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SOFLE ROMANIA

Supporting Operation Atlantic Resolve
through the Special Operations Forces Liaison
Element in Romania.

BY CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 2 RODNEY DOUGLAS

In September 2014, 1st Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) was tasked to support Operation Atlantic Resolve. The goal was to reinforce United States support and commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies in the Baltics and Trans-Danube regional areas. In Romania, Special Operations Command Europe faced three immediate challenges: transitioning from Operation Enduring Freedom, working a more expansive portfolio in a Chief of Mission-led environment and maintaining the exceptionally strong relationship with Romania's Special Operations Forces. While both Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State serve within the same country team, they operate in separate departmental efforts. The Special Operations Forces Liaison Element is the position best-suited to achieve the synergy required for the challenge of fusing special operations forces vision with interagency strategy thereby reinforcing "the network", formerly known as the Global SOF Network initiative.⁰¹

"A SOFLE is a task-organized rotational SOF element deployed within a specific nation or embedded within CF to conduct liaison activities. The SOFLE can coordinate,

*assess, and recommend training, equipping, and engaging opportunities with HN forces or provide connectivity and synchronization of expeditionary forces."*⁰²

A steadfast NATO SOF ally, Romania requested a SOF liaison for their SOF-focused objectives. Within the U.S. Embassy, the Department of Defense maintains a Defense Attaché and the Office of Defense Coordination. These offices are responsible for representatives in the development and operation of security assistance to the Romanian Ministry of National Defense, and more specifically to ROUSOF. On occasion, qualified Special Forces officers are placed in one of these positions, and are sufficient at incorporating the importance of SOF and its integration with interagency and conventional forces; however, the SOFLE is a more permanent solution. The SOFLE operates in a logical line of effort coordinating and aligning multiple agency goals with those of the SOC commanders. One of the initial challenges of the SOFLE is with their acceptance into the current joint international intergovernmental multinational environment. Interagency and inter-governmental partners are frequently reluctant to assimilate new faces. However, the dynamic nature of SOF liaisons allow this position to take root and build into the eventual 'hub' for all SOF interaction and engagement within the country of operations.

*"United States Special Operations Command describes its vision for the GSN as a globally networked force of SOF, interagency partners, and allies able to respond rapidly and persistently to regional contingencies and threats to stability."*⁰³

The operational experience of SOF operators balances the commitment associated with the SOFLE position and espouses that there is a significant impact on the efficiency of resource management, an extension of continuity of effort and a posture for time sensitive responsiveness. The SOFLE is embedded within the U.S. Embassy, and is directed to operate as an extension of the Commander of Special Operations Command (Forward Eastern Europe) and the Commander of Theater Special Operations Command.

THE EFFICACY OF EFFICIENT RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

An extension to continuity and effort, the SOFLE is placed in a position that takes into account the broader political, economic, informational and military effects when faced with operations, training engagements, and logistic support. Capitalizing on the ability to envelop the legal and political constraints, while applying them to each interaction, enables units to gain successes on the behalf of SOFLE efforts. Continuing to develop the environment to ensure the success of the SOCFWD commanders' long-term objectives and immediate or short-term needs is the SOFLE goal.

In concept, the SOFLE simultaneously maintains access to the full spectrum of operations within the interagency established mission. This access is for the purpose of interdicting obstacles before they have a



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chance to interrupt the functional process of SOF operations and synergized intergovernmental engagements. To aid in these functions, the SOFLE may be afforded the latitude to make time-sensitive decisions based on the commanders' guidance and objectives, to report any current issues to the SOCs. Properly selected Special Forces liaisons are experts in this task.

A second and more important purpose of a SOF Liaison element would be cultural competence. While many SOFLEs do not speak the host-nation language, they have served together (NATO) or in a common purpose (counterterrorism) within expeditionary combat environments (Operation Enduring Freedom) performing similar roles against a common enemy (violent extremist organizations). The complex and prolific nature of international terrorism generates the need for countries to interact and become interdependent of allies and partners across the globe.

"The activities of building partnership capacity included significant use of 1206, 1207, and Title 22 peacekeeping operations funding mechanisms. These train and equip packages were coupled with persistent presence elements such as the SOFLE."⁰⁴



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The Commander SOCFWD-EE cannot be everywhere at once. His staff works with the liaison as his extension of mission command in that country, in this case, Romania. The SOFLE's role is to track and synchronize that commander's efforts as efficiently as possible balanced with the Defense Attaché Office's requirements. Those requirements must meet the country teams' projected strategic message reflected in Mission Strategic Resource Plan. Normally, the SOF commander can use Civil Affairs and Military Information Support Operations to execute these tasks, but in smaller nations, this may have a saturating effect. In these cases, a SOF liaison enabling the country team singularly while identifying partners is a critical on-ramp to increased capability generating host-nation capacity.

This example is a SOF characteristic, and a process very representative of SOF forces around the world daily. USSOCOM routinely maintains thousands of SOF service members in almost every country and SOF operations are involved in regional engagements, with significant effect upon the international community. As a result, strategic communication is by-product of SOF activities in each country, 24/7/365.

PERFORMANCE, PROCEDURE AND PERIL

Primarily, the SOC is striving to strengthen relationships and increase the capacity of SOF interoperability within OAR's multiple NATO SOF and paramilitary forces. The SOFLE is positioned to ensure this task is adhered to for both the country team and

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The Palace of the Parliament in Bucharest is the seat of the Parliament in Romania and is the second largest administrative building in the world after the Pentagon.

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Romania is located in Southeast Europe and at 92,043 square miles it's slightly smaller Oregon. Bucharest, the capital, is the 6th largest city in the EU.

03
Romanian SOF soldiers practice tactical medical care while under fire during Operation Junction Strike 15 in Romania. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. DANIEL A. CARTER



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the SOF commander, while enforcing parameters set by the Initial Terms of Reference during all operations. When the Romanian SOF desire Partnership Development Program joint training and bilateral operations, the SOFLE is able to advise the Romanian Special Operations Component Command element of PDP purpose, funding, shortcomings and advantages. This key knowledge reinforces the ability of the deployed ODA to continue to advise and assist while the Romanian SOF execute the training programs, with minimal difficulty.

When done expertly, the SOFLE has accomplished one or more of three key outputs; worked himself out of a job, made the country team more dependent on his position (with an insatiable appetite to match) or provided complete synchronization to generate sufficient mass on the appropriate objective with complete unity of effort. In any case, the SOF liaison has provided a much needed function in the country team's performance of our nation's service.

A result of being able to blend into the operational environment, become a valued member of the U.S. Embassy Bucharest Country Team, provide SOF Commanders access to real-time situational awareness remains invaluable to commanders, staffs and peripheral forces. This increases the country team's operational focus and the ROUSOF's development of effective and increased USSOF interaction. As time endures, the SOFLE gains increased access further assisting Operational Detachments and other SOF elements, with the ability to more precisely gauge the effects of their operations and engagements. In the future, as the SOC needs insight on support the Romanian SOF requires, the SOFLE can provide the required insight needed. An anecdotal example of this

is the delivery of casualty assistance efforts at the behest of the SOC FWD or other SOF commanders.

CONCLUSIVE RESULTS

The SOFLE interacts with high-level allied nation officials and U.S. Embassy staff through constant facilitation of multiple USSOF leadership engagements. As an interlocutor, the SOFLE frequently creates conditions in support of Key Leader Engagements, and maintains a continual process of coordinating and interacting with all the relevant parties to ensure a smooth transition among the different organizations and groups. When available, the SOC commanders desire to retain the option to exploit time sensitive opportunities without interrupting the forward progress of the intergovernmental political objectives. The command's effort is demonstrative of a conscious willingness to integrate with and support the 'whole of government' approach, interconnecting their objectives with the political and interagency goals. As has been described, the SOFLE is in the unique position within assistance to the Foreign Service. The selected liaison requires maturity and sound judgment and has the work ethic common to the best professional of staff officers. The SOFLE is capable of setting the conditions and managing this synergy because the position is uniquely equipped with the SOCFWD-EEs vision, the TSOCs goals and the Theater Security Cooperation Support Plan. **SW**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NOTES **01.** Thomas S. Szayna, William Welsler IV, *Developing and Assessing Options for the Global SOF Network* **02.** Command, United States Special Operations. "Joint Publication 3-05." *Special Operations*. Compiled by United States Special Operations Command **03.** John Leitner, Cory Bieganeck, Phillip Madsen. *Special Operations Liaison Officer: Looking Back To See The Future*. Master's Capstone Project, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey; Naval Postgraduate School, 2014, 85. **04.** Ruskiewicz, Major Andrew. *Assistance Beyond Luck: Synchronizing Engagements in the Global SOF Network*. Essay, Joint Special Operations University, Tampa: JSOU Press, 2015



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Romanian Special Operations Forces Soldiers fire rocket-propelled grenades at targets during the culminating demonstration exercise of the ROUSOFEX in Romania. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. DANIEL A. CARTER

02
The patch of the Romanian 6th Special Operations Brigade.

03
A tactical psychological operations team broadcasts an emergency message during a field training exercise. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. DANIEL A. CARTER