



# Army Transformation and the Role of Tables of Distribution and Allowances

By Christopher Carver

# TDA vs

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# MTOE

Tables of distribution and allowances can be used to experiment with new unit structures and mission sets, leverage emerging technologies, and document unique equipment sets.

The adage “generals always fight the last war” reveals the Army’s propensity to focus on how things were done in the past. This adage is traditionally associated with the strategy and tactics of warfighting, but it also can and must be applied to the process of force management.

The role of force management and its influence on military readiness, organizational requirements, and capabilities should be focused on the total force. The arrangement, allocation, and documentation of manpower, personnel, and equipment must change with the current environment, which means that old institutional paradigms must evolve or be discarded.

The use of manpower and equipment in land warfare has changed significantly since World War II and even since the first Gulf War; however, institutional paradigms have changed little over this time.

In his book *Transformation Under Fire: Revolutionizing How America Fights*, Douglas Macgregor states that current efforts of Army transformation are materiel-centric and “largely cosmetic.” He writes, “Instead of recognizing that the Army’s strategic problem was not exclusively equipment, but legacy structure, legacy thinking, the Army set out to buy new platforms ... this is a strategy for change that is largely centered on new technologies rather than on new ideas.”

Transforming the Army for the 21st century must therefore begin with a closer examination of how the Army is structured and, further, how that structure is developed and documented. The Army force structure is recorded in two types of authorization documents: tables of distribution and allowances (TDAs) and modified tables of organization and equipment (MTOEs).

Although the majority of attention tends to be focused on MTOEs, which reflect most of the operating force, TDA documents can be successfully used to effect Army

transformation. TDAs traditionally document strategic, institutional, and mission command missions and their supporting infrastructures, but the Army should evaluate the possibility of expanding the range of units and missions that can be documented in this format.

#### TDAs and MTOEs

Using TDAs for operating force units offers a unique opportunity to experiment with new combat configurations, incorporate new technologies, and augment certain units. However, before these possibilities can be examined, it is important to dispel some common misconceptions about Army manpower and equipment documentation.

Perhaps the most predominant institutional paradigm regarding force management is the concept that warfighting units must, by default, be documented by MTOEs and that all peacetime and noncombat units are documented by TDAs. This is simply not true. Some MTOE documents reflect units that are considered part of the institutional generating force. For example, the National Training Center’s opposing force is primarily documented as an MTOE.

Also, some TDA units are involved in operating force missions. Some of the more significant, specially tailored warfighting units in the post-9/11 period are TDA units, and the use of forward deployed TDAs for critical missions is nothing new. The headquarters and headquarters company of the Berlin Brigade, one of the most visible brigades of the Cold War, was a TDA unit for almost 20 years.

MTOE documents are driven by doctrine. They are built from a standardized table of organization and equipment (TOE) developed by an Army Center of Excellence. The TOE is then modified to incorporate basis of issue plans in accordance with guidance from Headquarters, Department of the Army, and applied to a specific unit. The process of creating a new TOE or radically

altering an existing one is thus highly regimented and time-consuming.

The MTOE document and the documentation systems are built on the premise that there are pre-existing doctrine, policies, and validation for the various Soldier and equipment interdependencies for that unit.

When mission requirements are constantly evolving, or when equipment is developmental or lacks a formalized support structure, the flexibility required for ad hoc structure development and updates runs counter to the design of the MTOE documentation process and software. Therefore, documenting an exception MTOE often is like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole.

TDA documents, on the other hand, are designed for unique mission sets and capabilities for which doctrine is yet to be developed or is unnecessary. The documentation process from which TDAs are produced can quickly and efficiently produce unique, adaptable units while still ensuring that Army manpower, personnel, funding, and equipment policies are enforced.

In cases where an operational unit must be established quickly and no corresponding TOE exists, the unit can be more efficiently built using a TDA, saving a significant amount of work for both the unit and the Army.

### New Technologies

The 21st century has brought new threats that are quickly evolving and emerging technologies that may be used by or against our forces. In this rapidly changing environment, the Army may face challenges and threats for which there is no established doctrine and little time to develop formal policies and procedures for countering these threats.

In situations like these, TDA documents can quickly provide a prototype operating force unit in which organization, structure, and equipment can be developed and tested in real-time scenarios.

Macgregor states, “In a period when rapid obsolescence is a high risk, wildcatting with new designs, even aggressively courting failure, is absolutely necessary.” Although his statement is directed toward the development of combat equipment, the same argument could be made for the development of new combat units, organizational structures, and their documentation.

### Task Force ODIN

In 2006, the growing casualties caused by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) during Operation Iraqi Freedom resulted in a congressional inquiry that tasked the Army to develop a capability to counter that threat. The Army answered this challenge by standing up Task Force ODIN [observe, detect, identify, and neutralize]. The unit’s mission was to negate the threat from roadside IEDs.

Task Force ODIN used existing and prototype equipment, such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to accomplish its mission. Although units that employed UAVs for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance existed, Task Force ODIN’s mission and equipment set was too unique to be built from any existing TOE.

Since time was a critical factor, force developers decided to build the unit with a TDA. This approach lent itself to adaptability and efficiency. The unit was developed in August 2006 and became fully operational in July 2007. In its first year of operation, Task Force ODIN was credited with actions that led to the elimination of more than 3,000 adversaries and the capture of almost 150 insurgent leaders.

The approach used to develop Task Force ODIN can be used to develop future capabilities that, because of time constraints or the uniqueness of a particular mission, preclude the development of an MTOE.

A TDA could be used to create an operational unit that can be adapted after both warfighting concepts and

equipment are tested and adjusted in the field.

After such units discover the best mix of equipment, organization, skills, and structure for the highest degree of functionality for the mission set, the Army can use this information to create the foundation of a base TOE from which future similar units can be built for the operating force.

In time, the original unit could be redocumented as an MTOE organization after the design of that unit or mission set becomes standardized. Of course, if the unit in question remains unique to the force and no other units with similar missions sets are ever developed, the unit should remain a TDA unit that would continue to evolve to fit its mission. Developing a TOE for a single, specialized capability would waste time and effort.

### New Equipment

One of the significant challenges of Task Force ODIN was that much of its equipment was too new or still in various stages of development, which kept it from being assigned Army line item numbers (LINs). MTOE documents cannot reflect nonstandard equipment. However, TDA documents have a special annex section that can be used to document a piece of equipment that does not have a standard LIN.

As new technologies emerge, some of them will likely be deemed essential to mission sets before a standard LIN can be assigned. This was true in the case of the mine-resistant ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicle. Numerous types of MRAP vehicles were produced, but even after several years, no official LIN numbers were assigned.

Some MRAPs worked well in certain situations but were poorly suited for others. Also, maintenance requirements varied among the types. Thus, it was important for units to be able to select the right type of MRAP for their missions.

Only through validating and doc-

umenting the nonstandard LIN with TDAs were units able to identify the right type of MRAP for a given mission set.

This process was used for mission sets in Afghanistan. Several equipment-only TDAs were developed to supplement the equipment that was already in theater. As new units rotated in, the mission-essential equipment could be documented on the TDA.

Incoming units were told what equipment they would need to bring with them into theater as well as what equipment could be left behind. The goal was to reduce the logistics burden while ensuring that the units always had the right mix for their assigned missions, which varied significantly from their doctrinal TOE missions.

Although TDAs can be used to incorporate new and emerging technologies that are critical to the success of the warfighting mission, there are limitations to using a TDA in this manner. Using the supplemental section to list breakthrough technologies is not a complete equipping strategy because the data from the supplemental equipment section of the TDA does not feed into any automated resourcing system, nor has there been a demand for a process to propagate the data.

Therefore, trying to document all nonstandard equipment would waste both time and effort. The equipment documented in the supplemental equipment section of the TDA should be limited to those key equipment sets that are essential or that the gaining unit may be unfamiliar with.

### Regionally Aligned Forces

Just as new equipment can place unique demands on the Army documentation process, so can the emerging initiatives of our national military strategy. The recently developed regionally aligned forces (RAF) concept is likely to require capabilities that are unique to a particular part of the world or even a specific country.

As the U.S. partners with other nations, regional challenges could present requirements that are critical to certain missions but are too rare in the rest of the world to justify developing a new TOE or changing the RAF unit's MTOE.

TDAs could be constructed to supplement RAF, including allied coalition forces with organizational structures and equipment specifically designed around the mission sets projected for certain areas of the world.

A 2013 RAND Corporation study identified the need for capturing such supplemental capabilities, noting that evolving changes in technologies and capabilities means that "the MTOE is therefore less relevant as a near-term gauge of readiness, and it needs to be supplemented by an indication of the extent to which a unit has deviated from that design."

The RAND study noted that this approach would be shaped by differentiating between the "designed" missions for the MTOE and the actual "assigned" mission for the deployed unit. Naturally, future capabilities that the Army deems as universal and enduring would be incorporated into the doctrinal base TOE.

However, specific capabilities may be mission essential for one particular region but have no bearing in any other part of the world. These capabilities could be documented with an "augmentation TDA" in order to supplement a specific unit.

Or they could be documented with an independent TDA for specific missions and countries that various units could rotate into. Such TDAs could be used to help coordinate coalition capabilities and determine the amount of support that the United States would be required or expected to provide.

Training unique TDA force structures may be a challenge for commanders, but this training burden might be easier to meet than trying to retrain a doctrinally designed

unit to perform a mission set that was not part of the developed doctrine. Moreover, as indicated by the RAND study, doctrine tends to be based on models and expectations that differ greatly from the reality of the battlefield.

### Specific Missions

In addition to manpower requirements, future support to a specific region may require the use of Army pre-positioned stocks (APS). Currently all APS documents are MTOEs.

Some equipment sets may not be incorporated into TOEs, yet they are still critical for certain mission sets. In this situation, RAF APS or theater-provided equipment (TPE) TDAs could contain supplemental equipment that would be tailored to region-specific missions.

For example, one TDA might be designed around a mission set of security assistance and protecting our embassies in a large urban environment with a developed infrastructure. Another TDA might capture mission and equipment needs for an area with undeveloped roads in a thick jungle. Just as the TPE TDAs for Afghanistan were intended to work, each of these RAF TDAs would contain an equipment set that best fits a specific region and mission.

At a forum on RAF, Lt. Gen. James L. Huggins Jr., Army G-3/5/7, advised that commanders should try to anticipate needs "far in advance to mitigate risk and delays and help the Army better apportion those assets." An RAF TDA could help commanders anticipate needs far in advance by maintaining supplemental TPE.

When a situation arises that requires Army involvement, selected units could ensure that commanders already had equipment sets validated for that environment and would know what equipment, if any, they would have to bring from their home station to augment the APS for their specific mission requirements. This would greatly reduce planning, transportation, and oth-



*Spc. Jesse Searls, an aerial sensor operator with Task Force ODIN, fires his M9 pistol at a familiarization range. Task Force ODIN is an operating force unit that was built using a table of distribution and allowances. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Jack W. Carlson III)*

er logistics requirements, allowing units to deploy more rapidly.

Documenting the force by TDAs is not a panacea for all the challenges the Army faces in the 21st century. It is a tool that is often overlooked when searching for ways to improve force management.

Like any tool, it can be very effective for certain jobs but may be the wrong instrument for others. The TDA is, above all, an authorization document. TDAs should not be developed for basic modeling, mission-essential equipment lists, joint manning documents, or other temporary units.

Using TDAs to meet every force management challenge would result in an unnecessary investment of time, manpower, and other resources. The attention to detail that document integrators spend on ensuring that TDAs are valid, accurate, and

conform to Army guidance would be cost-prohibitive if the capabilities captured in those documents were not intended to be stable and enduring. As the Army continues to transform in an era of constrained resources the processes of force development, integration, and documentation will become paramount to ensure the Army remains viable in the modern world.

Old paradigms and archetypes must be discarded when they no longer fit the reality of the current environment. The current documentation format of Army force structure, TDAs and MTOEs, dates back to 1943. Much has changed since then and so should our methods of force development and documentation.

The TDA can be effectively used to meet emerging challenges for the future force. In cases where a long threat analysis process, combat development, and TOE development

are not practical, the TDA can be a valid option for manpower and equipment management.

TDAs are not the end-all solution to the Army's force documentation challenges, but they can be highly effective for establishing new capabilities or managing unique force management requirements.

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