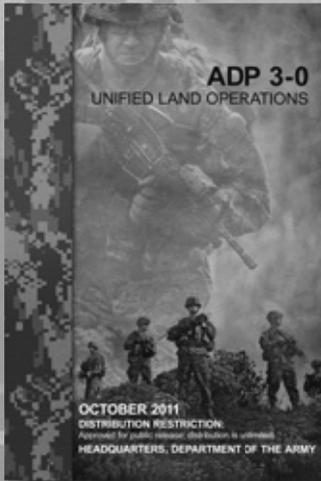


# The Missed Opportunity



## A Critique of ADP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*

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IN OCTOBER 2011, the Army unveiled Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, the replacement for FM 3-0, *Operations*. Under the Doctrine 2015 initiative, the new ADPs replace the traditional FMs with concise discussions of general principles of only 10 to 12 pages.<sup>1</sup> The reasoning behind the change is that doctrine should be useful and widely read, rather than gathering dust on the shelf. This makes ADP 1, *The Army*, and ADP 3-0, the two capstone manuals, particularly important; anyone seeking to understand the essence of the Army, how it is organized and how it operates, should be able to find the answer in a mere two dozen pages. That makes these ADPs the most important two dozen pages in the Army's doctrine. They are not just manuals, but opportunities for communicating a vision that should not be wasted.

This need is particularly pressing now, when the Army has to sort through a confusing mix of institutional crosscurrents. First, after 10 years of continuous operations, we need to take stock of our hard-won experience and identify the enduring lessons we need to codify in doctrine. Second, nobody expects the next decade to be much like the last, so we should not rely solely upon the accumulation of wartime experience. Soldiers everywhere recognize this fact, and they look to the institution for some indication of how to prepare for new challenges. Third, the adoption of modularity is the greatest organizational shift within the U.S. Army since the early 1960s. That it was accomplished in-stride while fighting two wars is an incredible feat, but doing so left us no time for contemplation. Now there is an opportunity to think about modularity's implications across the full spectrum of conflict and explain those implications to the force. Fourth, in a time of diminishing resources, it is important for doctrine to explain how the lessons of the past, the challenges of future, and the new force structure come together. There is no margin for wasted or misdirected effort.

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Image: ADP-3-0 *Unified Land Operations*, front cover

## The Role of the Army

Currently, the role of the Army is to *prevent*, *shape*, and *win*. The construct is sound, but, as always, the devil is in the details. Prevent, shape, and win would have been just as reasonable a response to the strategic environment of 2002 or even of 1992 as it is to the current environment. Yet, there are vast differences in the global posture, structure, and capabilities between the armies of 10 and 20 years ago and that of today. Doctrine should state how we can best employ the Army in its current configuration against present adversaries and challenges. As will be seen, the first pages of ADP 3-0 acknowledge that doctrine must address the contemporary context, not just timeless principles. However, the subsequent pages of *Unified Land Operations* fail to address key characteristics of today's operational environment—a complex battlefield rife with uncertainty, adaptive enemies using an array of hybrid capabilities, and a thinly stretched, but highly capable modular U.S. Army.

This is unfortunate. It has been at least half a century since there has been so much uncertainty about how to best use ground forces.<sup>2</sup> Soldiers intuitively understand the value of boots on the ground, but many now have a hard time envisioning how the Army will contribute to the joint fight over the next several years. At the beginning of his brief tenure

as chief of staff of the Army, General Martin E. Dempsey remarked that his transition team found a growing concern throughout the Army that we have lost our way.<sup>3</sup> The current chief of staff, General Raymond T. Odierno, acknowledged similar concerns in the December 2011 blog in which he introduced the prevent, shape, win construct.<sup>4</sup>

Naturally, these doubts are only magnified outside the Army. While no one seriously argues that armies are obsolete, there are many who doubt whether a dollar spent on ground forces will yield the same benefit as a dollar spent on air or naval forces. An influential study, appropriately titled *Hard Choices: Responsible Defense in an Age of Austerity*, makes this clear when it argues for overwhelmingly disproportionate cuts to ground forces to preserve naval and air forces that “will grow increasingly important in the future strategic environment.”<sup>5</sup>

These concerns are part of a larger tide of opinion that views the future as part of a new strategic era in which the Army's contributions to the joint effort will not be as self-evident as when it fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. Articulating the way forward will require more than “bumper sticker” generalities. It will require a vision for the use of land power. ADP 3-0 is the most logical place to look for such a vision.



(U.S. Army, Joseph Guenther)

Army paratroopers conduct a live fire exercise on Fort Bragg, NC, 5 December 2011.

## Naming of the Parts

Unfortunately, *Unified Land Operations* does not provide the necessary details. In content, it defaults to reasonable but timid generalities of little use to commanders and staff officers.<sup>6</sup> In organization, ADP 3-0 avoids nuanced discussion in favor of a numbing series of definitions, a taxonomy of operational functions and methods. This “naming of the parts” approach describes the components of unified land operations without ever conveying their essence. This fault is particularly inexcusable as the Doctrine 2015 format pairs each ADP with an accompanying Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) meant to capture important details that would otherwise detract from the discussion of fundamental principles in the ADP. *Unified Land Operations* is consumed by definitions that ought to be relegated to ADRP 3-0. The art and challenge of operations are not in identifying constituent elements but in orchestrating them in concert with each other. The current organization atomizes these parts and treats them in isolation, which is the worst possible method of conveying the complexity of land operations.

Conceptually, *Unified Land Operations* builds upon the last several decades of capstone doctrine. Its lineage traces back to AirLand Battle of the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> The most significant addition to this legacy is the acknowledgement that ground operations should take place in the larger joint and interagency context; this captures our experiences with the whole-of-government efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The most important new terminology is the introduction of two core competencies—combined arms maneuver and wide area security. Like integration, these terms reflect recent experiences; they also offer the possibility of a “grand unified theory” of operations that might connect two schools of thought, one urging a high-intensity, conventional warfare focus, the other urging a counterinsurgency focus. Unfortunately, because ADP 3-0 is organized into lists of definitions, it isolates concepts rather than explores how they interact; this only reinforces the divide between those who see operations as an either-or dichotomy between high-intensity and counterinsurgency warfare. The final noteworthy change is the substitution of *decisive action* for *full spectrum operations* as an all-encompassing descriptor of offensive, defensive, stability, and defense support to civil authorities.

***The problems of Unified Land Operations are most evident when it discusses integrating ground operations...***

The problems of *Unified Land Operations* are most evident when it discusses integrating ground operations into the whole-of-government effort. The concept is uncontroversial; we have a wealth of recent experience to draw upon, and the purpose of this particular manual is to describe how the Army contributes to the larger effort of unified action. With all of these factors favoring a substantive discussion, the actual passage describing integration is a great disappointment. I quote that paragraph here in full:

Army forces do not operate independently, but as a part of a larger joint, interagency, and frequently multinational effort. Army leaders are responsible for integrating Army operations within this larger effort. Integration involves efforts to exercise, inform, and influence activities with joint, interagency, and multinational partners as well as efforts to conform Army capabilities and plans to the larger concept. Army leaders seek to use Army capabilities to complement those of their joint, interagency, and multinational partners. These leaders depend on those partners to provide capabilities that supplement or are not organic to Army forces. Effective integration requires creating shared understanding and purpose through collaboration with all elements of the friendly force.<sup>8</sup>

While it is difficult to find fault with any of these statements, the content is so feeble that one could replace each instance of *Army* with some other service and the passage would be equally valid. Such timidity wastes the opportunity of a capstone manual to bridge joint and Army doctrine and to explain the Army’s capabilities, how it can best bring them to bear, and identify challenges in doing so. If capstone doctrine cannot provide such simple answers, it is little wonder that many feel that the institution of the Army is adrift.

## Conceptual Emptiness

The problem, however, is more than just a matter of style. The conceptual emptiness of *Unified Land Operations* suggests that the Army still lacks a compelling vision of how to operate in the next several years. One problem is the replacement of the term *full spectrum operations* with *decisive action*, even though the two are clearly not parallel in meaning. Full spectrum operations had many detractors, but at least the term communicated the intended concept. Without a doctrinal glossary, the casual reader would never guess that decisive action encompassed offensive, defensive, stability operations, and defense support to civil authorities. The Army is America's decisive force, but that does not mean that everything we do is decisive. Indeed, the term is so awkward that it is only rarely used within ADP 3-0, and it is completely absent from the section on operational art.<sup>9</sup>

Most readers will likely dismiss *decisive action* as nothing more than a buzzword meant to evoke a commendable aggressiveness and competence. This is a mistake. The term is an intellectual roadblock to determining what truly is decisive about land operations. The answer is certainly not everything. The concept is logically untenable, conflicts with joint and interagency practice, and does not accord with our recent experience of war.

One lesson of the last decade is that the nature of a conflict can make decisive action an impossible goal. If we truly believe that we cannot kill our way out of an insurgency, then we must logically accept that security operations are not decisive, and stability operations to increase governmental capacity are only a supporting effort.

The true decisive action in counterinsurgency is the reconciliation the host government brings about. To illustrate this point, imagine a perfect counterinsurgency campaign that neutralizes enemy combatants, increases the capability of host nation security forces, and improves the government and the economy. Yet rather than reconcile, the central government—dominated by a particular tribe, sect, or ethnic group—is so emboldened by its vastly improved security forces and temporarily prostrate enemy that it pursues a heavy-handed consolidation of power rather than the painful political concessions necessary for an enduring peace. These actions, in turn, perpetuate

the political, economic, and social inequities that caused the insurgency in the first place and, in the end, lengthen the conflict. In this hypothetical case, successful tactics and operations are actually counterproductive because they never had the capacity to be decisive in the first place. This conclusion is borne out by the alternative ending, in which wiser political leaders achieve a stable peace. Host nation political elites are the decisive actors, not the American forces.

In fact, decisive action sits uneasily with most of the ADP 3-0's stated roles for the Army, *to shape, influence, engage, deter, and prevail*.<sup>10</sup> Security force assistance is at the heart of shape, influence, and engage, and while important, it will only rarely be decisive in itself. Similarly, the relatively straightforward task of deterrence through forward-positioned troops is also not decisive, as demonstrated by nearly six decades of post-war presence in Korea. The Army excels in these missions, but they are not decisive. Indeed, we should take pride that the Army holds the line better than any other service, if for no other reason that in a time of austerity, holding the line will be an increasingly important strategic function.



U.S. Army LTC John E. Rhodes, right, commander of the United Nations Command Security Battalion-Joint Security Area, and his deputy, LTC Jung Hae-In, from the Republic of Korea Army, inspect operations during a joint evacuation exercise, Camp Bonifas, Republic of South Korea, 23 February 2009. (SSG Christophe Paul)

However, we should emphasize the decisive nature of *prevail* in the context of a high-intensity conflict. In that role the Army alone provides the potential for achieving a decision against an enemy powerful or determined enough to endure strikes by the world's most powerful air and naval forces. By diminishing the term *decisive*, ADP 3-0 avoids exploring the complex issue of how land operations contribute to the joint, interagency, and multinational effort. The passages cited above cheapen the Army's unique role as the indispensable service in winning wars.

Why ADP 3-0 does not address these issues is not clear. In its first pages, the manual declares that one of the functions of doctrine is to provide "a statement of how the Army intends to fight."<sup>11</sup> This would necessarily require some specific statement about how the Army of today can achieve our present strategic goals. But *Unified Land Operations* instead describes operations in vague ways that could apply to any expeditionary force at any time: "[Ground forces] seize, retain, and exploit the initiative to gain and maintain a position of relative advantage in sustained land operations in order to create the conditions for favorable conflict resolution executed through decisive action by means of Army core competencies guided by mission command."<sup>12</sup>

This is rephrased slightly differently elsewhere in the manual, but with much the same effect: "The foundation of unified land operations is built on initiative, decisive action, and mission command—linked and nested through purposeful and simultaneous execution of both combined arms maneuver and wide area security—to achieve the commander's intent and desired end state."<sup>13</sup> Both of these statements are so finely crafted as to have become completely untethered from context and, therefore, from substance. They say everything, yet they say nothing.

## Troubling Similarities

In the 1950s, the Army faced a similar situation when it had to drastically reduce defense budgets after a frustrating conflict (Korea) and the threat from a peer competitor (the Soviet Union) caused an identity crisis. Trying to stay relevant, the Army introduced the Pentomic organization, an ill-conceived, unworkable reaction to tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>14</sup> Although there is nothing in

*Unified Land Operations* so flawed as the Pentomic Era organization, there are several troubling similarities.

In the pages of this journal in 1960, Lieutenant Colonels Linwood A. Carleton and Frank A. Farnsworth warned that by seeking refuge in "generic terms" the Army was creating a false understanding of war. "Such generalities appeal to the imagination, but are of only limited practical value."<sup>15</sup> This criticism could apply to the passages cited in the previous paragraph.

By imagining that initiative, decisive action, and mission command have substance independent of a specific context, the Army risks developing doctrine that describes an imaginary world we desire rather than the one we have. This was, in fact, one of the implicit critiques of past doctrine raised in the 2009 Capstone Concept. It is a criticism we have chosen to ignore.<sup>16</sup>

A 1955 article by Colonel George A. Kelly contained another criticism that would be just as relevant today. Kelly found fault with the Army's tendency to provide only "a verbal solution" to real problems by taking refuge in "virtuous" and "magic" words such as "dispersion, flexibility, and mobility" without providing the necessary detail about how to achieve these traits.<sup>17</sup> This comes uncomfortably close to describing the operational tenets of ADP 3-0: flexibility, integration, lethality, adaptability, depth, and synchronization. Few would find fault with the concepts, but *Unified Land Operations* provides little useful guidance on how to achieve such obviously desirable traits. In addition, because ADP 3-0 presents a series of stove-piped definitions treating each subject in isolation, there is no potentially illuminating discussion of the tensions among the tenets. For instance, does the centralizing aspect of synchronization ever impair adaptability?

This article has harped on the lack of specificity throughout *Unified Land Operations*. Whether or not the case has been persuasive, the effort throughout has been to measure ADP 3-0 against its own standards, not some arbitrary personal notion of what doctrine should be. ADP 3-0's place within the hierarchy of Doctrine 2015 warrants high expectations. This critique weighs the discussion of integration against the manual's claim that it was the most significant addition to capstone doctrine. We must evaluate the term decisive action in terms of its suit-

ability as a descriptor for all land operations. This article weighs the claim that doctrine describes how the Army fights against the vague definitions of unified land operations and the operational tenets. But there are two final yardsticks specified within *Unified Land Operations* against which we should judge it.

The first is that doctrine should provide the “means of conceptualizing campaigns and operations, as well as a detailed understanding of conditions, frictions, and uncertainties that make achieving the ideal difficult.”<sup>18</sup> ADP 3-0 comes closest to this ideal in its brief three-paragraph discussion of the operational art, but this segment is too short to build much momentum. *Unified Land Operations* then reverts to type and provides us with four pages of lists under the heading of “the operations structure.” These topics are not fundamental principles, but descriptive tools: the operations process, the operational framework, and the warfighting functions. They provide the means for conceptualizing campaigns in the most basic sense, but they do not illuminate the conditions, frictions, and uncertainties inherent in war. Indeed, uncertainty was the central theme of the 2009 Capstone Concept, so its absence from ADP 3-0 is thus even more disappointing.<sup>19</sup> How can we discuss operations without discussing the fog and friction of war?

Yet even more glaring is the absence of the enemy. Although the opening review of the strategic context briefly identifies the nation’s two most challenging enemies as a nonstate entity able to attack our public will and a nuclear-armed state partnering with nonstate actors, after that passage there is no further mention of these—or any other—enemies.<sup>20</sup> A description of operations without either uncertainty or an adversary is a sterile vision of warfare. *Unified Land Operations* confuses conceptual tools used to describe operations with the operations themselves.

***Unified Land Operations confuses conceptual tools used to describe operations with the operations themselves.***

## Knowing Ourselves

Just as ADP 3-0 does not place operations in relation to the enemy, it also fails to place them in the context of the Army of 2012. This failure to speak to the present is particularly troublesome, as the Army is still working through the upheavals of modularity. While many of the new organizations have been tested in combat, those experiences represent only a limited portion of the spectrum of conflict and one that we do not anticipate revisiting in the near future. Thus, the best manner for using modular units might not be clear to joint task forces and land component commands. Some discussion of how modularity intersects with the new competencies of combined arms maneuver and wide area security, would be valuable. Sun Tzu said that the general who knows both himself and his enemy will “not be endangered in a hundred engagements,” yet our capstone doctrine has done nothing to foster collective professional knowledge of ourselves and our adversaries.<sup>21</sup>

According to ADP 3-0, “*capstone doctrine* [emphasis added] also serves as the basis for decisions about organization, training, leader development, Soldiers, and facilities.”<sup>22</sup> In an ideal world of linear processes, capstone doctrine would be the basis for other doctrine, as well as policies for equipping, manning, and training. In truth, not many engineers and force managers are waiting for the release of ADP 3-0 before they begin work. They often must make decisions long before the relevant doctrine appears. However, that does not mean that doctrine has no integrating function. Capstone doctrine is supposed to sort out and make sense of all the other disparate threads of organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, and facilities that shape the Army. It might be after the fact in terms of weapons procurement or force structure, but nonetheless, doctrine ought to suggest to commanders and staffs how to best use the capabilities of our forces. It also translates policy and strategic guidance into general guidelines for the employment of ground forces. ADP 3-0 is a great disappointment in this respect. It simply never engages with any of these issues.

The Army is understandably and commendably reluctant to tie the hands of commanders with overly prescriptive doctrine, but it is disingenuous to use this as an excuse for making doctrine nothing but definitions and generalities. In the process of allocating resources the Army has necessarily already made

difficult trade-offs that constrain commanders in such critical areas as which capabilities to place within brigade combat teams, the availability of enablers, the design characteristics to emphasize in vehicles and weapons, and where to allocate human capital. All of these trade-offs have operational implications. There is no better forum than ADP 3-0 for suggesting the most effective ways for commanders to take advantage of the resulting strengths and to mitigate resulting weaknesses. Rather than taking on this admittedly difficult task, *Unified Land Operations* confines itself to theoretical generalities that are so vague that they could just as well apply to the army of some other country or some other time in history. For instance, at what point have we not sought to achieve a position of relative advantage in order to create the conditions for favorable conflict resolution?

## A Suggestion

What then should ADP 3-0 be? The following is a starting point for debate. Rather than a list of attributes and definitions, the new manual should begin with a brief discussion of how our current Army, with its associated strengths and weaknesses, can best apply the operational art. That general discussion would then be illuminated by two case studies, each describing a successful campaign against a hypothetical enemy—a nonstate actor and a regional power, both using an array of hybrid methods. Ideally, a single paragraph would cover each phase of the campaign, providing the reader with an understanding of how ground forces contribute to unified action,

the interplay of combined arms maneuver and wide area security, the types of units best suited to those roles, and mission command during the frictions and uncertainties of war.

If retained, the tenets of operations should be illustrated in more tangible ways than at present. For instance, what role does lethality play in post-conflict stability operations? Case studies would provide a clear vision of how the Army fights without an unrealistic set of fixed rules that limit commanders' freedom. This alternate ADP 3-0 would conclude with a discussion of the Army's contribution to multinational, interagency, and joint operations. This hypothetical manual would provide both an inward-looking description of operations balanced by an outward-looking description of the link between land operations and national policy.

Whatever its eventual form, the U.S. Army should have capstone doctrine that meets the standards that ADP 3-0 recognizes yet fails to meet. Capstone doctrine should describe how the Army intends to fight in clear, compelling terms. It should help field grade and senior officers envision campaigns in all of their complexities and within the prevailing strategic context. Finally, it should help provide coherence to the efforts of the institutional Army by explaining the ramifications of resourcing decisions already made while clarifying likely future uses of land power (to better inform coming decisions). All this is desirable at any time, but ensuring that it takes place now is particularly important. This is a time for strategic vision, bold statements, and clear guidance. The Army looks to its capstone doctrine to provide such direction. **MR**

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## NOTES

1. "Doctrine 2015 Information Briefing," 27 October 2011, <<http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/adp/Repository/Doctrine%202015%20Briefing%2027%20Oct%202011.pdf>> (6 December 2011).

2. The New Look strategy of the Eisenhower administration saw little use in maintaining expensive ground forces during the early Cold War. For more on this period see, Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Pentomic Army* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1986). This study is available on-line at <<http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA956178>>.

3. Martin E. Dempsey, "CSA remarks to AUSA Institute of Land Warfare Breakfast," 5 May 2011. See also, Lance M. Bacon, "New Army Chief of Staff Eyes Big Changes," 7 May 2011, <<http://www.armytimes.com/news/2011/05/army-martin-dempsey-eyes-big-changes-050711w>> (9 May 2011).

4. Raymond T. Odierno, "Prevent, Shape, Win," 12 December 2011, <<http://armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2011/12/prevent-shape-win>> (14 December 11).

5. Lieutenant General David W. Barno, USA, Retired, Nora Bensahel, and Travis Sharp, *Hard Choices: Responsible Defense in an Age of Austerity*, Center for a New American Security, October 2011, 11 (quotation).

6. Headquarters, Department of the Army, ADP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Final Approved Draft), (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 22 September 2011), iii.

7. Raymond T. Odierno, "Foreword" to ADP 3-0, 1.

8. ADP 3-0, 7.

9. The lengthy paragraph describing decisive action only uses the word *decisive* once. Even in that instance, it is used in the sense of decisive and sustainable being equally important characteristics. The remainder of the description defines offensive, defensive, stability, and defense support to civil authorities without ever explaining how

they are (or are not) decisive. ADP 3-0, 5-6.

10. *Ibid.*, 1.

11. *Ibid.*, 2.

12. *Ibid.*, iv.

13. *Ibid.*, 5.

14. Bacevich.

15. Linwood A. Carleton and Frank A. Farnsworth, "A Philosophy for Tactics," *Military Review* 40 (July 1960): 12, 22, quoted in Bacevich, 135.

16. TRADOC Pam 525-3-0, *The Army Capstone Concept, Operational Adaptability: Operating under Conditions of Uncertainty and Complexity in an Era of Persistent Conflict* (Washington, DC: GPO, 21 December 2009), 5-8.

17. George A. Kelly, "Verbal Defense," *Military Review* 35 (October 1955): 45-46, 51, quoted in Bacevich, 134.

18. ADP 3-0, 2.

19. "War's enduring nature, as well as its shifting character will ensure that uncertainty remains a fundamental condition of any armed conflict." *Army Capstone Concept*, 7-8.

20. ADP 3-0, 4-5.

21. "Thus it is said that one who knows the enemy and knows himself will not be endangered in a hundred engagements. One who does not know the enemy but knows himself will sometimes be victorious, sometimes meet with defeat. One who knows neither the enemy nor himself will invariably be defeated in every engagement." If doctrine plays a role in the Army explaining itself to its constituent parts, then we risk disaster by Sun Tzu's estimation. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, tr. Ralph D. Sawyer (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 179.

22. ADP 3-0, 2.