

THE VALUE PROPOSITION OF SPECIAL FORCES  
FOREIGN INTERNAL DEFENSE

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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
General Studies

by

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## ABSTRACT

THE VALUE PROPOSITION OF SPECIAL FORCES FOREIGN INTERNAL DEFENSE, by Major Benjamin Franklin, 94 pages.

As the U.S. military transitions to great power competition it must also counter Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs). Balancing these two important missions, while also prioritizing readiness of the force requires careful consideration of the employment of U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) globally. Nevertheless, U.S. SF are uniquely capable to contribute to U.S. security challenges in the era of great power competition. Case studies of SF operations, actions, and activities in the Philippines, Lebanon, and Egypt demonstrate the successes, failures, and opportunities for SF countering VEOs and contributing to great power competition.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE THESIS APPROVAL PAGE .....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
ILLUSTRATIONS .....	viii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Strategic Setting.....	1
Building Partner Capacity.....	3
Foreign Internal Defense in the Philippines, Lebanon, and Egypt .....	7
Limitations .....	9
Scope and Delimitations .....	9
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	11
Foreign Internal Defense as a subset of Security Assistance.....	11
Understanding FID through Counterinsurgency (COIN) Doctrine and History .....	12
A Case for FID Partners.....	14
Partner Shortcomings.....	15
SF Partner Capacity Building .....	18
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	20
CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS .....	25
Philippines 2001 – 2019 .....	25
Internal Threat Overview .....	25
SF Partner Outcome .....	29
Battle for Marawi .....	35
Lebanon: 2006 – 2019 .....	40
Internal Threat Overview .....	40
SF Partner Outcome .....	45
Operation Dawn of the Hills (ODH).....	48
Egypt: 2012 – 2019.....	53
Internal Threat Overview .....	53
SF Partner Outcome .....	56
Operation Sinai 2018 .....	63

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	65
Conclusion .....	65
Findings .....	70
Recommendations for SF.....	72
APPENDIX A Foreign internal defense as part of security assistance and internal defense and development .....	74
APPENDIX B sfa VS fid.....	75
APPENDIX C philippine army organization.....	76
APPENDIX d JSOTF-P LINES OF EFFORT .....	77
APPENDIX E OPERATION DAWN OF THE HILLS AND SIMULTANEOUS HEZBOLLAH OPERATIONS.....	78
APPENDIX f u.s SECURITY AND ECONOMIC AID TO EGYPT .....	79
APPENDIX G 5th SFG(A) 90's LIAISONS.....	80
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	81

## ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Figure 1. Methodology.....	21
Figure 2. SF Partner Outcome in the Philippines.....	25
Figure 3. SF Partner Outcome in Lebanon.....	40
Figure 4. SF Partner Outcome in Egypt .....	53

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Strategic Setting

The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) has three lines of effort: first, create a more lethal force; second, strengthen alliances and attract new partners; and third, reform the department for greater performance and affordability.<sup>1</sup> The NDS also defines the principle threats to the United States as Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs), prioritizing the threats of Russia and China and a return to great power competition.<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, VEOs encompass non-state terrorist organizations, including Hezbollah, the Islamic State (IS) and its affiliates, Al Qaeda (AQ), Abu Sayaf Group (ASG), and other similar groups who threaten the U.S. and U.S. interests abroad. Nevertheless, even with great power competition as the primary concern, VEO threats remain prevalent and must be engaged with “strengthened alliances” and efficient performance.<sup>3</sup>

The U.S. must continue to evolve to effectively combat VEOs, accounting for the successes and shortcomings of 19 years of military actions since AQ attacked the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Since 9/11, US operations, actions, and activities against VEOs yielded undeniable tactical and operational achievements, but VEOs

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary of Defense (SecDef), *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (NDS) (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 2, 10.

remain a significant threat. The former Director of the National Counter Terrorism Center, LTG Mike Nagata remarked, the U.S. has made “strides against terrorism, but...the biggest deficit [the US has] is on the prevention side, not the countering side.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, AQ maintains a presence in Afghanistan while its global presence endures.<sup>5</sup> Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) exists to fight IS, which developed a terrorist state in Iraq and Syria despite years of a primary US focus on VEOs. Presently, IS exists through a sophisticated global caliphate that spawned subordinate “caliphates” throughout the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, presenting a significant global VEO threat.<sup>6</sup> For example, IS Sinai exists in Egypt as a subordinate IS caliphate.<sup>7</sup> VEOs remain a significant threat to U.S. interests and regional stability, even as the U.S. shifts resources away from the VEO fight towards great power competition.

The shift to great power competition has provided the U.S. Army with the impetus necessary to shift to large scale combat operations (LSCO), but the Army must also compete below the threshold of LSCO. As the NDS states, “China is using predatory

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<sup>4</sup> Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (CTC), “LTG Michael Nagata Visits CTC,” December 11, 2017, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://ctc.usma.edu/ltg-michael-nagata-visits-ctc/>.

<sup>5</sup> Mona Kanwal Sheikh, “Islamic State Enters Al-Qaeda’s Old Hotbed: Afghanistan and Pakistan,” *Connections*, 16, no. 1 (2017): 37-49.

<sup>6</sup> Robin Wright, “Baghdadi Is Back-and Vows the Islamic State Will Be, Too,” *The New Yorker*, April 29, 2019, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/baghdadi-is-backand-vows-that-isis-will-be-too>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, *Statement of GEN Lloyd Austin, U.S. Army; Posture of U.S. Central Command*, Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services, 114th Cong., 2nd sess., March 8, 2016 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2017).

economics to intimidate its neighbors while militarizing features in the South China Sea [...and...] Iran continues to sow violence and remains the most significant challenge to Middle East stability.”<sup>8</sup> Simultaneously, “Russia has violated the borders of nearby nations and pursues veto power over the economic, diplomatic, and security decisions of its neighbors.”<sup>9</sup> Russia, China, and Iran are aggressively projecting diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME) elements of power in a manner that counters US influence. In March 2018, USCENTCOM Commander GEN Joseph Votel testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), “Iran, Russia, and China are increasingly competing to be the partner of choice – militarily, politically, and economically – with U.S. allies.”<sup>10</sup> Even as the U.S. Army prepares for the potential of future LSCO, it must also meet the present competition of Russia, China, and Iran. Furthermore, the U.S. Army must address internal threats in nations of strategic importance. Failing to address current competition below the level of LSCO risks allowing internal threats to increase and great power competitors to gain influence.

### Building Partner Capacity

Dealing with VEOs and other internal threats efficiently in the era of great competition requires working with and through partners. This familiar phrase is used

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<sup>8</sup> SecDef, NDS, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, *Posture of U.S. Central Command Great Power Competition: The Current and Future Challenges in The Middle East to United States Committee on Armed Services*, Statement of GEN Joseph L. Votel, U.S. Army before the Senate Armed Services Committee, February 5, 2019 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2020).

widely among US forces working with foreign militaries, even as the effectiveness of this partner capacity is widely disputed. Recent foreign policy analysis contends that current US policy to build partner capacity is not comprehensive, resulting in “Fabergé egg armies: shiny and expensive, but easily broken by insurgents.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, in a *Foreign Affairs* article, former pentagon official Mara Karlin calls relying on local partners, economy drivers, and trade drivers a “goldilocks” approach for the Middle East.<sup>12</sup> Karlin and others argue for a change in US foreign policy, a new approach to security assistance, and a different approach to working with and through partners.

Working with and through partners is the principle mission of Foreign Internal Defense (FID) for U.S. Army Special Forces (SF). *Army Techniques Publication 3-05.2, Foreign Internal Defense*, defines FID as the “full range of measures taken by a government to protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency.”<sup>13</sup> Distinguished from other forms of security assistance, FID is a deliberate effort to address an internal threat in the context of a host nation’s (HN) comprehensive internal

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<sup>11</sup> Jahara Matisek, “The Crisis of American Military Assistance: Strategic Dithering and ‘Fabergé Egg’ Armies,” Modern War Institute, September 10, 2018, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://mwi.usma.edu/crisis-american-military-assistance-strategic-dithering-faberge-egg-armies/>.

<sup>12</sup> Mara Karlin and Tamara Cofman Wittes, “America’s Middle East Purgatory,” *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 1 (January 2019), accessed October 20, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2018-12-11/americas-middle-east-purgatory>.

<sup>13</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), *Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-05.2, Foreign Internal Defense* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, August 2015), 1-8.

defense and development (IDAD) strategy.<sup>14</sup> FID signals US support for a standing state and has potential to further US interests across the elements of national power by effectively addressing internal security issues in that state.

The “with and through” concept is rooted in the US Army SF doctrine of Unconventional Warfare (UW). According to *FM 3-18, Army Special Forces Operations*, UW includes “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area.” Furthermore, “SF is specifically organized, trained, and equipped for the conduct of UW.”<sup>15</sup> This organization and training for UW transfers seamlessly to FID, allowing SF to work with and through partners in a different environment.

In FID, SF works with friendly governments through a wide combination of military engagement activities that enhance the overall security of that nation; however, the mechanics of FID follow the principles of UW. FM 3-18 states “regardless of the mission, the selection, training, and education of the SF Soldier to work with indigenous forces while conducting UW are also applicable to the conduct of FID. In both missions, SF focuses on engaging with and empowering indigenous partners to act.”<sup>16</sup> As such, SF are uniquely trained and positioned to build partner capacity through FID. Rooted in the principles of UW, SF FID generates HN partner capacity to engage difficult internal

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<sup>14</sup> HQDA, ATP 3-05.2, 1-1.

<sup>15</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 3-18, *Special Forces* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, August 2014), V.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

threats. In summation, FID establishes partner capacity that is tactically capable and strategically relevant. Consequently, SF FID presents a unique value proposition.

While FID may be conducted by all elements of the US government, this thesis examines SF FID. In recent history, with the rise of VEO threats, terrorism, and the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, SF FID usually begins with SF developing partnerships with elite HN units capable of addressing internal threats directly.<sup>17</sup> These elite units are usually HN SOF or a portion of the HN's SOF. While SF doctrine does not specify SF partner with another nation's SOF, this is common practice of SF conducting FID around the world. In the Middle East specifically, former CIA analyst and military historian, Ken Pollack, asserts that partnering with elite units offers a better chance of building lasting tactical capacity.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, this thesis will explore the outcome of those SF FID partnerships.

Using data from three separate case studies, this thesis asks what is the outcome of the partner capacity generated through SF FID? This thesis also asks the following supporting questions. First, what was the internal threat requiring FID? Second, what tactical partners did SF work with and through to engage the threat? Third, what was the tactical outcome? Fourth, what was the operational outcome? Fifth, what was the strategic outcome? Finally, how did the partnership contribute to a significant FID

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<sup>17</sup> James M. Depolo, "The Strategic Relevance of Modern Foreign Internal Defense and Security Force Assistance Initiatives," *Special Operations Journal* 4, no. 1 (February 2018): 27; Timothy S. Ball, "From Successful Defense to Problematic Offense: the devolution of Unconventional Warfare," (Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, December 2016), 65.

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack, *Armies of Sand: The Past, Present, and Future of Arab Military Effectiveness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 28-52.

combat operation? Answering these questions will indicate the outcome of SF FID partnerships (see Figure 1).

### Foreign Internal Defense in the Philippines, Lebanon, and Egypt

The Philippines, Lebanon, and Egypt are strategically significant, and the United States has invested considerably in building the capacity of each military. The Philippines are essential in checking Chinese expansion in the South China Sea.<sup>19</sup> Lebanon is key terrain in Iran's expanded threat network. In fact, Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei considers Lebanon "Iran's greatest foreign policy success [and a model Iran] will repeat...until all of Islam is liberated."<sup>20</sup> Finally, Russia has interest in Egypt, the world's largest Arab state and home of the Suez Canal. Russia sells Egypt large defense articles, conducts overt "counter-terrorism" training with Egypt's airborne units, and is likely using Western Egypt as a base to conduct operations in Libya.<sup>21</sup> The strategic importance of each nation, coupled with the demonstrated desire of China, Iran, and Russia to increase

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<sup>19</sup> Karen Lema, "Philippines' Duterte Tells China to 'Lay off' Island in Disputed Waters," *Reuters*, April 4, 2019, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-philippines/philippines-duterte-tells-china-to-lay-off-island-in-disputed-waters-idUSKCN1RG0LC>.

<sup>20</sup> United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), "Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies (ARIS) Studies," U.S. Army, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://www.soc.mil/ARIS/books/arisbooks.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Alec Luhn, "Russian Special Forces Sent to Back Renegade Libyan General – Reports," *The Guardian*, March 14, 2017, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/14/russian-special-forces-deployed-in-egypt-near-libyan-border-report>; Dmitry Fediushko, "Russian and Egyptian Paratroopers Conduct Cohesion Training during Exercise 'Defenders of Friendship 2018'," *Jane's 360*, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://www.janes.com/article/84188/russian-and-egyptian-paratroopers-conduct-cohesion-training-during-exercise-defenders-of-friendship-2018>.

influence, indicate that these nations are worth examining when considering the value of SF FID in the era of great power competition.

In each of these strategically important nations, SF established FID partnerships with SOF units to address internal threats within each respective nation. In 2001, Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC) established a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) centered on developing a partner force capable of engaging internal terrorism threats in the Southern Philippines.<sup>22</sup> In 2006, Special Operations Command Central re-established a periodic training relationship with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) SOF to counter terrorism and instability in Lebanon.<sup>23</sup> By 2011, this relationship grew to a permanent Special Operations Command Forward (SOCFWD), marking a persistent SF presence in Lebanon to conduct FID.<sup>24</sup> In 2016, Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) inserted a Special Operations Liaison into the US Embassy in Cairo to establish a partnership with Egypt SOF focusing on IS in the Sinai in Egypt. While the environments, cultures, and threats differed in each location, the SF FID investment followed the fundamentals of UW, seeking the most capable partner force to work with and through.

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Swain, “Case Study: Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines,” (Booz-Allen and Hamilton Inc., McLean, VA, October 2010), 1.

<sup>23</sup> LTC Michael Reber, interview with author, May 2, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> COL Jack Jensen, interview with author, January 7, 2020.

## Limitations

Each case study is chosen within a specific time associated with an internal threat preceding USSF involvement. Specifically, this thesis examines the Philippines from 2001 – 2019, based on the threat of Sunni VEOs AQ, ASG, and IS; Lebanon from 2006 to 2019, based on the threat of AQ, IS, and Hezbollah; and Egypt from 2012 to 2019 based on the threat of IS Sinai and other Sunni VEOs in Egypt.

This thesis uses only unclassified sources. Information on SF FID in the Philippines is recorded in other research papers, professional journals, and military publications. There is less about SF FID in Lebanon, and almost nothing about SF FID in Egypt. However, there is considerable data on US security assistance to Egypt due to almost thirty years of over \$1 billion per year in foreign military financing (FMF) from the U.S. to Egypt. Understanding the context of all three countries is important.

Personal experience provides additional expertise and familiarity with this topic. I am an active duty SF officer with combat experience as an SF detachment commander. Following my detachment command, I served two years as a Special Operations Liaison Officer (SOLO) working at the US Embassy in Cairo, Egypt. I have no firsthand experience in the Philippines or Lebanon, but have access to military and diplomatic personnel with firsthand experience in both the Philippines and Lebanon.

## Scope and Delimitations

This thesis will examine SF FID through case studies of FID in the Philippines, Lebanon, and Egypt. In the Philippines, the thesis examines FID from 2001 - 2019. In Lebanon, it examines FID from 2006 – 2019. In Egypt, it examines FID from 2012 – 2019. I use the methodology and findings from Dr. Mara Karlin's book, *Building*

*Militaries in Fragile States*, to inform my methodology. Furthermore, I considered the FID planning imperatives outlined in JP 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*, and several characteristics of successful COIN operations from MG Chris Haas Master's thesis to provide additional criteria to analyze these cases (see Figure 1).

The following chapters include a review of literature applicable to this topic, an overview of the methodology used to evaluate each case, the analysis of each case, and the conclusion. The literature review examines positive and negative literature regarding SF FID and the outcome of working with partners. Building from this literature, my methodology establishes a manner to qualitatively analyze each case. That methodology serves as the outline for each case in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 restates the key findings of the thesis, offers recommendations for future SF FID, and areas of future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis examines the outcome of SF FID partners through comparative case studies of SF efforts in the Philippines, Lebanon, and Egypt. In each case study, this thesis examines the internal threat, FID partner, and partner impact which demonstrates partner outcome. This literature review provides context to FID as a subset of U.S. security assistance. It also reviews FID and similar efforts in other nations, informing the methodology for this thesis.

#### Foreign Internal Defense as a subset of Security Assistance

U.S. doctrine discusses SF FID as a portion of overall US security activities (see Appendix A). These activities include, but are not limited to; theater security cooperation (TSCP); foreign military financing (FMF); foreign military sales (FMS); international military education training (IMET); peace operations (PO); and Security Forces Assistance (SFA). Broadly, these programs and activities provide a myriad of training, equipping, and education to HN military and security forces which may be used to address an internal threat.<sup>25</sup> SFA is arguably the most difficult US military activity to distinguish from FID. SFA builds partner nation capacity under a broader context of collective security, whereas FID involves building capacity to address an internal threat (see appendix B).<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, understanding FID is a subset of security assistance is

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<sup>25</sup> HQDA, ATP 3-05.2, 1-8 – 1-9.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 1-9.

an important aspect of examining the impact of FID partners, specifically in determining how FID influences overall security assistance equipping and focus.

#### Understanding FID through Counterinsurgency (COIN) Doctrine and History

FID implies engaging an insurgency or similar element within a nation's borders. FM 3-24, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies*, defines an insurgency as “the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region.”<sup>27</sup> FID assists the HN in combating internal threats and included insurgency specifically in the doctrinal definition.”<sup>28</sup> Because insurgency is in the definition and protecting against terrorism and other internal threats require similar responses, FID and COIN doctrine are intertwined.

As a Major in his 1997 Command and General Staff College MMAS thesis, MG (R) Christopher Haas wrote, “Traditionally the U.S. military's involvement in FID has focused almost exclusively on counterinsurgency. Although much of the current FID effort remains focused on counterinsurgency, FID programs today may aim at other threats to a HN's internal stability. These threats include civil disorder, illicit drug trafficking, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism.”<sup>29</sup> Despite this distinction, much of the approach remains the same and COIN doctrine provides valuable

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<sup>27</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, August 2014), 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> HQDA, ATP 3-05.2, 1-8.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Haas, “Special Forces Organization for Foreign Internal Defense in 2010,” (Master's Thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, June 6, 1997), 116.

insight into an effective FID program, even if the threat is not categorized as an insurgency.

Haas derived eight principle characteristics of successful COIN operation: (1) develop effective mechanisms to enhance legitimacy (for both the U.S. and HN efforts); (2) unity of effort; (3) perseverance; (4) patience; (5) integrated psychological warfare operations; (6) coordinated and effective intelligence; (7) precision targeting of the insurgent infrastructure; and (8) minimum use of violence.<sup>30</sup> Haas' first four characteristics are contained in the FID imperatives, the last four characteristics (integrated psychological warfare operations, coordinated and effective intelligence, precision targeting of the insurgent infrastructure, and minimum use of violence) useful in examining tailored military support and will be particularly useful in assessing the quality of a US FID program.

The fundamentals of COIN directly contribute to a successful FID operation and are similar to the doctrinal imperatives of a FID effort. According to Field Manual 3-24 the fundamentals of COIN include: legitimacy is the main objective; counterinsurgent forces must understand the environment; intelligence drives operations; security under the rule of law is essential; counterinsurgent forces should prepare for a long term commitment; manage information and expectations; use the appropriate level of force; learn and adapt; empower the lowest levels; and support the HN.<sup>31</sup> These are very similar to the eight FID imperatives laid out in Joint Publication 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*:

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<sup>30</sup> Haas, "Special Forces Organization for Foreign Internal Defense in 2010," 116.

<sup>31</sup> HQDA, FM 3-24, 1-20 – 1-22.

(1) maintain HN sovereignty and build legitimacy; (2) understand strategic implications before commencing; (3) tailor military support to FID to fit the needs of the HN and operating environment; (4) incorporate unified action and unity of effort; (5) understand US foreign policy; (6) understand the information environment; (7) sustain the effort; (8) protect the effort.<sup>32</sup> The characteristics of historical counterinsurgencies studied by MG Haas and the FID imperatives provide a basis for criteria to assess FID partner outcome at the tactical, operational, and strategic level.

#### A Case for FID Partners

Army SF Colonel James Depolo wrote a 2018 article in the *Special Operations Journal* entitled, “The Strategic Relevance of Modern FID and SFA.” Depolo highlights that US strategic guidance requiring partner cooperation coupled with the looming great power competition require more investment in SFA and FID.<sup>33</sup> Depolo cites the senior leader documents, such as the 2015 Quadrennial Defense Review and SOUTHCOM Commander Posture statement to demonstrate the demand for FID and SFA. Depolo then offers a case study of the US efforts in Colombia to combat narco trafficking and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Depolo highlights the significant initial contribution of the U.S. who trained a small Colombian military contingent that provided a baseline force. U.S. advisory efforts ballooned to a largely conventional US military FID and SFA effort under the whole of government plan called Plan Columbia.

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<sup>32</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 17, 2018), IV-2.

<sup>33</sup> Depolo, “The Strategic Relevance of Modern Foreign Internal Defense and Security Force Assistance Initiatives,” 17.

Depolo offers statistics marking a clear downturn in violence and a reduction in areas contested by the FARC, culminating in formal political negotiations in 2016. Depolo's research offers a case for more FID and SFA to support current US interests and strategy.

Similarly, in his 2009 *DISAM Journal of International Security and Assistance Management* article "The Building Partner Capacity Imperative," Air Force LTC John Teichart offers similar justification to support partner capacity building, including FID. Teichart cites strategic guidance and multiple threats, challenges, and opportunities present in the current global security environment. Teichart asserts that important relationships will be valuable for future contingencies because of BPC activities.<sup>34</sup>

#### Partner Shortcomings

While some professionals cite the benefits of FID, COIN, and SFA partners, other professionals cite a poor return on U.S. investment to build partner capacity. Mara Karlin's, *Building Militaries in Fragile States*, examines building militaries in states that have internal problems. Karlin states that the US Government values "more equipment, more training, more help...and more money."<sup>35</sup> Karlin argues that the U.S. should worry less about quantity and become more involved in quality. Specifically, Karlin prescribes the U.S. should become involved in "influencing personnel and organization but

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<sup>34</sup> LtCol E. John Teichart, U.S. Air Force, "The Building Partner Capacity Imperative," *DISAM Journal of International Security Assistance Management* 31, no. 2 (August 2009): 116-125.

<sup>35</sup> Mara E. Karlin, *Building Militaries in Fragile States: Challenges for the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 2.

refraining from becoming a co-combatant.”<sup>36</sup> Additionally, Karlin amplifies the importance of external support from bad actors to an internal threat and contends that decreasing this external support has a significant effect on decreasing the internal threat, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the U.S. FID program.<sup>37</sup> Karlin illuminates that the quantity of US security assistance is not a measure of effectiveness. Instead, to measure effectiveness U.S. policy makers should examine if the assistance is connected to key decision makers and the external support of the internal threat.

Considering partner capacity and broad security assistance, Army SF COL (ret) David Maxwell offers that the conflicts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have muddled the understanding of terms within security assistance. Following 9/11, the U.S. adopted a murky approach of “building partner capacity (BPC) to capture FID, SFA, and other security assistance efforts.”<sup>38</sup> Maxwell argues that the US should take a deliberate, strategic approach instead of the broad BPC effort. Maxwell states the US has “thoroughly adopted the concepts “through, by, and with” and “train and equip” and “building partner capacity” as ways in our strategic calculus...and [the US expects] to simply apply [those ways] to problems.” However, Maxwell contends that working with partners requires a much more focused approach.<sup>39</sup> Maxwell asserts that an

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>37</sup> Karlin, *Building Militaries in Fragile States*, 194.

<sup>38</sup> Ilan Goldenberg, Alice Hunt Friend, Stephen Tankel, and Nicholas A. Heras, *Remodeling Partner Capacity: Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Counterterrorism Security Assistance* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2016), 5-10.

<sup>39</sup> David S. Maxwell, Bill C. Roggio, Robert C. Jones, Bill M. Madhu, “Do We Really Understand Unconventional Warfare?” *Small Wars Journal*, October 23, 2014,

understanding of UW is necessary to properly build partner capacity.<sup>40</sup> Maxwell's analysis aligns with Karlin as both call for going beyond large scale, non-focused capacity building to building partners for a specific purpose.

When considering partners, understanding the underlying culture is paramount. In his 2019 *Armies of Sand*, Ken Pollack examines the performance of Arab armies from 1945 through 2018, including many Arab armies who received security assistance from the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Pollack identifies areas where Arab militaries underperformed, experienced mixed results, or excelled. Pollack examines tactical leadership, information management and intelligence, technical skills and weapons handling, strategic leadership, unit cohesion, logistics and maintenance, morale, training, and bravery and cowardice.<sup>41</sup> Pollack does not examine every single Arab conflict, but his methodology identifies trends that are factors in all Arab militaries. Pollack finds Arab performance since 1945 to be overwhelmingly poor, with culture appearing as the most significant cause of the poor performance.<sup>42</sup> While this book does not address FID partner capacity specifically, its commentary on Arab military performance and lack of US success in security assistance to the Middle East are relevant to SF FID efforts.

Moreover, Pollack's finding on culture suggests a specific technique for success that applies to partner capacity in Arab cultures. Pollack asserts that Arab culture

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accessed September 29, 2019, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrn/art/do-we-really-understand-unconventional-warfare>.

<sup>40</sup> Maxwell et al., "Do We Really Understand Unconventional Warfare?"

<sup>41</sup> Pollack, *Armies of Sand*, 28-52.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 601.

produced “too few men with the skills...needed to succeed in industrial age warfare, surmising this has contributed for a poor return on the U.S. investment.”<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, one emergent element of success is keeping the forces trained small, gaining the benefits of elite soldiers with a high proportion of non-culturally regular skills. Pollack cites the Counter-terrorism Services (CTS) in Iraq as a prime example of this finding.<sup>44</sup> This broad analysis of Arab culture, Arab performance, and US assistance is especially important when considering SF efforts in Egypt.

Relevant literature concerning FID and partner capacity suggests that a regional, strategic, and specific approach is warranted. Existing literature clearly indicates that security assistance in the Middle East is precarious and involves significant cultural considerations. Additionally, a coherent strategy is important, potentially providing a higher quality program that should specifically address the internal problems through a meaningful military partnership.

### SF Partner Capacity Building

A 2019 Rand Study, “Measuring the Effectiveness of Special Operations,” identified measures of effectiveness to “demonstrate how SOF missions contribute to national and security objectives.”<sup>45</sup> The study identified seven steps that SOF should use to effectively assess operations: determine objectives, identify activities, define measures

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<sup>43</sup> Pollack, *Armies of Sand*, 609.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Linda Robinson, Daniel Egel, and Ryan Andrew Brown, *Measuring the Effectiveness of Special Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2019), accessed May 3, 2020, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2504.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2504.html), iii.

of effectiveness, identify indicators and data, conduct line of effort specific analysis, consolidate analysis, and conduct commander review.<sup>46</sup> The study highlights that persistent SOF operations, actions, and activities in an area provide considerable data to assess progress.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the study also highlights the SOF unique challenge of measuring effectiveness through partner performance in a foreign setting.<sup>48</sup> Rand indicates the challenges for measuring performance and establishing causation are many, but this observation yields a more measurable question for this study. Does SF have a reliable FID partner in a nation to examine partner outcome? Furthermore, in examining the partner outcome, what is the outcome at the tactical, operational, and strategic level of war?

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<sup>46</sup> Robinson, Egel, and Brown, *Measuring the Effectiveness of Special Operations*, 112.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, iii.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To determine the partner outcome of SF FID this thesis uses a comparative case study of SF FID in three countries.<sup>49</sup> All three cases selected have a recognized internal threat and an associated US program to deal with the threat. Examining case studies of similar context provide further understanding to determine the partner outcome of a US FID program.

A case study approach has advantages and disadvantages. According to David Culkin, a qualitative methodologist at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, case studies “provide a flexible approach to analysis, [combining] qualitative and quantitative approaches.”<sup>50</sup> Further, Culkin states, “the strength of case studies is their detail, their complexity, and their use of multiple sources to obtain multiple perspectives. The result is the thickness of description that allows the reader to interpret and decide the applicability of case learnings to other settings.”<sup>51</sup> Alternatively, a weakness of case studies is that they are not generalizable. While each case is unique, “lessons can be learned through analogy.”<sup>52</sup> This thesis will use comparative analysis to draw prescriptive lessons from the three case studies. (see Figure 1).

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<sup>49</sup> Shelagh Campbell, *Comparative Case Study Encyclopedia of Case Study Research* (Los Angeles, Sage Publications, 2010), 174.

<sup>50</sup> David Culkin, “Qualitative Research in the Social Sciences,” (Lecture, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, September 2019).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<b>Karlin</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training</li> <li>• Equipping</li> <li>• Organizational structure</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• U.S. limited involvement as a co-combatant</li> </ul>	<b>Haas (Successful Characteristics of FID)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unity of effort</li> <li>• Coordinated and effective intelligence</li> <li>• Minimum use of violence</li> <li>• Integrated psychological warfare operations –</li> <li>• Effective mechanisms to enhance legitimacy (for both the U.S. and HN efforts)</li> <li>• Precision targeting of the insurgent infrastructure</li> <li>• Perseverance and Patience</li> </ul>	<b>JP 3-22 (FID Planning Imperatives)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain HN sovereignty and build legitimacy.</li> <li>• Understand long-term or strategic implications and sustainability of all US assistance efforts before commencing FID.</li> <li>• Tailor military support to FID to the OE and the specific needs of the supported HN.</li> <li>• Incorporate unified action and unity of effort.</li> <li>• Understand US foreign policy.</li> <li>• Understand the information environment.</li> <li>• Sustain the effort, and Protect the effort.</li> </ul>		
<b>Internal Threat</b>	<b>Tactical</b>	<b>Operational</b>	<b>Strategic</b>	<b>FID Operation</b>
Threat warranting FID response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training</li> <li>• Equipping</li> <li>• Organization al Structure</li> <li>• Tailored to support HN need</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• US limited as a co-combatant</li> <li>• Precision targeting of insurgent infrastructure</li> <li>• Coordinated and effective intelligence</li> <li>• Unity of Effort</li> <li>• Civil Affairs and Psyops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership – “Sensitive Affairs”</li> <li>• HN legitimacy</li> <li>• Sustainability</li> </ul>	<p>In each country a significant FID combat operation occurred during the time period of research. Part of the analysis for each case includes considering the U.S. SF contribution and influence in each respective FID combat operation.</p>

Figure 1. Methodology

*Source:* Created by the author.

Each case was analyzed through the methodology listed in Figure 1. First, I examined the internal threat warranting the FID response. Second, I examined the specific SF FID partnership established to address the internal threat. Then, I examined the tactical, operational, and strategic factors of the FID partnership. Finally, I examined a significant FID combat operation that occurred in each nation to further measure partner outcome. Examining each case with this criterion determined the FID partner outcome.

Understanding the internal threat is important to gauge the outcome of SF FID partnerships for the U.S. To understand the internal threat, this thesis uses open source media, Geographic Combatant Command Congressional testimony, and Department of State documentation. This provides general understanding and what the U.S. national

objectives are in countering the threat. With this understanding, I shift to the specific SF FID partnerships that address those threats. Egypt, Lebanon, and the Philippines are similar in that all have internal threats addressed through broad U.S. security assistance and a specific SF partner.

The methodology to answer the partner outcome at the tactical, operational, and strategic level is based in part on Dr. Mara Karlin's book, *Building Militaries in Fragile States*. It is also informed by MG Haas' case study on successful COIN operations and current US FID doctrine.<sup>53</sup> While Karlin examined total security assistance, her methodology is useful for examining SF FID. Haas and U.S. FID doctrine directly apply.

Karlin identifies five key areas in defining the quality and quantity of building a military program: (1) training, (2) equipping, (3) organizational structure, (4) leadership, and (5) limiting direct US involvement as a co-combatant. Furthermore, Karlin found that successful FID achieves a sustainable monopoly of violence and allows U.S. involvement in the HN's sensitive military affairs.<sup>54</sup> Understanding her criteria and definition success provide a strong foundation for my methodology.

There is considerable overlap between MG Haas characteristics and the FID imperatives. Haas discovered that precision targeting of insurgent infrastructure, coordinated and effective intelligence, unity of effort, and psychological operations were important to successful FID operations. These correlate with the JP 3-22 imperatives of tailored support to specific HN needs, unified action and unity of effort, understanding

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<sup>53</sup> Karlin, *Building Militaries in Fragile States*; JCS, JP 3-22; Haas, "Special Forces Organization for Foreign Internal Defense in 2010."

<sup>54</sup> Karlin, *Building Militaries in Fragile States*, 11.

the information environment. I added civil affairs specifically. Additionally, JP 3-22 states that FID should prioritize HN legitimacy and sustainability of the FID mission and I included these as well in my methodology.

At the tactical level, I evaluated the training, equipping, HN SOF partner organization, and how SF tailored its support to the HN need. I examined the type of training SOF initially conducted in a nation, how it equipped its partner force and how it advised equipping external to SOF funding or resources. I also considered the organization and specific SOF partners SF established or connected with. Finally, I considered if the internal threat in the country drove the partnership.

The operational level of SF FID partner outcome is rooted in history and doctrine. Much of the operational criteria is drawn from a previous MMAS that considered successful characteristics of COIN. These characteristics are like the FID planning imperatives and similar to Dr. Karlin's characteristics, offering a conclusion that the operational criteria is well established. An important factor is also the U.S. limiting its involvement in combat. This does not mean SF is detached from combat operations but rather the partner force is conducting the operations without over-relying on SF. Coordinated intelligence and enabling precision targeting of the network are perhaps the most critical factors for SF FID at the operational level, as they demonstrate understanding of the operational environment and fusion of the effort. If FID can gather intelligence, fuse the intelligence with operations, and then effectively target bad actors it is clearly piercing a denied or sensitive environment, which is fundamental to SF UW and SF FID.

The operational understanding of the environment then enables unity of effort with the HN and U.S. interagency and intergovernmental effort. Unity of effort is therefore defined as multiple external entities supporting or gaining awareness from the SF FID effort. These entities include non-SOF HN military units, non-military security forces, and U.S. military and interagency partners. Additionally, this unity of effort also includes the SOF enablers of CA and PSYOP, which further indicate a comprehensive operational approach. After analyzing these operational criteria, I consider the strategic outcome of the FID partnership.

Impact at the strategic level is harder to define, but I consider relationships at the highest levels of a HN government, the long-term legitimacy of the effort, and the sustainability of the effort. A key finding of Dr. Karlin was successful security assistance allows the U.S. to influence sensitive decisions at the HN's national level. Therefore, I consider if the SF FID partnership enables communication and influence from the U.S. to HN senior leaders. Furthermore, does a nation make national security purchases based on SF advice or FID efforts? Additionally, is the effort sustainable and legitimate over time?

In each case, to further analyze SF partner outcome, I examine a significant FID combat operation conducted the HN military. I consider the partner outcome at the tactical, operational, and strategic level with respect to each major operation. I consider the outcome of the FID partner with respect to U.S. interests and against the identified internal threat.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

#### Philippines 2001 – 2019

<b>Internal Threat</b>	<b>Tactical</b>	<b>Operational</b>	<b>Strategic</b>	<b>FID Operation</b>
From 2001 – 2019 ASG, IS, and other VEOs presented a significant internal defense concern for the United States and the Philippines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JCET foundation</li> <li>• Initial relationship with host nation SOF with FID focus</li> <li>• FID related training</li> <li>• SOF-specific equipping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SF in advisory role</li> <li>• Coordinated intelligence enables targeting</li> <li>• Targeting: partners capable of executing arrests, raids, and precision fires</li> <li>• Unity of Effort – SF advised non SOF units, police forces, and integrated with greater US military and interagency effort</li> <li>• Focused civil affairs and PSYOP enabled with ground awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SF FID partnerships established credibility and relationships between SF and highest levels of AFP military</li> <li>• FID partnerships are a source of U.S. credibility despite political tension with Philippine head of state</li> <li>• FID partnership and effort did not eradicate threat but are legitimate and sustainable by the U.S. and Philippines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Battle of Marawi (2015)</li> <li>• The battle of Marawi demonstrated how SF FID at the tactical and operational level enabled Philippine SOF and the AFP to defeat IS in Marawi. This operation demonstrated the credibility of the U.S. - Philippine FID relationship, providing value at the strategic level. Marawi also demonstrates the limits of SF FID in eradicating internal threats.</li> </ul>

Figure 2. SF Partner Outcome in the Philippines

*Source:* Created by the author.

#### Internal Threat Overview

The U.S. Military has a long history in the Philippines, but the most recent engagement focused on the internal VEO threat. In 2000, ASG and other radical groups surfaced as a significant threat to the Philippine government, conducting several publicized terror actions in the southern islands of the Philippines.<sup>55</sup> ASG is a radical

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<sup>55</sup> Swain, “Case Study: Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines,” 1.

Muslim terrorist group with links to AQ, rooted in the long-standing Muslim separatist groups the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The MILF and MNLF are also Islamic groups but are distinguished from terrorists as separatists by the U.S. and Philippine government. ASG on the other hand was designated as a terrorist organization in 1997, but also fits the mold of a separatist group as it desires to establish a Muslim state ordered by Sharia law.<sup>56</sup> Other radical and criminal groups which threatened the Philippines internal stability in 2001 included Islamic groups like the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), and a large Communist faction.<sup>57</sup> Many of these threats were products of the large disenfranchised Muslim population in the Philippines. In summary, the complex internal threat situation warranted a US response in 2001.

In 2000 ASG conducted several notable terrorist actions which gained the attention of the U.S. Led by a veteran Mujahedeen fighter who fought the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s, ASG gained followers and power in the 1990s.<sup>58</sup> ASG reportedly received training and support from AQ and desired to establish an independent Muslim state encompassing the disenfranchised Muslim population of Basilan,

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<sup>56</sup> Swain, "Case Study: Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines," 8-9; Colleen Sullivan, "Abu Sayyaf Group," Britannica, September 10, 2014, accessed April 29, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Abu-Sayyaf-Group>.

<sup>57</sup> COL (RET) David Maxwell, "Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines: Lessons Learned from a Special Warfare Approach to Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency," unpublished draft, March 23, 2020, 2.

<sup>58</sup> Sullivan, "Abu Sayyaf Group."

Mindanao, and other small Philippine island provinces.<sup>59</sup> ASG conducted kidnappings and other criminal activity to earn financial support and increase its operational capacity. In March of 2000, ASG attacked two schools and kidnapped over 50 civilians, many of them children. In April, ASG kidnapped staff and tourists at a Malaysian resort on Sipidan Island. The tourists included U.S. and European citizens and the kidnapping gained international attention. The Philippine government ransomed the hostages and ASG's membership significantly increased.<sup>60</sup> By 2001, ASG headlined a growing radical Islamic signature in the southern Philippines which presented a tempting option to disenfranchised Muslims.

ASG and radical Muslim groups continued terror and criminal activity through the 2000s. On May 27, 2001, ASG raided resort near Basilan and kidnapped 20 tourists including three Americans. One of the Americans was beheaded while the remaining two were killed in an attempted rescue attempt by Philippine SOF.<sup>61</sup> In 2007, 10 Philippine Marines were beheaded by ASG on Basilan Island, demonstrating the groups remaining lethality.<sup>62</sup> ASG continued kidnappings and terror actions through 2008, including a ferry bombing that killed over 100 civilians.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, by 2008, due to continued

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<sup>59</sup> Sullivan, "Abu Sayyaf Group."

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Agence France Press, "Abu Sayaff Men Held for Dos Palmas Kidnappings," *ABS-CBN News*, September 13, 2012, accessed April 29, 2020, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/nation/regions/09/13/12/2-abu-sayyaf-men-held-dos-palmas-kidnappings>.

<sup>62</sup> Maxwell, "Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines," 8.

<sup>63</sup> Agence France Press, "Abu Sayyaf Men Held for Dos Palmas Kidnappings."

military pressure and political negotiations with the MILF, ASG lost much of its support and its membership dwindled to “less than 100 hard-core militants and 200-300 active followers.”<sup>64</sup> ASG was effectively countered but the foundation for insurgency continued to exist in the Southern Philippines.

The southern Philippines remains an impoverished region with a substantial Muslim population. The same roots that allowed ASG to gain power allowed IS to establish a base in the Philippines in 2014. In 2014, many of the remaining radical jihadists in the southern Philippines reflagged under IS. Just as IS capitalized on previous terror and insurgent tendencies in Iraq and Syria, IS in the Philippines united the existing Jihadists in the Philippines.<sup>65</sup> IS provided external support and financing to jihadists led by local Emir Isnilion Hapilon. In May 2015, Hapilon led a 1,000 strong IS force and seized the city of Marawi in Mindanao. The battle of Marawi captured the rise of IS Philippines rise and the Philippine response.<sup>66</sup>

The Philippine Armed Forces (AFP) responded to the seizure of Marawi and liberated the city in October 2015 after five months of tough fighting. The AFP was successful in killing Hapilon and his subordinate leaders, but the fight to re-take Marawi

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<sup>64</sup> Maxwell, “Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines,” 18; Peter Chalk, Angel Rabasa, William Rosenau, and Leanne Piggott, *The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009), 53.

<sup>65</sup> Inspector General, Department of Defense (IG DOD); Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of State (IG DOS); and Office of Inspector General, U.S. Agency for International Development (IG USAID), *Operation Pacific Eagle Philippines: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, July 1, 2019-September 30, 2019),

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

displaced 350,000 citizens and destroyed much of Marawi's infrastructure. The U.S. assisted the Philippine Army in retaking the city through its existing military assistance infrastructure. On September 1, 2017, the U.S. commenced Operation Pacific Eagle – Philippines (OPE-P), a continuing USINDOPACOM CT operation to combat IS and other VEOs in the Philippines.

#### SF Partner Outcome

Over two decades of partnership with the Philippine SOF prepared Green Berets to engage the internal threat present in the Philippines in 2001. U.S. SF had established long-standing relationships with Philippine SOF units, including the SF, SEALs, and Scout Rangers.<sup>67</sup> After assessing a need, U.S. Green Berets built the Light Reaction Regiment (LRR), which began with a Light Reaction Company (LRC) in 2001.

In 2000, the U.S. State Department's Ambassador for Counterterrorism initiated a program to establish a Philippine national counterterrorist force resulting in U.S. SF developing the LRC in 2001. USINDOPACOM, via Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC), directed the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 1<sup>st</sup> SF Group (Airborne) (1/1 SFG(A)) to execute this mission.<sup>68</sup> The LRC and existing Philippine SOF, with US SF FID support, served as the foundation to a campaign to engage the internal threat at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels.

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<sup>67</sup> COL (RET) David Maxwell, email message to author, March 23, 2020; MAJ Adam Janetti, interview with author, April 12, 2020.

<sup>68</sup> Maxwell, "Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines," 6.

U.S. SF began the FID campaign with influence at the strategic level due to previous tactical efforts and partnerships. A telling example of this influence occurred during the initial meeting between 1<sup>st</sup> SFG(A) and the Philippine Army General Staff. At this meeting, Philippine General Officers personally recognized an SF NCO from previous tactical training. These existing partnerships and subsequent influence gave the Philippine General Staff confidence in U.S. SF's ability to assist with the difficult mission. Influence and credibility at the strategic level enabled subsequent FID efforts to have greater impact at all three levels of war.

At the tactical level, the FID campaign required proper training and equipment. Experienced SF NCOs from 1<sup>st</sup> SFG(A) established an effective training and equipping plan, enabling Philippine SOF to increase in capacity and number. SF enhanced all Philippine SOF during this time, growing numbers and improving capability. For example, from 2001 to 2003, the LRC grew from a company to a regiment because 1<sup>st</sup> SFG(A) established a Philippine SOF training cadre who generated combat power internally.<sup>69</sup> The Green Berets identified smart equipping solutions as well. Understanding the Philippines manufactured .45 caliber ammunition, 1/1 SFG(A) ensured the LRC was equipped with .45 caliber pistols instead of 9mm pistols because 9mm ammunition was not internally produced in the Philippines.<sup>70</sup> The initial SF tactical relationships and tactical partnerships established a foundation for Operation Freedom Eagle.

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<sup>69</sup> Maxwell, "Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines," 4.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

Operation Freedom Eagle eventually became Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines (OEF-P) and oversaw the establishment of an enduring U.S.-Philippine effort against VEOs in the Southern Philippines. Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) 510 was a SOCPAC-led task force within OEF-P in 2001 to counter internal threats at the operational level. JTF 5-10 consisted of 1,300 U.S. personnel with a limit of 600 who could deploy to Zamboanga City to co-locate with the AFP's southern command. SF Soldiers from 1<sup>st</sup> SFG(A) were the main effort of JTF 510, forming the nucleus of the forces deployed to Zamboanga.”<sup>71</sup> Ten SF Operational Detachment Alphas (ODAs) deployed from Zamboanga to Basilan and advised Philippine Scout Ranger units, Marine units, and 15 Army infantry battalions who were fighting ASG. SF also continued to advise and build the LRC into the LRR during this time.<sup>72</sup> The Philippine government did not permit SF to engage in direct combat, but SF were able to provide training and remote advice to Philippine units engaging ASG. Civil Affairs, PSYOP, and a 500-man Navy-Marine Engineering task group supported the kinetic advise and assist operations.<sup>73</sup> By 2002, the “Basilan model” became a template for local FID success by temporarily removing the threat from Basilan; however, the VEO threat shifted and persisted in other areas within the Southern Philippines.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Barry Stentiford, *Success in the Shadows: Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines and the Global War on Terror, 2002 – 2015* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2018), 36.

<sup>72</sup> Maxwell email; Stentiford, *Success in the Shadows*, 37.

<sup>73</sup> Stentiford, *Success in the Shadows*, 37.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

JTF 510 and the Basilan model served as an operational foundation for JSOTF-P. SOCPAC replaced JTF 510 with a robust liaison element which evolved into JSTOF-P. The AFP also established a command and control structure to engage the internal threats in the Southern Philippines (see appendix C).<sup>75</sup>

The AFP established Task Force *Comet* with the bulk of Philippine SOF deployed to Jolo Island to combat the VEOs in the region. Simultaneously, by 2006, JSOTF-P had established an operational approach to countering VEOs in the Southern Philippines through four lines of effort: (1) Capacity building of Philippines Security Forces, (2) Targeted Civil Military Operations (3) Intelligence Operations, and (4) Information Operations (see appendix D).<sup>76</sup> These lines of effort guided the combined SOF campaign for the remainder of OEF-P.

To support line of effort one, JSOTF-P continued to work with and through Philippine SOF but also expanded direct advisement to local police forces and enablers. SF identified that lasting results required engaging local law enforcement during the initial placement of 1<sup>st</sup> SFG(A) in support of Philippine SOF.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, JSOTF-P advised the AFP to work through local law enforcement as a force multiplier, improving law enforcement professionalism and allowing local law enforcement to replace the military in checkpoints. An example of the payoff from this effort occurred in 2007 when ten Philippine Marines were beheaded by ASG. Instead of a heavy-handed military

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<sup>75</sup> Stentiford, *Success in the Shadows*, 49.

<sup>76</sup> Swain, "Case Study: Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines," 23.

<sup>77</sup> Maxwell email.

response, a capable police force issued arrest warrants and worked closely with Philippine SOF units to surgically engage the responsible ASG forces. This resulted in improved relations with the local population while minimizing collateral damage.<sup>78</sup>

Fires and intelligence provided important operational support necessary to isolate and engage the internal threat. To improve fires, JSOTF-P, in concert with U.S. joint conventional force, provided training, night vision goggles, and cameras to Philippine rotary wing and select fixed wing aircraft crews. Training was also provided to artillery assets and observers.<sup>79</sup> Concurrently, fusion centers at the Western Mindanao Command and subordinate task forces enabled intelligence collection and operational fusion down to the battalion level. Simultaneously, SF worked with Philippine counterparts to develop human intelligence networks while also assisting with essential equipping including Scan Eagle UAVs and additional sensors on Philippine aircraft.<sup>80</sup> These improvements facilitated successes such as enabling the LRC, Scout Rangers, and SEALs to identify and dismantle an ASG communication code and network of support on Jolo Island.<sup>81</sup> Improvements to intelligence and fires added important capability to the campaign, integrating the larger U.S. military security assistance effort into the SF led campaign to more effectively target and precisely engage terrorist threats.

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<sup>78</sup> Maxwell, "Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines," 8.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

The development of Joint Special Operations Groups (JSOGs) was another development supporting fires and intelligence fusion. JSOGs combined LRCs with dedicated Philippine Air Force (PAF) helicopters, providing improved command and control to conduct targeted raids against terrorists. The U.S. equipped PAF pilots with night vision goggles and provided training to enable the Air Force to insert LRC's at night to conduct operations.<sup>82</sup> The JSOG architecture was successful and was employed later in Marawi.<sup>83</sup>

The forward operations of JSOTF-P and its partners enabled impactful CMO at the local and national levels. At the local level, forces identified small projects that supported tactical objectives. For example, in Sulu province, AFP forces advised by US SOF built a community coordination center that empowered a local mayor to reside in his province instead of living off the island—this improved local governance and synched SOF action with local governance.<sup>84</sup> At the operational and strategic level, U.S. forces in the southern Philippines provided necessary awareness for Mindanao Economic Development Corporation and USAID initiatives, enabling “schools, medical facilities, roads, livelihood programs, and business development.”<sup>85</sup> Over the course of OEF-P, USAID provided over \$300 million to the Southern Philippines and had a long-standing

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<sup>82</sup> Stentiford, *Success in the Shadows*, 45.

<sup>83</sup> MAJ Adam Janetti, interview with author, April 12, 2020.

<sup>84</sup> Maxwell, “Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines,” 14.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

partnership with JSOTF-P.<sup>86</sup> SF provided awareness and oversight to the substantial USAID efforts. Targeted CMO reinforced the efforts of JSOTF-P, the Philippine government, and US government in combating VEOs in the southern Philippines.

JSOTF-P and its partners enabled effective messaging to combat the narrative of ASG and other radicals, while highlighting the efforts of the Philippine SOF and the Philippine government. JSOTF-P conducted targeted information operations against ASG and other groups, degrading radical messaging and recruiting.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps the most important message was emphasizing U.S. forces were operating in support of the AFP and Philippine government instead of the U.S. being involved direct combat, like in Iraq and Afghanistan. This message held true over time, increasing the legitimacy of the AFP while quelling popular and political opposition to the US military presence in the Philippines. Information operations were informed by ground truth and integrated into a campaign that continued into 2019.

#### Battle for Marawi

In 2014, IS Philippines surfaced as a significant threat by seizing Marawi. Even as OEF-P concluded in 2014, the joint campaign begun by SF in 2001 persisted through a SF liaison element, serving as the basis for another US surge to combat the VEO threat in the Philippines. Indeed, the foundation built through the efforts of JSOTF-P's partners contributed to the defeat of IS in Marawi in the Southern Philippines.

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<sup>86</sup> Stentiford, *Success in the Shadows*, 53.

<sup>87</sup> Maxwell, "Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines," 16.

Philippine SOF served as the main effort in defeating IS and re-taking Marawi. JSOG, LRR, Scout Rangers, SF, and Philippine National Police Special Action Force (PNP SAF) all fought in the battle of Marawi and sustained high casualties.<sup>88</sup> Philippine SOF, advised by U.S. SOF, had continued to battle radical Muslim groups in the Philippines since the completion of OEF-P in 2014. The Scout Rangers operated almost exclusively in the Southern Philippines with units assigned to specific battle space. Additionally, it was a JSOG raid against a VEO target which spurred a protest of Muslim sympathizers in Marawi that created an opportunity for IS to seize control of the city. Consequently, Philippine SOF were faced with difficult conditions and an arduous urban fight to retake the city.

The US SOF footprint in the Philippines at the outset of Marawi was significantly smaller than JTF 510 in 2001. Instead of 1,300 U.S. personnel with an SF battalion at the core, the advisory element consisted of “100 to 200 U.S. Personnel” with a core Philippine Advisory Team (PAT) led by an SF LTC and a small contingent of SOF advisors including small teams of SF, Marine Raiders, CA, PSYOP, and Air Force Special Operations.<sup>89</sup> These advisors provided remote advice and assistance, primarily from headquarters locations during Marawi. The small US footprint advising the Marawi fight was enough because the Philippine SOF were the best trained and equipped units in the fight for Marawi.<sup>90</sup> Years of SF partnership before and during OEF-P provided a

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<sup>88</sup> Janetti, interview.

<sup>89</sup> Agence France Presse, “US played key role in helping AFP retake Marawi: envoy”; Janetti interview.

<sup>90</sup> Janetti interview.

capable force that could respond to a significant internal threat without requiring the U.S. to be involved as a co-combatant.

Strategically, the U.S. SF FID effort was a sustainable model that increased HN legitimacy. The siege of Marawi, led by Philippine SOF who the U.S. trained and advised for decades, is exhibit A. The Philippine SOF were the most capable force in the fight and U.S. support was limited and remote, especially compared to JTF 510 in 2001. The battle for Marawi reinforced the legitimacy of the AFP who was led by Philippine SOF in the operation. The light and sustainable footprint of U.S. SOF and military advisors was politically palatable for both nations. US SOF support to the AFP during the battle for Marawi demonstrates the lasting influence of U.S. SF FID at the highest levels of the Philippine government.

SF FID efforts arguably provide influence at the highest levels of the Philippine government despite overt opposition from the President of the Philippines. In September of 2015, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte declared that U.S. SF would be required to leave Mindanao.<sup>91</sup> The following month, in a public address in China, Duterte proclaimed that China, Russia, and the Philippines were joined “against the world” and “America has lost now.”<sup>92</sup> However, in June 2015 after the siege of Marawi concluded, Duterte called the U.S. an ally, praised U.S. support, and deemed previous disputes with

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<sup>91</sup> Debasish Roy Chowdhury, “What now for Duterte’s China pivot as Marawi cements US importance for Philippines?” *South China Morning Post*, June 16, 2017, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/article/2098544/what-now-dutertes-china-pivot-marawi-cements-us-importance-philippines>.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

America as “water under the bridge.”<sup>93</sup> Additionally, the Chief of Staff of the AFP credited U.S. support in Marawi with “tilting the balance” against IS in Marawi, reinforcing the strategic influence of the U.S SF FID focused partnership.<sup>94</sup>

The U.S. provided material support to the Philippines during Marawi, but this influence was long established through FID-influenced security assistance. Between 2001 and 2019, the U.S. provided \$1.3 billion to the Philippines in total security assistance. Approximately half (\$640,762,000) was FMF, funding Philippine purchases of US defense articles.<sup>95</sup> After FMF, section 1206 “train and equip” funding and section 333 “build partner capacity” were second and third in total dollar amount, representing approximately 20 percent (\$218,117,000) of total U.S. Security Assistance from 2001 to 2019.<sup>96</sup> FID-focused relationships, led by US SOF, helped guide this process and established influence through long-term equipping. In Marawi, the U.S. built upon this base by providing “drones and P-3 Orion aircraft...300 assault rifles, 200 pistols, 100 grenade launchers, four heavy machine guns, and two Cessna surveillance aircraft.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Dr. Ian Storey, “End of Marawi Siege Underscores Critical Importance of US-Philippine Alliance,” Yusof Ishak Institute, October 30, 2017, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/media/commentaries/end-of-marawi-siege-underscores-critical-importance-of-usphilippine-alliance-by-ian-storey/>.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Security Assistance Monitor, “Military Aid Dashboard: Philippines, 2001-2020,” Center for International Policy, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://securityassistance.org/data/program/military/Philippines/2001/2020/all/Global/>.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Storey, “End of Marawi Siege Underscores Critical Importance of US-Philippine Alliance.”

China provided material support as well, through 6,000 assault rifles and nine million rounds of ammunition; however, China provided no advice or assistance during the battle, possibly because China had not built decades-long relationships preceding the conflict.

Marawi presented a significant internal threat to the Philippines from IS at a time when the rise of IS was a principle concern of U.S. foreign policy. The AFP with minimal but significant support from the U.S. defeated IS in Marawi. In doing so the AFP helped restore a political relationship between President Duterte and the U.S. The battle of Marawi and the preceding long-term SF FID relationships demonstrate how addressing internal threats provides important partnerships. In the era of great power competition, where VEOs also remain as a significant threat, FID partnerships present a unique value proposition that should not be overlooked.

Lebanon: 2006 – 2019

<b>Internal Threat</b>	<b>Tactical</b>	<b>Operational</b>	<b>Strategic</b>	<b>FID Operation</b>
From 2006 – 2019 AQ, IS, and other VEOs presented a significant internal defense concern for the United States and Lebanon. LH also presented a concern for the United States.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JCET foundation</li> <li>• Initial relationship with host nation SOF with FID focus</li> <li>• FID related training</li> <li>• SOF-specific equipping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. SF in advisory role</li> <li>• Coordinated intelligence enables targeting</li> <li>• Targeting: partners capable of executing raids and precision fires</li> <li>• Unity of Effort – SF advised non SOF units and integrated with greater U.S. military and interagency effort through SOCFWD-L</li> <li>• Focused civil affairs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SF FID partnerships established credibility and relationships between SF and highest levels of LAF military</li> <li>• FID partnerships are a foothold of U.S. influence despite increased Iranian influence</li> <li>• FID partnerships are legitimate and sustainable by the U.S. and Lebanon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operation Dawn of the Hills (2017)</li> <li>• SF FID at the tactical and operational level enabled LSOF and LAF to defeat IS in NE Lebanon, cementing U.S. influence at the military strategic level and offering a foothold for the U.S. to counter the significant influence of LH and Iran in Lebanon. The simultaneous LH operation shows the limits of SF FID.</li> </ul>

Figure 3. SF Partner Outcome in Lebanon

*Source:* Created by the author.

Internal Threat Overview

In 2005, Lebanon expelled Syria and achieved its independence during the Cedar Revolution.<sup>98</sup> Syria had maintained a military presence and considerable political control since 1982, following a period of instability that culminated in the Iran sponsored bombing of U.S. Marine Barracks in Beirut. Syria’s presence and Iran’s longstanding influence appeared vulnerable in 2005, and the U.S. elected to support the new Lebanese

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<sup>98</sup> Emile El-Hokayem and Elena McGovern, “Towards a More Secure and Stable Lebanon: Prospects for Security Sector Reform,” (Conference Summary, The Henry L Stimson Center, Washington, DC, February 2008), accessed May 2, 2020, <http://lebanonrenaissance.org/assets/Uploads/Towards-a-More-Secure-and-Stable-Lebanon.pdf>, 4.

government through security assistance, “training and equipping the Lebanese military.”<sup>99</sup> In his March 2006 SASC testimony, USCENTCOM Commander GEN Abizaid presented the opportunity to chart a new course in Lebanon, but outlined the opposition of Syrian influence and the Iranian backed militia, Lebanese Hezbollah (LH).

LH continued to increase political and military power and influence in Lebanon following the Cedar Revolution. LH demonstrated its power in Lebanon in the summer of 2006 in a war against Israel. LH forces and Israel fought for 34 days in southern Lebanon, requiring the LAF and UN Security Forces to intervene. Israel withdrew forces following UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701.<sup>100</sup> UNSCR 1701 ended the conflict with an agreement that was enforced by UN security forces and the LAF.<sup>101</sup>

Since 2006, LH cemented its place in Lebanon and now “maintains an extensive security apparatus, political organization, and social services network in Lebanon.”<sup>102</sup> LH is based in the Shiite regions of Lebanon, including the Bekaa Valley, Southern Lebanon, and parts of Beirut and has significantly increased its combat power and influence since 2006. “LH [reportedly] grew from 3,000 fighters in 2006 to 25,000 active

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<sup>99</sup> Eric S. Edelman and Mara E. Karlin, “Fool Me Twice: How the United States Lost Lebanon Again,” *World Affairs* 174, no. 1 (May-June 2011): 33-34.

<sup>100</sup> Jack Jensen, “Special Operations Command (Forward) Lebanon: SOF Campaigning Left of the Line,” *Special Warfare* 25, no. 2 (April-June 2012): 30.

<sup>101</sup> United Nations, Department of Public Information, News and Media Division (UN), “Security Council Call for End to Hostilities between Hizbollah, Israel, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1701(2006),” Press Release, August 11, 2006, accessed May 2, 2020, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2006/sc8808.doc.htm>.

<sup>102</sup> Kali Robinson, “What is Hezbollah?” Council on Foreign Relations, January 22, 2020, accessed May 2, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-hezbollah>.

fighters and an additional 20,000 to 30,000 in reserve in 2019.”<sup>103</sup> LH has conducted sophisticated overt training in Lebanon and boasts a considerable arsenal of modern weaponry. Israel assesses that LH increased its rocket arsenal from 14,000 in 2006 to 150,00 in 2017 and receives considerable support from Iran.<sup>104</sup> Consequently, LH has directly supported the embattled Syrian regime of Bashar Al Assad, gaining valuable combat experience and emerging as an expeditionary, non-state military force.<sup>105</sup> LH certainly increased in all elements of power since 2006.

Politically and socially, LH is a de-facto representative of the Shiite Muslim population of Lebanon. In 2009, LH officially entered Lebanon’s political sphere with a manifesto that called for democracy and reduced radical rhetoric. In 2018, 13 LH members were elected to Lebanon’s 128-seat parliament.<sup>106</sup> Socially, LH provides “a vast network of social services [including] infrastructure, health care facilities, schools, and youth programs,” endearing LH to Shia and non-Shia Lebanese citizens.<sup>107</sup> This social and political reality complicates the U.S. terrorist designation, mandating a nuanced response that acknowledges LH’s influence.

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<sup>103</sup> Nicholas Blanford, “Israel Raises Alarm Over Advances by Hezbollah,” IHS Janes, 2017, accessed May 2, 2020, [https://www.janes.com/images/assets/560/76560/Israel\\_raises\\_alarm\\_over\\_advances\\_by\\_Hizbullah\\_and\\_Iran.pdf](https://www.janes.com/images/assets/560/76560/Israel_raises_alarm_over_advances_by_Hizbullah_and_Iran.pdf), 6.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>106</sup> Robinson, “What is Hezbollah?”

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

The 2019 Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) for Lebanon affirms the influence of LH in Lebanon. The ICS is an annual strategy developed by the U.S. country team and signed by the Ambassador. Lebanon's ICS states that LH is "a designated foreign terrorist organization with considerable support from Iran, [that] maintains a powerful military, political, and economic, and security presence."<sup>108</sup> The ICS also indicates that LH remained emboldened due to the instability and refugees emanating from the Syrian Civil War. As of 2018, Lebanon held over 1.3 million Syrian refugees.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, LH continues to exert influence as a provider of security, social services, and political representation.

In addition to LH, Lebanon also has a Sunni VEO threat, including IS, Al-Nusra, and AQ. This threat is best characterized by three significant clashes: the 2007 Battle of Nahr al Balad; the 2014 Battle of Aarsal; and the 2017 Operation Dawn of the Hills (ODH). The 100 day battle of Nahr al Balad was the LAF's first conflict after the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War, pitting the LAF against Sunni Islamists at the Nahr al Balad refugee camp near Tripoli, Lebanon.<sup>110</sup> The U.S. provided direct support through 40 separate C-17 resupplies of ammunition and military equipment, but the battle highlighted shortcomings in the LAF. A Lebanese officer remarked that more sophisticated equipment would have allowed the LAF to win in 15 days, while another

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<sup>108</sup> U.S. Embassy Lebanon, "Integrated Country Strategy Lebanon," Beirut, Lebanon, August 9, 2018, 2.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Robert F. Worth and Eric Lipton, "U.S. Resupplies Lebanon Military to Stabilize Ally," *New York Times*, October 25, 2008.

LAF officer specifically emphasized that Lebanon did not have UAVs, night vision equipment, and other important military equipment necessary for combating the Sunni VEO threats.<sup>111</sup> The Battle of Nahr al Balad was a win for the LAF, but a win that highlighted significant weakness in the LAF's combat capacity.

The 2014 Battle of Arsal was another significant engagement between the LAF and Sunni VEOs. In 2014, the LAF captured an IS subsidiary leader, provoking around 700 IS and (then) AQ-affiliated Al-Nusra fighters to attack LAF elements in Arsal.<sup>112</sup> The initial Sunni VEO attack was successful, but the LAF responded with a counterattack and fought until reaching a ceasefire after five days. Both the IS and Al-Nusra elements withdrew, but conflict between the LAF and Sunni VEOs continued sporadically in Arsal through 2017.<sup>113</sup> The Arsal conflict set the stage for ODH in 2017. The operation demonstrated remarkable improvement of the LAF and provides the best example of the impact of the US SF FID partnership in Lebanon.

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<sup>111</sup> Worth and Lipton, "U.S. Resupplies Lebanon Military to Stabilize Ally."

<sup>112</sup> Nicholas Blanford, "The Lebanese Armed Forces and Hezbollah's Competing Summer Offensives Against Sunni Militants," *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 8 (September 2017): 27-32, <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-lebanese-armed-forces-and-hezbollahs-competing-summer-offensives-against-sunni-militants/>.

<sup>113</sup> Civil Society Knowledge Center, "Arsal Conflict (starting August 2, 2014)," last updated December 2017, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://civilsociety-centre.org/timelines/27778#event-a-href-sir-clashes-between-army-and-militants-arsalclashes-between-army-and-militants-in-arsal-a>.

## SF Partner Outcome

The SF partnership centered around three key LSOF units: Ranger Regiment, Air Assault Regiment, and Marine Commandos.<sup>114</sup> The Ranger Regiment consists of “five mechanized Infantry companies, three mountain companies, and an armor company,” which are sustained by internal logistics and sustainment elements.<sup>115</sup> The Air Assault Regiment consists of five infantry companies, one armored company, an artillery battery, and a support company.<sup>116</sup> Members of both units are required to complete the Ranger Course, and the Air Assault Regiment require an additional Air Assault Course. The Marine Commandoes were established in 1997 to provide the LAF with a maritime SOF capability to defend the Mediterranean coastline.<sup>117</sup> The Marine Commandos conduct similar training to the Rangers and Air Assault Regiment but have a maritime focus. All three units are the foundation of US SOF investment in Lebanon.

In 2006, U.S. SF engaged LSOF and re-established a partnership that remains. SF established an initial relationship with some LSOF units in the 1980s, but this partnership stalled, largely due to the untenable political situation in Lebanon prior to 2005.<sup>118</sup> SF initially focused on episodic training at the tactical level, including marksmanship, small unit tactics, and operations in urban terrain with the Air Assault Regiment and Ranger

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<sup>114</sup> Jensen, “Special Operations Command (Forward) Lebanon,” 32.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Reber interview.

Regiment, while SEALs conducted maritime-focused training with the Marine Commandos.<sup>119</sup> This training established a tactical foundation for future operations and expansion to a permanent SOF presence in Lebanon in 2011 with the establishment of Special Operations Command Forward-Lebanon (SOCFWD-L).<sup>120</sup>

SOCFWD-L was a permanent headquarters commanded by an Army Colonel (O-6), providing command and control of U.S. SOF in Lebanon while also working directly with the US Ambassador and the Country Team. The SOCFWD-L Commander worked out of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and reported directly to the SOCCENT Commander, the SOF Special Operations Component Command of USCENTCOM. This fusion of USCENTCOM, SOCCENT, and the U.S. Country Team in Lebanon allowed SF to tailor its support and directly address an internal threat in Lebanon.

SOCFWD-L capitalized on the SF FID partnerships and tailored support to build LSOF capacity to counter VEOs. The first SOCFWD-L Commander noted that five years of SF engagement focused on counterterrorism after Nahr Al Balad had already “greatly improved the [LSOF] ability to counter terrorists and other sources of instability within Lebanon.”<sup>121</sup> SOCFWD-L continued to build on this foundation. For example, SOCFWD-L secured \$1.5 million under section 1206 Counter Narco Terrorism (CNT)

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<sup>119</sup> 5th SFG(A) NCO, interview with author, April 2, 2020.

<sup>120</sup> Jensen, “Special Operations Command (Forward) Lebanon,” 29.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

funding to build the LSOF Rangers a “shoot house” to continue to support the Rangers tactical improvement in urban operations.<sup>122</sup>

Though still addressing the Sunni VEO threat through tactical partnerships and capacity, SOCFWD-L established a second line of effort to use LSOF to professionalize the LAF and increase LAF legitimacy as a guarantor of security to the Lebanon population. This line of effort allowed U.S. SF to strategically counter LH’s position as a guarantor of security to Lebanon.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, this line of effort was demonstrated, both operationally and strategically, in ODH. This impact would not have been possible without the meaningful tactical partnership between SF and LSOF which served as a foundation for trust and credibility.

Because SF focused on internal defense concerns like CT, SF tactical initiatives were relevant to senior U.S. and LAF leaders. SOCFWD-L’s seamless integration with the US Country team, SF tactical elements, and LSOF partners extended SOCFWD-L’s influence to LAF senior leaders, conventional LAF units, and the Lebanese Air Force. This resulted in direct relationships between the SOCFWD-L Commander, the US Defense Attaché (DATT) in Lebanon, and the LAF General Staff. Such expanded influence was critical in the success of ODH, which demonstrated the outcome of SF’s LSOF partners at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels.

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<sup>122</sup> 5th SFG(A) NCO interview.

<sup>123</sup> Jensen, “Special Operations Command (Forward) Lebanon,” 30.

## Operation Dawn of the Hills (ODH)

ODH was a week-long operation in July 2017 during which approximately 7,000 LAF and LSOF destroyed the IS pocket between the Lebanon and Syrian border. The operation was praised by defense professionals globally and demonstrated marked improvement by the LAF.<sup>124</sup> It is important to note that the operation occurred simultaneously with Hezbollah operations against IS elements in Syria, which resulted in criticism that the operations were coordinated (see Appendix E).<sup>125</sup> Certainly, the operation demonstrates the complexity of supporting the LAF in Lebanon, given Sunni VEOs are also opposed by Hezbollah. Nevertheless, the Nahr Al Balad and Arsal conflicts established Sunni VEOs were a significant threat in Lebanon and the LAF's ability to counter this internal threat was critical to the LAF being a legitimate option for security instead of LH. Consequently, the LAF's performance in ODH demonstrates the outcome of SF FID partnerships in Lebanon, established by the tactical investment into LSOF partners, which generated notable operational and strategic outcomes.

First, ODH demonstrates the outcome of SF FID partnerships at the operational level. The LSOF Air Assault Regiment was the only LSOF partner to participate in ODH and demonstrated the ability to target the insurgent infrastructure. While the Air Assault Regiment played an important role, a "non-SOF" LAF unit, the 6<sup>th</sup> Intervention Regiment

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<sup>124</sup> Blanford, "The Lebanese Armed Forces and Hezbollah's Competing Summer Offensives Against Sunni Militants."

<sup>125</sup> Hardin Lang and Alia Awadallah, "Playing the Long Game: U.S. Counterterrorism Assistance for Lebanon," Center for American Progress, August 30, 2017, accessed May 2, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2017/08/30/437853/playing-long-game/>.

(6<sup>th</sup> IR), had the most prominent role in the operation. The 6<sup>th</sup> IR headquarters was located with the Air Assault Regiment headquarters, allowing the SF detachment located with the Air Assault Regiment headquarters to provide remote advice and assistance to both the Air Assault Regiment and the 6<sup>th</sup> IR, without becoming involved as a co-combatant.<sup>126</sup>

The operation also demonstrated unity of effort between SF, the larger U.S. military, and the Department of State. U.S. logistical support to the 6<sup>th</sup> IR, the lead LAF unit in ODH, was one example of the unity of effort. SF advisors were aware that the 6<sup>th</sup> IR required better machine guns and notified the US DATT of the need. The DATT then facilitated several new shipments of machine guns to the 6<sup>th</sup> IR.<sup>127</sup> SF alone was unable to resource this equipment request and the Defense Attaché Office (DAO) did not have the awareness to identify the need. Together, SF and the DAO solved the problem.

Unity of effort between the U.S. government and LAF was also on display in an unconventional approach to precision fires during ODH. The long-standing partnership between SF and LSOF allowed the SOCFWD-L Commander to identify an opportunity to use excess U.S. M712 Copperhead artillery rounds to support LAF fires. The LAF had an effective artillery capability and the Copperhead rounds allowed U.S. SF to enable that capability to provide precision fires. M712 Copperhead rounds are designed to be controlled by a laser designator, which guides the artillery round to its target. U.S. SF

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<sup>126</sup> COL Michael Sullivan (2017 SOCFWD-L Commander), email message to the author, corroborated through email with other members of SOCFWD-L and Lebanon DAO, February 24, 2020.

<sup>127</sup> Sullivan email.

trained the LSOF and LAF on the capabilities of the Copperhead rounds and the LAF developed an innovative technique of laser designating from AC208 aircraft.<sup>128</sup> This allowed LAF observers in the aircraft to observe a target, laser the target from the air, and achieve Hellfire missile-like effects with artillery rounds at a fraction of the cost. During ODH, the Copperhead rounds had a 90 percent hit rate, even destroying a moving motorcycle carrying two IS combatants.<sup>129</sup> Through unity of effort, SF spearheaded an effective fires solution that allowed the LAF to target the insurgent infrastructure.

ODH also highlights the CA operations enabled from SF FID partnerships. SF relationships with LSOF and LAF enabled US CA teams to establish a Civil Military Cooperation Center (CMOC) with the LAF. Specifically, CA teams established a CMOC in Tripoli and Tyre and worked with USAID and other NGOs to enable local projects to build support for LAF units in their respective regions of influence.<sup>130</sup> This infrastructure enabled the LAF to provide military aid to the civilian population during ODH. In doing so, the LAF demonstrated care for the civilian population while conducting combat operations. This capability indicated the progress the LAF made towards becoming a professional force capable of securing and caring for the population of Lebanon.

ODH also demonstrates SF partner outcome at the strategic level. The SOCFWD-L Commander and the US DATT advised the LAF Chief of Defense and other key LAF senior leaders before, during, and after the operation. A separate U.S. SF command and

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<sup>128</sup> Sullivan email.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

control node maintained a 24-hour presence at the LAF headquarters overseeing the operation.<sup>131</sup> This level of integration was business as usual for U.S. SF in Lebanon. Influence at the highest levels of the Lebanese government was enabled by the credibility established through years of FID-focused partnerships with the LSOF.

The strategic payoff was also evident in U.S. security assistance. Eighty percent of the military equipment used in ODH was purchased from the U.S. More importantly, this equipment was employable and sustainable by the LAF. The equipment included AC208 Combat Caravans, M712 Copperhead rounds, M60 tanks, and heavy and light machine guns. The SF awareness that helped guide this equipping allowed \$1.9 billion in U.S. security assistance to have a significant impact on the prioritized internal defense issues that were identified in 2006.

ODH also shows how SF FID tactical partnerships with HN SOF establish a foundation for greater military action and overall US influence. While LSOF directly participated in ODH, conventional forces like the 6<sup>th</sup>IR, the Lebanese Air Force, and LAF artillery units were decisive in the LAF success. US SF advisors were directly or indirectly involved with these units. The preceding years of SF partnership with elite LSOF units established far reaching credibility and influence, permeating the LAF with former LSOF leaders such as the 6<sup>th</sup> IR Commander, a former LSOF Ranger. Additionally, the tactical FID partnerships provided invaluable awareness of the ground situation, enabling operational and strategic decisions that had an outsized impact.

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<sup>131</sup> Sullivan email.

Moreover, a demonstrated FID partnership between SF and LSOF allowed the establishment of SOCFWD-L. This permanent, persistent presence of a senior U.S. SF officer allowed SF to directly engage at the strategic level of the Lebanon and US governments. Direct relationships between SOCFWD-L Commander, the LAF Chief of Defense, the US Ambassador, and the US DATT allowed SF tactical success to have strategic ramifications. This strategic impact, underlined by years of FID tactical partnerships, remains a foothold for the U.S. as it continues to deal with the malign influence of LH, IS, and Iran while supporting the internal defense of Lebanon.

Nevertheless, the operational success and limited strategic impact in Lebanon is clouded by Iran's increased influence through LH. It is difficult to deny the U.S. is losing at the strategic level in Lebanon, demonstrating the limits of SF FID and U.S. security assistance. LH, directly supported by Iran, has exponentially increased its combat power.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, LH is now officially represented in the Lebanese parliament and holds considerable influence over the population both politically and socially.<sup>133</sup> This could be evidence to deter FID investment in Lebanon; however, the operational success and strategic foothold from SOCFWD-L and SF FID is a foothold to compete with Iran.

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<sup>132</sup> U.S. Embassy Lebanon, "Integrated Country Strategy Lebanon," 2.

<sup>133</sup> Robinson, "What is Hezbollah?"

Egypt: 2012 – 2019

<b>Internal Threat</b>	<b>Tactical</b>	<b>Operational</b>	<b>Strategic</b>	<b>FID Operation</b>
From 2012 – 2019 IS Sinai and other VEOs in Egypt presented a significant internal threat in Egypt in the view of the U.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JCET foundation</li> <li>• Initial partnership with host nation SOF with FID focus</li> <li>• FID related training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant SF operational relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of operational relationship prevented credibility from advice and partnership in FID efforts</li> <li>• Lack of access and transparency to FID operations is a source of tension between the U.S. and Egypt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operation Sinai 2018 (2018-2019)</li> <li>• The U.S. was not involved in an advisory capacity in this operation.</li> </ul>

Figure 4. SF Partner Outcome in Egypt

*Source:* Created by the author.

Internal Threat Overview

The 2011 Arab Spring revealed a significant internal threat in Egypt. Following the 2011 Revolution, GEN (R) George Casey chaired a “North African Task Force” of leading security personnel to assess Egypt. The Task Force findings were collected in a report published by Atlantic Council, outlining the challenges and opportunities for the U.S. in Egypt. The report stated “the greatest challenges to Egyptian security [in 2012] are internal and on the country’s borders: militants in the Sinai Peninsula; the flow of weapons, goods, and people emanating from Libya, Gaza, and Egypt’s other borders; and personal insecurity and crime.”<sup>134</sup> The Atlantic Council report outlined the internal threat in Egypt, which continued to increase.

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<sup>134</sup> George Casey, Jim Kolbe, and Jeff Lightfoot, *A New Deal: Reforming US Defense Cooperation with Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia* (Washington, DC: The Atlantic

In 2012, the US strategic calculus changed from maintaining the status quo to addressing internal instability in Egypt, including a growing VEO terrorist threat. In 2011, rioting in Cairo led to an ordered departure of US Embassy families and non-essential personnel.<sup>135</sup> In 2014, USCENTCOM Commander GEN Austin summarized the increasing threat in Egypt in his Posture statement to the House Armed Services Committee. Austin noted CENTCOM was doing all possible to assist Egypt with building security capacity. Austin stated, “Egypt is also facing heightened extremist attacks in the Sinai and the Nile Valley. The military and security services have heightened counterterrorism operations in the Sinai but continue to struggle to contain this threat.”<sup>136</sup> Indeed, the internal VEO threat in Egypt spiked from 2012 to 2014 and U.S. policy and focus shifted to address that internal threat.

The threat remained evident from 2014 to 2017 with both positive and negative developments. The VEO threat Sinai became increasingly unsafe, but Egypt gained some stability in Cairo and the Nile Valley. In his 2016 Posture Statement to the SASC, Austin stated, “While daily life is returning to normal after four years of political upheaval, including recently conducted parliamentary elections, Egypt still faces a number of internal and external challenges, especially in the Sinai Peninsula, which is now home to

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Council of the United States, 2013), accessed October 20, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep03575Report>, 7-8.

<sup>135</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, *Statement of GEN Lloyd Austin* (2014).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

[IS Sinai].”<sup>137</sup> Corroborating GEN Austin’s statement, a 2018 Congressional Research Report stated IS and other radical factions had waged an insurgency in the Sinai since 2012, which showed no signs of slowing into 2017. In 2015, IS Sinai “targeted Russian tourists departing the Sinai by planting a bomb aboard Metrojet Flight 9268, which exploded mid-air, killing all 224 passengers and crew aboard.

Two years later, on November 24, 2017, [terrorists] launched an attack against the Al Rawdah mosque in the town of Bir al Abed in northern Sinai. That attack killed at least 305 people and was the deadliest terrorist attack in Egypt’s modern history.”<sup>138</sup> In response to the attack, Egypt launched Operation Sinai 2018 and continues to battle terrorists in the Sinai in 2020.

The 2018 Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) for Egypt demonstrates that Egypt’s internal threat remains. The ICS states, “the Embassy’s highest immediate priority is expanding the partnership with the Government of Egypt (GoE) to counter active terrorist threats that also endanger the U.S. homeland and those of our allies. International and domestic terrorist groups, active in the northern Sinai Peninsula and the Western Desert, where they frequently attack security forces, have also perpetrated mass-casualty attacks against civilians in urban areas.”<sup>139</sup> The 2018 ICS demonstrates that Egypt’s internal

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<sup>137</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, *Statement of GEN Lloyd Austin, U.S. Army; Posture of U.S. Central Command*, Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services, 114th Cong., 2nd sess., March 8, 2016 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2017).

<sup>138</sup> Jeremy Maxwell Sharp, *Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress (Washington, DC: U.S. Library of Congress, 2014), 8.

<sup>139</sup> US Department of State (DOS), “Integrated Country Strategy Egypt,” (Washington, DC, August 1, 2018).

threat was the US top priority in Egypt. USCENTCOM Commander, GEN Votel, echoed this sentiment in his testimony to the SASC stating, “ISIS-Sinai continues to conduct daily attacks against the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) and security services, causing hundreds of casualties, while other extremist organizations have carried out attacks on the mainland. [Additionally,] ISIS has expanded its reach into the mainland and carried out mass-casualty attacks.”<sup>140</sup> The internal threat of terrorism in Egypt remained prevalent into 2018, ranking as the top diplomatic and military priority for the U.S. in Egypt.

#### SF Partner Outcome

Egyptian Army Special Operations Forces (EGY ARSOF) appear an ideal tactical partner to engage the VEO threat in Egypt. EGY ARSOF consists of three Ranger Groups and two more elite SF Groups who are primarily drawn from the Rangers. EGY ARSOF is one of the only formations in Egypt that retains enlisted personnel. This retention is significant because the Egyptian military primarily consists of a conscripted force that serves a two-year tour and then depart. While EGY ARSOF has short term conscripts as well, the number of enlisted personnel who remain and progress through its ranks provide potential for tactical capacity not otherwise available. Furthermore, based on testing, EGY ARSOF selects the best available conscripts for its ranks. Thus, the personnel in EGY ARSOF provide a potential for tactical ability that is important for prosecuting difficult FID missions.

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<sup>140</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, *Posture of U.S. Central Command Great Power Competition*.

EGY ARSOF previously worked with SF in the 1990s, but this partnership was erased due to a loss of contact. In the 1990s, 5<sup>th</sup> SF Group (Airborne) (5<sup>th</sup> SFG(A)) established a relationship with EGY ARSOF and even established a permanent liaison presence in the U.S. Embassy in Cairo from 1994 – 1997 (see appendix F). The relationship went cold in Egypt as SF shifted focus in USCENTCOM to Afghanistan and Iraq. Over ten years without contact erased the SOF partnership. Additionally, tension at the political level greatly increased following Sisi’s ascension to the presidency, straining military relations. Consequently, SF faced considerable obstacles in establishing an operationally focused FID relationship in Egypt, even though the conditions warranted such a relationship. SF was forced to start over in Egypt and establish the tactical partnerships were critical in the Philippines and Lebanon.

Even without a break in contact and strained politics, Egypt is more opaque than the Philippines or Lebanon in bi-lateral relations at the tactical and operational level. The 2012 Atlantic Study stated “mid-level US officers lack access to Egyptian military personnel and bases, which impedes transparency and the formation of lasting relationships based on information exchange, knowledge-sharing, and trust.”<sup>141</sup> In the experience of the former deputy U.S. Officer in charge of military cooperation in Egypt, U.S. operational access is actively thwarted by the Egyptian government.<sup>142</sup> Improving transparency through lasting relationships was a key contribution of SF in the Philippines and Lebanon. The opportunity remains in Egypt.

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<sup>141</sup> Casey, Kolbe, and Lightfoot, *A New Deal*, 9.

<sup>142</sup> COL (RET) Jeffrey Vordermark, interview with author, May 7, 2020.

In 2017, SOCCENT re-established a permanent liaison in the U.S. Embassy in Cairo to rebuild a tactical partnership with EGY ARSOF. In August 2017, SF executed the first JCET in Egypt with EGY ARSOF. Since then, SF has executed two JCETs per year with EGY ARSOF and established an annual small unit exchange hosted by 5<sup>th</sup> SFG (A) in the U.S. This partnership is far less than what SF established in the Philippines or Lebanon, but it represents progress in Egypt. The 2012 Atlantic Counsel Report specifically noted that while JCETs “would be a useful in the US-Egypt military relationship,” Egypt would not permit JCETs because they required the Egyptian government to consent to human rights (Leahy) vetting, which Egypt viewed as an affront to its national sovereignty.<sup>143</sup> Hence the 2016 decision to allow JCETs demonstrates tangible progress and the potential for partnership.

The nascent tactical training in Egypt includes small unit tactics, urban operations, and sensitive site exploitation, all focusing on the VEO threat present in the Sinai Peninsula. From 2017-2019, 5<sup>th</sup> SFG(A) conducted this intermittent training, including a small unit exchange at 5<sup>th</sup> SFG(A)’s base at Fort Campbell, KY. The exchange culminated in an urban assault and presented a unique venue for candid discussion between U.S. SF and EGY ARSOF. The exchange illuminated that both units face similar challenges in the VEO fight. The U.S. in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria and the Egyptians in their own country.<sup>144</sup> Discussion in training is the first step in a tactical

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<sup>143</sup> Casey, Kolbe, and Lightfoot, *A New Deal*, 9.

<sup>144</sup> As the SOLO in Egypt during this time the author was involved in this training.

partnership, creating potential to increase towards a more operationally focused relationship that impacts the operational and strategic level of the U.S. Egypt partnership.

SF are uniquely positioned to establish operational partnerships through FID which counters internal VEO threats. SF often have unmatched tactical awareness, either through direct partnered operations or second-hand training of units who are involved in combat. In Egypt, EGY ARSOF are a leading EAF unit combating VEOs, both in the Sinai and in the Western desert. If SF had remained engaged in Egypt and demonstrated success with a small investment over many years, it is plausible the U.S. operational partnership with the EAF might be further advanced.

Instead, the U.S. and Egypt's operational partnership is deficient. This is evident by examining an external review of U.S. FMF aid to Egypt. FMF accounts for the bulk of Egypt's security assistance and Egypt is second only to Israel in the FMF allotment it receives from the U.S. The external review, contracted to a consulting group by the U.S. State Department, discovered the framework guiding FMF assistance was largely unchanged since 1979. The report indicated the U.S. is making attempts to change the focus of FMF, but is meeting substantial resistance from Egypt because the length and intransient nature of the program has created a "fraught status quo."<sup>145</sup> The status quo is substantial arms purchases by the Egyptians for large ticket items like tanks and fighter aircraft, with much less focus toward training, weapons, and equipment that address the internal threat of VEOs within Egypt.

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<sup>145</sup> Dexis Consulting Group, *Egypt Security Assistance Review Executive Summary* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, October 29, 2018), 1.

Understanding this friction surrounding FMF requires understanding the history of US security assistance in Egypt following the 1978 Camp David Accords. Following Camp David, the U.S. began an aggressive aid program to Egypt, providing \$1.3 billion FMF dollars per year to cultivate an important regional partner and show good faith, balancing the substantial military aid the U.S. also provides to Israel.<sup>146</sup> The annual FMF allotment was complimented by considerable non-military aid, allocated through USAID (See Appendix F).<sup>147</sup> This aid formed solid strategic partnership between Washington and Cairo, but gave little thought to an operational partnership or an internal VEO threat.

Consequently, in a *Foreign Affairs* article, Middle East expert Michael Wadhid Hanna offers that \$1.3 billion FMF to Egypt is no longer warranted.<sup>148</sup> Hanna suggests that U.S. decrease FMF from \$1.3 billion to \$500 million, focusing on manageable military goals like counterterrorism and intelligence sharing.<sup>149</sup> Hanna recommends decreasing the quantity of investment in favor of quality; however, given the assessment that 1.3 billion in FMF maintains a “fraught status quo” it is likely impossible to reduce FMF while maintaining credibility and a political relationship that would enable an

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<sup>146</sup> Casey, Kolbe, and Lightfoot, *A New Deal*, 9.

<sup>147</sup> Amy Hawthorne, *Rethinking US Economic Aid to Egypt* (Washington, DC: Project on Middle East Democracy, October 2016), 7-9.

<sup>148</sup> Michael Wahid Hanna, “Getting Over Egypt: Time to Rethink Relations,” *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 6 (2015): 67-73.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

improved bilateral response to VEOs. The \$1.3 billion in FMF is tied to a bureaucratic military industrial machine that is not easily retracted.<sup>150</sup>

Therefore, improving the bi-lateral response to VEOs likely requires the U.S. to maintain \$1.3 billion in military aid while attempting to improve the operational relationship from within. Such an operational relationship could have far reaching effects according to Gregory Aftandilian, a career Middle East public servant and academic. Aftandilian contends that success against Egypt's internal terror threats, especially in the Sinai, could enable Egypt's SOF to offer regional leadership in dealing with terrorism in other countries in the region.<sup>151</sup> This is a lofty goal, but not out of the question.

In the 2018 Bright Star Exercise, SOF from across the Middle East participated with EGY ARSOF and U.S. SF in a simulated CT exercise. The potential for Egyptian leadership was evident, but the scripted exercise was far removed from the unforgiving conditions of the Sinai. Gaining an operational partnership with EGY ARSOF would likely improve Egypt's ability to address the internal threat of VEOs in Egypt, while increasing transparency and unity of effort between the U.S. and Egypt. Over time, such a partnership could offer regional leadership in the fight against VEOs.

A long-standing SF partnership would arguably have better supported an improved bi-lateral response to VEOs in Egypt since 2012. With improved understanding at the tactical level, operational improvement in precision targeting, coordinated intelligence, CA, and PSYOP may have followed as they did in the Philippines and

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<sup>150</sup> This is according to multiple U.S. military officers with experience in Egypt.

<sup>151</sup> Hanna, "Getting Over Egypt," 46.

Lebanon. By no means is this a suggestion the U.S. has the solution to the difficult conflict EGY ARSOF and the EAF are fighting, but a strong case can be made the EAF could increase operational performance by improving its partnership with the U.S. Shifting more of the \$1.3 billion in FMF to counter the VEO threat is a one glaring opportunity. While some progress exists, there is opportunity for much more.

A positive aspect of the FMF external review indicates the quantity and long duration of FMF provides a forum for the United States and Egypt to discuss the issues each nation prioritizes. While both nations acknowledge Egypt's internal VEO threat, there is disagreement over how to address it.<sup>152</sup> Some U.S. military officials contend Egypt does not prioritize the VEO threat because Egypt does not view VEOs as legitimate threat to the Regime.<sup>153</sup> Nevertheless, dialogue exists about the VEO threat at the strategic level which is an important precursor to a doctrinal FID campaign. Perhaps SF can improve its nascent tactical partnership toward operational access which may drive operational and strategic progress from within. The future spending of FMF could be a key indicator of success, as well as the trajectory of the VEO threat in Egypt.

Considering the VEO threat in Egypt through the lens of great power competition is also important. Russia is vying for influence in Egypt. Russia sells Egypt large defense articles, conducts overt "counter-terrorism" training with Egypt's airborne units, and is

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<sup>152</sup> Dexis Consulting Group, *Egypt Security Assistance Review Executive Summary*, 1.

<sup>153</sup> U.S. Officer with experience in Egypt, interview with author, May 7, 2020.

likely using Western Egypt as a base to conduct operations in Libya.<sup>154</sup> Egypt and Russia are aligned in support of the Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar and the Egyptian government views the instability and VEO threats emanating from Libya as a significant internal threat.<sup>155</sup> Russia's reported operational involvement in Libya and courting of Egypt through counter-terrorism training and security assistance challenges the U.S. for influence. As the U.S. considers the importance of the Suez Canal and a nation at the seam of USAFRICOM and USCENTCOM, it must consider the competition from Russia. The opportunity for U.S. SF to increase its bi-lateral partnership through a FID relationship with EGY ARSOF that engages the VEO threat in Egypt is compelling.

#### Operation Sinai 2018

After the Al Rawdah Mosque attack in Northern Sinai on November 24, 2017, the EAF launched Operation Sinai 2018.”<sup>156</sup> In an official statement, the EAF released a statement detailing the goals of the operation, foremost of which was to eradicate terrorism throughout Egypt while also securing the national borders.<sup>157</sup> Operation Sinai 2018 shared similarities to ODH and Marawi in that it was a national operation against an

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<sup>154</sup> Luhn, “Russian Special Forces Sent to Back Renegade Libyan General – Reports”; Fediushko, “Russian and Egyptian Paratroopers Conduct Cohesion Training during Exercise ‘Defenders of Friendship 2018’.”

<sup>155</sup> Aidan Lewis, “Egypt’s President Meets Libyan Commander Haftar in Cairo,” *Reuters*, April 14, 2019.

<sup>156</sup> Sharp, *Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations*, 8.

<sup>157</sup> Ahmed Eleiba, “Operation Sinai 2018 Deciphered,” *Ahram Online*, February 14, 2018, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/290988/Egypt/Politics-/Operation-Sinai--deciphered-.aspx>.

internal VEO threat. The deadliest terrorist attack in Egypt's history, followed by Operation Sinai 2018, presented a watershed opportunity for the U.S. to advance its top diplomatic priority in Egypt, outlined the Integrated Country Strategy below.

The Embassy's highest immediate priority is expanding the partnership with the Government of Egypt (GoE) to counter active terrorist threats that also endanger the United States homeland and those of our allies. International and domestic terrorist groups active in the northern Sinai Peninsula and the Western Desert, where they frequently attack security forces, have also perpetrated mass-casualty attacks against civilians in urban areas, often at places of worship. Instability in neighboring countries coupled with porous borders have resulted in the flow of arms and malign actors into Egypt, as well as the training and financing of terrorist elements. We will help the GoE counter these threats through the provision of military and law enforcement equipment, training, and cooperation that helps Egypt eliminate terrorist safe-havens and better secures land and maritime borders. We will leverage this assistance to encourage military doctrines that more effectively counter terrorist threats and respect the rights of non-combatants.<sup>158</sup>

Unfortunately, despite the U.S. focus and the EAF's operation in the Sinai, a lack of transparency and access persisted. Instead of spurring innovation like using copperhead rounds to precisely target terrorists, the "fraught status quo" between the U.S. and Egypt persisted.<sup>159</sup> U.S. SF were peripherally aware of operations through training relationships, but the interaction, advice, and partnership U.S. SF experienced in the Philippines and Lebanon were missing.

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<sup>158</sup> DOS, "Integrated Country Strategy Egypt."

<sup>159</sup> Dexis Consulting Group, *Egypt Security Assistance Review Executive Summary*, 1.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusion

SF's history in the Philippines, Lebanon, and Egypt demonstrates three possible outcomes of SF FID. In the Philippines, decades of partnership enabled SF to surge a battalion in 2001 to counter the rising VEO threat in the Philippines. This investment yielded noticeable positive results at the operational and strategic level. In Lebanon in 2006, SF began episodic training with LSOF partners that established a basis for a permanent SOCFWD in 2011, allowing a persistent presence of several SF teams and a tactical headquarters element, impact at the operational level, and relationships at the strategic level. In Egypt, SF established a liaison presence in 2016 that enabled episodic engagement with EGY ARSOF through JCETs and other small unit exchanges. SF's impact in Egypt is minimal but may present an opportunity for future investment. Each case demonstrates the reach and limits of SF FID partnerships at the tactical, operational, and strategic level of war and military relations.

In the Philippines, decades of episodic SF training with Philippine SOF partners established the foundation for an SF campaign in 2001. This campaign began with an SF battalion who served as the nucleus for a joint task force to combat ASG and other radical VEOs in the southern Philippines.<sup>160</sup> At the tactical level, SF continued to partner with Philippine SOF partners including the Scout Rangers, SF, and Navy Seals, while

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<sup>160</sup> Maxwell, "Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines," 6.

expanding the specialized LRC to a Regiment, the LRR.<sup>161</sup> These SOF partnerships served as a base to counter the VEO threat in the Southern Philippines and anchor the SF campaign at the tactical level.

At the operational level, the SOF partnerships expanded to allow operational impact throughout the AFP. In the Basilan province in 2001, SF expanded the partnership to include 15 Army infantry battalions who were positioned to engage the denied area and combat the threat. This is an excellent example of a SOF partner base rapidly expanding to include foreign conventional units who are able to combat the threat.<sup>162</sup> The “Basilan model” and initial SF campaign established a foundation for JSOTF-P to continue to engage the VEO threat at the operational level along four distinct lines of effort.

The lines of effort, (1) Capacity building of Philippines Security Forces, (2) Targeted Civil Military Operations (3) Intelligence Operations, and (4) Information Operations enabled JSOTF-P to effectively counter the VEO threat in the Philippines.<sup>163</sup> JSOTF-P expanded its efforts to work with and through local law enforcement, improved the AFP’s ability to conduct air to ground integration, and provided awareness to enable information operations and civil military operations.<sup>164</sup> Access to the threat area certainly

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<sup>161</sup> Maxwell email; Janetti interview.

<sup>162</sup> Maxwell email.

<sup>163</sup> Swain, “Case Study: Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines,” 23.

<sup>164</sup> Maxwell, “Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines,” 13-14.

helped guide over \$300 million dollars from USAID over the course of OEF-P.<sup>165</sup> The SF campaign led this economy of force mission, providing unity of effort to the whole of government effort over the course of OEF-P.

The 2015 battle of Marawi demonstrates the reach and the limits of SF FID in the Philippines. SF partners were the main effort in retaking Marawi, demonstrating the continued impact of SF partnerships.<sup>166</sup> However, the fact that IS sieged Marawi demonstrates SF FID is not a solution to an internal problem. Despite 15 years of FID efforts to counter VEOs in the Southern Philippines, ASG and other groups were still able to rebrand under the IS flag and seize Marawi. This could signal a negative partner outcome for SF FID, but it is important to consider that Philippine SOF were well positioned to respond and defeat the VEO threat. U.S SF and other U.S. SOF were involved in a limited, remote advisory role, but still received credit for the outcome of their partners in the Battle of Marawi. Thus, the battle of Marawi demonstrates both the reach and limits of SF FID.

Strategically, Marawi presented an opportunity to improve a strained political relationship. In September of 2015, Philippine President Duterte declared U.S. SF would be required to leave Mindanao. Then, in October, in a public address in China, Duterte proclaimed that China, Russia, and the Philippines were joined while America had lost.<sup>167</sup> However, in June 2015 after the siege of Marawi, Duterte called the U.S. an ally,

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<sup>165</sup> Stentiford, *Success in the Shadows*, 53.

<sup>166</sup> Janetti interview.

<sup>167</sup> Chowdhury, “What now for Duterte’s China pivot as Marawi cements US importance for Philippines?”

praised U.S. support, and deemed previous disputes with America “water under the bridge.”<sup>168</sup> Furthermore, the Chief of Staff of the Philippine Armed Forces credited U.S. support in Marawi with “tilting the balance” against IS in Marawi.<sup>169</sup> Marawi is a compelling example of how success against VEOs can buy strategic influence with important partners in the great power competition.

In Lebanon, a smaller SF presence enabled noticeable results at the tactical and operational level. Initial SF tactical investments in LSOF partners established tactical relationships and credibility to establish SOCFWD-L in 2011.<sup>170</sup> SOCFWD-L quickly grew SF’s impact to the operational level, expanding the tactical foundation to non-SOF units, improving intelligence collection, and developing an innovative fires capability with copperhead rounds that was critical to ODH.

ODH was the capstone event demonstrating the outcome of SF partners in Lebanon. 80 percent of the equipment used by the LAF was provided by the U.S. The Lebanese Air Assault Regiment provided precision direct action capability to the operation and allowed U.S. SF to advise both the Air Assault Regiment and 6<sup>th</sup> IR at the headquarters level. At the operational and military strategic level, the SOCFWD-L Commander and U.S. SDO DATT advised the LAF Chief of Defense and other key LAF senior leaders before, during, and after the operation. Furthermore, a separate U.S. SF command and control node maintained a 24-hour presence at the LAF headquarters

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<sup>168</sup> Storey, “End of Marawi Siege Underscores Critical Importance of US-Philippine Alliance.”

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Jensen, “Special Operations Command (Forward) Lebanon,” 29.

overseeing the operation.<sup>171</sup> SF partnerships reached denied areas in Lebanon and had a clear impact on the outcome of an important military operation.

Nevertheless, the operational success in Lebanon is clouded by Iran's increased influence through LH. It is difficult to deny that the U.S. is losing at the strategic level in Lebanon, demonstrating the limits of SF FID and U.S. security assistance. LH, directly supported by Iran, has exponentially increased its combat power.<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, LH is now officially represented in the Lebanese parliament and holds considerable influence over the population both politically and socially.<sup>173</sup> This strategic picture could be evidence the SF partner outcome in Lebanon was negative, but again it is important to consider the alternative.

Without SF influence, ODH would likely have transpired much differently. Yes, ODH was tainted because LH conducted a simultaneous operation in Syria, signaling tacit cooperation with the LAF. However, without SF advancing tactical ability, fires, and focused U.S. military security assistance, it is plausible the LAF would not have been capable of conducting ODH at all. At best, LH would have been positioned to control the message of ODH. At worst, LH might have led the operation in Lebanon, robbing the LAF of important credibility. In that perspective, SF's partnership with LSOF and the LAF provided capacity, influence, and awareness that countered LH in Lebanon while also reducing an internal VEO threat.

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<sup>171</sup> Sullivan email.

<sup>172</sup> U.S. Embassy Lebanon, "Integrated Country Strategy Lebanon," 2.

<sup>173</sup> Robinson, "What is Hezbollah?"

In Egypt, the SF FID partnership is nascent, but the examples of the Philippines and Lebanon offer a case to advance this partnership. Since 1978, the U.S. invested over \$40 billion in FMF into the EAF, providing enormous potential for partnership at the tactical, operational, and strategic level (see appendix F).<sup>174</sup> However, external evaluations reveal the partnership is deficient, especially at the operational level. The same issues of operational transparency discovered by the Atlantic Counsel in 2012 remain an issue between the U.S. and Egypt presently, presenting both a challenge and opportunity for SF.

### Findings

These three case studies offer findings for future SF FID operations, actions, and activities. At the tactical level, SF should continue to pursue and strengthen partnerships with HN SOF. This partnership begins with classic SF engagements such as JCETs. SF to SOF partnerships establish credibility and prestige at the tactical level, offering true capability that passes the test of combat. Additionally, HN SOF leaders often rise to positions of influence within a HN military, presenting opportunity for operational and strategic impact. In ODH, Marawi, and Operation Sinai 2018, HN SOF contributions were evident and respected. In the Philippines and Lebanon, U.S. SF contribution to the performance was evident and provided a foundation for operational impact that exceeded the tactical SOF capacity.

SF to HN SOF partnerships are critical but are the only the beginning of SF FID partner outcome. Impact at the operational level is the true SF FID value proposition

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<sup>174</sup> Hawthorne, *Rethinking US Economic Aid to Egypt*.

because it establishes access and enables unity of effort. Access encompasses the operational factors of targeting, intelligence gathering, and enabler actions, all of which enable unity of effort. Therefore, access and unity of effort should be the goal of U.S. SF FID.

JSOTF-P gained access and established unity of effort in the Philippines. The JSOTF-P campaign was successful in gathering intelligence, targeting, and enabling CA and PSYOP. JSOTF-P, with and through partners, reached denied areas of the Southern Philippines and advanced its LOEs in a denied environment at the operational level. Performance across the critical operational factors shows how JSOTF-P accessed a denied area and performed at the operational level, presenting an example for future SF FID.

Unity of effort will naturally follow access to sensitive or denied areas. In Lebanon, because SF had access to LAF units engaged in combat operations, SF advisors were able to identify and enable a whole of government approach to precision fires. SF enabled LAF Artillery, Air Force, and SOF units to fire excess U.S. Copperhead artillery rounds to accurately target IS. This demonstrated unity of effort across the LAF and U.S. footprints in Lebanon. Similarly, JSOTF-P access helped direct over 300 million in USAID funding, advised AFP Infantry battalions and police forces, and even enabled infrastructure projects by U.S. Naval Engineers. Access and unity of effort are intertwined and encompass the SF impact at the operational level in a denied environment.

Such impact in a denied environment buys influence and credibility at the strategic level. National-level leaders take notice of combat operations within their

borders. Affiliation and contribution to these operations transcends political tension and opposition. This held true in the Philippines and in Lebanon and presents a potential opportunity in Egypt. As EGY ARSOF continue to engage VEOs in the Sinai, SF have a nascent tactical base to demonstrate value over time and potentially increase a FID focused partnership, establishing access and subsequent unity of effort.<sup>175</sup> Such access and unity of effort would improve the U.S – Egypt bilateral relationship.

### Recommendations for SF

In a foreword to his 2019 U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) strategy, the USASOC Commander stated the 2018 NDS was a call for ARSOF to evolve to compete against state and non-state actors.<sup>176</sup> Specifically, the USASOC Commander seeks to compete by “advancing partnerships, influencing adversarial behavior, executing special operations, and responding to crisis.”<sup>177</sup> Responding to VEOs in a manner similar the Philippines and Lebanon is a unique value proposition, but this response must be measured and strive for strategic impact.

19 years of prioritizing the VEO fight “redlined” USASOC forces, while also causing strategic regression in the great power competition.<sup>178</sup> The current VEO effort is

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<sup>175</sup> Mahmoud Gamal, “Footage of EGY ARSOF soldiers engaging IS Sinai militants was released by the Egyptian Ministry of Defense,” Twitter, May 3, 2020, <https://twitter.com/mahmouedgamal44/status/1256934768912064512?s=21>.

<sup>176</sup> United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), *Army Special Operations Forces Operating Strategy* (Fort Bragg, NC: USASOC, 2019).

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

not sustainable at the same operational tempo. U.S. SF must continue to counter the VEO threat, but in a manner that prioritizes force readiness and enables a ready response to LSCO. Thus, SF FID offers the value proposition of managing the VEO threat in a manner that extends strategic influence to counter great power competitors.

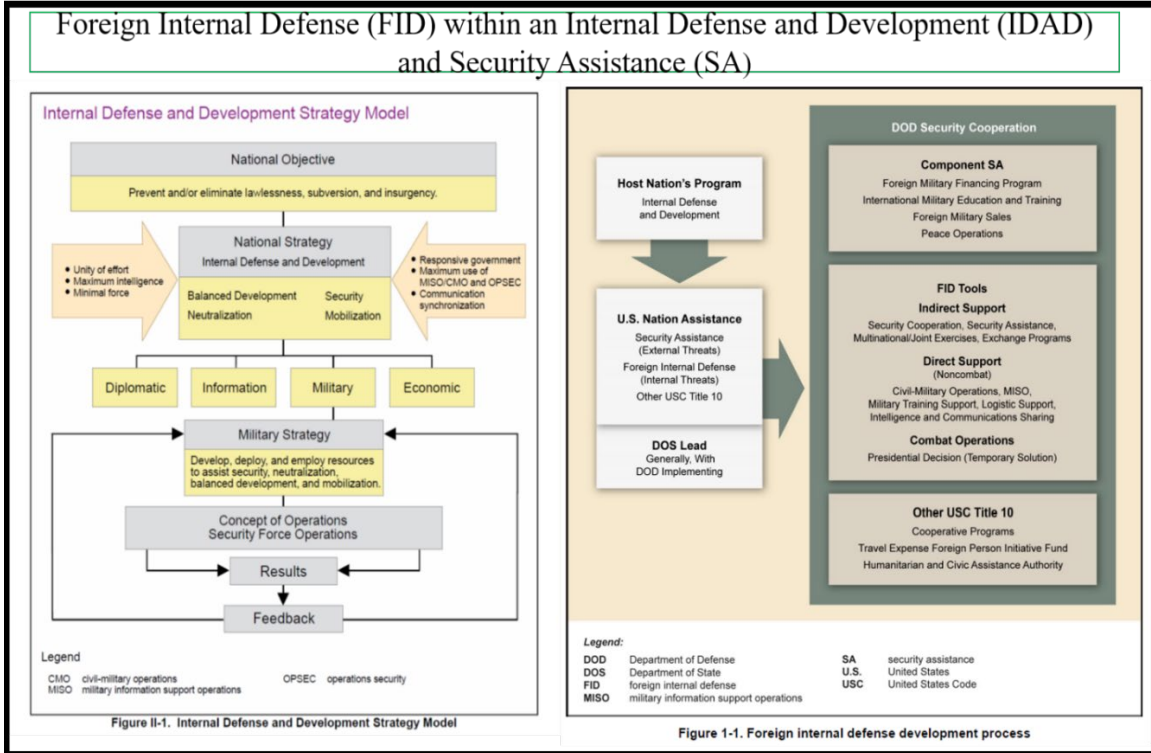
Dealing with VEOs efficiently in the era of great competition requires working with and through partners according to the principles of SF UW. Working “through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area” is seamlessly replaced by “working with and through HN SOF partners in a denied or sensitive FID environment like the Southern Philippines, Aarsal Valley, or Sinai Peninsula.

As SF seeks to judiciously employ its formations around the globe, it will do well to approach FID from a standpoint of UW. SF’s rich history of FID and UW offers positive examples to emulate and opportunities worth pursuing. Until the next UW mission arises, FID is an opportunity for SF to combat VEOs and compete in great power competition, making a distinct contribution in support of U.S. interests.

Future research should consider failing states where SF conducted FID including Yemen, Somalia, and Libya. What lessons can be drawn from these nations and how should they be approached in the era of great power competition? Further research into the strategic limits of SF FID should also be developed further to determine how SF can improve its strategic impact. Considering ways to increase fusion with the State Department and other U.S government agencies is another potential area of research. All future research should consider the USASOC ARSOF strategy and how future SF operations may be both impactful and efficient.

APPENDIX A

FOREIGN INTERNAL DEFENSE AS PART OF SECURITY ASSISTANCE  
AND INTERNAL DEFENSE AND DEVELOPMENT



Source. Joint Chiefs of Staf, Joint Publication 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 17, 2018).

## APPENDIX B

### SFA VS FID



## *SFA is Just FID....Right?*

### **Foreign Internal Defense**

### **vs. Security Force Assistance**

FID is conditionally based and does not depend on function

SFA is functionally based and does not depend on condition



FID depends on origin of the threat and must support Internal defense and development (IDAD)

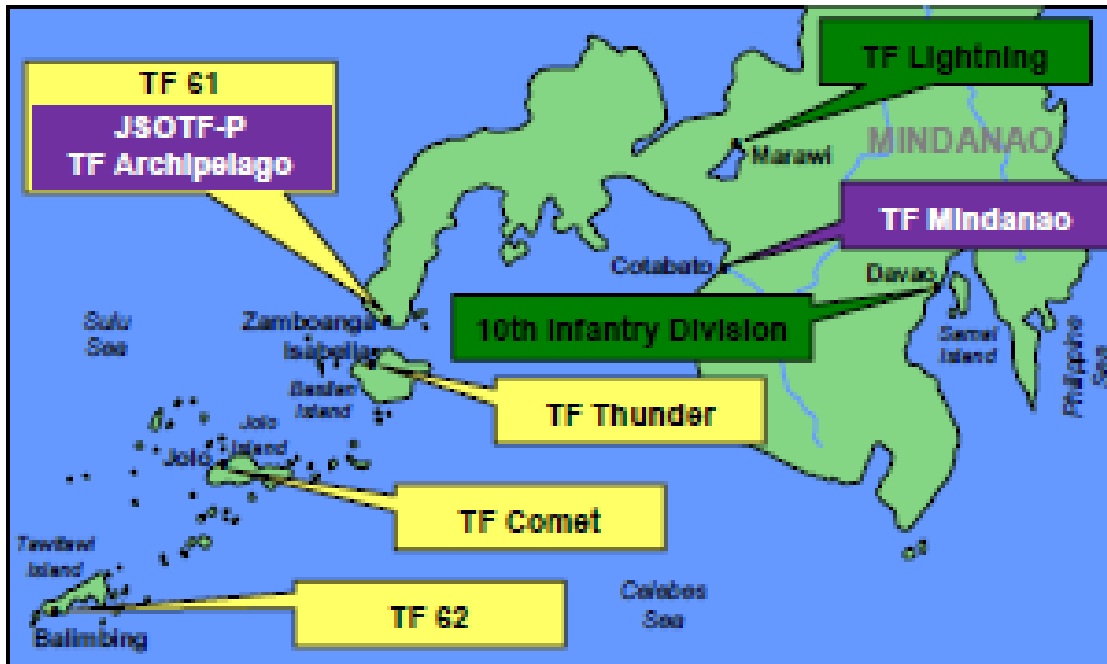
SFA depends on the activity (Organize, Train, Equip, Rebuild, Advise FSF)



*Source.* Joint Special Operations University Faculty, email to author, December 2019.

APPENDIX C

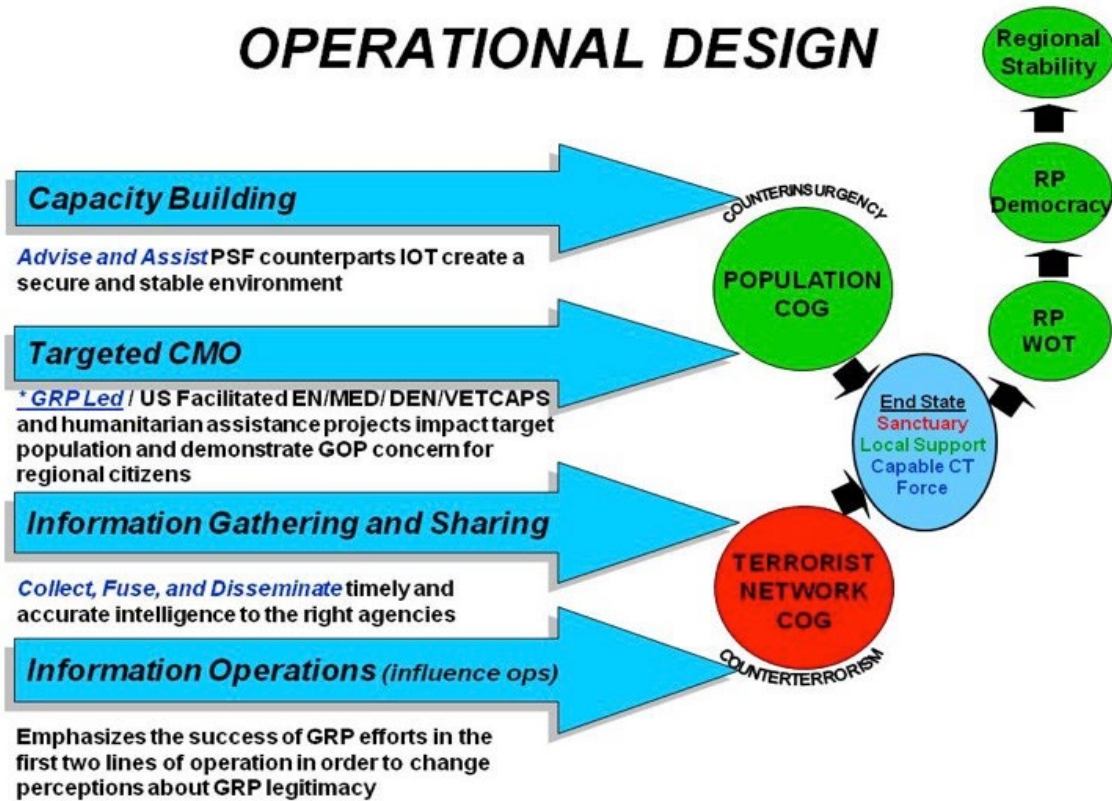
PHILIPPINE ARMY ORGANIZATION



Source: Barry Stentiford, *Success in the Shadows: Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines and the Global War on Terror, 2002 – 2015* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2018).

APPENDIX D

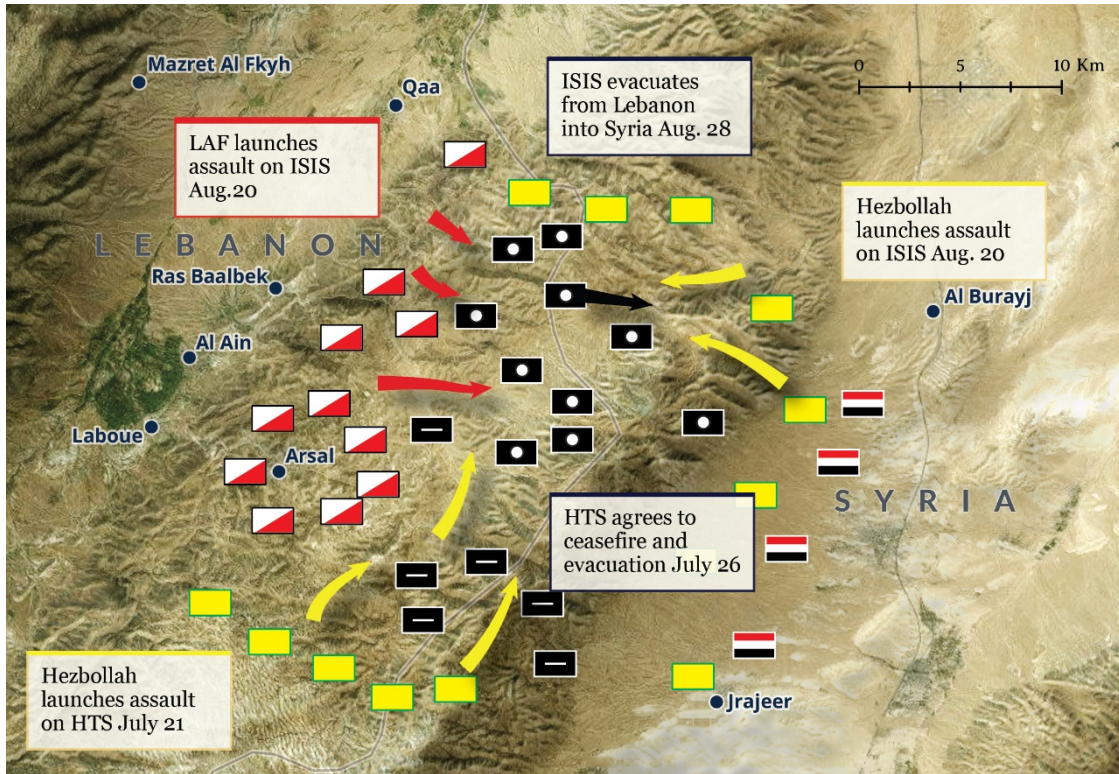
JSOTF-P LINES OF EFFORT



Source: COL (RET) David Maxwell, “Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines: Lessons Learned from a Special Warfare Approach to Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency,” unpublished draft, March 23, 2020.

APPENDIX E

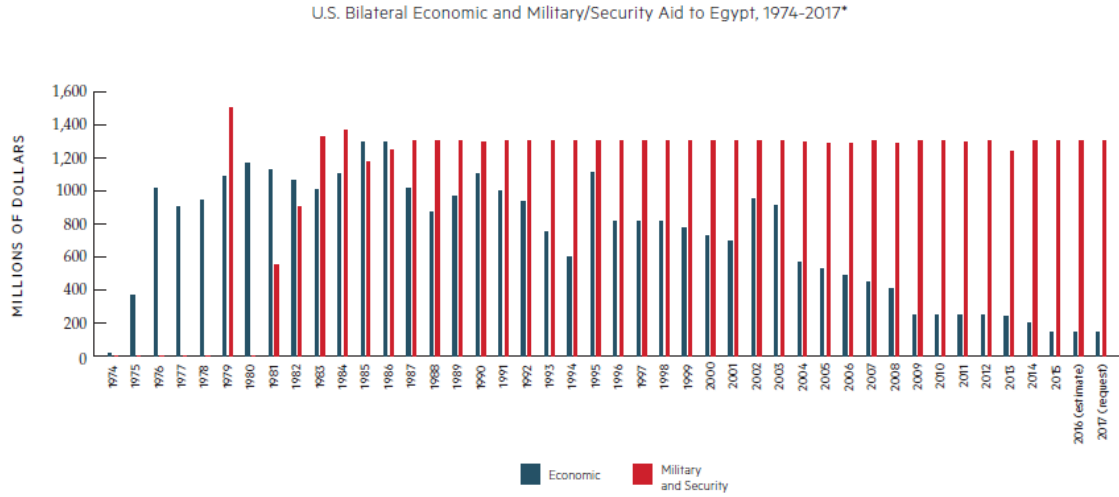
OPERATION DAWN OF THE HILLS AND SIMULTANEOUS  
HEZBOLLAH OPERATIONS



Source: Nicholas Blanford, “The Lebanese Armed Forces and Hezbollah’s Competing Summer Offensives Against Sunni Militants,” *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 8 (September 2017): 27-32, <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-lebanese-armed-forces-and-hezbollahs-competing-summer-offensives-against-sunni-militants/>.

## APPENDIX F

### U.S SECURITY AND ECONOMIC AID TO EGYPT



Source: Amy Hawthorne, *Rethinking US Economic Aid to Egypt* (Washington, DC: Project on Middle East Democracy, October 2016), 9.

APPENDIX G

5TH SFG(A) 90'S LIAISONS



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