

# Brokering Peace in

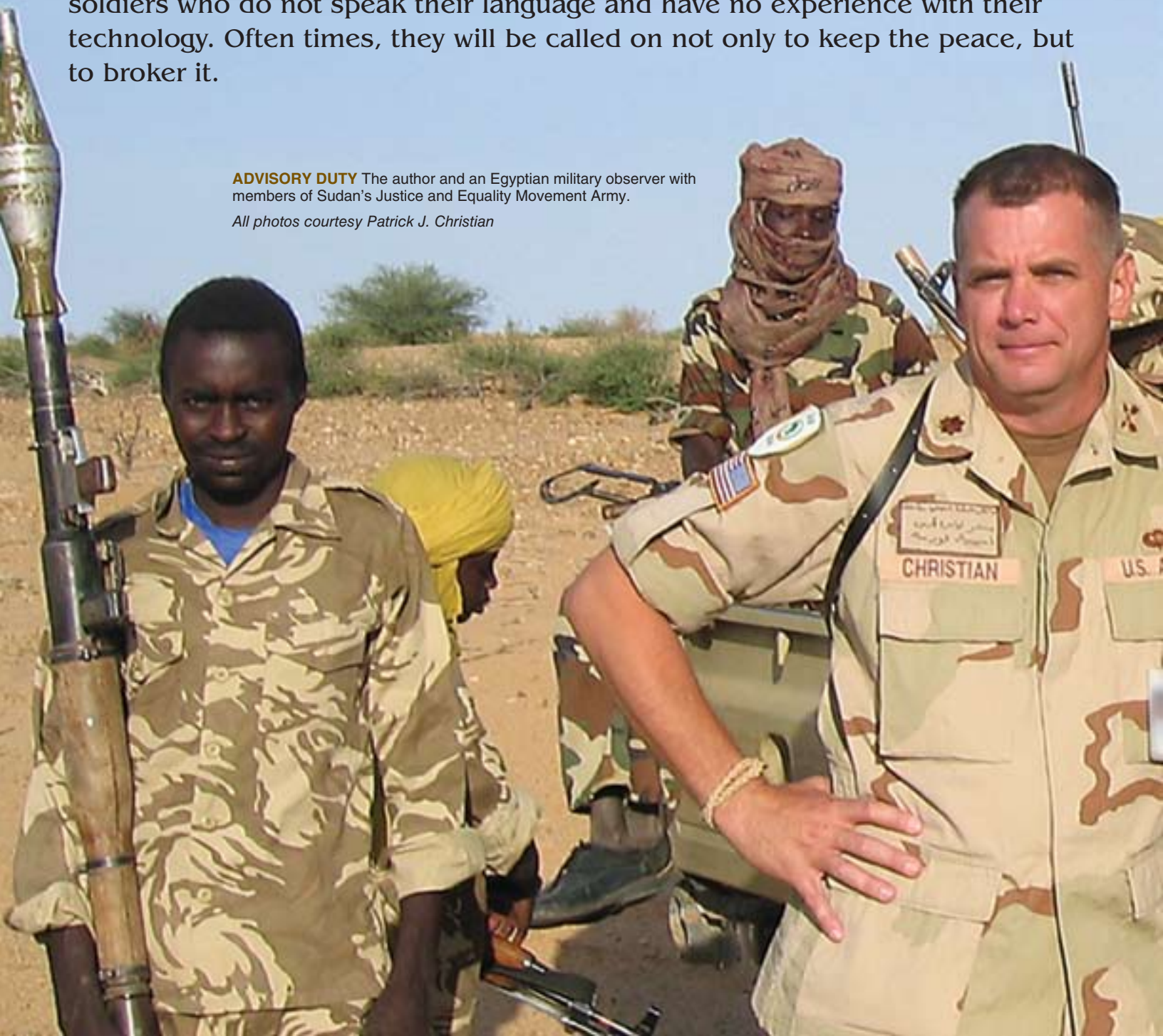
## Special Forces officer tackles unique advisory role in Darfur.

Story by Lieutenant Colonel Patrick J. Christian

As the world and regional security environments call increasingly for action under coalition and intergovernmental auspices, an emerging advisory role is forming for the Army special-operations community. In these roles, perhaps more than in any others, ARSOF Soldiers will be called on to put all of their skills to the test. In these advisory roles, Soldiers will operate in isolation, with few or no support personnel. They will have to work side by side with coalition soldiers who do not speak their language and have no experience with their technology. Often times, they will be called on not only to keep the peace, but to broker it.

**ADVISORY DUTY** The author and an Egyptian military observer with members of Sudan's Justice and Equality Movement Army.

*All photos courtesy Patrick J. Christian*



# Sudan



In August 2004, the author found himself in just such a role when he deployed to the Darfur region of Sudan as part of a small joint-special-operations advisory team dispatched there by the commander of the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Horn of Africa. The team, deployed from Camp Lemonier, Djibouti, consisted of a Navy SEAL lieutenant commander, a Marine recon major, and the author, then an Army Special Forces major. The team was tasked to work as advisers to the African Union's 12 military-observer

the Government of Sudan, or GoS (which is primarily in the control of the Northern Arab Sudanese), and the armed rebel groups in the Darfur region. The government-supported militias were created when the GoS armed a large number of Arab nomadic civilians, known as the Janjaweed. The Janjaweed have since begun attempting to clear the African Muslim tribes out of Darfur in a form of political/cultural cleansing.

It is this cleansing that former Secretary of State Colin Powell called

The other members of the MILOBS teams consisted of EU officers from Italy, Hungary, Ireland, France, England, Denmark and Norway. The AU officers hailed from South Africa, Mozambique, Namibia, Congo, Chad, Algeria, Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana, and collectively they spoke a dozen or so languages. Each team was also staffed with an interpreter and a military-officer representative from each of the three parties involved in the conflict: the GoS; the Justice and Equality Movement Army, or JEM;

**“ A line of Arab militia came over a steep rise on their camels and horses. ... A fierce battle ... erupted. ... Apparently, we would not be staving off any attack today, so we returned to our camp.”**

teams, or MILOBS, which were attempting to document cease-fire violations among the multiple parties in Sudan's civil war.

The mission was simple: to keep the MILOBS collecting information on the conflict, as well as to stay positioned between the warring parties as advisers without getting killed in the process.

The mission originated when the United States partnered with the European Union, or EU, in an effort to avoid a full-scale civil war in Sudan. The coalition focus is on funding and supporting the newly formed African Union, or AU, in a role designed to mediate between

the genocide in Darfur. The AU's first steps in dealing with the issue were to mediate a temporary cease-fire on April 8, 2004, to form and deploy MILOBS to patrol Darfur, and to encourage the warring parties to abide by the cease-fire and stay at the negotiating table.

Initially, there were 12 AU MILOBS teams, of five or six officers each, spread out among the six largest population centers in western and southern Darfur. Because of the warring parties' enduring distrust of both the Arab League and the African Union, the teams were mandated to have either an EU or a U.S. adviser to ensure impartiality and improve the reliability of the observing and reporting.

and the Sudan Liberation Movement Army, or SLA. The officers of the JEM and SLA were majors or lieutenant colonels.

The Muslim Brotherhood helped organize Sudan's government as an Islamic fundamentalist state. The calls to prayer from the minarets in Khartoum are different from those in Saudi Arabia, in that they mix the traditional "Allah Aqbar" call with angry denunciations of U.S. foreign policy.

The current president, Lieutenant General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, is a moderate (by Sudanese standards) who cooperates with the U.S. and the international community

**FORMING-UP** Members of the Janjaweed militia mass for an attack on a village in Darfur.



in countering terrorism. On the other hand, the current vice-president, Ali Asman Mohamded Taha, leads factions that advocate the spread of fundamentalist Islam through all parts of the country and region. It is in this complex and hostile environment that the MILOBS operate, brokering the peace that the AU is seeking.

The AU holds a charter to collect information under the cease-fire accords, but without training and guidance, its teams were unable to do much more than wander around in the desert. Contributing to the chaotic movements of the AU teams is the lack of communication and technology available to its members. There are some important lessons to be learned here, most importantly, the difficulties that the multinational unions (United Nations, EU, AU, Organization of American States and NATO) face in operating, given the vast differences in culture, language, doctrine and training among their member states.

For example, on one MILOBS team there were seven majors hailing from various countries. The major from Mozambique spoke Portuguese and Spanish. The major from the Congo spoke French, while the Namibian major spoke English. The major from Chad spoke Arabic and French, while the Egyptian major spoke Arabic and English, as did the lieutenant colonels from the JEM and the SLA. The Sudanese major spoke only Arabic,

and the author spoke English and Spanish.

The lack of a common language was a major source of problems, as most interviews were conducted in Arabic and English. Officers who do not speak either language must rely on other officers for interpretation. At any given time during planning and operations there were four- or five-way conversations going on as the MILOBS team members translated for each other.

In addition to the language difficulties, there are also problems caused by the lack of common military training. On one team, the Egyptian officer attended Infantry Officer Basic at Fort Benning, Ga. Within the AU team, he spoke the best English, understood U.N. and NATO doctrine and was often called on to translate between English and Arabic. Most of the other officers required constant encouragement to read their U.N. military handbooks to learn how to format reports, plan missions and communicate

*Editor's note: To further illustrate Major Christian's article, we have included excerpts from his diary accounts. Shown as comments on note paper, they are not intended to provide complete accounts of incidents but rather to convey the atmosphere of the situation.*

1 Nov  
Just as we landed near the village of Kasara (in the Jebel Mara Mountains), however, a line of Arab militia (known as the Janjaweed) came over a steep rise on their camels and horses. Some 300 African Arabs in mixed dress of civilian and military, sporting weapons of various countries and dubious age, trotted past us en route to the battle. A few of them glanced at us in curiosity but continued in their assault on the town of Moony, 2 kilometers away. The lead rebel pickets opened up, and a fierce battle of assault rifles and RPGs erupted. At this point, the pilots of the MI-8 were practically in panicked convulsions as they waved us back to the helicopter to get of the line of fire. Apparently, we would not be staying off any attack today, we returned to our camp.





▲ **ON THE HUNT** The MILOB investigates a missing herd of goats and a murdered family in the Bamina Region, Darfur Sudan.

1 Nov

The first was from a man named Hagar Abdullah Juma and his wife Hawa Isha Naser, who were refugees from Karnoi, 60 kilometers from Tine, Sudan. The couple and their two children arrived in Bamina with their last four goats, and the surrounding residents took pity on them, and gave them twenty more. The four goats they brought from Karnoi, led themselves and the other twenty back to the family home in Karnoi. So the story continues that Hawa woke up and discovered that the goats had gone, leaving 'no notice' as to where they went, so Hawa and a woman friend followed their tracks which led 48 kilometers to the military camp outside Karnoi. The soldiers, despite the fact that there were tracks leading right into the camp, said that they 'never saw no 24 goats', and the women should go away... The fate of a country stands equally on the back of a herd of unlucky goats, and a refugee family in the way of marauding Janjaweed, who lost their lives as a result. One complaint is about justice for the dead, in a land without remorse, without pity, and the other is for justice for their potential to

effectively. One ongoing split was the insistence by officers from Islamic countries upon using a religious header line, that proclaimed the glory of Allah, for all reports and plans. All attempts by other AU officers to convince them to use the U.N./AU templates were unsuccessful.

The lack of technology and coalition partners' inability to use it is also a drawback in these types

of missions. The author deployed with the most advanced support in terms of electronics, staff training and operational capabilities. Most U.S. first lieutenants and captains have more command and staff training and experience than many other countries' majors and lieutenant colonels. For instance, the Mozambique major had never had to operate a computer, and only the Egyptian officer could actually use the computer to type a report.

Without extensive training, none of the foreign officers would have been able to use the satellite phones provided to them. The phones provided latitude and longitude coordinates needed for navigating in the southern Libyan Desert. Most of the foreign officers were dangerous behind the wheel of the team vehicles, and they required driving instruction. Days not spent on investigations or patrols were spent on driving, computers, satellite phones and staff training. All of the



^ **TAKING NOTES** Members of the AU's military-observer teams meet with the secretary general and military leaders of the JEM in Darfur, Sudan.

AU officers readily and fully accepted the training offered, but they did place U.S. officers under a microscope, watching everything we did and said, looking for inconsistencies. The EU officers did not face the same sort of fascinated scrutiny that U.S. officers faced, and they would normally defer to their U.S. officer peer.

required analysis and real-time feedback to the field teams.

To overcome these difficulties and achieve this success, personnel from the U.S. Department of State's mission in Khartoum and U.S. Defense Department personnel at the U.S. base in Djibouti had to craft a support plan. The U.S. Embassy

Illustrating the requirement for solid mission planning was the incident in which the AU received information that a "non-Sudanese" third party was operating in Darfur with the intent of abducting U.S. or EU officers. Abductions, threats and hostile action toward AU, U.S. and EU personnel were not unusual. The

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Once a MILOBS team is trained up and well advised, they tend to yield significant information. A lack of regional technical means caused operators in the field to expend significant efforts to operate ad-hoc transmission/transport systems. Other constraints faced in the transport of information and materials included the lack of bandwidth for sending out reports, information and evidence that

is actually a mission that has only recently opened, and it operates on minimal staffing without an accredited ambassador.

The advisers to the MILOBS operated as isolated personnel in a region crawling with armed factions, as is often the case in advisory assignments. The team carried all its survival equipment on every mission and was always prepared to enter into the escape-and-evade mode.

author's initial assignment in Darfur was in Tine, Sudan, in the southern Libyan Desert. Shortly after the author left that first team, it was abducted by one of the warring parties.

Besides the threat from outside forces, the teams also faced the uncertainty of the cease-fire and the daily risk of crossfire. The cease-fire was tenuous, as there was steady fighting around Al Fashir, Kebkabia and Nyala, and sporadic fighting



▲ **SPECIAL DELIVERY** Severely overloaded trucks carry supplies and humanitarian aid for refugees in Darfur in September 2004.

around El Geniena, Ambarou and Bi'r Furniwayah.

The GoS reinforced its military and police battalions daily, but the government's intent was not always clear. The rebel groups claimed that the GoS was preparing for an offensive that would shatter the cease-fire and could cause the MILOBS team members to execute their escape-and-evasion plans.

The JEM and SLA representatives on the MILOBS teams constantly pulled the U.S. and EU representatives aside to show them documents that they claimed were taken from government offices. The documents allegedly outlined the GoS's "final solution" to the Darfur problem: the employment of chemical weapons.

The military advisers were lightly armed, carrying only a sidearm for protection, as anything else makes the warring factions uneasy. Rwandan and Nigerian soldiers were on the ground to keep the peace and provide security for the MILOBS and other parties within the country. These soldiers, however, were excitable and impulsive and proved dangerous when the teams confronted the edgy warring parties. More times than not, the Rwandans and Nigerians were left to guard the MILOBS sector base camp. The author's team's patrol vehicle came under fire by edgy participants in the fighting, with at least one officer receiving wounds.

The epidemiology of the region is even more of a security factor than the danger from civil war. When the author arrived for his second Darfur assignment, he found the teams living in rented mud brick huts in an area overflowing with desperate refugees.

30 Sep

The plight of the civilians here remains perilous, and each day is a struggle of denial about issues of suffering, starvation, and the deaths of families and cultures. In Ambarou, 120 kilometers east of Tine, we found 15-20 families living on the edge of existence between a government military brigade and a police battalion that we think is heavily staffed with former members of the Janjaweed Militia. The families are routinely attacked by government forces that rape and loot at will, adding to the already overwhelming sense of loss and destruction. The rebels



Because of the rampant disease within the refugee population, both teams in that sector were nearly non-mission capable. Of the 18 military observers on those two teams, nine tested positive for malaria and were bedridden. Three of the soldiers were medically evacuated to either Khartoum or Addis Ababa.

A significant number of MILOBS (including the author) eventually contracted malaria during the mission. The potential for large-scale epidemics is high, as the U.N. High Commission for Refugees, the International Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders and other nongovernmental agencies are not up to the task of dealing with so many people.

The sheer number of war casualties on both sides of the conflict has overburdened the medical support. The GoS did not support the efforts of the

NGOs or the MILOBS teams to provide medical care to the rebel forces.

The author's team spent several days in the Jebel Mara Mountains with the SLA rebels' western brigade, investigating Janjaweed attacks on villages. Before the team went out, rebel officers assigned to the team helped load several rucksacks with

medical supplies. The GoS officer assigned to the team had previously objected to providing medical assistance to the rebels, so caution had to be exercised in delivering them.

The hut the rebels were using as a hospital was almost medieval: Amputation was the solution for a compound fracture when the bone was exposed. Surgery was performed without anesthesia, and IV bags were being re-used. The acting doctor's credentials were that he had once been a medical technician before the war. While providing the medical assistance had the potential of causing problems within the team, it garnered important goodwill and often brought a wealth of information pertinent to the mission.

U.S. Special Forces Soldiers will increasingly be tapped for these new and emerging missions. Their expertise in operating in complex, sensitive and dangerous environments holds strategic national implications. Assignments of this nature provide valuable experience in working intimately with warring factions in areas normally denied or restricted to U.S. forces. In preparation for more of these types of advisory assignments, perhaps a class on that type of advisory role should be included in the officer portion of the Special Forces Qualification Course. **SW**

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