

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

# UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES IN AFRICA

by

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## **Biography**

Lieutenant Colonel Keith I. Crawford is assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. He graduated from the United States Air Force Academy in 1995 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering Mechanics and also holds a Master's degree in Aeronautical Science from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and a Master's degree in Strategic Intelligence from National Defense Intelligence College. Lt Col Crawford is a Master Navigator with over 2,500 flying hours in multiple aircraft to include EC-130H Compass Call and AC-130H Spectre Gunships.



## **Abstract**

The creation of United States Africa Command in 2007 manifested recognition that the United States has increasing strategic national interests on the continent of Africa that are worthy of long-term commitments. This paper proposes that given those U.S. national interests, the moral and political considerations of military engagement, and the complexities of the African continent, Special Operations Forces (SOF) are uniquely suited to further those interests. Additionally, the paper examines two recent challenges on the continent, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Boko Haram, and determines that there are lessons and recommendations for future engagements. These recommendations include employing SOF using a persistent engagement posture, focusing on advanced skills and professionalization training with partner military forces, using SOF to train host nation law enforcement on specific skill sets, and the importance of airborne ISR and basing access.

## Introduction

In February of 2007, President George W. Bush announced the creation of Africa Command (AFRICOM) by stating: “This new command will strengthen our security cooperation with Africa and create new opportunities to bolster the capabilities of our partners in Africa. Africa Command will enhance our efforts to bring peace and security to the people of Africa and promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy, and economic growth in Africa.”<sup>1</sup> The creation of a Unified Combatant Command for Africa in the U.S. Department of Defense manifested recognition that the United States has strategic national interests on the continent worthy of long-term commitments.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. shifted from what some called a history of “benign neglect” to a posture of “strategic engagement.”<sup>3</sup>

At the time of AFRICOM’s creation, U.S. strategic national interests included counterterrorism efforts to prevent the exploitation of ungoverned spaces by Islamic terrorists, protecting access to abundant strategic resources, fostering integration into the global economy, and empowering Africans and their partners to deal with the host of humanitarian and governance challenges.<sup>4</sup> These issues echo in the 2015 U.S. National Security Strategy with specific language focused on combatting terrorism, building partner nation capacities, shaping and strengthening economies, accelerating access to energy, and supporting democratic movements in Africa.<sup>5</sup> These interests can be boiled down simply to two related issues: security and access to strategic petroleum reserves.<sup>6, 7</sup>

How do these interests translate into priorities for AFRICOM? General David Rodriguez, Commander AFRICOM, in his 2015 posture statement to Congress described U.S. interests in Africa as “the prevention of terrorist attacks against U.S. interests, security of the global economic system, and protection of our citizens abroad.”<sup>8</sup> In order to protect these

interests, the General further described the long-term objective of developing partnerships on the continent as an effort to “advance good governance, security, and economic growth” while simultaneously pursuing five immediate priorities: 1) Countering Violent Extremism and Enhancing Stability in East Africa, 2) Countering Violent Extremism and Enhancing Stability in North and West Africa, 3) Protecting U.S. Personnel and Facilities, 4) Enhancing Stability in the Gulf of Guinea, and 5) Countering the Lord’s Resistance Army.<sup>9</sup> In order to accomplish these mission sets, AFRICOM will need to coordinate all instruments of national power to include continued military engagement.

However, military engagement should be used cautiously where the “cost is commensurate with the importance of these national interests.”<sup>10</sup> The costs and benefits of intervention must also be assessed from a monetary and military perspective as well as from an overall moral and political context.<sup>11</sup> Because of the recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, there is little public desire or political motivation to deploy U.S. ground troops in large numbers. This sentiment is true particularly in Africa considering the vivid memory of Somalia in 1993 where 18 U.S. soldiers and hundreds of Somalis were killed resulting in a full-scale withdrawal of the U.S. presence soon afterward.<sup>12</sup> Given these considerations in a continent where irregular warfare is the norm, U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) can bring unique capabilities to support AFRICOM’s priorities and further U.S. national strategic interests in Africa. In contrast to large conventional forces, SOF has a much smaller footprint and provides expertise in all forms of irregular warfare.

This paper proposes that given U.S. national interests, the moral and political considerations of military engagement, and the complexities of the African continent, SOF is uniquely suited to further those interests. Additionally, Africa poses challenges to SOF

effectiveness that can be addressed by drawing lessons learned from recent U.S. and allied engagements on the continent. The first section will discuss the reasons SOF are more suited to AFRICOM's mission on the continent in contrast to a significant conventional force presence. The following two sections draw on two cases in Africa, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Boko Haram, where lessons may be drawn for SOF engagement in the future.

### **Why Special Operations Forces in Africa?**

SOF are uniquely qualified to support national interests in Africa in much the same way that they are unique in comparison to conventional forces.<sup>13</sup> First, the special operations community is highly selective, and personnel are typically more experienced than conventional forces.<sup>14</sup> SOF personnel are also extensively trained in cross-cultural competencies and foreign language skills which are both routine developmental tasks.<sup>15</sup> These skills are invaluable on a continent as diverse as Africa with 54 individual countries and a population of 1.17 billion with thousands of ethnic and language divisions that are not necessarily cohesive with defined national boundaries. Ethnic and tribal loyalties may lie beyond traditional borders and be stronger than loyalty to the state.<sup>16</sup> Religious practices are diverse as well with hundreds of traditional African religions associated with the plethora of tribal groups as well as large populations of Muslims, primarily in the north, and Christians. Just as many places in the world, ethnic, tribal, or religious divides have led to conflict and even civil wars on the continent.<sup>17</sup> Although it is unrealistic for SOF personnel to be expertly versed in every language and culture, their extensive training, awareness, and mission specific preparation make them a more suitable fit than conventional forces.

In addition to their relative maturity and cultural awareness, SOF personnel utilize special equipment, training, and tactics and are specifically designed to operate in small, flexible and

agile teams. Therefore, these teams can conduct a wide variety of mission sets in austere environments with limited support and a relatively small footprint.<sup>18</sup> President Obama has articulated that the nation has moved past the period of engaging in large ground wars such as Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup> Aversion to large-scale wars and growing fiscal constraints drive a need for small-footprint operations and for leveraging our allies and partners to ensure a sustainable approach to global security issues.<sup>20</sup>

A small footprint is also more conducive to alleviating African concerns with an increasing U.S. military presence on the continent. Historically, occupying colonial militaries and even African armies were used primarily to repress the population to maintain colonial or ruling power. More often than not, African army demographics reflected political or ethnic loyalties rather than a meritocracy. This tendency towards patronage marginalized those groups that were not represented and often led to abuses by the military which created deeper rifts in existing ethnic divides.<sup>21</sup> The relatively small footprint of SOF, as opposed to a large, imposing conventional force, therefore allows the U.S. to keep a lower profile thus increasing potential support for assistance from African governments and local populations.

There are other compelling reasons that many Africans are skeptical and even distrustful of U.S. motivations. The legacy of colonialization “echoes military occupation, suppression of fundamental rights, and economic exploitation” justified in the name of development.<sup>22</sup> Due to years of colonial control, newly independent nations in Africa were left ill prepared to govern effectively leading to poor economic development and civil unrest. Many countries experienced military coups resulting in military dictatorships or saw the emergence of single party rule. This trend has led to widespread corruption and a concentration of wealth by the governed in many cases which further degrades government legitimacy and stability.<sup>23</sup> This legacy drives fears of



militarization, resource exploitation, destabilization, and loss of sovereignty to this day. SOF are uniquely trained, in contrast to conventional forces, to operate in environments challenged by government instability and illegitimacy.

SOF personnel maintain high levels of competency in multiple specialties. SOF conveys employment in two modes: a direct approach and an indirect approach. Admiral McCraven, the former USSOCOM commander, described these approaches as follows: “The direct approach is characterized by technologically enabled small-unit precision lethality, focused intelligence, and interagency cooperation integrated on a digitally networked battlefield...the indirect approach includes empowering host nation forces, providing appropriate assistance to humanitarian agencies, and engaging key populations.”<sup>24</sup> A more detailed description of direct and indirect approaches is presented in Appendix A.<sup>25</sup> Both of these approaches and the flexibility SOF provides are especially advantageous for U.S. involvement in Africa which will require a broad range of mission sets to include security cooperation, civil affairs operations, humanitarian assistance, and most forms of irregular warfare. Joint Publication 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States, characterizes IW “as a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s).”<sup>26</sup> SOF are specially trained for irregular warfare and are the designated joint proponent for security force assistance.<sup>27</sup> The twelve special operations core activities listed in Table 1 encompass the broad range of specialties SOF are trained to accomplish. Detailed definitions of these core activities are in Appendix B.<sup>28</sup>

| <b>Special Operations Core Activities</b>      |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Direct Action (DA)                             | Special Reconnaissance (SR)     |
| Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD)  | Counterterrorism (CT)           |
| Unconventional Warfare (UW)                    | Foreign Internal Defense (FID)  |
| Security Force Assistance (SFA)                | Hostage Rescue and Recovery     |
| Counterinsurgency (COIN)                       | Foreign Humanitarian Assistance |
| Military Information Support Operations (MISO) | Civil Affairs Operations (CAO)  |

**Table 1.** Special Operations Core Activities<sup>29</sup>

Finally, AFRICOM is the prime environment for SOF to operate due to their familiarity with joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) environments. AFRICOM was created as an interagency focused headquarters developing deep partnerships with Department of State and other governmental and non-governmental organizations to address the complex issues on the continent.<sup>30</sup> U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is inherently joint, and SOF works with multinational and interagency partners as well as conventional forces in joint and combined training on a regular basis.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, since September 11, 2001, USSOCOM has focused heavily on improving interagency collaboration and has achieved unprecedented levels in support of both direct and indirect approaches to combating irregular threats.<sup>32</sup>

Given their experienced personnel, specialized training, depth of experience in the JIIM environment, and the ability to apply a wide range of core activities with a relatively small footprint, SOF is the force of choice to counter the indirect and asymmetric threats facing AFRICOM today and in the future.

### **AQIM in Mali**

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is one of those threats that points back to AFRICOM's immediate priorities in North and West Africa. This section will provide a brief background of AQIM, discuss historical U.S. engagement in Mali, and the 2013 French

intervention to counter AQIM. This case study will bring to light the importance of persistent SOF presence and engagement, building and maintaining relationships, and how these play a large part in facilitating the intelligence networks required to accomplish AFRICOM's priorities against AQIM and other VEOs in Africa.

AQIM is a U.S. State Department-designated foreign terrorist organization that has established footholds in the African Sahel region that includes the countries of Niger, Mauritania, and Mali.<sup>33</sup> The organization dates back to 1998 when the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) formed as a break-away group from Algerian Islamist movements.<sup>34</sup> In the mid-2000s, the GSPC aligned itself with Al-Qaeda apparently expanding its recruiting, funding, and aspirations.<sup>35</sup> AQIM seeks to expel the influence of Western governments in North Africa, overthrow state governments in the region that are deemed apostate, and install fundamentalist governments based on sharia law. The group funds their activities through narcotics smuggling, kidnapping for ransom, and illicit trafficking in persons, arms, vehicles, and cigarettes.<sup>36</sup> Due to the rise of AQIM and other VEOs, the U.S. and France stepped up efforts to build Malian capacity to counter these threats.

Soon after September 11, 2001, the U.S. interest in Islamic extremism reached the countries in the Sahel, to include Mali. Beginning with the Pan-Sahel Initiative from 2002 to 2004, U.S. SOF became involved in building the capacity of the Malian military.<sup>37</sup> In 2004, the Pan-Sahel Initiative was replaced by the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), which was a five-year effort to train and equip security forces in the region through periodic training exchanges. This partnership also began a periodic region-wide military exercise called Flintlock. However, due to modest levels of resources assigned, activities were limited to a fraction of elite forces leading to continued deficiencies particularly in the Malian military.<sup>38</sup>

Following the 2009 execution of a British tourist by militants in Mali, the U.S. boosted its SOF engagement efforts in Mali. Although the number of episodic engagements did increase from two to seven, AFRICOM's request to allow U.S. personnel to accompany their Malian partners on actual counterterrorism efforts was disapproved by the U.S. State Department. Due to the limited duration of the engagements (30 days to 3 months maximum) and the frequent rotation of Malian military personnel, the SOF trainers had to start from square one with each event. According to SOF leadership involved, this episodic engagement did not allow for in-depth training beyond marksmanship and other basic skills. In one particular instance, however, SOF identified a unit that required an in-depth skill and received permission to conduct prolonged and continuous training. The SOF teams rotated at six-month intervals and worked with the same unit enabling the Malians to master the required skills. This unit proved their mettle at the 2011 Flintlock exercise by ranking near the top of African forces involved.<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, the U.S. terminated all assistance to the Malian government in 2012 following a military coup according to statutory requirements.<sup>40</sup> The loss of friendly ground forces severely hindered human intelligence gathering efforts, prevented the use of ground platforms, and thus drastically reduced the ability to target violent extremists. Although the U.S. was able to fly intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets over the area, the militants took significant efforts to reduce their susceptibility to signal or imagery intelligence gathering. In this case, a reduced capability to implement an indirect approach with SOF led to the reduced ability to execute direct approaches to combat violent extremists in Mali.<sup>41</sup>

To be effective, U.S. SOF must be allowed to engage partner nation units on a persistent and continuous basis and establish long-term relationships. Admiral McCraven conveyed this concept directly to Congress by saying that the indirect approach requires long-term efforts with

“forward and persistent engagement” to increase partner capacity to levels adequate to generate security, the rule of law, and discredit and ultimately defeat VEOs.<sup>42</sup> This persistent engagement also allows SOF to build trust and relationships that facilitate human intelligence networks which are critical to understanding the environment on the ground to support both the indirect and direct approaches for SOF action and build partner capacity.

French engagement in Mali demonstrates the value of long-term engagement and both the direct and indirect approaches that SOF can provide. In 2013, the French launched what became Operation Serval to counter the advance of militants, including AQIM, towards the Malian capital of Bamako.<sup>43</sup> Although the long-term strategic impacts are yet to emerge, the French intervention was deemed a success in destroying the terrorist safe haven in Northern Mali and preventing the collapse of the Malian government.<sup>44</sup> The French operation was of a conventional nature; however, SOF played a large part, and there are applicable lessons to be learned.

Of primary importance is the French familiarity and involvement in the region. Mali was a French colony before its independence in 1960 and deep social, political, and economic ties remain.<sup>45</sup> French security cooperation across the Sahel has focused on counterterrorism but has been primarily aimed at professionalization and strengthening militaries as a whole. France established at least sixteen military training academies in ten separate countries in West Africa to include Mali. Additionally, France regularly works bilaterally to strengthen security forces in the region to include working alongside their partners in counterterrorism operations.<sup>46</sup> This persistent activity across the region, in addition to assistance from U.S. SOF and intelligence assets, allowed the French to build up long term intelligence networks and access that facilitated their successful transition from an indirect to direct approach in Operation Serval.<sup>47</sup> These

relationships facilitated the insertion of approximately 100 SOF into Burkina Faso in 2009 in addition to pre-positioned forces in Chad and Cote d'Ivoire.<sup>48, 49</sup> These prepositioned forces were instrumental to success as French commandos were the first forces to engage the enemy and then continue to clear jihadist areas as conventional troops moved in with greater force.<sup>50</sup>

Important to emphasize from another perspective is the fact that much of the success the French enjoyed in Mali was due to the availability of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and mobility. The availability of both strategic and tactical ISR in addition to tactical mobility were critical enablers to SOF success as well as success of the overall operation.<sup>51</sup> Africa provides great challenges in terrain and distance when compared to recent areas of operation in Iraq and Afghanistan. The French were able to leverage pre-positioned, fast attack-transport helicopters to great effect as well as leveraging both airborne ISR and a deep understanding of the human terrain to facilitate SOF success early in the conflict. Without the persistent engagement and relationships established prior, neither the basing access to facilitate airborne ISR and mobility nor the human intelligence network would have been available. Airborne ISR was a very effective tool in this case. That may not be true in other areas of Africa where the terrain is not as conducive to airborne ISR which largely depends on being able to see the ground. This makes the human terrain knowledge and prior access that much more important for success in Mali as well as the rest of the continent.

### **Boko Haram**

Nigeria is an African country that manifests both security and access issues that are in the U.S. national security interest and addressed by AFRICOM's immediate priorities. U.S. crude oil imports from Africa have increased almost two-fold since 2002 and Nigeria has an estimated reserve twice that of China.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, Nigeria has the continent's largest economy and is

the most populous including both the largest Muslim and Christian communities.<sup>53</sup> The stability of the Nigerian state is, therefore, important to the U.S. and Africa, but also to the international community as a whole. The radical Islamic group known as Boko Haram continues to threaten this stability using devastating asymmetric terror tactics and more recently a conventional offensive that has managed to overrun and hold territory.<sup>54</sup> Although Nigeria's struggles with Boko Haram are complicated by many issues that require more than a military solution, this section will concentrate on those issues where SOF can specifically contribute. This section will provide a brief background of Boko Haram, U.S. assistance to Nigeria, and Nigerian government responses to Boko Haram.

Boko Haram is a State Department-designated foreign terrorist organization that aims to create an Islamic state in Nigeria.<sup>55</sup> A Muslim cleric, Mohammed Yusuf, founded the group in 2002 with the intention of creating "a 'better' Nigeria through strict adherence to Islam" to include strict Sharia law.<sup>56</sup> Due to increasing clashes between Christians and Muslims in the country and pervasive harsh tactics by the Nigerian government, the group radicalized and began to lash out violently. Following a 2009 brutal police crackdown on Boko Haram, an armed uprising spread through several Nigerian states. More than eight hundred people died when the army suppressed the protests. During these clashes, Yusuf and other Boko Haram members, including Yusuf's father-in-law, were arrested and subsequently shot by police in what were denounced as extra-judicial killings.<sup>57</sup> After this incident in particular, the group became more extreme and launched a terrorist campaign that lasts to the present day. Although Boko Haram originally formed due to grievances over inequality and poor governance primarily between the Muslim north and Christian south,<sup>58</sup> the group is not necessarily monolithic. There appear to be factions in what has been described as a diffuse organizational structure where some of the

groups are focused on domestic insurgency while others pursue affiliation with other organizations with transnational agendas such as AQIM.<sup>59</sup> The U.S. currently views Boko Haram primarily as a threat to stability in Nigeria and the surrounding areas in neighboring countries, but self-proclaimed ambitions, direct threats issued against the U.S., and increasing ties to transnational terrorist organizations are reasons for increased concern.<sup>60</sup>

U.S. security assistance efforts were expanded to include increased work with Nigeria as part of the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI) in 2005. This initiative, which later became the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), was launched to build partner capacities in the region to prevent terrorist safe havens and foster cooperation among participating states. U.S. counterterrorism cooperation increased following a 2011 Boko Haram attack on a police headquarters in Abuja.<sup>61</sup> More recently, the U.S. offered greater assistance to include intelligence sharing after Boko Haram kidnapped almost 300 schoolgirls in 2014.<sup>62</sup> However, U.S.-Nigerian security cooperation efforts have been problematic due to legal constraints, lack of Nigerian collaboration and systemic abuses by the Nigerian security forces.<sup>63</sup> These challenges continue even with expanded U.S. efforts to counter Boko Haram in the region to include increased counterterrorism support to neighboring Cameroon, Niger, and Chad.<sup>64</sup> Despite these efforts, Boko Haram is still wreaking havoc with an estimated 10,000 lives lost to connected violence in 2014 and an estimated one to three million displaced persons.<sup>65</sup>

The Nigerian government's response to Boko Haram has been problematic for several reasons, but primarily due to lack of support from the population most affected by the insurgency due to brutal tactics, corruption, and mistrust that damage legitimacy.<sup>66</sup> Apparent preference for violent repression has led to widespread reports of brutality, extrajudicial killings, and intimidation by security forces.<sup>67, 68</sup> These violent excesses serve to alienate the population



further from the government and play directly into the Boko Haram narrative and even facilitate recruitment. The group has used these acts of brutality to justify retaliatory attacks leading to further excesses by government security forces.<sup>69</sup> This type of behavior has resulted in less than optimal U.S. support to Nigeria due to the so-called Leahy Laws that prohibits offering training or equipment “to any unit of the security forces of a foreign country if the Secretary of State has credible information that such unit has committed a gross violation of human rights.”<sup>70</sup> Leahy restrictions have been a major hindrance to facilitating a persistent engagement strategy with Nigeria. As discussed in the previous case study, a persistent engagement strategy allows SOF the time and access to build vital long-term relationships and provide the advanced level and professionalization training required more consistently and with greater effect.

In addition to unprofessional behavior, widespread corruption in the government, military and the Nigerian Police Forces and continued issues with inadequate resources undermine successful actions against Boko Haram. Allegations also abound of plans being leaked by officials to Boko Haram in exchange for payoffs.<sup>71</sup> The effectiveness of security organizations in Nigeria are also severely influenced by nepotism. Instead of a meritocracy, people are placed in important positions based on who they know or where they are from in the country.<sup>72</sup> Compounding these issues are inadequacies in forensics and intelligence gathering in the police forces. A lack of forensic training, equipment, and methodology leads to a reliance on confessions to drive prosecutions in counterterrorism efforts. Unfortunately, reports suggest that often these confessions are coerced or forced further undermining government legitimacy and feeding insurgent messaging.<sup>73</sup>

These issues not only contribute to reduced government legitimacy, but also to a serious lack of human intelligence information regarding Boko Haram and how it is structured and

funded. The brutality of the security forces deprives them of valuable information about Boko Haram's organization, sponsors, and actions that could have been gathered otherwise.<sup>74</sup> There are concerns that the killing of suspected Boko Haram supporters, which has happened repeatedly, could serve to prevent the exposure of collusion between government or military individuals and Boko Haram.<sup>75</sup> Compounding this situation is that the soldiers and police are most times national forces that do not share ethnic or cultural ties with the local population and often do not work well together.<sup>76</sup> All of these factors contribute to mistrust, and the resulting lack of human intelligence is a major hindrance to successful efforts to quell the Boko Haram insurgency.

This lack of human intelligence and the limitations of airborne ISR platforms were highlighted in the unsuccessful response by the U.S., Nigeria, and other partners to recover over 270 Nigerian schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram in 2014. As of early 2016, none of the girls has been rescued by the Nigerian military and 219 remain missing.<sup>77</sup> The terrain, with dense jungle canopy, is much more challenging than ISR operators are used to in places like Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>78</sup> Also challenging to the ISR problem is the sheer size of the continent and availability of adequate assets. Africa has limited satellite coverage driving an increased need for airborne assets to provide ISR information. This challenge will require increased partnerships across the continent to facilitate basing access.<sup>79</sup> A combination of increased airborne ISR and the development of a more robust human intelligence network will be essential for SOF to promote success against Boko Haram in Nigeria and other VEOs around the continent.

The Nigerian government has also neglected to adequately counter Boko Haram's radical message to the country's Muslim population.<sup>80</sup> Boko Haram is pushing a highly conservative

form of Salafist Islam with strict Sharia standards that is not popular among most Nigerians. Boko Haram's violent and brutal means of conducting its insurgency is also showing itself to be an enemy of all Nigerians.<sup>81</sup> In addition to decreasing corruption and brutal tactics in the government and security forces, providing basic security for the population, and addressing economic grievances, a counter-messaging campaign must capitalize on the fact that Boko Haram envisions a future that few in Nigeria desire.<sup>82</sup>

## **Recommendations**

Several lessons can be learned and expanded upon based on these two case studies that can be beneficial to SOF employment on the African continent in the future. First, in areas of strategic interest to the U.S., early involvement with a persistent and long-term presence is important and necessary. In Mali, episodic and short duration engagement hindered SOF's ability to provide adequate training and assistance.<sup>83</sup> Some reasons for this stemmed from a concentration on non-military development programs to the neglect of using SOF to build partner capacity for security.<sup>84</sup> Another reason may have been a belief that strong militaries are a threat to African civilian governments. However, in Mali, it was the weakness of the military caused by government neglect that led to a military coup.<sup>85</sup> In Nigeria, a lack of persistence specifically contributed to a dearth of human intelligence information that hindered progress against the insurgents. In both case studies, the lack of persistent engagement hindered the ability of SOF to build long term relationships, provide appropriate and advanced skills training, and to develop adequate knowledge of the human terrain. Building adequate partner capacity requires persistent exposure to not only the specific skills needed, but time to adapt new cultural norms and behaviors that are conducive to organizational effectiveness. This effort can take a

considerable amount of time as evidenced in Colombia where U.S. SOF has been heavily engaged for decades.<sup>86</sup>

Consideration must also be given to statutory limitations on providing assistance to units with past records of human rights abuses. Evidence from U.S. efforts in Colombia shows that withholding aid due to these abuses is much less effective than providing consistent education and training.<sup>87</sup> These interruptions in training affected SOF efforts in both Mali and Nigeria. However, recent efforts seem to be moving positively in Nigeria. Reporting indicates that the U.S. has lifted restrictions and will be providing training, support, and supplies to support the new Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari in his fight against Boko Haram.<sup>88</sup> Regardless of the hurdles, for SOF to be effective for U.S. interests in Africa, they must be given the time, access, and resources required.

Second, the U.S. government should leverage SOF persistent engagement to provide advanced skills training, human rights education, and professional military education. SOF training needs to move beyond the basic skills like marksmanship and spend time on advanced training for security forces. Additionally, SOF needs to focus on values-based education. Former AFRICOM commander, General Carter Ham, stated “We didn’t spend...the requisite time focusing on values, ethics, and military ethos.”<sup>89</sup> This type of training would serve to improve civil-military relations, respect for human rights, and legitimacy with the population. SOF must concentrate on specific cultural expertise, long-term relationship building, and repeat deployment cycles to the same areas.<sup>90</sup> In partner nations plagued with insurgent threats, SOF should also provide training and education to security forces above and beyond elite units. Although SOF numbers are normally small, they can be used to train the trainers of the large conventional forces required to provide security for a counterinsurgency. MISO and civil affairs

operations can be especially effective in training support units to win hearts and minds.<sup>91</sup> Again, to be effective, this effort must be long-term and comprehensive.

The U.S. should also support the development of partner nation or regional professional education institutions much like those the French already have in place. These institutions, where partner nation leaders could spend extended periods, can provide excellent opportunities to continue professional education and to build relationships for the future.<sup>92</sup> Education should be concentrated on officers as well as the non-commissioned officer corps. Along the same lines, more African partner nation leaders should be given the opportunity to study professional military education in the U.S. The fiscal year 2015 request for African International Military Education and Training (IMET) program was, unfortunately, the lowest in at least six years.<sup>93</sup> IMET is a relatively inexpensive and worthwhile investment for a commitment to building long-term relationships and professional partner nation militaries. An increased and enduring U.S. investment in African partner military education will create a pool of capable candidates for future leadership. Over time, this investment will serve to erode the impact of favoritism in military placement and advancement and lead to greater institutional quality in African partner militaries.<sup>94</sup>

Third, SOF should be employed to train and support foreign police in addition to military forces and to act as honest brokers between the two to mitigate friction. SOF can also assist with forensic and intelligence shortfalls by sharing recent lessons learned in Afghanistan and Iraq such as sensitive site exploitation techniques that can lead to better criminal databases and legitimate prosecutorial evidence. Forging relationships between military and law enforcement can provide a force multiplier for developing intelligence capabilities as well as expedited arrests

and prosecutions.<sup>95</sup> These relationships add much-needed legitimacy to both military and law enforcement institutions that is vital to governance and popular support.

Finally, for SOF to be successful in building African partner capacity to counter insurgent and terrorist threats, airborne ISR is essential. French access and basing was a critical contributor to success in Mali. Past SOF lessons have shown that airborne ISR, when combined with an all-source network to include human intelligence, is a critical factor to successful irregular warfare operations.<sup>96</sup> Host nation ISR capacity in Africa is limited at best which necessitates basing locations for U.S. ISR assets on the continent and intelligence sharing with partners. Africa poses extreme challenges for aircraft basing due to the “tyranny of distance” and time as well as attempts to maintain a low U.S. profile. Although AFRICOM claims the only permanent base on the continent is Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, the U.S. has been expanding other operating locations around the continent.<sup>97</sup> The most recent involved a deployment of up to 300 U.S. military in to provide ISR support in partnership with Cameroon.<sup>98</sup> This expansion is a necessary step in assisting our partner nations against insurgent and terrorist threats. However, this effort needs to be complemented by robust investment in the development of organic partner nation ISR capability so as to minimize the duration of a substantial U.S. presence. The persistent presence of small SOF contingents is a more palatable and sustainable posture than a robust and long-term increase in the overall U.S. military presence on the continent.

## **Conclusion**

SOF are uniquely suited to conducting the missions required to support AFRICOM’s priorities due to their relative experience, specialized training, familiarity with the JIIM environment, and their ability to apply a wide range of competencies with a relatively small

footprint. These two brief case studies brought to light specific recommendations for future SOF employment to include the importance of persistent engagement, focusing on advanced skills and professionalization training, using SOF to train host nation law enforcement on specific skill sets, and the importance of airborne ISR and basing access. AQIM and Boko Haram are but two of the challenges facing AFRICOM where these lessons may be applicable, and special operations are only one part of the greater effort required in confronting these threats to U.S. interests and those of our African partners. However, these recommendations would ensure greater success for SOF employment as part of a whole of government effort to address AFRICOM's immediate priorities.



## Appendix A

### SOF Approaches:<sup>99</sup>

|       |                  | SOF Approaches   |   |
|-------|------------------|--|---|
|       |                  | Direct   | Indirect  |
| Means | SOF Skills       | Superlative small unit close quarter combat skills   | Political, cultural, and linguistic skills  |
|       | Forces           | Air Commandos<br>Special Mission Units<br>Navy SEALs<br>Rangers  | Special Forces<br>Civil Affairs<br>Psychological Operations                                     |
| Ways  | Missions         | Counterterrorism<br>Counter proliferation<br>Direct Action<br>Strategic Reconnaissance<br>Information Operations | Unconventional Warfare<br>Psychological Operations<br>Foreign Internal Defense<br>Civil Affairs |
|       | Partnerships     | Interagency  | International   |
| Ends  | Supporting force | Assist partners physically destroy the adversary   | Advise partners on reducing sources of support until adversary collapses                        |
|       | Lead force       | Physically destroy the adversary   | Reduce sources of support until adversary collapses   |



## Appendix B

### Special Operations Core Activities:<sup>100</sup>

**Direct Action (DA).** DA entails short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions conducted with specialized military capabilities to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets in hostile, denied, or diplomatically and/or politically sensitive environments. DA differs from other offensive actions in the level of diplomatic or political risk, the operational techniques employed, and the degree of discriminate and precise use of force to achieve specific objectives. SOF may take DA through raids, ambushes, or other direct assault tactics; standoff attacks by fire from air, ground, or maritime platforms; provision of terminal guidance for precision-guided munitions; independent sabotage; and special antiship operations or maritime interception operations.

**Special Reconnaissance (SR).** SR entails reconnaissance and surveillance actions normally conducted in a clandestine or covert manner to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance, employing military capabilities not normally found in CF. These actions provide an additive collection capability for commanders and supplement other conventional reconnaissance and surveillance actions. SR may include collecting information on activities of an actual or potential enemy or securing data on the meteorological, hydrographic, or geographic characteristics of a particular area. SEALs have historically conducted hydrographic reconnaissance in support of amphibious operations. SR may also include assessment of chemical, biological, residual radiological, or environmental hazards in a denied area. SR includes target acquisition, area assessment, and post-strike reconnaissance, and may be accomplished by air, land, or maritime assets.

**Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD).** SOF support USG efforts to curtail the development, possession, proliferation, use, and effects of WMD, related expertise, materials, technologies, and means of delivery by state and non-state actors. WMD are chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons capable of a high order of destruction or causing mass casualties and exclude the means of transporting or propelling the weapon where such means is a separable and divisible part from the weapon. The strategic objectives of CWMD operations of WMD; manage WMD risks emanating from hostile, fragile, failed states, and/or havens; and deny the effects of current and emerging WMD threats. USSOCOM supports GCCs through technical expertise, materiel, and special teams to complement other CCMD teams that locate, tag, and track WMD; DA in limited access areas; helping build partnership capacity to conduct CWMD activities; MISO to dissuade adversaries from reliance on WMD; and other specialized capabilities. SOF are attentive to any nexus of WMD and transnational violent extremist organizations.

**Counterterrorism (CT).** CT is activities and operations taken to neutralize terrorists and their networks in order to render them incapable of using unlawful violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals. In addition to being a SOF core activity, CT is part of the Department of Defense's (DOD's) broader construct of combating terrorism, which is actions, including antiterrorism and CT, taken to oppose terrorism throughout the entire threat continuum.

**Unconventional Warfare (UW).** UW consists of operations and activities that are conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area. The USG conducted UW during major combat operations (e.g., World War II and the Korean War) to create security issues behind enemy lines and erode enemy power and their will to fight, and in support of insurgencies attempting to overthrow adversarial regimes (e.g., Nicaraguan Contras and Afghan Mujahedeen). UW was used in support of the Northern Alliance against Taliban-controlled Afghan government forces following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. UW operations can put pressure on a hostile government, occupying power, or nation-state.

**Foreign Internal Defense (FID).** FID refers to US activities that support a HN's internal defense and development (IDAD) strategy and program designed to protect against subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to their internal security, and stability. As shown in Figure II-3, FID involves the application of the instruments of national power. In addition to enabling HNs to maintain internal stability and counter subversion and violence, FID should address the causes of instability. FID programs are tailored to the individual HN, and focus on CT, COIN, counterdrug, or stability operations. The three categories of FID are indirect support, direct support (not involving combat operations), and US combat operations. During combat operations, US forces either integrate with or operate in the place of HN forces.

**Security Force Assistance (SFA).** USG security sector reform (SSR) focuses on the way a HN provides safety, security, and justice with civilian government oversight. DOD's primary role in SSR is to support the reform, restructure, or reestablishment of the HN armed forces and the defense aspect of the security sector, which is accomplished through SFA. SFA are DOD activities that contribute to unified action by the USG to support the development of the capacity and capability of foreign security forces (FSF) and their supporting institutions. While SFA is primarily to assist a HN to defend against internal and transnational terrorist threats to stability, it also prepares FSF to defend against external threats and to perform as part of a MNF. FSF include, but are not limited to, military forces; police forces; border police, coast guard, and customs officials; paramilitary forces; interior and intelligence services; forces peculiar to specific nations, states, tribes, or ethnic groups; prison, correctional, and penal services; and their responsible government ministries or departments. US SFA activities train, equip, advise, and assist FSF organized under the HN's national ministry of defense, or the equivalent governmental structure. Other USG departments and agencies focus on FSF assigned to other ministries such as interior, justice, or intelligence services. US SFA can also be provided to regional military or paramilitary forces, or an IGO's security organization.

**Hostage Rescue and Recovery.** Hostage rescue and recovery operations are sensitive crisis response missions in response to terrorist threats and incidents. Offensive operations in support of hostage rescue and recovery can include the recapture of US facilities, installations, and sensitive material overseas.

**Counterinsurgency (COIN).** COIN is a comprehensive civilian and military effort designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes.

(1) **SOF and COIN Approaches.** SOF are essential to successful COIN operations. Their capacity to conduct a wide array of missions with HN security forces or integrated with US CF make them particularly suitable for COIN operations. They are particularly adept at using an indirect approach to positively influence segments of the indigenous population. In a more balanced or direct approach to COIN, however, they should be used to complement rather than replace the role of CF.

(2) **SOFs' Core Activities and COIN.** SOF are specifically organized, trained, and equipped to accomplish core activities that may be involved in COIN. Any of these special operations core activities may be conducted as part of a COIN operation. SOF must adhere to the same tenets of COIN as CF. Even if focused on DA missions, SOF must be cognizant of the need to win and maintain popular support.

(3) **DA.** DA missions may be required in COIN to capture or kill key insurgent leaders or other vital insurgent targets. The specific types of DA are raids, ambushes, and direct assaults; standoff attacks; terminal attack control and terminal guidance operations; PR operations; precision destruction operations; and anti-surface operations.

(4) **SR.** SOF may conduct SR into insurgent strongholds or sanctuaries. Activities within SR include environmental reconnaissance, armed reconnaissance, target and threat assessment, and post-strike reconnaissance.

(5) **CT.** Terrorism should be anticipated as a part of any insurgency. However, rather than just local terrorists supporting the insurgents, the more ominous threats are transnational terrorists taking advantage of the conflict and chaos of the situation for their own purposes. SOF are particularly capable of supporting HN CT efforts whether as part of a COIN operation, or just against transnational and other terrorists.

**Foreign Humanitarian Assistance (FHA).** FHA is a range of DOD humanitarian activities conducted outside the US and its territories to relieve or reduce human suffering, disease, hunger, or privation. DOS and the United States Agency for International Development would typically support the affected HN, and often in conjunction with an IGO such as the United Nations (UN). US military forces are not the primary USG means to provide humanitarian assistance (HA); the assistance they provide usually supplements or complements the other lead USG departments and agencies, SOF, and particularly civil affairs (CA). They can deploy rapidly with excellent long-range communications equipment, and operate in the austere and often chaotic environments typically associated with disaster-related HA efforts. Perhaps the most important capabilities found within SOF for FHA are their geographic orientation, cultural knowledge, language capabilities, and the ability to work with multiethnic indigenous populations, and international relief organizations to provide initial and ongoing assessments. CA are particularly well suited for stabilization efforts in disaster areas. SOF can provide temporary support such as airspace control for landing zones, communications nodes, security, and advance force assessments to facilitate the deployment of CF and designated HA organizations until the HN or another organization can provide that support.

**Military Information Support Operations (MISO).** MISO are planned to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to the originator's objectives.

**Civil Affairs Operations (CAO).** CAO are actions planned, executed, and assessed by CA that enhance the operational environment; identify and mitigate underlying causes of instability within civil society; or involve the application of functional specialty skills normally the responsibility of civil government. All CMO should be coordinated and support the commander's objectives. All CA core tasks support the JFC's CMO objectives.



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