

# Full Spectrum Mission Training Plans

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Mission training plans (MTPs) emerged from the post-Vietnam training methodology. These plans served multiple purposes, but three stand out as useful to today's Army.

First, MTPs helped reorient the Army from an almost exclusively Vietnam counterinsurgency focus to a primary focus on conventional warfighting. From the soldier's and leader's perspectives, the Army commitment in Vietnam looked very similar to current conditions: Soldiers and leaders were either in the war zone, returning from it or soon to be reassigned. Time available dictated that home-station training as well as formal military education focus on fighting under Vietnam conditions. There just didn't seem enough time to do much else. Almost every post and school, for example, had its own Vietnam village, complete with role players. Then came the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, which showed how lethal and complex conventional warfare had become. Senior Army leaders decided that we had to regain proficiency in our conventional skills. The Army of the early 1970s had plenty of combat experience, but not under conditions like those of the 1973 war and not under the conditions envisioned in a potential war in Central Europe.

Second, mission training plans helped rid the Army of multiple training standards. Training in the pre-MTP Army was a mixed bag. Without a common standard, quality depended entirely on local commanders. We had relatively good field manuals, but we had no "how to" guides for training—practical guides that would help us develop and execute the kind of training that changed the concepts in the manual into soldier, leader and unit behavior. When I took over the scout platoon of 3rd Battalion, 325th Infantry (Airborne), in 1972, for example, I traveled up and down Ardennes Street at Fort Bragg, N.C., talking to other scout platoon leaders, hoping to "steal" what I

thought were the best ideas. Mission training plans contributed to creating a doctrine-based Army with common Army standards.

Third, MTPs came as part of an overall training methodology. Each plan contained a list of tasks, a set of conditions that trainers had to create so that the tasks could actually be performed and a set of standards used to judge the quality of the performance. Leaders determined which tasks would be the focus of training through a methodology described in the predecessor to FM 7-0 *Training the Force*. Then leaders acquired the resources and set the conditions necessary for performance-oriented training. Leaders also set in place preparatory training when it was necessary as well as an evaluation regimen to determine whether the person or unit being trained met the standard.

By the mid-1980s, the combat training centers (CTCs) had become the crown jewels of the post-Vietnam training revolution. Senior Army leaders ensured that the CTCs reflected the toughest and most realistic conditions possible. In time, conducting honest and objective after action reviews, applying the Army's training methodology to ever more rigorous home-station training and repetitive rotations at the CTCs combined to improve proficiency and professionalism throughout the Army. Eventually, a commonality of performance standards across the entire Army emerged.

This reoriented, retrained and doctrine-based Army fought the first Gulf War. The performance of our soldiers, leaders and units proved the wisdom of the Army's training overhaul. In addition, the Army had become, more or less, a one-spectrum force. This time, however, that spectrum was conventional combat, which defined the Army throughout the 1980s and 1990s. When someone said: "We're warfighters," it meant: "We fight conventional wars." Of course, parts of the force did focus on other-than-strictly-conventional warfighting, but

by and large this is how the Army defined itself.

Then the world changed. In rapid sequence came conflicts in Grenada, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo. The Army slowly realized that war still came in many varieties. Training and Doctrine Command pamphlets, professional periodicals and other publications revealed spirited discussion on war and operations other than war, on the spectrum of war and the Army's place along that spectrum, and on various forms of peace operations. The 9/11 attacks and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq brought this discussion to a very pointed close: The Army had to do more than conventional warfighting because that's what the nation asked of it and what conditions demanded.

With nearly a decade of war under our belt, today we find ourselves with the best army on the face of the Earth—the most proficient, the most experienced, the most professional and the most envied. We are also, now, a new one-spectrum force and far afield from the doctrine-based MTPs that were the foundation of our proficiency.

The necessities of war—repetitive rotations to Iraq and Afghanistan—have resulted in an almost exclusive Iraq/Afghanistan counterinsurgency training focus. It can't be any other way—there simply isn't enough time between rotations, and we don't yet have enough units to allow more time. The Army has updated its force-generation model, but our mission training plans aren't as useful as they once were. Tasks, conditions and standards are outdated. Once again, leaders are using best practices and the latest tactics, techniques and procedures rather than Army training doctrine to guide training.

Ultimately, the pace of rotations will abate as requirements decrease and the number of available units increases. When that happens, however, will the Army be positioned intellectually and doctrinally to reset itself as the full spectrum force it needs and wants to

be? The new FM 7-0 *Training the Force* and FM 3-0 *Operations* manuals are good starts, but they are only starts. The Army needs to update its mission training plans with at least three sets of conditions—general war, hybrid war and stable peace—and three sets of associated standards to every core mission-essential task list (METL) task.

One set of conditions creates a one-spectrum force, whether those conditions apply to conventional combat or counterinsurgency. Using three sets of conditions will impress on our leaders that executing a task to standard depends upon the conditions under which that task is executed. The METL tasks associated with a specific deployment theater will always have one set of conditions, for these tasks are derived from specific wartime requirements. Core METL tasks, however, have a wider focus. These are the core tasks in which a unit must be proficient in all conditions because they are the unit's basic skills. When core METL tasks are used to reset a unit to

basic combat tasks, leaders can use the general war conditions and standards. When they are used for sustainment training while in the ready/available stage of the Army force generation model, but not aligned with a specific wartime theater, the leaders can mix conditions and standards as commanders deem necessary.

The Army has done relatively well with updating its intellectual manuals. Mission training plans can now be written to interpret these manuals as practical training guides—tasks, conditions and standards—that include current best practices. In this way, behavior can be aligned with the principles described in Army field manuals consistently across the Army.

Finally, the Army needs to consider developing a new mission training plan that lists the set of tasks, conditions and standards for security-force assistance operations. At least for the foreseeable future, many of our units will continue to help develop Iraqi and

Afghan security forces—and perhaps others. Some of these tasks may find their way to a unit's theater-specific tasks, but some may even become core METL for selected units. Security force assistance could end up as an enduring requirement for our Army—both conventional and special operations.

The set of field manuals that provides our leaders with the intellectual foundation of a full spectrum Army by presenting and explaining principles as well as providing context by using both history and current trends is absolutely vital. This set represents only half of the requirement, however. The other half involves translating this intellectual foundation into solid behavior performance. A doctrine-based, full spectrum force needs full spectrum mission training plans. □

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