



**ADVISE & ASSIST** U.S. Army Soldiers conduct close-quarters battle drills with Philippine Army Scout Rangers at Subic Bay in the Philippines. Within weeks of the Zamboanga Crisis, the SF cadre had already rewritten the program of instruction for the course to include more medical and close-quarters combat training. *U.S. Army photo.*

## Background & Evolution of OEF-P

OEF-P officially began in 2002, fueled by the country's renewed commitment to counterterrorism in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. However, the U.S. security interest in the Philippines had been piqued earlier, initially by the rise of the Abu Sayyaf Group, and their shift in tactics to kidnapping for ransom in order to finance and further their cause for separate Islamic state. As a result of these changes the Government of the Philippines requested assistance from the U.S. in dealing with the ASG threat. This resulted in the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) assignment to assist with the activation and training of the Philippine Army's Light Reaction Company, which would be trained in advanced CT doctrine, tactics, techniques and procedures in order to fulfill the request for assistance with the rising ASG problem. Training was conducted by 1st Battalion, 1st SFG(A) from March to July of 2001. In May 2001, the ASG conducted an attack and KFR of several tourists on the resort island of Palawan, prompting Special Operations Command Pacific to increase efforts from training the LRC to also providing intelligence assistance and conducting further assessment of the AFP for further support. Following 9/11 the Presidents of the United States and the Philippines agreed to military assistance and economic initiatives in support of the CT efforts that would become OEF-P.<sup>2</sup>

The initial focus of operations was the southern island of Basilan, the ASG safe-haven. As part of exercise Balikatan 02-01, U.S. Special Forces teams worked through and with their host-nation partner forces to separate the ASG from the population and destroy the terrorists and support networks.<sup>3</sup> Based on earlier successes, the OEF-P model evolved, and operations expanded beyond the island of Basilan to areas of Jolo in the Sulu Archipelago and throughout other areas of Mindanao in order to meet the ASG threat and other transnational terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah. During the transition period from SOCPAC's JTF-510 command element to Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines, the task force became a smaller, more tailored organization. While overall force strength was reduced, elements of U.S. Naval Special Warfare, Air Force Special Operations and Marine Special Operations Command joined the core of the Army's 1st SFG(A), which has remained the connective tissue



**TACTICAL TRAINING** U.S. Army Special Forces Soldiers work with Philippine National Police at Subic Bay, Philippines. U.S. Army photo.

on an enduring basis. Additionally, force multipliers such as Civil Affairs Teams, Military Information Support Teams and other tailored enablers for mobility, intelligence and support were added. JSOTF-P employs the liaison coordination element construct as the core unit to embed with selected host-nation partner forces in strategic locations and key junctures of host-nation military command structure. The LCEs, which are small unit-level SOF teams, such as a Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha, that partner with AFP conventional and special operations units, and Philippine National Police and PNP-Special Action Force (the PNP's paramilitary commandos) units to advise, assist and coordinate for U.S. support of the units' CT efforts. The LCE is flexible, adaptive and scalable unit capable of interfacing at the tactical through strategic level, including advising military and police units on how to interact with their interagency counterparts in the realms of intelligence, development and joint operations. From 2002 to the present, JSOTF-P has worked using the indirect approach of through and with host-nation forces while remaining closely synchronized with the U.S. Country Team and their 3D approach of diplomacy, development and defense.<sup>4,5</sup>

After more than a decade of engagement and operations in the Southern Philippines, significant progress has been made at the tactical level. Through continued combat operations, and subject matter expert exchanges on topics from troop leading procedures and the military-decision making process to small unit tactics, marksmanship and combat medical skills, the partnered forces have gained a large amount of self-sufficiency to operate and train on their own at the unit level. By mid-year 2012, LCEs and task force commanders were reporting that almost every aspect requiring improvement during host-nation combat operations were the result of operational considerations such as planning gaps or coordination and synchronization issues. In very few isolated cases, could combat effects be markedly improved by additional advice or assistance at the tactical level. At the direction of the JSOTF-P commander, task force commanders began to guide their LCEs' assessment and assistance on host-nation battalion, and JTF headquarters versus continued tactical subject-matter expert exchanges with subordinate units. The recent trend therefore, and to begin to frame the OEF-P Way forward, is to move almost entirely to focus at the operational level. Although several Philippine special operations units have previously received episodic engagement at the operational level, continued shortfalls during operations and planning are evident, indicating this is currently the level where advisory forces



**HEALTH AND WELFARE** U.S. Army Civil Affairs Soldiers conduct a MEDCAP in the Philippines. *U.S. Army photo.*

should be primarily focused. Many of the LCEs, as part of the legacy OEF-P construct remain task organized and partnered at the company level, allowing only minimum engagement and therefore only minimal capability enhancement. As part of the OEF-P way forward this balance would be inverted, with a bulk of the engagement at the JTF (brigades or higher) level, in order to build the relationships required to affect change, but still allowing for episodic engagement with subordinate tactical units. The adaptable nature of the LCE model is well suited to this task, and still maintains the flexibility to assist at the tactical level when the need arises.

## Philippine Security Forces' Internal Reforms as Guide for Developing the OEF-P Way Ahead

At the direction of the Government of the Philippines, the PSF have produced two major plans which have already begun to, or will require significant reform, investment in and development of both the military and police forces at large; the AFP's Internal Peace and Security Plan and the Philippine Army Transformation Roadmap 2028. These ongoing initiatives require adjustments to the OEF-P campaign design in order to maximize effective assistance and security gains through FID activities. It also provides an opportunity to develop a longer-term way forward for OEF-P for both U.S. SOF and PSF.

The first item is the AFP's Internal Peace and Security Plan referred to by the PSF members as "Bayanihan." Coupled with "Samahan," which is the complementary PNP plan, are jointly referred to as the Internal Peace and Security Plan. The plan was completed in 2010 and set for a six year implementation beginning in 2011. The IPSP provides for a holistic approach to national defense, acknowledging that peace and security requires a multi-stakeholder approach with emphasis on four key elements: governance, delivery of basic services, economic reconstruction and sustainable development and security sector reform. The plan refers to the stakeholders as national and local government agencies, non-government entities and the entire citizenry. More specifically to the AFP, the IPSP directs an equal emphasis on combat and non-combat dimensions of military operations. The plan defines the AFP's end state as "capabilities of internal armed threats are reduced to a level that they can no longer threaten the stability of the state and civil authorities can ensure the safety and well-being of the Filipino people."<sup>6</sup>

The most significant changes that affect OEF-P take the form of the PSF's phased plan to transition responsibility for internal security from the AFP to other "appropriate government agencies." In most cases with respect to OEF-P and the bulk of JSOTF-P's CT efforts in the Southern Philippines, this translates to the PNP-SAF assuming the role as the nation's primary CT force against internal threats. As noted earlier, the IPSP is to be implemented over the period of six years. The first phase, occurring from 2011 through 2013 is defined by the AFP focused on addressing internal armed threat groups. The second phase, is set to occur from between 2014 to 2016 is defined by the AFP handing over the lead for ensuring internal peace and security, again from the OEF-P CT perspective, to the PNP-SAF. This transition is predicated on the assumption that during the first phase of the IPSP that the AFP would have essentially achieved its prescribed end state of degradation of internal threats to a level which allows for the PNP-SAF and other law-enforcement agencies to assume responsibility to combat.<sup>7</sup>

What is clear about the IPSP is that by 2016, at the completion of the six year period, the GPH expects internal security for matters of insurgency and terrorism to be firmly in the hands of government agencies such as the PNP and more specifically the PNP-SAF as the elite commando force, leaving the AFP to focus on territorial defense and external threats. What is unclear is the exact process of transition during the second phase, or the next three year period. This transition provides a key opportunity for the JSOTF-P and OEF-P's way ahead. The prospect would seem to make a good case for refocusing OEF-P's CT efforts to the operational level, the most likely and effective realm where transition from AFP to PNP-SAF will take place. Another grey area with implications to U.S. SOF is the nature of AFP elements such as the Light Reaction Battalion, Special Operations Command, Philippine Army and the AFP's Joint Special Operations Group all of which are currently partnered with U.S. LCEs, and all which by virtue of their mission statements have a specific role to play in counterterrorism. The IPSP, as noted earlier, is addressed to the AFP at large, and no specific guidance has been provided to the AFP's elite CT units. Logically, following the year 2016, these units will be a supporting, if not an integral partner in the internal CT fight.



The transition period brings to light another significant gap and therefore another potential avenue for the U.S. way head. As U.S. advisory elements focused at the tactical level, certain operational-level short falls were illuminated. For those LCEs already working at the operational level, institutional shortcomings originating from the PSF qualification pipeline (i.e. Scout Ranger Course or Philippine Special Forces Qualification Course) are being identified, and as more LCEs shift focus to operational-level partners, a better assessment of where institutional-level advice and assistance would be warranted will be developed. Several key PNP-SAF leaders indicate that more PSF skill development, especially in the way of mission planning, is needed for their units to assume full responsibility for internal security and CT under the provisions of the IPSP. Great strides are already being made in terms of cooperation between AFP and PNP-SAF units with joint operations, joint training events and fusion. JSOTF-P and LCEs' focus on interoperability add to this effort, but at present there are few firm institutional measures to create baseline standardizations. The development of AFP/PNP interoperability is essential for timely and effective transition of security responsibilities from the armed forces to law enforcement elements in accordance with the IPSP timeline.

The second PSF reform initiative with potential significance to OEF-P is the Philippine Army Transformation Roadmap 2028. The ATR, initially authored in 2010, is the Philippine Army's 18 year strategic vision for creating a world-class Army that is a source of national pride, and able to defend its borders by 2028. It consists of several bench marks and intermediate goals, or base camps.<sup>8</sup> While this program is a service-specific Army model, great potential exists to employ the measures discussed to include other PSF partners in support of OEF-P.

The significance for both near-term and longer-term OEF-P FID objectives with regard to the ATR lies in the previously noted operational capability gaps that ultimately find their roots at the institution. In this case, institutional level is synonymous to the U.S. doctrinal definition, but refers primarily to the training, and doctrine development of the host-nation military.<sup>9</sup> In early 2013, JSOTF-P leadership began working with the



**ADVISORY ROLE** A Special Forces medic provides input for Philippine Army Soldiers during a medical training exercise at Subic Bay, Philippines. *U.S. Army photo.*

LCE partnered with Philippine Army Special Operations Command to identify what measures could be taken at the institutional level in support of the OEF-P CT and FID mission. SOCOM's mission consists of training, equipping and organizing special operations forces in support of the AFP mission, and is a force provider for almost every U.S. LCE partner force. During the initial internal mission analysis in February 2013, Col. Mark A. Miller, the JSOTF-P commander gave guidance on a strategy he termed "functional CT." The concept behind "functional CT" is that while not directly advising and assisting the units conducting CT in the Southern Philippines, assisting at the institutional level with specific emphasis on tactical and operational capability gaps would eliminate the need for repetitive SMEEs, significantly improve operational capacity in the joint operational area, comprising the southern Islands of the Philippines. Additionally seeking to assist with standardizing of core SOF capabilities and specialty skills, institutionalizing these skills so that they are taught during qualification pipelines, and professionalizing the skill level at which the skills are taught remains in direct support of the ATR and the OEF-P mission. This method serves two important purposes for host-nation partner forces and the U.S. FID mission: ensure the right skills are taught to the right people; and to create efficiencies in the training pipeline. The end result would be leaders and operators arriving for duty at tactical and operational units with a firm grasp on the skills required to conduct successful CT and facilitating the LCEs refocus to the operational level. As an example of developing core SOF capabilities, junior officers assigned to host-nation SOF units have minimal training outside of what they receive in their Infantry Officer Basic Course, leaving capabilities like SOF mission planning to be learned during on-the-job-training or through a U.S. LCE SMEE. In the realm of creating efficiencies, many of the individual SOF elements maintain their own specialty skill courses, such as sniper school, which create a wide range in standards and lack of efficiency in the training system. These are two poignant examples, as these are two of the most requested SMEEs.

Upon discussion with partner-force key leadership, JSOTF-P and Philippine Army SOCOM leadership hosted a series of Roadmap Conferences beginning in April 2013, during which U.S. advisers and AFP SOF key leaders exchanged ideas of ways to improve ATR base camps. The main FID advantage for this concept was the creation of a focal point at which to synchronize U.S. SOF efforts among key partners, with the additional emphasis on SOF and Intra-PSF interoperability. In essence creating something of a "SOF Center of Excellence" at SOCOM, U.S. SOF can focus LCEs, JCETS and other engagements to maximize their own efficiencies in supporting the CT efforts. The potential to include elements like the PNP-SAF in support of the second phase of IPSP transition was highly favored as well. Additionally, including Joint U.S.



**SMEE** A member of the JSOTF-P conducts a subject-matter expert exchange on photography. *U.S. Army photo.*

Military Assistance Group and Special Operations Command Pacific representatives as part of the effort opened doors for synchronizing other forms of military assistance and programs.

Although this process is still ongoing, and its full potential is yet to be realized, it serves as yet another example of the success of the indirect approach. The SOCOM leadership already had a vision of where they wanted to take their force, with some advice and assistance from their U.S. counterparts they were able to take the lead in continuing to develop the SOCOM Roadmap.

## The Way Forward

In the near term the refocusing on operational-level advisory missions will support the phased transition of the IPSP to internal security forces like the PNP-SAF while continuing to assist our enduring AFP SOF brethren. OEF-P is but one facet of the U.S.'s renewed strategic emphasis on the Asia-Pacific arena, and therefore like every other effort in today's fiscal environment the theme for the foreseeable future will be "doing more with less." This is not new territory for SOF, and JSOTF-P doing the critical analysis on what units, at what level, and in which key geographic areas or terrorist safe havens to partner to achieve greatest effects. This is the impetus behind the shift from the tactical to operational-level units such as Joint Task Forces of AFP, PNP and other interagency actors. LCEs advising and assisting host-nation commanders and staffs at this level will provide the JSOTF-P commander with the ability to follow on the past 11 years of successes by focusing on the new center of gravity in the CT and FID efforts.

1st Special Forces Group (A), which has been the long-time primary, force provider for OEF-P will soon assume full responsibility for JSOTF-P. During the period of transition for both OEF-P and the PSF this provides an array of options in support of a successful way ahead. JSOTF-P will also look at where it partners relative to the LCEs now advising at the operational level, in order to advance initiatives to improve and synchronize the institutional level through "functional CT." To complement this shift in emphasis at the higher headquarters level will also be an adjustment of some LCE missions to support this institutional focus.

The Philippines provides a unique and complex operational environment in which to conduct FID. The successes of OEF-P continue to be won by the highly adaptive men and women of U.S. SOF and their dedicated host-nation partners in the pursuit of mutual security objectives. JSOTF-P has developed viable initiatives for the next step in the evolution of OEF-P. While certainly not the model for FID, OEF-P serves as a very successful model of FID to be studied for possible application in other operations. **SW**

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## Notes

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