

Interoperability with Egyptian Forces

LIEUTENANT COLONEL WOLF D. KUTTER

MAJOR GLENN M. HARNED

In the NATO community, much progress has been made in the area of interoperability, or the ability of two armies to operate together on the modern battlefield. From the development of Standard NATO Agreements (STANAGs) to face-to-face coordination between partnership units at battalion level and below, procedures are largely in place to overcome national differences in organization, equipment, and doctrine. To a lesser degree, the same can be said of the interoperability procedures between United States and Republic of Korea (ROK) forces.

In the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area, however, there is no established interoperability doctrine. As a result, the lessons learned in past exercises have been largely lost to all but those who originally learned them. When the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) deployed Task Force Desert Eagle (of which we were a part) to Egypt in August 1983 to participate in Exercise BRIGHT STAR 83, a major objective of the task force was to develop and document procedures for interoperability with the Egyptian armed forces.

Over the course of a three-week period that included extensive counterpart training and a four-day combined FTX, members of the task force developed rewarding relationships with elements of an Egyptian Army airborne brigade and with an Egyptian Air Force helicopter squadron. The foundation for these

relationships was made up of four tenets:

- **Partnership.** We treated each other as professional equals. The Egyptians shared their desert expertise with us, we shared U.S. technology with them. And we mutually shared doctrine, tactics, and techniques.

- **Honesty.** Discussions between counterparts were open, frank, and honest. Within the bounds of hospitality and courtesy, nothing was held back.

- **Cooperation.** Problems and differences were resolved jointly to achieve mutual satisfaction. Because both parties had a sincere interest in cooperating to make the exercise a success, each was willing to compromise and to make concessions when necessary.

- **Hospitality.** Hospitality and reciprocity of gifts, including public praise, were found to be vital to success in the Middle East.

All of this is not to say that combined operations were easy. Significant differences exist between the military systems of the United States and Egypt. These differences often caused frustration and less than the best performance by both forces, usually because somebody had made an inaccurate assumption about how his counterpart would act in a given situation. We found several major differences during our visit, but we also found ways of working around most of them. We hope that our observations here concerning these dif-

ferences will be of help to others who may deploy to Egypt in the future.

The Egyptians follow the Soviet doctrine of centralized decision making and are quite bureaucratic in their hierarchy. Rarely is a major decision made below brigade level, and staff decisions routinely require general officer approval before they can be acted upon. Highly structured operations schedules "drive the train"; even battalion commanders cannot modify them without the approval of higher headquarters. And once briefed to a higher Egyptian authority, a decision or an agreement is difficult to change.

Conversely, daily meetings are conducted to confirm the details of the next day's activities. Within an operations schedule, a battalion commander can decide how he will accomplish his mission. Such details, though, as uniform and equipment, reporting times and locations, movement times and routes are rarely pinned down until this meeting the day before the event, and there is no guarantee that subordinates will be informed of the decisions their superiors make at this meeting. If the operations schedule must be changed, or if some other decision is made that is outside the authority of the battalion commander, then the battalion commander must arrange a meeting with his brigade commander to secure his approval.

A similar process must be followed when dealing with an Egyptian staff. After an initial introductory meeting

with all parties present, there is a working session for action officers. Once the action officers reach some tentative agreements, several meetings are then held to secure approval of the plan. The senior Egyptian officer at each of these meetings approves those portions of the plan over which he has authority and then defers the remainder to his superior. The culmination of all this is a final meeting in which overall approval is given by an Egyptian general officer. This time-consuming process can be very frustrating for the U.S. officer who is accustomed to decentralized decision making with backbriefs to his superiors on how the operation will be conducted.

Americans also tend to be continually frustrated by the Egyptians' cultural time orientation, and Egyptians by the Americans' apparent obsession with punctuality. In the Middle East there is no cultural impetus to be on time. Egyptians may say they will arrive for a meeting "from nine o'clock" (meaning don't expect them before nine, but anytime thereafter) or they may say "between two and three o'clock." Exact times are not expected, or even important to them, and if something more pressing arises, they will simply not attend. But this difference should be expected and accepted as a cultural difference; it should not be taken as a personal affront.

When it comes to certain matters, however — matters such as air mission briefs, operations order briefs, and line of departure times, among others — every effort must be made to reinforce the idea that the appointed time must be met. It is also important for the Americans involved to be on time. For some reason, the Egyptians' tolerance for tardiness in themselves and others is not always extended to Americans. Perhaps this is because of our insistence on punctuality.

The Egyptians' small-unit light infantry tactics do not differ radically from our own. Their platoon and squad battle drill is similar to that in our own doctrine before we intro-

duced overwatch. In our exercise, we cross-attached U.S. and Egyptian rifle platoons with only minor difficulties. Although this degree of cross-attachment proved to be an excellent way of developing interoperability procedures and learning each other's systems, during actual combat it would be cumbersome. (In wartime, cross-attachment should not occur below battalion level.)

MAPS

The Egyptians use Soviet graphics and prefer them to ours in the belief that they are simpler and do not clutter the map and also that they seem to convey a sense of dynamics that is missing from NATO graphics. Normally, the friendly force is depicted in red, the opposing force in blue. For a phased operation, however, the friendly force may be depicted in a different color for each phase. As in the Soviet system, maps are treated as classified intelligence documents and are not widely disseminated. Usually, the Egyptians draw their graphics directly on their maps, even at brigade level. (Acetate is extremely rare in the Egyptian Army and therefore makes a prized gift.)

The FM communication equipment of the U.S. and Egyptian forces will net (they use the AN/PRC77), but radio-telephone procedures and communication-electronics operation instructions (CEOI) are completely alien to each other. The Egyptians use only one FM net at battalion level, call each other by name over the radio, and employ fixed radio frequencies (at least in peacetime). They use AM single side band radios for long-range communications and also extend the range of their AN/PRC77s by laying a doublet antenna on the ground and transmitting.

They have no battalion tactical operations center as we know it. The Egyptian battalion commander is truly his own S-3. With one captain and two radio-telephone operators to assist him, he controls and employs the battalion. The system is effective

for simple operations, but it quickly becomes overloaded and overextended. This weakness, worsened by the centralized decision-making process, would seem to be a distinct liability in a fast-paced war.

The Egyptian training system is completely different from ours, and this fact initially caused some problems during our counterpart training. In the Egyptian Army, as in the Soviet system, the battalion commander is expected to be an expert in every aspect of battalion operations. He trains his officers, who then train the soldiers.

In our exercise, therefore, the Egyptian officers insisted on being trained first by U.S. instructors, so that only they conducted formal training for their soldiers. (The use of the NCO as a trainer was virtually nonexistent.) The result was a three-phased counterpart training program that worked quite well. We used our officers and senior NCOs to train the Egyptian officers, but not before the U.S. officer had demonstrated to the Egyptian battalion commander what would be taught so that he could brief his officers before the formal training began. Once the officers had been trained, time was allotted for the Egyptian officers to teach their soldiers and drill them until they achieved an acceptable level of performance. This system worked best if the time sequencing of the three phases was confirmed at the meeting the day before.

Most of the Egyptian Army's field grade officers we encountered spoke and understood English to varying degrees. Even so, when speaking with Egyptian officers, we could not assume that the message received was the same one that was being transmitted, in either direction. It is best for the receiver in such a conversation to restate the important points in his own words so that the sender can confirm that his message has been understood.

We soon learned that certain English words had meanings to the Egyptians that were different from the usual English connotations. For example, to them "to make coopera-

tion" means "to coordinate." "Demonstration" invariably means there will be VIPs present (brigadier general or higher), with no hands-on training to follow, and that refreshments will be served in a tent erected for officer-observers. "Tactical training" can be "without ammunition," with "false ammunition" (blanks), or with live ammunition.

The Egyptians admired our unit for its vigorous PT program. When we first arrived, our counterparts were concerned that we might not be acclimated to the Egyptian summer. From the first road march, however, our soldiers met or exceeded any standard set by the Egyptians. (We gained a real psychological advantage because of our predeployment physical conditioning in the humid afternoon heat back at Fort Campbell.)

Another cultural difference arose in regard to the 13 female soldiers who deployed to Egypt as part of Task Force Desert Eagle. Given the subservient role of women in Middle Eastern culture, it is not surprising that they created quite a stir. The initial guidance given our advance party

was that U.S. female soldiers, regardless of rank, would not speak to, or even look directly into the eyes of, any Egyptian man; that they would not wear shorts, even in PT formation; and other similar rules. This was clearly unacceptable, and the guidance was quickly revoked. Our Egyptian counterparts apparently had difficulty believing that our female soldiers were not camp followers. But by the end of the exercise — after much discussion and after the Egyptians had participated in night air assaults flown by both male and female Blackhawk pilots — the professional status of our female soldiers was understood (if not accepted as anything more than a cultural difference), at least by the Egyptian officers.

During BRIGHT STAR 83, the development of good will, mutual understanding, and interoperability procedures was just as important to the U.S. Army as the tactics we employed or the techniques our soldiers learned. Our leaders at all levels had to be flexible in their thinking and sensitive to the political and cultural implications of their words and ac-

tions. By all accounts, Task Force Desert Eagle succeeded, both tactically in the desert and politically in both nations. We hope whatever strides we made toward interoperability will help future CENTCOM elements that may deploy to the Middle East for combined operations and training.



Lieutenant Colonel Wolf D. Kutter commands the 4th Battalion, 187th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), which as the 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry, provided the nucleus of Task Force Desert Eagle during BRIGHT STAR 83. He commanded a rifle company in Vietnam and is a graduate of the Armed Forces Staff College.



Major Glenn M. Harned, a 1972 ROTC graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, was S3 of Task Force Desert Eagle during BRIGHT STAR 83. His previous assignments include service with the 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood and the Special Forces Detachment (Airborne), Europe in Germany.

CAPTAIN TAMAS F. DREILINGER

The Battalion Training Management System (BTMS) is designed to simplify the training of every soldier, from individual skills through unit ARTEPs. To accomplish this mission, the system employs a multi-tiered system of teaching, with the immediate supervisor being responsible for the training of his subordinates.

The system is ideal for some units, those in which the senior trainer, at

one time or another, has done the jobs of his subordinates. But while most infantry company first sergeants have been squad leaders and platoon sergeants, few PAC supervisors have ever been chaplain's assistants.

Not long ago, I served for 14 months as commander of a headquarters troop in an air cavalry squadron. During that time, I faced some of the pitfalls of implementing BTMS in

a headquarters outfit. (There were 22 separate MOSs in the troop, many with a density of only one or two.) The very nature of a headquarters complicates the challenge, because the desires of the company commander and the first sergeant must be balanced with the operational needs of the various staff agencies as they implement the battalion commander's guidance.