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Approaching Doctrinal Training the Army Way

by Morgan Sheeran

Our forces were exquisitely trained for the Gulf War. Everyone knew their roles in executing AirLand doctrine. The forces could move forward, backward, left, right and vertically. Each service was able to create the necessary effects at the proper time and place. Specific units trained for the breaching operations, with follow-on operations as their secondary responsibility. They created the breaches while other units passed through and exploited. The exploiting units knew how to breach, but their primary task was to expand and exploit the breach. They were using different tools drawn from the same bag; and they trained these tasks in the standard Army way. Recent history demonstrates that our bag of tricks is incomplete. Army units should have COIN and Stability capability as part of their repertoire. The secret to that is training. The Army can do anything that it properly trains Soldiers and leaders to do. We can look at our own history for guidance.

In the late seventies and early eighties, over a hundred articles were published calling the doctrine of Active Defense into question. The end result of this criticism was the development of AirLand Battle doctrine, which the Army then integrated into training with such vigor that by the time of the Gulf War, the United States Military was the world leader in the practice of maneuver warfare. The mantra of the Army, training relentlessly for the inevitable invasion of Western Europe by the Soviet horde, was, “Train the way you fight, fight the way you train.” This mantra, so effective in preparing our forces for the Gulf War and the initial invasion of Iraq, has fallen by the wayside. Soldiers on the ground in Afghanistan are frequently heard to say, “This is nothing like our training at home station or the mobilization station.”

More units are doing better COIN Operations, it’s true. However, it’s still hit or miss, with units who do “get it” often replaced by units that don’t. We cannot afford to be hit or miss in any fight, much less this one. We take two steps forward and one to the rear, and we do it a lot. The Army has solved this problem before. It has the institutional memory of how to thoroughly train anything that is important. COIN will eventually wind up as another tool for commanders to apply. The Army will figure out a way to orient itself towards and allocate time to train for the eventuality of COIN Operations in support of national policy. With the properly constructed training, this is what the Army does. We need to look at the mechanisms that were created to facilitate the domination of the conventional end of the spectrum. The Army knows how to construct world-class education and training, but has not applied that knowledge to Stability/COIN doctrine.

The combatant commanders have embraced COIN, but they are not the Army. In groups of twenty to thirty, groups of field grade officers who have recently arrived in theater are asked, informally, to raise their hands if they have read FM 3-24. They routinely return the response - three. Three of every twenty to thirty Army field grade officers have actually read the doctrine.

Those who have read Galula?¹ The answer is consistent - one. Career officers fail to read the text of the doctrine. It is not trained to either its spirit or its letter *in preparation for deployment* to the theater. Three years into this doctrine, it's time to develop the tools to properly disseminate and inculcate its capabilities. The Army cannot afford hit-and-miss application, any more than it can tolerate it in an AirLand fight.

In modern times there has been a strong propensity for commanders to focus training on tasks that will be evaluated and scored. Units train to get their “T” on the validation exercise. This practice should not be discouraged, as it is what has benefitted the system previously. This tendency should be leveraged. If the evaluated exercise includes such things as integrating governmental and non-governmental actors, ASCOPE/PMESII information gathering and managing population-relevant information as well as military intelligence, units will figure out a way to manage those functions. They will integrate tasks down to the Soldier level that enable such activities. They will begin to generate PIRs that reflect a commander’s desire to know the human aspects of the terrain. Soldiers will know those PIRs and units will understand that there is no thing as a “Presence Patrol;” there are only Reconnaissance Patrols. Every leader knows that you would never allow a recon patrol to return within “friendly lines” without being thoroughly debriefed for even the smallest detail of information.

Staffs need to organize to handle the information flow that is required for the proper practice of Counterinsurgency Operations. Such staff organization will occur when units are truly preparing to execute COIN Operations prior to leaving the United States. Maneuver Warfare Training Centers believe that they are doing a really good job of preparing units for the theater, but units are not arriving geared for the types of operations that the Commander says that he wants conducted.² Staffs arriving in theater are not organized to handle the information flow that is particular to COIN Operations. By the time the leadership receives theater-specific and relevant COIN training, their staff processes are set. Reorganizing a staff post-deployment is the equivalent of changing your shoes while running. It just doesn’t happen.

The Army deployed AirLand Battle doctrine with a comprehensive approach. It developed and provided tools for commanders to use to develop excellence. Education preceded training, and training and evaluation were standardized. The success of the National Training Center and the development of the professional OPFOR units supported the training which prepared and tested units in their practice of the doctrine. ARTEP training based on tasks, conditions and standards was the rule. METL were created to support their critical mission requirements and collective and individual task training flowed from this. To this point, the same methodology has not been employed to inculcate the doctrine relevant to current operations.

The first step in standardizing performance is to standardize education and training. A proponent agency for COIN doctrine should be established which spans the various branches of the Army. Education must precede training. Successful Army training has always included setting the mindset for training via some form of education. We called it “battle focus.” It explained why a task was important and the context in which it was to be used. Career officers and NCO’s need to have relevant education provided in their professional education courses.

¹ David Galula (1919-1967) wrote two highly regarded books on counterinsurgency; *Pacification in Algeria* and *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. The latter heavily influenced FM 3-24.

² ISAF Commander’s Counterinsurgency Guidance, August, 2009

This has begun in the officer track, but is so far lacking in NCO professional education. Professional education will ensure that officers and senior NCO's have, "read the book before the exam."

Standardized tasks drive standardized performance. METL-driven, ARTEP-type training, with certain tasks being non-negotiable, as in AirLand, is where this begins. In close cooperation with Lessons Learned organizations, recommended Full Spectrum Operations (FSO) Stability, and its subset COIN, METL should be developed, followed closely by supporting collective tasks. Individual tasks, many of which can be adapted from existing individual tasks, can then be developed to provide first line trainers with tasks, conditions and standards to be used in training individual tasks that support collective tasks. Collective task training will flow naturally from this, as it did in AirLand. Commanders will have ample opportunity to configure staff sections and processes in order to support mission accomplishment.

Concurrently, Mission Readiness Exercises should be constructed using the new FSO COIN METL for use by external evaluators, such as Maneuver Warfare Training Centers. These exercises will be used, as in AirLand, to validate units for the operational environment. This is not a revelation; it is simply using methods that have worked previously to produce world-class practitioners of relevant doctrine.

Stability/COIN Operations are nothing new. History has demonstrated time and again the need to perform these types of operations. Stability and COIN are tools that the Army needs to have in its bag, just as Offensive and Defensive Operations are tools of AirLand. The Army has an institutional memory of how to inculcate a doctrine. It's time to remember how to succeed.

Morgan Sheeran is an Ohio National Guard Sergeant First Class with 28 years of experience, including a tour in 2007-2008 as an embedded advisor with the Afghan National Police as part of Task Force Phoenix. (Fort Riley Class 15) Since July, 2009 he has been assigned to the Counterinsurgency Training Center – Afghanistan as a COIN instructor and has worked with Afghan National Security Forces, the forces of over 25 Coalition nations, governmental and non-governmental civilian implementation partners. An Infantryman and Cavalryman, his career has spanned assignments ranging from Rifleman to Operations NCO and Police Mentor Team NCOIC. He resides in Cincinnati, Ohio.

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