Rethinking OOTW

Robert J. Bunker
Claremont Graduate University

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the CGU Faculty Scholarship at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in CGU Faculty Publications and Research by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.
THE US ARMY’S AirLand Battle doctrine is significant in the historical evolution of wargfhting doctrine. Since its doctrinal inception in the August 1982 edition of US Army Field Manual (FM) 100-5, Operations, and the FM revisions in May 1986 to include follow-on force interdiction and operational maneuver, AirLand Battle doctrine has helped transform the US Army into a modern land warfare force qualitatively second to none in the world.

To maintain the Army’s land warfare dominance, the June 1993 edition of FM 100-5 documents the Cold War’s end, emphasizes shifting to a joint operations focus and anticipates the US need for a force-projection Army in a rapidly changing world. The inclusion of the operations other than war (OOTW) concept in the new FM 100-5 is regarded as vital to operations doctrine because it broadens the Army’s mission capability across the operational continuum. The OOTW concept, however, is flawed.

This article challenges the concept and, by default, the continuum shown in Figure 1 and the range of military operations in the theater strategic environment (hereafter referred to as the RMO model), which it helps define. To do so, it will address the relationship between the OOTW concept and RMO model, the concept of war underlying AirLand Battle doctrine and OOTW as a flawed concept. It further argues that the RMO model should be replaced by not one, but two new politico–military models as a doctrinal bridge. It is not within this article’s scope to attempt to create these models, which should reflect recognized differences in current Western and emerging non–Western approaches to warfare. Rather, its purpose is to call attention to a need for interim models to address AirLand Battle future concepts. For this to occur, however, long–held US political perceptions must change. As a result, the revolution in military affairs (RMA) concept must be broadened to include a political dimension.

The OOTW Concept and RMO Model

The 1982 edition of FM 100–5 introduced the concept of contingency operations, an early forerunner of OOTW. Contingency operations dealt primarily with urgent situations and crises below the level of general war but which required armed force to support national policy in a Cold War environment. These operations required either light or heavy Army

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States of the Environment</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Military Operations</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>Fight and Win</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Combat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>Deter War and Resolve Conflict</td>
<td>Other Than War</td>
<td>Noncombat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacetime</td>
<td>Promote Peace</td>
<td>Other Than War</td>
<td>Noncombat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The states of peacetime, conflict and war could all exist at once in the theater commander’s strategic environment. He can respond to requirements with a wide range of military operations. Noncombat operations might occur during war, just as some operations other than war might require combat.

Figure 1. Range of Military Operations in the Theater Strategic Environment. (FM 100-5)
forces and functioned within a strategic paradigm designed to prevent the global spread of communism. The OOTW concept introduced in 1993 expanded on the contingency operations concept, bringing it fully into the post–Cold War world, which requires more of such operations.

The continuum of military operations depicted in Figure 1 portrays three environmental states: war, conflict and peace. OOTW resides in both the conflict and peacetime states. War, however, resides only in the war environmental state. The US Army’s requirement in such a state is to fight and win. Under the OOTW concept, which seeks to overcome the problematic nature of the term low–intensity conflict (LIC), US Army forces are deployed to resolve regional conflicts and directly deter war. According to Colonel Steven M. Butler, former director, low–intensity conflict proponents, “Problems with the term LIC have been recognized for several years. It is distinguished from war not by intensity of violence but by a difference in purpose and method. Some such conflicts may be quite violent. However, the goal is to resolve a political problem by political means, with the minimum necessary use of military force.” This concept also includes peacetime operations, such as disaster relief, humanitarian assistance and counterdrug efforts, which the US Army has increasingly found itself asked to perform in support of national objectives to promote global peace.

In the military operations continuum, peace is considered to be the normal condition among and within nations. The maintenance or re-establishment of peace is sought by means of national influence, suasion and, if need be, coercion by the United States in its foreign and defense policies. This process is not discussed in the 1993 FM 100–5, yet it is implicit in the OOTW concept, as depicted in Figure 2. This political perception regarding the primacy of peace among and within states represents the OOTW concept’s raison d’être and the Western view of government’s natural order. This view, however, is fundamentally flawed when applied outside Western civilization.

Even as the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) was developing the RMO model to reflect post–Cold War realities, military and academic perceptions of the global security environment changed. Scholars increasingly recognized that war is no longer the exclusive domain of the nation–state. A qualitatively different war form has developed, challenging the central tenets of how modern warfare is conducted by armies in the West in general and by the United States in particular. These central tenets are structurally built upon technological dominance in military equipment. The non–Western form of warfare eschews such technology. Modern warfare is undergoing a simultaneous metamorphosis based on information and advanced technologies that will result in a qualitatively new form of Western warfare.

---

### Table: Continuum of Military Operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Policy Objective</th>
<th>Activities (Environment)</th>
<th>Use of Force or Forces</th>
<th>Military Role</th>
<th>Examples of Operations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Fight and Win</em></td>
<td>War (War)</td>
<td>Level of Violence</td>
<td>Force</td>
<td>Conventional Theater Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Deter War</em></td>
<td>Hostilities Short of War (Conflict)</td>
<td>Compel</td>
<td>Force</td>
<td>Raid/Strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suasion</td>
<td></td>
<td>Peacemaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post-Conflict Activity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Noncombatant Evacuation Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote Peace</td>
<td>Peacetime Engagement (Peace)</td>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>Force</td>
<td>Nation Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peacetime Engagement Activities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Counterdrug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Antiterrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peacekeeping</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Desired end state of use of force includes a return to the environment of peace


Figure 2. Continuum of Military Operations.
Deploying US combat forces with the expectation of stopping conventional war is unrealistic because in many cases, an indigenous infrastructure no longer exists to support large-scale combat operations. One example is Somalia, where nothing even remotely resembling Western conventional forces could have been fielded by the warring parties.

In many cases, a state of war based on non-Western political conditions—tribal and religious dominance or conflict between subnational and local groups—already exists. Doctrinally, these potentialities are not even considered. Embracing the OOTW concept thus concedes the political and military initiative to the opponent, who is thereby initially permitted to conduct non-Western military operations against US forces.

While the OOTW concept can be viewed as a bold and important shift in emerging US Army doctrine based on “... refining the understanding of how to use military force,” its perception of the non-Western conflict environment is inaccurate and inherently flawed. The OOTW concept became official Army doctrine with the publication of the 1993 FM 100-5, but by May 1994, it had already become discredited. “The next edition of FM 100-5, Operations . . . [will] . . . describe the seductively flawed distinction between war and operations other than war.” Before we can explore this conceptual flaw, the concept of war underlying AirLand Battle doctrine must be addressed.

US Army Concept of War
The US Army’s concept of war is based fully on the traditional Western definition, Clausewitzian in origin, which views war as an extension of politics by other means. Under this definition, war is conventional; the nation-state, or coalition of nation-states, is the wielder of political violence; and nationalism fuels ideology. War’s purpose in this context is to preserve and extend national sovereignty.

This definition of war is a product of the historical period when it was developed. Carl von Clausewitz’s On War skillfully explains the monumental military and political changes in European society after the French Revolution. Clausewitz’s definition of war fit hand-in-glove with the new definition of wealth developed in 1776 by Adam Smith in Wealth of Nations. Together, these two works accurately described the shift, albeit at times temporally extended, in European society after the demise of the ancien régime in France and the rise of the nation-state.

This traditional definition of war has prevailed for more than 150 years and has worked well throughout the 19th century, during World Wars I and II, during the Korean War and as a basis for possible confrontation with the Warsaw Pact in Central Europe.
Conventional military operations that are based on traditional Clausewitzian objectives seek to destroy opposing military forces, seize territory and capture another nation-state’s leadership to obtain decisive victory. The Army’s AirLand Battle doctrine and armored and mechanized force structure is based on this definition of war. While the US Army still has a significant light infantry mission capability, it would be de-emphasized if the Army’s combat role and mission were focused solely on armored and mechanized combat as part of its downsizing.

**OOTW’s Conceptual Flaw**

The OOTW concept’s fundamental flaw is that it is based on—and is a derivative of—the Army’s Clausewitzian definition of war. It is a definition now seriously challenged by recent historical events and military scholarship.

As a result, one can infer that the US Army, and in turn the defense establishment, is inadvertently using a Western concept of war to form the basis of military organization and policy in a rapidly changing world that now bears little resemblance to the world of the Clausewitzian paradigm. It is no coincidence that the decades-old Western economic paradigm is also being seriously challenged with reengineering concepts. It can be argued that what current Army doctrine defines as a conflict environmental state for OOTW is actually a non-Western war environmental state, as portrayed in Figure 3. This can be viewed as “a blurring of the distinction between war and operations other than war.”

This non-Western war environmental state has its origins in the past and can be viewed in many respects as a means by which the militarily weak can challenge the militarily strong. However, in the Oriental tradition of war, as seen in Sun Tzu’s writings, this is not always the case. Best thought of as a form of “military Akido,” the greater strength of an opposing force is used against it by an enemy well versed in deception, indirect fighting methods and flexibility. US Special Operations Forces (SOF) understand this form of warfare. However, because it is the “other future warfare” that is developing, instead of the RMA-based one, SOF’s future contributions have been generally overlooked.

Traditionally based in agricultural settings in the 20th century and usually linked in modern military literature to Lin Piao and Mao Tse-Tung, this evolving form of warfare has blended with terrorism and the urbanization of the less-developed world to create something new. The future killing grounds in the less-developed world will not be the impenetrable forests or remote mountain areas where guerrilla wars have traditionally been fought, but the crowded, built-up areas in and around the less-developed world’s burgeoning urban centers.

While the geographical context of this emerging form of war is changing, it is the recognition that it is an environmental state of war, not of conflict, that is important. Such a reality destroys the whole concept behind OOTW, which seeks to avoid conventional war in a crisis situation and return the environment back to peace. The American use of suasion in such a scenario to deter war and resolve conflict is totally inappropriate. In fact, deploying US combat forces with the expectation of stopping conventional war is unrealistic because in many cases, an indigenous infrastructure no longer exists to support large-scale combat operations. One example is Somalia, where nothing even remotely resembling Western conventional forces could have been fielded by the warring parties. More important, however, is the fact that in many cases, a state of war based on non-Western political conditions—tribal and religious dominance or conflict between subnational and local groups—already exists. Because the warfare is not between states, such conditions are often overlooked. Doctrinally, these potentialities are not even considered. Embracing the OOTW concept thus cedes the political and military initiative to the opponent, who is thereby initially permitted to conduct non-Western military operations against US forces. It is of little wonder,

**Information Operations**

Traditionally based in agricultural settings in the 20th century and usually linked in modern military literature to Lin Piao and Mao Tse-Tung, this evolving form of warfare has blended with terrorism and

Instead of a strategic asset, as futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler have suggested, information technology is more often an Achilles heel of Western (and specifically US) armies. News media broadcasts are often used as effective political tools by militarily weak opponents. CNN real-time pictures of body bags, flag-draped coffins and injured and dying US servicemen and local civilians greatly influence public opinion and pose significant problems for US leaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Clausewitzian (Non-Western Opponents)</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Clausewitzian (US Army)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Western War</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve Political Ends</td>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Deter War-Resolve Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNW Operations</td>
<td>Military Ops</td>
<td>OOTW</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.** Conflict versus Non-Western War Environmental State
Ultimately, the West's vulnerability in this regard is best understood by remembering that in an attrition war, a local warlord knows he can afford to lose hundreds of soldiers, unlike a US Army commander, who stands to face a huge public outcry back home if US casualties are high.

then, that most recent experiences under OOTW's rubric have been political and military failures.

Arguments against the existence of such non-Western military operations can be easily made because they conflict with traditional Western operational precepts. Such arguments can be made irrelevant, however, because what ultimately matters is the outcome of an operation—the progress toward a defined political end—not the form the operation takes.

Four operational characteristics support this line of reasoning about the existence of such non-Western warfare operations:

- The denial of real-time information to Western military forces.
- The use of real-time information against Western governments.
- Nonacceptance of Western laws governing war.
- The ability to defeat advanced Western weaponry.

The first two characteristics directly neutralize the West's superior information-based systems and permit the use of local knowledge as a political tool against the West. Non-Western combatants are deployed within the general populace, negating Western intelligence gathering from satellite imagery and remote sensing. For effective intelligence gathering to be conducted under these circumstances, labor-intensive human intelligence is required.

Due to ineffective local intelligence-gathering capabilities, military commanders are unable to obtain a battlefield picture of enemy troops as they would on a conventional battlefield. Non-Western combatants are thus able to effectively frustrate Western forces by spreading out across the battlefield to reduce their vulnerability while using a relatively high organic and inherent stealth capability to resist Western detection. In Somalia, as in other non-Western scenarios, it was almost impossible to distinguish civilians from insurgents.

Instead of a strategic asset, as futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler have suggested, information technology is more often an Achilles heel of Western (and specifically US) armies. News media broadcasts are often used as effective political tools by militarily weak opponents. CNN real-time pictures of body bags, flag-draped coffins and injured and dying US servicemen and local civilians greatly influence public opinion and pose significant problems for US leaders. Given the graphic footage now transmitted, this is more true today than during the Vietnam War. In a recent broadcast from Haiti, a machete attack victim's blood splattered a television camera lens. Local warlords and religious factional heads understand these images' effectiveness. The sensationalized deaths of even a small number of US servicemen, such as the Rangers in Somalia, can erode political support for military operations.

The third characteristic is a denunciation of Western ideals and the portrayal of Western civility as a weakness. Because they often place a much different value on human life than the indigenous combatants do, Western forces are constrained by ethical inhibitions against indiscriminate killing. For example, women and children were used to shield military objectives in Somalia and to carry suicide bombs in Vietnam. Dead US servicemen being dragged through the streets in Somalia and American prisoners of war on public display in Iraq are other examples of such propaganda.

Ultimately, the West's vulnerability in this regard is best understood by remembering that in an attrition war, a local warlord knows he can afford to lose hundreds of soldiers, unlike a US Army commander, who stands to face a huge public outcry back home if US casualties are high.

The fourth characteristic denies the West its military advantage based on advanced weaponry. The immense advantages offered by precision-guided munitions and air- and submarine-launched cruise missiles in a conventional setting are lost in environments where target acquisition is irrelevant and targets can be destroyed more effectively by other means. Furthermore, urban battlefields and other forms of restrictive terrain, such as jungles and mountainous countrysides, have historically been great equalizers of military forces.

Together, these non-Western operational characteristics erode many components of Western dominance in warfare because they require manpower-intensive operations rather than the technology-intensive operations the West relies on. Manpower-intensive operations often result in high casualties, making them politically unacceptable. In time, advances in intelligent robotic systems, weaponry, individual soldier protection and informational technologies will overcome this disadvantage for
The OOTW concept’s flawed nature highlights the fact that the Clausewitzian view of the traditional battlefield, where decisive victory is possible, is now rapidly becoming obsolete in conflicts against non-Western foes who possess many nontraditional advantages over the West. But many Western and Western–inspired states are still conducting war in the traditional sense.

Western security forces in non–Western military environments. In the interim, however, a growing number of conflicts with non–Western peoples—which are conceived as other–than–war military operations—wars are actually being waged and unwittingly lost by the West.40

Current Army doctrine does not recognize this fact, because it is generally outside of long–held US political and military perceptions. These perceptions view war, and hence the possibility of either political victory or defeat, as existing solely within the legitimate domain of the nation–state. This is in line with former Army Chief of Staff General Gordon R. Sullivan and Colonel James M. Dubik when they state, “Any use of America’s information–age Army in a situation in which one or more of the parties are using violence to compel others to do their will requires that we approach the situation as war and requires very strong civil–military and interagency links.”41

Doctrinal Suggestions

The OOTW concept’s flawed nature highlights the fact that the Clausewitzian view of the traditional battlefield, where decisive victory is possible, is now rapidly becoming obsolete in conflicts against non–Western foes who possess many nontraditional advantages over the West. But many Western and Western–inspired states are still conducting war in the traditional sense. As a result, I suggest that two new politico–military models, one radical and one traditional, be created for the follow–on edition to the 1993 FM 100–5. These models would serve as an interim bridge to help facilitate the Army’s development of a capabilities–based 21st–century warfighting doctrine.42

The radical politico–military model should be based on a “non–Western warfare model,” which conceptually breaks with the “war, conflict and peacetime” continuum of military operations. This model would be based on the premise that warfare will be a constant and endemic condition for operations in the majority of non–Western environments where the US Army will operate in the future—a non–Western world where conflict and war represent the new natural order of government. This realization conflicts directly with the politically based OOTW principle of
legitimacy, whose “… intent is to assist the legitimate regional governments to become self–sufficient, stable and peaceful neighbors.”43 It would conceptually draw upon some of Martin van Cnweld’s arguments in The Transformation of War.44

The failure of the Western form of the nation–state to take hold in much of the non–Western world and

Until US political perceptions change, the US Army will be handicapped in its attempts to come to grips with military operations in non–Western environments. Once these political perceptions do change, our perceptions concerning “legitimate government” must also change, because the [Clausewitzian] perception of the nation–state’s monopoly on war will be shattered.

the increasing rise of tribalism based on religious and ethnic groups should be the centerpiece of this model. The model must address how a technologically intensive West can effectively operate in military environments requiring manpower–intensive operations in which the West is at ethical and economic disadvantages. Organized criminal groups are another faction which must be taken into consideration.45 Possibly, it will be determined that the price for attempting to obtain real political success in such environments—creating the conditions for lasting peace—is currently too high a cost in American lives and economic resources to justify repeated interventions.

This means we will only treat the secondary effects of strife, not the root causes, by means of short-duration and limited-objective operations.46 These are operations which would be carried out only in direct support of well–defined national security objectives based on coherent foreign and defense policies—which the current presidential administrations have not yet established.47

Further, because current US Army doctrine is so bound to Clausewitzian thought, many doctrinal questions such as “Have the principles of war changed?,” “What is victory?” and “What is the battlefield?” must be re–examined. Questions regarding force structure, such as those focusing on the development of special division–size military police units, must also be addressed as this model is developed.48

The traditional politico–military model, based on a derivation of the current RMO model where peace represents the natural order, would be developed for US Army operations in Western industrial societies and non–Western influenced states whose methods of waging war are similar to our own. This model would enable the Army to continue to operate effectively in a modern conventional warfare setting as it did during the Gulf War. The model should also incorporate enough flexibility to address the likely threat of nuclear–armed outlaw states such as North Korea.

The creation of two models, a revolutionary non–Clausewitzian one for operations in the non–Western world and a traditional Clausewitzian model for operations in the Western and Western–influenced world, should be considered a conceptual bridge to facilitate Army doctrinal and force–structure reforms.

Western warfare is ultimately changing because of the emergence of advanced information and weapons technology embodied in the RMA and will require the development of a non–Clausewitzian model in the future. A single model based on non–Clausewitzian concepts and encompassing Western and non–Western approaches to warfare is required to firmly support US Army follow–on doctrine to AirLand Battle in the 21st century.49

Such an encompassing politico–military model cannot be created now, however, because new modes of emerging Western and non–Western warfare, and the political changes they will bring, are still in their infancy. Further, the US Army needs time to prepare for the massive institutional shock the break with the Clausewitzian paradigm will ultimately bring.

With the OOTW concept’s abandonment, the initial development of post–Clausewitzian operational constructs and the creation of interim warfighting doctrine based on two politico–military models will help the US Army achieve its ultimate vision: creating an information–age Army to protect and defend America’s vital interests in the 21st century.

TRADOC Pamphlet 525–5, Force XXI Operations, was published in August 1994. Although it has many innovative concepts, Force XXI Operations still follows conventional Army wisdom, which places OOTW in the environmental state of conflict—not war. The pamphlet does break new ground by viewing such conflict as existing outside of current Western paradigms.50 Still, this inability to substitute war for conflict is problematic. It results from TRADOC’s being subordinate to US government policy, which only recognizes the legitimate use of “political violence” by the nation–state or coalition of nation–states.

Herein lies the dilemma. Until US political perceptions change, the US Army will be handicapped in its attempts to come to grips with military opera-
tions in non-Western environments. Once these political perceptions do change, our perceptions concerning "legitimate government" must also change, because the perception of the nation-state's monopoly on war will be shattered.

Because of this, the simultaneous rise of non-Western warfare and the RMA must now be viewed together as bringing about a "Revolution in Political and Military Affairs." Hence, it is foreseen that our government will be required to undergo significant changes just as surely as the Army defending it. As a prerequisite of this change, closer integration of US foreign and defense policies is necessary. Only then can the suggestions for AirLand Battle doctrinal reform outlined in this article be successfully implemented.

NOTES

1. The US Army's pre-AirLand Battle doctrine was based on the concept of active defense in Western Europe against a superior Warsaw Pact threat in a probable chemical and/or nuclear environment. Actual defense was already motivated by 1965-75 requirement for a forward defense and was criticized even before it became official doctrine. See US Army Field Manual (FM) 100-5, Operations (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office [GPO], July 1976), and David Jablonski, "US Military Doctrine and the Revolution in Military Affairs," Parameters (Autumn 1994), 21-22.


3. FM 100-5 (June 1993), 2-1.


7. FM 100-5 (June 1993), 2-3 to 2-1.


13. For a subsequent trend of the trend, see Steven Metz's review essay, "A Wake for Clausevitz" Parameters (Summer 1993), 37-56.


20. Robert J. Bunker is an adjunct professor in the National Security Studies Program, the Center for Army Lessons Learned and the government documents staff of the Claremont Graduate School. His article "The Tofflerian Paradox" was published in the May-June 1993 Military Review "Insigths."