

# The EPIDOTE operation in Afghanistan

Since June 3, 2002, an Army Operational Training Detachment (DIO) is taking part in the training of the Afghan armed forces. This operation, nicknamed “EPIDOTE” was praised by the Afghan authorities and our American partners. However, after having recall the context of this mission and its current achievement, this short article will present some lessons learned drawn, from the seminar of detachment commanders, which was held at the Paris Military School last February.

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Within the framework of the Bonn agreements, signed December 3, 2001, and in order to ensure the protection of the interim authority, the British from the IFAS (Interim Force for Assistance Support)<sup>1</sup> were training a battalion from the Afghan National Guard in March 2002. The French participated to the training of the Afghan instructors.

In the continuity of this experience, France and the United States decided to participate to the first cycle of a training integrated within the framework of a comprehensive rebuilding plan organized over five years in connection

with the interim authority. Indeed, France considers that it is essential for this interim authority as for the future Afghan government to rely on a regular, trained and disciplined Army. In the long term, this Army should reach a strength of 80 000 men. Both nations, committed alone in this process, have agreed to work in close co-operation so that the future Afghan national Army constitutes a coherent entity in the long term. Thus, training is harmonized and support “mutualized”. In this same logic, France carried out the rehabilitation of the two buildings of the Afghan Military

Academy, intended to accommodate the recruits.

Initially, France committed itself to train light infantry battalions. Three Operational Training Detachments (DIO), made up of about fifty officers and NCOs, were successively engaged in this mission and some 1500 Afghan soldiers were trained.

This training was organized into five main areas :

- firing practice ;
- elementary level warfare ;
- MOUT (Military Operations on

Urbanized Terrain) and crowd control ;

- patrols ;
- setting up a support and HQ company.

Since February 2003 and within the framework of the Operational Training Detachment number 4 (DIO 4), the French Army takes part in the training of the future officers and NCOs of the Afghan Army. This training, planned until next summer, will thus enable the future Afghan officers to train themselves the units of their Army. As of February 2003, the CEREX convened the first detachment commanders in order to draw “hot” lessons



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from this operation's first phase, which consisted in training full battalions within a geographical and human environment new to the French Army. From this seminar, the four following conclusions came out, respectively in the fields of the tasked mission, the detachment's selection, the team's preparation and the opportunity of a doctrine.

#### WRITTEN DIRECTIVES

Though accustomed to Operational Training Detachment (DIO) missions in Africa,

neither the Army, nor the armed forces joint staff or the CORTOME would have written on this topic. However, these missions, which were devoted to a small number of units, will now involve the whole of the Army. To carry out this type of mission, it is thus no longer appropriate to rely on the expertise of a few units only.

Moreover, if it is necessary to preserve the freedom of action of the DIO commander through a mission's wording granting some flexibility to adapt it to the environment and to current circumstances, it is

nevertheless appropriate - in such a context - to characterize a mission in terms enough clear and precise to help the commander in the field, and to protect him - on a legal basis - as much towards the nations with which he operates or those he is addressing, as towards some "unexpected incidents" that could occur. The mission's spirit, political-military considerations (subordination, relations with the allies and the authorities of the country, for example) could be provided in a written document

which could be of a letter of instructions for commander's eyes only.

#### A THOROUGH PREPARATION

Owing to the theater's specificity, the training level, and the mission, notably the number of soldiers to be trained, it is impossible to define in advance the strength of a standard Operational Training Detachment (DIO). It is nevertheless possible to fix the type of skill necessary per specialty depending upon the necessary training level. Thus,

# Lessons learned

each mission should beforehand thoroughly study - on behalf of the ones deciding the tasking (CPCO : Operation Planning and Command & Control Center, CFAT : Land Forces Command)), which precisely determine for the appointed personnel the required human and material means as well as the specific training to be carried out. Moreover, the tasking authorities should know and check the security conditions on the theatre for such a detachment otherwise they will have to reinforce its manpower significantly. So, it is

the responsibility of the armed forces' service leader for that operation to define on a case by case basis the TO (Table of Organization) of the concerned DIO. Concerning the Army, the Land Forces Command could, in addition, identify the functions required for a DIO by differentiating, in particular, the personnel devoted to support and that in charge of training.

In any event, the appointment of the detachment should be made within time limits compatible with the preparation of this difficult mission, in

particular during the initial projection.

## AN IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE DOCUMENTATION

This preparation could be largely facilitated by setting up a data base (country file) on the whole of the territories likely to benefit of an Operational Training Detachment's (DIO) projection and especially of a "guide line" to be given to the DIO commander as soon as he is appointed, thus enabling him to optimize the time to devote to the preparation of the

mission itself (organizations, offices to be consulted) as to his own projection. Thus, it appears necessary to identify an organization (DCMD, DRM, CMIDOME, and COFT<sup>2</sup> ?) tasked to centralize the comprehensive data bases - existing or to be set up - concerning the theatres that could receive a DIO. However, documents on potential theatres - drafted as soon as (annual or contingency) planning directives are established, should often be enough. They could be available at the CPCO, which is



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now a planning organization. The DIO's basic document (memento ?) should indicate the place where information is available. Eventually, the proximity of the CPCO and the DRM should be used suitably (briefings, collecting documentation, offices to be consulted, etc.) to save time for the appointed commander.

### A GENERIC CONCEPT ?

Taking the extreme diversity of these missions into account, it appears useless to define a doctrinal framework concerning Operational Training Detachments.

Indeed, these missions can differ completely according to :

- their duration (from a few weeks to several years) ;
- the considered level (training officers and NCOs, experts, regular units...) ;
- the specific context of the considered country (geographical, historical and human framework, safety...) ;

- the own assets of the Army to be trained (initial level of soldiers to be trained, type and availability of equipment, available facilities...) ;

- the presence of a military co-operation mission and of French pre-positioned (or committed) forces or not, which can possibly support the mission ;

- a possible co-operation with other nations, as it is the case in Afghanistan, which can imply the harmonization of training activities, even task sharing, in particular in the support area.

Owing to these various situations, this is the reason why setting up a DIO cannot fall within a pre-established doctrinal and organizational framework.

Nevertheless, it would be desirable to formalize a generic DIO concept as a basis for setting up training to the benefit of foreign units. In fact, this concept should primarily clarify the administrative modalities, more than the educational directives, which are the normal job of any properly trained officer or NCO.

<sup>1</sup> *The Interim Force for Assistance Support includes 17 countries. With a strength of 4500 men, with about 550 French soldiers, the IFAS is deployed in Kabul and its surroundings.*

<sup>2</sup> *DCMD: Directorate of Defense Military Co-operation ; DSI : Directorate of Service Intelligence ; CMIDOME : Military Overseas Information And Documentation Center ; COFT : Land Forces Operations Center.*

### AS A CONCLUSION,

the adaptability of Army's officers and NCOs enabled them to successfully carry out the EPIDOTE operation within an initial very difficult context. Their action is at least as effective as that of American units, with which they cooperate - by the way - actively.

However, if no detailed doctrines or organization can be preset, this type of mission requires a very serious preparation and consequently time. Reconnaissance should be carried out beforehand on the theatre in order to define the strength and the qualification of the DIO's personnel, as well as the assets essential to carry out the mission. Moreover, a generic concept in this field would save time and improve efficiency, especially as regards support and in particular its administrative and financial aspects.

Finally, even if this type of mission is not really an operational one - in the first sense of the word - appointments should be made early enough to enable officers and NCOs to prepare for their mission intellectually and in particular, to acquire the knowledge necessary to a good understanding of the human environment in which they will be immersed - from a serious documentation base. Ideally for the initial deployment, it would be useful to appoint a detachment commander already having an experience of this type of operation and / or of the considered theatre, and to favor a good homogeneity of the team.

# lessons learned



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# ( Synergy between doctrine, training and military education in pictures )



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