

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Coalition Doctrine and LOT Houses

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MEDIA HYPERBOLE and pockets of isolation were challenges for coalition forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) as they approached the mission to downsize. Situational awareness was essential. Establishing coalition doctrine through liaison and observation team (LOT) houses to achieve situational awareness was a key objective for the stabilization force (SFOR).

Doctrine development and implementation is difficult. The U.S. military constantly strives to establish doctrine to enhance its prospects for success and minimize its possibility of failure. Current and anticipated operating tempo for U.S. military personnel makes it particularly important to identify guiding principles that will maximize military effectiveness, both unilaterally and with other nations.

During the past decade, the United States has worked with more than 40 nations to bring peace to the BiH area. The coalition force, which peaked at over 60,000 soldiers, has been gradually reduced, but the United States is still working with approximately 28 other nations in this long, complicated peacekeeping mission.

Developing coalition doctrine is more difficult than developing an individual nation's doctrine for a variety of reasons, including political, social, and economic factors. To maximize effectiveness and to minimize confusion, the international coalition should develop common doctrinal objectives yet recognize that tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) might be different for each nation.

In December 1995, the General Framework Agreement for Peace, commonly known as the Dayton Accords, ended the 3 1/2-year war that ravaged BiH. The war caused the deaths of over 200,000 people, displaced approximately 2 million others, and destroyed much of the country's infrastructure.

On 20 December 1995, NATO launched Operation Joint Endeavor, deploying a NATO-led multi-

national implementation force (IFOR) to BiH. Within 6 months, IFOR separated the warring factions; helped consolidate the boundaries of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska, moved forces and heavy weapons to approved sites; created the Joint Military Commission; and helped end fighting. On 20 December 1996, the SFOR became part of Operation Joint Guardian, marking the end of the IFOR mandate.

SFOR Evolution

SFOR's force structure constantly changed during the mission. The road to success began with 60,000 soldiers, but SFOR has consistently downsized with the mission's success and BiH officials' continued cooperation. SFOR performed periodic mission reviews every 6 months to determine the appropriate force structure and provided recommendations to military and civilian leaders in Supreme Allied Headquarters Europe and NATO.

In 2002, SFOR's force structure was approximately 17,000 soldiers, but the North Atlantic Council (NAC) voted to reduce force structure to 12,000. In December 2003, NAC voted to downsize SFOR even further to a deterrent presence of 7,000 soldiers by the end of 2004, when the ground mission would be handed over to the European Union Force (EUFOR). In addition to the reduction in force, SFOR's organizational structure also changed. Multinational brigades became multinational task forces (MNTFs). With reduced numbers in fixed organizations, presence patrolling was no longer viable. In some cases, SFOR had to conduct limited cross-boundary operations in different task forces to maintain situational awareness.

Because of force reductions, commanders had to do "more with less," which made it impossible to gain situational awareness through active patrolling. In fall 2003, the SFOR commander directed subordinate commanders to implement LOT houses to enhance

interaction between SFOR and BiH citizens.

LOTs deployed throughout the area of responsibility (AOR) to facilitate coordination and liaison with the international community, including nongovernmental organizations; local civil and police authorities; and the populace. LOT members lived throughout the AOR; built trust and confidence among international actors and service organizations; and obtained valuable information to maintain local security.

LOT House History

The concept of enhancing interaction with the local community is not new. Several variations of the concept were used in BiH during IFOR and SFOR missions, including faction houses, joint commission observer (JCO) houses, and platoon houses.

Faction houses. Community awareness demands a feel for a city’s political, economic, and cultural climate. SFOR established faction houses for liaison personnel who worked with the general staffs of the Entity Armed Forces. The rented houses helped advance civil engineering projects in communities considered to be hostile.

During the earliest days of IFOR/SFOR missions, the houses were vital to put eyes and ears on the ground in key locations and to create a permanent SFOR presence in trouble spots. Assigned soldiers made friends in local neighborhoods and had no serious force-protection problems. As the political situation improved, the houses were disestablished.

JCO houses. JCO houses evolved as the primary mission of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force at SFOR. JCO teams normally included 8 to 10 soldiers as a quick-reaction force. A typical team of 10 included support or civil affairs personnel, who were in as many as 19 locations in Bosnia. JCO’s primary mission was to serve as the SFOR commander’s eyes and ears on the ground and to verify information or intelligence derived from other sources. The teams created a matrix of contacts in Bosnia with a variety of people through inter-

views, personal meetings, and presence patrols. They cultivated old contacts and developed new ones. Good contacts were considered the best form of force protection.

JCO houses were a new, unusual concept. Special operations personnel operated completely in the open. The teams contributed substantially to a safe, secure environment by validating security-related information. Team members were highly skilled and well trained for their demanding mission. Training often took as much time to complete as the tour itself. One U.S. soldier, who could speak the local language, was placed in each house to provide support and monitor interpreters’ actions and credibility.

JCO houses looked like any other house from the outside, but they were reinforced and robustly armed. In fact, JCO members were involved in several hostile actions, but fortunately, there were no deaths. JCO houses were phased out in mid-2000 because the scarce special operations personnel were needed elsewhere.

Platoon houses. Certain nations, including France and the United Kingdom, established lightly defended platoon houses. In 2002, the French rented a house in Gacko, one of the poorest areas of the Republic. The French maintained the outpost in the middle of town, and the relationship between them and the locals was between cordial and indifferent. The Gacko house was another example of SFOR demonstrating its presence and helping to maintain a safe, secure environment with minimal security in an indifferent or hostile area.

In 2002, the British established a troop house in Gradiska that housed combat troops plus medics and a cook. Half the troops commuted to other towns in their AORs. The leader was a second lieutenant. The British mission included maintaining a safe, secure environment; showing enough force presence to confirm SFOR was actively engaged in keeping SFOR headquarters informed; and helping the local community.

Force protection was limited because the

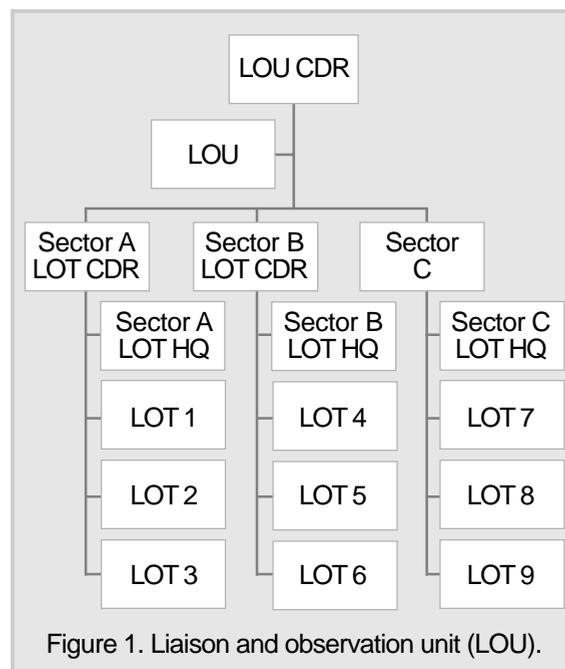


Figure 1. Liaison and observation unit (LOU).

threat was perceived to be low. The house was open to anyone from the community. Many people visited to report problems with housing and municipal authorities at the rate of about four to five visits each day. Soldiers listened to the locals to gather information, but it was not their mandate to become involved in municipal affairs. Still, because local residents often needed such assistance, troop leaders often followed their own leads to respond to the people's needs.

Implementation

SFOR began developing its version of LOT houses in late 2003. MNTF (Northwest), led by Canadian Brigadier General (BG) Stu Beare, initiated the LOT house concept in early 2004. MNTF (Southeast), led by German BG Gerhard Stelz, began implementation in spring 2004. MNTF (North), led by U.S. BG T.J. Wright, began implementation in June 2004. Although in late 2003 the COMSFOR had directed the task forces to implement the LOT house concept, he gave task force commanders great flexibility on implementation and operations. The various approaches in the different sectors reflected the strengths and challenges of developing and implementing coalition doctrine and related TTP.

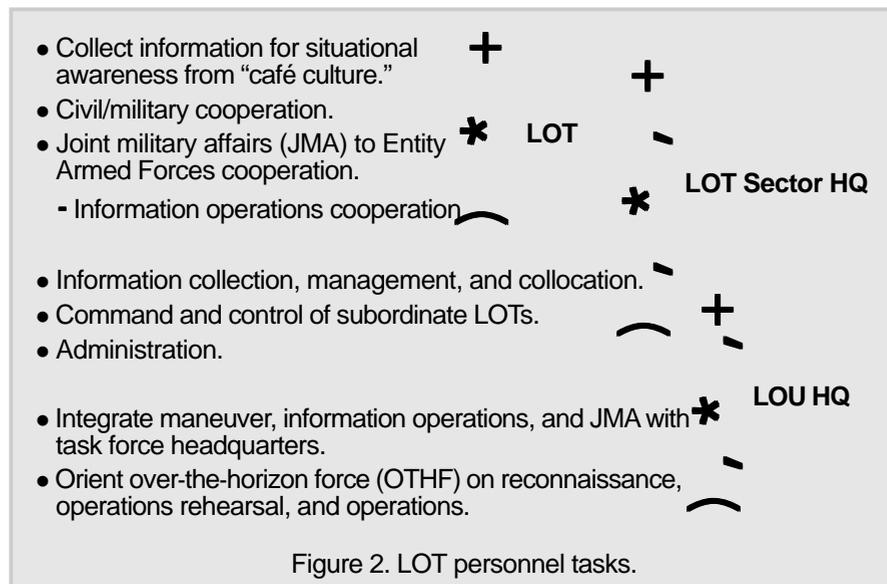
Structure. The number of LOT personnel in each house and the reporting structure varied by nation and task force. However, the following guidelines are being developed to adapt the chain of command and control to the SFOR's general organizational architecture:

- Each MNTF's liaison and observation unit (LOU) should share the same general structure.
- The LOU should report to the MNTF headquarters and have a distinct unit line and chain of command with developed complementary priority information requirements.
- Under the LOU's command, and to reduce the control sphere, several sector commands and headquarters should collocate to help coordinate information (Figure 1).

Tasks and responsibilities. A LOT's specific composition varies from one AOR to another. However, taking into consideration a LOT's tasks, force capability requirements, and necessary force protection and security measures, it was recommended that a LOT have 8 to 12 team members per house. Unfortunately, even with this basic issue, the number of assigned personnel per house varies because of each nation's resources and perceptions. For example, Italy has LOT houses with relatively few soldiers, which significantly affects the ability to patrol the streets and safeguard the house (Figure 2).

Selection and training. The LOT concept is a highly complex task. Selecting the right leaders and subordinates to make it happen is critical. Task force leaders concur that LOT personnel should be—

- Sufficiently confident and have enough initiative to thrive in an alien society and in isolated situations.
- Sensitive to local customs and behavior.
- Strong and not easily bullied or intimidated.
- Able to generate conversations and ask questions.
- Able to provide commanders with assessments on the information they receive and how to exploit it to assure local security and stability.



The mission must be clear. Individuals must know their purpose; be trained to monitor political, economic, social, and environmental developments; and be able to interact with BiH military and civilian authorities to enable better detection of anomalies. Before deployment, LOT members must clearly understand the historical background, current situation, and

US Army



An American infantryman in Bosnia plays with an infant, August 2002.

anticipated future developments in BiH. LOT personnel should be trained to operate in locations in direct contact with the local population, institutions, and international community. Therefore, LOT training must emphasize individual initiative.

LOT members' primary roles will be overt information-collection and civil and military cooperation duties. To assess local and regional threats to security and stability, LOT members must provide accurate information on displaced refugees, public institutions, the rule of law, and the local economy and infrastructure. They must undertake training on how to build confidence and maintain good relationships with local civilians, which requires an ability to communicate actively and openly while carefully assessing and revalidating information gathered. LOT members' training should also include practical procedures, techniques, and requirements for the field, such as driving skills, language abilities, and computer proficiency.

Because all nations' training and resources are not equal, LOT members will not have the same level of training before they arrive, and training varies greatly by nation after soldiers arrived. While EUFOR might yet develop standard operating procedures that require a baseline for training, it is likely training will continue to vary greatly from nation to nation. Also, the available number of soldiers for the LOT mission varies for each nation, which affects the selection process of LOT personnel.

Because all LOT houses use interpreters who help in the daily interaction with local citizens, language skills are particularly important. Depending on their nationality and native languages, LOT members will have different levels of success in obtain-

ing qualified interpreters who can speak the local language, the language of the LOT members, and English, the language used throughout SFOR and European Union Force operations. Accordingly, even with the critical issue of interpreters, it is difficult to establish common doctrine regarding their selection and training. For example, one interpreter for Spanish-speaking LOT members developed language skills by spending a month in Spain and landed the interpreter position by being able to answer some basic questions in Spanish.

An Italian interpreter acquired language skills by serving as a cook in the Italian barracks in downtown Sarajevo.

Because most interpreters cannot translate three languages simultaneously, they will take shortcuts. While this might work some of the time, it also can clearly affect a conversation's overall value and potentially mislead both soldiers and local citizenry. Further, the varied ethnic composition in different communities makes it difficult to find qualified interpreters who can blend in well with local citizens and also communicate with LOT members. That said, English is the common operational language in NATO, and all LOT personnel (both soldiers and interpreters) should be fluent in English to mitigate the difficulty of language issues.

Force protection. Force protection is sometimes difficult because of the distance from LOT houses to task force headquarters. However, minimum-security standards should ensure all LOT personnel, equipment, and information have the appropriate level of physical protection. LOT personnel also follow the same force-protection alert level in effect within the relevant AOR. Because the threat could vary, each situation has the potential to change on short notice. Should the threat to a LOT site increase, it might be necessary to reinforce or withdraw the team. Contingency plans must be in place for defense or reinforcement and to evacuate any site should it come under attack. MNTF headquarters should inform LOT members of any activity that would affect their security.

Significant questions have arisen regarding the issue of force protection for LOT members. Various nations have different perspectives on what is

needed to help military personnel. Also, each nation might have different capabilities for providing personnel and equipment such as aircraft or vehicles. The United States has unique capabilities other nations cannot match, which makes it difficult to establish a common doctrine for LOT force protection. However, the United States can establish a clear example and model as a guide.

Service support. Because troop-contributing nations (TCNs) provide service support for LOT houses manned by their respective soldiers, LOT members have different levels of supplies and creature comforts, including items as basic as sleeping accommodations, food, and transportation. Further, significant differences exist regarding movement restrictions, maintenance, and computer and administrative support. SFOR encouraged LOT members to eat and shop in the local economy as a way of improving relationships with the population and simplifying logistic support. This arrangement made it difficult for smaller, less prosperous TCNs to fund an effective LOT house. Whether LOT funding should be centralized with all LOT members receiving the same support and amenities is an issue under examination.

Field houses, bases, or facilities handed over by local authorities can serve as LOT houses. LOT section headquarters, and LOU headquarters. However, it is strongly recommended that LOTs and LOT sector headquarters be based exclusively in field houses, with LOU and MNTF headquarters collocated. The local population would be more willing to give information to LOT members if they can avoid military security procedures (such as ID checks, procedures to receive temporary passes, and so on). The LOT house should be the friendly face of SFOR, but because of different TCN resources, not every nation can acquire the desired number of LOT houses.

A Developing Success Story

The LOT house concept is a success story in the normalization in BiH. The improved security situation and the increased role BiH authorities play allowed SFOR to restructure and transition from large military bases to homes sprinkled throughout BiH that provide local security. LOT members are present to explain the open and transparent transition of the SFOR mission to the European Union and a newly established NATO headquarters.

Achieving the overall objectives and principles of coalition doctrine can be difficult because of the differences in individual nations' TTP. SFOR has encountered differences in approach to the LOT house concept as a result of significant distinctions in TCN resources and perspectives. As the United States and other nations develop future coalitions, they will do well to recall that the key issue remains whether the overall effort is successful, not whether each approach is identical. Task force commanders and LOT members agree there is more than one recipe for creating houses in each location. Unique characteristics in every LOT house create different, exceptional houses in every location.

Doctrine is malleable, particularly with respect to coalition doctrine. Each coalition nation must integrate TTP best suited for its mission, personnel, and resources. U.S. commanders must understand that establishing coalition doctrine is never easy, but it is not impossible.

To succeed in coalitions, it is important to never accept the first "no." Instead, the U.S. military must continually work with allies to establish consistent, overarching principles for execution of the mission. In BiH, TTP vary for LOT houses, and coalition doctrine is sufficiently flexible to accommodate the differences. The objectives for all LOT operations remain the same—obtain and provide situational awareness for the multinational coalition. **MR**

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