

EAST AFRICA RAF: A VIEW FROM THE GROUND

CPT RENEE SANJUAN

“The Army is globally responsive and regionally engaged; it is an indispensable partner and provider of a full range of capabilities to combatant commanders in a joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational [JIIM] environment. As a part of the Joint Force and as America’s Army, in all that we offer, we guarantee the agility, versatility, and depth to prevent, shape, and win.”

— Army Strategic Planning Guidance 2013

Background

The Army has combat-proven, tactical-level leaders who have worked closely with local leaders across Afghanistan and Iraq, but how does the Army leverage such talent and experience to engage effectively on a regional scale? After returning from a deployment to Afghanistan, the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), 1st Infantry Division was designated to replace the division’s 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team as the second Regionally Aligned Force (RAF) for Africa Command (AFRICOM). While small elements throughout the brigade deployed for training events and conferences, the 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment served as a forward-stationed capability under the operational control of the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA). This article will specifically focus on the forward-deployed element although many of the lessons learned can be applied to the remaining RAF force. The battalion received additional capabilities and built a task force (TF) ready and able to engage partner nations (PN) throughout East Africa. TF 2-16 broadened expectations for forward-deployed security elements, providing greater flexibility and capability to CJTF-HOA. Over the course of nine months, TF 2-16 fulfilled a complex mission set, which consisted of two East African response forces, a full training cycle, more than 70 theater security cooperation (TSC) initiatives, and newfound partnerships. This article serves to address challenges and expectations in order to provide lessons learned to future RAF elements. As the Army shifts efforts toward regional alignment, such conversations become critical to the successful employment of capabilities throughout the world.



Arta Interservices Military Academy cadets observe a Soldier from the 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Battalion during convoy training in Arta, Djibouti, on 9 December 2014.
(Photo by USAF SSgt Kevin Iinuma)

Deployment Preparation

Force Structure — In order to be an effective RAF, the unit needs to align its structure to cover the mission set, interact with allied nations, and meet the needs of African partners. A reliable projection of missions and a battle rhythm help align the force structure to conduct daily operations, operational missions, and TSC operations. However, in order to create an appropriate force structure and prepare for critical missions, units need accurate information on countries within the area of responsibility (AOR) with regards to not only their structure but also their historical engagements and projected needs. Partnering and working with our allies at the task force, company, and even platoon level calls for structures closely aligned to both regional capabilities and local force structures in order to make joint training and engagements more rewarding. Furthermore, within the organizational structure, there must be subject matter experts (SMEs) for TSC activities. Communication of growing trends and needs is imperative to provide continuous partnerships rather than a cyclic relationship that starts over with each unit. Mission commanders (MCDRs) typically deploy in support of missions for two to six weeks at a time. This calls for units to continuously improve their force structure and provide a more leadership-heavy organization. To support such efforts based on African nation requests, TF 2-16 recommended to its replacement that it deploy more senior NCOs, particularly in the logistics and counter-improvised explosive device (C-IED) fields. The emphasis on building the JIIM team is helping units develop more in-depth knowledge of other players in the area, but the most critical link is joining scattered information into a more user-friendly, timely, responsive, and easily shared web of knowledge.

Pre-deployment training — Training must continuously evolve as experience grows. The challenge planners faced was to prepare the brigade for a vast area with complex and different cultures. TF 2-16 attended a week-long block of instruction, which focused on the entire continent of Africa. The focus was too broad for those deploying to East Africa. Identifying skill-focused teams would more sharply target mission objectives in training. Training could then separate teams into areas of interest, and after a regional overview, the unit could split into task-focused working groups with an experienced advisor. Specialty military-to-military (MIL-MIL) teams could even pair with SMEs returning from theater. The 1st Battalion, 77th Armored Regiment — the unit which replaced TF 2-16 — received an informal version of this concept during their Combat Training Center rotation due to previously deployed leaders conveniently serving as observer-controller-trainers (OCTs). While a relief in place (RIP) should provide similar knowledge, the use of redeployed personnel as instructors for a pre-deployment curriculum could provide a more effective learning environment due to the lack of competing requirements found during a RIP. This example could be captured as a lesson learned and then formalized across the Army.

Aside from the general approach to pre-deployment training, TF 2-16 identified particular areas and skills which required an increased focus. Units would benefit from foreign weapons training and survival, evasion, resistance, and escape (SERE) training. For foreign weapons training, knowing what weapons our East African PNs use is critical. The opportunity to receive hands-on experience prior to deployment ensures that trainers are better prepared for TSC missions. In some cases, MCDRs first handled the foreign weapon system after already being deployed. Such an experience highlights the need for technically savvy and flexible leaders for these mission sets. Furthermore, when teams deploy, they operate in small teams, which is different than what most personnel experienced in previous deployments. To address this experience gap, CJTF-HOA assigned an Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG) operational advisor to the task force who had years of experience in that realm. However, resourcing in-depth training, like SERE training, for future MCDRs (or train-the-trainers) prior to deployment would better posture the unit for success and provide a more steady solution.

Lastly, upon arrival to theater, forward-deployed units need to conduct follow-on training in all areas with joint partners from CJTF-HOA and embassy teams. Battlefield circulation throughout East Africa during the pre-deployment site survey (PDSS) is imperative to establishing and passing off relationships critical to ensuring more productive communication prior to missions. There is no substitute for a face-to-face encounter. The first time PN leaders meet us should not be after our transfer of authority (TOA) but rather during the PDSS to build rapport and confidence with our counterparts.

Challenges and Recommendations

The problem set was complex: under a joint headquarters, TF 2-16 deployed small teams in support of TSC activities across East Africa. Young leaders faced the challenge of transitioning from combat operations in Iraq and



A Soldier with the 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment covers his teammates during a dismounted patrol on 25 September 2014 at the 5th French Marines Desert Commando Course near Arta, Djibouti. (Photo by USAF SSgt Dillon White)

Afghanistan to TSC activities throughout an unfamiliar region. The scope was significantly larger, and the force was drastically smaller. Innovation and initiative through mission command became the backbone of RAF operations. With the brigade operating from Fort Riley, Kan., a joint division headquarters co-located with the task force as small teams deployed to multiple countries. Challenges that would otherwise seem simple grew in complexity.

Most missions developed and came through three main sources: U.S. Army Africa (USARAF) staff, PN requests through embassies, and growing relationships/leader initiative. Each mission type required its own approach and produced unique challenges. While the threat was not imminent, the stakes were high: the RAF element had to “prevent violent extremist organizations from threatening America, ensuring the protection of the homeland, American citizens, and American interests.”¹ In order to accomplish that objective, the RAF focused on two key tasks:

- * Teach, coach, and mentor African partner militaries in order to enable them to neutralize violent extremist organizations; and

- * Develop and strengthen JIIM relationships.² Both tasks needed devoted time, resources, and clear lines of effort (LOEs).

The Approach

Shortly after taking over the RAF mission in the Horn of Africa, TF 2-16 analyzed the mission set, mission feedback, and AWG reports. Missions focused on MIL-MIL engagements across the area of operation, but the approach was fractured, sporadic, and missed mission analysis. TF 2-16 staff’s task was imminent: transform our approach to MIL-MIL engagements by focusing on the military decision-making process (MDMP) and provide MCDRs with a clear task and purpose. Following a deliberate MDMP, the Fire Effects Coordination Cell then acted as the proponent for an accelerated MDMP for the enduring mission. However, there was a lack of detailed information to conduct a true MDMP. At the very least, MCDRs attempted to conduct reconnaissance missions or video teleconferences (VTCs) to gather necessary information prior to missions. However, reconnaissance or assessment missions were not effective due to PN’s differing expectations, and conducting VTCs with the necessary personnel was unreliable. When a MCDR sent requests for information (RFIs) to PNs for mission planning and analysis, they received incomplete information if any at all.

Country team synchronization meetings occurred at the division level, but they seemed more staff focused than MCDR focused. A follow-on working group with key players for the upcoming mission could address RFIs and lead to more effective engagements. This group should require the attendance of an embassy representative and eventually a point of contact (POC) from the requesting unit. If personnel are not able to meet in person, then a VTC would be acceptable. This would fill the void of the analysis that would otherwise be provided by a brigade staff element and provide face-to-face emphasis on critical pre-mission coordination.

TF 2-16's C-IED cell achieved success with mission preparation and execution due to the increased need across PNs. This drove the ability to establish continuity by working with the same country desks and at times the same units or schools. Not surprisingly, they emphasized that it is "essential to be embedded into the initial planning process for every mission."³ Upon receiving the mission, Soldiers identified a lead trainer to help plan and certify subordinate trainers. At D-30, all the trainers focused on the material and rehearsed the classes until validated by the engineer cell NCOIC. They used the Army's troop leading procedures and the eight-step training model, which were extremely effective and provided maximum flexibility.

Understanding Capabilities

With respect to our African partners, we often lack a clear picture of their capabilities. When we plan a mission, we expect comprehensive intelligence products on our targets. Why should RAF missions and supporting MIL-MIL engagements be any different? When we conduct recons prior to MIL-MIL engagements, we start behind the curve as opposed to truly building off the knowledge collected from previous engagements, particularly when those engagements are conducted by other units. A lack of knowledge and an unclear concept prior to the mission creates confusion on the ground. For example, during a five-day long-range marksmanship (LRM) engagement, Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) sent a small team to conduct an assessment on Kenyan Defense Forces' (KDF) sniper capabilities to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the KDF. However, the KDF's expectation differed from that of the mission statement provided to the TF 2-16 MCDR. KDF soldiers attending the assessment were not trained in LRM and instead expected the U.S. team to provide instruction, causing the U.S. team to be less prepared for its mission.

The information is out there, scattered amongst different people and organizations. Only when we can effectively synchronize the information and make it easily accessible will RAF elements be able to overcome such challenges. A Partner Nation Data Packet (PNDP) should be provided to MCDRs prior to their departure on a TSC mission. MCDRs need a more in-depth brief on the mission focus to include: PN capabilities, previous training, equipment, and doctrine. However, as observed in the Kenya mission, being provided information does not necessarily mean that the MCDR will have an accurate understanding of the PN. According to a June 2014 report by AWG operational advisors assigned to CJTF-HOA, "understanding the PN and its culture, language, capabilities, and capacities is important to achieving a seamless and effective mission."⁴

With the shortfall identified, who is responsible for the product? Currently, no single office is ready or able to conduct such expansive and focused assessments. A training-specific intelligence estimate would require an intelligence and operations fusion cell. Thus adding fusion cells to embassy teams would provide an on-the-ground capability to communicate back and forth between MCDRs, PNs, and the Department of State. They could also collect information from MCDRs prior to their departure in order to ensure accurate and updated information. The PNDP is the first step towards a collective understanding and effective dissemination of information. Once received, a TF intelligence section can focus on analyzing the information for mission execution.

As the Army increases its RAF efforts by providing more resources and larger areas of interest, MCDRs need a place to start their research besides Google or hundreds of after action reviews (AARs) on a portal. According to the civil-military operations (CMO) officer at CJTF-HOA, the next step to making information available across the region is to establish a RAF Interactive Information Network (IIN).⁵ Once developed, the next step is to make the products accessible across the Army. In the digital age where we have access to instant communication, we should have a network with information, assessments, videos, pictures, programs of instruction, and points of contact available at our fingertips. For RAF missions, the most effective means of organizing all of the data would be by location, with all topics and mission categories searchable across the world. As the Army increases its RAF footprint across the combatant commands, those waiting to deploy to any area of the world could benefit significantly from this effort.

Partner Nation Needs

African countries work with multiple nations besides the United States, which illustrates the mission complexity. During a Uganda Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC) mission, for example, the medical team identified that the Ugandan People's Defense Force soldiers received previous training from French, British, Dutch and Italian forces. Therefore, we cannot assume that their doctrine or tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) will directly mirror ours or that they will choose to use all the TTPs we give them. Additionally, for Eastern Africa, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is a significant operation and a large focus for training efforts. Solutions used in our combat experience may not be accessible or practical in Somalia.

Furthermore, AMISOM forces receive equipment and training from multiple bilateral agreements as well as UN Support of AMISOM (UNSOA). There are differences between how a given country's forces operate under their own doctrine and how they operate under the African Union and United Nations. In short, every country operates differently based on its capabilities, and we cannot assume that it operates the same as us. We need to be able to relate to each nation's particular challenges. Teaching courses which focus on AMISOM-specific operations helped provide the task force with knowledge to conduct future TSC missions.

A growing need for C-IED training drives our efforts to support PNs. The goal of the TF 2-16 C-IED training cell was to enable Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) with internal capabilities and systems to establish their own C-IED training programs. We provided in-depth training for the PNs, but a train-the-trainer approach would be more effective if adequately supported by the PN.

Training aids need to be focused on what the PN uses. For medical training, units benefit more from training with improvised items instead of combat application tourniquets or emergency trauma bandages. After working with gendarmerie (police units) in Djibouti, we received a report that a gendarme used a veil from a nearby girl to make a tourniquet at the scene of a vehicle-motorcycle collision. The gendarme reported, "Our intervention was crucial since it helped us to demonstrate the good results of the 48 hours of first aid training we received from an experienced American team." SGT Joshua Morrison, an instructor during the training, responded to the report by stating that "knowing that what we teach is actually being used makes being here worthwhile." The main takeaway from that event is that by focusing on the actual capabilities and resources available to local forces, we can better influence the effectiveness of that force.

Other challenges are the funding process and time lag. After going on a mission to conduct an assessment and "share best practices" under Title 10 funding, MCDRs returned eager with a recommended way ahead. However, the funding process could take years. The friction causes confusion with PNs. Funding delays result in old LOE strategies driving current missions. Commanders should be given more flexibility to make missions responsive to PN needs and morphing LOEs, especially in regions with ongoing combat operations. Current operation funding requirements tie the hands of those planning missions, causing efforts to slow down or go in the wrong direction. Young leaders are used to combat operations that are end-state focused and produce quick results. The complex and time-consuming funding approval process slows a RAF unit's ability to effect change, and such delays can decrease confidence and trust between nations.

JIIM Team

Growing in importance, there are countless players involved in TSC efforts. Joint missions require a delicate touch, but efforts continue in hopes of reaching synergy through integrated employment of initiatives. CJTF-HOA drove the focus on strengthening the JIIM team and partnerships throughout the region, and Task Force 2-16 took initiative with every possible opportunity. Within months of TOA, the TF created close partnerships with other units in CJTF-HOA like Civil Affairs and Navy Seabees; allied partners such as the French, Germans, and Japanese; and units within Djibouti such as the Joint Military Academy at Arta (AMIA) and Djibouti armed forces. At the battalion level and below, experience working with JIIM environments is limited. Operating without the unifying thread of combat operations against a common threat challenged leaders as they worked to build the JIIM team. Building good rapport and an understanding of what each capability brings to the table helps drive mission success. According to an AWG study conducted to assess the RAF mission, "a common theme among all country teams in the region is the desire to limit the DoD signature while still achieving desired operational and strategic goals."⁶ While understandable that the Army is not the face of efforts as was so in Iraq and Afghanistan, we can be more

effective in a synchronized approach.

As we passed off our partnerships to the incoming unit, we emphasized the importance of taking the relationships to the next level by synchronizing LOEs with our multinational teammates in a regional approach. The next step in JIIM team efforts is to build strong relationships with our allies and then expand those relationships to host joint exercises.

Takeaways

The Regionally Aligned Force needs to put efforts towards gaining access, shaping the environment, and then refining the approach. To refine the RAF approach, our TSC missions need to be more targeted and deliberate with special emphasis on enablers such as embassies and Department of State officials to help multiply our efforts. As the Army expands its efforts to effectively align with regions across the world, the AFRICOM RAF serves as a lens by which future missions can be assessed. The missions are uncertain and challenge leaders to be creative in the employment of their capabilities. Focusing on leader development and mission command will ensure that elements are prepared for this unique mission. Lessons learned need to be communicated effectively throughout the Army, providing a robust network of knowledge that can be shared directly between mission commanders. Doing so will create a more flexible and effective force. However, in order to be effective partners, the Army must still maintain its lethality as the most highly trained and professional land force in the world by maintaining skills and conducting challenging training. RAF units need to be more than partners; they need to lead by example by upholding the highest degree of professionalism in both action and ability to teach others to defend their countries.

Notes

¹ CJTF-HOA Vision Statement.

² Task Force 2-16 mission statement key tasks.

³ Interview with TF 2-16 C-IED Cell OIC.

⁴ Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG) Report, June 2014, 13.

⁵ Interview with the CJTF-HOA civil-military operations officer.

⁶ AWG Report, 28.

At the time this article was written, **CPT Renee Sanjuan** was serving as commander of Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division. The battalion completed a nine-month deployment to East Africa where it served under the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa.