

A Tool for Achieving Regional Understanding at the Company/Platoon Level

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*"Army training must balance current-operations missions while simultaneously preparing forces to meet future requirements. The future requires the Army to be regionally responsive and globally engaged. Army training will provide the critical depth and versatility needed to support the three strategic roles of [p]revent – [s]hape – [w]in. ..."*¹

The Army's shift toward regionally aligned units demonstrates the need for a focused training framework that creates regional understanding in Soldiers and leaders. This article will provide a proposed training outline and tool based on the operational variables of political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, time (PMESII-PT) – and on their subvariables.

This outline is for execution at company level to complement the information provided by the Leader Development and Education for Sustained Peace (LDESP) program. The goal is to provide company-level-and-below leadership with a general training plan and the regional analysis worksheet (RAW) tool to conduct a sufficiently thorough analysis of a more focused area than current training facilitates.

Current training

The U.S. military is responsible for developing "innovative, low-cost and small-footprint approaches to achieve [the nation's] security objectives [through] exercise, rotational presence and advisory capabilities."² These approaches place a premium on gaining and maintaining a level of knowledge about a specific region defined by the Joint Chiefs of Staff as *regional expertise*. This knowledge focuses on gaining an "understanding [of the impact] of political and cultural differences [on] military operations."³ The Joint Chiefs go further, stating that such expertise is gained through a 40-credit graduate degree or substantial immersion in a geographic area.⁴

In-depth regional knowledge such as this is important at strategic and operational levels, but it is unrealistic to expect this level of

knowledge in Soldiers and leaders at company level. Instead, Soldiers at company level should strive to gain an understanding of a specific region.

One of the current training tools available to units is the LDESP program. This Web-based learning utility, managed by the Naval Postgraduate School, provides a centralized location for regional combatant commands (COCOMs) to create and manage training for the brigade combat teams aligned with them. U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), the COCOM with the first regionally aligned conventional units, requires all regionally-aligned-unit Soldiers to complete a specific training module and 40-question exam.⁵ Once complete, they receive certification to operate within AFRICOM.

While this training provides a solid foundation for understanding the complexities of Africa, it does not provide a framework for the more focused information required at the platoon and company level of operations. Given the current expectation that company-level units are the highest echelon that will deploy as a whole, their area of operations will be much smaller than the continental focus that LDESP training provides.⁶ With the possibility of multiple small units deploying at any given time, battalion staffs may find it difficult to provide the detailed information required by each of these platoons and companies. Therefore, the responsibility for conducting region-focused training events falls to the company commander, with approval from the battalion and brigade commander.

Regional understanding at company/platoon level

As the Army continues to geographically align units with COCOMs, doctrine provides us with a structured method of investigating and evaluating the operational variables defined as the PMESII-PT aspects of a region and people. (Table 1).⁷ This doctrinal framework provides military leaders a method for creating regional understanding in diverse environments.

| Variables | Description |
|----------------------|--|
| Political | Describes the distribution of responsibility and power at all levels of governance — formally constituted authorities as well as informal or covert political powers. |
| Military | Explores the military and paramilitary capabilities of all relevant actors (enemy, friendly and neutral) in a given operational environment. |
| Economic | Encompasses individual and group behaviors related to producing, distributing and consuming resources. |
| Social | Describes the cultural, religious and ethnic makeup within an operational environment and the beliefs, values, customs and behaviors of society members. |
| Information | Describes the nature, scope, characteristics and effects of individuals, organizations and systems that collect, process, disseminate or act on information. |
| Infrastructure | Is composed of the basic facilities, services and installations needed for the functioning of a community or society. |
| Physical environment | Includes the geography and manmade structures, as well as the climate and weather in the area of operation. |
| Time | Describes the timing and duration activities, events or conditions within an operational environment, as well as how the timing and duration are perceived by various actors in the operational environment. |

Table 1. Operational variables (PMESII-PT).

While LDESP is tremendously accommodating, it does not provide the detailed analysis required at platoon and company level. By supplementing LDESP's resources with the RAW (available from <http://www.westpoint.edu/gene/SitePages/Publications.aspx>), this detailed information can be systematically determined.

The RAW provides a doctrinally correct and useful tool that is readily available for Soldiers and leaders at company and platoon level (Table 2). By using the operational variables and subvariables of PMESII-PT, the complicated nature of a specific region can be effectively distilled into manageable pieces for individual Soldiers and leaders (Table 3).⁸

Application in unit training schedule

The unit training-management process, based on the operations-process framework in Army Doctrine and Reference Publication 7-0, **Training Units and Developing Leaders**, is the Army's methodology for developing training. Unit training management occurs through proper planning, preparation, execution and assessment of training (Figure 1).⁹ From qualification on a marksmanship range to the completion of bus-driver training, Army leaders excel at training Soldiers

to a specified standard while continually assessing and improving that training. The key to gaining regional understanding is dedicated and focused training, similar to that devoted to basic rifle marksmanship, land navigation and combat lifesaver training.

The following is an ideal training method for achieving regional understanding at the individual level. We understand it will not always be feasible – for example, due to the current operating environment's fluid nature, regionally aligned units may receive short notice for a deployment's location. However, the requirement for detailed information will not change. By using RAWs and conducting this training in whatever time is available, company commanders are able to increase the regional understanding of their Soldiers in concert with predeployment requirements. The size of the element deploying directly affects the level of leaders who will be involved with this material's instruction.

Planning. The company commander develops a training-plan process to develop platoon and individual tasks. It is important to identify regional understanding as a key individual task that supports the battalion commander's guidance and the company's mission-essential task list; if regional training isn't identified as an essential task and

| | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| P1. Attitude toward the United States | | | |
| Positive (POS) | | Neutral (NEU) | |
| | | Negative (NEG) | |
| P2. Centers of political power and type of government | | | |
| A. Name of state | B. Capital and location | C. Form of government | D. State shape |
| | | | |
| E. Area of state | F. Political boundary type(s) | G. Major boundary dispute(s) | H. External threats/enemies |
| | | | |
| J. Informal or covert political powers | | | |
| P3. Government effectiveness and legitimacy | | | |
| Effective (yes/no) Legitimate (yes/no) Details | | | |
| P4. Influential political groups | | | |
| A. Group 1 Name: Size: Objectives: | | B. Group 2 Name: Size: Objectives: | |
| | | C. Group 3 Name: Size: Objectives: | |
| P5. International Relationships | | | |
| Bordering countries A. B. C. D. | | Relationship (POS, NEU, NEG) A. B. C. D. | |
| | | Other significant relationships | |
| P6. History | | | |

Table 2. Regional analysis worksheet example.

given dedicated focus, it may fall by the wayside among many competing tasks.

Following development of a unit training plan, the last step in the planning process is identifying topics that will promote improved Soldier understanding of the specific region the unit is aligned with.¹⁰ Our recommendation is that company commanders use the RAW, with its foundation in the operational variables of PMESII-PT, to assist in researching a specifically assigned region.

Preparation. Training preparation is primarily executed by the leaders conducting training, with company commanders supervising the development and sourcing of specific training requirements. For regional understanding, platoon leaders and platoon sergeants serve as the primary trainers.

Individual squad leaders serve as alternate instructors, conducting reading checks and enforcing the daily requirements with their subordinates. Each platoon leader and platoon sergeant receives specific PMESII-PT variables to research and use to train the company (Figure 2). The RAW was formatted to be easily printed and distributed in pieces to individuals for completion.

Every Soldier in the unit, to include all the identified instructors, should first conduct training using the LDESP program. This will create a foundational understanding of the COCOM and satisfy any required certifications. The trainers should then complete their portion of the RAW and become subject-matter experts in their assigned operational variable. They should heavily use

on-line resources such as country studies available through the Library of Congress Website, LDESP, the Central Intelligence Agency's **World Factbook**, U.S. State Department fact sheets and the Center for Language, Culture and Regional Studies at the U.S. Military Academy. The company commander should then validate his leaders in their specific region in the form of a review of the RAW and backbrief. The trainers would then be responsible for planning and executing regional training in accordance with the company commander's training plan.

The final step of preparation is refresher training. Depending on the length of the training cycle and the large amount of information Soldiers must digest, refresher training will likely be an ongoing requirement. Platoon leaders and platoon sergeants will be responsible for creating this training under the company commander's guidance, with a focus on being able to quickly update the information to include changes that have occurred due to new information or experiences after spending time in the region.

| Political variable | Social variable | Physical environment variable |
|---|--|---|
| Attitude toward the United States Centers of political power Type of government Government effectiveness and legitimacy Influential political groups International relationships | Demographic mix Social volatility Education level Ethnic diversity Population movement Common languages Criminal activity Human rights Centers of social power Basic cultural norms and values | Terrain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation and fields of fire • Avenues of approach • Key terrain • Obstacles • Cover and concealment • Landforms • Vegetation • Terrain complexity • Mobility classification Natural Hazards Climate Weather <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precipitation • High temperature - heat index • Low temperature - wind chill • Wind • Visibility • Cloud cover • Relative humidity |
| Military variable | Information variable | |
| Military forces Government paramilitary forces Nonstate paramilitary forces Unarmed combatants Nonmilitary armed combatants Military functions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Command and control (mission command) • Maneuver • Information warfare • Reconnaissance, intelligence, surveillance and target acquisition • Fire support • Protection • Logistics | Public communications media Information warfare <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic warfare • Computer warfare • Information attack • Deception • Physical destruction • Protection and security measures Intelligence Information management | |
| Economic variable | Infrastructure variable | Time variable |
| Economic diversity Employment status Illegal economic activity Banking and finance | Construction patterns Urban zones Urbanized building density Utilities present Utility level Transportation architecture | Cultural perception of time Information onset Tactical exploitation of time Key dates, time periods or events |

Table 3. Operational subvariables.

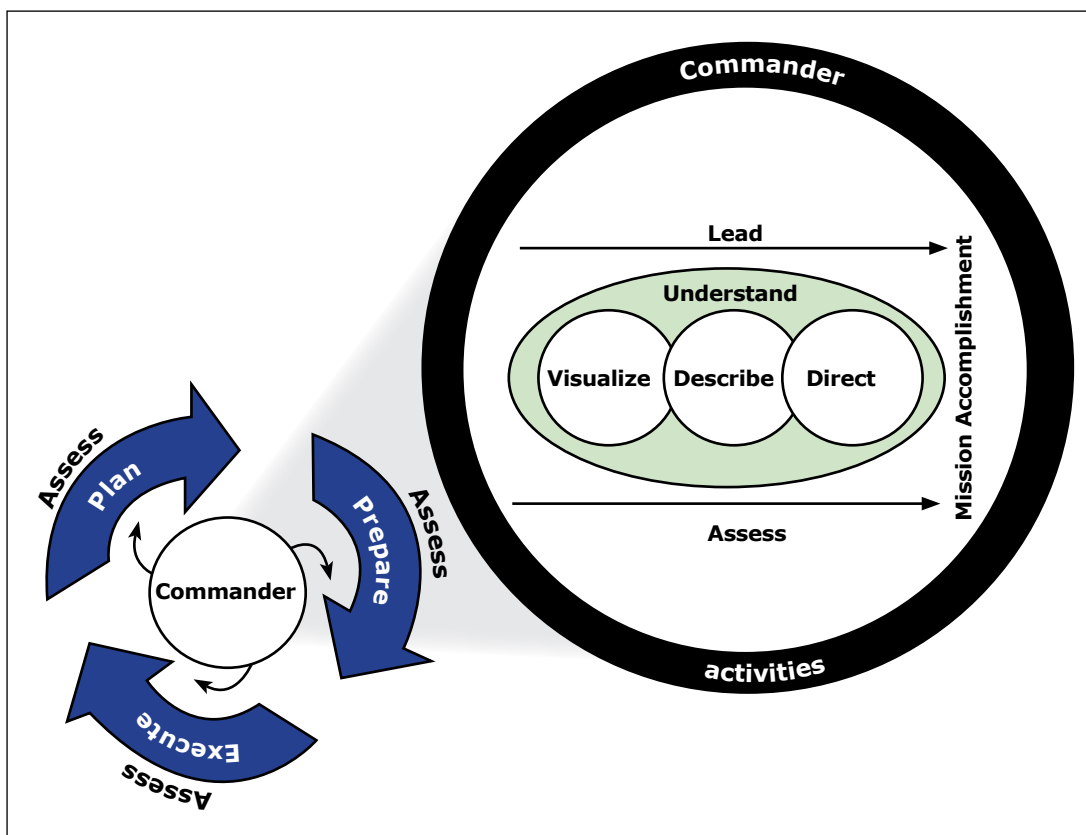


Figure 1. Operations process.

The methodology trainers will use will vary greatly from topic to topic; however, a standardized framework for material to be covered is essential. This is where the RAW is helpful in creating a detailed syllabus. This syllabus, at a minimum, should include operational variables and subvariables to be covered; specific knowledge of goals/outcomes; training location(s); and a general timeline for the training.

At the end of the preparation phase, the commander has reviewed and certified all training plans and trainers, published the syllabus (training schedule) and allocated time for regional training to be conducted.

Ideally, this training will be conducted as a "round-robin" event in a location that facilitates learning and encourages interaction from all Soldiers participating. A suitable environment can vary greatly dependent on the type of training conducted. For regional understanding, this location should provide trainers the ability to properly present their material and give Soldiers the room needed to take notes and truly engage in the topic.

Execution. With all topics divided among the company's platoon leaders and platoon

sergeants, training can be conducted efficiently and effectively. Also, by assigning each platoon a particular group of operational variables, those individuals attain a level of understanding nearing regional expertise. For example, the platoon responsible for the political and military operational variables becomes the company's most knowledgeable element in those subject areas.

Critical to the execution phase are daily requirements at the team and squad level. These requirements can include, but are not limited to, squad briefings on a portion of the day's material, a team case study of a region or backbriefs to their platoon on previously covered material. By assigning these tasks, Soldiers are required to complete the given assignments, participate in their own learning and guide their learning in a direction of their interests. This will improve the success of the program by creating a deeper understanding of the material.

Also, trainers should be encouraged to vary the methods of training they use. Situational exercises, limited lectures, the judicious use of PowerPoint presentations and reinforcement of reading assignments are a few techniques.

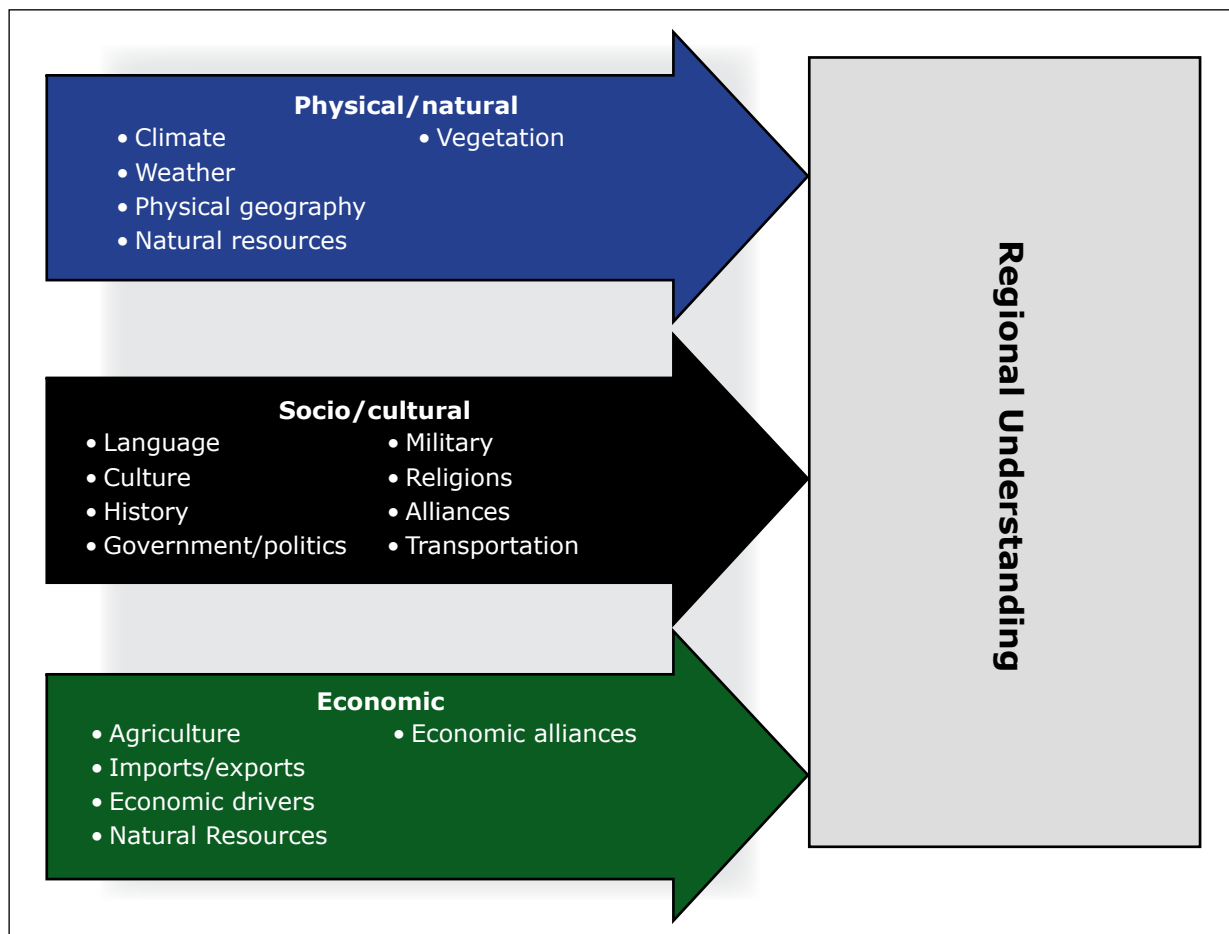


Figure 2. Subsystems of regional understanding.

Assessment. In accordance with ADRP 3-07, **Training Management**, commanders and other leaders conduct assessments throughout the entire training cycle. For regional training to succeed, assessing each Soldier is critical; if there is no qualification requirement, training will be much less effective.

To verify the success of regional training, individual testing can be included. Any test should be designed in a similar fashion to a high-school examination, with questions varying from multiple-choice, fill in the blank and short answer. While other verification and assessment methods may be used, regional studies are fact-based and thus an examination of the material is the most effective way to assess an individual's retention of knowledge.

The specifics of these examinations could be designed by the company commander and approved by the battalion or brigade commander. However, a centralized standard test format developed by the regional COCOM would prevent multiple standards across aligned units.

Key to this concept is that performance is valued. Encouraging Soldiers to value a test of any type is difficult. Thus, association of performance to a reward is critical. Rewards

are at the discretion of the command, but a recommendation would be those that award promotion points or recognize personal achievement. Army Achievement Medals, certificates of achievement and company special passes for those who excel on examinations are options company commanders have available. Conversely, Soldiers who do not achieve the standard can be subject to consequences such as revocation of pass privileges, developmental counseling or weekend re-training.

Regardless of the final technique or specific tasks trained, the company commander will be able to determine individual Soldiers' regional understanding and certify each as T (trained), P (practiced) or U (untrained).

Finally, the after-action review process provides the opportunity to incorporate lessons-learned into future training to better support the unit's mission.

Conclusion

The regionally aligned unit structure mandates that our Soldiers and leaders gain and maintain an in-depth understanding of a specific region to facilitate building partner capacity.¹¹ This regional understanding requires a standard training framework at

company level and below, which complements the existing COCOM training requirements and provides enough detail to ensure Soldier understanding. This emphasis on using the RAW while conducting training at company level complies with the Army training strategy of “[restoring] decentralized training management” while providing a tool for leaders and Soldiers to use when time is of the essence.¹² This focus will build on past cultural training events and allow unit leadership to emphasize the importance of required skills outside of shoot, move and communicate.



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Notes

¹ U.S. Army, *The Army Training Strategy*, October 2012.

² U.S. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf, accessed Oct. 24, 2012.

³ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Force 2020*, http://www.defenseinnovationmarketplace.mil/resources/JV2020_Capstone.pdf, accessed Oct. 24, 2012.

⁴ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3126.01, *Language and Regional Expertise Planning*, http://www.dtic.mil/cjcs_directives/cdata/unlimit/3126_01.pdf, accessed Nov. 20, 2012.

⁵ *Leader's Development Education for a Sustained Peace*, www.ldesp.org. AFRICOM's training module is currently required for all Soldiers who are members of 2/1 Infantry Division aligned with the command. This requirement was provided during an email conversation with LTC Jeffrey Powell, squadron commander, 5-4 Cav.

⁶ Vandiver, John, "AFRICOM first to test new regional brigade concept," *Stars and Stripes*, May 17, 2012, available from <http://www.stripes.com/news/afri-com-first-to-test-new-regional-brigade-concept-1.177476>, accessed Feb. 25, 2013.

⁷ ADRP 5-0, *The Operations Process*, Washington, DC: Department of the Army, May 2012.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ ADRP 7-0, *Training Units and Developing Leaders*, Washington, DC: Department of the Army, Aug. 23, 2012.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Army Training Strategy*.

¹² Ibid.

ACRONYM QUICK-SCAN

ADRP – Army doctrine and reference publication

AFRICOM – Africa Command

COCOM – combatant command

LDESP – Leader Development and Education for Sustained Peace (program)

PMESII-PT – political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment and time

RAW – regional analysis worksheet

USMA – U.S. Military Academy