

Modernization in Army Mobilization

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Executive Summary

First Army recently conducted a validation exercise for an Army National Guard (ARNG) maneuver enhancement brigade (MEB) headquarters (HQ) deploying in support of a United States Africa Command/Combined Joint Task Force (USAFRICOM/CJTF) Horn of Africa (HOA) mission set. Using information-age technology, the deploying HQ staff participated in a rigorous, six-day, live-SIPR culminating training event on Fort Hood, which linked the training HQ, continental United States (CONUS)-based observer coach/trainers (OC/Ts), and theater subject matter experts (SMEs) with action officers in Europe and Africa. This level of COCOM investment, coupled with available communications technology, decreased the overall time required to prepare a mobilized HQ for deployment and increased understanding of the in-theater mission. This modernization of mobilization operations bridges the timeline gap required for large-scale mobilization of reserve forces in support of multi-domain operations (MDO).

The First U.S. Army has modernized its approach to mobilizing reserve component formations to meet MDO requirements. Through direct investment from combatant commands (COCOMs), engaged partnership within First Army, and incorporating modern capabilities, reserve component road-to-war (RTW) training is approaching information-age proficiency. Beginning with notification of sourcing through mobilization, deployment, and return to home station, First Army provides integrated training for deploying HQ to meet a higher level of readiness on a shorter timeline. This new approach supports closing the gap in large-scale mobilization operations (LSMO) by reducing in-theater training and validation requirements through integrating stakeholders on the RTW with available technology.

As a key component of the Total Force, the Army National Guard and the U.S. Army Reserve make up more than half of the U.S. Army and contain vital capabilities required to meet the challenges of today's modern combat. Since the ramp up to Operation Desert Storm, reserve forces have continued to deploy in support of enduring military operations worldwide. The RTW process for each of these units historically exceeds 12 months to provide a ready and trained team to the end user and includes multiple engagements, targeted training, and tailored validation exercises. Recent mobilizations of portions of the reserve force to support COVID-19 response operations and near-peer deterrence exercises have exposed the inadequacy of existing mobilization systems and facilities to meet the demands of LSMO. The Army does not currently possess the time, personnel, and facilities required for a full mobilization of the strategic or

operational reserve. Nor do the strategic documents anticipate a future conflict in which the Army is afforded a six-month window to build combat capability. However, the Army will continue to mobilize units for OCONUS operations into the foreseeable future and can safely assume contingencies will arise necessitating a partial mobilization of the reserve. Reducing the time these mobilized forces require to understand their COCOM mission and validate prior to deployment will reduce the stress on existing mobilization resources. The concept of integrating COCOM SMEs in the development timeline not only makes sound logical sense but also improves the effectiveness of the training and reduces the overall time required to achieve deployment readiness.

Operationalizing this new modern concept, First Army deployed a MEB from Fort Hood, Texas, with real-time COCOM portal access and on-site theater SMEs in support of a USAFRICOM mission. The 67th MEB of the Nebraska Army National Guard mobilized in May of 2021 to conduct deployment training and validation on Fort Hood prior to their deployment in June to Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti. The 67th MEB HQ's culminating six-day validation exercise consisted of Master Scenario Event list (MSEL) injects developed with USAFRICOM SMEs through multiple joint exercise life cycle events to support the unit commander's training objectives and meet USAFRICOM's comprehensive assessment criteria. USAFRICOM SMEs attended these events and coordinated with the First Army exercise planners virtually as needed to not only approve the culminating training event (CTE) storylines and injects, but developed a comprehensive set of metrics for the OC/Ts to use to measure the 67th's performance and readiness for their USAFRICOM mission.

Subject matter experts from the 196th MEB, currently deployed to Djibouti, and USAFRICOM in Germany, were critical to the development of realistic and relevant story lines for the exercise and provided over-the-shoulder support to the deploying unit. The team from Djibouti, led by COL David Dailey, the CJTF-HOA chief of staff and 196th MEB commander, provided real-world mission information to the Exercise Design Team during the planning phase leading up to the exercise and then traveled to Fort Hood to mentor the 67th MEB as they faced the simulated rigors of their future mission during the training event. An additional team from USAFRICOM HQ worked with the 67th's staff to help develop their RTW plan and was on-site during the exercise providing higher HQ input and communications support.

USAFRICOM joint training analysts designed assessment criteria to certify a MEB HQ for the CJTF-HoA mission. Their operations research/systems analyst cross-walked the unit's deployed mission essential tasks with the USAFRICOM Campaign Plan, and the AFRICOM Campaign Order requirements supporting tasks to develop 600+ points of assessment. The points of assessment were tied to the key tasks performed by the deploying HQ. USAFRICOM theater SMEs provided an overview and assessment training for the First Army OC/Ts to capture their observations of each training task and provide a response for the points of assessment. This type of exercise analysis approach is typical for a joint force HQ (JFHQ) or an internal COCOM assessment, but novel for a post-mobilization, pre-deployment validation assessment. This exercise assessment approach provides information-age feedback to the deploying HQ and a statistics-based recommendation to the COCOM commander regarding the unit's training readiness.

In addition to on-site SMEs, CJTF-HOA and USAFRICOM provided live reach-back support in theater through video teleconference, email, telephone, and portal access. This setup offered the deploying HQ access to in-theater experts in areas the exercise could not replicate such as military intelligence, allied partnership, and foreign area officers. CJTF-HOA and USAFRICOM established positions in their joint operations centers to manage requests for information (RFIs) from the deploying HQ and to route them to the appropriate directorates within the HQ. Each RFI was tracked and provided a short suspense for action. The directorates designated RFI points of contact as well. Through this capability, the deploying HQ was able to enhance the mission analysis of its future operational environment (OE) in East Africa to meet required exercise training deliverables.

Several key technologies enabled a live/virtual validation exercise for the 67th MEB including access to the USAFRICOM portal, the Global Agile Integrated Transport (GAIT) framework, a host of thin client end-user computers, the new Joint Training Tool (JTT) and use of the new, state-of-the-art General Richard Cavazos Mission Training Complex (MTC). The GAIT framework was established by the Army in 2017 to link the worldwide Warfighter Information Network-Tactical regional hub nodes into one global architecture to enable network communication in, out, and within theater. This data exchange remains on a tactical network, eliminating the need for enterprise access and enables corps and division-level commanders at home station real-time mission command and exchange with subordinate units globally. For the 67th MEB, GAIT provided seamless communications with USAFRICOM over the COCOM's tactical network through Fort Hood's GAIT node.

The 67th MEB, the theater SMEs, and the exercise control personnel were required to submit access requests for the USAFRICOM network to access the USAFRICOM portal. The exercise utilized real-world theater data from the portal to include troop readiness and locations, intelligence reports, available transportation assets, and existing theater posture for the deploying HQ's planning considerations. The 67th MEB was presented with several crisis and deliberate planning scenarios of which they needed to navigate the portal to find the relevant data to conduct mission analysis. The USAFRICOM portal also allowed for the sharing of critical unit information and trackers.

The exercise was initially designed for each user to work on a classified government computer to access the portal. However, this design proved infeasible due to significant delays in the current digital equipment supply chain. In lieu of classified computers, USAFRICOM provided enough thin client computers to provide access for a majority of the deploying HQ staff, theater SMEs, and exercise control. Thin client computers provide a virtual computer environment from the COCOM's tactical servers without allowing classified data to rest outside of the virtual network. Since data never comes to rest, these systems are not classified and can support either secret or non-classified internet protocols in a very small form factor. Their use requires monitors and peripherals but reduces the overall secure storage requirement. The construction of secret and non-classified systems kiosks provided sufficient access for this exercise with the intent to procure enough systems in the future to replicate workstations in the deployed environment for follow-on training units.

Exercise control needed a means to manage and coordinate training injects by storyline for the exercise while operating on USAFRICOM's portal. First Army currently uses several different platforms for this task, but these platforms are not specifically designed for use on live SIPR. The Joint Force is developing a new MSEL management platform, the JTT which supports live SIPR collaboration, the exercise control was able to beta test for this event. JTT is on path to replace the Joint Training Information Management System (JTIMS) as the mandatory Joint exercise synchronization tool in FY2024. This was the first COCOM exercise with the first use of JTT and, while still under final development, the system showed great potential for real-time inject tracking and collaboration among the disparate stakeholders. Overall, JTT provided improvements in its ease of use and expanded functions in comparison to the legacy JTIMS platform. JTT is still in development and this exercise provided valuable feedback towards improvements in its ease of use and expanded functions.

The MTC provided the means to connect all the technologies required to make this exercise successful. The Fort Hood MTC, dedicated to General Richard Cavazos in May 2019, provided the deploying HQ with modern capabilities at the scale of a corps HQ and its subordinate commands. Although significantly booked for training events far into the future, the MTC was able to provide sufficient space to support a MEB HQ, the exercise control, theater SMEs, and OC/Ts. The MTC was already connected to the GAIT network for this purpose and provided pre-wired workspaces and drop down pigtails to pipe in the exercise data wherever it was needed. All the workspaces were modular, so conference rooms, large work areas, and command offices were simple and easy to configure to meet each mission. Workspace came with an installed overhead projector and white board to support briefings to put everyone on the same sheet of music or to get after planning the next operation. First Army will conduct future iterations of live virtual CTEs in the Fort Hood MTC and will look to expand the scope and scale of these events to larger formations.

Mobilization modernization improves the Army's ability to conduct LSMO, which deters adversary aggression and enables a capable response. The expansion of mobilization requirements from the two current mobilization force generation integration (MFGI) platforms to the expanded throughput of LSMO in near-peer or peer-to-peer MDO provides significant challenges to meet COCOM deployment readiness training requirements in a condensed deployment window. A live virtual training construct with COCOM investment, coupled with information-age capabilities can bridge this gap. Extending this new mobilization approach to additional COCOMs and establishing a relationship between GAIT nodes and MFGI training facilities provides a sound foundation for expanding mobilization operations in the future. The key selling point to this modernization is a significant return on investment to the COCOM by receiving a deployed HQ with advanced understanding of the mission and OE and mature communications and coordination with their supported HQ prior to arriving in the combat theater.

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