Lead Turning the Fight
The Joint Operational Access Concept and Joint Doctrine

By Gregory Kreuder

Our nation and Armed Forces are transitioning from over a decade of war to a future that presents us with a security paradox. While the world is trending towards greater stability overall, destructive technologies are available to a wider and more disparate range of adversaries. As a result, the world is potentially more dangerous than ever before.

—General Martin E. Dempsey

In peace prepare for war, in war prepare for peace. The art of war is of vital importance to the state. It is matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin. Hence under no circumstances can it be neglected.

—Sun Tzu

Over the last decade, U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have taken advantage of an unprecedented level of unchallenged operational access. This linchpin to virtually all military operations will become increasingly contested during future operations. The Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) proposes how future joint forces will achieve and maintain access in the face of armed opposition by adversaries under a variety of conditions as part of a broader national approach.1 Until these concepts become reality, there will be a gap in joint doctrine regarding how U.S. Armed Forces synergistically leverage cross-domain capabilities to overcome emerging threats and ensure operational access. The good news is that the joint doctrine community has options available that can help solve this dilemma. This article discusses how the changing operational environment, combined with emerging antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) threats, is creating doctrinal gaps. It then discusses the relationship between doctrine, policy, and concepts, along with ways to accelerate the transition from concept to doctrine. Finally, this article draws current concepts from the JOAC and suggests tools that proponents can use to make their concept reality and to ensure U.S. operational access for future joint operations.

Most concepts gradually become extant and incrementally inform joint doctrine. Before proposing ways to accelerate this process, it is important to emphasize that all concepts must first be validated. Because of this requirement, those not familiar with the process occasionally see doctrine as lethargic or nonresponsive.2 On the contrary, doctrine can rapidly inculcate validated concepts. However, if doctrine responded to every seemingly “good idea,” it would unnecessarily thrash the baseline for joint force employment. Worse yet, it could yield unpredictable and potentially tragic consequences.

To highlight the damage an unproven concept can cause, consider the example of effects-based operations (EBO). Initially seen as a reasonable approach to help targeters metaphorically “see the armored division, not just the tank,” it later became something else. Along with operational net assessment (ONA) and system of systems analysis (SOSA), EBO morphed into an attempt to bring mathematical certainty to warfare, an inherently uncertain endeavor. The Israeli Defense Forces applied EBO in the Israeli-Hizballah conflict in 2006 and failed. Israeli Major General Amiram Levin, former commander of Israel’s Northern Command, lamented that EBO, “ignores … the universal fundamentals of warfare. This is not a concept that is better or worse. It is a completely mistaken concept that could not succeed and should never have been relied upon.”3 General James Mattis, USMC, then commander of the disestablished U.S. Joint Forces Command, terminated the use of EBO in the development of future concepts and doctrine as the “underlying principles associated with EBO, ONA, and SOSA are fundamentally flawed and must be removed from our lexicon, training, and operations. Current EBO thinking, as the Israelis found, was an intellectual ‘Maginot Line’ around which the enemy can maneuver.”4 Although EBO may well have future potential, it is not ready for joint doctrine at this time.

Although many have tried, no concept has yet improved upon the Clausewitzian trinity that describes the nature of war: violence, chance, and reason.5 As the capstone publication and foundation for all joint doctrine, Joint Publication (JP) 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States, makes the point crystal clear: “War is a complex, human undertaking that does not respond to deterministic rules.”6 On the other hand, Clausewitz describes how a war is fought, and where it lies along the spectrum of conflict can and will change.7 Concepts that recognize the immutable nature of war, yet correctly predict and address the changing character of warfare, have the potential to affect force employment at a historic level.

These are the concepts that proponents must learn to identify, validate, and accelerate to joint doctrine. Consider the German concept of “mission-type tactics,” or Auftragstaktik, which specified a clearly defined goal and empowered subordinate leaders to act independently in order to achieve their commander’s intent.8 The German army and air force combined this concept with maneuver warfare and unleashed a historic offensive that overwhelmed numerically superior French and British forces in May 1940.9 General Mattis describes two additional concepts that had a similar effect on U.S. military forces in the 1980s:

Concepts can transform organizations. I believe this. I have witnessed it twice in my

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military career, when the introduction of the Air Land Battle doctrine transformed the Army and Air Force in the 1980s and the introduction of maneuver warfare similarly changed the Marine Corps a few years later. One may argue these were doctrines rather than concepts, but at the heart of each was an innovative operating concept—an underlying idea for how Army or Marine Corps forces would operate in dealing with their respective challenges—and that concept was a driving force behind the dramatic institutional changes that those Services experienced.

It is reasonable to conclude that the JOAC could produce as profound an effect on the joint force as Auftragstaktik and Air Land Battle. The JOAC is derived from the Capstone Concepts for Joint Operations, which outlines 10 primary missions through which U.S. joint forces will protect future American interests. Of these missions, the JOAC emphasizes the importance of being able to “project power despite [A2/AD] challenges.”

There is nothing new about the need to gain and maintain operational access in the face of a formidable and capable adversary; this has been a consideration throughout history. For any force to fight on foreign land, it must first gain access to it. This is understandably not in the best interest of the opposing force that attempts to deny access by any means necessary. Throughout history, opposing forces have sought an asymmetric advantage that will deny access. This ability can blunt an otherwise overwhelming offensive by a vastly superior force. King Leonidas of Sparta demonstrated the importance of A2/AD during the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE. His numerically inferior yet determined force exploited local geography, significantly delayed operational access to the Persian Empire, and arguably altered the outcome of the Persian war in the Greeks’ favor. Although operational access has proven a challenge throughout history, the underlying conditions that will affect future U.S. operations are going through slow moving yet tectonic shifts.

The JOAC outlines three emerging trends that will challenge operational access. The first is the dramatic improvement and proliferation of weapons and other technologies capable of denying access to or freedom of action within an operational area. These threats can employ not only advanced technologies, but also innovative applications of basic, even crude, capabilities. The second trend is the changing U.S. overseas defense posture, which is a consequence of markedly decreased support abroad for an extensive network of military bases around the globe and projections of severely contracting resources following a decade of war. The third trend is the emergence of space and cyberspace as increasingly important and contested domains in the projection of military force.

Potential adversaries are exploiting rapidly evolving and relatively inexpensive technologies to upgrade their A2/AD capabilities. Furthermore, antiaccess technology is generally much easier to develop than...
technology that ensures access. Technologies under various stages of development could also create antiaccess challenges for the United States including accurate surface-, air-, and submarine-launched ballistic and cruise missiles; long-range reconnaissance and surveillance systems; antisatellite weapons; submarine forces; and cyber attack capabilities. Key area-denial capabilities include advances in adversary air forces and air defense systems designed to deny local U.S. air superiority; shorter range antiship missiles and submarines employing advanced torpedoes; precision-guided rockets, artillery, missiles, and mortars; chemical and biological weapons; computer and electronic attack capabilities; abundant land and naval mines; armed and explosives-laden small boats; and unmanned aircraft and vehicles, which could loiter to provide intelligence collection or fires in the objective area.14

Many of the more advanced capabilities, for example the Chinese HQ-9 and Russian S-300 surface-to-air missile systems, are already extant. Others are progressing through the prototype stage, such as the Chinese J-20, J-31, and Russian Sukhoi PAK-FA stealth fighters. Other threats do not require advanced systems, yet highlight potential vulnerabilities that a savvy adversary can exploit using available technology, similar to how improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have challenged access for U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. The joint force must reorient itself to meet these existing and emerging A2/AD threats.

Although the emerging trends addressed in the JOAC reflect vulnerabilities that in some cases already exist, current joint doctrine’s coverage of A2/AD is not keeping pace. JP 3-18, Joint Forcible Entry Operations, is dedicated to overcoming area denial in order to establish a lodgment, but does not yet address these emerging challenges and has only seen modest updates during the last decade. JP 3-01, Countering Air and Missile Threats, and JP 3-09, Joint Fire Support, vaguely reference the importance of overcoming A2/AD challenges to operational access. None of these, or any other JPs, address the emerging trends and challenges identified in the JOAC; this is partly intentional, as many of the necessary capabilities are not yet extant. Aside from IEDs, however, ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have not faced significant A2/AD challenges. As a consequence, the doctrinal gap is large and growing.

This highlights an important point. As the emerging trends outlined in the JOAC gradually challenge future U.S. operational access, mitigating concepts requiring new capabilities will need to be inculcated into the joint force. These concepts may someday have a sweeping impact on joint doctrine similar to Auftragstaktik, Air Land Battle, and maneuver warfare. The key is in identifying these concepts early, validating them, and finding ways to accelerate their introduction into joint doctrine. Proponents must take a proactive approach and not passively wait for concepts and capabilities to gradually become fully extant in the field before socializing them throughout the joint community.

Before identifying the tools available to accelerate these concepts and capabilities, it is first important to briefly discuss what doctrine is and what it is not. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) Instruction 5120.02C, “Joint Doctrine Development System,” and CJCS Memorandum 5120.01, “Joint Doctrine Development Process,” provide guidance on the development of joint doctrine: “Joint doctrine establishes the fundamentals of joint operations and provides the guidance on how best to employ national military power to achieve strategic ends.”15 More specifically, joint doctrine is:

based on extant capabilities; i.e., current force structures and materiel. It incorporates time-tested principles (e.g., the principles of war, operational art, and elements of operational design for successful military action) as well as contemporary lessons learned that exploit US advantages against adversary vulnerabilities. Joint doctrine is authoritative guidance and will be followed except when, in the judgment of the Joint Force Commander (JFC), exceptional circumstances dictate otherwise.16

To alleviate some common misperceptions, it is worth noting what joint doctrine is not. First, joint doctrine is not policy, although the two are closely related. Each fills separate requirements, as policy can “direct, assign tasks, prescribe desired capabilities, and provide guidance for ensuring the Armed Forces of the US are prepared to perform their assigned roles.”17 In most cases, policy informs doctrine. If an identified need can only be satisfied “using prescriptive words such as ‘shall’ and ‘must,’ then the void is in policy and policy development should precede doctrinal development.”18 In other words, doctrine should not be used as a forcing function to change policy, yet policy can and often does drive changes to doctrine.

Doctrine shares a similarly close and complementary relationship with concepts. In general, a concept expresses how something might be done. Before discussing how the JOAC can inform joint doctrine, it is imperative to fully understand this relationship:

In military application, a joint concept describes how a Joint Force Commander may plan, prepare, deploy, employ, sustain, and redeploy a joint force; guides the further development and integration of the Capstone Concepts for Joint Operations and subordinate joint concepts into a joint capability; and articulates the measurable detail needed for . . . assessment and decision making. From a ways, means, and ends perspective, concepts and doctrine both describe how (the ways) a joint force uses given capabilities (means) in a generic set of circumstances to achieve a stated purpose (ends). There also is an important distinction between the two. Approved joint doctrine is authoritative, describes operations with extant capabilities, and is subject to policy, treaty, and legal constraints, while joint concepts—whether near-term or futuristic in nature—can explore new operational methods, organizational structures, and systems employment without the same restrictions. Joint concepts provide the basis for . . . assessment. These concepts are refined and validated during . . . modeling and simulation, selected training events and exercises, and capabilities-based assessment.19

Concepts respond to perceived inadequacies in current joint capabilities, test new capabilities, or propose innovative solutions to military problems. Worthwhile concepts should improve upon joint force effectiveness, not only propose another way to do something already addressed in approved doctrine. However, lessons learned from recent operations and emerging capabilities with relevant military applications also improve upon methods in doctrine. Since concepts usually project an operating environment in the future, they describe new approaches and capabilities that, when developed, should enable the military to operate...
successfully. On occasion, forecasting may uncover ideas that could improve how joint forces operate now and could have an immediate impact on current doctrine. Before changes are made to doctrine, operational joint force commanders will validate these concepts. These concepts must represent an extant capability and clearly demonstrate how they will improve doctrine. Finally, the joint doctrine community assesses concepts and their exercise results to determine necessary changes to approved doctrine.20

Now that we have established what doctrine is, what it is not, and its relationship to policy and concepts, it is time to discuss how concepts can make their way into approved joint doctrine. There are roughly four general methods: through scheduled JP revision, through a change recommendation, through a joint test publication (JTP), and through a joint doctrine note (JDN).

The first method, routing a JP for revision, is the traditional and most common method of informing doctrine, and it employs the preexisting doctrinal review process. The Joint Staff J7 Joint Doctrine Division (JDD) goal is to maintain current, relevant doctrine that is no more than 5 years old. The JDD has conducted multiple user studies that consistently indicate doctrine over 3 years old begins to lose relevance to the joint warfighter. To meet that objective, approved doctrine is normally assessed for revision when approximately 2 years old.

Revision begins with a formal assessment of the JP, where the combatant commands, Services, Joint Staff, and combat support agencies provide feedback on recommended changes. The percentage of the publication affected by the recommended changes determines the scope of the change. If 20 percent or less of the publication needs to be revised, a change-in-lieu-of-revision is likely; if greater than 20 percent, a full revision is warranted. In either case, any authorized organization can recommend changes, which will be evaluated on merit during the joint doctrine development process.21 This traditional method is the simplest, although not necessarily the most timely. With sufficient justification, however, proponents can accelerate this timetable and request an early revision to a JP.

The second method of informing doctrine is through an urgent or routine change recommendation. This may be the best choice if a proponent wants to submit a capability that recently became extant and the affected publication was just signed. Any member of the joint community can submit changes at any time. These changes are specifically designed to assist when a joint publication is current and not undergoing revision. Urgent changes are “those . . . that require immediate promulgation to prevent personnel hazard or damage to equipment or emphasize a limitation that adversely affects operational effectiveness.”22 Actions on urgent changes begin within 24 hours of submission. If the change does not meet urgent criteria, a routine change may be more appropriate: “Routine changes are those changes to JPs that provide validated improvements; address potentially incorrect, incomplete, misleading, or confusing information; or correct an operating technique.”23

The third method of introducing concepts into doctrine is the joint test publication. Although concept-based changes to doctrine are usually incremental rather than sweeping, on occasion a concept addressing a doctrinal gap may be large enough in scope either to affect a significant portion of an existing JP or justify creating a new JP. Semiannual joint doctrine planning conferences, hosted by the Joint Staff J7, approve proposals for developing JTPs. Once the designated lead agent develops the JTP, it enters the assessment phase, where combatant commanders exercise the JTP and its associated evaluation to “field test” the concept.

Unlike testing of emergent concepts, JTP field-testing should use extant forces and capabilities. Concepts that propose a different way of performing a mission with today’s forces are also known as concepts of operations. Exercising concepts with capabilities and forces that are still emerging can yield useful information, but should not be included in joint doctrine. Once testing of the JTP is complete, evaluation results will recommend one of the following disposition options: “discontinue work on the JTP with no impact on joint doctrine, incorporate the JTP or portions of it in existing JPs, or develop the JTP into a new JP.”24

The fourth method, the JDN, is relatively new to U.S. joint doctrine, although the British Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Centre has used them successfully for years. The JDN is considered part of the initiation stage of the joint doctrine development process. JDNs are intended to socialize potential best practices and capabilities that have demonstrated early and strong potential to positively impact joint force operations. Although pre doctrinal, JDNs present generally agreed fundamental principles and guidance for joint forces. Although they must contain capabilities and concepts somewhat rooted in reality, they are not necessarily constrained by purely extant capabilities. JDNs also have flexibility in scope and size, and they can address doctrine at any level and range, from a few pages in length to several hundred.

Since they are not approved joint doctrine, JDNs are not necessarily beholden to the same vetting requirements that JPs are. JPs can take years to develop; a JDN can be written and published in less than 1 year. This can save significant amounts of time that would otherwise be required before a concept gains visibility in the joint community. If the joint community accepts a published JDN, it can then be transitioned into a JTP for validation. If already sufficiently validated and extant, the JDN can instead transition directly into an existing JP or become a JP of its own. JDNs thus introduce flexibility into a necessarily procedural doctrine development system and have the ability to bridge the gap and accelerate the transition of a concept into doctrine.

The JOAC is already driving the creation of several concepts that demonstrate potential as future JDNs and JTPs. The Air-Sea Battle concept, under development by the Air-Sea Battle Office, is a prime candidate. It describes how to organize, train, and equip land, naval, and air forces to address evolving adversarial A2/AD threats. The preliminary objective of Air-Sea Battle is to provide combatant commanders networked and integrated forces that ensure freedom of access in the global commons.25 Air-Sea Battle’s goal is to develop forces capable of “networked, integrated, and attack-in-depth” operations across land, sea, air, space, and cyber domains in order to counter A2/AD capabilities and provide operational advantages to friendly joint and coalition forces.26 In 2012, then–U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff General Norton Schwartz outlined the importance of this emerging concept:

Ballistic and cruise missiles, the advanced submarines, fighters, and bomber aircraft, enhanced electronic and cyber warfare capabilities, and over the horizon surveillance and modern air defense systems, as
well as the improved ability to network and integrate these capabilities; these all present significant challenges that will contest our access to and freedom of action, freedom of movement in strategically important areas. And in vital areas such as the Hormuz or the Malacca Straits, even low technology capabilities such as rudimentary sea mines and fast attack craft or shorter range artillery and missiles can turn vital free flow movements in the global commons into maritime choke points to be exploited by aggressive or coercive actors. These capabilities, both the more advanced and the less exquisite, are increasingly available, effectively affording modestly resourced actors, including some non-state entities with the ability to shape outcomes in regional operating environments and perhaps even on the geostategic environment indirectly. And the ability that was once the exclusive domain of only well funded and well endowed nation states.27

Proponents looking to create a JDN concerning Air-Sea Battle in the near term should select portions of this concept that can employ existing capabilities in new ways to counter the A2/AD threats that General Schwartz highlights as similarly extinct today. It may take the Air-Sea Battle Office significant time to develop some of the capabilities that would be appropriate for a JDN. Proponents could justify a JDN much sooner, however, by developing innovative solutions that synergistically apply current joint force capabilities to counter extinct A2/AD threats. The JDN, when published, could inform the joint force on a timeline years before a JP ever could. If the JDN gains widespread acceptance by the joint force, it can be transitioned into a JTP to be validated by combatant commanders or, if both validated and extant, can be transitioned directly into joint doctrine.

Another JOAC concept that proponents could soon seize to create a JDN is Gaining and Maintaining Access (GAMA). Prepared by the Army and Marine Corps, this concept recognizes emerging AD trends identified in the JOAC. It is a logical extension in the scope of operations designed to seize a lodgment, currently only discussed in JP 3-18. GAMA recognizes that future operations will face increased challenges to the relatively permissive operations in Iraq and Afghanistan that allowed forces to build in-theater before commencing operations. Future access to the global commons and “ports, airfields, foreign airspace, coastal waters, and host nation support in potential commitment areas” will become increasingly competitive.28 In addition to emerging adversary capabilities, internal factors will complicate the application of the principles of war. For example, surprise will be more difficult to obtain due to “political transparency combined with the instantaneous transmission of information around the world.”29

The central idea of GAMA is to “contribute to the joint effort to gain and maintain operational access by entering hostile territory without benefit of domain dominance and by using littoral and ground maneuver to locate and defeat area-denial challenges.”30 As with A2, many AD threats are already extant, such as air and missile defenses, antishipping capabilities, and enemy maneuver units. Precision-guided munitions have seen widespread use since Operation Desert Storm in 1991, and potential adversaries have had over two decades to similarly upgrade their arsenals and employ them to deny operational access. Other adversary threats under development include guided rockets, artillery, mortars, and missiles.

Despite these threats, GAMA discusses the importance of “seizing key terrain in order to deny it to the enemy or to facilitate the introduction of follow-on forces” and rapidly project “follow-on forces that can be employed with minimal need for reception, staging, onward movement, and integration or dependence on local infrastructure.”31 Forces must be able to conduct “simultaneous force projection and sustainment of numerous maneuver units via multiple, distributed, austere and unexpected penetration points and landing zones in order to avoid established defenses, natural obstacles, and the presentation of a concentrated, lucrative target.”32 GAMA proposes to counter these effects through cross-domain synergy in “the air, sea, space and cyberspace domains by locating/seizing/neutralizing/destroying land-based capabilities that threaten those domains.”33 Potential adversaries may field layered and fully integrated A2/AD defenses in multiple domains in an attempt to deny operational access altogether, “while others with less robust and comprehensive capabilities may simply attempt to inflict greater losses than they perceive the United States will tolerate politically.”34

When sufficient joint force capabilities are identified and then created to address AD, proponents should consider creating a JDN, which would inform the joint force and ease the transition to joint doctrine. Although discussing a concept still in its early stages, GAMA is an important step in recognizing how emerging trends will make future operational access both more important and challenging. The JDN can be a mix of concept and extant capabilities, but should be executable with the existing joint force. Similar to the suggestion for Air-Sea Battle, this JDN (if accepted by the joint force) can be transitioned into a JTP for validation or transitioned directly to joint doctrine if it meets doctrinal requirements.

Finally, the JOAC itself may someday drive a joint publication and subsequent realignment of subordinate joint doctrine. As a recent example, in December 2012, Lieutenant General George Flynn, USMC, director of Joint Staff J7, approved development of JP 3-XX, Joint Support to Security Cooperation. This publication recognizes security cooperation as the overarching activity that encompasses other joint doctrine such as JP 3-22, Foreign Internal Defense, and JDN 1-13, Security Force Assistance, which is currently under development. Once this new joint publication is developed, it may either absorb doctrine on foreign internal defense and security force assistance or retain them as subordinate publications.

As capabilities become extant, the JOAC may drive production of a JTP or even a JP similar to JP 3-XX, perhaps entitled Achieving Joint Operational Access. This publication, once validated, could provide authoritative guidance for ensuring the Armed Forces are prepared to gain and maintain operational access in future joint operations. This could subsequently drive subordinate joint publications, possibly including Air-Sea Battle and GAMA. Regardless of the mechanisms that proponents employ to make JOAC a reality, joint doctrine stands ready to assist.

The JOAC outlines concepts that address emerging trends that will challenge the relatively permissive operational access U.S. forces have enjoyed in recent operations. The joint force is rapidly developing concepts that attempt to address the widening doctrinal gap these trends are creating. The traditional method of informing doctrine may prove too slow and, in the meantime,
holds the joint force ability to gain and maintain operational access at risk against extant threats. The JTP and JDN are available tools that proponents, who are willing to pick up the flag, can use to accelerate the validation and subsequent transition of valid concepts into joint doctrine. By proactively employing these available tools, JOAC proponents can help keep the leading edge of joint doctrine razor sharp and ready to provide authoritative guidance to the joint warfighter. JFQ

NOTES


2 Joint doctrine is much more responsive than it was a decade ago. The average age of the 82 joint publications is 2.8 years, or roughly half what it was then.


6 Joint Publication 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 2009), I-1.

7 Clausewitz, 220. To avoid confusion, joint doctrine distinguishes between “war,” which is unchanging, and “warfare,” which is ever changing.

8 Jochen Wittmann, Auftragstaktik (Berlin: Miles Verlag, 2012), 33.


13 JOAC, 9–12.

14 Ibid., 9.

15 As described in Chairman of the Joint Chiefs (CJCS) Instruction 5120.02C, “Joint Doctrine Development System,” A-5.

16 Ibid., A-2.