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Preparing and Training for the Full Spectrum of Military Challenges

Insights from the Experiences of
China, France, the United Kingdom,
India, and Israel

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Prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense

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Summary

I'm worried that we're losing the edge on our ability to conduct full-spectrum operations and major combat operations. . . . Some people say that we're so busy all we can do is focus on COIN [counterinsurgency] operations and we have no time to focus on major combat operations and I think that is wrong.

—*Lieutenant General Rick Lynch, Commanding General,
III Armored Corps*¹

The difficult and continually evolving operations in Iraq and Afghanistan show the complexities of what is now termed *irregular warfare* and highlight the need for new approaches to the security challenges with which the United States is now contending and will likely confront in the future. The research reported in this monograph focused on answering a rather straightforward, but thus far largely unanswered, question: What can the U.S. military learn from other militaries about how better to prepare for full-spectrum operations and deployments? To this end, RAND was asked by the OSD for Personnel and Readiness to examine the militaries of China, France, the UK, India, and Israel.

Not surprisingly, the training and organizing approaches of the armed forces of China, France, the UK, India, and Israel reflect the demands placed on them by their specific strategic environments. Our research, therefore, focused on identifying areas in which these coun-

¹ Kate Brannen, "Ft. Hood Commander Concerned Army Is Losing Full-Spectrum Capabilities," *InsideDefense.com*, April 9, 2009.

tries employ different approaches to readiness and operational issues that may offer potential benefits to the U.S. system.

Most Insights Come from Ground-Force Experiences

Early in the course of our research, it became obvious that the differences between how the United States and other nations train their ground forces are much greater than the differences between how they train their air and naval forces. The ways in which air and naval operations are conducted are much less affected by changes in the geographic and sociopolitical setting than are ground-force operations. Therefore, there is less scope for differences in how countries approach the problem of how to prepare air and naval forces for different contingencies. The principal adaptations required of air and naval forces are those dictated by (1) the relative capabilities of an adversary and (2) the specific rules of engagement imposed by the national command authorities. The adaptations of air or naval forces required by changes in the physical environment and the sociopolitical milieu are much less demanding than those required of ground forces. This is not to say that the former set of adaptations is not demanding: We only wish to note that U.S. air and naval forces face challenges comparable to those faced by the other nations and that all those forces train and prepare for the challenges in similar ways. The major difference is that the U.S. naval and air forces are much larger and their training is generally better resourced. The principal area of commonality shared by all the air forces we examined is the difficulty of integrating those air forces with ground forces. This is partly an issue of interservice cooperation and different perspectives, but it is also one of meaningful joint training in peacetime.

Ground forces face a very different situation than do naval and air forces. All of the states we examined, with the exception of China, are or have recently been engaged in active military operations that range from participation in large-scale combat operations to COIN to peacekeeping to train, advise, and assist (TAA) missions. These very different types of operations, in our view, suggest that ground forces

face the greatest demands in preparing for multiple types of military challenges. Furthermore, several of the nations we examined take different approaches than does the United States and therefore yield the majority of the insights in this monograph.

Strategic Imperatives, the Range of Military Operations, Specialty Forces, and Human Capital

Each of the states we assessed organizes and maintains its military forces to address what it perceives as its strategic circumstances. The militaries of France and the UK look most like the U.S. military. Neither nation faces any internal threats that require a military response, and, thus, their militaries are used abroad to pursue national policies and priorities. Both militaries deploy their forces overseas, but these deployments are limited to fit the size of the country's force and budget. Furthermore, deployed French and British forces often serve in a supporting role (e.g., contributing to coalition operations in Iraq or Afghanistan). Both France and the UK also employ significant TAA missions to extend their influence.

China and India, on the other hand, are focused on external threats and internal issues. They participate in few deployments, and those in which they do participate are almost exclusively noncombat operations conducted under the auspices of the United Nations (UN).

Finally, Israel faces a strategic circumstance that requires its armed forces to prepare for a mix of internal and external threats. Furthermore, these threats demand forces that are trained, organized, and equipped for high- and low-intensity operations and for contending with a state that does not share a border with Israel (i.e., Iran).

The militaries of the states we assessed are generally organized around general-purpose forces designed principally for combat operations. The UK, France, and Israel each visualize a range of operations that their forces may have to execute. Although they also rely on general-purpose forces, China and India mostly prepare their forces for a specific activity (e.g., COIN in India) or for operations relevant to a specific military challenge (e.g., a Taiwan contingency in China).

Additionally, China, France, India, and Israel all employ paramilitary specialty forces used for internal-security missions that lie somewhere between policing and military action (e.g., COIN, civil support, humanitarian assistance), and China has used its paramilitary forces to support a UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti. However, there does not appear to be a joint culture in any of these nations, except the UK.

All the nations we examined, except Israel and, to a degree, China, rely on volunteer forces (or are moving in that direction) and are reducing the size of their militaries. Long-serving volunteers are replacing conscripts, which results in higher costs but increased professionalism and a more sophisticated operational capability. Israel is the clear exception: There, universal service is still the basis of Israel's active-duty and reserve forces. In the active component, however, the Israeli system has resulted in a military without a noncommissioned-officer corps. Thus, Israeli junior officers pick up duties and responsibilities that, in other militaries, are in the realm of career noncommissioned officers.

Insights from Other Nations—Potential Best Practices

As already noted, each of the countries we examined relies on general-purpose forces organized principally for conventional combat operations. In this regard, the five nations are all very similar to the United States. There are, however, several differences evident in predeployment training, the use of subject-matter experts (SMEs), the approach to staff training, the use of combat training centers (CTCs), and approaches to the TAA mission. These differences, described in the following sections, may offer potential best practices for improving U.S. training systems.

Predeployment Training Can Build on Strong Traditional Skills

Training for traditional challenges appears to be highly successful in developing foundational individual and collective skills, skills that the British Army's Land Warfare Center calls the *adaptive foundation*. The term *adaptive foundation* refers to the starting point from which forces can subsequently be adapted to specific operational environments. The

UK's training and readiness cycle spends most of its time, and all of its CTC resources, preparing forces for traditional challenges. CTCs at Sennelager, Salisbury Plain, and the British Army Training Unit Suffield in Canada continue to focus on major combat operations (MCO), although they are integrating a more complex environment into training scenarios.

Preparing units for a specific operational environment (a process called *force generation*) requires a relatively modest commitment of time and resources, provided that units are well-trained in basic military operations (a process called *force preparation*). British forces have earned an enviable reputation at the level of the battle group and below in such diverse theaters as Northern Ireland, the Balkans, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The UK's Operational Training and Advisory Group (OPTAG) has the mission of preparing forces for deployment into these various theaters. OPTAG accomplishes this mission with fewer than 200 assigned military personnel (of very high quality). In a training and readiness cycle that lasts 24 months, OPTAG requires around one month to train the trainers; then, it allows the trainers to train their units and conducts a confirmatory exercise. India's various battle schools, including the XVth Corps Battle Schools, the Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School, and the High Altitude Warfare School, prepare units in a similar fashion, represent a similarly modest commitment of resources and seem to prepare units well for asymmetric challenges.

SMEs Can Provide Crucial Capability

The training of units in the Indian Army is tailored to the specific region and specific operational conditions in which units are stationed. In day-to-day operations, this is a viable approach. When the units deploy to contingencies for which they have not prepared—as in the 1999 war in Kargil, examined in Chapter Five—this approach can prove inadequate. In the Kargil crisis, Indian troops acclimated and trained for tropical COIN operations were not prepared for conventional combat operations in the mountains. The insight from the Indian experience in Kargil is that a small group of SMEs—in this case, mountain-warfare experts—can rapidly infuse capability into units by enabling forces

trained for one environment or contingency to improve their performance in a different set of circumstances. In the United States, this SME approach could be a way to improve training for specific deployments or to improve the performance of units that are deployed against contingencies that were not the focus of predeployment preparations. To do this, the U.S. military should take advantage of SMEs for operations across the spectrum and for different types of complex terrain, whether mountainous, urban, or jungle. Furthermore, to leverage these SMEs, a system of identifying and tracking SMEs across the force has to be in place.

Staff Training Can Serve as a Vehicle to Prepare Forces for Multiple Contingencies

French processes for command and control (C2) training offer a potential model for training staffs for multiple types of operational contingencies. The effective transition of French forces in the Ivory Coast in 2004 from peacekeeping operations to irregular warfare² demonstrated very agile C2 capabilities and was certainly more effective than either the U.S. transition to stability operations in Iraq after MCO or the British response to the deteriorating situation in Basra from 2005 onward. The professional French response undoubtedly owed much to the force's highly unorthodox operational commander, General Henri Poncet, but it also points to the importance of highly trained staffs. French brigade staffs gain their proficiency by conducting three to four times as many command post exercises (CPXs) per year as either the U.S. or the British staffs. Furthermore, a number of these CPXs are externally evaluated.

The significantly greater frequency of CPX training in the French force is enabled in part by the fact that the French often train a single echelon at a very reduced scale. This training omits many of the ancil-

² See U.S. Department of the Army, FM 3-0, *Operations*, Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2008, p. 2-4. U.S. Army doctrine currently recognizes five major operational themes: peacetime military engagement, limited intervention, peace operations (of which peacekeeping operations are a subset), irregular warfare, and MCO. Of these, irregular warfare seems best to capture the cognitive thrust of what was going on in Côte d'Ivoire.

lary functions required to establish and maintain headquarters (HQ) and instead focuses narrowly on cognitive processes. Thus, conducting a meaningful CPX does not require coordinating the schedules of multiple HQ at several echelons—an effort whose scope, resource demands, and complexity deter frequent repetition. Technology also plays an enabling role. France’s Simulation de Combat Interarmées pour la Préparation Interactive des Opérations for brigade HQ and above automates many of the entities, reducing the requirements for higher- and lower-control players.

The French process of increasing the proficiency of unit HQ seems to be highly effective in enabling units to master transitions, and their ability to do so shows that C2 training yields a high return on a marginal training investment. Thus, directed, evaluated CPXs could provide a training methodology for U.S. forces that could help address concerns, recently voiced by U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George Casey, about the deterioration of critical integration, synchronization, and other skills required to prevail across the full range of military operations. According to General Casey,

Current operational requirements for forces and insufficient time between deployments require a focus on counterinsurgency training and equipping to the detriment of preparedness for the full range of military missions.³

CTCs Can Be Used Differently

Several of our case studies show that other countries believe that their training centers should mainly provide foundational combined-arms fire-and-maneuver training. The militaries build on these skills with predeployment training focused on the specific operational environment to which a given unit is deploying. We believe that reorienting U.S. training to a predeployment model along the lines of OPTAG or the Indian Army’s Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School would allow CTCs to return to a principal focus on task-force

³ U.S. Department of the Army, *2008 Army Posture Statement: A Campaign Quality Army with Joint and Expeditionary Capabilities*, Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2008, p. 6.

combined-arms fire-and-maneuver operations training. We believe that this training is critical to maintaining full-spectrum capabilities and to addressing General Casey's concerns. We are not implying that there should be a return to a "Fulda Gap" model; rather, we believe that the model employed by several of the countries we examined is worthy of close examination by the United States. Additionally, we are not advocating that the CTCs return to portraying a sterile battlefield. The British Army Training Unit Suffield has integrated villages, civilians, and other complications into its training scenarios. Similarly, the Israelis have a sophisticated urban-operations training facility in Tze'elim.

It is logical to assume that when units spend time at CTCs preparing for the operational environment in Iraq and Afghanistan, they are not using that time to train for synchronized brigade and battalion task-force combat operations. It makes eminent sense to prepare units for the specific operational context they will face, but doing so at a CTC sacrifices an opportunity to conduct foundational combined-arms training at facilities uniquely suited to provide this training. Contextual training could likely be done elsewhere (at lower cost) or become one component of the CTC experience. Clearly, U.S. CTCs are the locations best prepared to provide combined-arms training in intense simulated combat. And, as the Israeli experience in Lebanon in 2006 shows, intense combat is not so much about scale (i.e., battalion or brigade force-on-force engagements) as about the qualitative challenges hybrid adversaries can pose. Opponents with a modicum of training, organization, and advanced weaponry—like Hezbollah—create tactical and operational dilemmas that demand combined-arms fire and maneuver. Thus, based on their experiences in Lebanon in 2006, the Israelis have reoriented the focus of much of their training—particularly the training conducted at the Tze'elim training center—on what they call *high-intensity conflict* (HIC). Their subsequent performance in Gaza in December 2008–January 2009 seems to show that this reorientation was wise.

Moreover, because the goal of the training centers in France, the UK, and Israel is foundational rather than finishing, U.S. units might profitably undergo their CTC rotation earlier in their training cycle.

The point of maneuver exercises in the UK and Israel is as much to teach staff operations, planning, troop-leading procedures, and basic tactical skills as to teach specific collective tasks. British forces undergo CTC rotations toward the middle of their readiness cycle, and such rotations constitute most of French forces' collective preparations for an operational tour.

Approaches to the TAA Mission—the French and British Models

Of all the countries we assessed in this study, it appears that France and the UK have the TAA models that provide insights into improving the U.S. model. All three countries view TAA and building partner capacity (BPC) as ways in which they can favorably shape and influence the global security environment. That said, their TAA approaches differ significantly in several key areas: trainer selection, mode of deployment, training of the trainers, and career implications for the trainer.

In the United States and the UK, the processes for selecting trainers and advisers from the conventional forces do not appear to be particularly rigorous, and these assignments are not generally sought by officers in these two countries. What appears most different in the French model for selecting advisers is that service on advisory duty is expected of French officers who are competitive for advancement.

The U.S. system for preparing trainers and advisers emphasizes operational and tactical training over cultural training, and the cultural training that is available does not address key points, such as empathy with the advised, addressed in the French and British models. Although the French and British predeployment training for advisers lasts only about two weeks, the process appears to do a good job of ensuring that advisers are adequately trained. In the U.S. system, training for TAA lasts between two and six months.

There are no foreign-area officer programs in France and the UK; most of the forces deployed on TAA missions come from the pool of general-purpose forces and are generalists. France and the UK employ similar TAA models: Advisers are embedded with the partner, and they often wear the host-nation uniform. In the U.S. system, advisers have typically not been embedded in partner units, although this is happening now in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines (as it did

during the Vietnam War), and embedding may evolve into the new norm. In the French system, the TAA mission is part of a deployed battalion's normal mission; advisory duty is part of the normal career path, and success in TAA missions is seen as a prerequisite for advancement. This is not the case in the UK or the United States. In the UK, TAA missions are encouraged but not necessarily career-enhancing. In the United States, TAA missions have traditionally not been part of mainstream career paths. Indeed, in the United States, advisory duty has generally been viewed as detrimental to advancement—it was what happened to an officer who was not competitive for more-important, career-enhancing assignments. Clearly, the importance of training the military forces of Iraq and Afghanistan as components of a successful strategy is understood within the U.S. military, and a recent message by General Casey stresses the importance of service on Training Teams and Provincial Reconstruction Teams.⁴

What Should OSD Do About These Insights?

Several overarching insights from our analysis lead to specific recommendations for OSD to pursue to improve current U.S. training practices. These insights and recommendations are in four areas: adapting to irregular challenges, preparing the force, defining TAA requirements, and preparing for future challenges.

Adapting to Irregular Challenges

The sponsor asked that we examine approaches to training forces to adapt to irregular challenges. There is an emerging literature that emphasizes the importance of individual and unit adaptability and, thus, improving methods to train both to be adaptable. Proponents of this training approach argue that

⁴ George Casey, “CSA Sends—Transition Team Commanders (Unclassified),” June 17, 2008.

- The United States faces future threats that are irregular and asymmetric.
- Adaptability is key to meeting these challenges.
- Adaptability (and intuition) can be taught.

This adaptation tautology implies that fundamental change across the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leader development and education, personnel, and facilities spectrum is not necessary to prepare for irregular and asymmetric challenges—well-trained individuals and units can adapt to any circumstance.

Although we generally believe this approach to individuals and units is important, in our view, it is necessary but not sufficient. Our opinion is that it is the role of the institutions within the Department of Defense (DoD) to prepare U.S. forces for the challenges that they will encounter in specific irregular (and regular) operations. The responsibility for adaptation must also belong to these institutions rather than to individuals and units. This is not to say that teaching critical thinking, decentralizing decisionmaking, and a host of other initiatives are not useful approaches. They are necessary but not sufficient, and they have always been valued, at least in theory, in the past.

That said, the important role of institutions is to provide an appropriate problem-solving framework for use by individuals and units when asymmetries present challenges that existing methods do not address adequately. Perhaps the best recent example of U.S. military institutions adapting themselves to new conditions is the case of the U.S. Army revising its fundamental concept about how to succeed in war. The 2001 version of Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, posited a construct for warfare that had endured in the U.S. Army for nearly 80 years:

The offense is the decisive form of war. Offensive operations aim to destroy or defeat an enemy. Their purpose is to impose US will on the enemy and achieve decisive victory.⁵

⁵ U.S. Department of the Army, FM 3-0, pp. vii, 7-2.

This was the doctrine that the U.S. Army—a very well-trained and well-equipped force—took into Operation Iraqi Freedom, and, by 2006, it was clear that this approach was not adequate to deal with the insurgency that developed after the end of MCO. Eventually, the U.S. Army revised its approach, publishing, in conjunction with the U.S. Marine Corps, a new COIN manual, FM 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, that fundamentally changed the basic construct for successful operations, noting that

the cornerstone of any COIN effort is establishing security for the civilian populace. . . . Soldiers and Marines help establish HN [host nation] institutions that sustain that legal regime, including police forces, court systems and penal facilities.⁶

This institutional adaptation was a precondition for the increasingly successful COIN operations that followed the promulgation of the new doctrine. Quite simply, absent FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, even the most-adaptable individuals and units were not able to solve the COIN problem across Iraq using FM 3-0, *Operations*.

Another difference between U.S. methods and those of several of the countries we examined is one of training focus for individuals and units. In France and the UK, training emphasizes building location-specific expertise as a means of adapting the overall force to the specific contingency. The French and the British—like the Americans—have also created the capacity to quickly infuse lessons learned from ongoing operations into the training for those preparing to deploy. This is done to adapt their militaries to operate in the places to which they are about to deploy and to train individuals within this specific context. This is different from trying to teach adaptability. It is more along the lines of creating deep, vicarious intuition by expanding patterns in training that can be recognized and referred to during operations. The key for the institution is to minimize how long any operational

⁶ U.S. Department of the Army and U.S. Marine Corps, FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007, p. 42.

environment remains asymmetric. Thus, our sense is that adaptability is an institutional—not an individual—responsibility. The challenge in training individuals is to prepare them as much as possible for the specific environment of the future deployment.

Nevertheless, there appears to be a need to understand how to identify how individuals respond to complex situations when they are under pressure and when traditional hierarchical chains of command are unavailable to support decisionmaking. This seems particularly important in the case of advisers. Thus, although adaptability may not be a trainable trait, it might be a discriminator for key positions in which the ability to cope with uncertainty is important. That said, our sense is that more empirical investigation is needed to understand the potential of training individuals and units to be more adaptable. Our recommendations are as follows:

- OSD should support further empirical research to determine if adaptability can in fact be trained and if an individual's ability to adapt can be determined.
- If adaptability can be assessed and trained, OSD should establish processes to determine which assignments (e.g., advisory assignments) require adaptability.

Preparing the Force

There are several gaps in current processes for preparing the U.S. armed forces for the irregular—and regular—challenges they face. There are multiple populations to prepare. Nevertheless, our sense is that the greatest gap exists at the senior levels. Quite simply, there has never been a deeply substantive or rigorous system of continuing training or education for officers beyond their attendance at a senior-service college at the O-5 or O-6 levels. A number of the nations we examined recognize the need for continuing education beyond that provided by their equivalent of the U.S. senior-service college. The British have a higher-command and staff course, and the Israelis have a course for colonels, brigadier generals, and new division commanders. Because senior U.S. officers are responsible for preparing their units for the challenges of

the future and for guiding their training, it seems important to provide them with continuing education. Our recommendation is as follows:

- OSD should assess current programs for the continuing training and education of senior leaders and recommend corrective action.

Defining TAA Requirements

There is currently no enterprise-wide system within the DoD or other U.S. government agencies to identify and prepare American officers for advisory or foreign-military training assignments. These assignments are generally conducted on a one-off basis and are not career-enhancing. Finally, there is no DoD-wide repository for best practices or lessons learned for these missions. Our recommendations are as follows:

- OSD should work with the Joint Staff and the U.S. military services to set standards for advisers (including selection criteria) and craft directives that ensure that adviser training assignments are career-enhancing. These efforts could be similar to measures taken after Goldwater-Nichols to ensure that joint duty became a viable assignment.
- OSD should create processes to capture and disseminate TAA- and BPC-specific best practices from across the U.S. government and from relevant foreign governments.

Preparing for Future Challenges

One of the central ironies about adapting to and preparing for irregular challenges is that such challenges then become the new “regular” challenges. Israel’s performance during the 2006 Second Lebanon War is instructive in this regard. After years of adapting to the challenges of the intifadas, the Israeli Army, despite its competence in addressing what its doctrine calls *low-intensity conflict* threats, found itself not competent to fight the HIC it encountered in Lebanon. There, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) faced an opponent that was qualitatively different than the opponent Israel had focused on for years. Hezbollah was a trained militia with modern weapons in prepared defensive positions.

Currently, the U.S. armed forces may be in a condition similar to that of the IDF in 2006. Multiple combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan have created U.S. units and individuals with deep experience in COIN. Additionally, adapting to the significant demands of the operational environments in these active theaters of war has, not surprisingly, resulted in a diminishment of high-end combat skills among U.S. forces. Thus, the extraordinary proficiency of the U.S. force at doing what it is having to do now may in fact be diminishing its capacity—as it did with the IDF—to do something it might have to do in the future. In short, the U.S. military, particularly its ground forces, has lost some of its full-spectrum capability.

Several of the nations we examined have developed training regimes that assist them in adapting and preparing their units for different operational scenarios. India deployed SMEs to improve unit performance, the French use multiple and evaluated CPXs involving differing scenarios to prepare their HQ, and the British “train the trainer” for several deployment scenarios through their OPTAG process. All of these practices offer promise to improve the current U.S. training system. Our recommendations are as follows:

- OSD should support an analysis to determine which Universal Joint Task List tasks are atrophying.
- OSD should further assess CPX strategies that train and evaluate HQ for the full spectrum of operations, and it should support the development of exercises that allow staffs to maintain full-spectrum proficiency.
- OSD should assess the potential of SME training and devise processes to identify and track SMEs.

Final Thoughts

During our research, we found that the U.S. military is the source of best practices in many areas in every country we examined. Nevertheless, the processes used to attain full-spectrum capabilities in several of the nations we analyzed differ from those used in the United States,

and they appear to work. Thus, as we believe we demonstrate in this monograph, there are areas in which the U.S. military can learn from the experiences of these other nations to improve its ability to perform more effectively across the range of military operations.