

Joint operational environment provides future global context

TRADOC News Service

FORT MONROE, Va. (July 12, 2004) – What will the world look like in 20 years from now? There is a team at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command that has a good idea what the operating environment will be.

“The Joint operational environment projects what the global environment may look like 15 or 20 years from now,” said Tom Schmidt, an intelligence analyst working for the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence in the Futures Section. One of Schmidt’s jobs is to keep this document up-to-date.

According to Schmidt, the operational environment is basically the conditions, circumstances and other variables needed to take into consideration when you take an armed force and stick it down somewhere.

“The JOE is a little bit different than an intelligence estimate in that it intentionally has some vagueness in it to allow the largest range of operational environments to fit into it,” he said.

According to Richard L. Grimm, “the JOE is a white paper which looks at critical issues 20 years ahead, which shape the battlefield of the future.” Grimm is a senior intelligence specialist in the Experimentation Division at U.S. Joint Forces Command Intelligence Directorate.

“We have a requirement to write concepts for the future. Nobody really knows what the future holds,” Grimm said. “We all probably have an idea about the future. This document was set forth to extrapolate and to look out into the future.”

“The JOE has allowed us to create an environment where we can put forces, having this global context,” said Schmidt. “The context from which we develop the JOE impacts the concept development, which in turn impacts our wargame and experiments.”

This is a living document, said Schmidt. “It says ‘draft’ on it, and I suspect that draft notation on it will be permanent. There are no end goals specified in the document, and the document is constantly being changed incrementally and adjusted downrange. As we start working ourselves toward the future, we want to do that in the context that is rational and reasonable.”

“We are supposed to be shaping or transforming the forces for the future,” Grimm said. “Writing future operational concepts, one of the things they discuss is the threat and the future operational environment these concepts will address. The JOE document underpins or is the foundation to some of our future operational concepts.”

The first JOE document was published as a white paper in October 2003 and stems from a TRADOC publication that talked about the current operational environment from the Army’s view, according to Grimm.

“This is not a projection of the future,” Schmidt said. “But it provides a reasonable framework for people to develop more specific scenarios; this gives them a much larger overview of the variables that you’ll have to consider.”

Schmidt said these are the trends that we have identified now and how they may impact the environment in the next 15 to 20 years, such as population shift and urbanization. “There are other variables that we factor into the document, such as the adversary will most likely not be stupid. He will probably be smart and adaptive,” he said.

"We look at where technology is going, what is happening demographically in the world. The warfighting community in the United States is looking at what we may face in the future," said Grimm. "We see how the threat has been evolving over the last several years; we have been fighting a more non-traditional or asymmetric threat.

"We look at the changes we see in doctrine, in technologies and things we are observing in tactics right now. We can get a sense for what we can accomplish today, and in 20 years we should be able to do something else," said Grimm.

While the lion's share of the document has been developed at TRADOC, it does apply to the Joint arena. "When the Army is experimenting in multiservice and multinational wargames, they have this view of the world and what the adversary is going to look like. It is helpful because everyone would be working from a common context of the world," said Schmidt.

TRADOC recently hosted a seminar on the Joint operational environment that representatives from the services and coalition countries attended. According to Schmidt, the JOE document is being farmed out to the other services and coalition forces to get their take on this platform.

"It is a very broad document. It is an unclassified white paper but marked 'For Official Use Only' so we can share it with our allies and coalition partners to get their perspective to see if they are integrating the JOE or have different viewpoints," said Grimm.

"Going into the future, we will have an increasing dependency in fighting with coalition forces," said Schmidt. "This makes it important to get their perspective on what they think the global context will be in the year 2020 and beyond."

"The seminar provided a chance to get their opinion on what they saw as the future threat and the future operational environment," said Grimm. "The countries in attendance gave their national perspective, and some of their opinions will be expressed in the next revision."

This document is still relatively new but is being recognized as a credible document in the Joint arena. "The document is a synthesis of ideas in one place," Grimm said. "One of the things we would like to do with the document is to get it accredited by the defense intelligence community. We are in the process of engaging with the community to take a critical look at the JOE.

"We realize this is unclassified. As an unclassified document, are we on the right track?" Grimm asked. "Does this document have merit? And if we can get them to validate it, it lends more credibility."

This living document is less than a year old, "and we know it will get better as it gets updated," said Grimm. "Once that next revision comes out, we are going to try to get that validated from the defense intel community so we can get some credibility for it. We at Joint Forces Command think this document has merit. We are getting the perspective of others in the defense community, coalition and multinational partners. This is what we think the future may hold."