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Tailoring Partnerships for Success: Experiences from the Djiboutian Humanitarian Demining Program

This article examines the multiple partnerships that were formed during the planning and training deployment of a team comprised of a sailor, Special Operations Forces (SOF) soldiers, Marines, Department of State resources, a civilian demining organization, and U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) planners. Several of these first-time partnerships discussed could be applicable to future Humanitarian Demining (HD) programs. A fundamental lesson is that the success of elected U.S. government HD operations require flexibility, and may need to be dismembered and recombinated to successfully accomplish a program’s goals. Equally important, these cooperative efforts resulted in significant cost savings to U.S. taxpayers without degrading U.S. HD to aid to Djibouti.

by Dr. Alan Childress and Major Matt Zajac

Introduction

During January 2001, U.S. Marines, Army SOF soldiers, and a Navy corpsman joined American Embassy personnel and a U.S. State Department HD contractor (RONCO) to execute a U.S. government-sponsored HD Program in a Horn of Africa nation, Djibouti. While the commencement of yet another U.S. HD program in itself is not necessarily noteworthy, this particular operation enjoyed a few unique aspects that stemmed from experience and a spirit of cooperation that enabled the players to bring fresh ideas to the planning table. Further to this, the program enabled the partnership of the Departments of State Bureau of Political-Military Affairs Humanitarian Demining Program office (PM/HO; Army SOF; Marine, and Navy HD-related trainers; the civilian demining community; the Djiboutian government; the U.S. country team in Djibouti; and U.S. Central Command planners. The success of the Djibouti HD program is due in large part to selfless and accessible leadership and the convergence of military, government, and civilian sector expertise. The Djibouti HD program results suggest that “out of the box” planning and execution cooperation can achieve significant cost, schedule, and quality-related consequences that open HD programs to unforeseen advantages (and pleasant surprises).

The Mine Problem

Djibouti’s mine problem is a result of ten years of civil war. Due to the nature of the warfare, the extent of the Djiboutian landmine problem is unknown. However, repeated mine incidents involving both military and civilian personnel, particularly in the fertile northern regions of the country, had brought economic activity, development, and non-governmental relief operations to a near standstill. Mine UXO or the perception of the presence of mines/UXO affects an estimated 45 percent of Djibouti. While French forces stationed within the country had provided some rudimentary military breaching training to a small Djiboutian military contingent, Djibouti possessed neither the technical nor organizational capability to address its landmine problem. Consequently, in late 1999 Djibouti requested U.S. government HD assistance.

The U.S.–Djibouti Plan

Following U.S. government approval for HD assistance, the American Embassy in Djibouti, the Djiboutian government, and USCENTCOM developed a five-year HD country plan for Djibouti. The Djibouti country plan outlined the U.S. role and strategy to assist Djibouti in creating a self-sustaining, civilian-led demining organization capable of reducing the impact of the real or perceived landmine threat in the near term and making the mine-safe nation in the longer term. The plan focused on creating a Djiboutian civil-military steering committee and mine action center organization, training and equipping a military mine survey and clearance unit, developing a mine awareness and information management capability, and en­gaging the donor community within the country and mined regions to help sustain the program. Previous HD country plans had been little more than 18-24 month planning and execution cycle. Clearly, compressing the length of the 18-24 month plan required the integration and cooperation of the U.S. and Djiboutian military and civilian capabilities. The program’s planners could not visualize how far the integration of these HD components would advance in the Djiboutian program—and the development of new partnerships is only the story of this program.

The Department of Defense normally executes HD training programs with a standard package of Army SOF assets, which consists of U.S. SOF Forces, Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations teams, and generally aided by Army Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) personnel plus a logistic cell. Due in part to a shortage of Special Forces assets, DoD, through USCENTCOM, asked the First Maritime Expeditionary Force (FMEF) to lead the training team, in part because I MEF was familiar with Djibouti from conducting previous and on-going humanitarian as­sistance missions. Thus, in setting a DoD HD precedent, a team to train and assist Djibouti establish a HD program was formed by USCENTCOM and led by I MEF. The team was comprised of Marine engineers and EOD experts, Army Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operations training, and a Navy corpsman. Each component brought unique skills to the team and, while some technical capabilities overlapped, they provided a basis for interesting exchanges and professional development opportunities for the Djiboutian trainees as well as the U.S. trainers. In addi­tion, the experience of the Special Forces team in training foreign sol­diers ensured that cultural considerations were practiced and misperceptions quickly overcome. Not only did this unique con­glomeration of forces succeed, it accompl­ished its cross-service planning and exe­cution cycle within 12 months.

U.S. & Djibouti Partnering

Military and civilian government cooperation between the U.S. and Djibouti was already strong. Previous and on-going U.S. humanitarian assistance programs, as well as outstanding personnel interchanges between the U.S. liaison officer and the Djiboutian senior military and civilian leadership, had developed an environment where trust, assess­ments and solid commitments to the pro­gram could be generated during a shortened plan­ning stage. The Djiboutian military agreed to provide a dedicated 35-man demining platoon led by a support, multi-lingual, highly educated and selfless com­mander, Captain Yoanou, an ex-French military camp to a permanent mine action center with breaching and training facilities, and various logistical support. The Djiboutian military government approved to waive customs fees and taxes on HD-related equipment and to support import clearance of mine/UXO de­struction training devices. The stage was set for USCENTCOM components to con­duct humanitarian demining training.

Preparing for Training

The Djiboutian military provided training and billeting facilities located at Camp LeMonier. However, since these had not been occupied for some years, USCENTCOM’s requirement analysis survey team determined that renovation of these facilities was necessary prior to inhabiting them. The spirit of cooperation of Depart­ment of State PM/HO to provide up front funds and support to refurbish these facilities—before military training began—sig­nificantly reduced start-up time. This inter­agency (DOS and DoD) cooperation en­abled facility renovation and training plan­ning to occur simultaneously. Military forces were not available to perform the renova­tions nor were they readily available to con­tract and oversee the renovation project at Camp LeMonier. PM/HO’s initial involve­ment was crucial to the timely start of the USCENTCOM HD program in Djibouti and soon expanded from infrastructure and logistical support for trainer success, to sus­tainment support of the program as a whole. In previous and current programs, DOS PM/HO executes (assists) its HD programs through civil approaches, such as RONCO, while DoD’s regional command, USCENTCOM, executes in HD programs through military training–the培训 lever. As an example of the cooperation and integration between the two groups, the HDTC Director led a party to Djibouti to collect lessons learned while also contributing their expertise to the train­ers at work.

Djibouti & U.S. Relationships

The actual training of the Djiboutian demining team began in Feb­ruary and was completed in May 2001. During this period, two significant partner­ships developed that contributed to the program’s success. One of these was predictable while the other evolved as another “first” for USCENTCOM HD programs. The predictable partnership...
was the development of mutual respect and friendship between the U.S. trainers and the members of the Djiboutian HD team. Although separated by an enor-

mous cultural gap, trust and respect between individuals and teams quickly developed. Many close friendships and professional exchanges con-
tinue today. While the value we may place on people's safety and freedom, the role of humanitarian demining as an engagement opportunity was underscored in Djibouti.

Department of State Logistics Support

The second unpredicted new partnership that evolved revolves around the suc-
cess of PM/HDP's contracts. RONCO, with renovating the facilities. Immediate re-
sults were gained from the RONCO supervisor's knowledge of the local economy, his language skills and his experience with the business culture. Historically, local log-

istical support has generally been the responsi-
bility of the Civil Affairs liaison officer. His training in civil-military cooperation and lan-
guage skills made him the right choice. However, after the Civil Affairs liaison of-

ficer constantly tied up with daily logistical requirements, the U.S. team would lose his skills in advising and coordinating the integration of host nation civil authorities and the non-governmental support essential to program sustainment. Recognizing this mismatch of resources, the HD Training Team recommended that the Civil Affairs liaison officer be detached and that a full-time embedded officer with civil-military support be provided. The new Civil Affairs liaison officer would have been integral to the mission's success.

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Sustainment Innovations

The final partnership development, and those most important to the HD program's sustainment, were recognized during the HD training and gained urgency as the USCETCOM team prepared to depart. The HD Training Team had accom-

plished its mission and the Djiboutian mili-

tary demining team proved their capabil-

ities in a final, out-of-camp, week-long train-\n
ing scenario designed to exercise independent planning, mine survey and clearance, information management, local knowledge, and leadership skills. At the national level, the Civil Affairs liaison officer had suc-

cessfully integrated a national mine action con-

struction project into his local Ministry of

LOGISTICS Department.

The national cadre were also benefited. RONCO was the new Djiboutian HD organization (now referred to as the Djiboutian Mine Action Center or DMAC) lacking planning and managerial skills and critical mine action experience—both at the national and executive levels where the military had been trained. The HD Training Team's research into overcoming these potentially debilitating weaknesses re-

sulted in the reorganization of and imple-

mentation of a new USCETCOM-DOS HD partnerships.

One of the County Plan's funda-

mental goals was the establishment of self-sustaining, national mine action organi-

zation under a civilian-led steering commit-

tee. It seemed logical that the American

Embassy in Djibouti, as the DOS representa-

tive within the country, should assume oversight of the HD program and its con-

tinued implementation. However, prior to the Djiboutian HD program, USCETCOM had performed this func-

tion, usually through the U.S. Liaison Of-

ficer of the Defense Attaché. The HD Training Team recommended to the U.S. Ambassador, whose experience with HD programs in the region encompassed almost a decade, to assign responsibility for the con-

tinued oversight of the HD program to one of his Country Team personnel—perhaps the Political-Military Advisor. Obviously, close cooperation between the Embassy Pol-

itical-Military Advisor and the DMAC

Liaison Officer would be necessary. Thus, while USCETCOM would conduct periodic assessment visits to evaluate the Djiboutian military's evolving capabilities and train if required, responsibility to assist the Djiboutian Government in strengthening its civilian-led mine action organization and to generate non-govern-

mental, long-term program sustainment sup-

port resided with a Country Team civilian ad-

viser. This arrangement recognizes that long-term U.S. sustainment is a function of local capabilities, not U.S. funding. In 2001, the first DOS Embassy-based HD program manager attended USCETCOM's annual planning conference in Tampa, FL. Another outcome of the USCETCOM and DOS-RONCO par-

Carlness was the solution to providing on-

the-flight, in-country support from other agencies interested in helping the Djiboutians and to help the government from a civilian-led HD organi-

sation. Finally, the contract-associated with the 7-10 day visits to Djibouti by the guar-

anted military contracting officer were saved through PM/HDP's contracted sup-

ports. Again, this was a result of USCETCOM-PM/HDP partnering in the planning stages and a PM/HDP desk officer volunteering to provide support, through RONCO, in advance of the startup. Although breaking new ground during this cooperative endeavor generated several lessons learned, the experience and results might serve as a model for future HD partnerships in other mine-inflicted nations seeking U.S. assistance.

Shifting the Measures of Effectiveness (MOE) Paradigm

While not directly related to the U.S.-

supported Djibouti HD program, an ad-

ditional lesson is taking shape from the

comparison of U.S. MODS and the other non-governmental HD program's success has traditionally been measured in quantities such as numbers of mines and UXO neutralized, minefields or area cleared, and reductions in casualties. Donors in particular often seek such numbers as incentives to continue support. A nation being advanced today, particularly by the

UN, is that success may also be a function of socio-economic impact considerations and people's perception of a truce threat. Although Djibouti was not recognized as a high or even medium threat mine nation, roughly one-third of the northern region was immobilised due to a perception of mines and UXO. Exactly how much of that perception is reality may be determined by the Djiboutian Mine Action Center as it broadens its operations; however, we predict that the presence of mines/UXO aware-
ness and clearance teams will open the region very far than grouping as a number of mines and UXO cleaned. In fact, relatively few mines may be found and the still areas will have been opened to farming and com-

merce. Reduction in casualties remains the most important consideration. Still, MOE calculated from periodic reports of num-

bers of mines/UXO or minefields cleared

will not describe success in socioeconomic experience of other nations with a re-
homeland, increased productivity, and opened agricultural areas. We would chal-

enge Djibouti and other mine-affected nations to gauge their mine threat success from a combined socioeconomic and ca-

sualty reduction base.

Conclusion

The article examined the multiple part-

nership approach followed during the train-
ing and execution of a demining program by a relatively small team of dedicated SOF soldiers, marines, a sailor, and the benefits achieved from USCETCOM and DOS cooperating and coordinating throughout the program. Several of the partnerships dis-
cussed may be applied to other HD pro-

grams. A fundamental lesson is that the or-

ganizational parameters of U.S. HD opera-
tions must remain flexible, and indeed may need to be further expanded to successfully meet a program's goals. Self-

less and accessible leadership is a vital de-

element in developing the inter-service relation-

ship necessary to achieve these goals in a compressed time span. The Djiboutian Hu-

manitarian Demining Training Team's flex-

ible approach, and the unique partnerships generated, resulted in categorical success and provided unforeseen advantages to the U.S. demining program in Djibouti.

Bios

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Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction, Vol. 6, Iss. 2 [2002], Art. 4

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