

Trimming the Fat

CW4 Danielle J. Watkins, U.S. Army National Guard

Are we our own worst enemy in preventing us from moving forward to keep up with and outpace our enemy? Do we realistically think that our most significant threats of China, Russia, and other state or non-state actors (that seek to disrupt the security, prosperity, and influence of the United States) are wasting their critical time, efforts, and resources on antiquated training, redundant inspections, and other cumulative requirements as we do in the Army? Does the Army simply hold onto these requirements that no longer apply as a sense of security? Is it merely that our operational tempo has grown so expeditiously that we do not have the time nor value the importance of periodically reviewing and eliminating items from our insurmountable list of “mandatory” training and other non-essential directed requirements? One can quickly conclude that our priorities have become misaligned, which consumes valuable time and restricts our ability to focus on the essential tasks supporting our strategic objectives and ensuring our combat readiness.

As a nation, we are at an “evolutionary inflection point” (U.S. Department of the Army, 2022, p. xi) where we must transition beyond the incremental changes that have occurred over the past 40 years so that we can “trim the fat” and move forward to focus on what is needed. Today’s contested environments throughout the world have thrust the Army among a plethora of other domestic and foreign service branches, agencies, and organizations to combine forces and efforts for multidomain operations that are required for unified action. This detailed systemic description of our current situation’s desired end state and strategic recommendations are based on research for consideration by the appropriate Army Senior decision-makers. The Army’s current state of extensive mandatory training and inundation of other requirements necessitates reducing our non-essential tasks to maximize our time available and streamlining our focus on requirements that directly support our strategic objectives and operational readiness.

Background

In 2015, Dr. Leonard Wong and Dr. Stephen Gerras published a study, “Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession.” I enjoyed hearing Dr. Wong speak about their research and findings and how they were received at our Annual Aviation Safety Day 2018. This paper will focus on the recognized deluge of Army requirements rather than the ethical fading and rationalization of inaccurate compliance reporting for individuals that Dr. Wong ascertained through his research with the below-focused discussion.

Current State

As an institution, the Army has successfully created an environment through extensive mandatory training and inundation of other requirements where it is impossible to accomplish all required tasks to standard. In the study mentioned above conducted by Wong & Gerras (2015):

Analysis began with an exploration of the avalanche of mandatory training requirements levied throughout the Army. It has been fairly well established that the Army, as an institution, is quick to pass down requirements to individuals and units regardless of their ability to actually comply with the totality of the requirements (p.4).

Concerns regarding this alarming trend were recognized as early as 2001 when the Army Training and Leader Development Panel noted that the Army could no longer follow its training management doctrine due to insufficient resources, especially time. Furthermore, in 2002, a study at the Army War College determined that 297 days were required for all mandatory training, far exceeding the 256 days available in a year (Wong & Gerras, 2015). These research findings support the need for cyclic reviews and updates of mandatory training required by AR 350-1 to remove training that has become antiquated and better align training requirements with current threats in multidomain operations.

In addition to unrealistic and unachievable training requirements, inspections required throughout the Army have become multi-layered, redundant, and expend valuable time in preparing for these evaluations, rather than focusing on necessary simulation and real-life training to ensure we can meet our strategic objective to support the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy. For example, as an aviation safety officer, in two to three years, I received two significant inspections from FORSCOM and OSHA and four to six moderate inspections from NGB and our local state safety office. This is in addition to a plethora of other ancillary inspections that are related to the Army Safety program, such as Industrial Hygiene and Environmental Inspections.

Countless hours are expended in preparation and pull my focus away from doing my actual job, which is highly challenging to manage based on the extent of regulatory requirements outlined by OSHA, the Army, NGB, and local entities. This is just one example of what is experienced by personnel throughout the Army, which contributes to frustration, burnout, and a force that needs to be truly trained for the current threat environment. In addition to unrealistic training and inspection requirements, the Army, over time, has begun to mandate numerous other requirements that contribute to a lost critical time for Army personnel and essentially have no direct correlation to the current operational environment we are facing and contribute to a reduction in our readiness.

Mission Command is “the Army’s approach to command and control that empowers subordinate decision making and decentralized execution appropriate to the situation” (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2019, p. x). However, this concept does not appear to be utilized by leaders as a technique for prioritizing and reducing extraneous training and administrative requirements at the unit level, nor would it be accepted as a response to the omission of “required items” during reporting requirements or an inspection.

Desired End State

Several actions are required to move towards our desired end state of reducing our non-essential tasks to maximize the time available to better achieve our strategic goals that have been identified based on our current threat environment. Wong and Gerras (2015) concluded, “Until a candid exchange begins within the Army that includes recognition of the rampant duplication, the current culture will not improve.” Their recommendations called for “restraint in the propagation of requirements and compliance checks.” Additionally, they advised that “policies and directives from every level of headquarters should be analyzed in regard to their impact on the cumulative load on the force” (Wong & Gerras, 2015, p. ix).

In 2018, the Army produced Army Directives 2018-07 and 2018-07-01 through 2018-07-18, “Prioritizing Efforts-Readiness and Lethality,” through the G-1 and the G-3/5/7 proponents, which initially appeared

to be a response in the right direction towards our desired end state following the findings from the research study conducted by Wong and Gerras. The purpose identified in the initial AD 2018-07 identified the following:

In order to build a more capable and lethal force, the Headquarters Department of the Army (HQDA) is reducing requirements in brigade and below units. This effort focuses on systematically simplifying, reducing, or eliminating required activities (training and non-training) that consume commanders', leaders', and Soldiers' time that they might otherwise spend building and sustaining combat readiness... All Army units, organizations, and agencies will ensure that they prioritize executing all activities and use time to enhance the readiness and lethality of our formations (Headquarters Department of the Army, 2018, p.1).

However, since this initial rollout, similar directives have yet to be published to advance the Army toward this desired end state. Few publications appear to have been updated because of these Army Directives. For the updated publications, their collateral publications often did not need to bend and continued to cite historical requirements, which are referenced in inspection checklists. Despite the latitude identified in the initial directive for commanders to make decisions at their level for reducing requirements in conjunction with applying risk mitigation, it appears to have yet to gain traction. One could infer this is due to the requirement for Commanders to verify compliance with published requirements, further compounded by a need for updates to associated Army publications and inspection checklists. It appears that the general population within the Army requires additional Prioritizing Efforts Directives, revisions to base publications and associated publications to reduce requirements, and other Army-wide directives as forcing functions for modernization for local regulations and inspection checklists to ensure compliance with publication changes.

Strategic Recommendation

Several strategic recommendations and innovative strategies may assist in remedying the current state problem. The Army Force Management Model (AFMM) is a system integration approach to develop and produce trained, modern, and lethal units to facilitate organizational readiness for achieving the mission. The AFMM illustrates the relationship between seven sub-modules and major DoD management processes to facilitate joint operations (U.S. Army War College, 2022). The first strategic recommendation is to apply the "Determine Strategic and Operational Requirements" followed by the "Develop Required Capabilities" modules within the AFMM to drive change through structure and resources to achieve the desired end state in reducing our non-essential tasks to maximize our time available so that we can better achieve our strategic goals. Force Management Capabilities for this initiative are focused on updating policy and doctrine and utilizing existing personnel, facilities, and means of communication within the Army. Reducing training, inspections, and the totality of Army requirements that do not directly support our strategic objectives will free up critical time to facilitate more MOS training at the unit level for increased proficiency and provide additional white space for the development and advancement of capabilities to better oppose our current threats in the multidomain spectrum.

The G1 and the G-3/5/7 proponents need to be re-engaged as part of this decision-making process toward continued reduction in requirements and publication of precise guidance. Feedback from the field must be solicited and returned to these proponents to have a realistic measure regarding the impact of consolidated Army requirements at the unit level. This information is essential to determine the changes required to align with strategic requirements for identified and anticipated threats within our current multidomain operational environment.

An initial recommendation is the publication and wide dissemination of an All Army Activities message (ALARACT) from the G1 and G-3/5/7 soliciting feedback from operational units to review their training, inspection, and other administrative requirements to develop a recommended list of non-essential items for omission, reduction, or modification. Each item will require justification regarding the negative impact on the unit's operational tempo and critical assets, such as time and other supporting arguments on why particular items do not meet the intent of strategic objectives. Options for collecting feedback include utilizing an existing survey generator program or submitting it in a standardized format to a group email or Microsoft Team.

Additionally, focus groups to assist the G1 and G3/G5/G7 should be developed to examine at least three critical areas where Army requirements may be decreased, including training, inspections, and other non-essential administrative or ancillary requirements. Committees should comprise leaders at all levels, especially down to the unit level, with participation from various fields and NCOs to gain the clearest picture of the cumulative impact at the unit level. The totality of requirements in these three concentrated areas must be identified, compared against strategic objectives, and a determination made for which individual requirements may be eliminated, reduced in frequency, consolidated, or redirected to the most appropriate required timeframe, such as only during initial training, pre-deployment, or post-deployment.

Following review, analysis, and determination of requirements moving forward by the G1 and G-3/5/7, the critical changes must be communicated widely throughout the Army to the lowest level to impact unit planning and operations significantly. Given the demonstrated previous success, the G1 and G-3/5/7 are recommended to publish subsequent Prioritizing Efforts-Readiness and Lethality Army directives until changes are incorporated into regulations. The current initial doctrine recommended for review and update includes the following items.

AR 350-1, Army Training and Leader Development, was most recently produced in 2017 and requires extensive updates, especially to Appendix F, Table F-1, and Table F-2, which identify mandatory training and other requirements. Only those directly supporting strategic objectives must be required when determining which training and ancillary requirements require an ongoing mandate. However, one caveat is when a residual risk is identified as high based on risk assessment regarding probability and severity if a particular training or other requirement was to be removed from Army doctrine (Headquarters, Department of the Army. (2021). To ensure training and other required guidance continually correlates to strategic objectives and appropriately manages our operational tempo, it is essential to have ongoing publication of Prioritizing Efforts-Readiness and Lethality Army Directives and a revision cycle to AR 350-1 that immediately follows each publication of the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy to facilitate proper alignment and consistency. Additional applicable doctrines that require recurrent reviews and updates include AR 1-201, Army Inspection Policy, AR 20-1 Inspector General Activities and Procedures, and other applicable doctrines regarding inspections and administrative requirements.

Conclusion

The Army's current state of extensive mandatory training and inundation of other requirements necessitates the implementation of strategic recommendations offered in this professional writing to achieve our desired end of reducing non-essential training and tasks within the Army to achieve our strategic goals better and support operational readiness. This may best be achieved by concentrating efforts on threats identified in our National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy, utilizing AFMM, and re-engaging the G1 and the G-3/5/7 proponents for necessary AR 350-1 updates. A systemic reduction towards essential training only and readiness tasks for the current threat environment will facilitate the best utilization of our most limited resource of time. This will better allow us to focus

on simulation and real-life training for threats posed throughout multidomain operations to remain combat-ready.

References

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