

RIGHT BOOTS ON THE GROUND

U.S. ARMY SPECIAL FORCES IN CENTRAL AFRICA

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BY CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 TERRY SHELTON

On Oct. 14, 2011, the President of the United States stated that approximately 100 Special Forces advisers were arriving in Uganda, to advise and assist in the removal of Joseph Kony from Central Africa. While Kony’s name is not well known in the United States, the conflict he has furthered and the war crimes he and his Lord’s Resistance Army have committed over the past 25 years have gravely affected life in four central African nations. One recent observer noted:

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inducted through raids on villages. They are brutalized and forced to commit atrocities on fellow abductees and even siblings. Those who attempt to escape are killed. For those living in a state of constant fear, violence becomes a way of life and the psychological trauma is incalculable.”¹

This would be context in which the U.S. Army Special Forces would work to advise and assist partners in Counter-LRA operations, a task requiring a unique blend of operational art and design.²

For decades, the Ugandan, Congolese, Central African Republic and South Sudanese people have all endured conflict with the LRA. As far back as 1987, the Ugandan People’s Defense Force have pursued the

LRA as they have abducted, enslaved, tortured, mutilated, raped and killed populations from these four countries. The indigenous populations involved in the conflict have all taken different perspectives, with outsiders to the region routinely attempting to quantify and qualify the need for the capture and prosecution of Kony for his war crimes. Thus the conflict, as it spiraled out of control within a sub-regional scope, was an ideal location for the application of SF skills.

The timing of the President’s statement is noteworthy, given that the advisers were en route to Africa as the press conference was ongoing. While this sequence of events is not unprecedented (President



UN Photo

Ronald Reagan had done much the same thing with his intervention in Lebanon in 1983) the fact that the release of this information occurred just as the SOF advisers were arriving in Africa provided very little warning to the international community. Still it is important to note that while this timing was designed to alert elements of the U.S. government as well as the nations affected by the deployment, it was also used by the Special Forces units assigned as a means of wielding an older weapon in their arsenal: information.

Upon arrival in Uganda, the command and control element of the advanced operations base immediately identified through liaison with the joint, interagency, intergov-

ernmental and multinational partners that all partners had a similar goal in mind, but were not communicating effectively. Upon infiltration, the operational detachments-alpha made contact with locally deployed forces including; UN contingents, Central African Republic Armed Forces, Republic of South Sudan's Sudanese People's Liberation Army, Democratic Republic of Congo's Forces Armées Republic du Congo and the Ugandan UPDF. ODA commanders employed liaisons and developed systems to establish systematic communications procedures. By embedding Special Forces Soldiers within the military and civilian entities in the operational area, SOF was able to identify challenges and create efficiencies.

A key to developing efficiencies was to analyze the systems and processes used by the broad spectrum of entities operating in the environment. Special Forces detachments had to alter the lens from which they perceived the operational environment. Using a somewhat orthogonal approach as a basis to gain a full perspective, the civilian model of project management emerged as a means of adjusting the existing plan for deploying military forces into a mature and complex JIIM environment heavily comprised of civilian entities.

A mile in their moccasins: The question of project management

Good management should dictate the time, scope and resources of a project, and these characteristics are precisely what define project management.³ The outcome of the effective balance of these characteristics is quality. That outcome, if effectively managed, produces results in which all stakeholders, with equities in the project, can accrue some positive percentage of satisfaction, while achieving the end state or goal. The first characteristic is time, which defines the expectation for when the achievement might take place, and also provides context for which to scale the next project-management characteristic, resources. Resources define the capacity for elements to achieve the third characteristic, scope, in the time allotted, balanced logically, and is referred to in project management circles as the Triple Constraint.⁴

This civilian perspective provided a logical method for gaining a cultural understanding of both allies and adversaries. The inherent capability of Army Special Forces to identify and establish engagement with other cultures, within the partner's cultural context, was critical to success. Cross describes "culture competence" as:

"... a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals that enables effective work in cross-cultural situations. 'Culture' refers to integrated patterns of human behavior that include the language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious or social groups. 'Competence' implies having the capacity to function effectively as an individual and an organization within the context of the cultural beliefs,

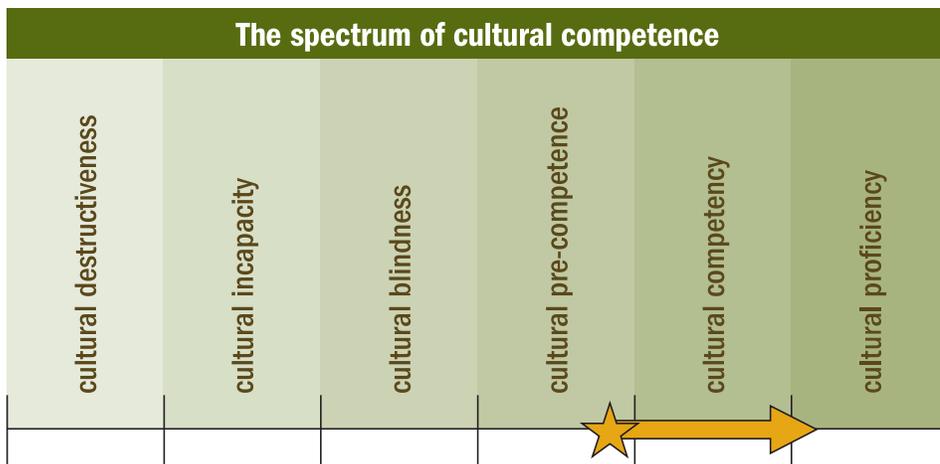


FIGURE 1 *The spectrum of cultural competence.*⁶ Cultural competence is a developmental process that occurs along a continuum with six possibilities, starting from a point and building toward another. The Counter-LRA mission achieved a suitable spot on this scale.

behaviors and needs presented by consumers and their communities.”⁵

The concept of cultural competence was well suited for understanding the context of the LRA conflict. Cultural competence is a developmental process that occurs along a continuum, there are six possibilities, starting from a point and building toward another. The Counter-LRA mission achieved a suitable spot on this scale, with the intent of moving to a more advantageous position (see Figure 1).

Right sizing the fit: Combining civilian and military doctrines

The protracted conflict with the LRA resulted in a set of loosely knit and informal, communication channels between the affected nations, NGOs and other governmental organizations such as the UN. Special Forces operators had to find a method of achieving cultural proficiency with the majority of the diverse players. The ability to maintain cross-cultural communication, and move toward cultural proficiency afforded the operational elements and liaisons a framework in which to achieve the ultimate goal. For the Counter-LRA effort, the ultimate goal has been the eradication of Kony and his key leaders, with the hope that the “cult of personality,” which surrounds the LRA leadership, evaporates and the LRA “boogeyman” disappears so that peace and justice might return to the region.

Aside from the joint intelligence preparation of the environment which SOF advisers conducted, SOF advisers also

utilized time wisely when assessing partner capacities. The use of foreign language, predominantly French, as a means of connecting with partners afforded Special Forces soldiers the means of achieving a measure of routine rapport.

Using doctrine to shoehorn uncomfortable shoes

There are obvious differences in culture between NGOs and Army Special Forces. For the military, Joint Doctrine points towards “principles guiding employment of US military forces toward a common objective”⁷ (see Figure 2).

Advanced operations base and ODA commanders identified and used the Joint Publication 1 concept of “unified action,” meaning, “The synchronization, coordination, and/or integration of the activities of governmental and nongovernmental entities with military operations to achieve unity of effort” to establish cultural communication and proficiency.⁹ ODAs worked with IGOs and NGOs using a refined approach that was not focused on deconfliction, but rather the synchronization of each elements actions and core competencies. Using Interorganizational Coordination, defined by the the Department of Defense as, “The interaction that occurs among elements of the Department of Defense; engaged United States Government agencies; state, territorial, local, and tribal agencies; foreign military forces and government agencies; intergovernmental organizations; nongovernmental organizations; and the private

Principles of Joint Operations:

Objective	Security
Offensive	Surprise
Mass	Simplicity
Maneuver	Restraint
Economy of force	Perseverance
Unity of command	Legitimacy

FIGURE 2 *The principles of Joint Operations.*⁸ The last three principles were added to the Joint lexicon to promote understanding of a modern warfare environment encompassing full-spectrum operations.

sector”¹⁰ Special Forces elements enhanced the flow of communications within the JIIM community that fostered an understanding of interdependent equities, while focusing on a tangible end result. AOB and ODA soldiers recognized this collective requirement for achieving a culturally competent outcome in a very physically and culturally dislocated environment. Success was achieved only through strict adherence to Chapter 1, Part 4 section (d) (Gathering the Right Resources) of Joint Publication 3-08 which dictated the actions of the Counter-LRA force to achieve objectives:

A challenge to commanders is to recognize what resources are available and how to work together to effectively apply them. Despite potential philosophical, cultural, and operational differences, efforts should be coordinated to foster an atmosphere of cooperation that ultimately contributes to unity of effort. Pursuit of Interorganizational coordination as a process should be viewed as a means to mission accomplishment.

To make transparent the goals of NGO partners and host nations, Special Forces ODAs created synchronization bodies within their operations areas. Interdependent coordination organizations termed Combined Operations Fusion Centers utilized the civilian “Triple Constraint” model as a means to achieve scaled, flexible and quality Counter-LRA outcomes.

As the four area-focused COFCs emerged with rudimentary facilities, logistical support and basic communications capability, a communication conduit

in the form of newsletters titled *COFC Talk* became a means of communicating the efforts of the COFC to the public, and potentially to the LRA. Balancing secrecy with efficacy, these newsletters were collaborated on by Special Forces and Military Intelligence personnel as a weekly compilation of area-focused stories on safe routes, danger areas, safe travel tactics, techniques and procedures, as well as dissemination of escapee recovery areas and news stories focused toward creating “tipping points” to encourage the populace to abandon the LRA. The newsletters were printed in English and French and reviewed by local partners.

Demobilization, Disarmament, Repatriation, Resettlement and Reintegration initiatives of the IGOs were expressed in the *COFC Talk* newsletters. Plans to ensure the functions of the COFC could transfer to the local government or IGO were developed. In this arrangement, the retrograde of U.S. operations in the region would leave an acceptable residual capability through civilianized demobilization actions.

This COFC configuration could be sustained using the same non-standard civilian aircraft (including airdrop in adverse airstrip conditions) or scale down to ground operations, depending on the threat remaining. Balancing the requirements of quality support in this austere environment is crucial to synchronized operations. Furthermore, ensuring that support is maintained during times of transition acts to avoid tensions created in time- and resource-constrained environments.

Conclusion

In an operational area that is as large as the state of California, Special Forces Soldiers entered into a context comprising a myriad of unique cultures. One key lesson of this Special Forces intervention is

that the judicious use of military doctrine, coupled with creative organizational development, and non-standard resourcing must be used without distancing the relevant populations and partners. By tying systems already in place together using valid doctrine and supportable resources efficiencies are gained in time and scope.

Without some crucial alterations in perspective, and the resultant creativity of specially selected and well-trained professionals, it is unlikely that a force of any size would achieve success alone, much less without the partnership with IGOs and NGOs in the operational environment. The nature of this unique and complex environment requires a focused and resourced force with inherent knowledge, skills, and experience to match or overmatch the adversary. These capacities, coupled with language capabilities, creativity, and professionalism prove that U.S. Army Special

Forces and assigned soldiers are still the nation’s first choice for the “wicked” problems of the 21st century. **SW**

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comment here

End Notes:

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 2. United States Department of State, *Counter LRA Operations*, Press Release (Washington, D.C. Oct. 11, 2011)
 3. Goldratt, Eiyahu M., and Jeff Cox. 2004. *The goal: a process of ongoing improvement*. Great Barrington, MA: North River Press, 307.
 4. Project Management Knowhow 2011 *Triple Constraint*. Accessed March 15, 2012 from http://www.project-management-knowhow.com/triple_constraint.html
 5. Cross T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K., & Isaacs, M. *Towards a culturally competent system of care, volume I*. Georgetown University Child Development Center, CASSP Technical Assistance Center. (Washington, D.C., 1989), iv.
 6. Cross, and others, v.
 7. United States Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, (Washington, D.C., Defense Printing Office, 2009), ix.
 8. United States Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint operations*, Version 2.0, (Washington, D.C., Defense Printing Office, 2011), 1-2.
- Doctrine recognizes that the U.S. *will achieve victory in this changed environment of persistent conflict only by conducting military operations in concert with diplomatic, informational, and economic efforts*. Battlefield success is no longer enough; final victory requires concurrent stability operations to lay the foundation for lasting peace. In support of this effort, three principles – *perseverance, legitimacy, and restraint* – have been added to the nine principles of war. Together, these make up the principles of joint operations.”
9. Joint Publication 1, GL-11.
 10. United States Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-08 *Interorganizational coordination during joint operations*, (Washington, D.C., Defense Printing Office 2011)
 11. Shelton, T., Tangeman, D., Beaurpere, G., & Deedrick, E. *Rearranging the box: Operational concept template of COFC employment for counter-LRA operations*, (Uganda, 2012)