



SPECIAL OPERATIONS IMPERATIVES UTILITY IN UNITED NATIONS SECURITY OPERATIONS

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+ INTRODUCTION

Two years after I retired from active military service in 1997, the UN offered me a post as Chief Security Officer for their fledgling peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone, West Africa. I was at that time serving as Policy Advisor to the Bosnian Ministry of Defense in Sarajevo. Africa sounded interesting. I was about to embark on a multi-country and multi-continent roller-coaster ride that would last over a dozen years, while stretching me - personally and professionally - in ways I never before imagined. As you will see, in the conduct of UN security operations, understanding the Special Operations Imperatives played a surprisingly significant role in guiding my decisions and actions.

+ PROVIDE SUFFICIENT INTELLIGENCE AND BALANCE SECURITY AND SYNCHRONIZATION

It was not altogether a surprise to the UN security community in Sierra Leone that the drug-crazed and brutal Revolutionary

United Front (RUF) would likely invade Freetown in 2000. I had spent weeks in the bush assessing the dangers and was therefore aware of their intentions. The only matter in question was the timing. My office subsequently provided sufficient intelligence. The problem in this case rested with senior UN mission management that declined to believe that assessment. They apparently preferred to believe that the RUF's signature on a peace accord signed in Lome, Togo earlier was more credible. So, when the invasion occurred in the month of May 2000, the Mission was not well prepared. Fortunately, with the assistance of an able Team of multi-national security officers - mostly former soldiers and police officers - we conducted a messy but ultimately successful fixed and rotary-wing emergency evacuation of over 200 UN civil staff from Freetown with no loss of life.

Thankfully, the British unexpectedly mounted a military intervention consisting of both Paras and SAS that stopped the

RUF in-their-tracks before they could do more damage. In building the air bridge in support of the evacuation we had to balance security with synchronization. We had to move the civilian staff members of the peacekeeping mission from our HQ at the Mammy Yoko Hotel helipad to Lungi International Airport on the opposite side of the Freetown Bay and ahead of the RUF's advancing troops. We used UN M-26s to accomplish this feat. We then cross-loaded those staff members into UN IL-76 cargo aircraft out of Brindisi, Italy for the next leg to Banjul, The Gambia, and safety. My Team subsequently assisted in the recovery of over 500 Zambian prisoner-detainees of the RUF via Monrovia, Liberia during the reign of the convicted war criminal Charles Taylor.

+ ENSURE LEGITIMACY AND CREDIBILITY

I was later transferred to Yemen to serve as the UN Field Security Officer in support of eight UN agencies, funds and programs.

Other than the Regional Security Officer (RSO) at the US Embassy, I was the only international professional security officer serving in Yemen at that time. Not long after arriving in Sana'a, the USS Cole bombing in Aden tragically took the lives of seventeen American sailors, which was followed the next day by another bombing at the UK Embassy in that nation's capital city.

Through having assisted Scotland Yard in the aftermath of their embassy's bombing; consulted successfully on several tribal kidnappings that had taken internationals captive; and established for the first time a formal multi-national security coordinating body in Sana'a, I attempted to ensure the legitimacy and credibility of my office. It seems to have worked. The UN often received requests for my Team's services from various embassies as well as UN agencies. I additionally conducted missions to Ethiopia, Eritrea and Oman, investigated subsequent bombings and often worked in support of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to mitigate violence in a Somali refugee camp in Yemen's remote and desolate southern desert region.

+ UNDERSTAND THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

In April of 2003 I accepted the post of UN Chief of Security for Iraq. US forces had successfully invaded that country in March. We conducted our re-entry into Iraq in early May via road movement across the Iraqi desert from Amman, Jordan. Our Baghdad headquarters was located in the Canal Hotel. I and others had warned senior UN management against returning to Baghdad at that time. Many of us knew that we might become a target. The UN-Iraq Security Team recognized the security implications because we understood the operational environment.

I was promoted in July. There was no time for celebration. The pace of work was unrelenting and merciless for the undermanned and under-funded UN security shop. Based on decisions made in New

York, hundreds of UN staff members subsequently entered Iraq with little understanding of the possible dangers. Physical security improvements at our HQ would take many months to implement. We were extraordinarily vulnerable. I lost 20 pounds in my first two months in Baghdad - some due to food poisoning - and was suffering from chronic fatigue due to lack of sleep.

Despite multiple warnings, the UN was ill prepared for the Al Qaeda vehicular suicide attack that resulted in the tragic deaths of 22 with over 150 wounded on 19 August. FBI estimates suggested that the bombers used as much as 1,000 kilos of explosive material. I was very fortunate to have been in my office on the backside of the building - away from the worst of it - at the time of the attack.

I immediately went to work with the Security Team - designating the triage area, establishing search parties to look for wounded, standing-up an Alternate Operations Center and coordinating with Coalition Forces for life-support

assistance as well as engineer support to search through the tons of rubble for possible survivors. The US Army medical community saved many lives that day. There is of course a great deal more to the Iraq story, but this is not the place for it.

+ CONSIDER LONG TERM EFFECTS AND ANTICIPATE AND CONTROL PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

I was subsequently posted as UN Security Advisor in Egypt, where my office spent 4 years investigating suicide bombings and advising heads of UN agencies on a broad array of security related matters in the development and humanitarian arenas. Egypt under Mubarak required both discretion and significant diplomatic skills. Nothing we did in the UN security community in Cairo went unnoticed. We always had to consider long term effects. A negative governmental response to our security initiatives could have had adverse impact on multiple UN agencies. In some ways, our attempts to anticipate and control psychological effects had



UN HQ in Baghdad after the Vehicular Suicide Bombing - 19 August 2003

much more in common with what most practitioners might understand to be public affairs concerns. The UN has a very public face. In a sense, we needed to not only protect the lives of those in our charge, but to protect the image of the UN as well.

+ DEVELOP MULTIPLE OPTIONS

In 2008 I applied for and was hired-on as Head of Safety and Security for the UN Relief and Works Agency in support of Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA). My home base was located in Amman, Jordan, but I was responsible for advising on organizational security matters in the sub-region of Israel/Palestine, Gaza, West Bank, Syria, Lebanon as well as Jordan. I travelled extensively in my area of responsibility. In the wake of the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip called “Operation Cast Lead” I deployed to Gaza City via Jerusalem and advised on operational security matters while writing the UN Post-conflict Security and Operations Plans. There is no need to belabour the political and military complexity inherent in any discussion of this region of the Middle East. In conversations with the humanitarians supported by my office, I often stressed the need to develop multiple options, in particular, those security protocols relating to internal re-location, external evacuation and static defense.

+ RECOGNIZE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FACILITATE INTERAGENCY ACTIVITIES

In 2010 I was much surprised and pleased to be promoted and selected from a pool of over 1,000 applicants for the senior management post of Chief of the Middle East and North Africa within the UN Department of Safety and Security at UNHQ-New York. The fact that I had been trained as Middle East Foreign Area Specialist while on active duty, which included a master's degree in international affairs, no doubt had much to do with the selection.

My pleasure was short-lived after arriving in Manhattan, though, with the advent of the “Arab Awakening”. We immediately saw the danger. Unfolding political unrest in Tunisia would likely spark more of the same in the remainder of the Arab World. Subsequently, my absolutely superb Team of experienced multi-national security officers and support personnel conducted – 24/7 – more successful emergency operations in a shorter duration than at any other time in UN history. Since the UN Department of Safety and Security at that time did not have a true Crisis Coordination Center, my staff and I maintained contact with our Field elements from our New York City apartments in the late evening and early morning hours due to the time difference

between the Middle East and Manhattan. At my wife's not-so-gentle insistence, I eventually moved “operations” from our bed to the couch in our living room, so she at least could get a full night's sleep away from the often nagging cell phone on my night stand.

Essentially, we facilitated the UN evacuations of Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Syria, Yemen and more utilizing a mix of commercial, contract and UN aircraft. The departure of the UN from any country where this organization has had a long term presence has recognized political implications. These political implications made for some very tough decisions in New York. We were subsequently challenged in our attempts to anticipate and then subsequently support the activities of Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA) Humanitarian Coordinator as well as the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy on multiple high-risk air and road missions into Tripoli and elsewhere in Libya at the height of the NATO bombing campaign. We also helped to facilitate multiple ship-borne evacuations of many thousands of endangered foreign workers out of the Libyan port city of Misrata through our direct support to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

At one point, and during the conflict, I



Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone - April 2000



The UN Helipad in Freetown just prior to evacuation - April 2000



The Author with UN Aircraft in Kuwait - March 2011

flew from HQ in New York to Cairo, Egypt; then from Cairo to Benghazi, Libya; and finally from Benghazi to Zarsis, Tunisia in order to meet with the senior representatives of the many involved agencies, funds and programs in an attempt to better coordinate and facilitate interagency activities of both the political and humanitarian sides of the UN on the security front – no easy task. As the fighting ended in Libya, and of necessity, we accelerated operational support to Syria. There was to be no rest for the weary. From the time of my arrival at UNHQ, my other missions included Iraq, Yemen, Algeria, Turkey, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait and more. Other than the assignment in Baghdad, this post was the most demanding and challenging of my UN career.

+ ENSURE LONG TERM SUSTAINMENT AND APPLY CAPABILITIES INDIRECTLY

After 2 years in New York burning-the-candle-at-both-ends, I gratefully accepted the job that I currently occupy as UN Chief Security Advisor (CSA) for the fascinating country of Indonesia. The UN assigns CSAs to the largest and most complex security missions. There are only 26 such positions in the world today. Since my arrival in Jakarta, I conducted missions to Jayapura, Manokwari, Yahukimo and

Wamena in West Papua, where there is a fledgling native insurgency in development; Samarang in Central Java; Banda Aceh and Medan on the Island of Sumatra, as well as the beautiful Island of Bali. More missions are scheduled for Kupang, Makassar on the Island of Sulawesi and Ambon in the near future. Indonesia is a large and complex country.

To ensure long term sustainment, most of my staff members are nationals. They speak the language and know the people far better than my international staff and they are here for the long-haul. Because of religious sensitivities in the world's largest Muslim nation, we have also found that security initiatives often worked best when implemented by national staff members that apply capabilities indirectly.

This last was in fact an imperative that was reinforced several times while serving on UN duty overseas – maintaining a low profile and light foot print, while attempting to create local stake-holders was often preferable to any other alternative. We carry no stick in the UN and sometimes even carrots are in short supply.

+ CONCLUSION

Not being a war fighting organization, and therefore with the singular exception of engage the threat discriminately, the Special

Operations Imperatives played a critically important part in whatever success I might have enjoyed in the conduct of UN security operations in Africa, the Middle East and Asia for more than a decade. They guided me through tough times - hard decisions - and out of some pretty tight spots.

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+ BRIEF BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Bob Adolph - a life member of our association - is a former SF Staff Sergeant (Light Weapons) that retired as a Lieutenant Colonel of Special Forces in 1997. He holds master's degrees in National Security Studies and Strategy and International Affairs and has published over 100 magazine and journal articles, commentaries and book reviews. While in uniform over a 25 year career, he served in Special Operations, Counterintelligence, Counter-terrorism, Military Intelligence, Psychological Operations, Civil Affairs as well as three volunteer UN peacekeeping assignments in Egypt and Israel, Iraq and Kuwait and Cambodia. Bob attended UN-sponsored and UK Scotland Yard conducted Hostage Negotiation Training in 1999. He is scheduled to retire from active UN service at the end of March 2014. Bob can be reached at robert_adolph@yahoo.com. ☒