
SECURITY ASSISTANCE PERSPECTIVES

Security Assistance in Operation Desert Storm

By

Lieutenant Colonel Terry E. Rutledge, USA

Events during the 2 August 1990—17 March 1991 period taught us in the security assistance community a lot about our business. Those are the respective dates, when USLOK (U.S. Liaison Office, Kuwait) was detained due to the Iraqi invasion and when it was reopened after the liberation. During this period, a coalition of forces from thirty-eight countries formed, trained, and fought together. The U.S. delivered 24 F-15 aircraft, 220 M-60A3 tanks, hundreds of tracked and wheeled vehicles, and thousands of bombs and missiles, and much, much more through FMS cases.

We found that while security assistance can function during a crisis, development of new procedures and a few policy changes could make the process a lot smoother. Security assistance made many contributions to the success of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM [See Sidebar], but this article will primarily discuss some of the key security assistance events that occurred in USCENTCOM during the period and offer some suggestions for making the system a little more manageable in wartime. But first, a little background to provide the setting.

BACKGROUND

USCENTCOM has an eighteen country Area of Responsibility (AOR) spanning the major oil fields and tanker routes of the Middle East. It stretches from Kenya across the Horn of Africa to Pakistan and Afghanistan. All of the peninsular Arab states are included, as are Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and Sudan. On 2 August, we had SAOs in thirteen of these countries: Kenya, Somalia, Djibouti, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, UAE, Bahrain and Pakistan.

Almost since its inception, USCENTCOM has realized the importance of security assistance. With our sole military presence in the AOR in the form of MIDEASTFOR in Bahrain, the only way to establish any kind of military-to-military relationship has been through the Security Assistance Organizations (SAOs) and an active military exercise program. These, then, have been the "three pillars" of the USCENTCOM peacetime strategy: solid security assistance programs to develop the relationship and equip potential allies; an aggressive exercise program to enhance that relationship and develop some operational interoperability; and, finally, as much permanent presence beyond that of the SAO as could be generated.

The headquarters' security assistance functions, like those of all unified commands, were primarily aimed at the care and feeding of the SAOs and keeping the CINC and the rest of the staff informed of what was going on in terms of requests and deliveries.

OPERATION DESERT SHIELD

Almost immediately after the Iraqi invasion, DESERT SHIELD began to bring to light factors which our plans hadn't addressed. The major cause of our problems was the nearly universal

perception that security assistance is a peacetime program. The SAOs in our allies' countries remained in place throughout the operation to help support the total coalition effort and we foresee this to remain the norm in future operations as well.

Immediately after the invasion, we found ourselves in what could have turned into a chemical environment with no protective equipment for the SAOs. However, peacetime equipment authorization doesn't require everyone to have chemical defense equipment (CDE), weapons, and field gear. The problem of providing CDE was solved fairly quickly by using the USCENTCOM Headquarters Commandant's stocks at MacDill AFB, and shipping by a combination of MAC airlift and commercial carriers. The problem, and our solution, brought to light the need to plan ahead. We either need to put more equipment into the SAOs which would require changing authorization documents, or maintain it at a central point in CONUS. If equipment is kept in the SAO, amounts would need to change with personnel. Therefore, maintaining equipment in CONUS is probably better from the point of view of inventory management, but transportation becomes a problem.

Transporting equipment for deploying U.S. units that needed all the same equipment as the SAOs took precedence over the SAO's transportation requirements. By the end of DESERT STORM, we still had people in the SAOs with incomplete field gear.

The second situation that confronted us was that the small SAOs in the Gulf didn't have enough people to cope with the enormous increase in their workloads. We were able to provide augmentees temporarily from other SAOs within the AOR, but not enough to accommodate all requirements. Eventually we received personnel from the Services to help out in six of our countries.

In the USCENTCOM AOR, the SAO Chiefs are, with one exception (Bahrain), the U.S. Defense Representatives (USDR). The USDR aspect of the SAO's job increased dramatically with the deployment of U.S. forces and the need to coordinate their beddown. A major issue faced by the SAO Chiefs in this regard was that of contracting the diverse support the incoming units needed. Of course, our initial augmentees had little, if any, contracting experience.

A lesson well learned from this is to plan for SAOs to support deploying units and their need for augmentation. When planning for and selecting augmentees, requirements should include contracting personnel.

Security Assistance Contributions

Security assistance proved critical to the success of USCENTCOM's coalition warfare strategy throughout operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Military equipment sales enabled regional countries to contribute to their own defense: notable examples are Saudi F-15s, Egyptian M-60 tanks and Kuwaiti A-4s. In fact, we had a security assistance relationship with all but two of our thirty-odd coalition allies.

More important for U.S. interests was our ability to deploy into the region, rapidly achieve operational status and carry out combined operations. Interoperability, achieved through common weapon and support systems, facilities, and training provided by security assistance programs, provided us this ability during Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

System sales have provided a base level of in-place support equipment, spares and munitions. Construction programs provided facilities designed and built to U.S. standards which supported U.S.-origin equipment. Training in the U.S. and in-country created military organizations influenced by exposure to American values, doctrine and procedures.

To reiterate, security assistance is an important part of the theater strategy of U.S. Central Command. Desert Storm has proven to many that security assistance does, in fact, represent an effective and important tool in our arsenal.

While the need for equipment and the requirement to support deploying units were becoming apparent, the security assistance workload was increasing rapidly. Suddenly, everyone seemed to want everything. In addition to major systems, our coalition partners needed uniforms, chemical defense equipment, radios, spare parts, night vision goggles, anchor chain, and support equipment in every shape and size.

At the Unified Command staff level, we immediately found that despite the amount of information we routinely received, we weren't getting all the information we needed to be able to assess the status of deliveries to many of our coalition partners. Part of this delay and incompleteness was because some of the information was passed directly between the MILDEPs and the SAOs, and failed to provide an info copy to the Unified Command. In this regard, we found the FAX to be an instrument that seemed just as good at keeping people in the dark as it is at keeping them informed. Sometimes it was used to minimize message traffic, sometimes to minimize coordination. Beware!

In our AOR we also missed a lot of information because much of the support equipment and supplies were purchased through direct commercial sales. This condition served to keep us guessing as to whether or not our allies were apt to be coming to us for in-country support—something that would have severely taxed logistics support to U.S. forces.

The worldwide security assistance database now under development should give the Unified Command better visibility in the future over this kind of planning information, at least for that portion being delivered via FMS.

SUPPORT TO ALLIES

The deployment of U.S. forces began without a clear policy on transfers of U.S. in-theater stocks to allies. Quickly, however, the general rule of “no transfers” was instituted. This rule was relaxed for special requirements, but the waiver authority remained with the CINC.

Demands on U.S. stocks were minimal, in part because our allies—especially the Saudis—had large stockpiles of munitions and the ability to fund resupply when they ran low. We were also fortunate in that the Saudis agreed to provide support to much of the coalition. If this hadn't been the case, the pressure on our own logistics system would have been much greater.

We have had security assistance relationships for years with nearly every member of the coalition which was arrayed against Iraq. This made their mutual support much easier than might have otherwise been the case.

The concept of mutual support among coalition partners brought up a security assistance policy issue whose solution needs to be institutionalized in some way before the next crisis. Peacetime policy requires a purchaser of U.S. military goods to obtain U.S. permission before transfer to a third party. Under peacetime conditions, this is reasonable. In the midst of a war, however, this is the kind of bureaucratic bump in the road which will be ignored because: (a) it's too difficult; and (b) it doesn't pass the "reasonable man" test.

At USCENTCOM's urging, the State and Defense Departments developed a solution of sorts which involved diplomatic notes to virtually every coalition partner. This process was restricted to expendables and required each nation to guarantee that it would maintain records of what was transferred and to whom and that it would not transfer certain items (Stinger, etc.) to anyone else, or any items to certain countries. Ideally, in the future we'll find a way to provide a blanket waiver with possibly a few non-waivered items. This is an area needing attention early in a crisis if nothing sensible is developed during the interim.

In a related area, the question arose of whether or not security assistance personnel (e.g., TAFTS) may legally perform advisory duties in a combat zone when the force they've been training is a coalition ally of the U.S. The decision was that since U.S. forces were committed to the coalition, trainers/advisors were allowed to continue to perform their functions in furtherance of U.S. objectives. This area, too, could use some policy guidance before the next crisis to ensure we know exactly where we stand.

An additional question regarding support to allies developed early on: did we want security assistance materiel for other coalition partners to be delivered directly into the Arabian Peninsula? We elected not to do so. Each country was required to work its security assistance actions in the normal manner with deliveries to their respective territories and follow-on transportation to the theater through whatever resupply channels they had established. To do otherwise would have created more transportation problems and could possibly have necessitated the deployment of SAO personnel from other Unified Commands each with his own communications requirements into an already crowded theater. Under some circumstances this might be preferable, but not in DESERT SHIELD.

An area we are still researching is how accurately security assistance requirements had been forecast in advance of the Iraqi invasion. A quick review of the data indicates that when countries go to war, the need for mundane military goods like trucks suddenly becomes much more clear and urgent. We'll provide the results of our analysis of the AIASA, Javits Report, and MESARS (Minimum Essential Security Assistance Requirements) as forecasting tools after we complete our study.

DISTRACTERS

Although most of the world's attention seemed to be focused on the Gulf during these eight months, there was considerable other security assistance-related activity in the remainder of our AOR. The command's Security Assistance Division thus found itself juggling three separate balls: support to coalition combat operations; other war-related activities; and the more-or-less routine security assistance management actions. From November 1990 through January 1991 we conducted an orderly closedown of OMC Khartoum, Sudan—something, we discovered, no one else had ever done (see Spring 1991, *The DISAM Journal*). We then very quickly suspended operations in OMC Sanaa—a result of Yemen's votes regarding actions against Iraq in the UN Security Council.

OMC Mogadishu, Somalia, had to be evacuated on 5-6 January along with the rest of the embassy by Marines diverted from the Gulf. KUSLO (Kenya-U.S. Liaison Office) had been heavily involved in planning the evacuation, but conditions in Somalia deteriorated too rapidly to allow the plan to be carried out. Manning in the SAOs in Jordan and Pakistan was also significantly reduced in January and February.

Then, of course, there were all the routine actions that refused to go away: planning the Security Assistance Conference; making recommendations on FMF funding; submitting inputs to the Javits Report; managing the T-10 and T-20 funds; and on, and on. Apparently, even major regional wars are not even enough to stop the bureaucratic wheels from turning!

Certainly, there were a number of small problems—management opportunities—for the security assistance community resulting from the first real test of its ability to go to war. In USCENTCOM, we think things went well. We also think security assistance was a major contributor to the success of the coalition effort. A lot of people in a lot of places made it happen. Thanks for the help.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LTC Rutledge is currently Chief, Security Assistance Plans, Policy and Training Branch at USCENTCOM. A Middle East Foreign Area Officer, he has had a previous security assistance tour in the Plans Directorate at DSAA. He has an MA in National Security Affairs from the Navy Postgraduate School and an MBA from Mount St. Mary's College.