



01

REPUBLIC OF KOREA ENGAGEMENTS THAT LAST

BY CAPTAIN CHRIS PINKERTON

United States Army Special Forces routinely conduct Theater Security Cooperation Program events using tactical-level engagements that enhance both the host nation and the executing USSF units' training proficiency, while enhancing operational and strategic interoperability between partnered forces. These tactical-level engagements deliver immediate increases in capability of partner-nation special operations forces, yet typically fail to inform or spark change outside of the participating tactical element. This creates disconnects between localized training and the host-

nation's institutional process.

Whether this is due to knowledge-management issues, or the inability to express the importance of change to improve the entirety of the institution, it presents an obstacle to growth and advancement. Company C, 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) took these institutional challenges into consideration during planning and execution of its last rotation as Advanced Operating Base-Korea in support of Special Operations Command - Korea. Four Operational Detachment Alphas partnered with four operational Republic of Korea SF

Brigades, while one ODA partnered with the Republic of Korea Special Warfare Schoolhouse.

AOB-K's engagement strategy was built around three main lines of effort: expand tactical-level engagements to train and affect the largest amount of partnered forces available; elevate engagements to battalion staffs to improve planning and advance battle-focused analysis; and use the schoolhouse to influence and shape training priorities in order to increase the operational capability of the ROK SF. This approach to simultaneously engage both the institutional level and units of action served to provide lasting benefits for both the host nation as well as the international SOF enterprise by providing more capable and interoperable SOF partners.

This concept is not new or groundbreaking, however its effectiveness is found in the breadth and number of units and institutional elements engaged throughout the rotation. In prior AOB-K rotations, the engagements were limited to one SFOD-A engaging and training with a single RODA. Through understanding that the warfighting function of Mission Command is held at higher levels within the ROK military, Company C looked to employ the doctrinal relationship of a SFOD-A with the battalion level of command.

The intent was to elevate the level of engagements by USSF to advise and assist at the battalion and brigade levels while presenting opportunities to improve the institutional training organization. Using this task organization, AOB-K took current information from the tactical level engagements and used them to inform the engagement strategy with the SWS. This created tangible goals to initiate quantitative long-term changes in the ROK SF training doctrine and programs of instruction. The application of this strategy established a feedback continuum model.

The model begins with "Finding the Gap" by working with host-nation tactical elements and making recommendations to improve their training to increase capability. These observations became the



input and were compared across the breadth of engagements to develop a common operational picture. “Fix the Gap” used the common themes to feed the ODA working at the institutional level with the SWS to suggest immediate changes with the cadre committees and begin institutional influence at higher levels (i.e. lasting doctrine changes). In the final phase of the model “Fill the Gap” references the loop being completed through doctrinal updates and POI changes, providing forces that have received enhanced training. This step can only be evaluated over the long term through continued engagements allowing time for the changes to take effect.

Historically, almost all USSF engagements with ROKSF have been at the Republic of Korea ODA level. The first hurdle was for the USSF ODA’s partnered with ROK SF Brigades to advance beyond one ODA aligned with RODA. All four ODAs succeeded, in not only engaging battalion staffs and commanders on a daily basis, but also by enabling partnered training with the entirety of the battalion. This engagement level allowed the ODAs to identify training gaps at the tactical level across a larger pool and refine recommendations for focus and attention. This proved to be the first step in the feedback loop process.

Observations common to all of the ROK partnered brigades were compared with observations made at the SWS, through constant engagement with the training cadre committees, which were coalesced to provide training priorities at the institutional level. Thus, the SWS engagement was the key to begin the process of creating long term fixes to tactical observations. Partnering at the institutional level enabled the ODA to work with each of the training cadre committees to observe and suggest changes to the baseline training POI, providing recommendations based on the gaps identified across the breadth of the AOB-K’s engagement. This approach encouraged institutional change to address the cause of the observed training deficiency, rather than treat the symptoms that are present

at the tactical level, as is often the focus of many TSCP events.

Though the effectiveness of this strategy can only be judged by future rotations, AOB-K did observe evidence of change in its time in Korea. During the six month rotation to Korea, AOB-K participated in multiple combined planning events. One such event involved SFOD-A 1235 and their partners planning a full mission profile operation and providing a brief back to the ROK Special Warfare Command Commander. The ODA trained their partner RODA on the Military Decision Making Process and used it to develop a detailed and thorough brief back that was well received by both the ROK SWC commander as well as the SOCKOR commander.

The brief and planning process left such a positive impression that the SWC Commanding General immediately directed his organization to use the brief and products as the standard for all future brief backs. MDMP is in a form, part of ROK SWC doctrine, but by fully committing to the process and using it to its full potential the ROK SWC commander recognized the benefits and through guidance renewed the ROK SOF’s commitment to such doctrinal detailed planning. The remainder of AOB-K confirmed that the changes were effective immediately with their counterparts the following day and immediately began working with them to incorporate the guidance into their future training. This is one example of how effective combined training and planning, when exposed to the proper levels of command and institutions, can have comprehen-

sive effects that shape institutional changes for host-nation units beyond the immediate engagement.

Persistent engagement at the tactical level while simultaneously elevating the partnership to battalion-and brigade-level commanders and staffs created a comprehensive operational picture that led to a more nuanced understanding of partner capabilities. This shared understanding enabled the development of recommendations to increase operational capability. Coupled with engagements at the institutional level, it provided the avenue to address and implement the acceptance of these recommendations by creating a viable path for institutional change.

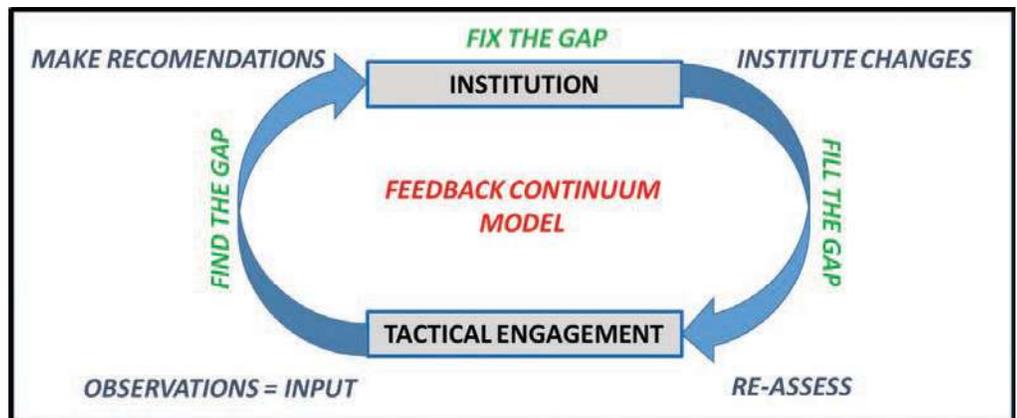
Although the measure of effectiveness can only be judged over the course of time, this engagement strategy serves as a platform to promote institutional change, and a way to defeat the problem of reoccurring engagements at the tactical level with partner forces that rotate and change, thus taking their experiences and hampering the progress made as new recruits repopulate their ranks with the same training deficiencies. Over time, this model will better serve to meet the ever-changing and demanding challenges of our strategic environment, and is necessary to build more effective and capable SOF partners which benefits the international SOF enterprise. 

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Capt. Chris Pinkerton is a Detachment Commander in 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne).

01
A Special Forces Soldier conducts a machine gun familiarization class with Korean SOF partners. U.S. ARMY PHOTO COURTESY OF 1ST SFG(A) PAO

02
The feedback continuum model.



02