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Session 3 Panel Member

Beth Cole

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BETH COLE: Thank you very much. I took want to thank IFPA and Fletcher and congratulate you on the fortieth anniversary. I was an aspiring Fletcher grad, but at the age of twenty-one I was given a kind of stark choice whether or not to join the executive branch and help to engage in a historic debate over strategic arms limitation or whether to go to Fletcher. I chose the former and got a pretty intense education, along with some people who are here on this panel. But I often regret that I did not join the ranks of Fletcher grads. There are all kinds of ways to get education in this world.

I want to start with a simple premise and just throw this out to you. From where I sit at USAID, if SOF operators can understand how USAID and its partners address food insecurity through very specific means, with farmers and pastoralists and other people who are struggling to put food on the table, and can understand how we also address natural resource management through water catchment systems in parts of Africa to enable farmers to plant trees with pods that feed their animals in times of drought and stress, on and on and on, if they can understand that and how we approach that issue, then maybe they can draw a connection to affecting the potential recruits that might join the bad actors that are conducting operations in that same place.

Similarly, if USAID operators – I think we have operators – can understand how SOF is looking at and really understanding the makeup of those bad actors, and there are many in a particular region that we're focusing on right now, then maybe we can understand where they're deriving their support, where they're getting the sustenance in the community and we can try to work on that part of the equation. So, in other words, and I think the deputy secretary said it very well today, if we align our differentiated capabilities to attack some very real problems around the globe, I think that's a good news story for the nation and it's really going to help in the end produce the security and build peace on the ground in the places that we're really concerned about.

This starts with a simple declaration that partnership is in both of our agencies' interest, and the SOF 2020 concept highlights that power of partnership and recognizes that imperative and opens the door for our collaboration. Similarly, USAID's policy framework calls for the agency to leverage solution holders such as SOCOM and to work very deliberately on that partnership.

How do we do that? And that's really what I want to talk about. I am going to focus on a very easy lane here, which is USAID and SOCOM and try to leave the rest of the interagency community to everyone else. But it starts first and foremost-- I think this is really important – with liaisons. So, I thank Admiral McRaven for giving USAID two SOSTs who are worth more than their weight in gold every day, and we have committed an agency of ten thousand people globally to have an advisor down at Special Operations Command in Tampa, and then last year we also agreed to place a new deputy advisor in the SOCOM's NCR operation here in Washington. And I think that committing to that fundamental exchange of personnel, that liaison function, is the fundamental building block, and if we don't do that – and I hope on my watch here, I don't want one combatant command to say sorry but we can't give you that guy because we're under budget cuts. If we do not commit to that fundamental partnership and liaison, then everything we do is going to be ad hoc and everything we do is going to be a lot harder. So, that's by way of saying thank you for giving us a precious resource, because we are giving you also a precious resource.

But why should we do that? Why should we partner? And why are these liaisons so important, for what and how? I think that the what is that we need to bring people together to , first, assess the environment together. How do we understand this envi-



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ronment, and then how do we apply our differentiated capabilities and partners that we work with in our networks to address that problem set and that environment? Once we assess and understand that, then maybe how do we plan together? And I'm talking about moving things way to the left end of the spectrum, not necessarily operations on the ground, but going up to the beginning of the problem. So, how do we plan together?

And then when we get to the ground, if we can, if it's safe, maybe how do we conduct some operations together?

But I think the first thing is this liaison that enables assessment together, that enables planning together; and finally, it's enabled I think by training and education, which is a real challenge for us right now. We heard this morning that training is being cut all over the place. Our agency doesn't do training in a robust manner to begin with. And we try very hard to work across that training and education environment to do what we need to do to begin with to enable any of this other stuff, which is to understand each other's unique roles and responsibilities.

So, let me start with the assessment piece, and I'm just going to give some illustrations. One of the reasons that I was bouncing up and down here today – I have the luxury of our headquarters being here – is that tomorrow we're preparing for a joint brief to Admiral McRaven and the administrator of USAID. They decided in October 2012 when they just did a meet-and-greet – and you never know what's going to flow from a meet-and-greet – that they were very interested in collaborating on some kind of global mapping capability that would map the way that SOCOM and its folks see the world and the way that USAID and our folks see the world, and that maybe together if we could map those understandings we could have a lot better programming on the ground.

They basically then decided that there are some real areas of concern around the world, but one of those occupying a lot of people's time was the Sahel. So, we set about to try to emerge after six to eight months of very hard work with a common understanding of the risk and resilience factors that are in the Sahel. Now, that might sound easy, but I've herded a lot of cats and dogs in my time here over the last couple of decades, and when you take SOF operators and USAID personnel that are operating on the ground, and academics and AFRICOM and intel people and State Department and Joint Staff and others and you try to put them in the room, well they have to decide, first of all, what do you mean by the Sahel? What are the boundaries? It sounds simple, but we don't even understand those things the same way.

So, this was a very, very hard piece of work, but I'm proud to say that in our first attempt at trying to do this kind of assessment, joint assessment together, that I think we've emerged with a really serious degree of understanding that has not only highlighted things that we know, but it has also shone a huge spotlight on things that we don't know. And therefore, it has informed some future work that I hope is going to form the basis for a continued partnership.

We are all focused on Mali – and I'll just give you this one due out, and sorry to preview the brief, Admiral – but in line of the focus of this conference on prevention I think one of the things that we've understood from this assessment is while we're all focused on Mali, if we want to prevent conflict we had better look at Niger and Burkina-Faso. So, that's just one thing that we have illuminated by doing this assessment together.

Then there is planning. Now, the Department of Defense and all of the services and components, you plan all of the time, and we can barely wrap our arms around your planning process because it's robust and it occurs every day. But we at USAID plan too. We plan from the ground level up. It is called Country Development Cooperation Strategies. And we've discovered with SOCOM over at least the past year that I've been in this job that, one, we should look at your top-level plan, so your campaign plan 7500, understand your global strategy; and you should look at our high-level policies and strategy, and we've begun to open those up to each other in draft so that we can actually shape and influence each other's strategies. But then we've gone down very specifically to the country level.

In Yemen, for example, our mission director has SVTCs (secure video teleconferences) with SOCOM personnel on a regular basis now. That didn't occur two years ago, three years ago, four years ago, five years ago. This is the heart of trying to really get at inter-agency collaboration in a very serious way. And we've got a long way to go, but given the size of our agency and the size of SOCOM and the Department of Defense, we have to be very strategic about looking at assessment and joint assessment and looking at planning together and really figure out where are those places where we have the possibility of trying to move things in a better direction together if we engage in that.

Education and training, I'm proud that my office and USAID have been providing training support to several hundred Army, Navy, and Marine Special Operations personnel who have been regularly deploying to Afghanistan, and we will continue to do that. But with the draw-down soon in Afghanistan and previously in Iraq, I have to raise the question of and the challenge for us all of how are we going to keep that education and training focus when we do not have the forcing function of us going off together and operating in these environments. It is much more disparate. It's going to be a lot harder and the challenge is going to be a lot harder.

USAID trainers, that's another example on the training front, come in regularly from Afghanistan to help SOF operators in the understanding of the environment before they go out, particularly on governance and development. My office at USAID supports SOF pre-deployment training in preparation for missions throughout the globe. We have in the last year literally had hundreds of special operators and especially civil-military support elements and MIST teams and others come through USAID and we have arranged meetings for them with experts, done roundtables for them, immersed them in the environment that we understand before they go out to the mission area and connect them with people on the ground.

In education, Joint Special Operations University, the same thing. We participate in their Combatting Terrorism Networks interagency seminar on a regular basis. We are constantly sending people down there to lecture and support that training and education curriculum. And I know from being down at SOCOM that you are building on that to take on the training and education of SOF personnel in a very serious way. That to me is where we should put our focus, but it's the greatest challenge as well, because our people are forward deployed. I mean they're not here. USAID is a mission-focus forward-deployed organization. And the demand signal from the department and SOCOM and others to try to get people down range to your schoolhouses and your training centers is a demand that I don't think we're going to be able to meet in the future. So, we have to think about how we're going to deal with that. It's the enabler actually that allows us to understand our roles and responsibilities, and then we can get to assessment, planning, and perhaps operations.

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So, let me just talk a little bit about operations. We are working with Special Operations Forces in Jordan, in Kyrgyzstan, in Peru, Honduras, the Philippines, Afghanistan; and I want to focus just on two areas, one is a place that we've put a lot of attention on, Afghanistan, and the other is one that we probably haven't heard that much about and that's Peru.

In Afghanistan we've worked very much around SOCOM's Village Stability Operations program and have found that it has been very successful, because they have been able to help create the white space that USAID and State Department and government of Afghanistan officials need to operate safely in that area. So, we will continue to work on VSO as a major point of intersection between us. Now, not all VSO areas are a homerun for development work. Some sites that are designated for Afghanistan local protection forces are simply too remote or simply too kinetic for our programs. But in some areas we're finding that where Special Operations task forces and USAID are trying to achieve common objectives that we can dual-hat – this is very procedural – but we can dual-hat some of our field program officers as LNOs in those Joint Special Operations task forces and be able to execute the development work that we need to do alongside of the Special Operations Forces. And this is a very unique and special program, the question is: is it replicable and is it replicable in other places in the world, and we should really look at that.

I'm just going to quickly pivot to Peru. I was just down at SOCSOUTH – and this is a new story for me. I don't think it is told very often. Everyone knows that in Peru there are some areas that have been a no-go for the government of Peru for perhaps thirty years, too unstable, too many bad actors operating there, and the population has been deprived of basic development and essential services for, as I said, thirty years. USAID with its National Commission for Development and Life without Drugs, it's called DEVIDA, and Peruvian national government and Special Operations Forces down there decided to target these areas. We aligned our strategies. And now I'm proud to say that I learned that for the first time this particular area of Peru is now open to government programs and USAID development actors for the first time thirty years.

It's a story that is a very interesting one and we don't hear about it, because the focus isn't on Peru, but I think it's a lesson that we can take to other places around the world.

Let me just close with prevention. Where is prevention? I talked about Burkina-Faso and I talked about Niger. Hopefully, we can work with Special Operations and other members in the interagency community, as we tend to like focus like a laser beam on Mali. Well, as we're reading about, those places are suffering from some deterioration of late and perhaps it's time to help buck them up. How do we do that? We try to align our strategies through assessment, planning, et cetera.

The other place that's very near and dear to a lot of us right now, Jordan and Lebanon. Last night I had an exchange with a senior person working for the admiral. He is going to be going to head the SOF element Lebanon. We agreed he is going to come through here. We're going to help train him up in terms of what USAID thinks and does and is worried about in that context, get him to understand what some of our non-governmental implementers are thinking and understanding about that situation so that he is prepared when he goes out. And more than that, we're going to follow him down to the mission in Lebanon and make sure that he has those relationships that he needs to be able to deal with what is a very, very, very serious problem for our government and for the people of that region.

So, I hope that you got a little taste of kind of just the nuts and bolts of how we're trying to do this. But this is the work that my office is doing with Special Operations Command every single day, and I hope it pays off. Thank you very much.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: Good afternoon. Major Taz(?)Bailey from Headquarters Marine Corps. Question for Ms. Cole and Mr. Kausner. We throw around a lot of liaison officers from the DOD as the largest department in the federal government. But at what point by the time we talk about TSOCs, geographic combatant commands, service headquarters, component commands, at what point do we began to tax your organizations with excessive liaisons to where you are unable to perform your mission at your current manning? And related to that, how would you rate your agency's treatment of people that go kind of the beaten path of a Foreign Service officer who go and do one these liaison jobs?

BETH COLE: That's a really good question. We're in a bidding cycle right now. So, I'm trying to grab senior Foreign Service officers for positions, and I get asked that question all of the time. Ironically, the last three senior development advisers that served in SOCOM, CENTCOM, and SOUTHCOM were promoted and are now mission directors. Our current senior development adviser sitting at SOCOM was promoted in place.

Is that the norm? I don't know. I don't know what the historical data would say. But I think that right now at this time, with people that are coming out of some very challenging environments, that these assignments are attractive. They get to work on newfound skills, at a comfort level that they've developed with their military colleagues. I worry about the future and whether or not that's going to hold true for the ranks that are coming up.

In terms of the other direction, until recently I don't think we did a very good job of orienting the officers that came in from the combatant commands and the services to our organization. We've now spent a lot more time in trying to help them to understand. I mean I've watched some of our officers come out of Afghanistan, get dumped into AID, and wow, talk about landing on Mars, it's a big change. And I've spend a lot of time talking to them and trying to help them understand that it's normal to feel strange in a strange land, but that they will gain a comfort level. And I have to say that after five months or six months of having our current liaison with us, I told him the other day when I heard him brief somebody, I said I hate to say this, but you've become AID-ified. You can speak the lingo. You can give a brief on food security. I probably can't give that same brief in the detail that you can.

So, it's something that you have to invest in and it takes time. But I think it's really, really critical. I'm more worried about people pulling back their liaisons than I am about handling more.