

U.S. Marines and Soldiers demonstrate use of nonlethal weapons and tactics in Boeblingen, Germany

FEATURE

New Thinking at USEUCOM

# The Phase Zero Campaign

U.S. Marine Corps (Donald E. Preston)

By CHARLES F. WALD

**T**he U.S. European Command (USEUCOM), headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, is fighting a new kind of campaign in the global war on terror. With an area of responsibility that includes all of Europe, Russia, Israel, and most of Africa, USEUCOM is home to a growing variety of threats. These dangers require new thinking and a new understanding of the differences between theater security cooperation (TSC) and traditional warfighting.

From Norway to South Africa, from Azerbaijan to Senegal, USEUCOM is engaged in a wide variety of operations and TSC activities. It is through these efforts that the command is fighting the war on terror using

a new approach, focusing on terrorism's long-term, underlying conditions. This deliberate strategy of engagement is called *Phase Zero*, but in truth it is much more than just a new phase of systematic campaign planning; it is a new form of campaign in and of itself.

This article examines a number of issues associated with this evolving concept, including the threats in the command's area of responsibility, origins of Phase Zero strategy, and initiatives that make up the campaign.

## New Threats

The security environment is changing rapidly. New threats manifest themselves in high-profile events, such as the bombings in Madrid, Casablanca, Istanbul, and London,

and the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. But far more frequently, these threats lurk in the shadows. The al Qaeda network inspires operatives to disguise themselves among thousands of peaceful immigrants in largely unassimilated Muslim enclaves throughout Europe. The complex European legal system provides a safe haven for those who would provide terrorists with logistic and financial support, while the vast undergoverned spaces of North Africa serve as fertile recruiting grounds, training areas, and transit routes for a wide range of loosely associated groups that are trying to replace their nations' governments with their own peculiar and intolerant version of an Islamic state. Many of them pledge allegiance to, or at least claim common cause with, the al Qaeda network. Some funnel money, arms, and volunteer fighters from Europe into Iraq.

In growing numbers, foreign fighters appear to be finding their way back to share their combat experiences with a new generation of potential recruits in Europe's mosques and madrassas and the tribal regions of Africa. With their strongholds in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the rest of the Middle East growing smaller every day, these groups are trying to build on safe havens in North Africa while simultaneously bringing the fight to the backyard of our European allies. To confront this growing threat, USEUCOM's Phase Zero campaign places a new emphasis on TSC and capacity-building with our allies throughout the region.

## What Is Phase Zero?

The traditional four phases of a military campaign identified in joint publications are *deter/engage*, *seize initiative*, *decisive operations*, and *transition*. Phase Zero encompasses all activities prior to the beginning of Phase I—that is, everything that can be done to prevent conflicts from developing in the first

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# Report Documentation Page

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE <b>2006</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2006 to 00-00-2006</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>New Thinking at USEUCOM: The Phase Zero Campaign</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 260 5th Avenue SW Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

place. Executed properly, Phase Zero consists of *shaping* operations that are continuous and adaptive. Its ultimate goal is to promote stability and peace by building capacity in partner nations that enables them to be cooperative, trained, and prepared to help prevent or limit conflicts. For the United States, this approach is typically nonkinetic and places heavy emphasis on interagency support and coordination. In many instances, Phase Zero involves execution of a broad national strategy where the Department of Defense (DOD) is not the lead agency and its programs are only one part of the larger U.S. Government effort.

The exact origin of the Phase Zero reference is unclear, making it difficult to give credit for its coining. While it may not have originated with USEUCOM, the command has long applied the Phase Zero concept as a central element of its theater strategy and continues to follow this approach in dealing with a complex and growing threat environment across its 91-country area of responsibility. In the early stages of the war on terror, senior leaders at the command recognized the importance of thinking long term and of collaborating with interagency partners to develop effective security relationships with key partner nations. Leaders at USEUCOM also realized that the preventive focus of Phase Zero is less costly (in both blood and treasure) than a reactive approach to crisis. At the very least, Phase Zero helps set conditions for an easier transition to a more comprehensive U.S. intervention in a crisis.

The primary goal of Phase Zero, however, is to invest fewer resources in a pre-crisis situation to avoid an exponentially larger expenditure later. The 2003 intervention by the United Nations (UN) and United States in Liberia provides a case study supporting this rationale. According to UN figures, the overall operational costs were over \$680 million, mostly for UN peacekeeping and emergency assistance. Prior to that, the United States had committed a mere \$67 million to programs to promote stability in the troubled nation. Doubling or even tripling spending on our preventive programs would still have been far cheaper than the cost of reacting to the crisis and the violence that eventually unfolded.

By taking a preventive approach to security throughout their area of responsibility, USEUCOM leaders accepted the fact that the payoff would not necessarily be immediate.

They understood that defeating terrorism would be a long-term fight and that, in some cases, success would be measured more by

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### *Phase Zero encompasses everything that can be done to prevent conflicts from developing in the first place*

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the avoidance of costly kinetic events than by the execution of direct action. The non-kinetic emphasis is the heart of Phase Zero, the driving force behind a major new strategy at the command. To achieve strategic objectives, the command has coordinated a variety of previously disparate TSC activities with information operations (IO) and other more traditional military operations into a seamless, effects-based program of operationalized TSC.

#### **Operationalizing TSC**

Theater security cooperation is not a new concept. Although it may have been known by other names, such as peacetime engagement, it has always fallen into the category of other-than-war activity. That view is changing, thanks to the maturation of the Phase Zero concept. USEUCOM currently plans and executes various TSC activities as an active and integral part of the war on terror. The primary objectives are eliminating conditions favorable to terrorists and preventing broader conflict. With operationalized TSC, U.S. European Command has improved on peacetime engagement by bringing together planners and operators from its joint staff, the interagency community, and the component staffs (U.S. Army Europe, U.S. Air Forces Europe, Naval Forces Europe, Marine Forces Europe, and Special Operations Command Europe) to plan engagement activities in a synchronized manner. All Phase Zero efforts are coordinated and executed in accordance with theater strategic plans. The continuous involvement of the component commands is essential to draw on their individual strengths and avoid duplication of effort, particularly important in the prudent use of finite defense resources.

While USEUCOM uses assigned, in-theater forces to conduct Phase Zero TSC activities as much as possible, it also gets significant help from Reserve Component forces. These assets are often National Guard units operating under the auspices of the State Partnership Program. This program pairs U.S. states with target countries in

broad-based contact programs that can range from combined military training and exercises to humanitarian assistance and civilian cultural exchanges. This superb Total Force collaboration allows USEUCOM to execute a robust collection of TSC activities, despite the fact that major portions of its assigned forces have been committed to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in support of Operations *Enduring Freedom* and *Iraqi Freedom*.

#### **Execution**

U.S. European Command executes Phase Zero by conducting operationalized TSC throughout its area of responsibility. Missions range from train-and-equip programs for building capacity in partner nations to regional security initiatives, humanitarian assistance actions, and similar “hearts and minds” engagements. This active TSC strategy is aimed at protecting U.S. interests, promoting stability, and defeating terrorism and its underlying causes. While it would be impossible to examine every TSC activity in detail, two are worth a closer look: Operation *Enduring Freedom*–Trans Sahara and the Caspian Guard Initiative.

Operation *Enduring Freedom*–Trans Sahara is an example of operationalized TSC. It is the first time a series of TSC events has been grouped under the umbrella of a named operation directed by the Joint Staff. It is the American military component of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative, a long-term U.S. Government program designed to help the countries of Trans-Sahara Africa cooperate to control the undergoverned spaces of their interiors.

The Trans-Sahara region stretches from Senegal and Mauritania on Africa’s west coast, across Mali, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad. The area is sparsely populated, largely barren, and difficult for local governments to control. Lately, a variety of transnational terrorist groups such as the Algerian-based “Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat” (commonly known by the French acronym GSPC) have sought sanctuary there. The entire region is crisscrossed with ancient smuggling routes for moving people, weapons, and other contraband. Under Operation *Enduring Freedom*–Trans Sahara, USEUCOM is working with the militaries of nine countries to improve intelligence, command and control,

logistics, border control, and execution of combined operations against terrorist groups. The mission is a successor to an earlier U.S. Government program known as the Pan-Sahel Initiative. In 2003–2004, planners and trainers taught a variety of basic infantry skills to soldiers from Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. The initiative also included the provision of basic uniforms and field equipment. During training in Chad and Niger, a “hearts and minds” dimension was added by U.S. Air Force Reserve medical specialists conducting medical civil action programs that involved examinations of thousands of local patients, providing many with the only medical, dental, and optometry care they had received in years.

In the summer of 2005, Exercise Flintlock '05 rolled out as the first major Operation *Enduring Freedom*–Trans Sahara activity. It involved a broad spectrum of forces training with several countries across the region. In addition to providing small unit tactical training in marksmanship, land navigation, and basic infantry skills, the exercise also included airborne operations and Special Operations aviation units. The overarching goal was to ensure that participating nations improved on growing security partnerships to halt the flow of illicit weapons, goods, and human trafficking and to deny terrorists sanctuary in the region. The hope is that engagements such as Flintlock will facilitate cooperation and development of capabilities among bordering countries that will result in the apprehension of terrorists—much like the successes achieved against GSPC

targets in the recent past in this same focus area of Africa.

The Caspian Guard Initiative is perhaps the best example of an interagency Phase Zero program. It represents a combined effort of DOD, the Department of State, and the Department of Energy. Caspian Guard is an initiative designed to help Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan develop capabilities to monitor traffic in the Caspian Sea and ensure that terrorists are not able to transport weapons of mass destruction, supplies, funds, or people

through the region. Caspian Guard includes a wide variety of programs, including training for Kazakh and Azeri naval units and maritime border guards, upgrading maritime detection systems, and teaching North Atlantic Treaty Organization standard procedures for maritime surveillance operations.

Success in these and similar endeavors is supported by robust information sharing between USEUCOM and partner nations, particularly on terrorist activity (for example, movement and threat warnings). U.S. European Command also cooperates with partner nations to develop and field information systems capable of protecting classified information while making it available to the personnel who need it for mission effectiveness. Through major programs such as Operation *Enduring Freedom*–Trans Sahara and Caspian

and countering extremist ideology through public diplomacy, DOD plays a significant role. USEUCOM's IO efforts consist of a wide variety of actions across many discrete lines of operation, being executed across the theater under the umbrella of Operation *Assured Voice*, which is designed to harness and orient a range of theater information and influence activities to reinforce regional security and establish an environment unfavorable to extremist ideas, recruiting, and support.

The primary intent of the operation is to establish a long-term capability to shape the information environment and counter the negative underlying conditions that impact vulnerable audiences in volatile regions. The value and overall effectiveness of Operation *Assured Voice* is determined by its relationship with other regional TSC activities,

so USEUCOM places significant emphasis on synchronizing information operations closely with all other TSC activities. Orchestration of what we say with what we do is vital; words fade, but actions endure. The local populations of our new partner nations must see concrete benefits from their cooperation with the United States or they will be vulnerable to extremist influences. The operation consists of a collection of specific programs, including military information support teams, Web-based initiatives, and collaboration with private industry throughout the area of responsibility.

Military information support teams are a great example of interagency cooperation to conduct

information operations. Provided to Embassies to support their public diplomacy efforts, these teams are normally made up of four to six uniformed military psychological operations specialists who deploy and work side by side with the country team. Skilled in mass communications and marketing, they perform assorted information activities, from setting up community outreach programs and youth sports leagues to training host-nation military personnel in the conduct of information operations. All their work is directed at



USS *Mount Whitney* underway in support of Joint Forces Maritime Component Commander Europe

U.S. Navy (Sarah Bly)

*while USEUCOM uses assigned, in-theater forces to conduct Phase Zero theater security cooperation activities, it gets significant help from Reserve forces*

Guard, with myriad supporting actions, the United States and allied nations are working together to defeat terrorist networks. Supporting all these efforts is a carefully planned and executed IO campaign.

### Attacking the Center of Gravity

The *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* identifies extremist ideology as the enemy's strategic center of gravity. While the Department of State is the lead Federal agency for strategic communications

improving the security environment in the host nation and reducing support to extremist elements. Deployments typically last from 90 to 120 days and are valued by the country teams as a tool for supporting ongoing Embassy public diplomacy.

The Web site initiatives consist of *Southeast European Times* (addressing audiences in the former Yugoslavia, as well as Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and Turkey) and *Magharebia* (for audiences in the Maghreb countries of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia). Run in partnership with the State Department and U.S. Embassies, these two sites allow the USEUCOM commander to communicate to foreign audiences using news and information about their regions and providing accurate, balanced coverage about key players, events, and issues.

In contrast to extremist ideology propagated throughout the Internet and other media, these sites present positive themes. The principal topics include the rule of law, open and unbiased media, civilian control of the military, and creation of strong, accountable

*success is supported by robust information sharing between USEUCOM and partner nations, particularly on terrorist activity*

institutions in both government and business. Six days a week, the Web sites feature regional news as reported in local and international media. They also include in-depth analysis, interviews, and commentary from local correspondents on key regional issues. *Southeast European Times* is published in nine languages and *Magharebia* in three. According to Internet industry sources, *Southeast European Times* is now a major source of regional information. It averages over 5 million hits a month from within the area, with average visits exceeding 20 minutes. Similar numbers are being realized for *Magharebia*, despite its relatively recent launch in late 2004.

All of these efforts are enhanced through collaboration with private industry. USEUCOM partners with local and regional public relations and marketing firms to research target audiences. These firms provide expertise regarding their own societies, and by conducting market research and focus groups they help the command assess attitudes and behavior of host-nation populations without

the stigma that might come from surveys conducted by uniformed U.S. military personnel.

### Assessing Phase Zero

To ensure success in Phase Zero, U.S. European Command has instituted a truly ground-breaking concept for assessing the effectiveness of all TSC activities and their supporting information initiatives. The Strategic Effectiveness and Communications Council (SECC) is the primary forum for USEUCOM senior leaders to orchestrate theater information and influence activities. It also evaluates how the command is doing in achieving strategic objectives.

The SECC is a forum of senior USEUCOM and component staff members that meets bimonthly to provide guidance, set priorities, and orient TSC and communications efforts throughout the theater. Each meeting focuses on a particular region of the command's area of responsibility and includes a review of the strategic assessments produced by the J-8 Effects Assessment Cell (comprised primarily of contracted system-of-systems analysts). These assessments provide a snapshot of the command's success or failure in achieving desired strategic effects and furnish the staff with the data to give the commander a regular update on the command's progress toward its strategic objectives.

The SECC also provides a forum for USEUCOM leaders to synchronize the command's messages with its TSC actions. Any action by U.S. forces in the command's area of responsibility can impact perceptions of local governments and populations about the United States. There is a real possibility of conveying conflicting messages when conducting such a variety of activities in a large and diverse area. One of the goals of the SECC is to reduce or eliminate these conflicts by bringing all the stakeholders together to discuss their respective activities, analyze them in the context of the command's overall theater strategy, and synchronize future actions to desired effects. In addition to the review of strategic assessments and the guidance from

### U.S. Air Force pararescue jumper glides in near Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti

the senior staff to the components, the key product of the bimonthly SECC is a tasking order that provides the command and components with clear guidance and priorities for all information activities.

Phase Zero (or "the time prior to the beginning of a crisis") relates strongly to the *deter* part of *deter/engage* as described in Joint Publication 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*; thus, it could be argued that Phase Zero is simply a subset of Phase I under current joint doctrine. But Phase Zero is much more than deterrence and goes beyond mere engagement. It is an active effort to win the war on terror by destroying terrorism at its roots, while avoiding the high cost of major actions by conventional forces. USEUCOM has launched a nonkinetic offensive that will deny terrorists resources and sanctuary and counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, while building partner nations' capacity to do the same.

U.S. European Command is striking at the enemy's most significant center of gravity—the ideological base and popular support—by encouraging European and African audiences to abandon radical causes. All of these actions are aimed directly at accomplishing four of the six military objectives listed in the *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism*. Most importantly, if executed successfully, Phase Zero eliminates the need for Phases I through IV. The goal is to sustain Phase Zero engagements with no transition to subsequent conflict. This long-term, open-ended endeavor makes it more appropriate to describe Phase Zero as a campaign in and of itself—a new kind of campaign that must be fought continuously by U.S. joint forces in concert with the interagency community and in cooperation with allies and partner nations. **JFQ**

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