Artificial Intelligence (AI)- Enabled Decision Making in Multi Domain Operations (MDO)

Brig Eshan Dalal, Research Scholar, Defence & Strategic Studies Department
Jiwaji University, Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, INDIA
Girish Sharma, Ph.D., Guide, Military Science, P. G. Department & Research Center
Govt. Science College, Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, INDIA

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Authors
Brig Eshan Dalal, Research Scholar
Girish Sharma, Ph.D., Guide

E-mail : eshandalal09@gmail.com

shodhsamagam1@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Multi Domain Operations (MDO) compress time, expand the battlespace and saturate commanders with information from land, air, maritime, space, cyber, electromagnetic and the cognitive domains. Traditional linear and hierarchical decision cycles cannot match this tempo or diversity. This article argues for disciplined integration of artificial intelligence (AI) to accelerate the observe orient decide act loop while maintaining human command responsibility. It explains why AI matters for operational advantage, distinguishes AI assisted and AI driven modes of decision making and outlines enabling technologies such as machine learning, neural networks and natural language processing. It then analyses the decision frictions unique to MDO information overload, deception, incomplete data and identifies four AI imperatives: convergence, optimization, synchronization and speed of awareness and action. Two developmental pathways are reviewed: the AI enabled Data and Applications Fusion Model and the AI enabled Military Decision Making Process (MDMP). Drawing upon Indian Army initiatives and global practice, the paper recommends a hybrid human AI approach emphasizing cognitive assistance, explainability and mission tailored workflows. Finally, it proposes concrete research directions ranging from swarm autonomy and predictive logistics to quantum resilient command and control networks. The central conclusion is that AI can shorten the OODA loop without surrendering judgment, ethics, or accountability to algorithms.

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KEY WORDS

Artificial Intelligence (AI), Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP), Machine Learning, Autonomous Systems, Cognitive Decision Support.

INTRODUCTION

Multi Domain Operations demand the capacity and endurance to operate across every dimension of conflict from dense urban terrain to the electromagnetic spectrum, space, cyberspace and even the cognitive sphere often under contested conditions. In such an environment, advantage derives from the rapid integration of collection, processing, dissemination and exploitation of information at scale. Against adaptive adversaries, commanders require AI enabled systems capable of transforming vast ISR data into timely, actionable understanding.

Aim

To analyse AI-Enabled Decision Making and recommend a way forward toward possible exploitation of AI-Enabled Decision Making in Multi Domain Operations (MDO).

Why AI?

Artificial intelligence augments human judgment by analysing large and fast moving data sets, revealing patterns and generating courses of action with measurable confidence. Two decision modes are relevant. AI assisted systems provide recommendations and insights while leaving final judgment to a human decision maker; AI driven systems operate autonomously within predefined limits for time critical, rule based tasks. In modern operations both modes are indispensable: the former for complex, ethically charged decisions and the latter for micro decisions such as sensor tasking or fire control corrections where milliseconds determine success.

Key AI Technologies used in Decision-Making

Machine learning enables predictive analysis and anomaly detection by learning from data, while neural network and deep learning architectures extract meaning from imagery, signals and telemetry to support sensor fusion. Natural language processing allows machines to interpret textual or voice inputs, transforming unstructured reports into structured knowledge. Together these technologies make it possible to convert overwhelming data flows into operationally relevant information.

How AI Improves Decisions in MDO

AI systems enhance decision making through advanced support functions that provide alternate courses of action, forecasted outcomes and risk probabilities. They uncover hidden patterns, conduct simulations and learn continuously from feedback. They facilitate collaboration across echelons by presenting common visualizations of battlefield and by forecasting logistical or operational needs. True value lies not in perfect prediction but in faster, better informed approximations under uncertainty decisions that evolve dynamically with the battle.

Traditional Military Decision Making and its Limits under MDO

Classical staff procedures such as Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield, the Military Decision Making Process and the Joint Operations Planning Process were designed for a slower, sequential environment. These methods, though robust, are linear and limited by human cognitive capacity. They rely on hierarchical information flow and standard operating procedures, with automation confined to data collation and mapping. In multi domain context, such rigidity leads to delays and an over dependence on partial intelligence, constraining creativity. AI based Decision Support Systems (DSS) allow commanders and staffs to move from information collection toward insight generation, shifting effort from compilation to interpretation.

Decision Frictions Unique to MDO

Colonel John Boyd's OODA concept out cycling the adversary faces new challenges when information flows simultaneously from multiple domains. Commanders experience overload, deception and latency as data from land, air, maritime, space, cyber and cognitive fronts arrive in torrents. Effective MDO therefore requires converging ISR capabilities faster than any human team can manually process. Robust AI and machine learning become indispensable for data fusion and for dissemination of actionable intelligence to decision cells in near real time. U.S. Army's MDO framework envisages a layered ISR network of autonomous sensors, human intelligence and special operations elements, in which AI accelerates analysis and distribution.

What AI Must Enable

To function meaningfully in MDO, AI must achieve four outcomes. First, convergence: the rapid and continuous integration of diverse capabilities across domains, including intelligence development and surveillance tasking, even under electromagnetic disruption. Second, optimization: striking right target at right time through efficient pairing of sensors, shooters and effects. Third, synchronization: merging situational awareness, fires, maneuver and sustainment so that brief windows of domain superiority can be created and exploited. Finally, speed of awareness and action: identifying decisive conditions early, visualizing them and enabling rapid re tasking to compress the detect decide deliver cycle without eroding integrity of command.

Narrow AI and General AI Designing for Today, Not Tomorrow

Narrow AI, sometimes called weak AI, is designed for specific tasks and already permeates civilian life through translation engines, voice assistants and recommendation systems. In military settings, such models must be composable and interoperable so that specialized algorithms imagery recognition, signal analysis, route optimization can be sequenced into mission workflows. General AI, or Artificial General Intelligence, capable of cross domain reasoning, remains theoretical. Operational design should therefore concentrate on fielding robust, testable narrow AI tools that are auditable and resistant to adversarial manipulation.

AI in the Indian Army: Momentum and Opportunities

Indian Army has begun integrating AI across multiple functional areas: intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, autonomous vehicles, cybersecurity, training simulation and predictive analytics. Demonstrations of drone swarms and AI driven imagery exploitation, along with institutional mechanisms such as Defence AI Council and the Defence AI Project Agency, show a determined national approach. Partnerships with public and private industries, including collaborations with BEL on predictive and generative AI, are expanding. These initiatives signal a shift toward dual use innovation but also underscore need for standardized data governance, transparent validation frameworks and commander education to cultivate trust in AI recommendations.

Two Practical Development Paths

First pathway is AI enabled Data and Applications Fusion Model designed to link command and control, fire support and intelligence functions through layered integration. At the edge, onboard AI performs initial exploitation of sensor data; a second layer fuses outputs across ISR.

Second pathway is the AI enabled Military Decision Making Process (MDMP), focusing initially on mission analysis. Here, staff tasks can be ranked according to war fighter benefit and technical feasibility. Immediate automation is possible for activities such as initial IPB preparation, assessment of asset availability and shortfalls, identification of constraints, collation of facts and assumptions, optimization of time plans and generation of draft warning orders. Tasks requiring further research include automated parsing of higher headquarters directives, extraction of specified and implied tasks, probabilistic risk assessment and narrative generation for information operations. Command intent, ethical review and final approval must remain human responsibilities.

Recommended Application Areas in MDO

AI should be applied to ISR fusion by integrating multi source intelligence with confidence measures and automated alerts; to real time targeting through collateral damage estimation and sensor to shooter pairing; to network management through adaptive routing under electronic attack; to coordination of uncrewed aerial and ground systems through decentralized task allocation; and to operational planning through AI assisted course of action generation and red teaming.

Design Principles for Human AI Teaming

Effective military AI must function as a cognitive assistant rather than a substitute for command. It should provide transparent reasoning, confidence levels and traceable evidence. Hybrid collaboration where algorithms supply speed and humans supply context ensures balanced judgment. Systems should manage cognitive load by filtering irrelevant data and highlighting anomalies. Trust must be built through shadow mode testing, validation in exercises and clear interfaces that display how recommendations are derived.

AI Enabled Mission Analysis Automate What Matters

Immediate opportunities lie in automated layering of terrain and sensor imagery, real time inventory of available assets, constraint extraction from rules of engagement, dynamic time budgeting and semi automatic generation of warning orders. Research priorities include natural language models capable of parsing operational orders, Bayesian risk estimation that quantifies uncertainty and machine generated narrative frameworks aligned with commander's intent. Command judgment, ethics and political considerations must remain human prerogatives.

Data, Models and the Adversary

MDO data are often incomplete, deceptive and noisy. AI models must therefore express uncertainty explicitly through confidence and provenance tags, remain robust to adversarial spoofing and perform gracefully in degraded communication environments. They must enforce strong data governance and security across coalition networks while allowing rapid retraining as new data arrive.

Metrics That Matter

Evaluation of AI in command contexts should track time saved between detection, decision and effect; the accuracy and reliability of recommendations; the rate at which commanders accept or override AI suggestions; resilience under jamming or deception; and interoperability with allied systems.

Recommended Research Lines for a Defence AI Program

Future research should address swarm intelligence for decentralized operations, predictive battle analysis that anticipates escalation, pre emptive logistics optimization to forecast supply shortages, cognitive domain defence against misinformation, quantum inspired algorithms for large scale optimization and quantum resistant cryptography for secure AI mediated command networks.

Implementation Roadmap

A realistic near term roadmap involves identifying a few priority mission threads such as counter UAS defence, brigade level ISR fusion, maritime interdiction, or contested logistics and establishing reliable data pipelines for them. Narrow, composable AI models should be built for each sub task and linked through workflow engines rather than one massive system. Essential inferences must run at the edge with central retraining when bandwidth permits. Human on the loop interfaces should provide explanations and easy override functions. Field trials should progress from simulation to shadow mode and then live exercises, feeding results into doctrine, training and tactical publications.

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CONCLUSION

Artificial intelligence has emerged as a tempo technology that compresses decision cycles, scales analysis across domains and enables simultaneous employment of joint capabilities. The success of MDO will depend not merely on acquiring AI tools but on integrating them responsibly through modular narrow AI solutions, explicit uncertainty management, adversarial robustness and transparent interfaces that elevate rather than obscure human judgment. Beginning with mission analysis and ISR fusion, militaries can achieve immediate efficiency gains while preparing for richer cross domain synchronization. The goal is not to transfer command authority to algorithms but to arm commanders with faster, clearer and more trustworthy insights so that decisive action can outpace the adversary's decision loop while preserving the ethical, legal and strategic primacy of human control.

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