Principles and Priorities in Training for Iraq

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"The troops are unleashed,"
I said to the squadron's
operations officer,
"and I'm absolutely amazed
at their speed and agility."

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PHOTO: A view of the 14th century Ottoman Castle in Tal Afar, January 2005.

(All photos courtesy of the author)

AS WE STOOD OUTSIDE my headquarters, the 2d squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, in a small courtyard at the base of the 40-foot walls of an Ottoman-Empire-era castle in Tal Afar, Iraq, I reflected on my squadron's operations over the past year. The troop commanders and their Iraqi Army and police partners had taken ownership of their area of operations. They were integrating their actions cohesively and effectively along our lines of operation: Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), information operations, civil-military operations, and combat operations.

The environment we faced required junior leaders to make hundreds of independent decisions every day. The sheer volume of information generated daily was staggering. Moreover, the operations tempo was very high, requiring the execution of dozens of missions simultaneously across the spectrum of operations. It would have been easy for any leader to be overwhelmed by the complexity of operating in such an environment. Yet, despite these circumstances, the squadron operated with little guidance from me. I knew all of the subordinate leaders' capabilities and expected those leaders to aggressively exercise initiative while conducting operations. As I looked back on three years in command through two deployments, I recognized that my trust in their judgment—the faith that they could and would make the right decisions—was the key to our success.

Since my return from Iraq, I'm often asked by those preparing to deploy, "What are the most important things to train for?" Most commanders preparing their units for deployment share a common feeling that there is just not enough time to train for everything they think may be important. It can be frustrating: leaders not only have to prioritize essential tactical training, but also must find time to prepare equipment, reorganize into modular organizations, relocate to a new post, and allow for personal and family time for Soldiers.

I give those who ask a list of about a dozen things, based on our after action reviews, to focus on. With the number of combat-experienced leaders in the force, I am sure there are no surprises on the list. Identifying the tasks to train is the easy part. Our training doctrine is superb. The mission essential task list (METL) development process will lead units to the key tasks, and the intellectual energy that it takes to develop the METL creates

buy-in of the product. Even so, as I look back on my unit's performance in Iraq, I'm convinced that whatever success we enjoyed had less to do with my day-to-day actions as a commander or with the actual combat skills learned in training, and more to do with a pre-deployment training environment that cultivated initiative in my junior leaders. I believe that a command climate that builds initiative—one that focuses on developing critical thinking skills so that leaders at all levels have not only the knowledge and training, but also the judgment, to make the right decisions in a combat environment—is the most important element in the training environment for units deploying to Iraq or Afghanistan.

Field Manual (FM) 6-22, *Army Leadership,* states that leaders can "set the conditions for initiative by guiding others in thinking through the problem."[1] I believe the converse of that is also true: leaders who do not create an empowering environment that allows for individual resourcefulness will stifle initiative. Consequently, their subordinate leaders will not develop the confidence they need to respond with well-reasoned judgment in the complex counterinsurgency environment we face today.

A program that promotes such intellectual capability must emanate from a command philosophy that considers individual initiative a priority. This philosophy is founded on building bonds of trust, instilling discipline, bolstering morale, and training critical tasks with special emphasis on rules of engagement (ROE) and risk management.

Command Philosophy

As a company commander, I never developed a command philosophy, probably because I didn't know what one was. I suppose my subordinate leaders and troops implicitly learned what was important to me by observing my actions and listening to my guidance over time, but this clearly was not the best way of doing business. Over the years, I observed many great leaders and learned from their approaches to command, which, without exception, included setting forth a formal command philosophy to shape the unit. As a result, when notified of my selection for squadron command, I was already persuaded of the essential need for formulating such a philosophy. Well in advance of assuming command, I began crafting a philosophy that would reflect my personal priorities and leadership style.

I started to form my command philosophy by jotting down observations that resonated with me. I kept a piece of paper with me on which I recorded leadership principles as they occurred to me. Two books that especially made an impression on me were *Leadership: The Warrior's Art*, by Christopher Kolenda, and *Defeat into Victory, Battling Japan in Burma and India, 1942-1945*, by Field Marshal Viscount Slim. Kolenda's book is a collection of essays from active and retired leaders about leadership; Field Marshal Slim's book provided practical insight into the influence of command philosophy and was a fascinating account of how a bad situation was completely turned around through skillful leadership. Slim focused on building competence and improving morale at the lowest levels to develop organizational cohesiveness and combat effectiveness.
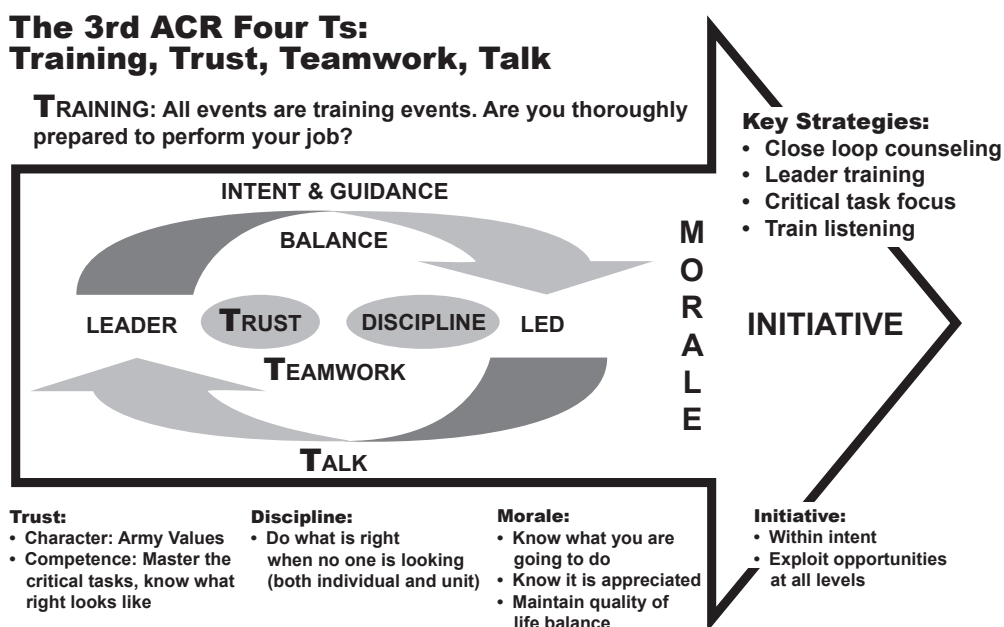
When I knew which squadron I was to command, I contacted my future regimental commander to learn what his philosophy was so that I could nest mine with his. During the year before I assumed command, I noticed reoccurring themes on my piece of paper and began to see how the parts of my command philosophy would fit together.

Through this process, I reached the conclusion that, for a command philosophy to work, your unit must come to live it—it cannot be something that you merely write down during a pre-command course, hand out on your first day of command, and never see again. On the contrary, you and your unit must believe in it. Your philosophy should be so assimilated into the unit culture that even the jargon that expresses its concepts becomes part of the unit vernacular.

I wanted my philosophy to reflect a command climate that would encourage initiative—but initiative within the framework of a disciplined and specific combat purpose. However laudable initiative is in junior leaders and Soldiers, encouraging initiative for initiative's sake, without an overall controlling intellectual and emotional paradigm, is counterproductive and potentially disastrous. It was clear to me from the outset that discipline had to be instilled and trust between the commander and subordinate troop leaders cultivated to develop initiative. Promoting initiative without such a foundation was courting disaster and would likely result in chaos.

To help me visualize my command philosophy and then communicate my intent, I designed the following illustration (see figure 1). Obviously, my

*My vision is creating an environment that will develop
initiative-taking leaders that will dominate the 21st century battlefield.*

The 3rd ACR Four Ts: Training, Trust, Teamwork, Talk

TRAINING: All events are training events. Are you thoroughly prepared to perform your job?

INTENT & GUIDANCE

BALANCE

LEADER   **T**RUST   DISCIPLINE   LED

TEAMWORK

TALK

MORALE

INITIATIVE

Key Strategies:
• Close loop counseling
• Leader training
• Critical task focus
• Train listening

Trust:
• Character: Army Values
• Competence: Master the critical tasks, know what right looks like

Discipline:
• Do what is right when no one is looking (both individual and unit)

Morale:
• Know what you are going to do
• Know it is appreciated
• Maintain quality of life balance

Initiative:
• Within intent
• Exploit opportunities at all levels

Figure 1. Author's command philosophy.

command philosophy is not the only good one—others will be different and perhaps equally or more successful. But I wanted to formulate and codify a philosophy specifically to help create a command climate that encouraged subordinate leaders to develop acute judgment and take initiative.

Trust. Within my visual construct, trust is a quality defined by character and competence. In my mind, one has character if he lives up to the Army values, which are all-important guiding principles appropriate for comrades-in-arms who place their lives in each other's hands. I made it clear that I would assume that everyone who had put on a uniform and joined our unit was living up to the Army values, unless one proved otherwise through his conduct.

In the intellectual construct of my command philosophy, competence—having the skills, knowledge, and judgment to perform assigned duties—was never assumed, but had to be developed and ultimately demonstrated in practical application. Collective technical competence would only come about through team training and experience. It was understood that this process took time and patience: none of us is as competent on the first day in a new position as he is six months later. As the Soldiers improved their skills and grew confident in one another, they developed collective competence and came to trust their team members.

Discipline. I defined discipline as doing what is right when no one is looking. It is the self-determination that finds you working out before physical training or staying late to fix a deadlined vehicle. This kind of anonymous dedication to the mission and to one's comrades is a key factor in assessing the health of a unit. It is the measure of buy-in to the command philosophy. Although no one sees you do it, or even knows about it, you do what you know should be done because this dedication, or loyalty, has been inculcated into you and you have accepted it as a value: it means doing the right thing all the time.

Unit morale. I emphasized the importance of developing an environment that promotes high morale. This is critical. Everyone wants to be informed, to feel he is important to the unit, and to know that his contributions are appreciated. Satisfying these desires through effective communications helps promote the climate of trust, discipline, balance, teamwork, and high morale in which initiative is most likely to prosper.

Balance and teamwork. Both in garrison and when one is deployed, it is important to keep a balance in life. In garrison, I made it a point not to work late or on weekends unless there was a real need to do so, for if I did, others would as well. Never use how late you or your subordinates work as a measure

of performance: it can be counterproductive and makes for miserable relationships. Balancing your time and attention between work and personal time is always difficult in an Army career, but I believe you will actually accomplish more if you have a balanced lifestyle. Think of your Army career not as a 20-year sprint by yourself, but as a marathon in which your family runs with you as part of the team.

Teamwork is another key element of my command philosophy. Real teamwork means unhesitatingly helping each other out. If another unit asks for help, the answer is yes. To encourage teamwork, I would have lunch with my commanders each week. The entire focus of the luncheon was to share good ideas. Many of the commanders did the same with their leaders.

Guidance to subordinates. I told my subordinate leaders that a key principle of leadership was to explain their intent and provide the "left and right limits" to their subordinates. We called this "the rumble strip," in reference to the rumble strips on the side of a highway. Rumble strips establish the outer driving boundaries for the direction you are headed. If you stray too far to the left or to the right, you hear the strips' rumbling sound as a warning not to stray off the road. The phrase "rumble strip" became part of the vernacular of the squadron. For instance, when a junior leader said that something was "outside the rumble strips," he was describing an action that was outside the leader's intent.

A leader has to decide where to place rumble strips for each unit and clearly explain these boundaries in his guidance. As subordinates become more competent and earn the trust of their superiors, the distance between the rumble strips widens. A scout platoon leader with 20 months of combat experience, for example, is likely to have more latitude than a brand-new platoon leader.

Initiative happens within the limits of the rumble strips, so allow leaders the freedom to make decisions when they are on track. Sometimes, they will do things that might not be exactly the way you would have done them, but if their actions are within your intent and guidance, let them happen. Not only will it promote initiative, but it will also build trust, because trust is a two-way bond. However, if you see actions not in line with your guidance, then you must give the nudge to get them back between the rumble strips.

Mistakes are bound to happen as you cultivate initiative in your leaders, but that is the price of doing business. My command philosophy recognized the difference between negligence and a mistake that occurred when trying to do the right thing. I assumed that, more often than not, subordinate leaders who understood my intent, and who had been given the opportunity to develop keen judgment skills, would come up with better solutions than I in situations with which they were more intimately familiar.

For example, one concern we had in Iraq was the lack of protection for Bradley commanders from improvised explosive device (IED) blasts. Before we knew that the Army had a solution in the works, some of our junior leaders figured out how to mount up-armored HMMWV windshields to the right of the Bradley commander's head so that the commanders could still see clearly through the windshield while their heads were better protected. We mounted these on our entire fleet. Within a week, one of our vehicles was hit by a blast from an IED mounted high off the road on a building. The windshield cracked, but it saved the life of the vehicle commander. In fact, these windshields saved many lives during our deployment. For showing such initiative, we awarded impact Army Commendation Medals to those who had developed the idea.

Self-assessment. Establishing rumble-strip guidance also provides a good yardstick for self-assessment. If things are not going as you intended, then it may be time to review the quality of your intent and guidance. You may have failed to clearly communicate your expectations, or perhaps your guidance is unworkable and you need to change it. In any case, confirmation and back briefs are essential to ensure the communications loop is working.

A 2d Squadron Bradley modified with up-armored windshields to protect Bradley commanders from IEDs, February 2006.

In addition, it is important to train yourself to listen. This is easier said than done, but it is absolutely vital for a combat leader. As was the case with the Bradley windshield, many—if not most—important ideas for improving units usually percolate from below. Consequently, if a commander listens, he will hear creative and reasonable solutions for needed innovations and can establish a feedback loop that can greatly improve a unit's performance and morale. Troops will know that, although you may not always adopt their ideas, you respect and will listen to their ideas.

Training to Develop Judgment

Once a commander has a command climate that fosters initiative and allows subordinate leaders to develop the mental skills they need to make decisions in a crisis, it's time to focus on exercising their judgment. General of the Army Omar Bradley once said, "Judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment."[2] Taking the wisdom of General Bradley's comments to heart, most of us would agree that it is clearly better to gain experience from bad judgment during training than during combat. So how do you design training that gives junior leaders the opportunity to exercise judgment?

For starters, I recommend reviewing and having leader professional development sessions on FM 7-1, *Battle Focused Training*. The manual states, "The ultimate goal of the Army's leader training and leader development programs is to develop leaders who are self-aware, adaptive, competent, and confident."[3] Figure 2, borrowed from FM 7-1, illustrates the transition "from the past" to the type of leader who will succeed in the contemporary environment.

For your program, you can identify some of the tasks to train using Army Mission Training Plans, but this is merely the beginning of the process. You will need to develop other tasks independently, ones that can realistically depict the conditions that your unit will face in counterinsurgency operations or combat. For those tasks, you will most likely be the one to establish the standard you want your Soldiers to achieve. Training the technical tasks to standard is essential, but I believe it is equally important to view the training of these tasks as a vehicle to cultivate judgment in your subordinates. Therefore, I suggest that the conditions be adjusted to improve and refine judgment using the crawl-walk-run method.

Adjusting the variables. I recommend drawing on the practical experience of combat veterans to generate realistic scenarios that closely replicate the situations your troops are likely to encounter, to include the complications of dealing with civilians in a combat environment.

Once your Soldiers are meeting the basic standard for a task, commanders can make the conditions

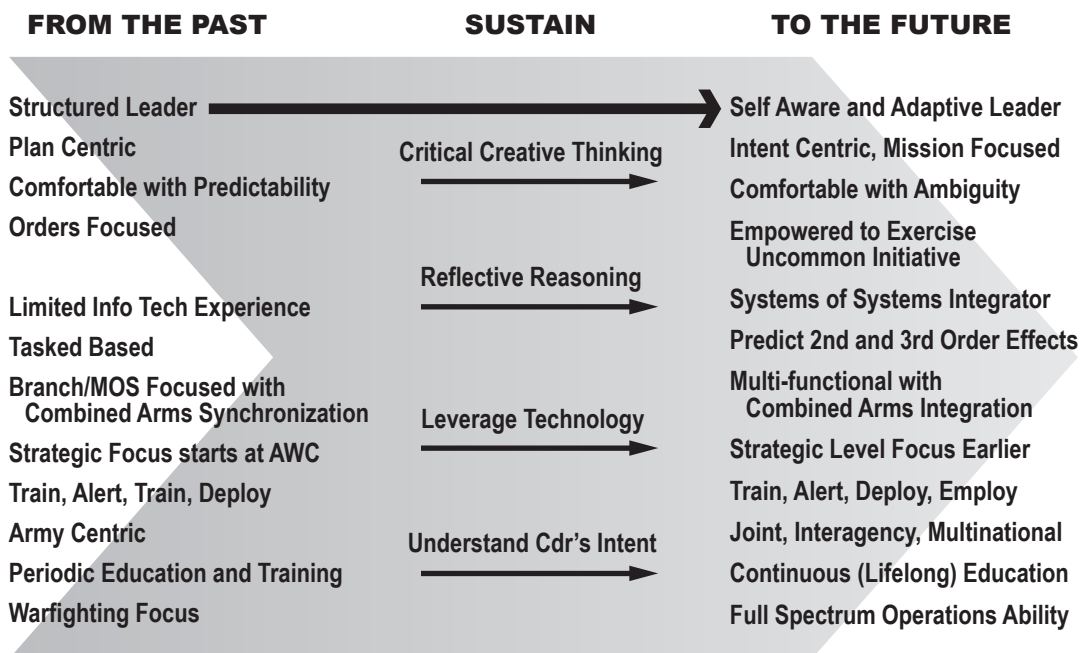| FROM THE PAST	SUSTAIN	TO THE FUTURE
Structured Leader		Self Aware and Adaptive Leader
Plan Centric	Critical Creative Thinking	Intent Centric, Mission Focused
Comfortable with Predictability		Comfortable with Ambiguity
Orders Focused		Empowered to Exercise Uncommon Initiative
Limited Info Tech Experience	Reflective Reasoning	Systems of Systems Integrator
Tasked Based		Predict 2nd and 3rd Order Effects
Branch/MOS Focused with Combined Arms Synchronization		Multi-functional with Combined Arms Integration
Strategic Focus starts at AWC	Leverage Technology	Strategic Level Focus Earlier
Train, Alert, Train, Deploy		Train, Alert, Deploy, Employ
Army Centric	Understand Cdr's Intent	Joint, Interagency, Multinational
Periodic Education and Training		Continuous (Lifelong) Education
Warfighting Focus		Full Spectrum Operations Ability

Figure 2. The goal: self-aware, adaptive, competent, and confident leaders.

more difficult by adjusting the variables. You can increase the tempo of one task and then add additional tasks, or adjust the difficulty by modifying the amount of ammunition available, the number and intensity of opposing forces, the type of terrain, the severity of the weather, or the time of day.[4] As you create tougher and more realistic conditions, fabricate ambiguous and unpredictable situations to force your subordinates to make deliberate decisions and take calculated risks. In this decision-making process, look for your leaders to consider the ROE and use the risk management process.

Rules of engagement. Training ROE involves more than just having the Army lawyer brief the unit before deployment. During these briefings, the lawyer often presents situations for which the training audience can apply ROE. This is good, but not good enough for the complex environment in which you will operate once you deploy. You must integrate ROE into your training scenarios to exercise judgment. Troop leaders should be intimately familiar with the ROE. They need to apply them in training scenarios exercised at night, in a house or in a city block where there is a mixture of enemy and civilians and the situation changes, causing a change in the mission. Integrating the application of ROE into operational decision making is absolutely key. The same is true with risk management.

Risk management. Risk management is another topic worthy of a leader development session. FM 3100.12, *Risk Management*, explains the risk-management process well, but to understand how to incorporate it into operations, planning, and training, you should consult several other sources. FM 3-90, *Tactics,* describes how to integrate risk management into tactical operations; FM 5-0, *Army Planning and Orders Production*, explains how to conduct risk assessment during the decision-making process; and FM 7-1 explains how to integrate risk management in each step of the training-management cycle.

Risk management cannot be an afterthought. There are two kinds of risks: tactical and accidental. Tactical "is concerned with hazards that exist because of the presence of either the enemy or an adversary."[5] These are the hazards you identify (IEDs, ambush, suicide bomber or car bomb) and the controls you take to mitigate them.

By contrast, accidental risk "includes all operational risk considerations other than tactical risks. It includes risks to the friendly force, those posed to civilians by an operation, and those to the environment as a result of an operation."[6] An example of accidental risk is a sandstorm. When this hazard is identified, possible risk mitigations involve either delaying the mission until after the storm or pulling well off the road and waiting it out. Both tactical and accidental risk considerations are important.

Insist that leaders and Soldiers integrate risk management into their planning and decision-making processes (see figure 3).[7] Risk management should be intuitive and always considered, like the ROE: both help to determine what action to take. In my view, a leader who fails to manage risk is derelict in his duty. He is gambling that he or his Soldiers will never get into a situation where these hazards could affect them. In such a gamble, the odds are against you from the start.

I cannot emphasize this more strongly. Your leaders must be able to think through risk assessment and management when planning for future operations and make them part of their intuitive response when dealing with an unexpected, stressful, and oftentimes dangerous event. Neglect this process, and Soldiers will needlessly die.
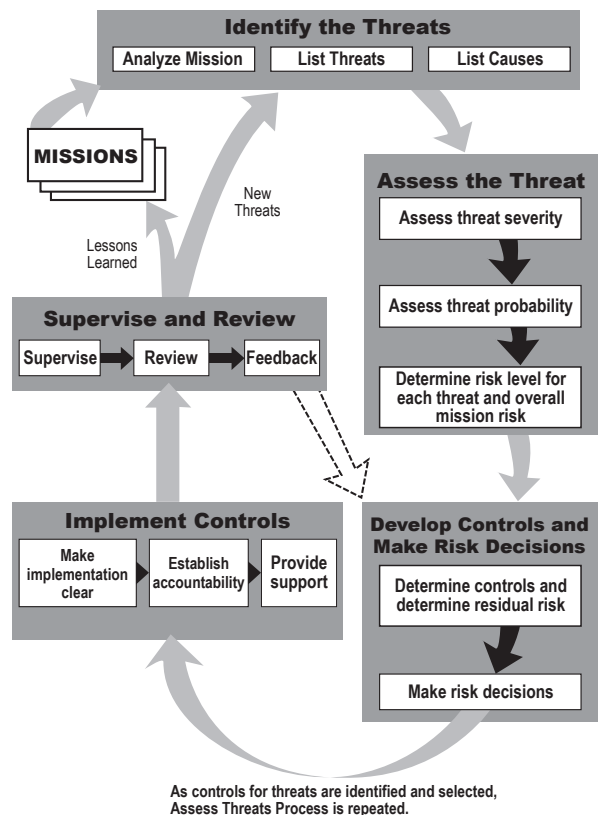
Figure 3. The risk-management process.

There are two levels of risk-management application: deliberate and crisis-action. Deliberate risk management is "the application of the complete process when time is not critical."[8] FM 5-0 requires that risk management be considered in each step of the military decision-making process (MDMP) and then built into the course of action. Risk management is not done separately from the order. It is a huge mistake to produce an order and then develop and conduct risk management: you must ensure your leaders and staff build risk mitigations into the plan.

Operationally, you are using the deliberate process when you prepare for a mission. Figure 4, taken from FM 3-90, depicts how the level of information/intelligence available for a mission increases or decreases the uncertainty of risk to a force, and how a commander should then adjust his plan to manage risk.[9]

As portrayed in Figure 4, the more information and intelligence available, the less the uncertainty and risk to the force. Conversely, the less information and intelligence available, the more the uncertainty and risk to the force. Insure your leaders are trained to assess the degree of uncertainty relative to a mission, and that they then base their plan on what is known, what is assumed, and what is unknown.

For example, in our Joint Operations Center, staffed by members of the squadron, Iraqi Army, and Iraqi Police, we would receive calls on our TIPs line from Iraqis telling us about an IED at a certain location. We didn't know if these were legitimate calls, hoaxes, or invitations to a prepared ambush, but we couldn't ignore such calls because most of the time they were legitimate, and citizens were trying to warn us.

To deal with the uncertainty surrounding each call, we routinely sent a relatively large force, usually a platoon with the firepower and capability to defeat anything we might encounter. We integrated aviation and/or unmanned aerial vehicles, engineers, and ISF into the mission. These MDMP and operational risk-reduction actions were examples of deliberate risk management.

By doctrine, deliberate risk management should be integrated into each step of the training management cycle. Performing deliberate risk management during training sets the conditions for a safe training event and serves as a vehicle to make risk management intuitive. The level of certainty is much higher in a training event than in combat operations, but people still get killed and injured.

Crisis-action risk management "is an 'on-the-run' mental or verbal review of the situation. . . . It is used in a time-compressed situation."[10] Therefore, you should use the deliberate risk-management process to train crisis-action risk management as well. The steps of the two processes are identical, except that you must be more intuitive and able to mentally process the data that you do have faster during crisis-action risk management.

Executing Situation Training Exercises

Situation training exercise (STX) lanes provide a great opportunity for a commander to develop leader judgment and improve decision-making skills by incorporating scenarios that require junior leaders to apply ROE and deliberate and crisis-action risk management.

As a squadron commander, I trained troops and evaluated platoons. Before our second deployment, we executed STX lanes for every scout, tank, artillery, and engineer platoon in the squadron. We rotated the troops to the field so we could focus on each platoon. They conducted two missions a day, one in the morning and one either in the afternoon or at night based

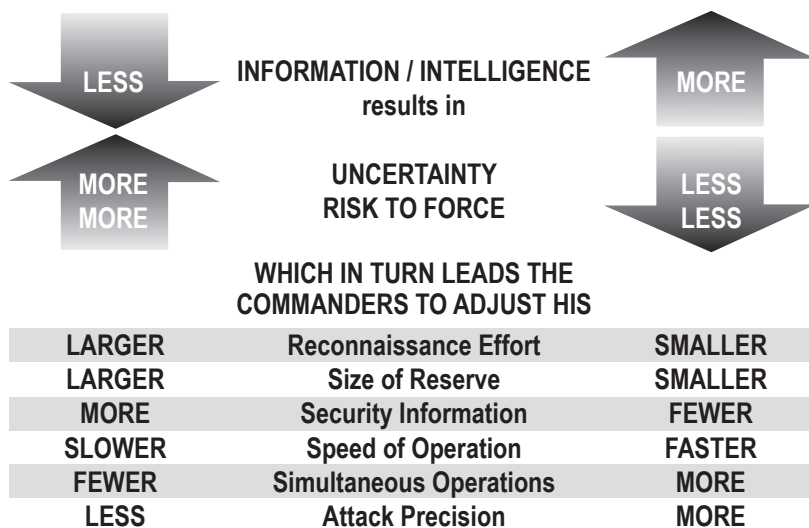| LESS	INFORMATION / INTELLIGENCE results in	MORE
MORE MORE	UNCERTAINTY RISK TO FORCE	LESS LESS
	WHICH IN TURN LEADS THE COMMANDERS TO ADJUST HIS	
LARGER	Reconnaissance Effort	SMALLER
LARGER	Size of Reserve	SMALLER
MORE	Security Information	FEWER
SLOWER	Speed of Operation	FASTER
FEWER	Simultaneous Operations	MORE
LESS	Attack Precision	MORE

Figure 4. Intelligence/risk uncertainty/tactical adjustments.

on the desired conditions. Planning provided for multi-echelon training. Everyone in the troop was "in play" and got evaluated. We also took advantage of unplanned events. For example, if a vehicle broke down, the maintenance recovery operation became a tactical mission as important as the STX lane. To facilitate effective training evaluation and to give the troops instant feedback, we used camcorders and digital cameras to record good and bad tactical habits. For example, we recorded how high Soldiers rode in the hatch of an armored vehicle and whether they were wearing their protective glasses.

The missions the platoons had to execute in the STX lane came from the squadron via an order to the troop. As he would later do in Iraq, the troop commander managed the diverse, simultaneous missions of his platoons in his unit's area of operations. This exercised both the commander's ability to interact with his platoon's troop-leading procedures and the troop command post's ability to track the platoons' and adjacent units' tactical situations. A troop not executing the STX lane played the role of the opposing force and contributed "civilians on the battlefield." We schooled these Soldiers on how to interact with the training

unit to replicate a reasonably realistic scenario. An unexpected positive result of having Soldiers play Iraqis was that they saw the unit's actions from the Iraqi perspective. Many of them said that it was an eye-opening event.

If I could do this again, I would use the squadron's own Soldiers for role playing and observer/trainer duty. First, I would have our Soldiers simulate being members of the Iraqi Army and police force. Had I done this, it would have been very helpful when we later had to train Iraqi soldiers and police. When we initially started working with the Iraqi military, we tended to be very U.S.-centric in the planning and conduct of our combined operations. It took us time to get to know the Iraqi Army, develop mutual trust, and strike a balanced training and support posture. Had we learned some of the peculiarities of the Iraq Army and simulated interaction with them before deploying, the process would have been more efficient. For instance, during the first few weeks we worked with the ISF, we discovered that when they made contact with the enemy, or an Iraqi soldier negligently discharged his weapon, they would fire wildly in all directions in what we called a "death blossom." While our efforts helped instill

Soldiers of the 2d Squadron, 3d ACR, and Iraqi Police patrol a local market in Tal Afar, fall 2005.

fire discipline in our Iraqi partners, it would have been helpful to know of this behavior before encountering it.

Next, I would use my own troops as observer/trainers for the STX lanes. We brought in highly professional observer/trainers from another battalion, and they did a great job. However, I missed an opportunity by not having my own troops learn from observing, giving feedback, and conducting after action reviews (AARs) for other units. These are all tasks we found ourselves doing with the Iraqi Army. It would have benefited us greatly to have had the opportunity to prepare for these roles in advance.

Soldiers of the 2d Squadron, 3d ACR, conduct combined cordon-and- search operations with Iraqi Army soldiers in Tal Afar, summer 2005.

Mastering Tasks and Building Initiative

We purposely limited the number of tasks that we trained, which gave us time to correct deficiencies and let the troops achieve mastery (that is, to accomplish the task to standard under complex and stressful circumstances).

Based on unit performance, we modified conditions to increase the difficulty. Most of the platoons started at what I would term a crawl. I was interested in evaluating the platoons' ability to conduct troop-leading procedures and execute tasks under one form of enemy contact at a time. So initially, we gave each platoon a generous amount of time to conduct the procedures, and the terrain was usually more open. At the crawl level, we kept civilians out of the scenario and made ROE decisions "black and white." That way, I could assess the platoon leader's ability to conduct crisis risk mitigation in a less complex situation.

To know when and how much to modify the difficulty for each platoon requires well-trained observer/trainers who can evaluate the tactical situation, collect observations, and conduct AARs. Between the STX iterations and after the last mission, I met with the observer/trainers and the commander of the troop executing the STX lanes to review each platoon's collective task rating and evaluation. The meetings typically lasted about an hour, during which the platoons were preparing for the next mission. Based on our observations,

we would decide whether the platoon was ready to advance to the next level. If the platoon had not performed well, then it might have to repeat the mission or conduct a new mission with the same conditions. It depended on the problem. For instance, a leader problem might require leader retraining. One systemic problem we noticed with new platoon leaders was the difficulty they had conducting METT-TC (mission, enemy, troops, time, terrain and civilians) analysis and deliberate risk mitigation as they developed their plans. Anticipating where the enemy could apply forms of contact based on the terrain was something that took time for them to master. In this case, since the problem was systemic, I gave a leader-training class at night on the subject. The class helped them prepare for the next mission, but cut into their preparation time with their unit. This was the intended effect as we increased the difficulty.

Getting tougher. As we presented the platoons with walk-level mission conditions, we increased the type of enemy contact and its frequency. Some of the contact occurred simultaneously. For example, we would combine an IED attack with an RPG- and small-arms ambush. We also relocated to more challenging terrain, such as defiles or constricted areas; gave the platoons less time for troop-leading procedures; and injected civilian play into the battlefield. At this point, the ROE situations got a little ambiguous, challenging the platoon leader's

judgment. Many platoon leaders got flustered trying to execute crisis risk management. They had not yet developed the mental acuity to evaluate the hazards, think of mitigating actions, and issue precise, concise, and clear task and purpose orders at the speed required to dominate the situation. If this deficiency happened early during the mission, we often conducted a quick platoon AAR, and either I or a senior observer/trainer called an administrative halt to take the platoon leader aside for a quick one-on-one AAR of his actions. After 15 or 20 minutes at the halt to conduct the AAR, we would immediately reset the mission and do it again. Platoons typically took a few missions to progress from the walk to the run level.

Mastering the task. At the run level, we tried to replicate the conditions of Iraq as closely as possible. The many forms of simultaneous enemy contact became more challenging and happened more frequently. We adjusted the terrain to close-in, urban conditions; issued a fragmentary order over the radio from the commander; and significantly compressed the platoon's troop-leading procedures. The effects of many long, exhausting days became a factor, and distinctions between civilians and enemy combatants became uncertain. The light available was twilight or night light, because seeing the world through night vision equipment is like living in an alien world until you get used to it. In these scenarios, the ROE situations became more complex. In terms of crisis risk mitigation, the platoon leader had to be on his game, or it could be very ugly.

Variety in the STX lane. Not all the lanes had enemy contact. In fact, in some lanes all the Iraqi civilians were non-hostile. This is important because the troops will encounter this condition in Iraq. If the training conditions always include enemy contact, what do you think your unit's mental picture will be when it deploys? We developed several scenarios that didn't include enemy contact. For example, we had a platoon leader conducting a meeting with a village mayor. We evaluated how the platoon came into town, set up security, and interacted with the population. Then, based on the platoon's actions, we adjusted the reactions of the crowd that gathered outside where the meeting took place. We reviewed the platoon leader's patrol report to see if he noticed things like the picture of a Shi'a leader on a wall of the mayor's house.

Time Is a Zero-Sum Resource

Time is a limiting factor as a unit prepares for a deployment, so we must find ways other than STX-type events to develop judgment in our leaders. For instance, predictable operational patterns are deadly in Iraq, so I would avoid having any standard schedule in garrison. Instead, I recommend allowing troop commanders to exercise their judgment as they perform their day-to-day activities. Decentralize garrison operations and allow your leaders to make command decisions appropriate for their level and position. Although having the whole squadron do maintenance on Monday might be convenient for me, it's not the type of thinking I wanted to promote.

Other useful ways to exercise your subordinates' judgment include having discussions over sand tables and simulations, encouraging all your leaders and Soldiers to read about the history and culture of your area of operations, and conducting leadership development seminars where subordinates can discuss their readings and experiences.

By focusing on developing the problem-solving skills of subordinates during predeployment training, I knew what sort of judgment each of my leaders had by the time we arrived in Iraq. My command philosophy still applied in combat. We pushed the rumble strips out farther based on each leader's experience and signs of increased competence. Naturally, what we were capable of doing after a month of continuous operations was quite different from what we had done during the first month.

When your unit receives an attachment or integrates new leaders, you must take time to assess the experience and competence of the newcomers.

The after action review products for the 2d Squadron, 3rd ACR, have been posted on the Battle Command Knowledge System (BCKS), Counterinsurgency Operations (COIN) professional forum, and can be reviewed at the following links:

PowerPoint Presentation: https://leadernetwork.bcks.army.mil/secure/CommunityBrowser.aspx?id=333311
PDF Overview: https://leadernetwork.bcks.army.mil/secure/CommunityBrowser.aspx?id=333305

Sabre Squadron TAC, February 2005.

Providing more directive guidance and integrating new units with a more experienced organization until the new unit is up to speed will help mitigate the risk.

Putting It All Together

We worked very hard to train individuals and units to the standards for each combat task, but that wasn't our only goal. By adjusting and tailoring the conditions based on the platoon's performance, we developed the judgment of everyone in the platoon. Developing a platoon leader's judgment under tough, realistic conditions is analogous to developing a quarterback's judgment on how to read a defense while being rushed. Both the platoon leader and the quarterback are conducting crisis-action risk mitigation. The quarterback must follow the regulations. The platoon leader must follow the ROE. Finally, just as a coach removes a quarterback who isn't up to the task of leading his team, as a commander you must realize that leading a platoon in combat is serious business, and not everyone is up to the challenge. It is tough to tell a platoon leader that he's in the wrong business, but sometimes it must be done.

The vast majority of our platoon leaders became unbelievably good combat leaders. By the time we left, I had scout platoon leaders with two years of combat experience in places like Ramadi, Fallujah, and Tal Afar. I once departed a meeting with Iraqi leaders and was moving back to my headquarters in my tactical command post (TAC), a Bradley section, when one of my scout platoons encountered enemy contact. My TAC was in the area, so I coordinated on the troop net to see where the platoon needed the TAC's combat power to support its operation. That platoon leader had the best situational awareness of the local tactical situation. I had trained him, had seen him operate calmly and decisively in some intense situations, and absolutely trusted his judgment. The platoon leader told me where he could use the help, and I positioned the TAC accordingly while I evaluated the situation to see if it required any other squadron assets.

This is how we operated. All the troops supported one another in similar situations. Speed and agility are critical to beat the enemy's decision cycle. Succeeding in combat is about trust and judgment. It is amazing to see the power of initiative when judgment is developed. ***MR***

NOTES

1. FM 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: GPO, October 2006), 8-6.
2. Ibid., 6-9.
3. FM 7-1, *Battle Focused Training* (Washington, DC: GPO, September 2003), app. A-2.
4. Ibid., 5-11.
5. FM 5-0, *Army Planning and Orders Production* (Washington, DC: GPO, January 2005), 3-21.
6. Ibid
7. FM 3-100.12, *Risk Management* (Washington, DC: GPO, February 2001), 1-4.
8. Ibid., 1-3.
9. FM 3-90, *Tactics,* (Washington, DC: GPO, July 2001), 1-13.
10. FM 3-100.12, 1-3.