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14. ABSTRACT Special Operations Forces (SOF) conduct activities in every phase of joint operations. To tackle these differing requirements that range from high end combat to shaping politically complex environments of countries not at war, SOF has developed several command and control (C2) constructs. These constructs include the Special Operations Joint Task Force (SOJTF) and the Special Operations Command – Forward (SOC-FWD). Further, SOF developed concepts of <i>special warfare</i> in the <i>gray zone</i> to describe the environment in which SOF operates outside of war. Employing the right C2 structure in special warfare is essential to achieving the mission in the politically complex gray zone environment. This space exists in phases 0-1 of the joint operations model phases. Primacy of interagency collaboration, the requirement for a small footprint and a unified voice in key relationships, and the central role of the TSOC characterize special operations in the gray zone. The SOC-FWD model is the optimum model for SOF C2 in special warfare campaigns to <i>shape</i> and <i>deter</i> . To increase the effectiveness of special operations, SOF must adopt SOC-FWDs as the preferable C2 model over the SOJTF in phases 0-1. It must man the SOC-FWD with qualified commanders under Chief of Mission Authority and improve the ability of the SOC-FWD to prepare for transition to larger C2 nodes with greater capacity in the event of higher end conflict.						
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Leading in the Gray Zone: Command and Control of Special Operations in Phases 0-1

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Paper Abstract

Leading in the Gray Zone: Command and Control of Special Operations in Phases 0-1

Special Operations Forces (SOF) conduct activities in every phase of joint operations. To tackle these differing requirements that range from high end combat to shaping politically complex environments of countries not at war, SOF developed several command and control (C2) constructs. These constructs include the Special Operations Joint Task Force (SOJTF) and the Special Operations Command – Forward (SOC-FWD). Further, SOF has developed concepts of *special warfare* in the *gray zone* to describe the environment in which SOF operates outside of war. Employing the right C2 structure in special warfare is essential to achieving the mission in the politically complex gray zone environment. This space exists in phases 0-1 of the joint operations model phases. Primacy of interagency collaboration, the requirement for a small footprint and a unified voice in key relationships, and the central role of the TSOC characterize special operations in the gray zone. The SOC-FWD model is the optimum model for SOF C2 in special warfare campaigns to *shape* and *deter*. To increase the effectiveness of special operations, SOF must adopt SOC-FWDs as the preferable C2 model over the SOJTF in phases 0-1. It must man the SOC-FWD with qualified commanders under Chief of Mission Authority and improve the ability of the SOC-FWD to prepare for transition to C2 nodes with greater capacity in the event of higher end conflict.

INTRODUCTION

“The greatest single challenge facing SOF today is outdated command and control structures.”¹ Thus states the U.S. Army Special Operations Command’s (USASOC) vision document for future special operations. Command and control (C2) of special operations forces (SOF) has become a challenge not only for Army SOF, but throughout the United States’ joint SOF capability. Among the primary challenges for SOF C2 is the need to operate across all phases of joint operations.² This broad spectrum includes Phase 0 *Shape* and Phase 1 *Deter* which characteristically do not involve major combat. Joint doctrine describes the *shape* phase as actions that “dissuade or deter adversaries and assure friends.”³ The *deter* phase seeks to “deter an adversary from undesirable actions because of friendly capabilities and the will to use them.”⁴ Both of these phases occur below the threshold of conventional combat and involve maneuvering capabilities, relationships, and access to gain a superior position before the event of war, or to prevent war. Strategists have recently described this time-space below the threshold of violent combat as the “gray zone” that “involves the holistic application of a mosaic of civilian and military tools, short of combat operations, to achieve gradual progress toward political objectives.”⁵ Further, SOF theorists have called for SOF to develop the ability to plan *special warfare* campaigns that are capable of synchronizing SOF efforts in the gray zone. Scholars best describe special warfare as “political-military warfare, or shaping and influencing environments and populations.”⁶

¹ U.S. Army Special Operations Command, “ARSOF 2022,” *Special Warfare*, April-June 2013, 22.

² COL Mark Miller, e-mail message to author, April 28, 2016. COL Miller provided the idea to frame the C2 problem in terms of the joint phase model.

³ Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 11 July 2011), V-8.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Michael J. Mazaar, *Mastering the Gray Zone*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, December 2015), 64.

⁶ Linda Robinson, *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2013), 11.

Common to all of these descriptions is a time-space that is long in duration, does not involve combat, and emphasizes influence via engagement that includes, but is not limited to, military efforts.

To meet this challenge, SOF developed several C2 concepts which it employs concurrently today. Chief among these concepts are the Special Operations Joint Task Force (SOJTF) and the Special Operations Command- Forward (SOC-FWD). Of these two, doctrine identifies the SOJTF as the “principal joint SOF organization tasked to meet all special operations requirements in major operations, campaigns, or a contingency.”⁷ The SOJTF is a relatively larger organization consisting of a “HQ [headquarters], SOF units, support forces, and service provided capabilities.”⁸ A SOF unit HQs forms the nucleus of the SOJTF staff. The SOJTF has the capacity to C2 large scale SOF activities and is manned, trained, and equipped to do so.

Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs) construct and deploy many versions of SOC-FWDs. For the purposes of this paper, SOC-FWDs are a command cell led by a command selected O-6, joint qualified officer, subordinate to the TSOC commander, who works from the US Embassy in his or her area of operations. This commander has a small, in-country supporting staff consisting of a senior enlisted advisor and two or three operations officers. A rotating company of Special Forces soldiers often augment the SOC-FWD as staff serving at a separate location within the area of operations (AO), typically on a partner force installation. These SOC-FWDs rely heavily on the TSOC headquarters staff located in the continental United States (CONUS) for non-operational staff functions.

⁷ JP 3-05, *Special Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff: 16 July 2014), III-4

⁸ *Ibid.*

In both doctrine and practice, SOF recognizes SOJTFs as the principle and preferable SOF C2 architecture for special warfare. Indeed, USASOC criticizes SOC-FWDs as “Ad hoc in nature and insufficiently resourced...resulting in missed opportunities to effectively integrate SOF capabilities.”⁹ The USASOC response to the problem is doctrinal and involves building an organization that can serve as a HQs nucleus of a SOJTF. The SOJTF construct relies largely on lessons learned from commanding SOF in Iraq and Afghanistan. There, integration with conventional forces was critical and the operating environment was one of combat.

SOF must consider the characteristics of Joint Operations phases 0-1, and the nature of special warfare in the gray zone. Special warfare emphasizes operations that have the following characteristics; leadership of the interagency and consequent cooperation, small footprints and low visibility, primacy of the partner nation, and long duration. SOC-FWD nodes match the nature of special warfare in three specific ways. First, the SOC-FWD is uniquely capable of interagency cooperation because of its size. Second, they are a low-visibility and networked node that can remain in place for protracted campaigns. Finally, as a subordinate to the TSOC, the SOC-FWD is the C2 element most intimately plugged into the proper organization for theater special operations campaign plans. *Special Operations Commands- Forward are the SOF C2 structure most beneficial to the development and employment of special warfare campaigns to shape and deter.*

INTERAGENCY INTEGRATION

SOC-FWDs are the most beneficial SOF C2 structure for special warfare campaigns for their intimate interagency coordination capability. Special Warfare campaigns demand an

⁹ U.S. Army Special Operations Command, “ARSOF 2022,” *Special Warfare*, April-June 2013, 22.

interagency approach. A recent report on the special warfare operational art states, “Special warfare efforts benefit from greater joint and interagency support when key partners are involved in the planning process.”¹⁰ More to the point, doctrine describes military involvement in foreign internal defense (FID), a component of special warfare, to be one of the integrated efforts of a whole of government approach. “For FID to be successful in meeting an [host nation’s] needs, the United States Government must integrate the efforts of multiple government agencies.”¹¹ Former SOC-FWD Yemen commander Rob Newsom stated unequivocally, “SOC FWDs must be and are integrated into the U.S. Country Team and a whole of government, interagency approach.”¹² This is necessary because the political nature of special warfare campaigns involves the whole of government and “are routinely reviewed and discussed by the National Security Staff and often require U.S. Presidential approval.”¹³ Moreover, the risk of “policy fratricide” is high if interagency coordination does not balance lines of effort.¹⁴ Scholars have pointed out that SOF has perfected interagency collaboration in regards to direct-approach, counterterrorism operations; however, collaboration in regards to indirect special warfare approaches remains an underdeveloped concept.¹⁵

SOC-FWDs achieve interagency integration primarily in three ways. First, their approachable size deflates militarization of foreign policy perceptions. Second, their physical

¹⁰ Dan Madden et al., *Toward an Operational Art in Special Warfare*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), 72-73.

¹¹ JP 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff: 12 July 2010), xiii.

¹² Rob Newsom, “Adapting for the ‘Other’ War”, *Small Wars Journal* (October 18, 2013): Available at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/adapting-for-the-%E2%80%9Cother%E2%80%9D-war>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Dan Madden et al., *Special Warfare: The Missing Middle in U.S. Coercive Options*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014), 3.

¹⁵ Christopher Lamb, “Global SOF and Interagency Collaboration,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 7, no. 2, (Summer 2014): 17.

location within a U.S. embassy increases planning opportunities. Finally, SOC-FWD commanders are valuable, if honorary, members of the country team.

SOC-FWDs are the best SOF C2 model for interagency collaboration because their small size deflates perceptions of the militarization of foreign policy. Benefits are twofold. First, it facilitates special warfare campaign integration where the Department of Defense (DoD) is likely not the lead department. Second, it reduces strain on US diplomatic efforts. DoD dwarfs other federal agencies. For example, “at 68,000, the Special Operations forces of the Pentagon are larger than the personnel of the civilian foreign policy agencies.”¹⁶ This figure operates in the background of interagency collaboration where other government agencies tend to view the DoD as *everywhere* by virtue of its manning, budget, and authorities gained over the Long War. Within a country, a SOJTF numbering several hundred will easily dwarf the staff of the US embassy. Indeed, a SOJTF can be overwhelming to an embassy. A former SOC-FWD commander explained how the ambassador appreciated the SOC-FWD as a way to prevent the “invasion force” from arriving.¹⁷ This anecdote also serves to illustrate how the embassy understood the SOC-FWD as distinctly different and acceptable from other large C2 nodes.

The small size of the SOC-FWD also does not disrupt diplomatic or other interagency efforts. SOF theorist Brian Petit notes that within a host nation “visible military actions (DoD) improve security but strain diplomacy (DoS).”¹⁸ For example, the arrival in a country of a large SOJTF may signal that the country is weak, or inflame anti-American sentiment in

¹⁶ Gordon Adams, “The Institutional Imbalance of American Statecraft,” in *Mission Creep: The Militarization of US Foreign Policy?*, ed. Gordon Adams and Shoon Murray (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 23.

¹⁷ Interview with former SOC FWD Commander A, April 12, 2016. All interviews with SOC-FWD commanders were conducted under condition of anonymity.

¹⁸ Brian Petit, *Going Big By Getting Small: The Application of Operational Art by Special Operations in Phase Zero* (Denver, CO: Outskirtspress, 2013), 75.

a population who views a large US military presence unfavorably. These then become diplomatic and intelligence problems as the interagency adjusts to the shift in the political environment. In contrast, a small SOC-FWD team can conduct C2 functions with relative discreetness from within the embassy and pose no threat to adjusting diplomatic calculus for the country team.

SOC-FWDs are the best SOF C2 structure for integrating with the interagency because of their forward presence *in* the relevant U.S. Embassy. For example, Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) SOC-FWDs currently occupy office space in the US embassies in Jordan, Lebanon, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and until recently Yemen. The embassies are able to accommodate the 3-4 members of the SOC-FWD team. This presence in the embassy gives the SOC-FWD direct access to the country team and to the ambassador. Subsequently, it allows the country team to see the SOC-FWD commander as a member of the team. Currently, SOC-FWD commanders are not under chief of mission authority and are thus not a statutory member of the country team. Despite this formal inhibitor, current commanders have used their authorities derived from the Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) to the advantage of the country team. For example, a recent SOC-FWD commander explained that his authorities gave the ambassador flexibility in integrating SOF into the country plan because of the SOC-FWD's access to resources and his ability to engage other regional nations that influenced the security environment in her area.¹⁹ This SOC-FWD commander was invited to country team meetings and diplomats understood him to be the SOF coordinator in the country similar to the way they understood the chief of station as the intelligence chief. A former commander of SOC-FWD Lebanon recounts a similar experience, "Although not formally a country team member under chief-of-mission authority,

¹⁹ Interview with former SOC FWD Commander A, April 12, 2016.

the SOF O6 SOC FWD commander is afforded a seat at the invitation of the ambassador at weekly country team meetings and other country team director level venues.”²⁰ In unconventional warfare scenarios, the SOC-FWD may be located in a US embassy in an adjacent country or with a government agency responsible for overseeing a failed state in which no US political representation exists. Regardless of the physical location, the SOC-FWD commander is located with other US government agencies conducting engagement in a given country. This physical location with the interagency facilitates constant integration with the interagency team. It allows the SOC-FWD commander to leverage direct relationships with interagency principles in his area. Most importantly, it allows the commander to identify opportunities as they materialize thereby accelerating the operational planning and execution cycle. In special warfare, seizing opportunities and understanding the operational environment in real time constitute retaining the initiative.

Finally, SOC-FWDs are the best SOF C2 model for interagency collaboration because they most readily operate in the human domain of interagency relationships. The embassy understands the SOC-FWD as referring to a *person*. This is difficult to quantify yet it remains essential to the effectiveness of the SOC-FWD model against the SOJTF model. The synchronization and coordination of interagency special warfare lines of effort are “thoroughly human endeavors.”²¹ Embassy culture is not military. It does not prize process and it is not rigid. The country team commonly understands military personnel as perpetually prepared or preparing for war. SOC-FWDs are politically sensitive commanders who, by virtue of experience and training, understand special warfare as civilian turf where diplomats and intelligence officers have traditionally worked to prevent the deployment of US service

²⁰ Jack Jensen, “Special Operations Command Forward- Lebanon: SOF Campaigning Left of the Line,” *Special Warfare* 25, no. 2, (April-June 2012): 29.

²¹ Petit, 84.

members in major war. General McCrystal selected SOF *maneuver commanders* from the Joint Special Operations Command units to be liaisons in the SOF network. This recognizes the critical function that collaboration with other government agencies entails. In a similar way, SOF must select talented, SOF-qualified officers to serve in command. Their qualification gives them the credentials not only to command disparate SOF units, but also provides a baseline of credibility when working with the country team. Understanding the nature of interpersonal relationships and interagency agendas in an embassy goes a long way to framing the right mindset and attitudes that must characterize the SOC-FWD commander.

LOW-VISIBILITY AND UNITY OF VOICE

SOC-FWDs are ideal models for SOF C2 that allow for a small footprint in a protracted campaign. Small footprints are beneficial for special warfare campaigns for several reasons. First, small footprints contribute to the low-visibility requirements for conducting special warfare. “Low Visibility” is often understood as a characteristic of quasi-intelligence operations. In this case, low visibility has to do with the employment of small numbers of personnel using minimal infrastructure to subdue the signal of military involvement. The greatest effect of low-visibility operations is to allow civilian agencies to retain unquestioned leadership in the gray zone. Second, a small footprint is more conducive to influencing activities that characterize special warfare by achieving a *unity of voice*. Just as unity of command in the operational art ensures that aims and actions align, a unity of voice is necessary for effective communications and influence with partner nation political and military actors.

Small footprints are necessary for the low visibility nature of a special warfare campaign. By definition, special warfare is attempting to influence the political nature of a place or event, not *lead* the change. Nor does special warfare seek to directly impress US will onto an adversary or a partner. Special warfare is an indirect and persistent approach. It requires the primacy of the host political community. This necessitates a presence that is as small as possible while remaining effective. To accomplish this, former SOCOM commander Admiral McRaven stated, “proactive, relationship-based approaches grow through effective, enduring partnerships and globally agile, forward-deployed or forward-based SOF.”²² Essential to this perspective is the concept of SOF *in theater*, persistently based with the partner nation which enables the establishment of a trust-based relationship. Trust is essential. The SOC-FWD C2 construct meets this description by being located in the country with commanders serving for one year. Unlike large special operations footprints, the SOC-FWD is able to remain small by placing additional personnel at the CONUS-based TSOC. This allows the SOC-FWD commander and his/her small team to remain on point for the low visibility work of influencing relationships. For example, a SOC-FWD may require a more robust intelligence staff capability or a staff capable of conducting increased requests for forces. The TSOC is able to provide these functions and prevent growth at the forward location.

In contrast, SOJTFs are intrusive. SOF researchers have written, “Contrary to both doctrine and perception, SOF have a record of operating with a large footprint.”²³ Deploying a division-size staff to a country sends a strategic signal of US, and specifically DoD,

²² U.S. Congress, Senate, *Posture Statement of Admiral William H. McRaven, USN, Commander, United States Special Operations Command, before the 113th Congress Senate Armed Services Committee*, 113th Cong., 1st sess., March 11, 2014, 4.

²³ Michele L. Malvesti, *To Serve the Nation: U.S. Special Operations Forces in an Era of Persistent Conflict* (Washington D.C.: Center for a New American Security, June 2010), 25.

leadership. Scholars have observed that this type of expeditionary activity often leads to mission creep because of its “political complexity.”²⁴ The result in the case of special warfare is the expansion of limited, political aims with larger conventional, military aims. Consider the example of Vietnam from 1963-1964. With the increasing requirements for special operations in Vietnam in terms of both personnel and infrastructure, a direct correlation in the need to improve protection and the other war fighting functions continued to increase requirements of SOF. The result was a *SOF culminating point* where special warfare was necessarily overtaken by conventional combat. This led to an end to what some have argued was an effective special warfare-*like* campaign.²⁵ In the current environment, SOC-FWDs are a concept that hedge against mission creep.

The small footprint of a SOC-FWD is most effective for influencing relationships with the partner nation or non-state actor. Reducing the points of contact between the special warfare planners and the leadership of a partner nation allow for the strategic message to remain more effectively controlled. For example, in Jordan, the United States established several points of military authority to include the Defense Attaché, the SOC-FWD commander, the Central Command (CENTCOM) Forward- Jordan commander, and the frequent visits of sub-unified commanders. All of these leaders are oriented toward assisting Jordan in solving security issues that are relevant to the United States, but all represent different points of contact, different perspectives, and different authority for the Jordanians. The result is a confused narrative or worse, an exposing of seams in the US operational approach.

²⁴ Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide of the Twenty-First Century* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 257.

²⁵ Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 73-75.

Another example is Saudi Arabia, where the robust Defense Attaché office competes with the United States Military Training Mission to represent the interests of the US military. Outside of these two commands, SOCCENT conducts special operations activities while maintaining communications with both. This presents the Saudis with at least three separate and distinct US voices concerning US-Saudi Arabian security issues.

Empowering the SOC-FWD commander with the authoritative voice for activities conducted in the gray zone allows for a more effective unity of voice. Small presence SOC-FWDs do this by unifying and clarifying communications with the partner nation. More diplomatic than military in nature, this approach relies on the SOC-FWD in the role of point-of-contact to host nation officers and the interagency. Fewer points of contact reduce the confusion of message and improve trust among interlocutors.

TSOC IN COMMAND

SOC-FWDs are ideal models for SOF C2 because they are organic, subordinate commands to the TSOC commander. The TSOC is the ideal command for developing and employing regional special warfare campaigns for several reasons. First, the TSOC is OPCON²⁶ to the GCC and under COCOM²⁷ authority of SOCOM. The TSOC is directly responsible for coordinating the special operations for a theater in support of the GCC. Second, the TSOC is a permanent organization with a continuous operational picture of the region. More importantly, the TSOC maintains relationships with the US embassies within

²⁶ Operational Control. Partly defined as authority to “perform those functions of command over subordinate forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, designating objectives, and giving authoritative direction...” JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*, III-4.

²⁷ Combatant Command Authority. Partly defined as “the nontransferable command authority established by Title 10 USC, Section 164, exercised only by commanders of unified or specified CCMDS...” JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*, III-4.

the region. Third, the TSOC has the capability to provide staff functions for the SOC-FWD that allow the SOC-FWD to remain small. Thus, the TSOC enjoys the unique position of having SOF resources and access to the global SOF network in its effort against the regional problem set for the GCC theater campaign plan. For example, CENTCOM identifies building partner capacity as a “key component” of its theater strategy.²⁸ SOCCENT provides regionally-focused special operations trainers and programs towards this line of effort.

The TSOC is the subunified command under a GCC doctrinally assigned the responsibility to “provide the necessary unity of command” of SOF in a given theater.²⁹ To accomplish this, the TSOC commander exercises three roles; Joint Force Commander, theater special operations advisor, and Joint Force Special Operations Component Commander.³⁰ These roles place the TSOC as the preeminent SOF planner, coordinator, and executor for a theater. SOF scholar Linda Robinson notes that “It is important for the [GCCs] to retain [OPCON], since TSOC operations should always be conceived and executed as part of the plan of the [GCC] to ensure synergy and effectiveness.”³¹ The SOC-FWD is the subordinate command of the TSOC that maintains presence in the theater and provides the TSOC with immediate reporting and shaping efforts. As an organic element of the TSOC, the SOC-FWD is an extension of the TSOC and thus is the most synchronized and effective SOF C2 structure relating to the TSOC.

As a subunified command of the GCC, the TSOC is a permanent organization that maintains a continuous understanding of the operating environment through its coordination of SOC activities in theater, its consolidation of SOF reporting in theater, and its overall

²⁸ *Statement of General Lloyd J. Austin III on the Posture of U.S. Central Command*, March 8, 2016, accessed May 4, 2016, <http://www.centcom.mil/about-us/commanders-posture-statement>.

²⁹ JP 3-05, *Special Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff: 16 July 2014), III-4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Linda Robinson, *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces*, 9.

responsibilities to support the GCC theater campaign plan. With respect to special warfare campaigns, this nests with the protracted and small footprint requirements of a special warfare campaign. Unlike declared theaters of war where SOJTFs are appropriate solutions to ease the burden on TSOCs and channel large resources, special warfare campaigns decidedly are about *not* escalating the level of US involvement. Rather, the gray zone of conflict is about “competitive interactions among and within state and non-state actors that fall between the traditional war and peace duality.”³² In this environment of jockeying for advantageous relationships and positions, the TSOC is the most effective operational headquarters because it maintains visibility of and influences the gray zone lines of effort. This is done primarily through SOC-FWD commanders who direct SOF resources in their respective AOs, interface with the host nation and the interagency, and identify opportunities and pitfalls to advance the US position.

Finally, the TSOC provides the SOC-FWD the ability to remain small by providing the reach back staff for the SOC-FWD commander. Former SOC-FWD commander Jack Jensen explains, “The Special Operations Command Central J33-Levant Operational Planning Team...conducts planning, programming and coordinating support for SOC-FWD Lebanon.”³³ By placing planning functions within a joint planning group (JPG) located at the TSOC headquarters, SOC-FWD Lebanon was able to remain small while also having an appropriate JPG conduct planning. As a counterexample, SOJTF headquarter elements often deploy as an entire unit into a theater and do not maintain enduring relationships with regional actors. SOJTFs begin developing relationships on receipt of mission. This does not take advantage of the experience and relationships of the TSOC.

³² United States Special Operations Command, *White Paper: The Gray Zone*, September 9, 2015, 1.

³³ Jensen, 29.

Counterarguments include the difficulty for undermanned TSOC staffs to singularly provide staff functions for multiple SOF C2 architectures. Indeed, most TSOCs fall 20% short of their assigned strength.³⁴ However, it is essential to remember that special warfare campaigns in phases 0-1 require an innovation in thinking small. For example, SOF theorists have advanced a concept of counter-unconventional warfare (C-UW).³⁵ A former SOC-FWD commander describes C-UW as being “executed by a smaller force and is more narrowly scoped.”³⁶ This type of a SOF C2 model requires discipline in resisting the temptation to discard tenets of economy of force in favor of building large and complicated headquarters. Indeed, the SOC-FWD model matches the characteristics of special warfare, but also forces special warfare planners to keep things small.

CONCLUSIONS

The requirement for SOF to operate across all phases of joint operations from the non-violent initial phases 0-1 to the high intensity phases thereafter present SOF with very different operating environments to establish C2. This gray zone demands an interagency collaborative, forward, protracted, and influence-focused effort. To accomplish this, the SOC-FWD model is the best SOF C2 concept for special warfare campaigns. SOC-FWDs provide the US with a persistent forward presence armed with the resources for conducting the engagement activities necessary to *shape* and *deter*.

³⁴ Linda Robinson, *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces*, 15.

³⁵ United States Army Special Operations Command, *Counter-Unconventional Warfare White Paper* (26 September, 2014).

³⁶ Robert Newsom, “Counter-Unconventional Warfare Is The Way of the Future. How Can We Get There?” *Defense in Depth*, October 23, 2014, <http://blogs.cfr.org/davidson/2014/10/23/counter-unconventional-warfare-is-the-way-of-the-future-how-can-we-get-there/>.

SOC-FWDs are ideal interagency players. Their small footprint, embassy location, and special operations qualified commanders are ideally suited for being non-statutory members of the country team that provide the ambassador with a single SOF voice and point of coordination for the military lines of effort in a special warfare campaign. The SOC-FWD does not disrupt diplomatic efforts by virtue of its small political signal.

SOC-FWDs are capable of unifying the SOF voice in a country by being the enduring C2 node of SOF. With greater empowerment, the SOC-FWD can also be a focal point for unifying the US military message in a country and thus shore up gaps in the operational messaging of multiple US military entities. Most importantly, the persistent, forward, presence of the SOC-FWD in theater allows SOF to build the critical trust with partner forces that is necessary to *shape* and *deter*.

As subordinate commands of the TSOC, SOC-FWDs are the most persistently engaged of SOF C2 models. Unlike a SOJTF, the SOC-FWD is constantly plugged into the TSOC network and maintains situational awareness for the TSOC and benefits from the TSOC's broader regional awareness. It also benefits from the CONUS-based TSOC staff which ultimately allows the SOC-FWD to remain small thus enhancing its effectiveness at working in the interagency and amongst the host nation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The demands of special warfare campaigns include interagency integration, operations over protracted periods of time, and employment of small forces and small footprints. The SOC-FWD construct is best suited for these types of engagement campaigns occurring in the gray zone of international competition. The following recommendations

represent those things that need to be done in order to increase the effectiveness of SOC-FWDs.

First, the SOC-FWD should be under Chief of Mission authority. This authority fully integrates the SOC-FWD into the country team. The integration better allows SOF to synchronize efforts within the whole of government approach. It improves relationships between the interagency that ultimately increases the speed with which SOF can generate opportunities.

Second, the SOC-FWD must remain no more than a 3-4 man team, physically located with other US government agencies either at an embassy or in a central location, and must rely on the TSOC for reach back staff capability. Current practice and historical case studies suggest that temptations to increase the size of the forward staff, relocate to a separate headquarters facility forward, or simply deploy a SOJTF from outside of the TSOC exist. However, increasing staff size, separating from the interagency, and adding another degree of separation from the TSOC will result in missed opportunities and broadcast over-involvement by the US military in the gray zone.

Third, the SOC-FWD must be commanded by qualified SOF commanders. Deploying top talent to serve for 3-4 years at a time in an embassy counters the traditional career tracks for senior SOF command. The temptation will be to place non-SOF officers in command to free up qualified officers for career-enhancing tactical positions. This sends the wrong signal to country teams and the conventional force that SOF priorities lay elsewhere and that the command is little more than a liaison. The SOC-FWD must be a serious command billet. The Army has begun to take strides in this direction by making some SOC-FWD positions command-select billets for O-6s. This should be the case for all SOC-FWD commands.

Further, former SOC-FWD commanders should be prime candidates for general officer/flag officer level leadership following their command.

Finally, the virtues of the SOC-FWD limit its capacity to conduct larger special warfare campaigns that might include so-called combat FID, counterinsurgency, or large scale unconventional warfare. In these instances, the small SOC-FWD is *not* the best model for SOF C2. However, the advantages of the TSOC's habitual relationships with the COCOM and the regional US embassies should not be lost by the immediate deployment of a SOJTF. Instead, SOF should explore bridging solutions that include making the existing SOC-FWD the nucleus of a larger task force or providing a TSOC-based SOJTF that employs qualified TSOC-personnel as a nucleus. This would be a step in the direction of SOF C2 that seriously takes into account the primacy of relationships as part of the solution to interagency, protracted, special warfare campaigns in the gray zone.

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