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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 the first-time partnerships discussed could be applicable to future Humanitarian Demining (HD) programs. A fundamental lesson is cooperative efforts resulted in significant cost savings to U.S. taxpayers.

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. demining program in itself is not necessarily newsworthy, 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. First, in orchestrating the program, we expanded the partnership of the Department of State Bureau of Political-Military Affairs Humanitarian Demining Program office (PM/HOP), 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 government, military, 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 aid organizations to a near standstill. While UNOCHA or the perception of the presence of mines/UXO offers 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 USHD country plan for Djibouti. The Djibouti country plan outlined the U.S. train-the-trainer 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 nation mine-safe 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 energizing the donor community within the country and mined regions to help sustain the program. Previous HD country plans operated on an 18-24 month planning and execution cycle. Clearly, compressing the length of the 18-24 month plan required the integration and cooperation of both the United States’ and Djibouti’s military, governmental, and civilian capabilities. The program’s planners could not visualize how far the integration of these HD components would advance in the Djibouti program—and the development of new partnerships is only the success story of this program.

The Department of Defense normally executes HD training programs with a standard package of Army SOF assets, which consists of Marine SOF, Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations teams, and generally aided by Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) personnel plus a logistics cell. Due in part to a shortage of Special Forces assets, DoD, through USCENTCOM, tasked the first Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) to lead the training team, in part because 1 MEU 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 JTF MEE. The team was comprised of Marine engineers and EOD experts, Army Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operation trainers, 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 trainers as well as the U.S. trainers. In addition, a central component of the Special Forces teams 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 ongoing U.S. humanitarian assistance programs, as well as ongoing terrorism concerns, had already established 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, mid-fingal, highly educated and selfless commander, Captain Yoanouf, an ex-French military camp to house a permanent mine action center with billing and training facilities, and various logistical support. The Djiboutian military obtained government approval to waive customs fees and taxes on HD-related equipment and to support import clearance of mine/UXO detection training devices. The stage was set for USCENTCOM contractors to conduct humanitarian demining training.

Preparing for Training

The Djiboutian military provided training and billing facilities located at Camp LeMonier. However, since those premises had not been occupied for some years, USCENTCOM’s requirements analysis survey team determined that renovation of these facilities was necessary prior to inhabiting them. The spirit of cooperation of Department of State PM/HOP to provide up front funds and support to refurbish these facilities—before military training began—significantly reduced startup 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/HOP’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 addition, the program formation process included coordination with the Djiboutian Ministry of Defense, a work that was crucial to the success of the Djiboutian demining team.

Training the Djibouti Team

Prior to deployment, all U.S. trainers attended the Humanitarian Demining Training Center (HDTC) at Fort Leonard Wood, MO, where they received important lessons on not only the technical aspects of mine action but critical, experience-based guidance on the development of lesson plans, host nation civil organization development and overcoming common training challenges. It was at HDTC that the face-to-face integration of this diverse, three-service military training team really began. 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 his 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

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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 logi-
sis 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 default choice. However, Civil Affairs team officers of-
certainty tied up with daily logis-
tical requirements, the U.S. team would lose his skills in advising and coordinating the integration of local nation civil authorities and the non-governmental support essential to program sustainment. Recognizing this mismatch, the Civil Affairs liaison officer and his Civil Affairs team officers worked to improve the Civil Affairs' role by building a relationship with the U.S. Embassy in Djibouti. The relationship between the U.S. Embassy and the local government is a key factor in the success of PM/HDP's contracts.

**Sustainment Innovations**

The final partnership development, and those most important to the HD program's sustainment, were recognized during the HD training and given urgency as the USCENTCOM team prepared to depart. The HD Training Team had accomplished its mission and the Djiboutian mili-
tary demining team proved their capabil-
ities during a final, out-of-camp, week-long train-
ing scenario designed to exercise indepen-
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**Conclusion**

The article examined the multiple partnerships that developed during the plan-
ning and execution of a demining program by a relatively small team of dedicated SOF soldiers, marines, a sailor, and the benefits achieved from USCENTCOM and DOS cooperation 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 USG HD opera-
tions must remain flexible, and indeed may need to be further examined, to successfully meet a program's goals. Self-
less and accessible leadership is a vital de-
mem in developing the inter-service relationships and to ensure that 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.