, protection, maneuver, intelligence, and information. Both China and Russia possess advanced nuclear weapons, hypersonic missiles, advanced drone technology, offensive cyberwarfare capability, space-based military assets and an armed force of over 1 million service members respectively. The DoD is now focusing on *Integrated Deterrence* but emphasizes that the US military must prevail in conflict, when necessary, against the PRC and Russia.⁹

⁵ Biden, Joseph R. 2022 *NSS of the United States*- Page 21. The White House. October 2022. [Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf](#)

⁶ Garamone, Jim. *DOD Report Details Chinese Efforts to Build Military Power*. DoD News. United States Department of Defense. October 2023. [DOD Report Details Chinese Efforts to Build Military Power > U.S. Department of Defense > Defense Department News](#)

⁷ Congressional Research Service. *Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress*. November 2022. [93.pdf \(SECURED\)](#)

⁸ Biden, Joseph R. 2022 *NSS of the United States*- Page 20. The White House. October 2022. [Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf](#)

⁹ Austin, Lloyd J. 2022 *National Defense Strategy of the United States*, Page 7. United States Department of Defense. October 2022. [2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.pdf \(SECURED\)](#)

*The military will act urgently to sustain and strengthen deterrence, **with the PRC as its pacing challenge**. We will make disciplined choices regarding our national defense and focus our attention on the military's primary responsibilities: to defend the homeland, and deter attacks and aggression against the United States, our allies and partners, while being prepared to fight and win the Nation's wars should diplomacy and deterrence fail.*(2022 NSS Pg. 20) ***Emphasis added**

"A combat-credible military is the foundation of deterrence and America's ability to prevail in conflict. We will modernize the joint force to be lethal, resilient, sustainable, survivable, agile, and responsive, prioritizing operational concepts and updated warfighting capabilities." (2022 NSS Pg. 21)

It has been over 2 years since the National Defense Strategy charged US military leaders to develop new operational concepts and enhance future warfighting capabilities to build enduring advantages in our technological edge and Joint Force combat credibility¹⁰. The US Army has taken this guidance and shifted focus to MDO against an adversary like China¹¹. Unlike Violent Extremist or Terrorist Organizations, adversaries like China and Russia have militarized capability across the five domains of Sea, Air, Land, Space and Cyberspace.¹² The US has not encountered an advanced state military adversary who can employ or challenge US dominance in those domains¹³. But what do the domains of MDO mean and how are they significant today? How do those domains relate to Large Scale Combat Operations? What role do Conventional Forces of the Army have in this conflict, and how can Army Special Operations help?

¹⁰ Austin, Lloyd J. 2022 *National Defense Strategy of the United States*, Page 10. United States Department of Defense. October 2022. [2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.pdf \(SECURED\)](#)

¹¹ Cooper, Helene. *New Vehicles, Face Paint and a 1,200-Foot Fall: The U.S. Army Prepares for War With China*. New York Times. October 2024. [The U.S. Army Prepares for War With China: New Vehicles, Face Paint and a 1,200-Foot Fall - The New York Times](#)

¹² McCall, Stephen M. Space as a Warfighting Domain: Issues for Congress. Congressional Research Service. August 2021. [JF11895.pdf \(SECURED\)](#)

¹³ Wallace, GEN William S. Multi-Domain Operations in Context. THE LANDPOWER ESSAY SERIES. Association of the United States Army. April 2020. [LPE-20-4-Multi-Domain-Operations-in-Context.pdf](#)

Review of Doctrine: LSCO, MDO and ARSOFs role.

It may be useful to frame both Large-Scale Combat Operations and Multi Domain Operations in the context of Ends, Ways and Means originally framed by COL Arthur Lykee back in 1989¹⁴. Lykee posits that the **Ends** are the objectives or goals one strives to achieve. The **Ways** are the courses of action taken to achieve those objectives. The **Means** are the resources or instruments used to execute the strategy. In preparing for deterrence or combat against the PRC and Russia, the **Ends** are given to the US Army by the National Security Strategy: *deterrence first, prevail in conflict second*. The **Ways** are Large-Scale Combat Operations. The **Means** are Multi-Domain Operations. While there are many “Ways” that the PRC or Russia could choose to challenge the US militarily, LSCO, specifically Large-Scale Ground Combat is the highest risk situation that the US Army is able to plan against.

Large Scale Combat Operations (The “ways”)

Large Scale Ground Combat occurs when the highest level of national interest requires it. When the stakes are the highest and all other means of national power across diplomacy, information, military and the economy have not been able to secure a vital interest of the United States, Large Scale Ground Combat stands as an option at the upper limit of conventional military options. The goal of Large-Scale Ground Combat Operations is to use overwhelming military power to return an adversary's political engagement to diplomacy instead of organized violence.

¹⁴ Lykee, COL Arthur F. Military Strategy. Military Review. May 1989. [75th-Lykke.pdf](#)

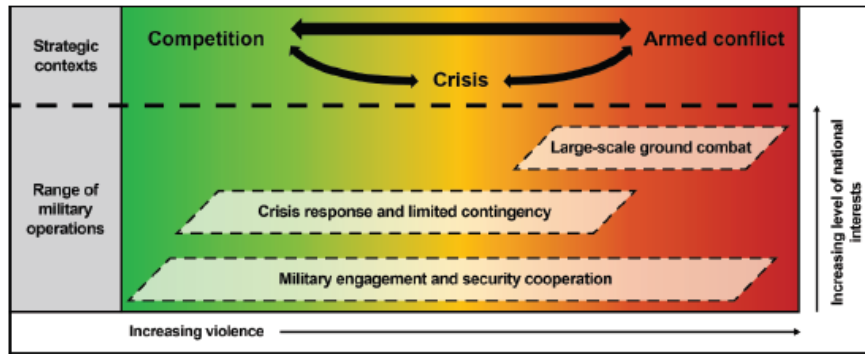


Figure 1-3. Army strategic contexts and operational categories

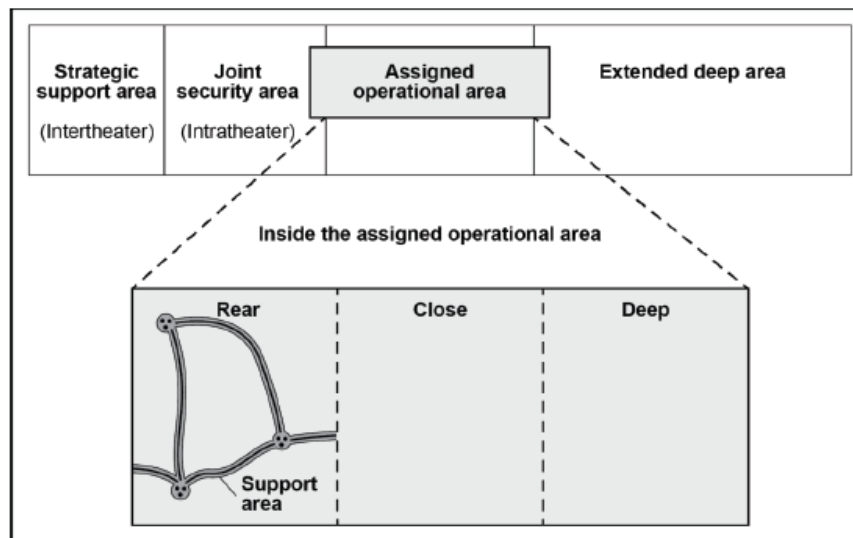


Figure 3-2. The operational framework in the context of the strategic framework

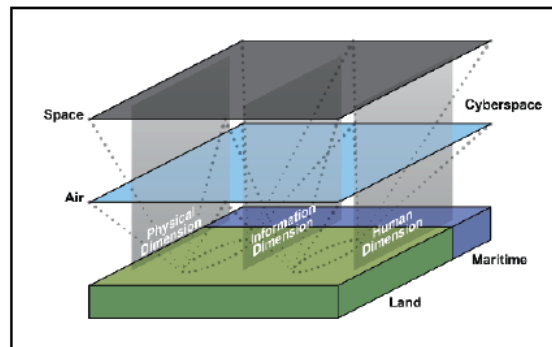
Multi Domain Operations (The “means”)

If LSCO is a “way” that the Army will have to fight, MDO are the “means”, or resources that will be used to fight in the environment of large-scale combat. While inherently a joint concept, the Army plans to fight advanced adversaries on the land leveraging capability in all five of the warfighting domains: Sea, Air, Land, Space and Cyberspace. Those five domains occur in three dimensions: Physical, Human and Virtual. Multidomain operations require integration of Army and joint capabilities from all domains to defeat the enemy’s integrated fires complexes and air defense systems so that maneuver forces can exploit the resulting freedom of action. If LSCO is “what” the Army will be required to do as part of the Joint warfighting force,

MDO is “how” it will fight to integrate critical resources across all military services to create an enduring advantage against an adversary who will compete or contest US presence in all five domains. While the Army does not play to fight adversaries at sea or in space, they plan to leverage joint warfighting capabilities that need to be present in those domains. Based on the experiences during the Global War on Terror, ARSOF has extensive experience in Multi-Domain Operations. ARSOF members in forward conflict areas provide a terrestrial link to space-based satellite collection and cyber based access that can exploit adversary networks and enable deep-sensing, long range joint fires. Army Field Manual 3-0 (Operations-2022) graphically depicts Multi-domain Operations below:

Multidomain operations:
The combined arms employment of joint and Army capabilities to create and exploit relative advantages that achieve objectives, defeat enemy forces, and consolidate gains on behalf of joint force commanders.

Army forces conduct multidomain operations throughout an operational environment that consists of 5 domains and 3 dimensions



Army Special Operations in LSCO/MDO Doctrine

ARSOF are organized, trained, and equipped to conduct special operations. These forces include Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations, Rangers, Special Forces, Special Mission Units, and Army special operations aviation forces assigned to the United States Army Special Operations Command (Airborne). Both FM 3-0 (2022) and ADP 3-0 (2019) include Special Operations employment, specifically during Deep operations. In a high intensity armed conflict scenario like LSCO, CF will be the supported element as ARSOF fills a supporting role. ARSOF

can enhance the effectiveness of conventional forces through various special operations activities, creating temporal effects and enabling Army Corps to achieve operational convergence and support Army Division shaping efforts.

ARSOF in Deep Area Operations

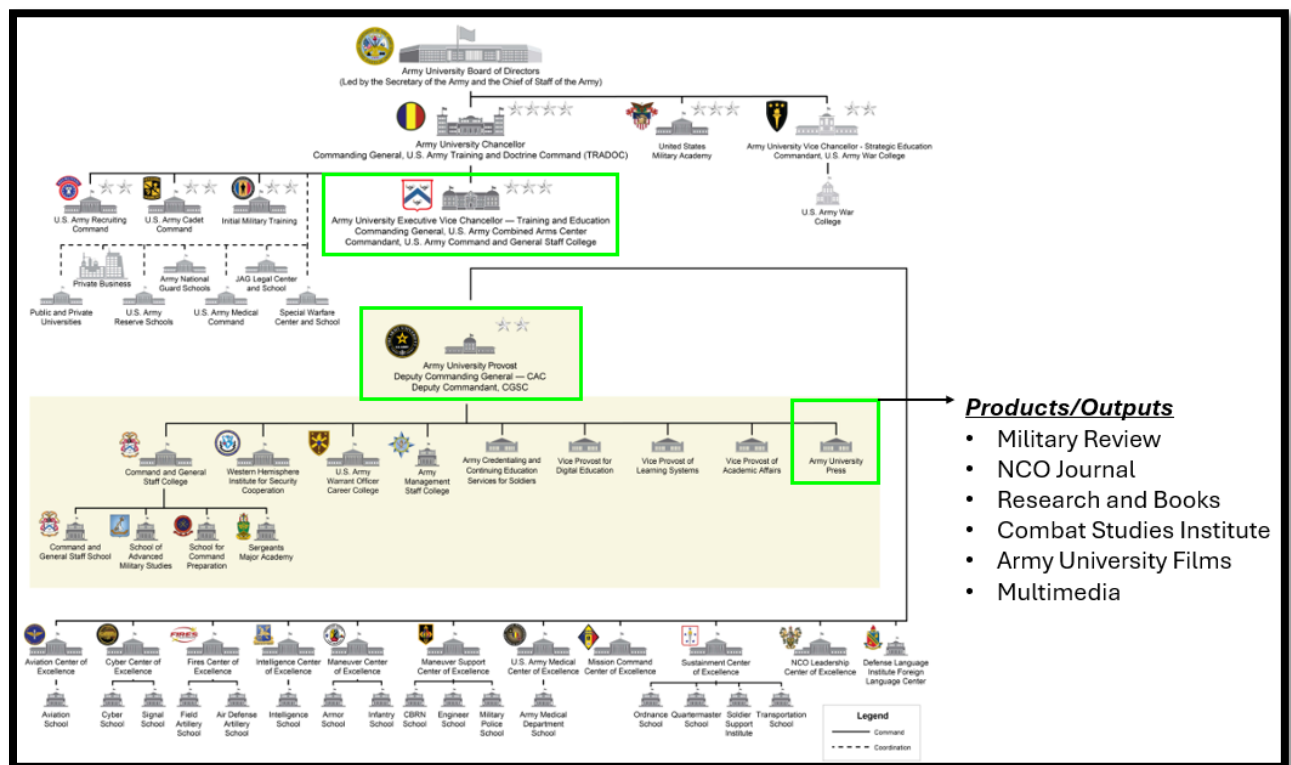
While SOF can support the Conventional Force in the Close and Rear areas, ARSOF is particularly well suited to support the Conventional Force in the Deep area. Deep area operations can occur inside and outside the assigned operational area of a division or corps, which comprises the operational and strategic deep areas. In the deep fight, Special Forces provide the Army and joint force with a physical presence in areas normally denied or beyond the reach of other conventional ground forces. The *deep area* is where the Conventional Force commander sets conditions for future success in close combat. Operations in the deep area involve efforts to prevent uncommitted enemy forces from being committed in a coherent manner. Operations in the deep area might disrupt the movement of operational reserves or prevent enemy forces from employing long-range fires. The principal effects of deep operations focus on an enemy force's freedom of action and the coherence and tempo of their operations. Deep operations strike enemy forces throughout their depth and prevent the effective employment of reserves, C2 nodes, logistics, and long-range fires. Deep operations focus on the enemy vulnerabilities and capabilities most dangerous to the next close operation for a given Conventional Force corps or division. The value of ARSOF employment in the deep area is to support a JTF, corps or division commander to degrade enemy combat power by disrupting the ability to command or coordinate enemy combined arms maneuver, defense, logistics or communications.

ARSOF support to CF Examples

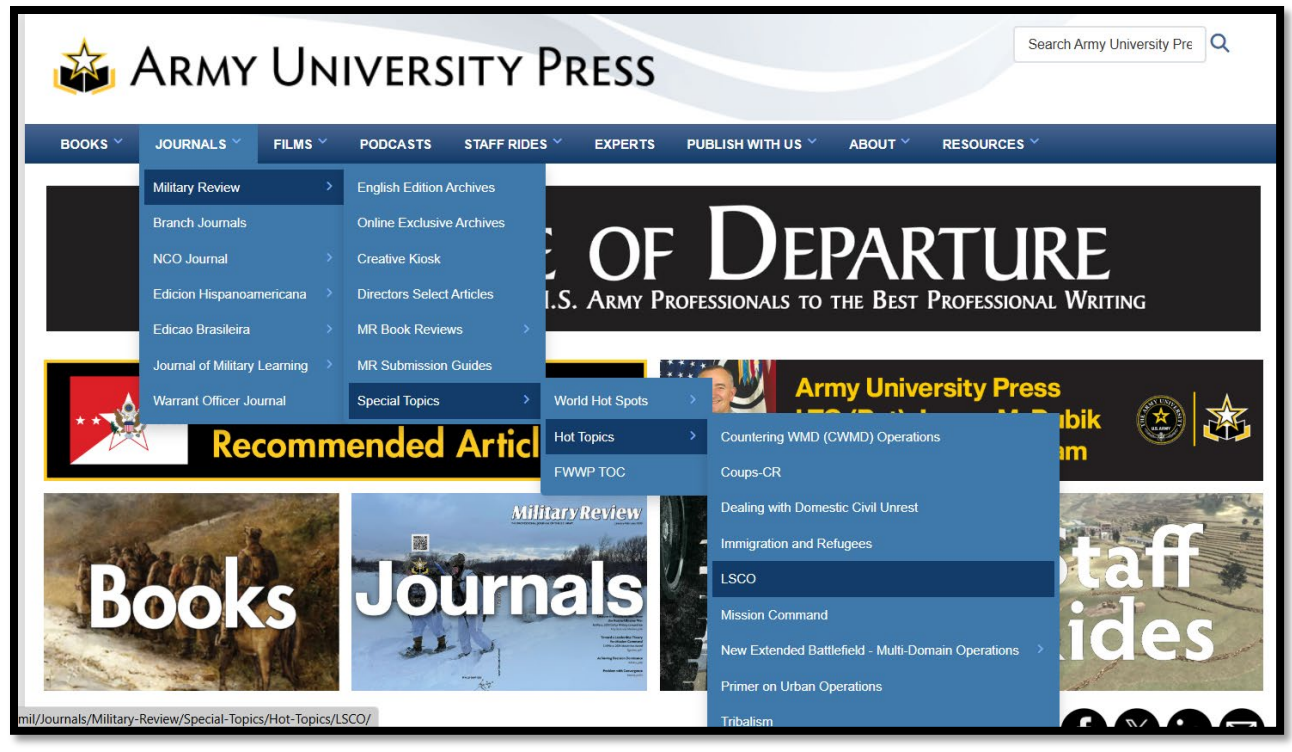
While still in draft, FM 3-05 (Special Operations - 2025) increases focus on LSCO/MDO compared to the 2019 version. The following are examples of how ARSOF can support the CF in a LSCO scenario described in that doctrine. ARSOF Special Mission Units can penetrate deep into enemy territory of the Deep area for a limited duration to neutralize select A2AD radar to enable Airborne or Air Assault movement of Conventional Forces into a Close area objective previously considered denied. ARSOF can support the CF commanders with deep sensing via partial low earth orbit satellite communications with indigenous forces. ARSOF can proliferate communication capability and commercially procured drones to support networks behind enemy lines who identify enemy formations and key infrastructure for CF and Joint Fires. ARSOF also enables CF commanders by determining enemy vulnerabilities outside the operational area to strike, sabotage or disrupt. Unique ARSOF authorities and capabilities can leverage cyber tools to access horizontal intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance by exploiting networks, turning any IP based camera on active networks into a sensor for a commander to understand the battlefield. Open-Source Intelligence and cyber authorities allow ARSOF to leverage publicly available information. As every tweet, post and social media action occurs in real time, ARSOF can provide situational awareness to CF commanders who may not be able to access space-based intelligence collection assets.

Beyond Doctrine: ARSOF Absence from Army University Press

Army doctrine explains the critical role of CF and the supporting role of ARSOF in LSCO and MDO. The Army University Press (AUP) is a part of the Army University Enterprise under Training and Doctrine Command and is the nation's premier military service press and publisher of choice for Army leaders¹⁵. The Army University Press is tasked to lead, educate, and influence thinking and intellectual engagement within the military professional community by advancing insights and ideas military professionals need to succeed.



¹⁵ Foley, David C. BG. The Army University Strategy. The Army University. December 2023.
[2023 Army University Strategy Final.pdf](#)



(Above: Screenshot of LSCO/MDO resources on Army University Press)

Various publications through the Army University Press contain unclassified Army professional articles. These articles are written by field grade to general officers and explain how the Army should prepare to fight LSCO and MDO. While these resources are not doctrine, they reflect how current leaders envision the training, resources and application of the National Security Strategy and doctrine. In an analysis of 14 published articles and 9 books on Large Scale Combat Operations found via the Army University Press, Military Review, and Aviation Magazine, discussion on how Special Operations could or should be employed in MDO/LSCO is only mentioned sparingly.

In 14 published articles and 96 pages of content from Military Review and Aviation Magazine on LSCO, Special Operations is not mentioned. These 14 articles include those written by Army CF senior leaders on how the Army will fight and align in the future LSCO/MDO fight. In the 9-book series published by the US Army Combined Arms Center, only three books

mention SOF in LSCO. While these books are reviews of historical anecdotes of Large-Scale Combat, all of them are written to provide historical examples of LSCO and how lessons should be applied to the future MDO/LSCO fight. One dedicated publication titled “*The Competitive Advantage: Special Operations Forces in Large-Scale Combat Operations*” is written by 3 primary authors, all of whom are former Special Forces soldiers. In 2239 pages of content, *The Competitive Advantage* is 279 pages, and those examples include 12 historical vignettes. 11 of those vignettes include SOF in LSCO when conflict existed in 2 or 3 domains: Sea, Air and Land. The vignettes, while historically valuable, do not provide useful examples of how ARSOF can provide an enduring advantage to the CF in LSCO/MDO in the future against an adversary like China.

Analysis of Training: CF-SOF integration at Army Combat Training Centers

The US Army Combat Training Center Directorate (CTCD) is a subordinate directorate of the US Army Combined Arms Center. It facilitates the validation, administration, and integration of the Army's Combat Training Center (CTC) program. The CTC Program leads the Army's transition to Unified Land Operations as described in ADP 3-0. The CTCs are the engine of change for collective training in the Army. The US Army Combat Training Center Directorate is responsible for 3 maneuver Combat Training Centers: Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC- Louisiana), National Training Center (NTC- California) and Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC- Germany). An analysis of the US based training centers of JRTC and NTC rotations between November 2022 and current day (March 2025) assessed frequency and integration of CF and ARSOF in LSCO/MDO training events. This analysis also included Army Warfighter Exercises. Warfighter Exercises are distributed, simulation driven, multi-echelon tactical exercise in which a division or corps is placed against a live, free-thinking adversary in a staff centric (usually without maneuver forces involved) exercise.

In FY 2023, there were 16 CF exercises (15 Brigade / 1 Division) and ARSOF was integrated in 11 (69%), including the division exercise. There were 4 Warfighter exercises, and ARSOF was integrated in 1.

In FY 2024, there were 17 CF exercises (17 Brigade / 1 Division) and ARSOF was integrated in 10 (59%), to include the division exercise. Of note, 7th Special Forces Group conducted the first ARSOF only LSCO/MDO training exercise at JRTC this year. There were 3 Warfighter exercises, and ARSOF was incorporated in 1.

Thus far in 2025, there have been 5 CF exercises (4 Brigade / 1 Division) and ARSOF was integrated in 4 (80%), including the Division exercise. There was 1 Warfighter exercise and ARSOF was integrated.

One observation to note in this analysis is that the average participation of ARSOF units at JRTC and NTC was 1 Company Headquarters and 3 Operational Detachments of Army Special Forces. ARSOF participated in a total of 4 out of 48 JRTC or NTC rotations with a battalion headquarters. In summary, ARSOF and CF integrated in 24 of 38 exercises (63%) at the brigade and division level from November 2022 to March 2025. When incorporating corps level Warfighter exercises, ARSOF and CF integrated in 27 of 48 exercises (56%). A closer analysis of the size and leadership investment in ARSOF participation in division and brigade level exercises appears to be low. While the CF units are sending large formations and headquarters to these training centers, ARSOF has sent small units of action to integrate.

Interviews to understand gaps between CF-SOF in LSCO/MDO

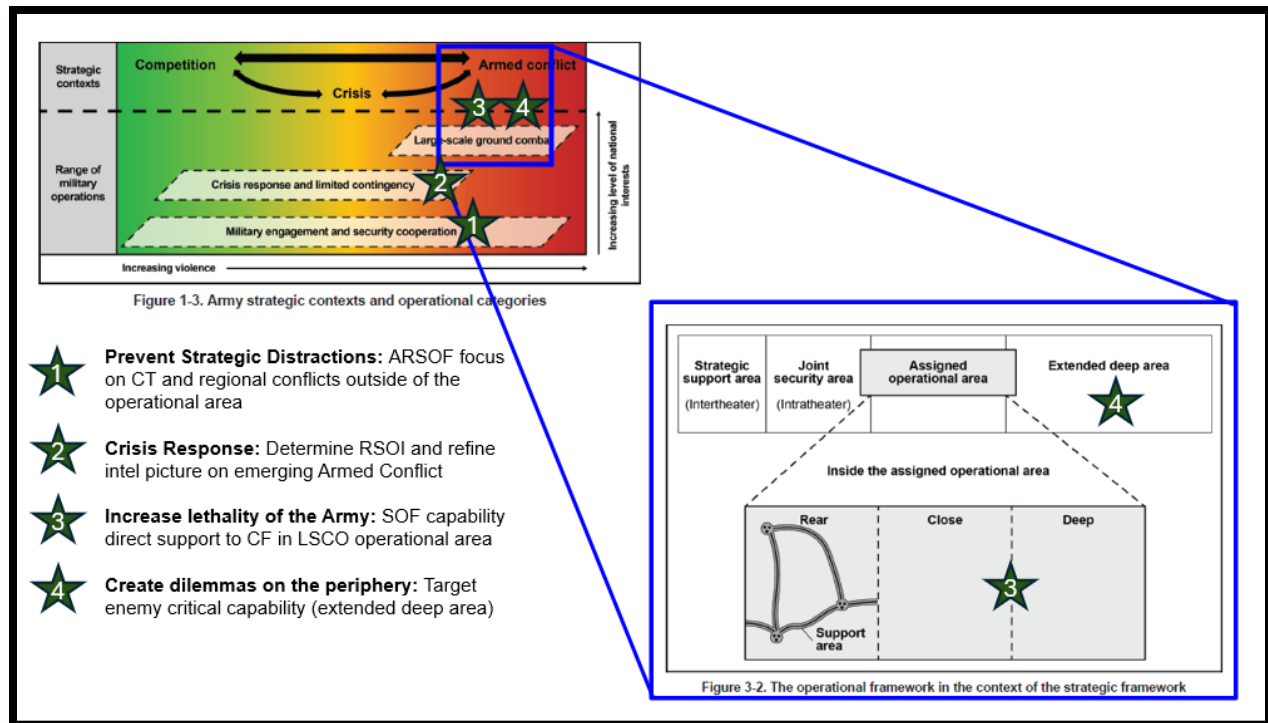
Four ARSOF and four CF senior leaders were interviewed to identify gaps in operational concepts and training between CF and ARSOF in Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) and Multi-Domain Operations (MDO). The interviews aimed to: (1) assess alignment between Army CF and ARSOF leaders regarding ARSOF's role in LSCO/MDO and (2) gather insights on doctrine, education, training, and command relationships. Leaders received the four interview questions 24 hours in advance.

Senior Leader Interview Population Breakdown		
	ARSOF	Army CF
O-10 (General)		1
O-9 (Lieutenant General)	1	
O-8 (Major General)	1	1
O-7 (Brigadier General)	1	1
O-6 (BG Sel)	1	1

The questions evaluated alignment on how ARSOF should support CF during LSCO/MDO. Question 1 asked which ARSOF mission is most important in LSCO/MDO. Question 2 assessed resource sufficiency. Question 3 focused on current CF-SOF integration. Question 4 asked whether improvements are needed in doctrine, training, education or command relationships.

Question 1: ARSOF's Most Valuable Role

There was no unanimous agreement among leaders on ARSOF's top mission. Notably, all leaders either ranked "increasing CF lethality in the Close/Deep area" as most valuable or least valuable—none ranked it second or third. This mission places ARSOF directly within the operational area in warfighting support of CF.



Question 2: ARSOF Resourcing

Most leaders agreed that ARSOF currently has adequate resources for its missions. However, potential shortfalls in areas like intelligence, unmanned systems, and logistics were identified, especially if ARSOF is to support CF lethality in LSCO/MDO's Close and Deep fight.

Question 3: Integration of ARSOF and CF

The majority indicated that ARSOF-CF integration at home stations and in training exercises needs improvement. Though recent integration has improved, it remains insufficient. CF leaders from mechanized divisions noted the lack of SOF participation above the company level in their training over the past year. Five of the eight leaders cited division and corps-level Warfighter Exercises as where integration is most needed, especially for staff to understand ARSOF capabilities.

Three CF leaders voiced dissatisfaction with ARSOF's limited involvement in LSCO/MDO training, citing marginal participation and inadequate leadership representation. Two ARSOF leaders noted that such exercises offer limited value to ARSOF due to unrealistic scenarios and conflicting deployment demands.

Question 4: Doctrine, Training, Education, and Command Relationships

There was a consensus that all four areas need improvement.

- *Doctrine:* While CF doctrine (FM 3-0, ADP 3-0) effectively addresses LSCO and MDO, ARSOF doctrine lags. ADP 3-05 (2019) scarcely mentions LSCO, with just 3 out of 108 pages addressing it, and lacks discussion on ARSOF roles in operational areas. The updated FM 3-05 (2025) provides more detail but is late and misaligned with CF doctrine.
- *Training:* Leaders highlighted a need for training above the brigade level, particularly in areas like unmanned systems protection, electronic signature management, intelligence fusion, and cyber capabilities. ARSOF leaders noted challenges in meeting integration demands due to forward deployments and force generation limitations.
- *Professional Military Education (PME):* CF leaders expressed concern that ARSOF's separate PME (e.g., ARSOF Captains Career Course, Naval Postgraduate School, Special Operations Sergeants Major Academy) hinders integration. Although not a primary focus of the research, this was cited as an area for further study.
- *Command Relationships:* All leaders agreed improvements are necessary. Multiple CF leaders emphasized the importance of gaining Operational Control (OPCON) of ARSOF in LSCO, allowing them to direct missions and assign tasks. Current doctrine does not support OPCON below the 3-star command level, which ARSOF leaders view cautiously.

to prevent misuse of forces. Experimentation during training was suggested to refine these relationships.

Assessment of ARSOF most valuable role in LSCO/MDO and Recommendations to Close the Gap

While there was no consensus between senior leaders on ARSOFs most valuable role to the CF in LSCO/MDO, it is my assessment based on this research that ARSOF can be best used in the Deep area supporting a CF division to achieve effects and maneuver in and through the Close area. This should be considered the main effort for ARSOF doctrine in LSCO/MDO. It is my assessment that ARSOFs most valuable role is to allow CF to continuously maneuver and prevent becoming static. If US Army Conventional Forces in LSCO/MDO become mired and slowed to a static condition like trench warfare, our adversaries in LSCO/MDO will be able to converge all their warfighting domains against the US and inflict significant casualties and deny operational objectives. These static conditions would present a risk to US strategic and political objectives during Large-Scale armed conflict. The speed, precision and synchronization of joint warfighting effects through the Close and Deep area will be the difference maker during LSCO/MDO that ARSOF should seek to enable.

While ARSOF can support CF in the Close area, that use may be an inappropriate use of a finite resource like SOF that does not bring overwhelming firepower and mass. That is not to say that ARSOF should not be involved in the Close area. If CF require it, ARSOF can advise and integrate capability in the Close or Rear areas as required by a division or corps. ARSOF operations on the periphery of the LSCO assigned area of operations should be considered a supporting effort. Crisis response and preventing strategic distractions like managing global terrorism should be considered supporting efforts of a lower priority if an active LSCO/MDO conflict is eminent or ongoing.

Based on research conducted and interviews with senior leaders, the following are 11 recommendations across doctrine, training, professional military education, and command relationships to close the gaps identified between CF-SOF in supporting the CF in LSCO/MDO.

Doctrine: ARSOF doctrine needs to be more responsive to CF doctrine development, ARSOF leaders need to be more involved in publishing novel operational concepts and ARSOF roles in the Rear, Close and Deep should be added into FM 3-0 updates.

1. **Synchronize and respond to CF doctrine faster.** ADP 3-0 published in 2019 was the first modern doctrine to publish SOF roles in LSCO. That same year, FM 3-05 was published with little consideration to ARSOF in LSCO. Waiting 6 years (2019-2025) to publish and update to FM 3-05 that specifies ARSOF potential roles in the Rear, Close and Deep is not an agile response to such a significant task.
2. **ARSOF leaders publish operational concepts in LSCO/MDO.** While not doctrine, ARSOF leaders at the field grade level and above should make greater efforts to publish operational concepts on ARSOF support to CF in LSCO as part of Command General Staff College.
3. **Add ARSOF role in LSCO to FM 3-0 (Operations).** This publication is Army CF doctrine and what CF leaders read. Detailed and long revisions of FM 3-05 (Army Special Operations) to focus on the wide role of ARSOF may create a barrier for CF leaders to read and understand.
4. **Define Command Relationship during LSCO.** If changes are made to CF-SOF COMREL based on training and experimentation during LSCO/MDO, these changes need to be reflected in FM 6-05, and have it reflected in subsequent Army and Joint Doctrine (FM 3-0, JP 3, JP 1)

Training: SOCOM via Theater Special Operations Commands and Geographic Combatant Commander should reduce the deployment requirements for ARSOF Battalion HQs to allow

increased capability to train and experiment with CF. While ARSOF units of action will likely continue to be in demand across Combatant Commands as part of Integrated Deterrence, Battalion HQs have been absent in the vast majority of CTC rotations since 2022. ARSOF units of action need to accept and understand that increased CTC rotations in conjunction with CF units in LSCO/MDO scenarios are as much about training integration of CF/ARSOF as it is with SOF tactical task training.

5. **BDE level CTC Rotations** – 50% of CF LSCO/MDO CTC rotations through JRTC and NTC (approximately 15 per year) should include at a minimum: ARSOF tactical battalion representation, a full company headquarters and three maneuver units (platoons or detachments)
6. **Division level CTC Rotations** – 100% of CF LSCO/MDO CTC rotations through JRTC and NTC (1 per year) should include a full ARSOF battalion headquarters, two company headquarters and four maneuver units (platoons or detachments)
7. **Warfighter Exercises** – 75% of WFX should be supported by an ARSOF O-6 HQs and General Officer Headquarters. While these exercises are typically Command Post Exercises that do not involve significant amounts of ARSOF units of action, increased participation at the O-6 level of ARSOF should occur. These exercises provide the opportunity to test and validate CF corps and division ability to employ COMREL changes described below.

Professional Military Education: As the integration between ARSOF and CF in LSCO/MDO scenarios requires closer coordination and understanding, Professional Military Education integration should be reviewed between ARSOF and the CF.

8. **Review ARSOF PME courses and the cost/benefit of continued separation.** Based on this research, I recommend that three levels of education be reviewed: Company Grade (Captains Career Course), Field Grade (CGSC and NPS), and Senior Leader

(Sergeants Major and War College). While not covered in this research project, there may be value in evaluating increased co-curriculum or full integration of ARSOF leaders into CF Professional Military Education.

Command Relationships: Experiment and define command/support relationships between ARSOF and CF based on time/location during LSCO/MDO.

9. **Crisis to Conflict:** test and determine appropriate OPLAN with ARSOF (Supporting/Supported) forward presence as CFs mobilize and respond to impending LSCO/MDO situation in CTC rotations.
10. **Extended Deep Area:** test ARSOF (OPCON/TACON/Support) to JTF Commander when ARSOF is tasked to degrade enemy capability on the periphery through JCS Exercises and Warfighters.
11. **Assigned Operational Area (Rear, Close and Deep):** test ARSOF OPCON to CF corps or divisions during division level CTC rotations and Warfighter exercises. As the corps and division are the key maneuver units in LSCO/MDO, I would recommend that OPCON of ARSOF be limited to the division level at the lowest.
 - a. Senior Army CF commanders will need to understand and leverage ARSOF unique authorities (Cyber, Operational Preparation of the Environment, highly classified intelligence)

Conclusion

The US military has pivoted from two decades of counter terrorism and stability operations to preparing for the drastically different situation of Large-Scale Combat Operations. The strategic framework outlined in the 2022 National Security Strategy describes the ends for the US military in regard to China and Russia: to deter if possible, then to win in conflict. Should deterrence fail, LSCO is one of the most dangerous ways that the US military could confront China and Russia. The means that the US military will use against those adversaries will be Multi-Domain Operations. To ensure an enduring advantage against China or Russia, the US Army will need to employ all its core competencies to maximize Multi-Domain Operations. It is my assessment that ARSOF can be best used in the Deep area supporting a CF division to achieve effects and maneuver in and through the Close area to ensure CFs maintain movement and maneuver through the Operational Area. While gaps do exist today between Army Special Operations Forces and Conventional Force Army in Large Scale Combat Operations and Multi Domain Operations, those gaps are not insurmountable. While exploring doctrine, Army publications and interviewing Army senior leaders, most of these gaps are not intentional. Instead, shortfalls in doctrine, training, education and command relationships have created cracks between the Conventional Force Army and Special Operations during the 20-year Global War on Terror. These cracks have grown over 2 decades into the gaps they are today. Persistent demand for SOF in general, and ARSOF in specific to support Integrated Deterrence has made it a challenge for ARSOF to give the needed level of attention and focus to training. Over 3000 ARSOF soldiers remain persistently deployed across 80 countries. As the US Army prepares for the ominous situation of armed conflict with another Great Power, an opportunity arises to close those gaps through the 11 recommendations above to bring Army Special Operations and the Conventional Force closer than ever.

Additional Resources:

1. Rainey, GEN Jim E. and Dr. James K. Greer. *Landpower and the Air-Ground Littoral*. Army Aviation Magazine. December 2023. [Home | Army Aviation Magazine](#).
2. Arnold, MAJ Thomas and MAJ Nicolas Fiore. *Five Operational Lessons from the Battle of Mosul*. Military Review. February 2019. [Military Review](#).
3. Beagle, LTG Milford. *Disruption is Key to Delivering the Army of 20xx*. Military Review. February 2024. [Military Review](#).
4. Fiore, MAJ Nicolas. *The 2003 Battle of Baghdad: A Case Study of Urban Battle during Large-Scale Combat Operations*. Military Review. October 2020. [Military Review](#).
5. Fogg, MG Rodney D. and LTC William C. Latham. *Risky Business: Commercial Support for Large-Scale Combat Operations*. Military Review. August 2019. [Military Review](#).
6. Gingrich, MAJ Dana M. *Do Large-Scale Combat Operations Require a New Type of Leader?* Military Review. October 2019. [Military Review](#).
7. Jackson, LTC F. Cameron. *Don't Get Wounded: Military Health System and the Risk to Readiness*. Military Review. October 2019. [Military Review](#).
8. Strong, BG Eric and MAJ Brett Reichert. *Restructuring the Division Command Post in Large-Scale Ground Combat*. Military Review. June 2021. [Military Review](#).
9. Lundy, LTG Mike, COL Richard Creed, COL Nate Springer and LTC Scott Pence. *Three Perspectives on Consolidating Gains*. Military Review. October 2019. [Military Review](#).
10. Simmering, COL Michael J. *Working to Master Large Scale Combat Operations: Recommendations for Commanders to Consider during Home Station Training*. Military Review. June 2020. [Military Review](#).
11. Smith, Maj. Jeremy. *Leadership during Large-Scale Combat Operations*. Military Review. February 2020. [Military Review](#).
12. Rainey, GEN James E. and GEN Gary M. Brito. *Sustaining Our People Advantage in Data-Centric Warfare*. Military Review. March 2024. [Military Review](#).
13. Rainey, GEN James E. *Continuous Transformation: Transformation in Contact*. Military Review. August 2024. [Military Review](#).
14. Townsend, GEN Stephen J. *Accelerating Multi-Domain Operations: Evolution of an Idea*. Military Review. October 2018. [Military Review](#).
15. Rein, Dr. Christopher M. *Weaving the Tangled Web: Military Deception in Large-Scale Combat Operations*. Army University Press. October 2018. [Large-Scale Combat Operations Book Set](#)
16. Schifferle, Peter J. *Bringing Order to Chaos: Historical Case Studies of Combined Arms Maneuver in Large-Scale Combat Operations*. Army University Press. October 2018. [Large-Scale Combat Operations Book Set](#)
17. Bradbeer, Thomas G. *Lethal and Non-Lethal Fires: Historical Case Studies of Converging Cross-Domain Fires in Large-Scale Combat Operations*. Army University Press. September 2018. [Large-Scale Combat Operations Book Set](#)
18. Beurskens, Keith R. *The Long Haul: Historical Case Studies of Sustainment in Large-Scale Combat Operations*. Army University Press. September 2018. [Large-Scale Combat Operations Book Set](#)
19. Kem, Jack D. *Deep Maneuver: Historical Case Studies of Maneuver in Large-Scale Combat Operations*. Army University Press. September 2018. [Large-Scale Combat Operations Book Set](#)
20. Waitl, Florian L. *Into the Breach: Historical Case Studies of Mobility Operations in Large-Scale Combat Operations*. Army University Press. September 2018. [Large-Scale Combat Operations Book Set](#)

21. Vertuli, COL Mark D. and LTC Bradley S. Loudon. *Perceptions Are Reality: Historical Case Studies of Information Operations in Large-Scale Combat Operations*. Army University Press. September 2018. [Large-Scale Combat Operations Book Set](#)
22. Toguchi, Robert M. and Michael E. Krivdo. *The Competitive Advantage: Special Operations Forces in Large-Scale Combat Operations*. Army University Press. May 2019. [Large-Scale Combat Operations Book Set](#)