



The U.S. Military Academy and the Africa Military Education Program

Col. Rich Morales, U.S. Army

Lt. Col. David W. Hughes, U.S. Army

Maj. Christine Krueger, U.S. Army

Maj. Daniel Newell, U.S. Army

Maj. Ben Showman, U.S. Army Reserve

Maj. Jay Brend, U.S. Army

Although Niger ranks among the poorest and least developed countries in the world, assistance from the United States and other partners has helped this landlocked nation maintain itself as an oasis of stability in a volatile region. This type of partnership, one of collaborative effort, works only if both parties are vested in the outcome. In its 2017 report on Niger and Boko Haram, the International Crisis Group urged that “Niger’s partners, who encouraged it to take action against Boko Haram, must also provide practical assistance so that it is better able to deal with the threat.”¹ The United States Military Academy (USMA) partnership with the *École de Formation des Forces Armées Nigériennes* (Nigerien Armed Forces Training School, or EFOFAN) through the Africa Military Education Program (AMEP) is an effort to provide this practical—and much appreciated—assistance.

From the onset, it is important to understand why AMEP exists and how it is executed. AMEP is a Department of State, Title 22-funded program designed to strengthen professional military education across the African continent by providing our African partners with faculty and/or curriculum development. While funded by the State Department, the Department of Defense is responsible for executing AMEP, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense designated this responsibility to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS). One of the Defense Department’s five regional centers established and funded by Congress, the Africa Center’s mission is “to advance African security by expanding understanding, providing a trusted platform for dialogue, building enduring partnerships, and catalyzing strategic solutions.”² While the Africa Center’s mission makes it a sound choice to oversee AMEP, ACSS is not manned to execute the program. As a result, AMEP has historically relied on a volunteer model to execute its mission. In the case of Niger, since EFOFAN is a military academy, ACSS coordinated with USMA to designate a volunteer to serve as the academic lead to execute the program. Ideally, an AMEP program will be completed within twenty-four to thirty-six months.

The USMA Niger AMEP team, consisting of faculty from the Department of Systems Engineering, the Department of Physical Education, and the Brigade Tactical Department, traveled to Niger six times from 2017 to 2020 to help EFOFAN build its leadership capacity through a combination of a combatives program, a new leadership model and class, and discussions on gender integration. The goal of each engagement is to devote large, dedicated blocks of time to collaborative curriculum development, EFOFAN officer training and discussion, and the AMEP team’s ongoing, periodic assessment of how the cadets and cadre are progressing and performing.

After the USMA Niger AMEP team’s third visit, the U.S. Embassy’s Office of Security Cooperation (OSC) in Niger started to notice significant progress, and EFOFAN leadership was encouraged by the changes they were seeing amongst their cadets and cadre. After each subsequent visit, the OSC and EFOFAN leadership commented that the progress made was remarkable. While the USMA Niger AMEP team felt like it was making progress and achieving “wins,” with no point of reference, it had no idea how significant its successes were, so the team was surprised to learn that the Africa Center considered the Niger AMEP program as one its top three programs. With experience from over forty AMEP programs in thirty different countries in Africa, the Africa Center knows a well-executed AMEP program when it sees one. This type of positive feedback encouraged the Niger team to write this article to share five lessons learned from this capacity-building experience in the hopes that future AMEP teams will find them useful.

Lesson 1: Employ a Systems Approach

There are currently AMEP teams working with nineteen partner nations. These teams come from a variety of host institutions and departments within the institutions. What is unique to the USMA Niger AMEP team is that its lead has consistently been from USMA’s Department of Systems Engineering at West Point. Rather than drawing on vast experience in international relations, history, or management,

Previous page: Cadet student-leaders and their assigned squad members stand in formation 26 June 2019 as they receive instructions on the training events of the day at an officer candidate leadership course conducted by the Nigerien Armed Forces Training School in partnership with an Africa Military Education Program team from the United States Military Academy at Camp Tondibiah, Niger. (Photo by Lt. Col. David W. Hughes, U.S. Army)

leveraging expertise in systems engineering has been critical to the team's success to date. From the nascency of the team's relationship with EFOFAN, the employment of a systems approach facilitated thorough problem definition, stakeholder analysis, iterative solution design, and comprehensive assessments.

When defining the problem, the team viewed EFOFAN in its operating environment rather than as an isolated institution. While the primary mission of many AMEP teams is curriculum improvement, through systems thinking, the USMA Niger AMEP team expanded its focus beyond the classroom walls.³ The team focused on the fundamental objective: building leadership capacity. This ultimately led to the establishment of a combatives program as a means to develop leadership opportunities, a leadership model inspired by USMA, and most recently, discussions on gender integration. These opportunities were all derived from placing EFOFAN in the context of its operating environment and its strategic importance.

In addition to academically studying the problem, a systems approach meant the team needed to engage with

relevant stakeholders to holistically define the problem according to the needs of EFOFAN. These stakeholders included the Africa Center, the OSC in the U.S. embassy, and the cadet and faculty leadership of EFOFAN. AMEP leadership provided the context for our cooperation with the school. The OSC described the role of EFOFAN as strategically critical to increasing capacity of the defense forces of Niger in particular, thus increasing stability in the region. But the most important stakeholders were the EFOFAN leaders. By listening to their input as to where they desired the most assistance, the USMA team ensured their buy-in and thereby ensured their ownership of the process.

Based on Niger's input and the OSC's initial written request for AMEP support, ACSS's initial charge to the first team in July 2017 was to build a structured physical training (PT) program and to assist with leadership development at EFOFAN. During the initial trip, the team determined that the Niger PT program was already quite robust. However, they observed that all the training events were planned and executed by cadre, which limited the opportunities the cadets had to test their own leadership styles. This key finding led the AMEP team to develop and consider leader integration opportunities across all facets

of cadet development to include PT.

After discussing the initial assessment with the key stakeholders, the USMA Niger AMEP team revised the problem statement and developed a recommended leadership model that suited the realities and challenges that EFOFAN faced. In order to provide the cadets with the opportunity to lead under stressful conditions, the AMEP team proposed rotating cadets through leadership positions,

Col. Rich Morales, U.S. Army, leads the Department of Systems Engineering at the U.S. Military Academy. He holds a BS from West Point, an MBA from Yale University, MA from the Naval War College, MS from the National Defense University, and a PhD from Cambridge University. A multi-tour combat veteran, Purple Heart recipient, and Army strategist, he led a Gulf War tank platoon, a UN peacekeeping company, a battalion responsible for one-third of Baghdad, and a Cadet Command brigade. He was a White House Fellow at OMB, aide to the head of NASA, and a director in the Executive Office of the President.

Lt. Col. David W. Hughes, U.S. Army, serves as an operations research systems analyst at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. He holds a BS from the United States Military Academy, an MS from Stanford University, and a PhD from George Mason University. During his career, Hughes served with the 159th Aviation Regiment in Germany and Iraq; Task Force Sabre (Afghanistan); the 1st Infantry Division (Kansas); and the NATO Special Operations Component Command (Afghanistan). He also taught in the Department of Systems Engineering at the U.S. Military Academy from 2009 to 2012 and again from 2017 to 2020.

Maj. Christine Krueger, U.S. Army, is an operations research and systems analyst at the Center for Army Analysis at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. She holds a BS in engineering management from the United States Military Academy, an MS in project management from Drexel University, and an MS in operations research from Northeastern University. Krueger has served with the 82nd Airborne Division and the 128th Aviation Brigade. She recently taught in the Department of Systems Engineering at West Point as an assistant professor.

similar to how USMA cadets fill several leadership roles during their time at the academy. This model provides EFOFAN cadets leadership experiences and exposes them to a variety of leadership styles—all while giving them the chance to iterate and discover which techniques work for them.

In addition to this new leadership model, the AMEP team saw that there was a larger opportunity to leverage its current physical development program to supplement leadership training and to instill a stronger foundation for the warrior ethos. Anecdotally, the team learned of the challenges faced by new graduates in their outposts fighting violent extremists; stories indicated that some young officers may not have fully developed their warrior spirit. In order to develop combat leaders, the team used solution design techniques that led to a recommendation to implement the Modern Army Combatives Program (MACP). In the U.S. Army, developing a warrior spirit is one of the main tenets of the MACP and is not something that can be effectively learned through simple lectures. Thus, the AMEP team collaboratively devel-

oped a tailored combatives program with EFOFAN cadre while simultaneously ensuring that it facilitated leadership development opportunities. This

Maj. Daniel Newell, U.S. Army, is an assistant product manager at the Program Executive Office Missiles and Space at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama. He holds a BS in engineering management from the United States Military Academy, an MS in engineering management from Missouri University of Science and Technology, and an MBA from the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University. During his career, Newell served with the 82nd Airborne Division and the 31st and 4th Engineer Battalions. He recently taught in the Department of Systems Engineering at West Point as an assistant professor.

Maj. Ben Showman, U.S. Army Reserve, holds a BS from the United States Military Academy and an MS from Texas A&M University. During his active duty career, he served with both the 555th Engineer Brigade and the 20th Engineer Brigade to develop, manage, and evaluate training and operations in combat conditions and in peacetime environments. He also instructed physical education at the United States Military Academy from 2017 to 2020.

new EFOFAN combatives program required cadets to learn and demonstrate new warrior skills. After becoming proficient at certain techniques and drills, the cadets were asked to teach their peers and subordinates the skills they mastered. Like the MACP, this program also helped leaders to develop a warrior spirit and to not be afraid to take the fight to the enemy under any condition.

Another systems technique is the distinctions, system, relationships, and perspectives technique created and endorsed by Drs. Derek and Laura Cabrera at Cornell University.⁴ Using this structured approach, systems thinkers place the problem in the context of its environment and also acknowledge that each stakeholder has a different perspective as to what the problem is and how it affects them. Therefore, when the OSC asked the USMA Niger AMEP team to consider adding gender integration into the agenda for the January 2020 trip, the team understood the politically charged nature of this endeavor and deliberately approached it with a distinctions, system, relationships, and perspectives technique mindset. First, placing the problem in context extended beyond the borders of Niger. As it approached the twenty-year anniversary of United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 (which was the foundational work to begin promoting the women, peace, and security agenda), the UN set goals for the percentage of women in the force of peace-contributing countries.⁵ As of January 2020, Niger contributed over nine hundred troops to UN peacekeeping missions,

Maj. Jay Brend, U.S. Army, serves as a combatives instructor in the Department of Physical Education at the United States Military Academy at West Point. He holds a BS from the United States Military Academy and an MEd from the University of Virginia. Brend has served with the 25th Infantry Division, the 3rd Infantry Regiment, The Old Guard, and the 3rd Infantry Division.

mainly to the effort in Mali.⁶ Therefore, as a major peace-contributing country, Niger may soon feel the pressure from the UN to increase the number of women it deploys.

Increasing the number of women in the defense force is a nuanced problem and requires cultural as well as organizational change to create an environment where women feel included



“ When cadre from *École de Formation des Forces Armées Nigériennes* (Nigerien Armed Forces Training School, or EFOFAN) visited West Point in July 2018, one of them received a small academic award wreath pin from a United States Military Academy cadet as a small gift. Nigerien officer 1st Lt. Mahamadou Hamani Tahirou later decided that this would become the uniform symbol by which EFOFAN would recognize its combatives-certified leaders. ”

and valued. EFOFAN leadership recognized that it is uniquely positioned to drive conversation in its defense force and lead cultural change since it graduates roughly fifty officers a year (a relatively large number for an African army that has about 5,300 personnel).⁷ When developing the gender agenda with the stakeholders, it was critical to view it from multiple perspectives. How do the cadets perceive this issue? What barriers do they anticipate precluding more integration? How about the cadre? What do the women currently serving think are the largest obstacles? Questions like these drove the agenda to be all-encompassing: understanding the stakeholders' beliefs and beginning the problem definition of how Niger can lead its peers in the African Union toward meaningful participation of women.

Ultimately, through the application of a systems approach (which includes systems thinking concepts), the team was able to rapidly place the problems in context, iteratively conduct problem definition, and work with stakeholders to develop and implement a robust leadership solution. Essential to the iterative approach was deliberate assessment at each juncture. Prior to each trip to Niger, the team deliberated on what must be assessed and what success would look like in each focus area. In other words, what would success look like in the combatives program? Which drills should the students have mastered? With an assessment framework developed prior to the trip, the team could objectively measure progress while also introducing new concepts. It was imperative to

Nigerien officer 1st Lt. Mahamadou Hamani Tahirou points to his gold wreath award 26 July 2018 while at the Nigerien Armed Forces Training School, Camp Tondibiah, Niger. (Photo by Col. Rich Morales, U.S. Army)

include the OSC and the EFOFAN leadership in the assessment process since they are the critical stakeholders and owners of the process, respectively. The assessments directly fed back into the systems approach, which allowed for rapid growth and improvement in several key areas at EFOFAN. Continued application of this systems approach will also serve as the foundation for future success and should be considered by other teams as they work with partner institutions.

Lesson 2: Deliberately Build the Team

Much has been written about producing effective teams; that is not the goal here. Addressed here is what we can learn about the type of team that is effective in partnership work. Two key aspects seem to have been instrumental to the USMA Niger AMEP team's success: (1) construct an adaptable, interdisciplinary team and (2) ensure the team is cohesive and collaborative in nature.

Adaptable, interdisciplinary team with the right capabilities and expertise for the mission. It is perhaps obvious to say that we need the right people on the team. In most professional military contexts, individuals figure out how to work together to achieve their goals. However, when individuals with competing priorities or ideas also lack clear roles, ambiguity and conflict reign. The initial team visit in July 2017 proposed to develop means for improved leadership development and physical training capacity at EFOFAN. Two of the team members were at odds over the best methods to improve the leadership development program. Through team discussion, it became apparent that in order for EFOFAN to be successful, EFOFAN leadership would have to be intimately involved in coming up with a solution that works in their environment and within their culture. This stood in contrast to handing over a USMA-owned curriculum that, while fully developed, was not fully applicable to the EFOFAN context. While it was tempting to “stick to our guns” in terms of our ideas about the mission, the team possessed the collective flexibility to tailor its approach to the circumstances.

The USMA Niger AMEP team became an adaptable group with a mutually supporting attitude and an approach that readily evolved with its circumstances. When cadre from EFOFAN visited West Point in July 2018, one of them received a small academic award wreath pin from a USMA cadet

as a small gift. Nigerien officer 1st Lt. Mahamadou Hamani Tahirou later decided that this would become the uniform symbol by which EFOFAN would recognize its combatives-certified leaders. Our team quickly adapted to support this initiative by supplying one hundred such gold wreath awards to EFOFAN on a subsequent visit. As of January 2020, thirty-four cadets and cadre proudly wear the combatives wreath award on their uniforms.

In the consultant role, it was critical for our team to understand our own capabilities. What exactly did each team member bring to the table? Early in the process, there was talk of providing a Master Instructor Program to train EFOFAN faculty as experts in teaching practices. The idea was for this program to endure as a train-the-trainer certification course. While all team members possessed advanced degrees in their disciplines, none were well established in teaching pedagogy, let alone in designing such a program to be implemented in a different culture and language from our own. As such, deciding to forego the Master Instructor Program in favor of leadership and physical development—two areas of team expertise—proved successful.

On all six visits, the USMA Niger AMEP team was comprised of officers from different disciplines. Their experience in systems engineering, leadership, and the MACP allowed for diversity of thought and creative approaches to arrive at realistic solutions. As availability of some team members changed, the team had to evolve and pick the right people for the job. For example, when the initial combatives expert was no longer able to participate in overseas travel due to other requirements, another master combatives trainer from USMA's Department of Physical Education joined the team. Additionally, when the team decided to address the topic of gender integration from a holistic perspective, the team added an experienced female officer who had expertise in the subject area.

The USMA Niger AMEP team considered individuals from the OSC as critical members of the team as they were heavily relied upon to help coordinate, inform, and support this mission. The AMEP team remained in direct contact with the OSC before, during, and after each visit. On the team's fourth arrival in Niger, the OSC chief related that a cadet had recently been killed at EFOFAN during an incident allegedly involving hazing, and that this incident was under investigation. This news certainly



Nigerien Armed Forces Training School cadets pose with Africa Military Education Program instructors 22 January 2020 at the conclusion of combatives training at Camp Tondibiah, Niger. (Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. David W. Hughes, U.S. Army)

impacted the team's approach to various conversations about leader development. In fact, it led to a fruitful discussion about risk assessments, which are now implemented at EFOFAN. Flexibility in this situation allowed the USMA Niger AMEP team to adapt to a dynamic situation and, in the end, provide useful information to the OSC regarding EFOFAN atmospherics.

Cohesive and collaborative team. We cannot overstate the importance of building a cohesive team that is willing to listen to and trust those around them. Frequent team meetings before and during each trip helped to establish member roles and to build trust among the team. These meetings also aided relationship building among new and veteran teammates. As we confronted challenges during the planning process, we

relied on each other to develop creative solutions. And then, when we were in country, the team spent most waking hours together. It was an intense, shared experience that served to challenge and bond the team.

It was also important that team members' personalities facilitated teamwork, especially when working in a foreign context with a language barrier. The previously built trust among teammates further enabled this by encouraging the team to share ideas and to support one another's lines of effort. For example, during a discussion about how to link physical training tasks to the physical demands of the tactical mission, one team member struggled to communicate, through an interpreter, the steps of this process. On a teammate's suggestion, the original team member was able to quickly pivot and then



lead the EFOFAN faculty to use a whiteboard to visually depict these steps. Not only did this help to communicate the ideas, but it also enabled the EFOFAN leaders to draw their own connections in the process. Mutual trust, built through significant interaction and enabled by humble personalities, made these types of positive collaborations possible within the team.

The same principle of trust benefited the team even in seemingly small ways. When planning for a combatives training session, the combatives team lead was advised against conducting the training in an open field due to the intense heat. Heeding the advice of the other team member, the combatives team lead moved the training to a shaded location, which enabled the training to progress while minimizing the possibility of overheating in the participants. Although the advice was coming from a team member with a different area of expertise, listening to each other's input paid off.

In summary, this AMEP team's success was enabled by building an adaptable, interdisciplinary team with the right capabilities and expertise for the mission. When adding or replacing team members throughout the team's existence, it was crucial to bring in subject-matter experts who possessed the right traits to cooperate and collaborate in accomplishing this unique mission. Trust, built through significant interaction before and during each trip, formed the bedrock of the team's cohesion and unity of effort.

Lesson 3: Build Strong Relationship with Partner

Early into our partnership with EFOFAN, we recognized that building strong relationships was critical to the success of our visits. We believed that superficial relationships would prevent the transformational impact and lasting change that our team desired. To



achieve this outcome, the USMA Niger AMEP team, EFOFAN's leadership, and EFOFAN's mid-level influencers and "change agents" needed to recognize each other, trust each other, and ultimately believe in each other's goodness as equal partners working together as "one team." On each of our visits, we strategically and very deliberately endeavored to build the relationship. Relationship building played a central part in thinking about our USMA Niger AMEP team selection, our planning and brainstorming sessions, our trip's itinerary, and during our nightly huddles at the end of each day in Niger. After six visits in three years, we believe three essential themes support the relationship-building process: (1) having the same (and right) people "in the room," (2) maintaining frequency of contact, and (3) establishing rapport. Though these ideas appear simple, they are not easy.

Same (and right) people in the room. Given the numerous challenges associated with partnership (the language barrier, cultural differences, varying interest levels from partners, short-duration visits, differing focus areas and desired outcomes, to name a few), we found that having the same, and right, people in the room for our engagements was the first essential step to strategic progress. If both sides knew each other, recognized each other's faces, or had experiences with each other previously, our visits could more quickly move past surface-level engagements. As such, we planned continuity into our team as well as theirs. We worked tirelessly to identify which partners were needed for impactful change, and once these individuals were identified, we strongly encouraged and nearly handpicked by name the people we hoped and expected to see at each particular meeting, training exercise, or discussion. For example, we knew that one experienced lieutenant had enduring longevity at EFOFAN and was an engaging, thoughtful leader who recognized the importance of instituting transformational change at his school. As such, we strove to ensure he was present at many, if not all, of our engagements. These subtle but consistent techniques of getting the right people in the room allowed

our team to achieve momentum and start to build strong relationships with our EFOFAN partners.

Frequency of contact. The second critical relationship-building tool we utilized was applying an appropriate amount of contact with each other. We believed that if too much time passed between visits or too little communication occurred, momentum would stall, each side's focus would naturally turn elsewhere, and the relationships would weaken. To build upon previous trips' progress, we believed in high-frequency contact. We developed our plans to have no longer than six months between visits. Additionally, we stayed in contact with our partners through occasional emails and WhatsApp messaging. We also heavily relied upon the OSC to be our "on-ground" contact and keep our partnership strong when we could not be present. During our visits to Niger, we filled each day with activities and engagements from morning PT to dinnertime, maximizing the time and connection opportunities with EFOFAN. Ensuring high-frequency contact sustains and grows the relationship between partners and cannot be overlooked.

Establish rapport. Third, we believe establishing rapport was the final, critical component in our relationship-building efforts. Rapport is not easily earned, especially when the relationship begins as a meeting between strangers from different parts of the world, and site visits are often only a few days in duration. Our team quickly learned, however, that without a mutual sense of camaraderie, our recommendations and improvements would not be nearly as effective. As such, we believe our team built rapport by displaying genuine humility and kindness; by treating the partnership as a sincere opportunity of "give and take" between nations, one where supporting each other is the primary mission; by having the sense and flexibility to change plans as partner nation feedback is received; and by seeking to always make the partner nation feel respected. Subtle examples of this were found in our team our team conducting physical training sessions each morning with EFOFAN cadets and cadre and also in exchanging thoughtful gifts that supported their

Top left: Maj. Jay Brend (*second from left*), a combatives instructor from the U.S. Military Academy and member of the Africa Military Education Program team, oversees combatives training 21 January 2020 at the Nigerien Armed Forces Training School, Camp Tondibiah, Niger. **Bottom left:** Maj. Christine Krueger (*left*), a member of the U.S. Military Academy Africa Military Education Program team supporting the Nigerien Armed Forces Training School, oversees a combat training exercise 22 January 2020 at Camp Tondibiah, Niger. (Photos by Lt. Col. David W. Hughes, U.S. Army)



current mission or focus area. On one of our visits, for example, EFOFAN was in the process of developing its leadership curriculum, and we made it a point to ensure that our gifts at the end of the trip included books on the topic of leadership. On another visit, the school had experienced a need to incorporate risk planning into its training exercises, so we pivoted from our plan and conducted a class on composite risk management. Exhibiting flexibility while ensuring a partner-centered mindset helped us quickly develop and maintain rapport with our EFOFAN teammates. This ultimately led to lasting positive results across our program's objectives.

Lesson 4: (Re)Define Success and (Re)Assess

At the start of every site visit, it was critical to meet with all the previously mentioned key and hand-picked leaders. With all the stakeholders in one room, the USMA Niger AMEP team and the partner nation set goals and established a clear agenda for the trip. Although our Nigerien partners always had a tentative schedule one month prior to our arrival, this meeting ensured they were comfortable with our goals and

Maj. Ben Showman (right) and Capt. Issoufou Abdonlaye Souley discuss class material 15 November 2017 on the process of establishing physical performance goals based on tactical training needs at the Nigerien Armed Forces Training School, Camp Tondibiah, Niger. (Photo by Maj. David McLean, U.S. Army)

stated objectives. Moreover, they always built in stretch goals or had requests of their own. Addressing their stretch goals and requests were key to every individual trip success and to the AMEP mission as a whole; not only to build rapport (as was mentioned in the lesson 3 discussion) but also to get a shared understanding of what success would look like and what exactly needed to be assessed to give feedback.

To help us define success, each member from the AMEP team built initial goals of what success looked like. For example, the combatives member envisioned success on an Army scale of trained, proficient, and untrained (T, P, U). More specifically, our combatives member defined success on the following detailed scale: T = excellent technique and cadets teach/correct with no feedback from cadre, P+ = cadets perform techniques

well but need cadre input, P = cadets perform skills moderately and need cadre feedback, P- = cadets perform technique poorly and cadre are not teaching correctly, and U = untrained. With success defined, this AMEP member now had the correct scale to assess combatives as its own program within EFOFAN.

In addition to defining success for planned visits, there are opportunities where the host nation will try to achieve its stretch goals.

In our most recent visit to Niger in January 2020, the EFOFAN cadre asked if we could observe one of its military training exercises—an unplanned stretch goal for that visit. The AMEP team quickly adapted the schedule to fit it in. After listening to a cadet platoon leader brief the operations order, the cadets conducted a movement to contact, cleared an improvised explosive device, and executed a raid. By U.S. standards, the tactics, techniques, and procedures exhibited some room for growth. However, from a programmatic point of view, this type of training exercise, with cadets leading other cadets, was not feasible two years prior and therefore was defined as a huge win. Defining success with realistic and measured expectations is crucial when working with a partner nation. Sometimes, success can just be an observation of an event, especially when it is the first time ever for that event.

Assessment and Feedback

During every trip, the hard work comes down to the daily assessments and observations. At the end of each day, the USMA Niger AMEP team wrote a shared daily log or trip report that mentioned everything we

observed and discussed. This shared log kept us on the same page (literally and figuratively), while also acting as a guide to keep us focused for the next day.

These observations led to structured assessments. Each AMEP member built different tools and charts with simple and clear Likert scales to measure his or her subject matter of expertise. As an example, our combatives master trainer assessed EFOFAN's combatives pro-

gram, using the previously mentioned scale that was mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. Table 1 is the EFOFAN Combatives Assessment Tool, and it highlights the observations of the most recent (January 2020) AMEP trip to Niger.

From this tool, we were able to provide honest feedback to EFOFAN at the conclusion of every trip. Because we had built rapport and genuine relationships, EFOFAN received feedback professionally. Additionally, sharing the feedback enabled us to better coach, tutor, and mentor on subsequent trips. In fact, some of the "bad grades" motivated them to work on certain areas more in preparation for future AMEP visits.

From the AMEP perspective, these assessments give future AMEP teams an expectation of progress that they can reassess on future trips. These tools are simple and self-explanatory. As the AMEP team and mission grows, assessment tools need to be created for different focus areas of each trip, and these tools need to be used. Moreover, at the final outbrief, these tools enabled the USMA Niger AMEP team and EFOFAN to build new and future goals. This is redefining success in practice.

Table 1. École de Formation des Forces Armées Nigériennes Combatives Assessment Tool

Technique	Assessment
Cooperative pummeling	P+
Competitive pummeling	P+
Inside and outside wedge	T
Drill #1 (Arm trap and roll, pass guard, achieve top mount)	T
Drill #2 (Arm push and roll, rear naked choke, escape rear)	P
Drill #3 (Shrimp to guard, reverse bent arm bar, hip heist sweep)	P-
Bent arm bar	T

(Table by authors)

**Table 2 . Overall Assessment Tool Used by the U. S. Military Academy
Niger Africa Military Education Program (AMEP) Team, 2019–2020**

January 2020 assessment items	Observed?	June 2019 AMEP assessment	January 2020 AMEP assessment	Notes
Journey line papers continued	Yes	Good	Very good	<i>École de Formation des Forces Armées Nigériennes</i> (Nigerien Armed Forces Training School, or EFOFAN) cadets are now revisiting the journey line papers at the end of the first year.
Case studies developed by current cadre	Yes	OK	Good	Two officers from the field are now brought to EFOFAN each year to discuss real case studies from the field. It is still recommended that they formalize these case studies in writing.
Level 1 combatives program (for drills 1, 2, and 3)	Yes	Very good	Excellent	The Level 1 combatives program is 100% cadet-led and cadre-supervised.
Level 2 combatives program (for drills 4 and 5)	Yes	N/A	Untrained	EFOFAN has a strong desire to add Level 2 to their combatives program. Capt. Jay Brend gave an introduction to Level 2 on 22 January 2020. The next step is to bring two lieutenants to West Point to train them on Level 2 combatives.
Combatives wreaths awarded (Level 1)	Yes	Very good	Excellent	Fifteen new wreaths were awarded on 23 January 2020 after an awesome combatives demonstration. As of now, twenty-nine cadets and five cadre have been awarded the combatives wreath.
Combatives star wreaths awarded (Level 2)	No	N/A	N/A	It was determined that a gold star wreath would be awarded to any cadet or cadre who demonstrates mastery of combatives drills 1–5.
West Point leader development model implemented	Yes	Good	Very good	EFOFAN cadets are assigned a new leadership position each week. If a cadet fails to perform sufficiently over the course of that week, they will repeat that leadership position for an additional week. EFOFAN is still interested in implementing periodic development reviews that would be filled out by cadre. They are also considering adding peer evaluations.
Curriculum for stand-alone leadership course developed by appointed cadre	Yes	OK	Good	We were able to observe one of their leadership classes on 21 January 2020. While we would have liked to see less lecture and more discussion, it was encouraging to see how much effort was put into the class.
Cadets training cadets witnessed on multiple occasions in different settings	Yes	Good	Very good	AMEP team was able to interview EFOFAN cadets who were in leadership positions on 22 January 2020. Overall, the feedback was extremely positive.

(Table by authors)

Table 2 . Overall Assessment Tool Used by the U. S. Military Academy Niger Africa Military Education Program (AMEP) Team, 2019–2020 (continued)

January 2020 assessment items	Observed?	June 2019 AMEP assessment	January 2020 AMEP assessment	Notes
Risk assessments developed and used	Yes	Good	Very good	EFOFAN modified their risk assessment form after we discussed how the U.S. Army conducts risk assessments in June 2019. EFOFAN now lets cadets fill out risk assessment forms so they can learn about identifying risks and consider how to mitigate them.
An EFOFAN comprehensive training event observed	Yes	N/A	OK	EFOFAN took initiative by planning and executing a cadet-led combat training exercise that we were able to observe on 22 January 2020. EFOFAN leadership would still like to observe a comprehensive training event at West Point to see how they can modify and improve their training exercise.
Gender integration discussions	Yes	N/A	Good	It was very evident that the leadership of EFOFAN are sincerely committed to advancing gender integration.

(Table by authors)

Finally, we found that it is important to consolidate all the individual assessment tools into one large AMEP assessment tool. This assessment tool consolidated all agreed-upon objectives from every visit as we (re)defined success over time (see table 2). When new team members joined the team, this tool acted as the starting place. It helped track each assessment item over time, provided critical notes, and prevented stagnation/digression on the ground. It is not complicated. The tool is simple, yet effective in communicating progress or lack thereof. After several visits with the same EFOFAN leaders over time, certain goals became more realistic and more applicable to what EFOFAN was looking for in this partnership. It is important to be flexible and relentless in providing never-ending assessments and feedback.

Lesson 5: Plan Four-to-Six Months Out

The last lesson we learned dealt with planning. If someone is leading an AMEP team, it is critical that he or she get the team together early on—no later than four months before a scheduled departure. This allows for course/curriculum development, stakeholder

engagement, iterative planning, research, and preparation. In fact, one of our AMEP team members spoke with the OSC chief at least five times over a span of four months before our January 2020 trip just to get an understanding of the atmospherics for women in Niger. The same team member also engaged with U.S. Africa Command and two other AMEP teams to see what they were doing in their respective countries. Finally, sometimes materials need to be translated, which obviously takes coordination and time.

There are many administrative requirements that must be completed before going overseas. These include medical screening; passport and visa applications; chain of command and Defense Travel System trip authorizations; survival, evasion, resistance, and escape training; isolated personnel report photos revalidation; gifts for hosts; packing lists, etc. Some of these duties can be accomplished in a matter of days; however, securing a visa/passport or getting the first general officer in the chain of command to approve the trip can take months. Additionally, some requirements can be completed too soon. Medical screening; survival, evasion, resistance, and escape training; and isolated personnel report photos

validation can only be done within ninety days of departure. It takes good managerial skills to ensure completion of all required tasks, and we recommend using a detailed checklist, or even Microsoft Project, to keep on track.

Finally, it is imperative to create an extremely detailed schedule for a trip. Account for nearly every hour of the trip, including where and when mealtimes will be, workout times, and summaries of daily activities. Send the draft schedule to the OSC chief for review and ask him or her to forward it to the partner. This allows for complete buy-in by both the OSC and the partner. If either of them has suggestions to improve the schedule, make every effort to incorporate their suggestions. When we followed this protocol, our partner's preparation and participation was extraordinary, and the OSC's involvement was maximized.

Conclusion

The Africa Center has structured the AMEP program such that each AMEP team has incredible latitude in how they interact with their partner institutions and to determine their unique objectives. This freedom of maneuver is critical since no two countries, or military institutions within a country, are alike or have the same challenges. In this light, the USMA Niger AMEP team found the five aforementioned

lessons learned to be critical to its past and current success with EFOFAN. Working together, the USMA AMEP team increased EFOFAN's leadership capacity through a combatives program and a new peer leadership model. Additionally, it was imperative that the interdisciplinary AMEP team worked alongside its Nigerien partners to define, achieve, and assess success. The final path did not reflect exactly what the initial AMEP team envisioned, but the team was flexible and willing to listen and learn. Ultimately, the collaborative effort resulted in a successful program that is growing and building upon itself. As the relationship with Niger and the other AMEP partners continues to grow and expand, these five lessons provide a foundation for future AMEP teams to leverage for their own success. Systems thinking teaches us that the problem is not solved once a solution is implemented; rather, it must be assessed to determine its efficacy and if it solved the right problem. The United States and its African partners continue to have a strong partnership and that is in no small part due to the mutual respect gained through programs like AMEP. These five lessons learned expand beyond curriculum improvements. They help to truly build partner capacity and develop the rapport necessary to fight shoulder to shoulder. ■

Notes

1. *Niger and Boko Haram: Beyond Counter-Insurgency* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 27 February 2017), accessed 10 December 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/niger/245-niger-and-boko-haram-beyond-counter-insurgency>.

2. "Mission," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, accessed 13 January 2021, <https://africacenter.org/who-we-are/>.

3. For the mission statement and objectives for the Africa Military Education Program, see "Africa Military Education Program (AMEP)," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, accessed 10 December 2020, <https://africacenter.org/programs/amep/>.

4. Derek Cabrera et al., "Applying Systems Thinking Models of Organizational Design and Change in Community Operational Research," *European Journal of Operational Research* 268, no. 3 (2018): 932–45, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejor.2017.11.006>.

5. "Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security," Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, accessed 10 December 2020, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>. Security Council Resolution 1325 increases the participation of women in peacekeeping operations.

6. "Troop and Police Contributors," United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed 10 December 2020, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>. This chart shows the breakdown of peacekeeping forces by country.

7. "Niger Military Strength (2020)," Global Firepower, accessed 13 January 2021, https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=niger.