

Security-Force Assistance Brigade Aids Allies in Theater

by CPT Nathan Sitterley

As a response to the ongoing effort to defend Europe against Russian aggression after it invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Operation Assure, Deter and Reinforce was introduced to bring to the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) theater two armored brigade combat teams (ABCTs), one infantry brigade combat team (IBCT) and one security-force assistance brigade (SFAB) force package comprised of 20 teams.

This article will shed some light on the operational and support framework of an SFAB maneuver-adviser team (MAT) in a theater. It will also highlight specific challenges, opportunities and recommended courses of action for future teams or for those interested in implementing change.

Each SFAB is aligned to a specific U.S. combatant command. For example, our team, Team 3331, was aligned to

U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and scheduled to deploy with Task Force Xyston from Fort Hood, TX, at the beginning of Spring 2022. Then, as part of the request for forces (RFF), our team and two other MATs from 3rd SFAB realigned to 4th SFAB. In addition, Security-Forces Assistance Command was the proponent of this RFF to meet the expedited timeline for having 4th SFAB teams deploy earlier than expected to counter the Russian threat within the conflict stage in the EUCOM theater.

Notified while at NTC

We received word during our National Training Center (NTC) Rotation 22-04 with 2nd ABCT, 1st Infantry Division, that some of the teams would go to support an RFF in EUCOM. Our team was partnered with Troop T (tanks), 5th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, Fort Riley, KS. Our mission at NTC was

tailored to advise in the conflict phase of warfare.

Fortunately, our time there allowed us to test our integrated telecommunication networks in different terrain and weather. The rotation prepared us to be highly expeditionary and to depend on no one for support. Overall, we had a positive relationship and an exceptional outcome from our partner force.

In summary, there were three main takeaways from our NTC rotation:

- You can get tired of being overly advised in a persistent advisory capacity. We overcame this by setting up touchpoints daily to ensure we were all on the same page. These engagements have time limits and will not extend past a prescribed time that our team established based on the threat and the need to be mobile. The commander allowed



our team to be integrated into their plan. In addition, we were to help him and his troop to identify friction points within each phase of the operation by warfighting functions.

- You cannot advise if you do not survive. The troop commander and our team clearly understood our disengagement criteria and a retrograde position. The “host-nation force,” which in this case was 5-4 Cavalry, was supposed to provide security and sustainment for our team throughout the operation. If they did not meet those two criteria, our team would fall back to episodic or over-the-horizon advising.
- The final point we took away from Troop T, 5-4 Cavalry, mirrored many of our counterparts in Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina. We learned that not all subordinate leaders can act on disciplined initiative. This can come from a myriad of reasons. First, it may come down to higher-echelon commanders lacking trust in subordinate commanders due to experience. Second, a general observation is that some commanders or subordinates are not aligned with specific political parties or ethnic groups. We understand this was not the case for the 5-4 Cavalry. However, commanders at higher echelon must view options from all sides before conducting offense, defense, reconnaissance or security operations. The high levels of inaction during this rotation frustrated the troop commander and our team.

We were expected to deploy within two weeks after our orders arrived. Consequently, the team leader was still signing over the troop’s property to our home-station mission-command element at Fort Hood, TX, pushing the rest of the force package out to the CENTCOM theater and preparing to push our team to the EUCOM theater. Also, our team was responsible for shipping containers forward to both theaters of operations, including sensitive items and hazardous materials. Without the support of the 3rd and 4th SFAB brigade staff and the forward-support element positioned in EUCOM, we could not have accomplished these tasks.

Our MAT was aligned with 282nd Armored Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, of the Romanian Land Forces (RoLF). Our main objective for our mission was to continue to build a strategic partnership by fostering a persistent presence with the RoLF and to assess their interoperability with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies. The term “assessment” to the RoLF seems a bit taboo. Also, it gives a perception that “we are better than you.” We avoided this terminology and used “observation notes” and “reporting criteria” instead.

The defense attaché and the Office of Defense of Cooperation (ODC) at the U.S. Embassy in Romania became significant assets for our team. We were able to brief them on specific tasks we were working and the feasible objectives that meshed with the Country Campaign Plan Fiscal Year 2023. RoLF then allowed our team to begin gathering assessments throughout the host nation’s 282nd Armored Brigade, which was spread throughout the southern portion of Romania.

Based on guidance from V Corps, we set conditions and had four broad lines of effort (LoEs) to accomplish our mission to *assure, deter and reinforce*.

LoEs

LoE 1: Setting the theater. “Setting the theater” means understanding how the sustainment piece works in theater. We had multiple advisers go to the Mihail Kogalniceanu Airbase to establish and network with various agencies to develop a relationship and plan for extending our operational reach in Romania. We also gained access to multiple installations and gathered site-survey assessments to hand off to the division liaison officer from 101st Airborne Division.

LoE 2: Present combat-capable forces. We accomplished this through liaising and partnering with 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 2nd IBCT, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), and with RoLF’s 282nd Armored Brigade. We provided them with multinational training opportunities (Operation Zimbrul 22 at the Smardan Training Area and Justice Sword 22 at the Cincu Training Area), housing within the brigade’s installation, and key-leader information and contacts within RoLF.

Also, our team hosted a short-range training calendar sync and working group between the Smardan Training Area staff and the S-3s of all the battalions from 2nd IBCT, 101st Airborne Division. This was essential to facilitate training between U.S. and Romanian forces because the outcome of this synchronization can help shape how (procedurally) we can align the interoperability piece between two different countries within a short-allotted time and without an extensive training area.

LoE 3: Transform the force. We had a chance to work with the foreign-military sales team in ODC. The ODC requested we conduct a site survey and a doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities and policy assessment of 284th Armored Battalion within 282nd Armored Brigade. The main question from ODC was “When will the brigade and battalion be ready to receive the new tanks?” We were able to answer this question and accomplish this task within two weeks. Our information helps drive the discussion between U.S. stakeholders and the Romanian parliament’s potential authorization of fielding the M1 Abrams Version R main battle tank between 2023 and 2026.

LoE 4: Increase capability and interoperability of allies and partners. We tailored this effort to enhance the brigade’s medical platoon. Our medical adviser, SSG Frank McIntosh, supported and advised several tactical combat-casualty-care classes and helped create a battalion’s standing operating procedures for large-scale combat operations (LSCO) rather than the battalion’s previous counterinsurgency (COIN) focus. In addition, McIntosh gathered essential information that can potentially affect Soldiers’ healthcare within RoLF and liaised that information higher.

We also took time to understand the communications architecture within the unit and gather three facts:

- Sharing digital reports and data, especially on a system with intranet-only capabilities, is generally non-existent between conventional RoLF and their U.S. allies.
- Our team’s tactical-communications

equipment will work with the RoLF Harris radios and other models if it is connected with a tactical voice bridge.

- Many tactical routers and auxiliary equipment needed to send and receive digital reports are discontinued or do not have repair parts. RoLF is looking to modernize its communication measures to ensure all units at each echelon have the same type of radios to have interoperability in both the technical and procedural domains.

The challenge that comes with identifying friction points is getting to the truth. No allied force wants to admit they need help or that it struggles with certain warfighting functions. Our team was fortunate enough to gain trust from within the brigade before acquiring all the information and coordinating instructions.

Another opportunity

As we were preparing to redeploy, we had another deployment opportunity to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The main task of our mission was to serve alongside the NATO monitoring and evaluation team as observers. As observers, we were to gather information on how a NATO Evaluation Level II was conducted and share any captivating information and potential partnership opportunities for the Armed Forces of BiH Light-Infantry Battle-group (AFBiH LiBG).

Working alongside ODC and the defense attaché in BiH, we entered BiH with six advisers. We left three other advisers with RoLF to facilitate a persistent presence with 282nd Armored Brigade and 1-26th Infantry, 2nd BCT, 101st Airborne Division. In addition, we embedded our team with the on-the-ground evaluators and the LiBG battalion staff from BiH. We did this so we could observe where the major incidences will occur based on the main-events list/main-incidents list agreed to by NATO and the AFBiH exercise-design team.

We observed the integration of mechanized vehicles with a light-infantry company, tactical-operations-center operations, multiple actions on contact, a deliberate offense and several COIN-centric tactics, techniques and

procedures. We also focused our observations on the lack of equipment and capabilities. What the AFBiH LiBG does not have in equipment, it makes up for by being present, eager and committed to the cause. Therefore we assessed that our future partnership between AFBiH and the SFAB could blossom into a more persistent presence alongside the Maryland National Guard State Partnership Program.

At the culmination of the exercise, we discussed with the EUCOM security-office personnel as they tried to understand how to replicate another exercise like Operation Combined Endeavor and improve the execution of field training.

Recommendations

We also described three specific ways to improve a NATO combat-readiness evaluation exercise:

- **One:** Use simulation equipment and training aids to add realism to the training. For example, the lack of blank ammunition and the Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System to elicit both auditory and visual cues will deny the Soldiers the ability to have a potential fight-or-flight response.
- **Two:** Move the scenario from COIN operations to LSCO. As the LiBG becomes a NATO ally, it will need to augment a force larger than its own. We want to observe how AFBiH LiBG integrates with those they will work with.
- **Three:** Have observers and controllers throughout the entirety of the operation. Our MAT was one of the only entities present throughout the NATO Evaluation Level II field-exercise portion. We were not intrusive but rather were observant. We positioned ourselves to find things that will affect the human domain regarding interoperability within AFBiH. We gathered some startling observations. The observation was sent up to ODC and the defense attaché to explain the degree of severity when it comes to multiple ethnic groups working within the same company and area of operations. This was a big priority-intelligence requirement for us.

Opportunities occurred from this

experience. For example, our team conducted a cultural-exchange day with the NATO evaluation and monitoring team within the small town of Jajce. Jajce was one of the decisive terrains used as a defensive position during the Bosnian War in 1992. The evaluation director in the NATO team was one of a few commanders who defended his battalion against the Army of Republika Srpska in October 1992.

Overall, the AFBiH seems eager to partner with the SFAB. Our expertise can be tailored to specific units, and 4th SFAB is flexible with travel arrangements. Our team had autonomy, and it ensured mission success by stating specific requests for information and highlighting critical points of contact within the region.

Our team experienced firsthand what it was like to be given an expedited mission and to be ready to deploy within two weeks. Working with a specific country's ODC and the defense attaché, we were able to conduct a far-side linkup specifically on advising, liaising, supporting and assessing operations. In a few short months, we could support new-equipment-fielding and training tailored into a partnered or allied nation's training glidepath. Our signal advisers can assess the host-nation force's actual levels of interoperability with technical and procedural objectives.

Lastly, our team leader and operations noncommissioned officer can advise a battalion staff on how to integrate what they previously learned from COIN into LSCO within the multidomain battlefield.

In summary, the SFAB team brings more to the table in a smaller package. It can strategically impact a partner or allied nation's armed forces. The SFAB team is the tool to enhance combat readiness, improve interoperability, build sustainable processes and increase lethality.

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Schofield Barracks, HI. CPT Sitterley's military education includes Maneuver Captain's Career Course, Cavalry Leader's Course, Army Reconnaissance Course, Maneuver Leader's Maintenance Course, Common Faculty Developmental Program Instructor Course, ABOLC, Airborne School and Pathfinder Course. He holds a bachelor's of science degree in marketing from Salisbury University. CPT Sitterley's awards and honors include the Meritorious Service Medal and the Order of Saint George Bronze Medallion.

ACRONYM QUICK-SCAN

- ABCT** – armored brigade combat team
- ABOLC** – Armor Basic Officer Leader Course
- AFBiH LiBG** – Armed Forces of Bosnia and the Herzegovina Light-Infantry Battlegroup
- BCT** – brigade combat team
- BiH** – Bosnia and Herzegovina
- CENTCOM** – U.S. Central Command
- COIN** – counterinsurgency
- EUCOM** – U.S. European Command
- IBCT** – infantry brigade combat team
- LoE** – line of effort
- LSCO** – large-scale combat operations
- MAT** – maneuver-adviser team
- MCoE** – Maneuver Center of Excellence
- NATO** – North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- NTC** – National Training Center
- ODC** – Office of Defense Cooperation
- RFF** – request for forces
- RoLF** – Romanian Land Forces
- SBCT** – Stryker brigade combat team
- SFAB** – security-force assistance brigade

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