

**THE TRANS-SAHARA
COUNTERTERRORISM
PARTNERSHIP: STRATEGY AND
INSTITUTIONAL FRICTION**

BY

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The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) is the primary vehicle of U.S. counterterrorism policy in North Africa. Established in 2005, the TSCTP is a multiyear, multiagency effort to support diplomacy, development, and military activities aimed at inhibiting the spread of extremist ideology in nine countries. Led by the Department of State's Africa Bureau, key participating agencies include the Department of State (DOS), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Department of Defense (DoD). A 2008 GAO report noted that a weakness of the TSCTP was that it lacked a comprehensive, integrated strategy. The paper examines the threat, the evolution of strategy from 2002 to 2010, and the institutional friction that developed during implementation. Five conclusions are gleaned from TSCTP that apply to Irregular Warfare when an embassy is used as a platform during a whole-of-government effort.

THE TRANS-SAHARA COUNTERTERRORISM PARTNERSHIP: STRATEGY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRICTION

Everything in strategy is very simple, but that does not mean that everything is very easy.¹

—Carl von Clausewitz

While bestselling authors capture the U.S. struggle to formulate strategy to combat insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan, little has been written about the smaller theaters in “the global war on terror.” One particular region that has not received much attention is the U.S. program to combat terrorism in the Sahara region of North Africa. The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) is the vehicle of U.S. counterterrorism policy in West Africa and the Maghreb. The TSCTP finds its roots in the less ambitious Pan-Sahel Security Initiative (PSI), which was initiated in 2002 to enhance the counterterrorism capacity of the militaries of Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.² By 2005, the TSCTP grew to a multi-year, multi-agency effort to support diplomacy, development, and military activities to combat the spread of Islamic extremism in nine countries: Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Senegal and Nigeria (Burkina Faso was added in 2009).³ Led by the Department of State’s Africa Bureau, key participating agencies include the Department of State (DOS), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Department of Defense (DoD).

An examination of the TSCTP reveals five insights that apply to Irregular Warfare when an embassy is used as a platform during a “whole-of-government effort.”⁴ First, the TSCTP reveals the difficulty of creating and implementing a national security strategy in an interagency environment below the level of the Deputy’s Committee. This

is complicated by a lack of common agreement on the nature of the threat, something that can be addressed through operational design.⁵ Second, the TSCTP provides a framework for viewing the difficulty of coordinating a synchronized regional security strategy at the national level in an interagency environment. As late as July 2008, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) noted the TSCTP lacked “a comprehensive, integrated strategy.”⁶ The evolution of the TSCTP strategy reveals that the whole-of-government approach grew from the bottom up from the region rather than the top down. Finally, a review of the TSCTP highlights the difficulties of implementing a whole-of-government strategy in an interagency environment at the country level. When conducting Phase Zero military operations and shaping activities, frictions can arise at the embassy level.⁷ These frictions -- which can relate to capacity deficits, cultural misunderstanding between U.S. organizations, and questions of legal authorities of ambassadors (Chiefs of Mission or COMs) and the Geographic Combatant Commander (GCCs) -- should be anticipated in interagency operations. Understanding the nature of these frictions that occur at the embassy level when implementing a whole-of-government approach may ultimately distinguish a successful Irregular Warfare campaign from a failed one.

Framing the Problem: What is the threat?

The Sahel is a sparsely populated area with porous borders, little central government control of rural areas, and vast distances between population centers in the south and deserts in the north where the terrorists operate.⁸ The principal terrorist group of strategic interest in the region is The Organization of al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). AQIM's predecessor, The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), was designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization on March 27,

2002.⁹ The GSPC officially merged with al-Qa'ida in September 2006, and changed its name to AQIM in January 2007.¹⁰ Despite its adoption of an international brand, the DOS assesses that AQIM is largely a regionally focused group with aspirations of creating an Islamic Caliphate in Algeria.¹¹

At the root level, the GSPC (now AQIM) started in 1998 as an offshoot of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). The GIA was one of the principal belligerents in the Algerian Civil war that began in December 1991. The conflict originated when the Islamic Salvation Front political party gained popularity amongst the Algerian electorate, and the ruling party -- fearing an Islamic political takeover-- cancelled elections after the first round. The GIA led the armed uprising that followed the cancellation of elections. The GSPC originally broke with the GIA over the GIA's slaughter of civilians.¹² Following the ascension of Abdelazize Bouteflika to president of Algeria in 1999 and the granting of an amnesty to the GIA, GSPC membership fell to approximately 600.¹³ Confrontations with Algerian security services resulted in the arrest and killing of key leaders, which caused disarray in the group.¹⁴ Algerian citizens lost tolerance for the GSPC's violent tactics, and the GSPC exhausted the goodwill of rural populations in Algeria that served as their sanctuary.¹⁵ Both to ensure their survival and revitalize their base, the GSPC shifted their ideology from domestic insurgency to global jihad and expanded their area of operations to the Sahel.

AQIM's headquarters, and center of gravity, remains in northeast Algeria, however, they maintain several operational units (called *katibah* in Arabic) in the Sahel.¹⁶ Unable to organize operational cells in Tunisia, Libya and Morocco, AQIM successfully recruited small numbers of fighters from Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.¹⁷ The

group is significantly constrained by poor finances and a lack of broad general appeal to moderate Sufi Muslims in the region.¹⁸ In Algeria, it has not been able to conduct spectacular attacks since it bombed the United Nations building and Algerian government buildings in 2007.¹⁹ In Algeria, AQIM continues to conduct small-scale attacks and ambushes against security forces, and regularly uses improvised explosive devices (IEDs).²⁰ AQIM *kitabahs* in the northern Sahel (Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) primarily conduct kidnap for ransom operations, generally against Westerners, and small-scale attacks on security forces; during 2009, one U.S. citizen was killed in Mauritania and a United Kingdom citizen was killed in Mali.

There are two distinct narratives regarding the threat AQIM poses. One narrative poses the threat in the context of global jihad. “Pressed by Algerian counterterrorism success, the once Algeria-centric GSPC has become a regional terrorist organization, recruiting and operating all throughout the Maghreb – and beyond to Europe itself,” said Hank Crumpton, the U.S. Ambassador for Counterterrorism, during Senate testimony in 2006.²¹ Bruce Riedel, a former CIA counterterrorism official, believes that AQIM has been building capability to carry out attacks in Europe and beyond, and points to arrests of logistical and support personnel in Paris in 2007 and Spain in 2008.²² Evidence also suggests that AQIM funneled significant numbers of North African fighters to Iraq.²³ In terms of identifying the actors, the lines of authority and affiliation blur when attempting to determine whether actors are leftovers from the GIA in early the early 1990s – which numbered in the tens of thousands, former members of the GSPC – which numbered in the thousands, or AQIM – which numbers in mere hundreds.²⁴ A second narrative of

AQIM accounts for this de-evolution from the Algerian Civil War of the 1990s to the present.

This more nuanced narrative discounts AQIM affiliations with al Qa-ida, believes the group is shifting towards more of a criminal organization that uses Islam in a superficial sense, and highlights Algerian geo-strategic interests. “They haven’t done anything spectacular,” said Hugh Roberts, the former head of International Crisis Group’s North Africa Project. “They have not actually pulled off a spectacular attack in Europe in the eight years they’ve existed...(something) that you have to put in balance against European security services that say the group is a major threat.”²⁵ AQIM’s allegiance to al Qa-ida is a formality of desperation born from the effectiveness of Algerian security services and without practical significance. According to this narrative, actions rather than words portray an organization that is most interested in kidnapping Westerners for profit and trafficking in drugs and other contraband. In a version of a geo-strategic kabuki dance, Algeria is using its intimate knowledge of an organization it has followed for almost 20 years as it morphed from the GIA to the GSPC to AQIM to improve its regional status with Sahel states and to garner the interest (and treasure) of external actors such as the United States and the European Union.²⁶

In reality, the actual threat that AQIM poses probably lies somewhere between the two narratives. Lianne Kennedy-Boudani, currently at Rand and previously at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, synthesizes the two perspectives. She highlights AQIM’s lack of success in recruiting from the Sahel countries and the lack of an influx of foreign fighters returning from Iraq.²⁷ In her view, AQIM is neither a strategic threat to the United States nor is it “on the brink of creating a new African safe-haven for

Usama bin Laden.”²⁸ Nor does it pose a threat to the survival of the Algerian government or to any of its neighbors; and it is “unlikely that AQIM will succeed in unifying other North African groups under its leadership, and without them, it is simply not strong enough to destabilize any North African regimes.”²⁹

In her merging of narratives, Kennedy-Boudani reframes the threat by incorporating a variety of perspectives. First, AQIM’s primary threat is that it can disrupt trade and development in the impoverished region.³⁰ Second, only cooperation between governments in the region and improving the capacity of local security services will prevent the group from growing.³¹ Finally, long-term success requires that Sahel states counter radical ideologies that fuel recruitment and provide alternatives to terrorist and criminal activity to ensure vulnerable populations do not view extremist activity as “either spiritually or economically beneficial.”³² In short, she proposes a whole-of-government approach to combating extremism in the Sahel.

This evolution leads to the first conclusion regarding Irregular Warfare in smaller theaters. A narrative like the global war on terror can narrow the framing of a problem like AQIM to solely a security problem. Other narratives, incorporating local, regional and international perspectives, reveal nuances of the problem and broaden the set of potential solutions. The first conclusion from TSCTP requires U.S. planners to broaden their apertures: In Irregular Warfare all narratives have value and should be incorporated into operational design.

In Search of a Strategy for the Trans-Sahara Region

The 2002 Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) grew out of a U.S. strategic shift originating from the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. The July 2002, U.S. National Security Strategy articulating the global war on terror stated the need “...to

disrupt and destroy terrorist organizations...and attack their leadership” while undermining all support and resources.³³ PSI was implemented during 2003 as a new theater in the global war on terror. The program was quite limited, consisting of \$7.5 million for the U.S. military to train rapid reaction companies in Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger; and \$6.6 million of State Department Anti-Terrorism Assistance funds to train civilian law enforcement.³⁴ In his work *The Accidental Guerilla*, David Kilcullen wrote of insurgents having an “anti-viral” response to foreign intervention.³⁵ International reactions to the initial U.S. security engagement in the Sahel can be characterized as being similar. In 2004, the International Crisis Group went as far as to charge that DoD was creating a threat where none existed.³⁶ Another study from a recognized Finnish think tank stated that in the competition for scarce resources the Department of State identified terrorism problems in the region to attract funds.³⁷ Theresa Whelan, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, called the program a “little bit of a band aid approach.”³⁸

The TSCTP, with a military component designated Operation Enduring Freedom – Trans Sahara (OEF-TS), followed PSI in June 2005.³⁹ Initially named the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative, which became TSCTP in 2007, the program was designed as a DOS-led program merging diplomacy, development and security assistance into a comprehensive policy vehicle against Islamic terrorism in the Sahel. The TSCTP expanded to beyond the original four Sahel countries to the the Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia) and the sub-Saharan African countries of Senegal and Nigeria (Burkina Faso was added in 2009). Funding increased steadily from \$16 million in 2005 to \$30 million in 2006, with incremental increases up to \$100 million per year

through 2011.⁴⁰ In 2005, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) reported that if there was a U.S. strategy in Africa, it was solely military.⁴¹ A review of the TSCTP by the GAO in the summer of 2008 deemed that the policy initiative had a major shortcoming: “No comprehensive, integrated strategy has been developed to guide the program’s implementation.”⁴²

As a new “surge” strategy was being implemented in Iraq, and long before the strategy review on Afghanistan, pressure emerged to reframe the TSCTP. At the time, fissures in the global war on terrorism were appearing. The view of America around the world had plummeted from all time highs following 9/11; and the GSPC – despite pressure from effective Algerian security services – re-designated itself as AQIM and established formal ties to al Qa’ida.⁴³ Attempts to align the strategy horizontally across the region are clearly evident in USEUCOM’s FY-2007 annual report and individual country Strategic Resource Plans.⁴⁴ However, it was not until 2009 that Washington got on board with initiatives from U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM -- the responsible geographic command) and the embassies, and the TSCTP strategy was fully aligned both horizontally and vertically.

At the national level, U.S. policy for Africa was shaped by President Barack Obama’s speech in Ghana in July 2009: “We must start from the simple premise that Africa’s future is up to the Africans.”⁴⁵ Characterizing the relationship as a “strategic partnership,” four lines of effort were articulated: (1) support for strong and stable democratic governments, (2) support for development that provides opportunity for more people, (3) strengthening public health, and (4) support for strengthening security

capacity.⁴⁶ A clear intent of the speech is that the four lines of effort would not be U.S. led, but led by Africans.

During testimony before the Senate Committee of Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Africa in November 2009, the newly appointed Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson said the U.S. would play a supporting role in a regional effort, but avoid “actions that could unintentionally increase local tensions or lend credibility to AQIM’s claims of legitimacy.”⁴⁷ As the lead for the TSCTP, Carson said the partnership has two primary purposes. First, the TSCTP will identify and mobilize resources throughout the interagency to support sustained efforts to address violent extremism in the region. To achieve long-term results, the emphasis will be placed upon key capacity deficits that can be addressed over a period of years through the resources and expertise of DOS, DoD, and USAID.⁴⁸ Because of differing threats, political environments, and resource needs, programs for engagement and assistance under TSCTP would be tailored to fit the priorities of the individual countries.⁴⁹

Second, Carson explained that the TSCTP was designed with the goal of coordinating or synchronizing the interagency effort at three levels. The first level of coordination takes place at the sub-deputy level in Washington.⁵⁰ The second level consists of representatives in Washington and USAFRICOM meeting regularly with embassies in the TSCTP countries.⁵¹ The final level of coordination is at the embassy level. Carson noted that while various assessments and input from throughout the interagency inform decisions regarding TSCTP programming, ambassadors are responsible for implementation: “They are best placed to understand the immediate

and long-term implications of various activities and are ultimately the primary interlocutor with the host countries.”⁵²

During the same hearings before the Africa Subcommittee, Earl Gast, the Assistant Director of USAID, outlined his agency’s contribution to the TSCTP. Emerging forces of violent extremism, he said, threaten development efforts to create good governance and economic opportunity in the region.⁵³ USAID’s TSCTP focus is “...on youth empowerment, education, media and good governance” and tailored to meet the needs of each specific country.⁵⁴ Unlike traditional development programs, counter-extremism efforts target narrow populations that generally are not reached by other programs, specifically, they target young men – the group most likely to be recruited by extremists.⁵⁵

The same day, Vicki Huddleston, the new Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, described the U.S. military’s role as the “third pillar of the ‘3-D’ approach – Diplomacy, Development, and Defense.”⁵⁶ The DoD, through primarily USAFRICOM, supports the overarching U.S. strategy to counter terrorism – specifically AQIM – in the Sahel and North Africa by building the capacity of regional militaries.⁵⁷ In Huddleston’s opinion, “TSCTP is an excellent example of how interagency coordination should work.”⁵⁸ Despite separate funding, close collaboration was accomplished through annual planning meetings, monthly interagency teleconferences between Washington and the field (including USAFRICOM and embassies) and synchronizing scheduling and implementation activities with partner nations.⁵⁹ This perspective is reflected also in USAFRICOM’s 2010 Posture Statement.⁶⁰

The DOS action officer responsible for day-to-day management of the program, Dan Epstein, described the TSCTP strategy as an African-led program where the U.S. provides the training. “Our goal is to keep this from becoming a serious problem, like Somalia, that winds up on the desks at the National Security Council.”⁶¹

The strategy against AQIM shifted over time. As defined by the global war on terror, the solution started with a military emphasis. Initial efforts to align the strategy began in the region, led by USEUCOM (and later AFRICOM) and the embassies, not Washington. This leads to a second conclusion that follows from TSCTP: In Irregular Warfare, anticipate strategies evolving from the bottom up to accommodate a comprehensive whole-of-government approach to the threat.

Friction in the Interagency: Sahel Embassies in the Global War on Terror

It took several years for a comprehensive, whole-of-government strategy to emerge for combating terrorism in the Trans-Sahara. In the course of the evolution, interagency frictions regarding the global war on terror occasionally spilled into the public domain. In July 2005, the debate over policy made the front page of the *The Washington Post* when it was reported that DoD was seeking authority to launch operations overseas without the “often time consuming interagency debate.”⁶² In defense of interagency turf, deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage, a former Navy SEAL, gave former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) counterterrorism director and then Ambassador for counterterrorism J. Cofer Black “...specific instructions to dismount, kill the horses and fight on foot” to prevent the undermining of ambassadorial authority overseas.⁶³ In 2006, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held hearings that examined “Embassies as Command Posts in the Anti-Terror Campaign.”⁶⁴ Both the article and the hearings were reactions to increasing numbers of military personnel and

DoD activities in non-combat countries as a result of the global war on terror. One of the principal findings of the Senate hearing was: “It is in the embassies rather than Washington where interagency differences on strategies, tactics and divisions of labor are increasingly adjudicated.”⁶⁵

Sources of friction appeared during the implementation of PSI as early as 2002 and carried over into the TSCTP. Friction in the interagency environment, as the Senate hearings noted, occurred primarily at the level of implementation, in other words, at level of the embassy. This friction occurred in three domains: institutional, cultural, and legal. First, the expanded military effort faced problems at individual embassies in the region due to their lack of institutional capacity as a support platform. Second, although embassies are support mechanisms for overseas interagency operations, they come with their own rule book, and are culturally alien to outsiders, including elements deployed by Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCCs). Third, friction occurred between GCCs executing the urgent global war on terror and ambassadors, who were responsible for bilateral relations between the United States and sovereign nations.

Institutional Friction. From the beginning, a goal of PSI was to build capacity for host nations to combat terrorism. Unfortunately, when the program was birthed no one had bothered to take a close look at the capacity of the embassies supporting the effort. A study of the situation in the Sahel would have revealed that a whole-of-government effort was impossible in 2002. The affected U.S. embassies in the region, specifically Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, had their support capability stripped away as part of the peace dividend following the end of the Cold War. Fully staffed into the early 1990s, after the first Gulf War CIA officers, defense attaches, USAID officers, public diplomacy

officers, security officers, and economic and political officers were the primary targets of the savings effort.⁶⁶ On 9/11, the U.S. embassy in Nouakchott, Mauritania, consisted of seven U.S. staff: an ambassador, a deputy chief of mission (who also served as the political officer), an office management specialist, a dual-hatted consular/commercial officer, a communication officer, an administrative officer, and a newly arrived regional security officer.⁶⁷ When the Peace Corps country director attended the country team, the “interagency” consisted of eight persons. Since downsizing, Nouakchott, along with Bamako, Mali; Ndjamena, Chad; and Niamey, Niger, were classified as part of the Special Embassy Program. Known in the Foreign Service as SEP posts, these four embassies were among the smallest in the world, and received special relief from mandatory reporting, were locked up at night when staff went home, could not process top secret information, and all taskings had to be approved by the State Department’s Undersecretary for Management.⁶⁸ If they were sovereign nations instead of embassies, they would fit somewhere in the top twenty on the Failed States Index.

Moreover, because of staffing demands for Afghanistan (2002) and Iraq (2003), hardship posts commonly faced severe staffing shortfalls in terms of personnel and talent. In 2006, GAO reported that mid-level positions at hardship posts were commonly staffed by junior officers, often on their first assignments.⁶⁹ Moreover, there were significant deficiencies in the ability, training, and experience of officers serving in “stretch” assignments.⁷⁰ Many junior officers stretched into more senior positions lacked managerial experience and the supervisory guidance to effectively do their jobs.⁷¹ As a consequence, senior staff, including ambassadors, spent more time on operational matters and less time on policy planning and coordination.⁷² As of 2006, many officers

at hardship posts also lacked language proficiency for their positions: 77 percent in Mali; 20 percent in Mauritania; 57 percent in Chad; and 10 percent in Niger, did not meet specified language requirements.⁷³

On 9/11 most of the country teams in Sahel barely had the capacity to support themselves, much less develop capacity for the host nation. Gaps in experience, skills and language proficiency inhibited their capability to accomplish their fundamental mission of Diplomacy, much less the Information, Military, Economic, Financial, Intelligence and Law enforcement functions (DIME-FIL) required of by a whole-of-government approach. Over time, things improved. For example, in Nouakchott during 2002 a general services officer was assigned to assist the post management officer and the CIA re-opened their station. In 2003 the defense attaché office reopened.⁷⁴ A public diplomacy position and a political officer position were added in 2005, and a six-person Marine Security Guard detachment was added shortly thereafter.⁷⁵ In 2006 a USAID coordinator was added to manage development programs, and there are plans to add a security assistance officer in 2011 to manage military-to-military cooperation programs.⁷⁶ The net effect of the lack of capacity is that the DOS-managed embassy platform was not staffed to match the pace of USEUCOM's (and later USAFRICOM's) staffing and coordination initiatives. This leads directly to a third conclusion that can be drawn from the TSCTP: Although an Irregular Warfare strategy may be implemented at the embassy level, overseas diplomatic missions are not always staffed to meet the requirements of a whole-of-government approach; they will grow to meet the need, but not overnight.

Interagency Cultural Friction. While all embassies are different, they speak a common bureaucratic vernacular, one which State, USAID, defense attaches, the CIA, the Peace Corps and all other agencies serving overseas historically share. The GCCs come with their own language and rules, too. The differences in culture result in misunderstandings, at a minimum, and occasional sharp clashes. For example, many DoD representatives failed to appreciate that embassies do not follow campaign plans nor conduct campaign planning; embassies coordinate Mission Strategic Resource Plans that outline strategic goals five years into the future. Diplomatic passports do not mean that the bearer has Diplomatic Immunity, nor do embassies grant Diplomatic Status or Immunities, which are granted by the host countries. Embassy employees are careful about making financial commitments that might be considered “unauthorized commitments” (e.g., making a verbal contract to set up a banquet at an Iranian restaurant for \$2,000) because they are illegal under Federal Acquisition Regulations (and they can be fired or have to pay for the event out of their own pockets). Embassy employees know not to sleep with the “cute girl in the travel section” because she comes from an upstanding Muslim family and they will disown her if she spends the night out or comes home with alcohol on her breath. Embassy employees know that if they fabricate diplomatic license plates they better tell the security officer before they get in an accident. Embassy employees know to ask for a country clearance before visiting a neighboring country on business. Embassy employees know not to report threat information (or any intelligence) to Europe or Washington that may affect the lives and safety of everyone at post before discussing it with the defense attaché, the station chief, and the security officer. However, temporary personnel, including DOS

contractors and GCC military personnel serving in the Sahel under the rubric of the global war on terror had difficulty appreciating the Foreign Service perspective in each of the aforementioned examples.⁷⁷

These frictions typically evolve from a lack of understanding of the cultural framework of the Foreign Service derived from formal and informal constructs. In terms of formal constructs, missions are broadly governed by Foreign Affairs Manuals and Handbooks (FAMs and FAHs). The FAMs and FAHs, much like military regulations, explain responsibilities, provide information, and specify procedures for accomplishing all embassy operations. They provide the rules that govern everything from motor pool operations to the issuance of visas. An experienced embassy “hand” will turn to the FAMs and FAHs when a first tour State or military officer tells them that something is impossible. A little research will show that there is a right way to get diplomatic plates, who they can contact to get permission to carry a weapon, or how to negotiate a local contract legally. Local policies regarding implementation of regulations are addressed in Management and Security Notices. Both carry the weight of policy, are cleared through section chiefs, and explain how regulations are actually implemented. Firearms policies (for official and personal weapons), out-of-town travel procedures (e.g., trip plans for in-country and country clearance requirements for out of country), and financial operations (e.g., check cashing hours and amounts) are covered in painful detail.

Informal cultural constructs are more complicated because they are not written. An overriding concern for post management is “no double standard.” In an interagency environment all assigned personnel and agencies are treated equally. No double

standard means the written and unwritten rules for the usage of government vehicles, housing security standards, after-hours access, the storage and processing of classified information, and visitor policies apply to all. No one is special. (But, like the U.S. military, most procedures can be waived when coordinated for special circumstances.) Unwritten rules also extend to official embassy functions. For example, the 4th of July reception at the ambassador's residence is a working event, where employees arrive early, mingle with guests, drink moderately (if at all), and leave when the last guest leaves. In Sahel countries, you never offer your hand or shake a women's hand unless she offers first (which demonstrates *her* cross-cultural appreciation of Western manners). At the base of the informal framework is something known as "corridor reputation." Corridor reputation is built over a career, and it is how Foreign Service members personally evaluate their peers. It is not based on annual evaluations nor awards, but the informal assessment of an individual's effectiveness. It is what a boss says behind closed doors when asked if a person should be hired for an important or sensitive position. Corridor reputation is pervasive in the Foreign Service, and more often than not it articulates - more than the performance file - the reasons why someone is or is not promoted. At an embassy overseas, all employees – permanent and temporary – carry a corridor reputation.

Failure to understand the formal and informal aspects of embassy culture can produce friction in the interagency environment, particularly at a small embassy. A 2010 GAO report noted that "USAFRICOM staff have limited knowledge about working with U.S. embassies and about cultural issues in Africa, and the training or guidance available to augment personal experience in these areas is limited."⁷⁸ While there have

been efforts to increase GCC temporary staff expertise in these areas, the limited knowledge among some staff puts USAFRICOM at risk of being unable to fully leverage resources with diplomatic mission personnel, build relationships with African nations, and effectively carry out DoD activities.⁷⁹ In 2010, USAFRICOM established an interagency collaborative forum to assess, prioritize, and implement the recommendations from the GAO assessment.⁸⁰

It is popular to say culture eats strategy for lunch.⁸¹ For the interagency culture of a small- or medium-sized embassy this is a truism. The key to negotiating the culture, which is ruled predominately by the U.S. Foreign Service, are interpersonal skills. This leads to a fourth conclusion that can be drawn from TSCTP: If Irregular Warfare is executed from the platform of an embassy, personal relations with individuals from other agencies are critical; spend as much time mastering the embassy interagency culture as that of the host country.

Legal Authorities and Tradition: Chief of Mission and the Combatant Commander. Although State, USAID, and the DoD jointly collaborated in implementing the TSCTP, the GAO found that disagreements about whether the ambassador should have authority over DoD personnel temporarily assigned to conduct TSCTP activities has hampered implementation.⁸² As evidence of this the report, DoD officials complained in 2007 when the ambassador in Niger limited the number of DoD personnel in country because of concerns over the country's fragile political environment and the limited support capacity in the embassy.⁸³ In Chad, another ambassador called for a "strategic pause" to TSCTP activities to reassess the mission's ability to support activities.⁸⁴ The authorities of the GCC are derived from Title 10, USC

Section 164, under which the GCC is responsible for all military personnel and activities under their command. Chief of Mission authorities are outlined in Title 22 USC, 3902, 3927 and 4802, which specify Chief of Mission responsibilities for all executive agencies overseas except those deployed under the authority of a GCC. In the State Department's reply to the GAO, the friction is clearly articulated:

Most DoD personnel implementing TSCTP activities on a nonpermanent basis are under the command of the area military commander and thus, pursuant to the terms of the President's letter to COMs, do not directly fall under COM authority. In practice, however, these DoD personnel come under COM control at post: they seek clearance from the Ambassador to enter the country to conduct their activities, and while posted there they abide by COM rules and policies and are subject to the COM's supervision. DoD's common practice in TSCTP countries of deploying personnel for seriatim "enduring presence" extended tdy periods, however, creates positions considered "permanent" under Department policy. Like other permanent Mission positions, employees encumbering those positions should come under COM authority.⁸⁵

DoD's reply to the GAO finding was that legal authorities were sufficient, but "further guidance reflecting the implications of DoD's growing role in shaping and deterrence operations would be helpful."⁸⁶ This is not a new problem: the U.S. Marine Corps *Small Wars Manual* in 1940 (in a sub-chapter titled Importance of Cooperation) noted the absence of a "clean-cut line of demarcation between State Department and military authority" when conducting "Small Wars."⁸⁷

The State Department's position -- since the administration of President Eisenhower -- is buttressed in U.S. ambassadors having their authority articulated in a personal letter from the President at the time of appointment.⁸⁸ This authority was deemed necessary following the vast growth of U.S. agencies serving overseas due to the Cold War.⁸⁹ The mandate makes it clear that the ambassador works for the President, not the Secretary of State.⁹⁰ The crux of the problem is not so much in the

law as the terms of the President's letter appointing each ambassador. Further authority is granted in National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 38, which gives the Chief of Mission control of the size, composition, and mandate of overseas full-time mission staffing for all U.S. Government agencies serving at embassies. The problem, noted Ambassador Robert Oakley, is that other agencies often view the ambassador as the Department of State's representative, rather than the President's.⁹¹

While the authorities of the GCC and COM are subject to interpretation, they appear to be relatively clear under two situations: (1) During full combat operations authorized by National Command Authority (GCC leads); and (2) Stable situations when there are no combat operations (COM leads).⁹² Although DoD had an executive order signed by the Secretary of Defense and coordinated through DOS and the NSC, TSCTP fell somewhere between these two well-defined situations, and the result was interagency friction between DoD personnel and the embassies in the region.⁹³ This friction largely overshadowed synchronizing activities that occur as national strategy is implemented at the country level. In 1951, General Lucius Clay, who served as the military governor of post-war Germany, first established the concept of the country team to achieve coordination overseas in a memorandum of agreement between the Departments of State and Defense commonly referred to as the "Clay Paper:"

To insure the full coordination of the U.S. effort, U.S. representatives at the country level shall constitute a team under the leadership of the Ambassador.... The Ambassador's responsibility for coordination, general direction, and leadership shall be given renewed emphasis, and all United States elements shall be re-indoctrinated with respect to the Ambassador's role as senior representative for the United States in the Country.⁹⁴

Although a construct and not codified in law, the country team is where unity of effort is achieved in each embassy. Washington makes policy and embassies implement

through interagency country teams. A sub-committee of the country team, commonly referred to a “executive” or “core” group has access to various compartmented information sources. This group -- usually numbering no more than four or five persons in even the largest of embassies -- meet separately when required to discuss the most sensitive issues, e.g., classified threat information or Title 50 activities⁹⁵ that may impact a mission or host-nation relations. In an era of universal condemnation of the interagency process and calls for reform, the full-time country team is often pointed out as one of the few places it works:

When compared to Washington, the efficiency of interagency work at various field offices additionally reaps the advantage of operating on a significantly reduced scale. Each Mission has the opportunity to designate clearly its objectives and stipulate an interagency plan of action to achieve these aims. At most embassies, an economy of scale greatly enhances cross-disciplinary and interagency awareness and familiarity, allowing informal networks and personal relationships to strengthen cooperation and improve outcomes.⁹⁶

A limiting factor of the effectiveness, however, is that the functioning of the team is dependent upon the quality of leadership provided by the ambassador.⁹⁷

Although these frictions of authority have not been fully resolved in the TSCTP, the perspective of DoD has evolved as the strategy shifted from the global war on terror to a whole-of-government, capacity-building approach. In 2009, Ambassador Mary Yates, the Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military relations, USAFRICOM, highlighted this change when she quoted directly from Joint Publication 1 that GCCs are “responsible for integrating military activities with diplomatic activities in their areas of responsibility.”⁹⁸ The U.S. Army USAFRICOM assistant chief of staff acknowledged that Africa is not Afghanistan or Iraq.⁹⁹ Despite the lack of full resolution regarding legal or command authorities, a fifth conclusion can be made. It is best encapsulated in a

common refrain heard from many CIA chiefs of station overseas: The first person to recruit in any country is the ambassador. However, this conclusion is even simpler: In Irregular Warfare, ambassadors matter and are critical to success.

Conclusions: Strategy is Simple But Not Easy

The global war on terror was a misnomer and not very helpful in describing the post 9/11 world of conflict.¹⁰⁰ It eventually played out as more of a visceral national reaction than a strategy. Nonetheless, it persisted as a prism to view and sort various threats that the nation observed around the world. Over time, strategy evolved. The ends, ways and means of the global war on terrorism shifted from a solely military campaign to a nuanced view of terrorism as an aspect of Irregular Warfare. As a consequence, threats around the world - in large theaters like Iraq and Afghanistan and smaller theaters like the Northwest Africa – were viewed in a more complete way, elevating development and diplomacy to legitimate tools in the campaign.

In the course of reviewing the efforts against AQIM in the Sahara from 2002 to the present, five conclusions regarding Irregular Warfare and the whole-of-government approach necessary to combat terrorism have been posed:

- All narratives have value and should be incorporated into operational design.
- Anticipate strategies evolving – possibly from the bottom up -- to accommodate a comprehensive whole-of-government approach to the threat.
- Overseas diplomatic missions are not always staffed to meet the requirements of a whole-of-government approach; they will grow to meet the need, but not overnight.

- Personal relations with individuals from other agencies are critical; spend as much time mastering the embassy interagency culture as that of the host country.
- Ambassadors matter and are critical to success.

These conclusions are particularly relevant as a whole-of-government approach to international terrorism becomes the norm rather than the exception. Secretary Gates hinted at this shift in 2007 when he said: “We must focus our energies beyond the guns and steel of the military, beyond just our brave soldier, sailors and airmen. We must also focus our energies on the other elements of national power that will be so crucial in the years to come.”¹⁰¹ This concept that came to be known as “smart power” was further articulated by Secretary of State Clinton in 2009: “...we view defense, diplomacy, and development as the three pillars of American foreign policy. That’s not rhetoric. That is our commitment. That is how we are proceeding.”¹⁰² The TSCTP demonstrates that time and effort are required to conceptualize, synchronize, and implement a ‘3-D’ approach. The whole-of-government approach to solving terrorism in the Trans-Sahara demonstrates the difficulties of implementing a “smart power” policy. The mechanisms depend upon the interagency process, particularly at the embassy level. Frictions in terms of capacity, institutional culture, and authorities will persist. These frictions can be anticipated and resolved at the level of the country team when a common understanding of the situation exists. Most of all, strategic patience and strong leadership from ambassadors are critical to success in the existing interagency environment. Just as a nation does not go to war with the army it wants but the army it

has, the United States will counter transnational terrorism with the interagency processes and overseas missions we have, not the ones we wish for.

Endnotes

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 178.

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³ Ibid.

⁴ For the purposes of this paper, Irregular Warfare is defined in Department of Defense Directive Number 3000.07, (Washington, D.C., Department of Defense, Dec. 1, 2008), as: “A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). Irregular Warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will.” The same definition is included in Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, (Washington, D.C., Joint Chiefs of Staff, May 2, 2007, incorporating Change 1, March 20, 2009), GL-8.

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²³ Ibid. Evan Kohlmann, a terrorist consultant, estimates that North Africans represent 9-25 percent of foreign fighters in Iraq.

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