

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH BRIGADIER GENERAL ROBERT ABRAMS,
DEPUTY COMMANDING GENERAL, COMBINED ARMS CENTER, UNITED STATES ARMY VIA
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LINDY KYZER (Army Public Affairs): Thank you everyone for joining us on the line. We are very thrilled to have with us Brigadier General Robert Abrams. He's deputy commanding general of the Combined Arms Center. He's going to be discussing FM 7-0, "Training for Full Spectrum Operations." Again, I will award bonus points and first question to anyone who has read the manual in full between Monday and today.

But without further ado, I'll go ahead and turn it over to General Abrams for his opening comments.

Thanks so much, sir.

GEN. ABRAMS: Okay. Thanks very much. And this is Brigadier General Robert B. Abrams. And I go by Abe, A-B-E, so if you want to put that in print, that's -- that's how it's spelled. Thanks to everybody for joining me today, and I look forward to your questions. Yesterday, we released FM 7-0, "Training for Full Spectrum Operations." It's the third -- only the third time we've updated this manual since its inception -- or actually the second update -- but since 1988, which kicked off the training revolution in

the United States with training -- FM 25-100. We republished it again in 2002 under the new joint conventional -- numbering convention of 7-0 versus 25-100 series. And so this the third iteration.

This is about changing the Army's mind-set about training. And I'll start off with two points and then I'll look forward to your questions.

The first one is -- is that we are a full-spectrum Army. That's codified in FM 3-0, which is our capstone operational manual that was published in February of this past year, and that is, is that we're a force that operates across the spectrum of conflict, that is capable of conducting offense, defense and stability operations simultaneously. That is a big change in mind-set for the Army. And so this manual is about training forces to be full spectrum: offense, defense and stability.

A question I often get asked is, well, isn't that going to be kind of hard? You know, how are we going to be able to do that? And the fact of the matter is, is we've been a full-spectrum force since at least 2003 in both -- in Iraq and Afghanistan, conducting offense, defense and stability operations simultaneously in an irregular warfare environment.

And we've learned a lot about how to train forces to be full spectrum. This manual captures a lot of the lessons learned as to the how or the what of training units for full-spectrum operations and codified it in doctrine. So that's point number one.

Point number two is -- for those of you who haven't had a chance to read it there in Chapter 1, we talk about changing the Army's mindset. And I'll refer you to this chart. It's called the Aim Point chart. And that is that our objective is to train forces that are full-spectrum but somewhere between -- and train them under conditions that are somewhere between insurgency and general war.

And why is that? Because we believe as an institution that we're not going to return to pre-9/11 training focus. And that pre-9/11 training focus, one, was offense-defense only, and two, we only trained under major combat operations themes. That colored everything we did, at home stations and in combat training centers. And so as an institution, we've had a change in mindset because -- the reason we trained that way, by the way, was that we believed that if you could do that, the most complex training there is, that everything else would be easy.

And what we've learned from Iraq and Afghanistan, amongst many things we've learned, is that couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, conducting offense, defense and stability operations, somewhere between an insurgency and major combat operations, is oftentimes much more complex than just doing offense/defense in a major combat operation environment. And I'm prepared to discuss that in whatever detail you want.

So this embraces the notion that what we've already been doing now for several years in the war, that we're a full-spectrum force; and two, we're not going to revert back to pre-9/11 training focus and looking at just training under major combat operations conditions.

So with that, I'll take your questions.

MS. KYZER: Great. Andrew Lubin, did you have a question?

Q Yes, I did. General, good afternoon. Andrew Lubin from Naval Institute's Proceedings. Thank you for taking the time today, sir.

GEN. ABRAMS: Thank you. Q Good. General, I've got a bit of a -- probably my usual long-winded question here. How is this being received by the regular Army? I'm thinking back to about a year and a half ago when those junior officers and senior enlisted wrote the articles in The New York Times op-ed.

We've heard multiple stories out of West Point and junior officers, complaining that effectively, if you get involved in the COIN, it's a career-wrecker. You know, you're convinced, General Caldwell's convinced, General Petraeus is convinced. How about everybody else?

GEN. ABRAMS: I'm going to ask you to put a little sharper point on exactly what you're asking me. But I'm -- your first part of your question was, how do I think this is being received? When you say "this," do you mean training for full spectrum operations?

Q Well, training from full spectrum ops, and acknowledging that it's no long pre-9/11 focus; it's got to be offense, defense and stability ops.

GEN. ABRAMS: Yeah. Right. Well --

Q Are they teaching stability ops at West Point with any conviction nowadays?

GEN. ABRAMS: Well, I'll -- let me take that one bit at a time. But I would -- here's what I'm not answering, which is what I thought you were getting after in terms of the op-ed pieces -- that was maybe a year and a half ago in vogue -- that was really describing some frustration by some junior leaders that if they served on a transition team, training post-nation forces, that somehow that was a career-killer. That's the direction I thought you were going, because that's not what I'm talking about here.

So first off, this manual, just like FM 30, was vetted at every level of the Army -- I wasn't on the 30 writing team, but I was on this one, and I can tell you, with a fair amount of assurance, that it's been well-received throughout the force. And let me give you some metrics. First off, we've been -- we staffed it for over two years in a continuous cycle with the field. We did numerous road trips out to the force to get feedback from every level -- not just talking with senior officers, talking with noncommissioned officers, first sergeants, platoon sergeants, to get their feedback on what they felt we needed to change in our training doctrine. So that's point number one.

Point number two is, we conducted in its latest -- last -- near its last stages of development we sent a copy to all of our professional military education courses that were in session, to include our basic noncommissioned officer courses, advanced noncommissioned officer courses, our basic course, our captain's career course, the Command General Staff College here at Fort Leavenworth and the Army War College, and asked them a series of questions in terms of specific doctrinal thoughts underpinning big ideas in this manual. And we got great feedback. Well over 80 percent were in strong support of what we've proposed is a different way of thinking about training.

We did get some good feedback, though, and they drew some lines on a couple of items and said: Hey, you shouldn't change this from our previous doctrine. And we never intended to. In fact, you'll see a lot of the -- there's still some of the same doctrinal underpinnings from the original 1988 25-100 that still apply today. Those are enduring good training principles.

So -- but to answer your question, yeah, we've gotten resounding -- great feedback. And look, we're doing a road show helping to jump- start the concepts that are in this manual out across the operational Army and in the institution with our schools and centers. And thus far, we've probably been to 15 locations now. We've gotten great feedback. The team was at Fort Lewis a week and a half ago and talked to two different Stryker brigade combat teams, got great feedback.

So does that answer your question? You asked me about are they teaching stability operations at the military academy. I wouldn't know. I'm not familiar with the curriculum at the military academy.

But I can tell you here at the Command General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, we're -- we have about 1,400 students, mid- level guys, majors, who are going through their intermediate leader education training. That is absolutely included as part of our core competency in training our future leaders.

Q Excellent. Thanks very much.

GEN. ABRAMS: Okay.

MS. KYZER: And Bethany (sp), did you have a question?

Q Not at this time. Sorry. (Laughs.)

MS. KYZER: No, no problem.

Q Fumbling with technology.

MS. KYZER: That's okay.

Spencer (sp), did you have a question?

(Pause.) Spencer (sp)?

Did we lose --

Q Hello? Can you hear me?

MS. KYZER: Did you lose -- yeah. Spencer (sp), did you have a question?

Q Yes. I'm sorry about that.

MS. KYZER: No problem.

Q General, thanks very much for this. I was reading through the manual, though I haven't finished it, and what I was struck by was there's emphasis on sort of how to think about stability operations but not things like how to work in an interagency environment, with diplomats on the ground, with aid workers on the ground. Was that a conscious choice? Can you speak to that a bit? Or is that not an accurate assessment of the manual?

GEN. ABRAMS: I -- yeah, I -- first of all, I don't think that's an accurate assessment. And I'd ask you to wait until you've been all the way through it and then get back. If we have not made that clear that we're going to operate in a joint, interagency, intergovernmental, multinational environment -- JIIM; you'll see that acronym throughout the manual -- if we haven't made that strong enough or clear enough, I'd appreciate that feedback, because we think we have.

That was -- if you've drawn that perception, that was certainly not our intent, because we understand that anything we do is going to require unified action, which means -- to be full-spectrum, and specifically when you're conducting stability operations, we're -- we are an enabler to all of those entities that you just described.

One other point of clarification: This book's not about the how- to. This is the what.

This describes the what of training, to help frame what that operational environment needs to look like, how you need to focus your training, where -- how you can accept risk. What are sort of the training management functions, to help organize ourselves to conduct training?

The how-to, the tactics, techniques and procedures, best practices of training; heretofore we put that in a sister manual called FM 7-1, Battle Focused Training. And what we're going to do for the next version of 7-1 is, we're actually going to change it.

We're going to make it, one, Web-based. It's going to be called the Army Training Network. It's going to have all of those best practices that we had before, in terms of training management, how to conduct a situational training exercise, how to conduct a field training exercise, how to set those up.

But what we always found before was, the day those manuals were published, that tactic, technique or procedure was already outdated. And so we needed something that's much more relevant and easy to update and can be -- continue to grow, as best practices grow and develop, to meet the realities of today's force generation model.

So that's why we're going to go Web-based. It's going to go active in about 90 days. And it's going to be for trainers at every level of the Army, from the training clerk down in the company, battalion S3s, master gunners, training NCOs, all of those guys.

That's where the how-to, in terms of being able to incorporate different elements of our joint interagency, intergovernmental, multinational team as part of our training. But it was certainly no intention.

We absolutely embrace that. And by the way, our training today, as we get forces ready to go to Iraq and Afghanistan, those entities you just mentioned, they are present, either lives ones from those particular agencies, or we contracted role players to play them.

MS. KYZER: Great.

And Greg, did you have a question?

Q I did. I was -- there's a debate going on, within the Army, I'm sure you're aware of, and it gets heated at times, about referencing the 2006 Lebanon War and that Israel became -- the Israeli army became a very good counterterrorist force during the years fighting the Intifada. But then when it came time to do combined arms operations, they had let those skills kind of disappear if you will.

I'm just wondering if you could talk a bit about how the Army intends to avoid that, being that the focus has been so much on counterinsurgency recently.

And how are you going to get back those complicated skills, such as calling in artillery, aircraft --

GEN. ABRAMS: I got you.

Q -- the combined arms?

GEN. ABRAMS: Yeah, I got you. And I'm looking at something -- I believe you've been embedded before, right, in Iraq?

Q Yeah.

GEN. ABRAMS: And Afghanistan?

Q Yeah.

GEN. ABRAMS: And look, I don't -- I don't need to be a needler about this, but I want to be -- use precise language. So when you talked about the Israeli Defense Forces, you mentioned their focus on counterterrorist operations, which is probably an accurate description. And then you tried to draw a parallel between that and our focus currently, the U.S. Army focus on counterinsurgency and irregular warfare.

Those are two different entities. And so my answer to you is this: We conduct combined arms operations -- offense, defense, and stability -- in both Iraq and Afghanistan today, and have been since 2003 in an irregular warfare environment. So those conditions are different than the conditions you might find in a major combat operation environment.

And I recognize that there is -- I'm sounding like a doctrine -- doctrinaire, but that doctrine's important to us; you've got to -- words mean something. And so we are very good at combined operations -- combined arms operations. We're excellent. We integrate joint fires; we shoot artillery; we shoot mortars; we conduct counterfire; we use the effects of both indirect and direct fire, closing with and engaging the populace -- engaging, both lethal and non-lethal; not shooting the populace with lethal munitions, but engaging the populace with non-lethal.

We do all that today as part of our full-spectrum capability. What we're not doing is we're not doing it in a major combat operation environment, which is punctuated by, you know, a large-scale conventional force that would be fighting against us with some near-peer capability, other -- you know, armored vehicles, large-scale rocket and artillery fire and return and so forth. No, we're not operating in that environment right now.

But it's -- it's -- you're mixing apples and oranges. My opinion is those that are having this -- trying to draw a comparison between us and the IDF, it's really mixing apples and oranges. The experience of the Israeli Defense Forces in their operational environment is completely different than what our forces are facing in Iraq and Afghanistan.

And I submit to anyone who has been to both locations or has read in great detail, it is readily apparent that what they're -- been doing, and as a result what happened to them in 2006, that that -- that couldn't be further from the truth in terms of what we're doing now in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Now, are we as good at conducting major combat operations -- or conducting full-spectrum operations in an MCO environment as we used to be? Probably not.

But I'll tell you that we have an incredible -- I mean, we have a thousand times higher level of proficiency conducting full-spectrum operations, regardless of the environment, than we ever did. Pre-9/11, we were an offense/defense force only. Now we are -- we are walking the walk. We are offense, defense and stability. We've never had that capability embedded in our doctrine. We've not had it embedded in our force.

And with the combat seasoning that we have today -- that's the other difference, I'd say, between us and the IDF -- we have the most combat-seasoned force this country's ever had, ever. And that counts. And I submit to you that that's a lot different experience than the IDF, because they've been able to have relative calm and peace as they fought counterterrorist operations for the last 10 years. So that's kind of my response to that.

Q Do you see the -- do you see the Army going back to kind of the force-on-force OPFOR engagements out of the NTC that --

GEN. ABRAMS: Yeah, no. In fact -- in fact, that's -- in chapter one, we talk about -- this -- we don't see this as a temporary interruption of the -- of what we need to be doing. And in fact, as a -- as an institution, we said we're not going back to pre-9/11 force- on-force Krasnovia-like training.

However, let me be clear --

Q Yeah, how do you -- how do you prepare for that, though?

GEN. ABRAMS: I know. But I -- what we're not going to go back to is strictly force-on-force, offense, defense training.

Q Okay.

GEN. ABRAMS: We are going to conduct offense, defense and stability in a MCO theme against a threat -- it's not going to look like, if you're familiar with the National Training Center, the old Krasnovian threat.

Q Right. Right, right.

GEN. ABRAMS: That's gone. We've got a new blueprint. It's just been recently approved and we're going to continue to flesh that out. It's a hybrid. You know, we're -- historically speaking, we're batting zero trying to predict where our next conflict's going to be. So it's a -- it's a hybrid that's got a multitude of capabilities. It's got a conventional capability, you know, vehicles. It's got a(n) infantry capability. It's got an anti-armor capability. It's got a paramilitary capability. It's got an asymmetric capability. It's got a cyber capability. It's got an information operations capability. It's got a media capability.

That'll all paint that mosaic at our combat training centers to better reflect an operational environment that we expect that our -- that can best replicate the conditions we think we'll fight under. So --

Q But you say it's a Hezbollah-like --

GEN. ABRAMS: No, I wouldn't say it's Hezbollah-like.

Q Okay. (Laughs.)

GEN. ABRAMS: It's a hybrid somewhere between an insurgency and a major combat operation. It's a -- and I -- there's a term, a buzzword going around. It's called hybrid warfare.

Q I got it.

GEN. ABRAMS: I wouldn't use that one, either.

Q Oh, really? Huh.

GEN. ABRAMS: It's -- I would say it is a -- it's a mix of all those.

I'm not the right guy to put a label on it. We refer to it as the operational -- NCO operational environment blueprint. That's what we call it.

Q Got it.

GEN. ABRAMS: And because we don't -- you know, people want to put labels on things. And they'll want to say, well, you know, it's largely Hezbollah, or it's Russian or, you know, after this last incursion into Georgia and so forth. Nope. It's sort of a mix of all that. And you know, is it going to be exact? Is it perfect? No.

But it's about putting the most challenging conditions on our force that we might be able to find, you know, in future conflicts that we might run into, to make our leaders and our soldiers think on their feet, to be agile, to be flexible, to be lethal when necessary, to be non-lethal when necessary and pose them with dilemmas to help develop and further develop this notion of being agile, flexible and full-spectrum.

And so it won't be modeled after just one or another sort of environment that, we think, we might go to. It's sort of a hodgepodge. But it's all about presenting a challenging operational environment that will really stress our force. That's what it's about.

Q Got it.

GEN. ABRAMS: By the way, that's a big change in mindset for us, as you know.

(Cross talk.)

MS. KYZER: Great.

And we'll go back around.

Andrew, did you have another question?

Q General, Andrew Lubin again from the Naval Institute.

Sir, can you talk to us about how this has changed the pre- deployment training down at Fort Polk?
GEN. ABRAMS: Well, as I mentioned earlier, the training at the Joint Readiness Training Center, at Fort Polk, has been evolving since 2003. You know, that was our -- largely we trained our infantry brigade formations, our infantry for our light infantry formations, at the Joint Readiness Training Center, previous to 2003; now -- and primarily to fight in a low-intensity conflict environment.

Low-intensity conflict out of -- that's no longer in our lexicon. Now we refer to operational themes. And so absolutely it has continued to develop, as has the Combat Training Center in Hohenfels, Germany, and at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, to reflect the operational environment that the formations will see in Iraq or Afghanistan.

And we tailor the rotations to account for the differences between Iraq and Afghanistan depending upon, you know, that formation's destination.

So we'll change the language, we'll change the cultural norms and so forth to account for that.

But if you were to go to any of our Combat Training Centers and try to draw a comparison between now and what you saw there in, say, 2002, you would -- you'd see an incredible difference. Much more urban sprawl. You'll see hundreds of role-players -- not handfuls, hundreds of role-players, cultural role-players. You'll see either live or contracted -- either real or contracted role-players that reflect provincial

reconstruction teams, USAID, Department of Justice, other elements of the Department of State, nongovernmental organizations. All of those, now, you'll see. A large -- you know, you'll see an insurgency vice a uniformed threat. So it's changed quite a bit. If you haven't been lately, I'd encourage you to get down there and go see it.

Q Great. How do we -- how would we do that? Just contact Fort Polk directly?

GEN. ABRAMS: Yeah. I think if you would contact Fort Polk directly, they'd be happy to have you. All our Combat Training Centers would. It's -- it's important that you see it, so that -- and again, this is not something new. This is something that has been under change since 2003.

And I can tell you from firsthand experience. I was a BCT commander in the 1st Cavalry Division in 2003. When I took command we had not received our deployment order. About two minutes into it, we did. I was already scheduled to go to the National Training Center for a traditional MCO Krasnovian threat training event -- or training rotation. In the span of about 45 days, NTC retooled itself to provide the very first full-spectrum rotation in a(n) irregular warfare environment.

And, I mean, they changed overnight. It was dramatic. And it was absolutely fantastic training. And it's only gotten better since then.

Q Do you -- do we -- got time for another? Can I follow up on this, guys? Or Grant or Spencer (sp), do you have another one?

MS. KYZER: We're running short on time, so -- did you have another question, Spencer (sp)? Q Nothing that I can't get from you afterwards, Lindy, so go right ahead.

MS. KYZER: Okay. And Greg?

Q Yeah, just a quick one. I know you -- that you want to avoid the labels, but are you purposely not using the hybrid label? I know that the Marine Corps and MADIS (sp) and others have been -- kind of embraced that hybrid -- the hybrid label. But is the Army not?

GEN. ABRAMS: Yeah, I -- yeah, I'm purposely not. First off, I'm not the proponent for naming those environments.

Q Yes.

GEN. ABRAMS: And words do matter. And so I'm hesitant to say -- you know, if you pull up, you know, Webster's Dictionary and you look up the definition of hybrid, is what we're doing -- would it meet that definition? Probably. But, you know -- this sort of sounds like a cop-out, and I apologize, but that's really for someone else to put that label on them, what we're going to call it.

Q That's okay. Can you at least say that after the 2006 war, that the OPFOR you're operating against, you've given them more anti-armor capability?

GEN. ABRAMS: No, I'd -- no. That -- no, that would be disingenuous.

Q Okay.

GEN. ABRAMS: Our combat training centers -- the operational environment that we replicate in home station and combat training centers replicates the environment in Iraq or Afghanistan, not in southern Lebanon. So, no, that would be definitely misleading. We are focused like a laser beam, prepping our forces on where they're going. And the more specific we can make it, if we know in advance, long enough in advance on the exact sector a BCT will go to, we will make his rotation replicate as closely as we can to conditions we think he's going to see when he gets there.

Q Okay.

MS. KYZER: Okay. And Andrew.

Q Yes. Sir, going back to my Fort Polk question.

GEN. ABRAMS: Yeah.

Q With the new programs that you're running, do the young soldiers, the kids who -- your PFCs and the kids who are on the front line talking to villagers, are they getting more spun up on this too, or this is more reserved for senior --

GEN. ABRAMS: Oh, no, no. Absolutely not. No. In fact, you know, we used to talk -- we used to joke about the strategic corporal. And that, by the way, has been sort of a buzzword or a bumper sticker since operations in Bosnia, if you'll recall. You know, all it takes is one corporal sitting at the right checkpoint and we could have an international incident -- the strategic corporal, if you will. So, no, absolutely not.

And our soldiers who do a fabulous job downrange -- you know, because that's where we are closing with and engaging the populace, is at the squad and platoon level. So, no, absolutely. Our training strategies specifically -- I mean, all three combat training centers, we have specific engagement training for squad leaders. I mean, it's focused -- that's the target audience, squad leaders, platoon sergeants and platoon leaders. Senior leaders get it in sort of a different venue. But no, absolutely focused on junior leaders.

Q Okay, great.

GEN. ABRAMS: And they get plenty of practice. And that's -- I mean, this is essential to our training, and that is, having a large enough body of role players, both cultural or native-speaking role players as well as others, to be able to provide that realism so when they go into a town or a township area, that, you know, it looks like you got a populace there. And they're faced with all of those challenges that they see on the streets and in villages, whether it be in Iraq, in Afghanistan. Very, very important.

MS. KYZER: I believe we have a firm deadline, sir, so I wanted to give you a chance for any other -- anything you wanted to touch on that we didn't -- haven't addressed already.

GEN. ABRAMS: Well, yeah, I will. And that is that -- I want to go back to a point I made earlier, that we -- no kidding, no exaggeration -- have the most combat-experienced force we've ever had. This manual embraces the concepts that have evolved over time, from 2003 onward, to prepare our formations to go conduct these full- spectrum operations.

We've taken the best of that and changed our thinking on -- and shifting our thinking about how we've got to train to prepare units to do it. But it's a result of the outstanding soldiers and leaders that we have out in the formations today. That's where all this comes from.

And so, you know, our -- one of our previous chief of staff of the Army used to talk about soldiers are our credentials, and that couldn't be more true today. And they're living and breathing it every day and they're doing a fantastic job. This manual's about embracing this culture, this whole change in mind-set, putting it in our doctrine to help shape the conditions for our Army for the future.

So I appreciate everybody coming online today and look forward to further dialogue with you.

Q Thank you.

MS. KYZER: Thank you so much for your time, sir.

Q Thanks very much.

MS. KYZER: You can find the audio file and transcript at defenselink.mil/blogger. This concludes today's roundtable.

Thank you, everybody. Merry Christmas.

Q Thanks, Lindy. You too.

Q Thanks. Merry Christmas.

END.