



## ***Annual Report 2015***

Founded in 2003, Spirit of America (SoA) is a 501c3 tax-exempt public charity. Our mission is to support the safety and success of American troops and diplomats and the local people they want to help. SoA provides assistance in response to local needs identified by deployed US troops and diplomats. We apply our resources at the intersection of security, humanitarian need, and US national interest. This support makes our deployed personnel safer and more successful in their missions and helps local people not reached by large-scale aid programs. At the same time, we provide Americans with an opportunity to connect with and support the work of those who serve abroad, a connection that leads to a more well-informed public and more effective US engagement in the world.

In 2015, Spirit of America focused on four major challenges around the world, all identified as top priorities by US military and civilian personnel:

1. We expanded our support for the counter-Islamic State mission throughout the Middle East, with an emphasis on continuing to provide critical humanitarian assistance and also enhancing partner capacity in Iraqi Kurdistan, building upon the relationships we established after the fall of Mosul in 2014;
2. We continued to work alongside US military personnel tasked with countering Islamic extremism in West Africa, confronting not only al Qaeda and related extremist organizations but also reacting to the growing Boko Haram threat along the border between Niger and Nigeria;
3. We maintained our efforts to support US missions to counter Transnational Criminal Organizations and Drug Trafficking Organizations in Central and South America, with a particular focus on countering youth recruitment into those groups;
4. And, we significantly increased our programming aimed at countering Russian aggression in Eastern Europe, specifically in Ukraine, where we executed projects designed to build the capabilities of the Ukrainian military to defend its people and freedom.

In addition, Spirit of America provided targeted support in response to US priorities in several countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Throughout the course of 2015, Spirit of America's all-veteran field team designed and implemented 70 projects in 24 countries.



*Spirit of America Project locations, 2015*

# War, Peace, Philanthropy

Bringing the spirit of America to combat zones



Spirit of America's work was featured in numerous media products in 2015, including the Washington Times, Mashable, Business Insider, the Hoover Institution, and Defense News.

An excellent summary of our model of non-neutral private sector support to US missions abroad can be found in *Philanthropy Magazine*: [http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/topic/excellence\\_in\\_philanthropy/war\\_peace\\_philanthropy](http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/topic/excellence_in_philanthropy/war_peace_philanthropy).

World | Fri Sep 18, 2015 1:09am EDT

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DIFFA, NIGER | BY WARREN STROBEL



Also, Spirit of America's work in support of the United States' counter-Boko Haram mission in southern Niger was highlighted in two Reuters articles: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-niger-boko-haram-idUSKCN0RIOCO20150918> And <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-niger-boko-haram-nonprofit-idUSKCN0RIOCA20150918>.

In addition, Spirit of America welcomed two new Advisory Board members in 2015:



### General Jim Mattis, United States Marine Corps (Ret.)

Former commander of US Central Command

"Spirit of America gave us an organization that unapologetically takes America's side. Over the years, I saw Spirit of America's remarkable commitment, and I saw results."



### Lieutenant General Charlie Cleveland, United States Army (Ret.)

Former commander of US Army Special Operations Command

"Spirit of America is a unique organization that gives our troops a real advantage. An ounce of prevention is much better than a pound of cure, and that's how I see SoA."

## SELECTED PROJECT EXAMPLES



### ***Iraqi Kurdistan***

Since the middle of 2014, the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, has emerged as one of the most brutal extremist organizations in the world. The group has conquered large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria, subjecting the people living in those areas to unspeakable acts of cruelty. Rape, enslavement, torture, and brutal executions, not to mention the destruction of priceless antiquities, have been the hallmarks of this ruthless organization.

The United States has assembled an international coalition to counter the Islamic State, halt its expansion, and ultimately defeat it. One of the strongest partners in this struggle has been the peshmerga, or security forces, of the semiautonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq. The peshmerga successfully prevented the Islamic State from taking over all of northern Iraq last year and have been gradually regaining territory from the group ever since.

While the peshmerga are highly motivated, Spirit of America was alerted by US advisors to an urgent need. The peshmerga were lacking the basic items needed to help them survive on the battlefield. They needed medical supplies to stop preventable fatalities, the means to clear mines and roadside bombs, and the tools to accurately mark their locations to prevent accidental strikes by coalition aircraft.

Through our donors' generosity, Spirit of America able to drastically improve the survivability and effectiveness of one of the United States' key partners in the fight against the Islamic State. We have provided the peshmerga with metal detectors, tourniquets, first aid kits, cameras, and IED-clearing tools.

This equipment directly saved the lives of both US personnel and the Kurdish peshmerga forces. According to one US advisor, "Right now these mine detectors and trained personnel are headed to the front lines to clear mined and IEDed areas that we operate in daily. This project is already making us, and our partners, safer."

A peshmerga commander echoed this statement, relating, "We searched with your equipment and discovered five IED with lots of explosives. If we did not have your equipment, probably 20 peshmerga would have lost their lives, if not more."



### ***Southern Niger***

Over the past few years, the extremist group Boko Haram has terrorized the greater Lake Chad Basin of West Africa. The group has tortured, kidnapped, and killed innocent civilians in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. By the beginning of 2015, Boko Haram's activities included sensational acts of violence and terrorism such as the kidnapping of hundreds of young girls, suicide attacks in busy markets, and a pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State.

In response to those atrocities, a combined offensive of Nigerian and Chadian forces was launched to eradicate Boko Haram in those two countries, as well as to defeat the group in Nigeria itself. A US Army team was mentoring one of the key units in this effort – a 150-man Nigerian Army unit responsible for security along the border between Niger and Nigeria.

While the Nigerian unit was well trained and motivated, they lacked the equipment needed to detect and survive Boko Haram attacks. Simple equipment such as metal detector wands, first aid kits, and stretchers would drastically improve the unit's ability to withstand Boko Haram, survive attacks, and safeguard the local population; headlamps and hydration systems (Camelbaks) would help them conduct patrols in all conditions.

In addition, the US Army team was working to support the local population. The vulnerable communities along the border were subject to senseless attacks, with women and children being burned alive in their homes as Boko Haram rampaged. These communities needed to coordinate their response to this violence, and stronger relationships were needed between them and the Nigerian government in order to ensure more effective responses and communication.

Spirit of America supported both these efforts. We provided the equipment desperately needed by the Nigerian Army, and we funded a regional summit that brought together leaders from the border communities to develop a unified approach to countering Boko Haram.

This support, augmenting with the incredible efforts of the small U.S. advisory team and its Nigerian partners, helped prevent Boko Haram from taking territory in southern Niger, thereby limiting the group's advance and saving untold lives.



## **Ukraine**

Ukraine, a strategic partner of the United States, has been destabilized by a Russian-backed separatist movement for the last two years. This conflict, characterized by sensational events like Russia's annexation of Crimea and the downing of a Malaysian airliner, has serious repercussions for international security and stability. By most estimates, 10,000 people have already been killed in the fighting, and Russian-supported troops have pushed far into the country. Accordingly, the United States and NATO allies are supporting the Ukrainian government's efforts to secure its people and prevent further Russian territorial expansion.

The Ukrainian armed forces are severely underresourced, particularly in terms of medical equipment. US Army teams from the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade was providing much-needed trauma training to the Ukrainian National Guard, but a critical need existed. The Ukrainian soldiers lacked the basic medical supplies to put their newfound skills to use in real-world situations, limiting their ability to save themselves, their comrades, and civilians caught up in the conflict. Simple first aid kits – tourniquets, bandages, etc. – would help prevent needless deaths.

Accordingly, Spirit of America provided first aid kits to two battalions of Ukrainian soldiers being trained by the US team. These supplies helped the Ukrainian soldiers – who were destined for the front lines after the training course – operationalize the lifesaving skills they had been taught.

The US commander in charge of the training program indicated the value of this support to the mission: "The fielding of the first aid kit to the Ukrainian National Guard (NGU) was absolutely invaluable. During Operation Fearless Guardian [the US training mission], the NGU Soldiers are training in critical life saving skills. Fielding these kits – to the individual level – complemented the training in a way that was absolutely priceless. Each NGU Soldier is now both trained and equipped to conduct life saving care."

In addition to this project, Spirit of America began planning for a major counter-propaganda initiative that came to fruition in 2016.

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Thank you for joining us in our mission to support the safety and success of Americans serving abroad and the local people and partners they seek to help. There are exciting things on the horizon for Spirit of America in 2016, and we are grateful and honored to have you standing with us.

All the best,  
The Spirit of America Team