

FLEXIBILITY: **Today's Leaders Adjust, Adapt,** **OVERCOME**

CAPTAIN JOSEPH CLABURN

Today, more than ever, Army leaders are being required to work well beyond their scope to excel on the battlefield. The ability to adapt, adjust, and overcome has become more critical than ever before. On today's battlefield, the varying situations that our Soldiers and leaders face help create a truly combined force. Now, leaders find themselves conducting operations with forces across a broad spectrum. Young lieutenants coming right out of the Infantry Officer Basic Course may have to conduct operations with different units, branches, and countries. Our NCOs are not only leading young Soldiers on a fast-paced battlefield, but they are also being required to conduct these operations with attached units from different services and nations. Flexibility has become one of the many essential characteristics of a leader in today's Army, and this has been proven on the battlefields in Afghanistan and Iraq. One of the ways that we can help leaders become more adaptive to these changes is to incorporate more real-world experiences into their training plans as well as at the various combat training centers.

During Operation Enduring Freedom, the 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment from the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) conducted a cave-clearing operation known as Operation Mountain Lion on the Afghan/Pakistan border. The combat forces on the

ground at the time of the air assault were British motorized units in an overwatch position of the battalion's landing zone. The task of the battalion commander was to move into the valley and conduct a relief in place of the British unit on the ground, search and clear the terrorist training camp buildings and surrounding caves, and assess the civilian situation in the area for future stability and support operations (SASOs). The battalion successfully air assaulted into the area of operation and relieved the British forces on the ground. Almost immediately upon arrival into the area, a group of Afghan locals approached the leaders, and a new working relationship on the battlefield resulted. Over the next

couple of days of operations, the Soldiers of several companies in the battalion worked with the Afghan elders (who later revealed themselves to be old Mujahideen soldiers who fought the Russians in the 1980s), interacted and relieved the British units in the area, and conducted combat operations to search the enemy buildings and caves. While the medical personnel assessed the needs of the village, the leaders on this mission had tea with the local leaders. Upon returning from the mission, the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ronald Corkran, said that he had led "the largest A-team in the Army."

The essence of that statement may have set the stage for what future operations



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Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) scan the ridgeline for enemy forces during Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan.

would be like in the U.S. Army. During my seven-month deployment as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, I had the opportunity to work with several of the conventional forces in the area of responsibility, such as the 10th Mountain and 82nd Airborne divisions, as well as coordinate intertheater flights with Air Force and Marine Corps' aircraft from several air bases. I found myself cross-talking with Special Forces elements and Air Force Special Operations Command personnel as well as being a liaison for the Joint Coordination Center with Pakistani forces. In retrospect, I can't recall any training conducted during the military schools I attended that could have prepared me to operate with so many people from such a broad spectrum.

On more than one occasion during Operation Iraqi Freedom, conventional and unconventional forces had to work together and perform missions alongside each other. Despite differing standing operating procedures (SOPs) and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), the foundation of being an infantryman rose above differences in Soldiers to make the mission a success. During the course of the war in Iraq, Special Forces units had to use the assets available from a mechanized infantry unit to help provide security and isolate objectives. While in Baghdad, my unit was assigned an area of responsibility where a Special Forces A-Team was also operating. Without having to do so, we shared intelligence information with each other specific to our area and would also assist each other with items of necessity. So, though our missions were different on a relative scale, our overall task was as united as if they were task organized to us or we to them. The military has never seen such cross utilization of forces in an operation like we have in Operation Iraqi Freedom. In our efforts to perfect the combined arms fight, we have set the bar even higher by considering a combined arms fight that incorporates joint operations of conventional, unconventional, and other government agencies such as the CIA.

In addition to working with and integrating such varying forces, leaders should also take into consideration how civilian and urbanized factors affect Soldiers. A quick differentiation between combative and non-combative forces in the urbanized fight is critical when dealing with situations like we faced in Iraq. The Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) is the only place in the Army to train leaders and Soldiers in this adaptive environment, and based on my experience, it was and is the best place to train Soldiers and leaders for this experience. On the asymmetric battlefield, where the enemy doesn't use conventional force-on-force tactics, units have to adapt to fast-paced and unpredictable situations. The need for a leader to be flexible is critical as the transition from combat operations to peacekeeping operations occurs quickly.

As the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq proved, the time period for defined combat operations has decreased. After the U.S. started



Private First Class Joshua Hutcherson

Soldiers from Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, detain a man who was seen leaving the house of a suspected arms dealer in Iraq.

combat operations in Afghanistan following September 11th, coalition forces successfully took over the capital of Kabul and removed the Taliban from power. All of this happened by December of 2001. U.S. forces began combat operations against Saddam Hussein's regime in March 2003, and President Bush proclaimed that combat operations had ceased by the beginning of May. Though combat operations in the two theaters have come to an end, offensive operations by coalition forces continue in both countries. The end of the combat phases of operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq have brought about the transition of military combat forces and ultimately added more mission essential tasks that Soldiers needed to be trained on.

SASO is a fairly new term in Army doctrine. With the quick transition from combat operations to stability and support operations, a new host of other groups have entered the battlefield. Civilian contractors from the U.S. government, newly trained Iraqi and Afghan police forces, and other government and non-government agencies have been introduced to the region to help provide stability and political guidance to the regions. The addition of these new groups of 'force multipliers' has made the spectrum of support operations that much broader.

As leaders, both officers and enlisted, we are presented with a wide variation of change that the battlefield brings to us. We must

be adaptive to certain situations like having to link-up and patrol with Special Forces units, securing a CIA safe house, or performing joint operations with foreign forces in a coalition. Everyone is feeling the effects of this truly combined force, from platoon leaders to the company commander in Iraq who has just been named the mayor of a small village north of Baghdad. TTPs being used in Iraq right now should be incorporated into JRTC, which has become the cornerstone of preparing the force for combat.

We must also pay close attention to young Soldiers and the difficulties they may experience from putting their weapons on safe in order to perform SASO after having constant vigilance on the battlefield. The individual Soldier from the 82nd Airborne who has never operated around M1 tanks must get training and experience before he conducts operations with a mechanized task force. The mission essential task lists (METL) for every unit in the Army should begin to incorporate the integration of civilians on the battlefield

and the intricate details of operating in the urban environment. We must face the fact that our military operations are no longer conducted in the open fields and deserts. Our fight, as short-lived as all of our conflicts have become since the Vietnam War, are slowly but surely creeping into the backyards and soccer fields of the nations in which we conduct operations. The dangers with these operations won't be the artillery that our Soldiers receive in their foxholes, but the improvised explosive devices left on the side of the road for our patrolling units. It is the sniper who lives in the building across the street of a company of residing infantrymen and the fanatical suicide bomber who drives up to our military checkpoints. JRTC must do better to help units integrate conventional and unconventional, government and non-government agencies, as well as friendly and opposing civilians. Rotations focusing solely on offensive and defensive operations should thus be changed to simulate an even and continuous distribution of offensive operations to

stability and support operations.

Leaders in today's Army need to be able to adjust, adapt, and overcome. Leaders displaying flexibility during this global war on terrorism are critical to our success. We, as an Army, must concentrate and focus on training our future forces for this new combined arms and joint operations fight and to efficiently transition into the stability and support operations that are now taking the forefront of our unit's missions. Proper training is crucial to the efficiency and survivability of our Soldiers no matter where we find ourselves deployed. It is the only way the Army will be able to continue with our tradition of serving from every theater in the world, whether it's fighting the combined arms fight or rebuilding a war-torn nation.

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