

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 resourcers, 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 that the organizational parameters of selected U.S. government HD operations require flexibility, and may need to be dismembered and recombined 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 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. 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. From its inception the program entailed the partnership of the Department of State Bureau of Political-Military Affairs Humanitarian Demining Program office (PM/HDP); 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 civil-

ian 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. Mines/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 one-year HD 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 civilian 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 were based 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, government and civilian capabilities. The program's planners could not visualize just how far the integration of these HD components would advance in the Djibouti program—and the development of new partnerships is truly 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 Special Forces, 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 Force (I MEF) 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 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 trainees as well as the U.S. trainers. In addition, integrating 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.

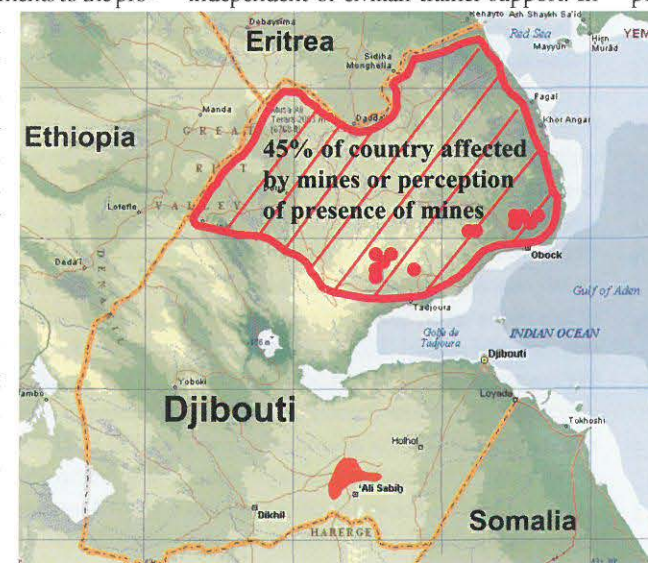
U.S. & Djibouti Partnering

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 personal relationships between the U.S. liaison officer and the Djiboutian senior military and civilian leadership, had developed an environment where frank 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 superb, multilingual, highly educated and selfless commander, Captain Youssouf, an ex-French military camp to house a permanent mine action center with billeting 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 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 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/HDP to provide up front funds and support to refurbish these facilities—before military training began—significantly reduced start-up time. This inter-agency (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/HDP'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/HDP executes (outsources) their HD programs through a civilian contractor, RONCO, while DoD's regional command, USCENTCOM, executes its HD programs through military train-the-trainer programs, independent of civilian trainer support. In



general, DOS PM/HDP contracts mine clearance to industry, while DoD trains and equips nations to demine themselves through train-the-trainer programs. Seldom have the two approaches combined to achieve time and cost savings.

Training the Training 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 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



■ Navy corpsman observing first aid instruction.

■ Map reading training.

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 enormous cultural gap that spanned both personal and professional experiences, mutual respect between individuals and teams quickly developed. Many close friendships and professional exchanges continue today. While secondary to 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 success of PM/HDP's contractor, RONCO, with renovating the facilities. Immediate results were gained from the RONCO supervisor's knowledge of the local economy, his language skills and his experience with the business culture. Historically, local logistical support has generally been the responsibility of the Civil Affairs liaison officer. His training in civil-military cooperation and language skills made him the default choice. However, with the Civil Affairs liaison officer continuously 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 misapplication of a scarce resource, the HD Training Team commander requested that PM/HDP continue supporting RONCO's involvement as the HD Training Team's logistical contracting and disbursing officer. His management of the day-to-day logistical needs, financial accounting, and his ability to quickly effect facility repairs allowed the HD Training Team to focus on continuously evaluating and improving training. Yet this evolution of the USCENCOM-DOS-RONCO partnership still had one unforeseen, but highly successful, permutation to realize.

Sustainment Innovations

The final partnership developments,



and those most important to the HD program's sustainment, were recognized during the HD training and given urgency as the USCENCOM team prepared to depart. The HD Training Team had accomplished its mission and the Djiboutian military demining team proved their capabilities in a final, out-of-camp, week long training scenario designed to exercise independent planning, mine survey and clearance, information management, local mine awareness and leadership skills. At the national level, the Civil Affairs liaison officer had successfully integrated a national mine action center into an existing Djiboutian cross-ministerial steering committee and obtained support from the U.S. Ambassador, the United Nations Acting Resident Representative, and other prominent non-governmental organizations active within the country. Yet the new Djiboutian HD organization (now formed as the Djiboutian Mine Action Center or DMAC) lacked planning and managerial skills and critical mine action experience—both at the national and execution levels where the military had been trained. The HD Training Team's research into overcoming these potentially debilitating weaknesses resulted in the reconfiguration of and implementation of a new USCENCOM-DOS HD partnership.

Since one of the Country Plan's fundamental goals was the establishment of a self-sustaining, national mine action organization under a civilian-led steering committee, it seemed logical that the American

Embassy in Djibouti, as the DOS representative within the country, should assume oversight of the HD program and its continued implementation. However, prior to the Djiboutian HD program, USCENCOM had performed this function, usually through the U.S. Liaison Officer 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 continued oversight of the HD program to one of his Country Team personnel—perhaps the Political-Military Advisor. Obviously, close cooperation between the Embassy Political-Military Advisor and the DoD-USCENCOM Liaison Officer would be necessary. Thus, while USCENCOM would conduct periodic assessment visits to evaluate the Djiboutian military's evolving capabilities and re-train if required, responsibility to assist the Djiboutian Government in strengthening its civilian-led mine action organization and to generate non-governmental, long-term program sustainment support rested with a Country Team civilian advisor. This arrangement recognizes that longer-term U.S. sustainment is a function of DOS funding, not DoD, and in May 2001, the first DOS Embassy-based HD program manager attended USCENCOM's annual HD planning conference in Tampa, FL.

Another outcome of the USCENCOM and DOS-RONCO part-

nership was the solution to providing on-the-ground experience and oversight to the newly trained Djiboutian military. Given that RONCO's representative now had first-hand knowledge of the training provided to the Djiboutian military and their landmine problem, the HD Training Team recommended to the Ambassador that part of the DOS sustainment money for 2001 be used to retain RONCO's services. RONCO's role would then change from that of logistical facilitator to an advisor to the Djiboutian Mine Action Center (DMAC). This would provide several immediate benefits. First, a civilian demining firm's employees would not be under the legal restrictions that prevent DoD personnel from entering known mine-threatened areas. This would allow the Djiboutian HD program to benefit from current mine action experience at the location where demining is occurring. Second, it provides a direct link between the Djiboutian military and the DOS representative in the American Embassy, strengthening the ability of DOS to influence the use of USG provided resources. Finally, the RONCO representative can provide accurate information regarding the Djiboutian programs development, enhancing USCENCOM's periodic training assessments.

Cost Reductions and Increased Training and Security Benefits

The results of completing infrastructure renovations at Camp LeMonier prior to the arrival of U.S. trainers, and removing major burdens of logistical support from the Country Team and the Civil Affairs officer can hardly be exaggerated. When the trainers arrived in Djibouti their billets were secure and ready for occupancy, transportation vehicles were in place, offices and training facilities outfitted, and messing areas complete. The savings in hotel/villa billeting and transportation costs were considerable and the entire team was able to work and live in a secure environment. The Djiboutian cadre were also housed at Camp LeMonier, which resulted in training economies and relationship building not achieved in previous USCENCOM HD operations. In addition, freeing the Civil Affairs officer from

logistical support details allowed him to seek support from other agencies interested in helping the Djiboutians and to help the government form a civilian-led HD organization. Finally, the costs associated with four 7-10 day visits to Djibouti by a warranted military contracting officer were saved through PM/HDP's contracted support. Again, this was a result of USCENCOM-PM/HDP partnering in the planning stages and a PM/HDP desk officer volunteering to provide support, through RONCO, in advance of training start-up. Although breaking new ground during this cooperative endeavor generated several lessons learned, the experience and results might serve as a model for future HD engagements 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 additional lesson is taking shape from the Djibouti experience. The authors note that HD success has traditionally been measured in quantities such as numbers of mines and UXO neutralized, minefields or area cleared, and reduction in casualties. Donors in particular often seek such numbers as incentives to continue support. A notion being advanced today, in particular by the UN, is that success may also be a function of socio-economic impact considerations and people's perception of a mine threat. Although Djibouti was not recognized as a high or even medium-threat mined nation, roughly one-third of the northern region was immobilized 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 mine/UXO awareness and clearance teams will open the regions faster than exhibiting a number of mines/UXO cleared. In fact, relatively few mines may be found and still the areas will have been opened to farming and commerce. Reduction in casualties remains the most important consideration. Still, MOE calculated from periodic reports of numbers of mines/UXO or minefields cleared

will not describe success in socioeconomic factors such as people returned to their homelands, increased productivity, and opened agricultural areas. We would challenge Djibouti and other mine-affected nations to gauge their mine threat successes from a combined socioeconomic and casualty reduction base.

Conclusion

The article examined the multiple partnerships that were formed during the planning and execution of a demining program by a relatively small team of dedicated SOF soldiers, marines, a sailor, and the benefits achieved from USCENCOM and DOS cooperating and coordinating throughout the program. Several of the partnerships discussed may be applied to other HD programs. A fundamental lesson is that the organizational parameters of USG HD operations must remain flexible, and indeed may need to be dismembered and recombined, to successfully meet a program's goals. Selfless and accessible leadership is a vital element in developing the inter-service relationships necessary to achieve these goals in a compressed time span. The Djiboutian Humanitarian Demining Training Team's flexible 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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