

13 ARTICLES: FUNDAMENTALS OF HOSTING A MULTINATIONAL TRAINING EXERCISE

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You've just been assigned the responsibility to plan and host a multinational training exercise. You've read the history of the training exercise. You know what nation you are hosting a military unit from. You may have even partnered with other countries in a multinational training event in the past. All that being said, this exercise will present a whole other set of challenges that you have not yet experienced.

So, where do you start? What are some of the important aspects of the exercise you must consider? Who can you turn to for assistance in coordinating with your foreign guests?

In September 2015, Blackhawk Company, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 1-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), 7th Infantry Division, executed Yudh Abhyas, a training exercise with a company of the Indian Army's 6th Battalion, Kumaon Regiment (a light infantry company). Not every multinational training exercise is the same, however, there are some inherent fundamentals that you may find universally applicable. What follows are observations from collective experiences rooted in the lessons learned during Yudh Abhyas 2015 and can be applied to any multinational training exercise.

1) Planning conferences are exercises in themselves

When beginning the planning process of any multinational training exercise with a foreign military, you should plan everything you can together from the start. Senior leaders should collaborate with one another to build a scheme of maneuver or the exercise framework. This framework will be the baseline for the hosting unit's staff to work. Implementing the foreign unit's input early in the planning process may prevent last-minute changes. The unit may



Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment and Indian Army troops with the 6th Battalion of the Kumaon Regiment stand together during the opening ceremony of Yudh Abhyas 15 at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., 9 September 2015. (Photo by SGT Sinthia Rosario)

have specific training events it wants to conduct or equipment it “wants to showcase, some of which may be “red line.” At a minimum, build the framework together, but ideally the final product should be a written order with a synchronization matrix.

2) Success is in the details

Like any training event, the success or failure of the exercise will be based on the coordination with adjacent units for assets. Transportation and lodging arrangements will require daily coordination, especially if the exercise encompasses two separate components — a staff exercise (STAFEX) and a field training exercise (FTX). Use rehearsal of concept (ROC) drills to discover issues that require prior coordination to resolve. A good example of this is when the visiting foreign unit is using its own strategic lift assets for transportation. To ensure personnel, crew, and cargo are properly received, you will need to coordinate with U.S. Air Force officials at the base where they are going to land.

3) Always maintain unity of command

Multi-component exercises that incorporate both a STAFEX and an FTX component should be executed within the same battalion or brigade. If not, the next higher headquarters must provide unity of command. Just like any military mission, staffs exist to integrate numerous processes and activities within the headquarters and across the force. Failure to maintain mission command of the exercise will result in inefficiency and de-synchronization between subordinate units. This is especially prevalent during ceremonies or when logistical support requirements change.

4) Everything is a negotiation

Always build your training exercise framework with flexibility in mind. Whether you have planned too much or not enough training, or didn’t plan for something altogether, the plan WILL change. “Great ideas” happen. Just ensure all leaders remain open-minded and flexible, especially when working with your counterparts. However, beware of saying “yes” before determining if requests can be fulfilled. Events like ceremonies or visits from distinguished visitors are likely situations for last-minute changes or requests. Some things like the order of precedence for national anthems or Army songs may have significant importance.

5) Protocol and sensitivity

The most important thing to remember while conducting a multinational training exercise is to maintain cultural sensitivity and knowledge of foreign military protocol. Ensure cultural or religious sensitivities are clearly understood by all Soldiers participating in the exercise. Soldiers and officers should always show the same respect to visiting leaders as they would their own. They can also use the visiting unit’s “motto” or proper greeting, if they have one.

It is important here to note that American dietary needs are very different than most foreign countries and thus may require prior planning and coordination. Be cognizant of foreign militaries with a cultural class system as it may cause frustration when attempting to coordinate with lower-ranking individuals.

Additionally, the U.S. military is unique because of our expected standards and work ethic. For us, a standard duty day is 0600-1700, but this might not be the case for your guests. They may be accustomed to a shorter duty day with less emphasis on training and more on team-building or esprit de corps events.

Most cultures place great emphasis on exchanging gifts from Soldier to Soldier at the completion of an exercise. However, there are no formal means to fund gifts within regulation. The gifts are usually inexpensive, but nevertheless, proper cultural protocol should be respected. Official gifts are usually exchanged in a formal fashion, and some countries may have particular requirements, i.e., combat arms officers give gifts to combat arms officer and logistics officers give gifts to logistics officers.

6) Bureaucratic collisions

To prevent frustration and bitterness, ensure prior coordination is made with installation support organizations. This is especially true when planning to use foreign weapons and ammunition. Coordinate with range control to ensure all proper documentation is submitted. Failure to do so may halt training before it even begins for something as simple as a memorandum of agreement. Ensure there is a mutual understanding between U.S. and foreign militaries with regards to weapons storage and ammunition control and collection. This may require some



**Soldiers from 1-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team and the Indian Army's 6th Battalion of the 6th Kumaon Regiment bound forward to assault a target while conducting company movement procedures during exercise Yudh Abhyas 15 on 21 September 2015.
(Photo by SGT Daniel Schroeder)**

deconfliction in order to ensure post security regulations and foreign military regulations are both being followed. Again, a ROC drill in the planning phase can identify this issue before it ever becomes one.

7) Teaching vs. sharing

How we in the U.S. military structure standard training exercises is slightly different from how we should structure a multinational training exercise. Emphasis on the mutual sharing of knowledge and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) should be the focus. Beware of replicating the training based off of your experience with security force assistance missions in Iraq or Afghanistan. Avoid a training structure that may lead your foreign counterparts into perceiving that there is no desire to learn their TTPs.

8) Always plan to have interpreters

Most foreign militaries have officers who are fluent in English, however, their soldiers may not be fluent. Despite the confidence your foreign counterparts have in the ability of their soldiers to understand English, this may be a slight overestimation. If possible, talk to a foreign affairs officer (FAO) of that country to determine if additional interpreters are required. After all, the English language is complicated, especially when you consider the slang and various accents of Soldiers in the U.S. military today. At a minimum, you should identify your personable Soldiers and plan for them to help bridge the language gap. Foreign soldiers will gravitate more to personable Soldiers simply because they are easier to converse with.

9) Mind the gap — the NCO gap

The U.S. military has the strongest NCO Corps in the world. However, some countries do not put a strong emphasis on empowering their junior leaders, thus creating a weak NCO corps. This may be due to their class system or centralized command structure. It could just be how they prefer to do business. However, in some cases, it may be best to positively showcase the U.S. Army NCO Corps to help passively influence other countries to follow suit.

10) Managing the media

High-profile training exercises will draw media attention which should be embraced. In this area, the public affairs officer (PAO) is your best friend. The PAO exists to bridge the gap between the architects at the tactical level and the policy makers at the strategic level. They will highlight the training to the public and promote the exercise for future support. However, more attention can cause distraction from the training objectives which should be

avoided. The exercise should be promoted by the media, but not planned around media interaction. Maintain the exercise's authenticity.

11) Social events are key to integration

Social events are a great method for creating bonds between Soldiers and building cohesion between two units. Therefore, it is highly recommended that a social event be planned before the training even begins. This will act as an ice-breaker and bring the Soldiers together. Additional social events should be planned both during the exercise as well as at the conclusion of the exercise. Each social event will strengthen relations and solidify the integration of the two units, sealing the bonds built over the course of the exercise.

12) Don't forget the cultural events

When planning the exercise, remember that your counterparts may be visiting the United States for the first time. Time and effort should be placed on planning and coordinating cultural events. Ensure you take into consideration that it should be about building a team and interesting to both U.S. and foreign Soldiers.

One important note on this subject is that most foreign militaries take pride in their unit's history. Your counterparts may be eager to learn about your specific unit's history and the history of your installation as well. Also, just as U.S. Soldiers are naturally athletic, so too are the soldiers of most foreign militaries. Many Soldiers, no matter the country of origin, have an appreciation for professional sports.

Finally, discuss with your counterparts about whether they would be interested in engaging their diaspora here in the U.S.

13) Synchronization from the strategic to the tactical level

Multinational exercises are directly connected to the Army Service Component Command's (ASCC's) Theater Security and Cooperation Plan (TSCP). This may not be readily apparent during planning and execution. However, units hosting such exercises should become intimately familiar with the ways in which these exercises contribute to the mil-to-mil relationship with the hosted army and the TSCP. Appreciating this bridge provides vision and purpose for the platoons that are committing their time and energy to the exercise. It informs the way leaders engage. It also allows your PAO to communicate to specific audiences with precision. The unit's best resources to gain this understanding are the FAOs that are liaising on behalf of the host nation. FAOs provide firsthand knowledge of the affairs of the U.S. defense attaché office for the hosted nation. They may also have contacts within the strategy and policy staffs of the hosted army, and certainly do in the U.S. ASCC. As a backup, the country desk officer in the political-military section of the J5 within the appropriate ASCC can also provide key information about the mil-to-mil foundation of the exercise. Units should not hesitate to reach out to these points of contact for assistance.

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