

Running head: RELEVANCY OF THE METL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Relevancy of the Mission Essential Task List (METL) Development Process

Master Sergeant Steven T. Burke

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

Class #58

SGM Richard B. Adams, Jr.

27 November 2007

## Introduction

Now, more than ever, the Army is in a constant state of transition. The Global War on Terror (GWOT), defense of the homeland, and modernization, all compete for priority and to shape the direction in which the Army will head. Even with the turmoil the transformation of the operational environment causes, commanders and leaders can still use the Mission Essential Task List (METL) development process to obtain relevant training strategies. Commanders should continue to use the METL development process despite the ongoing transformation of the Army's operational environment. The METL development process can assist commanders in their preparation for the GWOT and any other future crisis. The development process and the METL are still relevant tools in the constantly transforming operational environment.

### METL Development and Transformation

#### *Relevant METL*

Commander's claim that because of the turmoil the transformation of the operational environment causes it does not allow commanders and leaders to use the METL development process to obtain relevant METL's or training strategies. In the past, the METL was derived from the unit's war plans and external directives. The more current field manual; FM 7-0, *Training the Force*, shows there are five primary inputs to current METL development. These five primary inputs are wartime operational plans, enduring combat capabilities, operational environments, directed missions, and external guidance ("Department of," 2002). Leaders combine all five inputs along with the next higher commander's guidance when doing their unit's mission analysis and submitting their METL for the next higher commander's approval. Commander's mission analysis must include the operational environment. The use of relevant

doctrine and mission training plans (MTP) is still very important when developing battle tasks that support the next higher headquarters METL. The Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) incorporates lessons learned from the field and Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs) to produce doctrine and field manuals that are current and relevant. By conducting mission analysis and using relevant doctrine the commander and non-commissioned officers (NCO) can then crosswalk individual, leader, and collective tasks and develop a unit training plan that supports their METL. This training strategy will still be relevant in the changing operational environment.

### *Changing Environment*

Today, Army commanders are finding it even more difficult to maintain the METL, and the process, is relevant to what they are doing in the changing operational environment. In the decades past, the Army had been in a peacetime operational tempo (OPTEMPO). Leaders had time to develop their METL, plan and execute training, assess that training, and compare their battle tasks and METL to see if it supported the stated wartime mission. In the current operating environment, the Army is in a wartime mindset with the multiple challenges of operations other than war (OOTW). The time and predictability commanders once had to develop their METL is gone. The constant change of missions replaces predictability. The commander not only has to plan and train for combat scenarios but humanitarian missions, support to civil authorities, and peacekeeping missions are all part of the changing operational environment that commanders will find themselves in. Doctrine is shifting; commanders can no longer plan and develop a METL that accounts for a single threat. In today's operating environment commanders must plan training that accounts for multiple and complex threats.

### *Planning Training*

In the past commanders had to be more reactive, combining their wartime missions and external directives to account for the last threat. Now commanders and NCOs can be more proactive. Leaders take lessons learned and TTPs and develop relevant training strategies to fit their current directed mission. The composition of a unit was in response to what the current crisis was. Units were attached and cross attached based on threat. Today with the structure of new brigade combat teams (BCT) units now have internal assets in place to plan and conduct training. The BCT can now develop a METL that will allow for training strategies that shape future operations and are more proactive. Before commanders had the time to conduct the military decision making process (MDMP), war game, and develop a course of action. Today's OPTEMPO calls for rapid adaptive planning coupled with innovative resource management. Therefore, the METL and the development process must take into account the changing threats brought on by the GWOT.

### METL and the Global War on Terror

#### *Changing Threats*

Regardless of the changing threat environment, commanders and NCOs should continue to use the METL development process. The METL can assist commanders in their preparation for the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) and any other crisis. In the past the METL was designed to confront a nation state type threat, as seen in the example of the former Soviet Union. The war time plans and battle tasks were geared for force on force type operations. Now the Army is conducting combat operations with non-state enemies like Al-Queda. In the past, the Army operational plans involved moving large armies and resources to conduct wars against

nations. Now the Army is transforming its operational plans and training doctrine to conduct missions in countries we are not at war with, as is the case with Afghanistan. In transforming the METL and training doctrine the Army continues to maintain readiness and deter aggression.

### *Deterrence*

During the Cold War training and planning was in the form of “one size, fits all” deterrence. Leaders developed a METL that reflected this external guidance. Battle tasks were selected that supported the next higher headquarters ability to meet and engage, force on force, with a similar armed force. Conventional forces were trained to deter, or if required engage, the “Red Menace”. In the complex operational environment of today commanders must account for new dimensions when developing a relevant METL. There are six new dimensions to today’s operational environment; threat, unified action, political, land combat operations, information, and technology (“Department of,” 2001). Commanders need to conduct an in-depth mission analysis to adapt the METL and training strategies to incorporate the new environment and all of its dimensions. In today’s OPTEMPO commanders are finding it difficult to develop relevant METLs to fit the directed missions of Joint Operations, Special Operations, pre-emptive actions, Homeland Security, and Stability and Support Operations. Regardless of the operational environment, the METL is just as useful now as it was in decades past.

### METL in the New Operating Environment

#### *Then and Now*

One of the most important reasons commanders and NCOs should continue to use the METL development process is so they can execute relevant training strategies that focus on the transforming operational environment. These new strategies will enable units to train and prepare for the ever changing environment in which they will be conducting missions. In the

past commanders had to train for the kinetics of an operation. They would plan and train to use large forces to take the objective and hold ground. Now it is effects based operations. Smaller units, using technology and superior firepower to enhance target effects, can take and hold larger objectives. In the effects based environment leaders must also account for all of the other dimensions of the conflict, not just taking and holding ground. These additional dimensions include humanitarian aid, civil affairs, and civilians on the battlefield. The new environment has led to new approaches and the transformation of TTPs.

### *The New Approach*

The linear battlefield and straightforward fight of the past gives way to new wartime operational plans. Now commanders and NCOs incorporate the new ideas of interoperability, information technology, intelligence, and mobility into the METL process. The new training strategies allow units to train to be more mobile and fight in depth along all lines of operation. In the past The Army had many large stagnant divisions with large staffs and a garrison mentality. With transformation, the Army now has smaller, more mobile, BCTs with a METL suited to their warfighting capabilities.

### Conclusion

We see with transformation the 20<sup>th</sup> Century approach to the linear battlefield and the straightforward fight gives way to a new integrated 21<sup>st</sup> Century approach. The METL will always be an important part of this regardless of the operational environment. In addition, the METL will be the primary tool commanders will use to prepare for their wartime mission and as a guideline to plan resources and execute training. The development process and the METL are still relevant tools in the constantly transforming operational environment. Commanders therefore must remember that the focus must be the, “boots on the ground”, Soldiers. No matter

how much the operational environment changes commanders must develop a relevant Mission Essential Task List. NCOs must take those essential tasks and implement relevant training strategies that prepare today's Soldiers to meet the challenges they may encounter on the modern battlefield.

## References

Department of the Army. (2001). Army Field Manual 3-0, Operations, Department of the Army, Washington, DC.

Department of the Army. (2002). Field Manual 7-0, Training the Force, Department of the Army, Washington, DC.