

The Deep Area: Misconceptions and Challenges
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Introduction

Recent Warfighter Exercises (WFXs) have demonstrated that divisions often struggle to plan and execute deep operations. This negatively impacts the brigades in close contact with enemy forces. The purpose of this article is to aid units with deep operations. To do this, it first discusses division planners' varying conceptions of the deep area and the consequences for each. It next reviews doctrine concerning deep operations, highlighting potential areas that may either help or contribute to these issues. Finally, it offers recommended approaches and additional considerations to help units overcome the deep area challenges.¹

Defining and Visualizing the Deep Area

WFXs have highlighted that units and planners do not consistently define or visualize the deep area in the same way. Observations and trends have revealed three varying perspectives/conceptions units and planners often have of the deep area. These conceptions typically define and/or treat the deep almost exclusively in either *space*, *time*, or *specific enemy systems*.

Deep in Space

Many units strictly define the deep area in accordance with their boundaries or fire control measures (FCM). Most commonly, divisions have defined the deep area as the terrain between its coordinated fire line (CFL) and the fire support coordination line (FSCL). This has led to several issues. First, this approach has led planners to view the deep as a separate effort in itself, de-linking the division's deep and close operations. With this, divisions target and shape in their designated deep area, but these shaping efforts do not necessarily support or set conditions for the current or next close fight.² Next, by defining the deep area in space only, units often neglect deep operations due to a lack of enemy presence in their defined deep area. This often narrows a unit's focus to its close area, reducing its shaping efforts within the greater AO. Lastly, units often fail to shift boundaries or FCMs at the pace of an advance, leading to a convergence of deep and close areas.³ This often leads to confusion in terms of area responsibility as well as missed targeting opportunities.

Deep in Time

While units do not define the deep area explicitly by time, WFX observations highlight that many planners consider and discuss the deep area in terms of future operations and time. This leads to units considering the close fight as the only current fight, neglecting opportunities for current/immediate deep operations against unengaged enemy forces. Many comments highlight that planners have often viewed the close fight within the next 24-hours and the deep fight within the following 72-96 hours. This tendency became even more apparent as the intensity of close area combat increased. During these times, division current operations integration cells almost solely focused on the close and immediate (within the next 12-hours) fight at the expense of the deep

area/operations.⁴ Consequently, divisions either missed immediate/near terms opportunities to shape in the deep area, or corps had to try to take-over the division's current, deep fight.

Deep in Enemy Systems

Much like the previous conception, units have not explicitly defined the deep area by enemy systems. However, observations highlight a fixation units often have on certain enemy systems and capabilities that come to define and dominate their efforts in the deep area. These enemy systems have typically been air defense systems, long-range fire systems, C2 nodes, and unmanned aviation system (UAS) ground control stations. Specific capabilities and assets associated with these systems typically define a division's targeting priorities throughout the exercise and rarely change to any great extent. As these systems typically rest beyond the close area, the divisions largely focus on them as part of their deep operations and targeting efforts. From this, many planners begin to view and discuss the deep area exclusively in regards to these systems, narrowing the overall focus of the division's efforts and missing opportunities to effectively shape the deep area in other ways. This also directly impacts the brigades, which end up in close contact with enemy reinforcements and units that the restricted system/capability focus prevented the division from targeting.⁵

Doctrinal Definitions of the Deep Area

In considering the divisions' varying approaches and perspectives, it would be beneficial to review how U.S. Army Doctrine defines the deep area. FM 1-02.1 *Operational Terms* defines the deep area as the area "where the commander sets conditions for future success in close combat."⁶ ADP 3-0 *Operations* and FM 3-94 *Armies, Corps, and Division Operations* cite this same definition. However, ATP 3-94.2 *Deep Operations* defines the deep area as "the area that extends beyond subordinate unit boundaries out to the higher commander's designated AO."⁷

In addition to the definition, ADP 3-0, FM 3-94, and ATP 3-94.2 also provide amplifying descriptions of the deep area. In line with the 3-94.2 definition, ADP 3-0 states, "a commander's deep area *generally* extends beyond subordinate unit boundaries out to the limits of the commander's designated area of operations."⁸ However, it also adds, "in some instances, a deep area may focus along a single line of operation. In other instances, *a deep area* may focus along multiple lines of operations."⁹ This latter statement seems to convolute the deep between a geographically designated area and a line of operation.

In discussing the operational framework, FM 3-94 describes the deep area as part of defining the area of operations geographically. It expands on this "geographic" limitation, stating, "In their assigned AOs, Army commanders designate deep, close, rear, and support areas to describe the physical arrangement of forces in *time, space, and focus*."¹⁰ In another section pertaining to large-scale combat operations, FM 3-94 states, "a division uses the operational framework of deep-close-rear-support areas to do three things simultaneously. It shapes enemy forces in the deep area, synchronizes subordinate forces in the close area, and coordinates friendly activities in the support areas."¹¹ While this statement also supports the geographic basis for the deep area, it seems to expand it to a specific purpose more in line with the FM 1-02.1 definition, focusing on setting conditions. However, it subsequently provides the view of the division deep area as "beyond the BCTs' coordinated fire line and focused on uncommitted or out of contact enemy forces. In terms of geographic control measures, the deep area often encompasses physical space between the

coordinated fire line and the fire support coordination line.”¹² While none of these descriptions and definitions necessarily conflict, it is easy to see how varying conceptions of the deep may arise.

Doctrinal Descriptions of Deep Operations

Looking further into doctrine, one can see other areas that likely impact the various approaches and views units have of deep operations. ATP 3-94.2 defines deep operations as:

“Combined arms operations directed against uncommitted enemy forces or capabilities before than can engage friendly forces in the close fight...Deep operations are not simply attacking an enemy force in depth. Instead, they are the sum of all activities that influence when, where, and in what condition enemy forces can be committed into the close and support area.”¹³

ADP 3-0 and FM 3-94 state, “Operations in the deep area involve efforts to prevent uncommitted enemy forces from being committed in a coherent manner.”¹⁴ Both of these references also stress the purpose of deep operations as “setting conditions for future events in time and space.”¹⁵ While these specifically mention or at least allude to a deep “area” for deep operations, they place more emphasis on *the purpose*, which is to set conditions for the close fight/area. FM 3-94 reinforces this even more, highlighting that deep operations “are not necessarily a function of geographic distance, but rather a function of the intent of the operation.”¹⁶

Doctrinal examples of deep operations reinforce this emphasis on intent rather than geographic area. ADP 3-0 states that deep operations may seek to disrupt the movement of reserve forces or prevent the enemy’s employment of long-range fires against the brigades. It also gives the additional example of disrupting recruitment/training of insurgents.¹⁷ While these examples may fall into a deep area, it is not necessary, particularly in the latter insurgent example, which could just as easily be in the close or rear area. In addition to providing the same examples as ADP 3-0, FM 3-94 also states that deep operations “may include actions to divert, disrupt, delay, or destroy enemy forces and capabilities before their commitment and efforts to prevent or limit their coherent employment against friendly forces.”¹⁸ These examples also seem to emphasize deep operations more as a function of purpose/intent rather than specific terrain or area. As with the definition of the deep area, these descriptions do not necessarily conflict, but they do allow for various, differing conceptions of what a deep operation may or may not be.

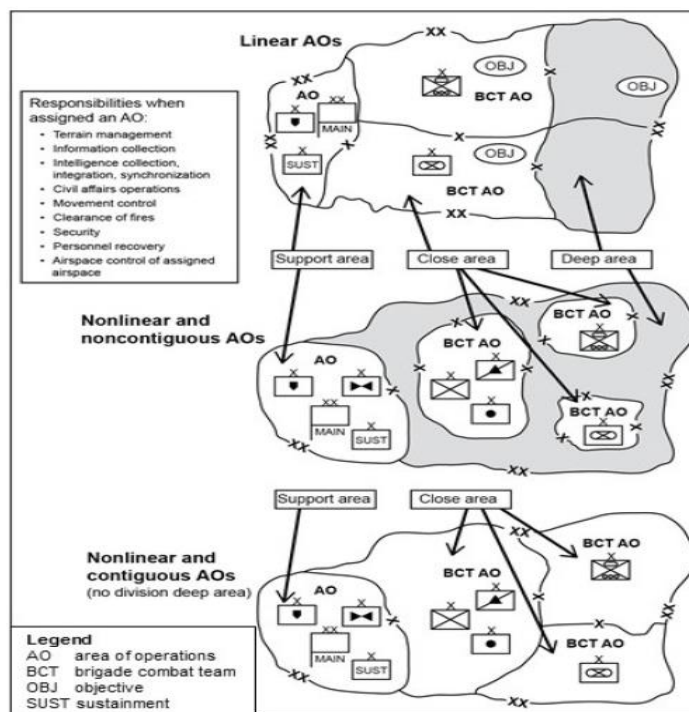
Considerations and Recommendations

In reviewing the doctrine, it is not surprising that division planners and staff may have varying conceptions and approaches to deep area operations. While descriptions and definitions of the deep area in doctrine do not conflict, they also do not provide a clear, concise idea that ensures a consistent understanding and approach to division-level deep operations. At the same time, however, it is clear that doctrine is likely not the only contributing factor to the various misconceptions of the deep fight.

Doctrine clearly articulates the combined nature of the deep planning efforts across the staff and warfighting functions. It also provides several examples of deep operations, highlighting possible targets and missions. Subsequently, it is unlikely that doctrine is at fault for the enemy system

fixation that dominates/defines many divisions' deep focus and operations. Further, while doctrine states that units need to plan deep operations 72-96 hours in advance, it also clearly calls for the handover from plans and future operations planners to the current operations sections for action. With this, the conception of the *deep in time* and as a function of either the plans or future operations section alone may arise from an oversight in reading doctrine but not from the doctrine itself. From this, it is evident that planners and staff should deliberately relook at the doctrine to discuss and dispel any misconceptions/preconceived notions of the deep area that are not in-line with the doctrine.

Next, it would be beneficial to reconsider and refine some of the doctrinal descriptions of the deep area. The greatest consistency that the doctrine expresses concerning both the deep area and deep operations concerns *the purpose* of the mission/operation. The deep is where the commander sets conditions for the future, close fight. It seems that confusion and the misconception of the *deep in space-only* stem from the follow-on descriptions that highlight the strictly geographic aspect of the deep, e.g. that the deep “generally extends beyond subordinate unit boundaries” or coordinated fire lines. This conception also results from the commonly pictured “examples of area framework” that depict the division deep strictly in terms of geographic boundaries (or even not existing).



Source: ATP 3-94.2 *Deep Operations*, Figure 1-1, page1-3.¹⁹

The reduction or elimination of these strictly geographic descriptions of the deep may reduce confusion and misconceptions. Further, planners and staff may benefit from an expanded definition of the deep area. The following is one proposed definition: **the deep area is the area and/or domain where a unit shapes now within its assigned AO against uncommitted, enemy forces and capabilities that may inhibit its subordinate units from accomplishing their current or next objectives.**

Lastly, division planners should consider posing some additional questions throughout the planning (and assessment) process as well as during the rehearsals and wargaming to ensure timely, effective, and purpose-oriented deep operations. First, units need to plan deep operations in conjunction with and in support of their subordinate units' current or next objectives. Deep operations that are not nested with current or future objectives are useless. With this, division planners need to first review and ask:

1. What are the brigades' current and next objectives and how does the commander prioritize these for accomplishing the division's mission (e.g. main effort, supporting effort etc.)?

Next, the purpose of deep operations is to *shape and set conditions* for the brigades' current and next objectives. To best do this, planners should ask:

2. What enemy systems or capabilities can impact the brigades' current/next objectives?
3. Where and/or in what domain are these systems located?
4. When/how long until these systems/units can engage or impact the brigades' objectives?
5. Which of these enemy systems/capabilities poses the greatest threat to mission accomplishment?

These questions will help guide the collection plan as well as help planners to prioritize shaping efforts (i.e. deep operations) based on risk to mission in terms of time, space, and threat. This will also allow the division to communicate its needs with higher and adjacent units for additional support outside of its AO.

Conclusion

From the review above, it is apparent that doctrine serves as a great guide for division deep operations planners. Doctrine is very clear about division command post deep planning responsibility; handovers between plans, future operations, and current operations sections; and required planning horizons. It also describes and provides examples of the deep area and deep operations, highlighting their various (but not mutually exclusive) aspects in terms of space, time, and enemy forces. However, these examples and descriptions can sometimes lead to misconceptions about what the deep area is, impacting the effectiveness of a unit's deep operations. Consequently, units and planners may benefit from some doctrinal revisions as well as additional questions to focus planning and rehearsals. While the proposed definitions and questions here will not eliminate the challenges divisions face in the deep area, they may help planners to maintain a *purpose-based* focus for it.

¹ Several of the documents in this publication are linked to the Joint Lessons Learned Information System (JLLIS). This system is only available to authorized users. In order to access the site, you must establish a JLLIS account at <https://www.jllis.mil>.

² CALL WFX 21-3 Observation, “Setting Conditions for Operations,” Joint Lessons Learned Information System, <https://www.jllis.mil/apps/?do=lessons:lesson.view&doit=view&disp=lms&lmsid=226684>, 06 May, 2021.

³ CALL WFX 21-1 Observation, “FSCL Management in LSCO,” Joint Lessons Learned Information System, <https://www.jllis.mil/apps/?do=lessons:lesson.view&doit=view&disp=lms&lmsid=225359>, 20 November, 2020.

⁴ FY20 Mission Command Training in Large Scale Combat Operations Mission Command Training Program (MCTP) Key Observations, <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2021/05/19/bbd7f7a9/18085.pdf>, October 2021, 7.

⁵ CALL WFX 21-5 Observation, “Division Targeting Process,” Joint Lessons Learned Information System, <https://www.jllis.mil/apps/?do=lessons:lesson.view&doit=view&disp=lms&lmsid=228613>, 23 June 2021.

⁶ FM 1-02.1 *Operational Terms*, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN31809-FM_1-02.1-000-WEB-1.pdf, March 2021, pg., 1-28.

⁷ ATP 3-94.2 *Deep Operations*, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ATP%203-94x2%20FINAL%20WEB.pdf, September 2016, pg., 1-2.

⁸ ADP 3-0 *Operations*, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN18010-ADP_3-0-000-WEB-2.pdf, July 2019, pg., 4-4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-4.

¹⁰ FM 3-94 *Armies, Corps, and Division Operations*, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN33025-FM_3-94-000-WEB-1.pdf, July 2021, pg., 2-19-2-20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5-19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5-19.

¹³ ATP 3-94.2 *Deep Operations*, 1-4.

¹⁴ ADP 3-0 *Operations*, pg., 4-4 and FM 3-94 *Armies, Corps, and Division Operations*, pg., 2-20.

¹⁵ ADP 3-0, 4-4 and FM 3-94, 2-20.

¹⁶ FM 3-94, C-4.

¹⁷ ADP 3-0, 4-4.

¹⁸ FM 3-94, C-4.

¹⁹ ATP 3-94.2 *Deep Operations*, Figure 1-1, pg., 1-3.