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RELATIONAL MANEUVER: HOW TO WAGE IRREGULAR WARFARE AND MARSOC'S STRATEGIC APPLICATION

by

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13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

Based on historical lessons learned from irregular warfare case studies, and internal organizational analysis, this thesis seeks to provide Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) with specific implementable recommendations based on Edward Luttwak's concept of relational maneuver. Luttwak defines relational maneuver as a style of warfare that requires a deep understanding of the threat and its operational environment to identify vulnerabilities, adapt, and exploit those weaknesses to destroy the enemy as a system. Luttwak argues that irregular warfare requires effective implementation of relational maneuver to achieve operational and strategic success. The U.S. military's experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2009 through 2016 have revealed insufficient use of relational maneuver, favoring, instead, employment of attrition warfare, which focuses on optimizing internal organizational efficiency without understanding, or adapting to, the threat or the operational environment. Through this research, the authors seek to influence MARSOC's organizational strategy to more effectively wage irregular warfare. The final recommendations provide a possible path to MARSOC for overcoming institutional challenges inhibiting the employment of relational maneuver in irregular warfare.

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ABSTRACT

Based on historical lessons learned from irregular warfare case studies, and internal organizational analysis, this thesis seeks to provide Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) with specific implementable recommendations based on Edward Luttwak's concept of relational maneuver. Luttwak defines relational maneuver as a style of warfare that requires a deep understanding of the threat and its operational environment to identify vulnerabilities, adapt, and exploit those weaknesses to destroy the enemy as a system. Luttwak argues that irregular warfare requires effective implementation of relational maneuver to achieve operational and strategic success. The U.S. military's experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2009 through 2016 have revealed insufficient use of relational maneuver, favoring, instead, employment of attrition warfare, which focuses on optimizing internal organizational efficiency without understanding, or adapting to, the threat or the operational environment. Through this research, the authors seek to influence MARSOC's organizational strategy to more effectively wage irregular warfare. The final recommendations provide a possible path to MARSOC for overcoming institutional challenges inhibiting the employment of relational maneuver in irregular warfare.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Af-Pak Hands	Afghanistan-Pakistan Hand Program
ALP	Afghan Local Police
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANASOB	Afghan National Army Special Operations Brigade
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
ARSOF	Army Special Operations Forces
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
ASD(SOLIC)	Assistant Secretary of Defense (Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict)
CAP	Combined Action Program
CERP	Commanders Emergency Response Program
CFSOCC-A	Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command Afghanistan
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
CINCSOUTH	Commander in Chief Southern Command
CJFLCC	Owner Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command
CJSOTF	Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force
CoG	Center of Gravity
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CONARA	National Commission for Area Restoration
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
CSO	Critical Skills Operator
CT	Counterterrorism
CTZ	Corps Tactical Zone
CV	Critical Vulnerability
CWMD	Counter Weapons of Mass Destruction
DA	Direct Action
DAT/PAT	District Advisor Team / Provincial Advisor Team
Det 1	Detachment 1
DoD	Department of Defense
DoS	Department of State

ESAF	El Salvadoran Armed Forces
EWS	Expeditionary Warfare School
FAO	Foreign Area Officer
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Area
FID	Foreign Internal Defense
FMF	Fleet Marine Force
FMLN	*Frente Farabundo Martí para Liberación Nacional*
FMTU	Foreign Military Training Unit
GCC	Geographic Combatant Command
GFC	Ground Force Commander
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GVN	Government of Vietnam
HQMC	Headquarters Marine Corps
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IOC	Infantry Officer Course
ISAF	International Security Force Assistance
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence Agency
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ITC	Individual Training Course
IWG	Irregular Warfare Group
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JPP	Joint Planning Process
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Command
JSOFSEA	Joint Special Operations Forces Senior Enlisted Academy
JSOU	Joint Special Operations University
JTAC	Joint Tactical Air Controller
LeT	Lashkar-e-Taiba
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MACVSOG	Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observations Group

MAGTF	Marine Air-Ground Task Force
MARSOC	Marine Special Operations Command
MAU	Marine Advisory Unit
MCDP	Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication
MCO	Marine Corps Order
MEA	Municipalities in Action
MEB	Marine Expeditionary Brigade
MEU (SOC)	Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
MFF	Military Free Fall
MILGRP	Military Group
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOC	Marine Operating Concept
MOE	Measure of Effectiveness
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MOST	Marine Special Operations Team
MR	Military Region
MRB	Marine Raider Battalion
MRR	Marine Raider Regiment
MRSG	Marine Raider Support Group
MRTC	Marine Raider Training Center
MSOAG	Marine Special Operations Advisory Group
MSOB	Marine Special Operations Battalion
MSOB	Marine Special Operations Battalion
MSOC	Marine Special Operations Company
MSOI	Marine Special Operations Insignia
MSOR	Marine Special Operations Regiment
MTT	Mobile Training Team
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NAVSPECWARCOM	Naval Special Warfare Command
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NLF	National Liberation Front
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
NSC	National Security Council
NSS	National Security Strategy
NSWTG	Naval Special Warfare Task Group
NTM-A	NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan
NVA	North Vietnamese Army

OCPW	Office of the Chief of Psychological Warfare
ODB	Operational Detachment Bravo
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OPATT	Operations Planning and Training Teams
OPLAN	Operations Plan
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PAT	Provincial Advisor Team
PEP	Partnership Exchange Program
PME	Professional Military Education
PMESII	Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, and Infrastructure
PRIO	Peace Research Institute Oslo's
PROVN	Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam
PRP	People's Revolutionary Party
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Teams
PRU	Provincial Reconnaissance Unit
PSDF	Peoples Self-Defense Force
RAND	Research and Development Corporation
ROE	Rules of Engagement
SACSA	Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities
SAR	Stabilization Assistance Review
SAS	Special Air Service
SCO	Security Cooperation Office
SEAL	Sea Air and Land
SFA	Security Force Assistance
SFG	Special Forces Group
SFOD	Special Forces Operational Detachment
SOCFwd	Special Operations Command Forward
SOCOM	Special Operations Command
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOFLE	Special Operations Forces Liaison Element
SOJTF	Special Operations Joint Task Force

SOK   Special Operations Kandak
SOLO   Special Operations Liaison Officer
SOTF   Special Operations Task Force
SF   Special Forces
SPMGTF   Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force
SR   Special Reconnaissance
SVN   South Vietnam

TAAA   Train, Advise, Assist, and Accompany
TSOC   Theater Special Operations Command

UN   United Nations
UNAMA   UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
USAID   U.S. Agency for International Development
USASOC   U.S. Army Special Operations Command
USIS   U.S. Information Service
USMC   United States Marine Corps
UW   Unconventional Warfare

VBSS   Visit Board Search Seizure
VC   Viet Cong
VCI   Viet Cong Infrastructure
VEO   Violent Extremist Organization
VSCC   Village Stability Coordination Center
VSO   Village Stability Operations
VWP   Vietnam Workers Party

WWII   World War II

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) intends to reorient the U.S. military to competition with peer and regional adversaries. The NDS, however, also explains that this competition is taking place "below the level of armed conflict."[1] Instead of using traditional warfare, adversaries are employing "competition short of open warfare" through proxies and irregular warfare in operational environments such as Ukraine, Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.[2] So, while Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) may be less strategically important than the intensified threat from Russia, China, or Iran, the lines between state and nonstate competition, threats, and operational environments blend together. Furthermore, while the potential for traditional warfare with state adversaries has intensified, projections of the future indicate that irregular warfare will likely remain the predominant form of warfare.[3] In current and future, mostly irregular, operational environments, the 2018 NDS states that the U.S. military must "compete more effectively below the level of armed conflict" against adversaries while also defeating VEOs and "defending allies from military aggression and bolstering partners against coercion."[4]

Strategic success in irregular warfare, however, has eluded the U.S. military recently. Seventeen years into the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Middle East operational environment is arguably worse than when the military launched its efforts 17 years ago.[5] Furthermore, strategic ineffectiveness in irregular warfare is not new for the U.S. military. The U.S. military's efforts in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan reveal trends that have inhibited operational effectiveness and strategic success. Analysis of

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[1] James Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), 6.

[2] Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*, 3.

[3] Thomas Szayna et al., *Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers: An Empirical Assessment of Historical Conflict Patterns and Future Conflict Projections* (RAND Corporation, 2017), https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1063.

[4] Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*, 7, 4.

[5] John Arquilla, "Perils of the Gray Zone: Paradigms Lost, Paradoxes Regained," *Prism: A Journal of the Center for Complex Operations* 7, no. 3 (2018): 119, http://search.proquest.com/docview/2059595949/.

Special Operations Forces' (SOF) approaches in irregular warfare also reveals room for improvement to better align tactical-level actions with strategic objectives.

The evidence suggests that the root of the U.S. military's strategic failures in irregular warfare lies in ineffective implementation of what modern strategist Edward Luttwak defines as relational maneuver.[6] Relational maneuver is a style of warfare that focuses on studying a threat to identify and exploit vulnerabilities to achieve strategic success. This style of warfare requires a deep understanding of the threat and operational environment and the adaptation to exploit threat vulnerabilities. In irregular warfare, adaptation and exploitation must occur through both political and traditional military competition. The U.S. military, including SOF, disproportionally applies maneuver through traditional military violence rather than political competition.

This study draws upon the strategic context outlined by the 2018 NDS, the projected prevalence of future irregular warfare, credible research on irregular warfare, historical U.S. military lessons, and internal organizational analysis to produce implementable recommendations to the Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC). These recommendations are intended to enhance MARSOC's ability to wage irregular warfare and influence successful strategic outcomes in line with the 2018 NDS. Three intermediate arguments underpin the final recommendations. First, irregular warfare is fundamentally more complex, dynamic, and uncertain than doctrinally defined traditional warfare due to political competition that occurs at every level of warfare. Second, U.S. military strategic success in irregular warfare requires applying relational maneuver, which enables the necessary understanding and adaptation to identify and exploit threat vulnerabilities in uncertain operational environments. Third, SOF and MARSOC need to better apply relational maneuver through both political competition and military violence.

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[6] Edward N. Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare." *Parameters* 13, no. 4 (Dec 1, 1983);Edward N. Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance," *Survival* 21, no. 2 (March 1979): 57–60, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396337908441800; Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, Rev. and enl. ed (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 113–55.

Therefore, MARSOC should focus its organizational strategy on employing indirect irregular warfare approaches to support national-level objectives against prioritized threat networks within select operational environments. The advocated strategy contains seven nested recommendations so MARSOC can provide greater direct strategic utility to the Department of Defense, Marine Corps, and Special Operations Command. Ultimately, MARSOC's utility to the 2018 NDS lies in applying the principles of relational maneuver to influence strategic objectives in irregular warfare.

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I.   INTRODUCTION

> If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

—Sun Tzu[1]

A.   CONTEXT AND PROBLEM

The 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy and 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) reorient the U.S. military on great power competition with revisionist and rogue powers who threaten U.S. interests and the international order.[2] The 2018 NDS explains that these particular adversaries will likely use "other areas of competition short of open warfare to achieve their ends (e.g., information warfare, ambiguous or denied proxy operations, and subversion). These trends, if unaddressed, will challenge our ability to deter aggression."[3] The history of great power competition supports this assertion. During the Cold War, the United States, the Soviet Union, and China fought a series of proxy wars that spanned the globe across Korea, Vietnam, El Salvador, Afghanistan, and many more venues. These proxy wars often took place within irregular warfare contexts where intrastate social-political turmoil provided opportunity for competition among both great and regional powers. The history of proxy wars, often within the context of irregular warfare, often included the same irregular methods that the current defense strategy describes as "corruption, predatory economic practices, propaganda, political subversion, proxies, and the threat or use of military force to change facts on the ground."[4] The history of the Cold War echoes the current strategic environment where the current defense strategy asserts that:

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[1] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Lionel Giles (New York: Open Road Media, 2014), 23.

[2] National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Washington, DC: The White House, 2017); James Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018).

[3] Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*, 3.

[4] Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*, 5.

China and Russia are now undermining the international order from within the system by exploiting its benefits while simultaneously undercutting its principles and "rules of the road." Both revisionist powers and rogue regimes are competing across all dimensions of power. They have increased efforts short of armed conflict by expanding coercion to new fronts, violating principles of sovereignty, exploiting ambiguity, and deliberately blurring the lines between civil and military goals.[5]

The 2018 NDS' description of "competition short of armed conflict" and "competition short of open warfare" refers to revisionist powers' and rogue regimes' competition directly with the United States. Although short of open and traditional warfare, competitors like Russia and Iran are waging irregular warfare against the United States and allied partners to disrupt and tilt the current global order in their favor.[6] These competitors are waging this irregular warfare through non-state actor proxies by exploiting and exacerbating intrastate social-political turmoil created by local insurgencies and terrorism:

> In the Middle East, Iran is competing with its neighbors, asserting an arc of influence and instability while vying for regional hegemony, using state-sponsored terrorist activities, a growing network of proxies, and its missile program to achieve its objectives.[7]

Not only are Middle Eastern powers like Iran exploiting intrastate turmoil and waging irregular warfare, Russia is also currently waging irregular warfare in Ukraine. A 2015 study argues that "the evidence that [conflict in Ukraine] is a Kremlin-directed war is overwhelming."[8] The study goes on to explain that "Russian soldiers on active duty have fought and died in Ukraine only to return to their families in unmarked coffins."[9]

Therefore, although the 2018 defense strategy emphasizes a return to great power competition between Russia, China, and the United States, it also reveals that irregular warfare and non-violent competition below traditional warfare will represent the most

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[5] Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*, 2.

[6] Linda Robinson et al., *Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), 103.

[7] Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*, 2.

[8] Maksymilian Czuperski et al., *Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin's War in Ukraine* (Washington, DC: The Atlantic Council, May 2015), Preface.

[9] Czuperski et al., *Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin's War in Ukraine*, Preface.

prevalent and likely form of conflict. This prevalence of irregular warfare is not new and represents the most common form of warfare since at least 1945.[10] As of 2017, 49 conflicts persisted around the world, with only one of the 49 occurring between two nation states, Pakistan and India (over the Kashmir region).[11]

Although irregular warfare has been pervasive, modern strategist Edward Luttwak argues that the U.S. military has generally considered low-intensity conflict, or irregular warfare, a "lesser-included case of 'real' war"—interstate traditional warfare—and has therefore largely overlooked the necessity of preparing for and conducting such warfare.[12] Instead, the predominant American way of war focuses on preparing for and fighting firepower-driven, technologically enabled, high-intensity warfare directly against other uniformed militaries. Although well suited for engaging in principally traditional warfare during World War II, the Korean War, Operation Desert Storm, and Operation Iraqi Freedom I (OIF I), the traditional way of war proved insufficient in the irregular operational environment in Vietnam—and more recently in Afghanistan since 2001.

In the *Art of War*, Sun Tzu famously stated that success in battle depends on knowing the enemy as well as oneself.[13] Expanded beyond the tactical battle, Sun Tzu asserts that success in war does not occur without first recognizing and understanding the threat and its contextual operational environment, then adapting to overcome the threat. The history of war and warfare suggests that irregular wars, such as waging or countering insurgency, require a better discernment of the adversary and its contextual operational environment, unlike traditional interstate conflict in which the U.S. military can primarily focus on the adversary's military force and merely the contextual geographic environment.

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[10] Thomas S. Szayna et al., *Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers: An Empirical Assessment of Historical Conflict Patterns and Future Conflict Projections* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017), xvi–xvii, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1063.html.

[11] Kendra Dupuy and Siri Aas Rustad, "Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2017," *Conflict Trends*, May 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Dupuy%2C%20Rustad-%20Trends%20in%20Armed%20Conflict%2C%201946%E2%80%932017%2C%20Conflict%20Trends%205-2018.pdf.

[12] Edward N. Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," *Parameters* 13, no. 4 (Dec 1, 1983): 11, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1306224678,_335.

[13] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 23.

Studies like RAND's *Paths to Victory* indicate that in irregular war the destruction of the adversary's military force, while important, is only one of several supporting efforts requisite for success.[14] Irregular warfare, then, requires a more comprehensive understanding of the operational environment. In addition to the same requirements for waging traditional warfare, irregular warfare requires understanding politically fragmented operational environments influenced by complex, dynamic, and uncertain socio-cultural, violence, economic, and information factors across a range of threatening, neutral, and friendly participants.

Although the U.S. military pays lip service to understanding the operational environment, the historical record from Vietnam to El Salvador to Afghanistan reveals that the U.S. military has not always effectively understood, confronted, and overcome its irregular threats. Many of the core problems that led to the United States' military and political failures in Vietnam continue to reveal themselves in more recent and ongoing irregular wars. As participants in these conflicts, this study's authors have observed and experienced some of these failures first-hand. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, conventional and Special Operations Forces' (SOF) operational approaches have often gravitated toward attritional short-term lethal effects at the expense of implementing long-term approaches to inform, influence, execute, and achieve political-military strategy and objectives.

The military's ineffective understanding of the contextual political core of operational environments in irregular warfare fuels ineffective attritional approaches. This is evident in historical irregular warfare engagements and persists today, proving that the U.S. military is not adapting to succeed. Success in irregular warfare requires that adaptable task-organized forces develop a deeper understanding of the operational environment, construct and implement unified political-military strategy, and adjust operational approaches to overcome the threat(s) they face. The inconclusiveness, or as retired general

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[14] Christopher Paul et al., *Paths to Victory* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2013).

officer and author Daniel Bolger argues, the failure of modern U.S. efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq indicates a gap of effectiveness in waging irregular warfare.[15]

The U.S. military's challenges in irregular warfare should concern U.S. political-military leaders because revisionists, rogues, and violent extremist organizations (VEO) have used, and will continue to employ, irregular warfare to exploit U.S. vulnerabilities and to threaten U.S. interests. In the two decades since September 11, 2001, author and irregular warfare expert John Arquilla argues that the U.S. military's ineffectiveness in irregular warfare has contributed to destabilizing the international order and producing more irregular threats than existed before the attacks on 9/11.[16]

Furthermore, a wide range of analysis of both SOF and the military writ large indicates that the U.S. military has treated irregular wars as opportunities to maintain or advance organizational or individual bureaucratic interests rather than committing to long-term solutions and threat resolution.[17] The evidence suggests that underpinning these shortfalls is a lack of dedicated personnel, resources, and study focusing on the external threat and overall operational environment. In place of externally orienting and focusing on the operational environment, the military allows and enables internal administrative organizational constraints and considerations to outweigh its operational effectiveness. This internal orientation suggests that the U.S. military has typically gravitated toward

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[15] Daniel P. Bolger, *Why We Lost: A General's Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014).

[16] John Arquilla, "Perils of the Gray Zone: Paradigms Lost, Paradoxes Regained," *Prism: A Journal of the Center for Complex Operations* 7, no. 3 (May 2018): 119. http://search.proquest.com/docview/ 2059595949/.

[17] Robert Michael Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 114; Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1988), 650; Thomas E. Ricks, "Our Generals Failed in Afghanistan: The United States Displayed a Failure of Leadership in Afghanistan;" *Foreign Policy*, October 18, 2016, https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/18/our-generals-failed-in-afghanistan/; Interview with Ronald Norris, September 6, 2018; Todd Greentree, "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: U.S. Performance and the Institutional Dimension of Strategy in Afghanistan," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 3 (June 2013): 1–32.

what Luttwak defines as an internally focused attritional style of warfare that substitutes nuanced understanding and adaptation with overwhelming military force and firepower.[18]

In place of attrition, Luttwak describes and proposes a style, or philosophy, of warfare—relational maneuver—better suited to understanding and countering irregular threats and waging irregular warfare. In irregular warfare, relational maneuver requires an external focus on the threat, an adaptive conceptual understanding, a unified political-military strategy, and flexible internal organizational design to ultimately produce and apply operational warfare approaches to exploit weaknesses within the threat system.[19] Both Luttwak and history unequivocally demonstrate that irregular warfare's inherent political complexity, instability, and uncertainty require relational maneuver to confront and overcome the threat.[20]

Within the U.S. military, SOF's core activities and agility in comparison with conventional forces should make SOF the nation's leading experts in irregular warfare and advocates of relational maneuver. In reality, SOF have historically experienced mixed success in irregular warfare. Although the nation's ostensible experts in waging irregular warfare, SOF have often implemented narrow, kinetically attritional approaches at the expense of understanding the operational environment and ensuring that lethal attrition is balanced against more holistic approaches. Furthermore, while SOF claim to be agile and adaptive, their agility has been largely confined to employment of military violence on the battlefield. Instead, SOF, like the broader military, have allowed themselves to disproportionally focus internally on developing and advertising tactical-level capabilities at the expense of implementing relational maneuver to confront and overcome irregular threats. SOF, like the military writ large, have not consistently applied relational maneuver

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[18] E. N. Luttwak and S. L. Canby. MINDSET: National Styles in Warfare and the Operational Level of Planning, Conduct and Analysis, 1980; Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, rev. and enlarged ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); Edward N. Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance," Survival 21, no. 2 (Mar, 1979): doi:10.1080/0039633790 8441800. https://search.proquest.com/docview/1299551054.

[19] Luttwak and Canby. *MINDSET: National Styles in Warfare*; Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*; Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance."

[20] Luttwak and Canby. *MINDSET: National Styles in Warfare*; Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace;* Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance."

to develop a conceptually deeper understanding of the operational environment, to influence or support an effective political-military strategy, to tailor their organizational design to the operational environment, or to implement adaptive operational approaches.

This study closely explores how Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) can and should transform to better implement relational maneuver. As MARSOC and Naval Special Warfare special operations officers, the authors have observed successes and failures over the last decade and have vested interests in their respective organizations' ability to contribute to strategically successful outcomes against irregular threats. While a pure attritional style of warfare may play a more important role in confronting adversaries in traditional wars, it is not the focus of this research. Fighting traditional warfare is the primary responsibility of conventional or general-purpose forces, with SOF in a supporting role. U.S. military conventional forces are generally designed to employ large-scale violent force on the physical battlefield. In contrast, SOF should have a strategic advantage in waging irregular warfare given SOF's relative advantages.

Relational maneuver depends on understanding the operational environment and adapting to protect and exploit vulnerabilities. U.S. SOF commonly state their organizational desire for agility, adaptation, and innovation. For example, as stated in its recently released organizational vision, *MARSOF 2030*, MARSOC seeks to achieve organizational agility to confront the current and future complex operational environment.[21] This study's research directly applies to MARSOC's desire for agility and provides specific recommendations for MARSOC to operationalize *MARSOF 2030* by connecting and applying the concepts of relational maneuver.

History provides the only evidence by which to understand the current irregular threat environment and to imagine the future thereof. As historian Williamson Murray advocates in *The Past as Prologue,* this study will examine history to explore how relational maneuver applies to MARSOC in the current and future environment. This history includes three of the most important U.S. irregular warfare experiences since World War II, including Vietnam, El Salvador and the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. Analysis

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[21] Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030*, 2018.

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of each case assesses the pertinent U.S. military forces' conceptual understanding of the operational environment, political-military strategy, organizational design, and implementation of operational irregular warfare approaches to achieve success.

While historical analysis clarifies the external irregular threats, critical analysis of MARSOC will determine how to transform and enhance their internal organizational effectiveness. To that end, and following Sun Tzu's guidance to know oneself, this study will also conduct an open systems analysis of MARSOC's operational elements using organizational design principles. Comparing the external irregular operational environment against MARSOC's internal environment will provide holistic insight and recommendations for how MARSOC can more effectively employ relational maneuver to wage irregular warfare and influence politically succesful outcomes against current and future threats.

B.   RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS, QUESTIONS, AND THESIS

Fundamentally, this thesis uses several basic assumptions. The first is that SOF's very nature requires the employment of relational maneuver principles to be effective due to inherent size and reource constraints. Second, all military units should desire to enhance their organizational effectiveness. Third, since the 2018 NDS outlines specific irregular warfare threats from revisionist, rogue and VEO adversaries, the entire Department of Defense (DoD), Special Operational Command (SOCOM), and MARSOC should more effectively understand the challenges of confronting and overcoming these irregular threats to operationalize many of the concepts within the NDS.

This study's fundamental question asks, **how can MARSOC employ relational maneuver to wage irregular warfare more effectively and achieve strategically successful outcomes?** The four primary principles that distinguish relational maneuver's effectiveness in irregular warfare provide the basis and analytical framework for this study. Taken together, these principles and related questions dictate how MARSOC should conceptually understand relational maneuver's employment in irregular warfare:

1. How important is it to conceptually gain a **Deep Understanding of the Operational Environment** in irregular warfare, and what factors enable the comprehension necessary to employ relational maneuver?

2. How important is **Political-Military Strategy** for confronting and overcoming irregular threats?

3. What kind of **Organizational Design** enables relational maneuver against irregular threats?

4. What relational maneuver-based **Operational Irregular Warfare Approaches** have been historically successfully employed?

Because the answers to these questions will only provide general utility to the U.S. military at large, further questions must assist in specifically determining how MARSOC can implement these solutions in the present. Answering the following questions will assist in translating general insights directly to MARSOC:

1. In comparison to conventional forces, what are SOF's general relational maneuver advantages in waging irregular warfare?

2. What inhibitors exist within MARSOC organizational design which undermine the employment of relational maneuver within irregular operational environments?

This study determines that, to employ relational maneuver effectively, MARSOC should develop a deeper understanding of operational environments; inform, influence, support, and implement political-military strategy; tailor internal organizational design to meet the challenges of unique irregular operational environments; and implement advisor-centric operational irregular warfare approaches. Together, these four principles can enable MARSOC to identify and exploit the threat vulnerabilities necessary to influence and achieve strategically successful outcomes in irregular warfare.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

Currently, due to MARSOC's organizational youth, no literature directly addresses how MARSOC should wage irregular warfare and confront irregular threats. Furthermore, no literature applies Edward Luttwak's concept of relational maneuver to MARSOC. This research intends to fill this gap and to make an argument that MARSOC can fill critical gaps in historical U.S. military capabilities, current Marine Corps warfighting capabilities, and better supplement U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) capabilities by specializing in applying relational maneuver to irregular warfare and specific irregular threats and operational environments.

1. MARSOC's Effectiveness in Irregular Warfare

The prevalence of irregular warfare (especially since 1945), the projection of future irregular warfare, the U.S. military's and SOF's mixed record of effectiveness in irregular warfare, and MARSOC's persistent engagement in irregular warfare establishes the relevance for this research study. Historian Max Boot's accounts of irregular warfare, including *The Savage Wars of Peace* and *Invisible Armie*s,[22] provide context for the prevalence of irregular warfare throughout history both around the world and for the U.S. military. More focused from 1945 to the present, Research and Development (RAND) Corporation's 2017 study *Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers*[23] and the Peace Research Institute Oslo's (PRIO) recent 2018 study "Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2017"[24] are two credible and representative analyses that reveal the predominance of irregular warfare versus traditional warfare in the recent past.

The Department of Defense's (DoD) recent 2018 NDS[25] is the most recent and critical literature that explains the current, and projects the future, prevalence of irregular

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[22] Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present*, 1st ed. (New York: Liveright Pub. Corp, 2013); Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

[23] Szayna et al., *Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers*.

[24] Dupuy and Rustad, "Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2017."

[25] Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*.

warfare, described within the context of competition below the level of direct or open warfare. The National intelligence Council's 2012 *Global Trends 2030*[26] and RAND's 2017 and PRIO's 2018 analyses affirms the likelihood for the predominance of irregular warfare into the foreseeable future.

Substantial literature also exists that questions the U.S. military's effectiveness in irregular warfare. Historically, Edward Luttwak's "Notes on Irregular Warfare"[27] criticizes the U.S. military's style of warfare in Vietnam. Research from the Vietnam War further contains a significant number of accounts that criticize U.S. abilities in waging irregular warfare, including various articles by Edward Lansdale,[28] Andrew Krepinevich's critique *The Army and Vietnam,*[29] Neil Sheehan's *A Bright Shining Lie,*[30] and many others. More recently, one of the most circumspect analyses of the U.S. military's challenges in Afghanistan and Iraq, Richard Hooker and Joseph Collin's edited volume *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*[31] closely analyzes the challenges confronted and mistakes made by the U.S. military. Retired General officer Daniel Bolger's *Why We Lost,*[32] and John *Gentry's How Wars are Won and Lost: Vulnerability and Military Power*[33] further assess many of the strategic related U.S. failures associated with waging irregular warfare. This study also draws extensively from Colin Gray's analyses of the U.S.

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[26] National Intelligence Council (U.S.), ed, Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds: A Publication of the National Intelligence Council. (2012).

[27] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare."

[28] Edward Lansdale, "Viet Nam Still the Search for Goals," *Foreign Affairs* 47, no. 01 (1968); Edward Lansdale, "Memorandum to Ambassador Collins from Lansdale," (Vietnam: January 3, 1955), http://search.proquest.com/docview/1679150236/; Edward Lansdale, "Viet Nam: Do We Understand Revolution?" *Foreign Affairs* 43, no 01 (1964) http://search.proquest.com/docview/198195307/.

[29] Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

[30] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*.

[31] Richard D. Hooker and Joseph J. Collins, *Lessons Encountered Learning from the Long War* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015).

[32] Bolger, Why We Lost.

[33] John A. Gentry. *How Wars Are Won and Lost: Vulnerability and Military Power*. (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2012).

military's failures in strategically waging irregular warfare in the modern era.[34] Finally, this study draws from the authors' own experiences and observations of U.S. military ineffectiveness as well as from interviews with subject matter experts and military practitioners across case study analyses.

Within the genre questioning general military effectiveness in irregular warfare exists a narrower critique of Special Operations Forces' (SOF) effectiveness in irregular warfare. The core of the argument confronting SOF effectiveness in irregular warfare consists of SOF's overemphasis on the tactical employment of direct-action kinetic skills versus a strategic employment of indirect approaches that harness SOF's abilities to work with and through indigenous partners to achieve lasting political and military objectives. RAND's study, *Toward Operational Art in Special Warfare,*[35] retired Army Special Forces officer Scott Mann's *Game Changers: Going Local to Defeat Violent Extremists,*[36] Linda Robinson's *One Hundred Victories*[37] and *Future of U.S. Special Operations,*[38] and retired Special Forces officer and author Hy Rothstein's "A Tale of Two Wars"[39] all explore SOF-related failures in operating strategically in irregular operational environments.

Finally, open source reporting and the authors' personal experiences reveal that in its organizational history since 2006, MARSOC has been persistently engaged in irregular

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[34] Colin S. Gray, "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (Jan 1, 2007): 35; Colin S. Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2006); Colin S. Gray, "The Strategist as Hero," *Joint Force Quarterly* 62 (3rd Quarter, July 2011).

[35] Dan Madden et al., *Toward Operational Art in Special Warfare* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016) http://www.rand.org/search.html?query=9780833087638.

[36] Scott Mann, *Game Changers: Going Local to Defeat Violent Extremists* (Leesburg, VA: Tribal Analysis Publishing, 2015).

[37] Linda Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*: Special Ops and the Future of American Warfare (New York: Public Affairs, 2013).

[38] Linda Robinson, *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces*, Special Report no. 66 (New York, NY: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2013).

[39] Rothstein, Hy S, "A Tale of Two Wars: Why the U.S. Cannot Conduct Unconventional Warfare" (PhD diss., Tufts University, 2004).

warfare in the Philippines, Africa, and the Middle East.[40] Whether officially identified as Foreign Internal Defense (FID), Counterinsurgency (COIN), Stability Operations, Security Force Assistance (SFA), virtually all of MARSOC's historical, current, and projected missions relate to waging irregular warfare directly or assisting other partners in waging irregular warfare.

2.   Irregular Warfare: Definitions and Effectiveness

The literature on irregular warfare and identifying how to wage irregular warfare effectively and counter irregular threats is broad. Due to its purpose to influence MARSOC, an operational military organization, this study uses current joint military doctrine to define irregular warfare as well as key terminology thereof, such as the participants, the activities, and the operational environment.[41] Although utilizing current doctrine to define terminology, this study also draws extensively from historical literature from classic studies including Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*[42] to define war, the Marine Corps' 1940 *Small Wars Manual,*[43] and C.E. Callwell's *Small Wars.*[44]

Building from doctrine and classic analysis of irregular warfare, this study examines and synthesizes a wide range of the most pertinent studies on the character and effective practices in irregular warfare. While not exhaustive, these relevant studies

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[40] Matthew L. Schehl, "10 Years of MARSOC: How the Marine Corps Developed Its Spec Ops Command." Marine Corps Times, August 7, 2017, https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2016/02/24/10-years-of-marsoc-how-the-marine-corps-developed-its-spec-ops-command/.

[41] Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Counterinsurgency,* JP 3–24 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018); Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Stability Operations,* JP 3–07 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2016); Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Unconventional Warfare*, JP 3–05.1 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2015); Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Foreign Internal Defense*, JP 3–22 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2010); Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment*, JP 2–01.3 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014)*; Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare (IW)*, DODD 3000.07. (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2017) https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/d3000_07.pdf; Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Joint Doctrine Library," accessed October 22, 2018, http://www.jcs.mil/Doctrine/DoD-Terminology/

[42] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed and trans Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[43]Ronald Schaffer, *Small Wars Manual: United States Marine Corps 1940* (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 2004).

[44] Charles Edward Callwell, *Small Wars*, 3d ed. (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1906).

include: David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare*,[45] David Kilcullen's *Counterinsurgency,*[46] John Nagl's *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife,*[47] Kalev Sepp's "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency,"[48] RAND's *Paths to Victory: Lessons from Modern Insurgency,*[49] Joint Publication 3–24, *Counterinsurgency*,[50] Mao Tse-Tung's *On Protracted War*[51] and *On Guerilla Warfare,*[52] Joint Publication 3–05.1, *Unconventional Warfare,*[53] Roger Trinquier's, *Modern Warfare a French View of Counterinsurgency,*[54] Robert Taber's, *War of the Flea,*[55] and Williamson Murray and Peter Mansoor's edited volume *Hybrid Warfare.*[56] These and a host of other studies inform this research's analysis of the character of as well as the common effective practices in irregular warfare. Together, these studies depict complex, dynamic, and uncertain operational environment where political factors are as or more important than the traditional military employment of violence.

Due to the centrality of politics in all war, but especially in irregular operational environments, this study especially focuses on the role of political competition and its

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[45] David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964).

[46] David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[47] John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[48] Kalev I. Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency" *Military Review* 85, no. 3 (Oct 1, 2006) https://search.proquest.com/docview/225309746.

[49] Christopher Paul et al., *Paths to Victory: Lessons from Modern Insurgencies* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2013); Christopher Paul et al., *Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2013).

[50] Joint Publication 3–24: *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018).

[51] Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung: On Protracted War* (Beijing, China: Foreign Languages Press, 1967).

[52] Mao Tse-tung, *Mao Tse-Tung on Guerrilla Warfare*, trans Samuel B. Griffith II (Washington, DC: USMC, 1989).

[53] Joint Publication 3–05.1: *Unconventional Warfare* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2015).

[54] Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Combat Studies Institute, 1985).

[55] Robert Taber, *War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2002).

[56] Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor. *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

implications to relational maneuver effectiveness in irregular warfare. Afghanistan veteran and scholar Emile Simpson's illuminating analysis of political competition, based on a Clauswitzian foundation of war and warfare, plays a significant role in shaping this study's examination of the political complexity of irregular warfare.[57] RAND's recent study *Modern Political Warfare*[58] as well as George Kennan's classic thinking on political warfare also serve to shape this study's analysis and supports the criticality of relational maneuver in understanding and waging political competition in irregular warfare.[59] The uncertainty in political and violent competition in irregular warfare leads to the requirement to employ an adaptive philosophy or style of warfare to effectively wage irregular warfare, relational maneuver.

3. Relational Maneuver and Effectiveness in Irregular Warfare

The core of this study is the application of relational maneuver in irregular warfare to MARSOC. Edward Luttwak's concept of relational maneuver is articulated as a national style of warfare and applied in his writings towards the U.S. military at large. Edward Luttwak defines relational maneuver and provides the conceptual principles to build an analytical framework to enable the adaptability necessary to succeed in irregular warfare. This study employs his elements of relational maneuver to examine historical U.S. military experiences in irregular warfare and the irregular operational environment, examine SOF's relational maneuver advantages in irregular warfare, and internally examine MARSOC's organizational design.[60] In multiple works since the 1970s, Edward Luttwak has argued that effectiveness in irregular warfare necessitates adapting to the requirements of the

[57] Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[58] Robinson et al., Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses.

[59] "George F. Kennan on Organizing Political Warfare." April 30, 1948, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Obtained and contributed to CWIHP by A. Ross Johnson. Cited in his book Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, Ch1 n4 – NARA release courtesy of Douglas Selvage. Redacted final draft of a memorandum dated May 4, 1948. and published with additional redactions as document 269, FRUS, Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320.

[60] Luttwak and Canby*, MINDSET: National Styles in Warfare*; Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*; Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance."

operational environment and exploiting threat vulnerabilities.[61] Relational maneuver requires understanding the threat and operational environment both cognitively and physically, building strategy that accounts for both political and violent competition, tailoring internal organizational design to align to the environment, and operationally maneuvering to adapt and exploit weaknesses to defeat the adversary's system of defense.[62]

While no existing literature applies relational maneuver directly to MARSOC, its parent service possesses substantial literature applying aspects of relational maneuver to the Marine Corps. Maneuver Warfare is the Marine Corps' application of relational maneuver. The Marine Corps codified Maneuver Warfare into Doctrine in the 1980s under Marine Commandant General A.M. Gray, which was then refined by General Charles Krulak in 1997 with the publication of the current Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 (MCDP 1) *Warfighting.*[63] *Warfighting* is currently the guiding philosophy to the Marine Corps' way of war.

Warfighting's way of warfare closely mirrors Luttwak's relational maneuver; however, *Warfighting* also focuses nearly exclusively on the traditional battlefield, employment of military violence, and the traditional conception of the separation of political and violent competition. *Warfighting* explains that "at the highest level, war involves the use of all the elements of power that one political group can bring to bear against another. These include, for example, economic, diplomatic, military, and psychological forces. Our primary concern is with the use of military force."[64] This study's examination of relational maneuver's application in irregular warfare indicates that a different philosophy is required. One where the primary concern for MARSOC, and all U.S. military elements in irregular operational environments should be political

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[61] Luttwak and Canby*, MINDSET: National Styles in Warfare*; *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*; Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance."

[62] Luttwak and Canby*, MINDSET: National Styles in Warfare*; Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*; Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance."

[63] Department of the Navy, *Warfighting* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps, 1997).

[64] Department of the Navy, *Warfighting*, 25–26.

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competition. Veteran and author Emile Simpson's analysis in *War From the Ground Up* exposes the character of irregular warfare where all levels of warfare require integrating all elements of power.[65] Essentially, this study's exploration of relational maneuver argues that *Warfighting's* philosophy of Maneuver Warfare is not adequate for success in irregular warfare and that MARSOC should build and expand on *Warfighting*'s conception of Maneuver Warfare by better integrating Luttwak's elements of relational maneuver in direct application to irregular warfare.

Aside from Luttwak's concept of relational maneuver and external to the Marine Corps, other variations of maneuver warfare exist. Political scientist John Gentry's 2012 book *How Wars Are Won and Lost: Vulnerability and Military Power* closely relates to relational maneuver.[66] Gentry defines military power as the "ability to consistently favorably influence strategic military outcomes" and argues that national and military success depends on identifying vulnerabilities in an opponent, exploiting those vulnerabilities, and protecting internal vulnerabilities.[67] Learning and adapting therefore better explain strategic success over time than strictly material strength, or what Luttwak defines as an attrition style of warfare that pits strength against strength. Gentry's book reinforces Luttwaks' concepts of relational maneuver but also applies these concepts to the national level of warfare.

In "How the Weak Win Wars,"[68] Ivan Arreguín-Toft provides a similar argument to relational maneuver that contends that a stronger actor must match the weaker actor's strategy to win. This implies that in irregular war, the United States and SOF must match the weaker adversary and employ relational maneuver to succeed. Toft's argument also focuses on national strategic application.

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[65] Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*.

[66] Gentry, *How Wars Are Won and Lost*.

[67] Gentry, *How Wars Are Won and Lost*, 4.

[68] Ivan Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (Jul 1, 2001): 93–128. https://doi.org/10.1162/016228801753212868.

More directly similar to the application of relational maneuver to MARSOC, in 2017 United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) published a series of white papers that included "Expanding Maneuver in the Early 21st Century Security Environment."[69] In this article, the author outlines this expansion from purely physical maneuver to both physical and cognitive maneuver. This series of white papers examine the implications of cognitive maneuver, especially within the human domain and its implications for USASOC in the 21st Century. These papers contain many of the principles of Luttwak's concept of relational maneuver, especially pertaining to the requirement to deeply understand the operational environment to identify vulnerabilities and maneuver to exploit those vulnerabilities. This study's exploration and application of relational maneuver differs from USASOC's concepts in several important ways. First, this study focuses application specifically on irregular warfare operational environments. Second, it more definitively focuses on the centrality of political competition in irregular warfare. Third, this study identifies specific recommendations to adapt MARSOC's organizational design to better align to irregular operational environments.

### 4.	Case Studies: Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan

To examine how the U.S. military has historically employed relational maneuver in irregular warfare, this study surveys literature of the U.S. military's irregular warfare efforts in Vietnam (1954–1973), El Salvador (1979–1992), and Afghanistan (2001–2018). Since the literature on these conflicts is vast, research will be limited to the most relevant, comprehensive, and well-regarded studies on each conflict. The U.S. military's irregular warfare efforts in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan are three of the most critical irregular warfare experiences since World War II. These three experiences span nearly 50 of the last 73 years since the end of World War II, took place on three separate continents, and include the full range of military operations in diverse operational environments. These three cases are especially apropos given that they involved Marine conventional and special operations forces and that they all have had profound impacts on U.S. military efforts in

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[69] U.S. Army Special Operations Command, *White Paper Expanding Maneuver in the Early 21st Century Security Environment* (United States Army Special Operations Command, 2017).

irregular warfare. In particular, MARSOC's formative years, starting in 2006, occurred in the context of Afghanistan. Together, these cases enable this study to use its relational maneuver analytical framework to validate the character of irregular warfare and operational environments, to confirm the necessity of employing relational maneuver to wage irregular warfare, and to identify the challenges the U.S. military, SOF, and MARSOC have faced in employing relational maneuver in irregular operational environments.

5. SOF's Relational Maneuver Advantages in Irregular Warfare

To determine SOF's comparative relational maneuver advantages in irregular warfare, this study employs a breadth of literature from subject matter experts and credible research. These experts and credible studies include Thomas Adams U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action*,[70] Linda Robinson's *The Future of U.S. Special Operations*,[71] Susan Marquis' *Unconventional Warfare*,[72] Eliot Cohen's *Commandos and Politicians*,[73] Mark Moyar's *Oppose Any Foe: The Rise of America's Special Operations Forces*,[74] and David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb's *United States Special Operations Forces*.[75] These and other studies enable assessments of SOF's general advantages applicable to relational maneuver effectiveness in irregular warfare.

6. Organizational Design and Open Systems Analysis

The examination of MARSOC's organizational design through open systems analysis employs recognized literature on organizational design and open systems analysis

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[70] Thomas K. Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action*: The Challenge of Unconventional Warfare (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998).

[71] Robinson *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces*, 4.

[72] Susan L. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1997), 252.

[73] Eliot A. Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians: Elite Military Units in Modern Democracies*, Harvard Studies in International Affairs 40 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

[74] Mark Moyar, Oppose Any Foe: The Rise of America's Special Operations Forces, 1st ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

[75] David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York. Columbia University Press, 2007).

primarily from Henry Mintzberg's "Organization Design: Fashion or Fit?,"[76] Richard Daft's *Organization Theory and Design,*[77] and concepts from Retired General Stanley McChrystal's *Team of Teams.*[78] Together, these sources enable an internal analysis of MARSOC's operational elements to determine alignment with relational maneuver and irregular operational environments.

7.   Literature on MARSOC

The academic literature on MARSOC is sparse. To examine MARSOC's organizational design, this study draws from the authors' personal experiences, unpublished official and unofficial organizational documents, limited published articles and books, and the recently published organizational vision, *MARSOF 2030.*[79] Of these sources, the authors' subject matter expertise, interviews with organizational members, and *MARSOF 2030* are the key source documents for analysis. Additional sources that provide MARSOC's primary organizational inputs from the DoD, SOCOM, and the larger Marine Corps will also assist internal organizational analysis.

8.   MARSOC: Applying Relational Maneuver in Irregular Warfare

To produce the ultimate organizational recommendations to MARSOC, this study synthesizes literature across a wide range of subjects, each with its own particular literature. While the breadth of literature is vast regarding broad military and SOF-specific lessons learned in irregular warfare, there is a dearth of literature on how specific SOF organizations can and should implement these lessons to more effectively wage irregular warfare and link tactical and operational effects to strategic outcomes. To fill this gap, this study applies Edward Luttwak's concept of relational maneuver to MARSOC in irregular warfare. To do so, this study constructs a relational maneuver analytical framework,

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[76] Henry Mintzberg, *Organization Design: Fashion or Fit?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review, 1981).

[77] Richard L. Daft, *Organization Theory & Design*, 10th ed. (Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning, 2010).

[78] Stanley A. McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2015).

[79] Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030*.

applicable to analyze any case study or organization interested in or responsible for waging irregular warfare. Lastly, synthesizing the literature that exposes gaps in U.S. military, Marine Corps, and SOF effectiveness in irregular warfare, this study produces an argument that MARSOC should specialize in irregular warfare and applying the tenets of relational maneuver to achieve politically successful outcomes.

D.   METHODS

To produce the ultimate recommendations to MARSOC, this thesis employs a mixed-methods approach to research. The relational maneuver analytical framework enables case study analysis of Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan. Internal analysis of MARSOC employs organizational design theory through open systems analysis to provide organizational recommendations that MARSOC can implement in the present. Finally, interviews of subject matter experts and the authors' personal experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq supplements traditional academic and official literature.

To enable analysis, Chapter II constructs an analytical framework primarily from Luttwak's conceptual principles but also influenced by the range of literature on war, irregular warfare, effectiveness therein, and irregular operational environments. To enable the adaptability that relational maneuver demands to identify and exploit threat vulnerabilities, the analytical framework consists of four primary components. First, relational maneuver demands a deep understanding of the irregular operational environment, including the threat and the threat context. Second, it requires balancing political and violent competition to inform, influence, and implement a unified political-military strategy. Third, relational maneuver entails tailoring internal organizational design, particularly of tasks, structures, and its people, to adapt to the needs of the operational environment. Finally, relational maneuver produces adaptive irregular operational approaches that exploit vulnerabilities within the threat operational environment to reach strategic objectives. The entire process requires constant evolution and adaptation to effectively implement. This analytical framework, constructed in Chapter II, enables external analysis of irregular warfare case studies as well as internal analysis of MARSOC's organizational design.

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To conduct the internal analysis of MARSOC, this study employs recognized and accepted organizational design theory to conduct an open systems analysis of MARSOC's operational units and levels of command. Open systems analysis will focus on how well MARSOC aligns to the principles of relational maneuver to be operationally effective and to directly support strategic outcomes in irregular warfare. The study's analytical framework provides the measures of effectiveness to examine the internal characteristics of MARSOC. Comprehensively, organizational design theory, the defined irregular operational environment, and the relational maneuver analytical framework enable an open systems goals-based approach to assess organizational alignment with irregular operational environments and to determine areas where MARSOC can better apply relational maneuver.

To supplement case study and organizational design analysis, this study also employs interviews of academic subject matter experts and SOF practitioners. These interviews with individuals such as retired Marine Corps Commandant, General A.M. Gray (Ret), USASOC Commander Lieutenant General Charles Cleveland (Ret), current Special Operations Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Freedom (SOJTF-OIR) Commander Major General Patrick Roberson, Major General Ray Smith (Ret), Colonel Gerald Turley (Ret), active duty and retired participants from each case study, current MARSOC organizational leadership, and academic subject matter experts enable insights into the application of relational maneuver in irregular warfare to MARSOC otherwise unavailable. The authors' personal experiences in irregular warfare across the Middle East further supplement application of theory, traditional historical research, and interviews.

E.   RESEARCH STRUCTURE

The remainder of this thesis is broken into three parts and eight chapters modeled after Sun Tzu's conditions for success in war: to know one's enemy and oneself.[80] Part 1: "To Know One's Enemy" contains chapters II through V. Chapter two builds a conceptual foundation for irregular warfare and relational maneuver and constructs the study's

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[80] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 23.

analytical framework. Chapters III through V take this foundation and framework and apply them to Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan. Overall, Part 1 examines the external irregular operational environment, analyzes a variety of irregular threats, and identifies general U.S. military challenges in employing relational maneuver to wage irregular warfare and overcome irregular threats.

Part 2: "To Know Oneself" contains chapters VI and VII. Chapter VI examines SOF relational maneuver advantages in irregular warfare compared to conventional forces. This chapter reveals how SOF are uniquely suited for the complexity, instability, and uncertainty of irregular warfare. Chapter VII then conducts an open systems analysis of MARSOC's operational elements to identify areas to improve organizational alignment with irregular operational environments and to enable the employment of relational maneuver.

Part 3: "Success in Irregular Warfare" contains chapters VIII and IX, which apply the study's analysis to MARSOC. Chapter VIII synthesizes the externally oriented historical case study analysis and the internally oriented organizational design analysis to produce tailored recommendations for MARSOC. Chapter VIII also contains two sections. Section A consolidates the primary overarching challenges inhibiting MARSOC. These challenges are synthesized from the external and internal analysis across case study and organizational analysis and apply across the U.S. military and SOF. Section B then applies these challenges to MARSOC and outlines specific recommendations to overcome these challenges. Altogether, Chapter VIII synthesizes the challenges identified throughout the study and applies recommendations directly to MARSOC. Chapter IX concludes by discussing unexpected discoveries, research disclaimers, and further research to implement conclusions from this study as well as expand into topics that this study's scope did not allow.

F.   SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This study focuses primarily on the U.S. military to provide analytically and historically based organizational recommendations to MARSOC. Since the scope of this study is already large, certain limitations preclude the consideration of some relevant

material. Most importantly, the scope of this project limited the number of relevant case studies to three of the U.S. military's most critical irregular warfare experiences between World War II and the present. This thesis explores each irregular warfare effort broadly especially at the theater-strategic and operational levels of warfare, to include U.S. interagency as well as military efforts to avoid limiting analysis to normative traditional military activities. Because of this broad approach, analysis will remain broad to identify trends within the U.S. military's institutional efforts and deficiencies in applying the principles of relational maneuver to achieve strategic success. Moreover, because this thesis seeks to provide MARSOC organizationally strategic recommendations, analysis primarily focuses on organizations, specifically the U.S. military and MARSOC, and the group level rather than individuals. Certain individuals during analysis, however, will be more thoroughly discussed since their leadership and actions are representative for organizational propensities. This intentional limitation towards individual analysis does not disregard the individual's importance in the U.S. military or within irregular warfare, rather it merely recognizes that strategic success, or failure, in prolonged irregular warfare efforts does not typically occur due a single individuals' competence or failings, but due to teams, groups, and organizations that apply strategy and approaches to achieve success.

Also, this study only explores the role of technology in the most cursory manner. The literature on irregular warfare, especially for the United States, predominantly argues that the U.S. military tends to overly rely on technology in irregular warfare.[81] The same literature argues that the causes of success or failure in irregular warfare lies within the employment of technology, since technology it only as effective as the strategy and approaches that guide its employment. The mere fact that technologically inferior irregular adversaries have defeated materially superior state governments suggests that technology, while important, is often not decisive. Due to time and scope, this study leaves the examination of technologies role in irregular warfare to other research.

Finally, this study will not cover classified material. This gap limits the depth of discussion and analysis of intelligence and clandestine capabilities within the current

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[81] Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy*, 35–38.

environment. An essential element of irregular environments, future research should build on this analysis and carefully examine the conclusions obtained from a sensitive materials perspective. Ultimately, keeping the conclusions declassified will enable the broadest ability to interact with a variety of perspectives and enable thorough and accessible review for implementation by MARSOC leaders and personnel.

G.   CONCLUSION

This introductory chapter outlines the context, purpose of research, literature review, methods, structure, and scope that guide this study. It is critical for MARSOC, SOF, and the U.S. military to closely study the historical and internal challenges that have undermined effectiveness and success in irregular warfare. The most cursory study of the U.S. military's experiences in irregular warfare exposes profound and repetitive challenges since at least the Vietnam conflict. Furthermore, projections of the likely future threats to the United States, whether from revisionists, rogues, or violent extremists, reveal a predominantly irregular future threat environment.

Through studying the theory and history of irregular warfare, and the U.S. military's challenges therein, this thesis seeks to enhance MARSOC's direct organizational contributions to overcoming the challenges associated with irregular warfare. The concept of relational maneuver guides this study. Although it is an old concept to which most U.S. military organizations publicly subscribe, this study indicates that the employment of relational maneuver exists mainly within the traditional domain on physical battlefields. This study argues that physical maneuver on the battlefield represents the most rudimentary element of relational maneuver, and that more sophisticated applications should integrate the intellectual thought, strategy, organizational design, and operational approaches especially necessary to succeed in irregular warfare. Although some reading the 2018 NDS may too narrowly focus on the sections describing the risks that exist for possible direct interstate conflict between the U.S. and a revisionist or rogue competitor, the indisputable fact is that revisionists, rogues, and global and local insurgent VEOs are waging irregular warfare against the United States right now. Part of the global SOF network charged with understanding, confronting, and overcoming the nation's irregular threats, MARSOC can

contribute to this effort by better aligning its organization to the requirements of irregular warfare and better applying the principles of relational maneuver.

PART 1: TO KNOW ONE'S ENEMY

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II. RELATIONAL MANEUVER: AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

> There are some militarists who say: "We are not interested in politics but only in the profession of arms." It is vital that these simple-minded militarists be made to realize the relationship that exists between politics and military affairs. Military action is a method used to attain a political goal. While military affairs and political affairs are not identical, it is impossible to isolate one from the other.
>
> —Mao Tse-tung.[88]

A. INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history, and especially since 1945, the United States has faced numerous irregular warfare threats both directly from irregular non-state groups as well as indirectly from proxies sponsored and supported by other state governments.[89] More generally, analysis of war since 1945 illustrates that insurgent, revolutionary, unconventional, and proxy wars have vastly outnumbered traditional or conventional wars directly between state governments.[90] During the Cold War between the Soviet Union and United States, most interstate military competition occurred within the context of intrastate conflict in locations like Afghanistan, El Salvador, and Vietnam waged by proxies funded or supported by the great powers.[91] This competition and conflict also spilled over into Marxist revolution and, later, Islamic Jihadist global terrorism and insurgency. Current

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[88] Mao Tse-tung, Mao Tse-Tung on Guerrilla Warfare, 89.

[89] Max Boot, Invisible Armies; Max Boot, The Savage Wars of Peace (New York: Basic Books, 2014); Thomas S. Szayna et al., *Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers: An Empirical Assessment of Historical Conflict Patterns and Future Conflict Projections*, Ch. 2; Daniel Moran, ed, "Global Trends and the Future of Warfare 2025," Strategic Insights, special issue 10 (Monterey, CA: Calhoun: The NPS Institutional Archive, 2011), Ch. 10.

[90] Szayna et al., *Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers*; Daniel Moran, ed. "Global Trends and the Future of Warfare 2025"; Kendra Dupuy and Siri Aas Rustad, "Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2017."

[91] Andrew Mumford, "Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict," *The RUSI Journal* 158, no. 2 (April 2013), https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2013.787733.

research and analysis forecast that irregular warfare will continue to be the most prevalent form of war in the foreseeable future.[92]

Although irregular warfare has been pervasive, modern strategists Colin Gray and Edward Luttwak argue that the U.S. military has not effectively waged irregular warfare or produced strategically successful outcomes in irregular operational environments.[93] The status of irregular warfare conflicts across the Middle East supports assertions of military ineffectiveness. While exceptions exist, historical and current military experience across U.S. military irregular warfare efforts indicates that, institutionally, the U.S. military often narrowly and disproportionally focuses on the physical battlefield and equates tactical victories with strategic success. In 1988, Retired Army Colonel and author, Harry Summers, recounted a conversation from 1975: "America's fighting forces did not fail us. 'You know, you never beat us on the battlefield,' I told my North Vietnamese counterpart during negotiations in Hanoi a week before the fall of Saigon. He pondered that remark a moment and then replied, 'That may be so, but it is also irrelevant.'"[94] Colonel Summers relayed this discussion to argue that the U.S. military did "not deserve…[the] blame… for what went wrong there."[95] In Colonel Summers' and Retired General Frederick Weyand's rendition of the Vietnam War, it was the "deep-seated strategic failure: the failure of policy-makers to frame tangible, obtainable goals."[96]

The problem with the narrative as reported by Colonel Summers and General Weyand is that it does not account for the inherently complex political-military character

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[92] National Intelligence Council (U.S.) ed., *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds,* 59–61; Thomas S. Szayna et al., *Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers*, Ch. 4; Daniel Moran, ed. "Global Trends and the Future of Warfare 2025," Ch. 10 and Appendix A; Daniel Coats, "Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community" (Office of the Director of National Intelligence February 13, 2018) https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/congressional-testimonies/item/1845-statement-for-the-record-worldwide-threat-assessment-of-the-us-intelligence-community.

[93] Colin S. Gray "Irregular Warfare: One Nature, Many Characters," 35; Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy*.

[94] Harry G. Summers, Jr., "Interview with General Frederick C. Weyand About the American Troops Who Fought in the Vietnam War," HistoryNet, accessed October 22, 2018, http://www.historynet.com/interview-with-general-frederick-c-weyand-about-the-american-troops-who-fought-in-the-vietnam-war.htm.

[95] Harry G. Summers, Jr., "Interview with General Frederick C. Weyand."

[96] Summers, Jr.

of irregular warfare in general, nor of the complexity in Vietnam specifically. Their narrative seems to assume that the policy makers in Washington possessed a clear picture of the operational environment in Vietnam and suggests that the U.S. military clearly conveyed clear and accurate assessments of that situation as well as proposed strategy and approaches that would achieve U.S. interests. Analysis of the war suggests otherwise and demonstrates that the U.S. military predominantly viewed Vietnam through a traditional warfare lens that advocated either committing unlimited forces or not committing at all.

Presently, it is of great consequence to recognize and acknowledge that in addition to the responsibility that falls on the policy makers for historical failures, the U.S. military bears a substantial burden of responsibility for failing to understand the realities of irregular warfare and adapt its strategy, organizational design, and approaches to achieve success. In irregular warfare, the U.S. military is often the only force with the access, placement, and capabilities to understand the operational environment and to inform, influence, and implement political-military strategy at every level of warfare.

This chapter re-exposes the historically evident truth that the employment of violence cannot unilaterally produce successful strategic outcomes. The U.S. military, institutionally, either does not understand or does not accept this concept or its implications for U.S. military; that in irregular warfare, the U.S. military must engage in direct political competition and employ violence in support of politics. Specifically, the evidence suggests that the U.S. military has not adapted itself properly to understand irregular operational environments; inform, influence, and implement political-military strategy; tailor its task organization to the environment; and ultimately execute the operational approaches required to produce strategic success. Instead, the historic record reveals that the U.S. military institutionally clutches to a predominantly attritional way of war to "close with the enemy and destroy him with fire and maneuver."[97] Some of the most comprehensive examples that reveal the U.S. military's challenges in irregular warfare include the American experiences in Vietnam and El Salvador, and in the ongoing irregular conflict in Afghanistan.

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[97] Summers, Jr.

Framing the historical irregular challenges in present day, the 2018 National Defense Strategy and intelligence projections describe how U.S. peer and regional adversaries, like Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran are pursuing competition "short of armed conflict" and "short of open war" to undermine U.S. interests and global stability.[98] Across places like Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Ukraine, adversarial efforts 'short of open war' interact with irregular warfare operational environments, and state actors, terrorists, insurgents, violent extremist organizations (VEO), and proxies blend together.

Although U.S. adversaries openly seek to take advantage of these irregular operational environments, the U.S. military focuses on preparing for traditional major combat operations against existential peer-revisionist adversaries following periods of irregular warfare.[99] Although the U.S. military *may* confront peer-revisionist adversaries in high-intensity, traditional warfare in the *future*, revisionist, rogue, and non-state actors *are* waging irregular warfare against U.S. interests *now*. Therefore, to succeed now, the U.S. military must reorient its current focus, integrating past insights to inform present-day engagements. Unfortunately, in both historical and current irregular warfare conflicts, the U.S. military has demonstrated institutional "difficulty in adapting what fairly may be termed the traditional American way of war in a manner such that it can be effective against unlike, or asymmetrical, enemies."[100]

Since the general lessons for success in irregular warfare are well documented, the U.S. military's ineffectiveness in waging irregular warfare and producing strategic outcomes is even more concerning and reveals an inability to learn from history and to apply lessons to the present. A mountain of research and this study's authors' experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq expose troubling gaps in the U.S. military's organizational

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[98] Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*, 2.

[99] Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*; "Remarks by Secretary Mattis on the National Defense Strategy" *U.S. Department of Defense Information / FIND* (Jan 19, 2018), https://search.proquest.com/docview/1988978977; BBC News, "US Security Focus 'No Longer Terrorism,'" (January 19, 2018), https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-42752298; Jeff Schogol, "The Next Fight: The Commandant Is Pushing the Corps to Be Ready for a 'Violent, Violent Fight,'" Marine Corps Times (September 18, 2017), https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2017/09/18/the-next-fight-the-commandant-is-pushing-the-corps-to-be-ready-for-a-violent-violent-fight/.

[100] Gray, "Irregular Enemies," 13.

understanding of irregular threats and warfare, a lack of coherent political-military strategy, flawed organizational design, and ineffective implementation of operational irregular warfare approaches. Ineffective employment of Edward Luttwak's principles of relational maneuver is the primary cause of the U.S. military's institutional failures in irregular warfare.

To contribute to the wider effort to improve U.S. military effectiveness, this study holistically examines **how Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) can better implement relational maneuver to wage irregular warfare more effectively and help achieve strategically successful outcomes.** As the newest member of the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), MARSOC's organizational youth and development provide an opportunity to break away from traditional attritional paradigms. To ultimately produce implementable recommendations to MARSOC, this chapter builds a conceptual foundation for war and irregular warfare and produces a relational maneuver analytical framework for further case study and organizational analysis.

The analytical framework identifies four primary components of relational maneuver's application to irregular warfare that enables the adaptation to exploit threat vulnerabilities.[101] Together, these four components comprise a deeper understanding of the requirements to succeed in irregular operational environments. After defining the terms essential to this study, the subsequent section explains relational maneuver's first component: a requirement to deeply understand the relevant threats and their operational environments. The second component builds on this requirement and outlines the necessity of informing, influencing, and implementing coherent political-military strategy to overcome the threat. The third component explores the critical, but often overlooked, role of organizational design to adapt to and overcome irregular threats. This section emphasizes the necessity of appropriately tailoring a U.S. military force to wage irregular warfare in specific irregular environments. Finally, the fourth component investigates the adaptive operational approaches, which includes the use embedded advisors to achieve

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[101] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 335–336.

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success. These four major components require external orientation on known threats to identify weaknesses and strategically adapt to dismantle the adversary's system.

B. CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING: WAR, WARFARE, AND STYLES OF WARFARE

> The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive. — Carl von Clausewitz[102]

Synthesized analysis of Carl von Clausewitz and modern strategists Colin Gray and Edward Luttwak indicates that strategic effectiveness in war depends on conceptually understanding what war is, the differences between traditional and irregular warfare, and the philosophies or styles of waging warfare.[103] To construct the analytical framework that guides this study, this chapter establishes these concepts, exposes the U.S. military's propensity toward attrition warfare, and defines and describes the core components of relational maneuver. For the U.S. military, strategic success in irregular warfare depends on how well it employs the principles of relational maneuver.

1. War

> The probable character and general shape of any war should mainly be assessed in the light of political factors and conditions.

> —Carl von Clausewitz[104]

Carl von Clausewitz provides a well-known definition of war. According to Clausewitz, war is competition in which violent force is used to bend an adversary to one's will.[105] Clausewitz further explains that "war is not merely an act of policy but a true

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[102] Clausewitz, *On War*, 30.

[103] Clausewitz, *On War*; Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*; Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare"; E. N. Luttwak, and S. L. Canby, MINDSET: National Styles in Warfare and the Operational Level of Planning, Conduct and Analysis; Gray, "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters"; Gray, "Irregular Enemies"; Gray, "The Strategist as Hero."

[104] Clausewitz, *On War*, 254.

[105] Clausewitz, *On War*, 13; Gray "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters," 40.

political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means. What remains peculiar to war is simply the peculiar nature of its means."[106] Therefore, organized violence, used for a political purpose, distinguishes war from general political competition. Within Clausewitz's definition of war, all warfare is inherently political regardless of ethnic, religious, or other considerations. In terms of strategy in war, violence is the primary means and the objective is to influence a certain distribution of power. In this sense, the inherent composition of all war includes political and organized violent competition (see Figure 1).

War = Political Competition + Organized Violence

Figure 1. Clauswitzian War

According to Clausewitz, the purpose of war is to achieve political objectives. Cold War–era foreign policy expert Robert Osgood explains that objectives in war can be broken into two simple categories: limited and total war.[107] In total war, the political objective is the complete overthrow and destruction of the enemy's political system and military forces through the mobilization and use of all of a nation's resources. In contrast, the objectives in limited war are less than complete overthrow and destruction without employing all of a nation's resources.[108]

2.   Irregular Warfare, Threats, and the Operational Environment

We think we can improve our understanding of a subject as diffuse and richly varied as irregular warfare and insurgency by hunting for the most precise definition and subdefinitions. The results all too often are official definitions that tend to the encyclopaedic and are utterly indigestible. Or we discover a host of similar terms, each with its subtly distinctive meaning and probably its unique historical and cultural baggage. So, are we talking

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[106] Clausewitz, *On War*, 29.

[107] Robert Endicott Osgood, *Limited War Revisited*, A Westview Special Study (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979) 3.

[108] Osgood, *Limited War Revisited*, 3.

about irregular warfare, insurgency, low-intensity conflict, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and so forth? The answer is yes, and more than those.

—Colin Gray, 2007[109]

The Department of Defense's (DoD) definition of warfare depends on who the participants are, the methods employed, and the targeted political audience. The DoD defines two forms of warfare, traditional and irregular. Traditional warfare is a "form of warfare between the regulated militaries of states, or alliances of states, in which the objective is to defeat an adversary's armed forces, destroy an adversary's war-making capacity, or seize or retain territory in order to force a change in an adversary's government or policies."[110] Joint doctrine defines irregular warfare as a "violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s)."[111] Figure 2 synthesizes doctrinal terminology related to warfare and serves as a roadmap for this section.

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[109] Gray, "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters," 37.

[110] Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare*, 14.

[111] Department of Defense*,* 14.

What	War: Political Competition + Organized Violence to Meet Policy				
Why	Objectives	Description			Remarks
	Total	Complete military and political defeat of the enemy/adversary(s)			-Regime Change -Unconditional Surrender
	Limited	Less than the complete military and political defeat of the enemy/adversary(s)			-To influence or manipulate a given, real or perceived, distribution of power
Who	Actors Level of International Recognition	Type of Warfare	Participants within the Operational Environment	Primary Types of Operations/ Activities	Remarks
	State vs. State	Traditional: Regular/ Conventional /High Intensity	-Enemy -Neutral -Friendly	-Major Combat Operations (MCO) -Security Cooperation: -Security Force Assistance -Bilateral Training	-Can Include supporting Irregular Warfare Operations -Often includes stability operations after completion of MCO -Likely includes all six phases of joint operations -Clear distinctions between war and peace
	State vs. Non-State	Irregular: Low-Intensity /Small Wars	-Enemy -Adversary -Belligerent -Opportunist -Neutral -Friendly	Stabilization Operations: -FID/COIN -Unconventional Warfare -Security Force Assistance -Terrorism/ Counterterrorism -Guerilla Warfare	-Can include Major Combat Operations -Often Includes Hybrid Warfare -Murky Gray Zone between Peace and War -May only include one or more phases of a joint operation -Fragmented Political Landscape -Blurred separation between political competition violent violence -Often Includes Proxy Warfare
	Mix of Multiple States and or Non-States				
How	Forms of Competition in Warfare	Employment within the Levels of Warfare			Remarks
	Violent Competition	Use	Direct: Offense/Defense		-Main Effort in Traditional Warfare -Supporting Effort in Irregular Warfare
			Indirect: Assist Partners		
		Threat of Use: Deter - Compel			
	Political (non-violent) Competition	Information	Diplomacy/Negotiations/ Persuade		-In Traditional Warfare, Political Competition takes place primarily at the strategic level of warfare -In Irregular Warfare, Political Competition takes place at all levels of warfare
			Psychological/Manipulate		
			Intelligence Collection		
		Economic	Sanctions		
			Trade		
Where	Domains	Physical-Geographic, Information-Cognitive Cyber-Electromagnetic, etc			-Depends on each specific Operational Environment
	Geographic Area of interest	Global, Regional, Local-Intra State			
	Levels of Warfare	Strategic, Operational, Tactical			

Figure 2. Framework of Warfare[112]

Currently, U.S. military doctrine categorizes the internationally recognized groups that wage war as either state or non-state actors. In traditional warfare, the participants are state actors and warfare occurs between 'regulated militaries.' In irregular warfare, however, the participants are more nebulous and broadly defined to include both state and non-state actors. The inclusion of non-state actors opens the spectrum of participants to

112 Adapted from Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Joint Doctrine Library," accessed October 22, 2018, http://www.jcs.mil/Doctrine/DoD-Terminology/; Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Stability*; Department of the Navy, *Warfighting*.; Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare*.

forces outside of regulated militaries and can include conventional, special operations, and paramilitary or irregular forces.[113]

The modes and methods of waging war also differentiates traditional and irregular warfare. In traditional warfare, conventional forces primarily conduct major combat operations, campaigns, and battles to "defeat an adversary's armed forces, destroy an adversary's war-making capacity, or seize or retain territory."[114] In contrast, the methods characteristic of irregular warfare are nebulous and violent, aiming to influence targeted populations.[115] Joint doctrine further specifically describes irregular warfare as "a deviation from the traditional form of warfare where actors may use non-traditional methods such as guerrilla warfare, terrorism, sabotage, subversion, criminal activities, and insurgency for control of relevant populations."[116] As opposed to more clearly defined traditional warfare methods, irregular warfare subsumes an eclectic and unregulated mix of nontraditional and traditional tactics and activities.

As with the participants and the methods, the targeted political audience is significantly more nebulous in irregular warfare than in traditional warfare. In traditional warfare, the targeted audience is a clearly defined state government and its regulated military. In irregular warfare, the target audience(s) are relevant populations whose role completely depends the war's unique set of circumstances and may include a diverse array of participating state governments and non-state terrorist, insurgent, religious, ethnic, or other relevant political groups. The current joint doctrinal stability publication, JP 3–07, provides six categories of irregular warfare participants: enemies, adversaries, belligerents, opportunists, neutrals, and friendlies.[117] Joint doctrine explains that these categories are often difficult to distinguish and evolve over time. Whereas traditional warfare contains

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[113] Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Joint Doctrine Library."

[114] Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare,* 14.

[115] Department of Defense*,* 14.

[116] Department of Defense, 14.

[117] Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Stability*, III-15.

clearly defined political audiences at the level of state governments, the relevant populations in irregular warfare can be challenging to identify and categorize.

Regardless of the classification of warfare, state and non-state actors in traditional and irregular warfare both employ violence and political competition to wage war. Therefore, as Colin Gray explains, the nature of war remains the same, but the character can radically differ based on the participants, modes and methods of warfare, as well as the targeted political audience.[118] Political competition outside of war includes the use of information—through diplomacy and psychological manipulation—and economics—through trade, sanctions, and assistance—and potentially deterrence, the threat of violence to achieve objectives. Inside war, all the same tools of political competition exist, but war also includes the use of organized violence to achieve either limited or total political goals.

Finally, the character of war has also changed due to technological innovations. Warfare can occur across all domains of time and space (e.g., physical and cognitive) at the doctrinal tactical, operational, and strategic levels.[119] Technological advancements in transportation, communications, and weaponry have caused the operational environment to expand the number of available domains, expanded war's physical and cognitive effects over time, and compressed leaders' time for decisions. The same factors have also increasingly pushed the traditional strategic level of warfare down toward the tactical level of warfare due to the proliferation of information and economic tools of competition formerly reserved for state governments.[120]

a.   *The Operational Environment: Determining the Kind of Threat*

As Clausewitz explains, it is imperative for policy makers and senior military leaders to determine the "kind of war on which they are embarking."[121] Clausewitz further explains that correct determination requires recognizing war as an "instrument of policy"

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[118] Gray "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters," 39–40.

[119] Department of the Navy, *Warfighting*, 28–32.

[120] Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*.

[121] Clausewitz, *On War*, 30.

and understanding the motivations and root causes of the war.[122] The way the U.S. military determines the kind of war and against whom, how, and where the violent and political competition will occur is through understanding the operational environment. Joint doctrine defines the operational environment as the "composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander."[123] The operational environment contains all considerations globally, regionally, and locally of threat, neutral, and friendly forces that will impact a war and the accomplishment of U.S. political and military objectives across all physical and cognitive domains (See Figure 3).
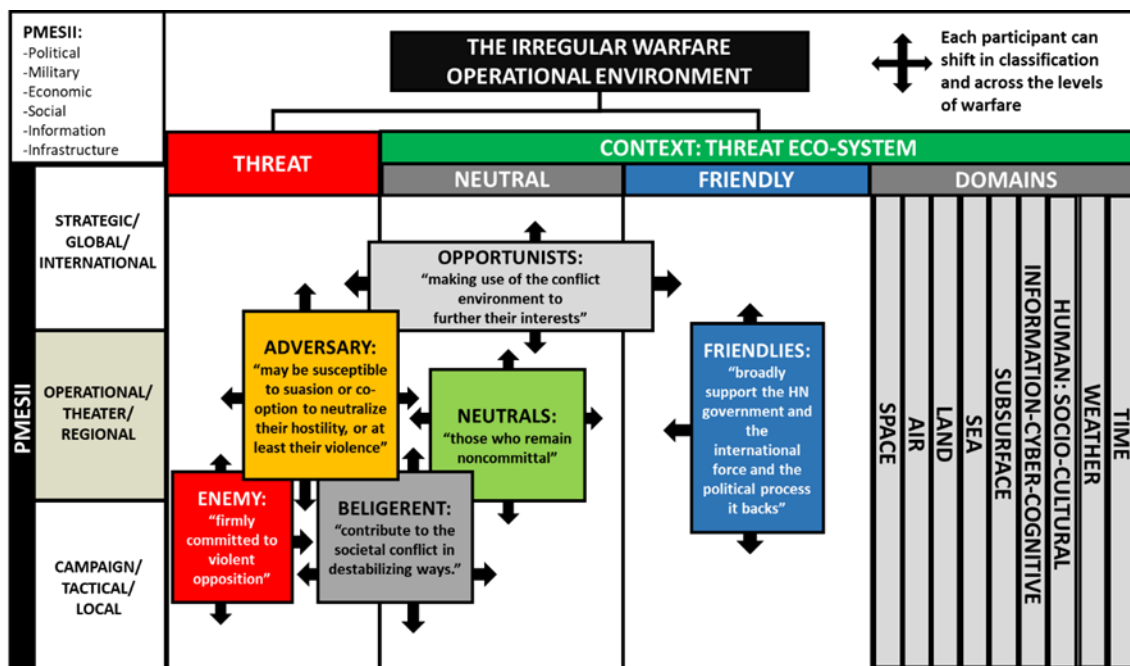
Figure 3. The Operational Environment[124]

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[122] Clausewitz, *On War*, 30.

[123] Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Joint Doctrine Library," 173.

[124] Adapted from Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Stability*; Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment.

Joint Publication 3–25, *Countering Threat Networks,* explains that "there are three general types of networks found within an operational area: friendly, neutral, and hostile/ threat networks."[125] Doctrine further expounds that these networks evolve and that "for a threat network to survive political, economic, social, and military pressures, it must adapt to those pressures."[126] These networks become complex, dynamic, and ambiguous across enemy, adversary, belligerent, opportunist, neutral, and friendly participants, especially in irregular warfare, which includes state actors and ill-defined non-state organizations and groups.

The way to assess the traditional or irregular character of a threat is to understand the operational environment in relation to U.S. interests. Traditional threats are limited to interstate competitions between state militaries.[127] History exposes that this form of warfare, strictly defined, is seldom found in war. Even a war such as World War II, predominantly characterized by traditional warfare between the great powers, included numerous irregular warfare efforts across Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and the China and Southeast Asia theater of operations.[128] Conversely, an irregular warfare conflict, such as the American war in Vietnam, can include significant elements of traditional warfare. The Viet Cong's (VC) main force units and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) in Vietnam would often fight in traditional or irregular ways depending on the year and phase of the war. This mix-and-match of warfare methods and the types of actors involved is often defined as hybrid warfare.[129] Given the trend toward irregular warfare, most threats in the modern era can best be characterized as irregular threats that utilize hybrid characteristics of both traditional and irregular warfare.

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[125] Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Countering Threat Networks*, JP 3–25 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2016) xi.

[126] Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Countering Threat Networks*, x.

[127] Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare,* 14.

[128] Williamson Murray and Allen Reed Millett, *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 406–409, 454,488–493, 551–552.

[129] Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor, *Hybrid Warfare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Joint doctrine also provides an analytical framework to understand the internal considerations that comprise each participant in an operational environment. The political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure (PMESII) characteristics of the operational environment form this framework, which sheds light on the relevant threat and threat eco-system, including neutral and friendly participants, that allows the threat to exist and develop. Analysis of the operational environment and relevant networks must encompass all participants at all levels of warfare and across all domains.
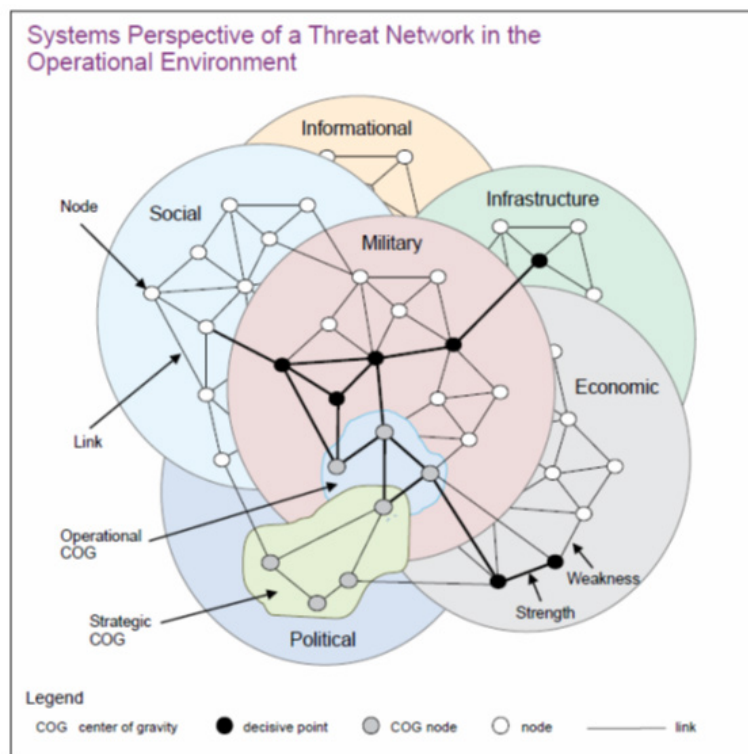
Figure 4. PMESII[130]

Based on the inherent complexity and uncertainty within war, a PMESII analysis should constantly reassess and evolve, since the operational environment is not static and participants will adapt based on the conflictual pressures on their perceived interests and ultimate individual, group, or national physical and ideological survival. Since war

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[130] Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Countering Threat Networks,* I8.

typically contains both traditional and irregular elements of warfare, warfare is better thought of as a spectrum of conflict rather than in binary categories. Figure 4 depicts PMESII's relationship to the operational environment as the sub-elements that compose a threat network. Joint Doctrine depicts this spectrum across the range of military options between peace and war, seen in Figure 5.[131]

Figure 5. Operations across the Spectrum of Conflict[132]

b. The Character of Irregular Warfare: Politics at all Levels of Warfare

Synthesizing joint doctrine and historical analysis of strategy and irregular warfare, the U.S. military primarily distinguishes the irregular operational environment from the traditional operational environment by four interactive variables.[133] These variables

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[131] Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Operations*, V-4.

[132] Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Operations*, V-4.

[133] Callwell, *Small Wars*; Lord, "The Role of the United States in Small Wars;" Gray "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters; Gray, "Irregular Enemies;" Taber, *War of the Flea*; United States Marine Corps. *Small Wars Manual*; Trinquier, *Modern Warfare a French view of Ccounterinsurgency*; Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare;" And Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*; John A. Nagl *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Paperback ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964); Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung: On Protracted War* (Beijing, China: Foreign Languages Press, 1967); Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Counterinsurgency,* JP 3–24 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018); Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Stability Operations*; Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Unconventional Warfare*, JP 3–05.1 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2015); Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Foreign Internal Defense*, JP 3–22 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2010); Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment*, JP 2–01.3 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014).

include: 1) complex and dynamic political competition between participants and networks; 2) employment of irregular methods; 3) the level of direct threat to national, or group, vital interests; and 4) uncertain information. The consolidated interaction between these four variables requires an externally attuned understanding of the irregular operational environment that only relational maneuver can provide. The four primary variables of the irregular operational environment produce important implications for the U.S. military in irregular warfare.

(1) Complex and Dynamic Political Competition

The potentially immense number of political groups and networks in irregular warfare creates complex and dynamic political competition between participants in fragmented irregular warfare conflicts, such as Vietnam between 1954–1975, El Salvador 1979-1992, and Afghanistan between 2001–2018, relevant political actors and networks spanned individual villages, tribes, subtribes, clans, ethnicities, religions, political affiliations, and state governments. The sheer number of political actors and their dynamic interaction create complexity and challenges that impede understanding and identifying proper objectives and solutions.

(2) Irregular Methods

Joint doctrine explains that irregular warfare includes "non-traditional methods such as guerrilla warfare, terrorism, sabotage, subversion, criminal activities, and insurgency for control of relevant populations."[134] This irregularity in methods is related to disparities in material strength between the irregular forces, such as terrorist or insurgent groups, and state governments, which normally possess regulated militaries and police forces.[135] Terrorists and insurgents often employ irregular tactics because they do not have the human and material strength to operate in a traditional manner; or, in the case of a proxy warfare effort such as the U.S. unconventional warfare support to the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan in the 1980s, a nation state may use irregular methods to weaken an adversarial

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[134] Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare*, 14.

[135] Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, 153.

state without provoking a direct traditional warfare confrontation.[136] In either case, for a state or non-state actor with limited or unlimited objectives, the disparities in material strength and reduced risk of traditional warfare incentivize the use of irregular methods.

Although participants in irregular warfare employ irregular and hybrid modes, participants also employ traditional or conventional warfare. Mao Tse-tung explains in *On Protracted War* that his ultimate political objective in China was to mobilize political and military support so that, in his third phase (the "strategic counteroffensive"), Chinese forces would employ traditional "mobile" and "positional" warfare to defeat the Japanese.[137] Moreover, military historians Williamson Murray and Peter Mansoor reveal in *Hybrid Warfare* the prevalence of mixing traditional and irregular forms of warfare throughout history.[138]

The history of irregular warfare also reveals, however, what happens when irregular forces improperly employ traditional forms of warfare against a materially stronger government force. Robert Taber's history of insurgency and guerrilla warfare, *War of the Flea,* describes how communist insurgents in Greece in the late 1940s fatally decided to employ traditional forms of warfare by holding and seizing terrain rather than employing previously successful forms of guerrilla warfare.[139] Exposed to the materially stronger government forces, the communist insurgency was quickly crushed by the government through traditional attritional firepower and maneuver. Similarly, in 1968 the communist Viet Cong (VC) insurgency in South Vietnam massed forces during the Tet offensive to seize and hold key terrain across South Vietnam. As in Greece, the South Vietnamese and U.S. military crushed the VC uprising and virtually destroyed the active guerrilla forces across South Vietnam.[140] Unlike Greece, however, the military defeat of the VC also

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[136] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, Penguin Politics Current Events (London: Penguin Books, 2005).

[137] "Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung: On Protracted War*, 193.

[138] Murray and Mansoor, *Hybrid Warfare*.

[139] Taber, *War of the Flea*, 142–147.

[140] Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 137.

achieved a decisive political victory in the communist effort to force the U.S. to end their support for South Vietnam.[141]

Political scientist Ivan Arreguín-Toft argues that strategic interactions between strong and weak actors determine the outcome of wars.[142] He contends that asymmetric strategic approaches favor the weaker actor while symmetrical approaches favor the stronger actor. This asymmetry, he suggests, contributed to the United States' defeat in Vietnam, where the "the U.S. military could never reconcile itself to the demands of a COIN war" to combat the communist's irregular asymmetric strategy in South Vietnam.[143] Together, the importance of irregular and asymmetric methods differentiate irregular warfare from traditional warfare.

(3)   Level of Threat to U.S. Vital Interests

Because of asymmetries in power in the current global environment, irregular warfare operational environments tend to threaten U.S. vital interests more indirectly than traditional warfare.[144] In his article, "The Role of the United States in Small Wars," political scientist Carnes Lord argues that the United States faces three types of threats to its national security interests: "direct threats to the United States itself and to its citizens and assets abroad; threats to the security and well-being of its allies and friends; and threats to world order."[145] He asserts that small, irregular, wars are mostly confined to the most indirect level of threat, those against the world order. Even for terrorist threats such as al Qaeda, who do directly threaten U.S. citizens and assets, the threat is not existential in comparison to a nuclear state actor, such as China or Russia.

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[141] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 717.

[142] Ivan Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict."

[143] Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 120–121.

[144] Carnes Lord, "The Role of the United States in Small Wars." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 541, no. 1 (September 1995), 90–97, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716295541001006.

[145] Lord, "The Role of the United States in Small Wars," 97.

In line with Lord's analysis of the relationship between irregular warfare and U.S. vital interests, author Andrew Mack argues that asymmetry in interests and willpower was the determining factor in the U.S. loss in Vietnam.[146] Whereas the communist forces in South Vietnam faced a war of survival directly against North Vietnam's vital interests and total political objectives, the U.S. faced an indirect threat to the global order and against a questionable ally in South Vietnam as part of the Containment Strategy limiting the expansion of Communism from China and the Soviet Union.[147] This asymmetry in interests and willpower made the U.S. effort in Vietnam vulnerable due to the great expenditure of human and material resources incommensurate to the level of the threat to U.S. interests. Therefore, as Lord and Mack explain, irregular threats to U.S. interests are generally more indirect and uncertain than traditional warfare threats. The interrelation between the level of threat to U.S. interests, its associated impact on national willpower, and connected uncertainty imply that the United States, and its military, should pursue objectives while not overspending beyond the level of national interests and commensurate willpower.

(4)   Uncertain Operational Environments

Political complexity and instability, irregular methods, and indirectness of the threat to U.S. interests create highly uncertain irregular operational environments. Because of the number of political actors and their dynamic interaction between state and non-state groups, the political objectives and factors influencing the political decision making are uncertain. Within Afghanistan's operational environment between 2002 and 2018, the threat network has included a wide range of interconnected groups. These groups have included hardline al Qaeda enemies, a range of Taliban-led and affiliated adversaries, proxies from Pakistan and Iran who have acted as opportunists, belligerents, or outright adversaries, local warlord and criminal opportunists, and the local neutral population that

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[146] Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics* 27, no. 02 (January 1975), https://doi.org/10.2307/2009880.

[147] Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars," 181-186.

have acted in opportunist, belligerent, neutral, or friendly ways to ensure their own survival.

Together these factors produce uncertainty regarding the status of individual and group participation and political objectives. This uncertainty inhibits the U.S. military from holding relevant groups politically accountable and opens opportunities for third-party proxy warfare and exploitation. While the status and objectives for clearly defined enemies and friendly forces, such as al Qaeda and NATO coalition partners in Afghanistan, are clear, the status and objectives for the majority of the participants in Afghanistan are uncertain and blend together. This uncertainty in identifying political groups and their intentions makes it difficult to use political and violent force to bend those groups to U.S. policy objectives. How can the U.S. directly, or indirectly through local partner forces, influence or coerce indigenous groups if the U.S. cannot properly identify or understand them? Uncertainty, in turn, allows outside state and non-state groups to exploit the operational environment according to their own political objectives. This use of proxy warfare to exploit national interests is illustrated by the U.S. covert effort to assist the Mujahedeen in the Soviet-Afghan war during the 1980s, the Soviet and Chinese assistance to North Vietnam between the 1960s and 1970s, and current Iranian efforts within Iraq and Syria.

In addition to the uncertainty obscuring identification of the relevant political actors, the internal factors influencing political decisions among the participants are also uncertain. Joint Doctrine's PMESII framework can assist in determining the primary factors influencing political decision-making in irregular warfare. Each relevant state and non-state political group has its own internal set of factors that influence its political decision-making, including political, military (control of violence), economic, social, information, and infrastructure components.

c.   *Implications of the Irregular Operational Environment*

The uncertain character of the irregular warfare environment produces several important implications. First, and most importantly, as the body of doctrine, academic research, and experience in irregular warfare illustrate, political and violent competition

occurs at every level of warfare.[148] The uncertainty regarding the relevant participants prevents easy identification of who is part of the threat network and how violence, information, and economics can be used to achieve success. Even more fundamental, in irregular warfare it is unclear which groups can and will align with U.S. objectives and which participants will undermine or compete against U.S. objectives. U.S. Joint Doctrine, illustrated in Figure 6, effectively depicts how irregular threat networks include violent and political competition across all levels of warfare.[149]
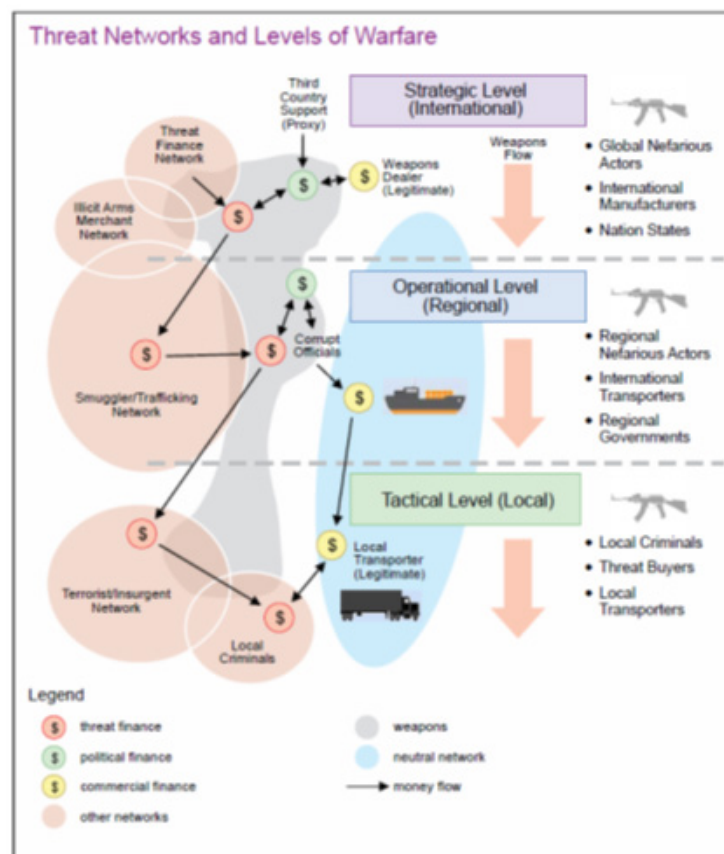
Figure 6. Political and Violent Competition at All Levels of
Irregular Warfare[150]

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[148] Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*; Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Countering Threat Networks*.

[149] Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Countering Threat Networks*, I6.

[150] Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Countering Threat Networks*, I6.

Unlike traditional warfare, where political competition is confined to the strategic interaction between state governments, irregular warfare requires political, non-violent interaction with local tribal, ethnic, religious, military, criminal and other political leaders to determine how to meet political objectives and employ violence to reach those objectives. In irregular operational environments in Afghanistan and Iraq over the last two decades, political and military competition has blended together to the point where it becomes indistinguishable. Commonly, local political leaders across Afghanistan, ostensibly part of, or aligned to, the Afghan Government, have employed violence directly against the government or U.S. forces as a negotiation tactic to better support that group's or leader's political-economic interests within a region.[151] This blend of political and violent competition is not unique and has reoccurred in irregular warfare throughout history.[152] By the nature of an irregular threat's complex local, regional, global social-political context, military violence will often not decisively achieve the ultimate political objective. Instead, as depicted in Figure 7, irregular warfare requires meshing violent and political competition at all levels of warfare.[153]

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[151] Stephen S. Evans, *U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare, 1898–2007: Anthology and Selected Bibliography* (Marine Corps University Press, 2008), 250–252, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015075667066.

[152] Christopher Paul et al., *Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013).

[153] Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*.
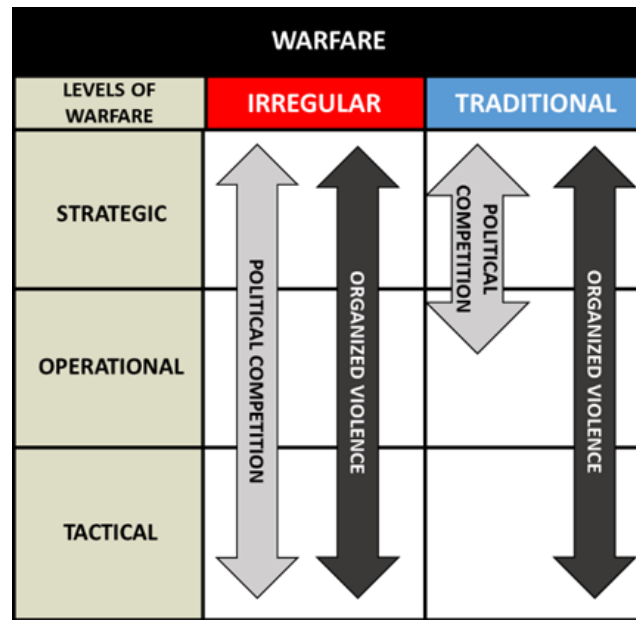
Figure 7. Political Competition across All Levels of Warfare in
Irregular Warfare

The second implication, in addition to political competition at all levels of warfare,
of the uncertainty of irregular operational environments is that it increases the political
restraints on the use of U.S. military violence. This restraint does not apply to all nations
in irregular warfare, or even the United States in the Indian Wars of the 19th Century, in
which indiscriminate violence was often prevalent.[154] In the modern era, however, in
Afghanistan and Iraq, significant constraints contained in the Rules of Engagement (ROE)
are intended to prevent unnecessary harm to non-combatants. In irregular warfare, where
control and influence of relevant populations determine success, reducing unintended
indigenous casualties is vital, whereas indiscriminate violence is considered immoral,
violates the internationally recognized law of war, and undermines the legitimacy of the
U.S. political-military effort.[155] The history of U.S. wars since World War II supports the
assertion that political constraints restricting violence tend to be higher in irregular warfare

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[154] Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1977), Ch. 8.

[155] Edward N. Luttwak, "Dead End: Counterinsurgency Warfare as Military Malpractice. (Essay)." *Harper's Magazine* 314, no. 1881 (February 2007), 40–42; Office of General Council Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Law of War Manual* (December 2016).

than in traditional warfare. At one extreme, during World War II, the U.S. faced clear enemies that directly threatened U.S. vital interests, and the U.S. military employed firebombing and nuclear weapons that produced indiscriminate harm against non-combatants. On the other end of the spectrum, during the U.S. assistance to El Salvador during the 1980s and early 1990s, the U.S. government restricted its military efforts to non-combat advising and financial and political assistance. In between these two extremes, illustrated in Figure 8, lies a spectrum of restrictions on the employment of violence closely related to the characteristics of traditional versus irregular warfare.
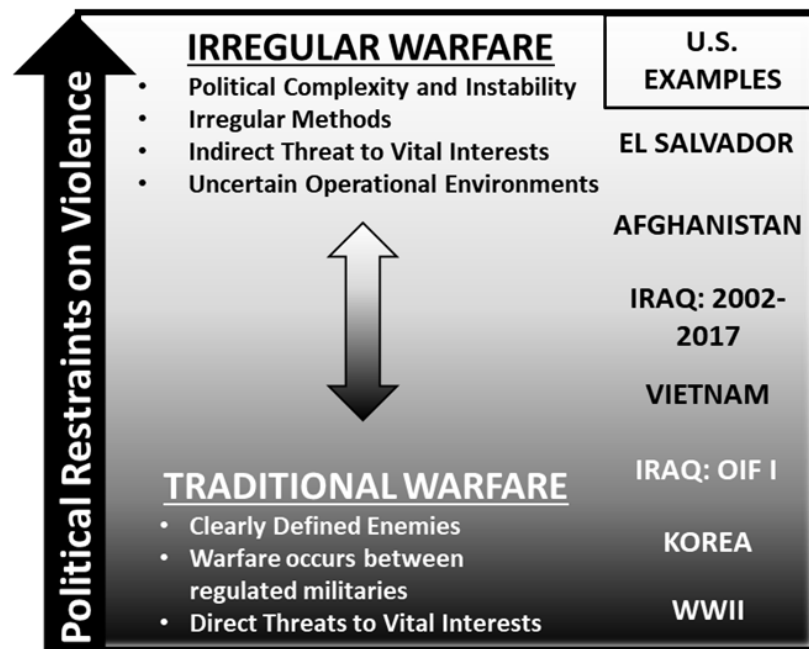
Figure 8. Political Restraint on the Use of Violence in U.S. Wars

Third, irregular warfare operational environments are conducive to proxy warfare and exploitation by both state and non-state actors. The uncertainty in these environments often allow outside states and groups to provide assistance or engage in overt and covert methods to influence the conflict according to their own interests and to the detriment of their adversaries. Political scientist Andrew Mumford explains that proxy warfare allows a state or group to pursue its interests while reducing the risks of direct escalation with an

adversary as well as the risk of expending more human and material resources than national interests warrant.[156] Modern irregular warfare environments in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria readily expose these tendencies and opportunities to exploit uncertain operational environments.

Fourth, and lastly, uncertainty in irregular warfare elevates the importance of understanding the threat eco-system more than in traditional warfare. C.E. Callwell's classic study *Small Wars* and the USMC 1940 *Small Wars Manual* both explain that small, irregular, wars occur in inherently unique, complex, and uncertain operational environments.[157] They further explain that the "fundamental causes of the condition of unrest may be economic, political, or social" and require close study and "knowledge of the theater of war" to identify the political solution as well as the political and military path to reach that solution.[158] The requirement to study and understand the context of the threat's eco-system, which allows or exacerbates the threat to U.S. interests, is greater than in traditional warfare, where the contextual understanding focuses on the state actor and its regulated military forces.

3. Styles of Warfare: Attrition and Relational Maneuver

Those that seek to practice relational maneuver must subordinate their own preferences to develop whatever capabilities they believe can best exploit enemy weaknesses.

—Edward Luttwak, 2001[159]

Edward Luttwak explains that, independent of who wages warfare, two opposing conceptual styles, or philosophies, of warfare exist: attrition and relational maneuver.[160] Fundamentally, attrition warfare is an inward-looking style of warfare that seeks to enhance organizational capabilities independent of knowledge of the threat or its operational

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[156] Mumford, "Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict."

[157] Callwell, *Small Wars*; Ronald Schaffer, *Small Wars Manual*.

[158] Ronald Schaffer, *Small Wars Manual*, 15; Callwell, *Small Wars*, 43–44.

[159] Luttwak, *Strategy*, 117.

[160] Luttwak, Ch. 7.

environment. Conversely, relational maneuver is fundamentally an externally focused philosophy of warfare that depends on understanding the operational environment to identify threat vulnerabilities and to enable systematic exploitation and success. In reality, both styles of warfare are theoretical and do not exist in their pure abstract form.[161] Luttwak clarifies that attrition warfare best suits a materially superior force confronting a weaker force on the traditional battlefield, while relational maneuver best suits the requirements of irregular warfare or a materially weaker force.[162]

a. *Attrition Warfare and the Traditional American Way of War*

Modern strategists Edward Luttwak and Colin Gray argue that the United States military employs a predominantly attrition style of warfare.[163] Edward Luttwak explains that "attrition warfare is industrial warfare [in which the] enemy is an array of targets [and] victory is achieved through superior destructive firepower and material strength."[164] In attrition warfare, "process replaces the art of war."[165] The operational environment matters little except to identify where the enemy is so that mass and firepower can destroy the target. Since the enemy is reduced to targets, its capabilities can be understood based on technical ranges and lethality of its weapon systems.

Trench warfare during World War I and General Dwight Eisenhower's "broad front" approach during World War II provide excellent examples of the application of attritional warfare.[166] In these examples, Luttwak argues that great powers in World War I and the United States in World War II on the western front primarily chose to employ a strategy and operational approach that sought to overwhelm the enemy strength with mass

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[161] Luttwak, 116–117.

[162] Luttwak, *Strategy;* Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare."

[163] Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance"; Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy*. Gray's descriptions of the U.S. military way of war aligns with Luttwak's definition of attritional warfare.

[164] Luttwak, *Strategy*, 113–114.

[165] Luttwak, 113–114.

[166] Luttwak, 114.

and firepower directly rather than identify and exploit vulnerabilities and weaknesses within the threat system.

Colin Gray's more recent assessment of the predominant American way of war also suggests that the United States employs an attrition style of warfare more readily suited toward traditional warfare.[167] Attrition warfare fits relatively well with the traditional concept of warfare where the outcome of the war is primarily decided by the military on the battlefield. Some battlefield maneuver may occur, but this maneuver is relegated to traditional employment of military violence. The political competition in traditional warfare occurs primarily at the strategic level, where senior military leadership, such as the Secretary of Defense and Joints Chiefs, advise and plan with the National Security Council and President.

Colin Gray argues that the U.S. military primarily views military force as apolitical and argues that the U.S. military "has shown a persisting strategy deficit."[168] The American military's prevailing apolitical mindset determines that war occurs once political diplomacy has failed.[169] Once war occurs, this view claims that politics should take a "backseat" and allow the military to set the conditions for negotiations to occur from a better position of advantage.[170] This perspective may align with traditional warfare, in which political competition occurs primarily at the strategic level of warfare, but it defies the political character of irregular threats and warfare.[171]

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[167] Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy;* Gray, "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters."

[168] Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy,* 5.

[169] Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy,* 5.

[170] Gray, "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters," 44.

[171] Gray, "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters," 44.

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1. Apolitical                       8. Large-scale
2. Astrategic                       9. Aggressive, offensive
3. Ahistorical                     10. Profoundly regular
4. Problem-solving, optimistic     11. Impatient
5. Culturally challenged           12. Logistically excellent
6. Technology dependent            13. Highly sensitive to casualties
7. Focused on firepower
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Figure 9. Colin Gray's Characteristics of the American Way of War[172]

Strategy occurs by linking political-diplomatic, economic, information, and military power projection methods to meet national interests and political objectives.[173] The predominant U.S. military conception of strategy seeks to narrowly apply military force, while avoiding the political and economic challenges, or integrating the effects of military force to achieve political objectives.[174] While applicable to traditional interstate military threats, bifurcating the military and other means of power projection in irregular warfare is doomed to fail in irregular operational environments. In irregular warfare, the political character of the operational environment includes the contextual social, economic, and military distributions of power, and relegates the military component as merely one of several supporting efforts.[175]

Colin Gray's descriptive list of America's way of war, displayed in Figure 9, aligns with Luttwak's definition of attrition warfare.[176] In addition to Gray's descriptions, Luttwak also adds that the U.S. attritional way of war prioritizes attention on internal administration and bureaucracy.[177] This rigid bureaucratic way of war further inhibits external study and learning requisite to adaptation in irregular warfare. While all of Gray's points apply to the difficulties in confronting irregular threats, at the heart of this attritional American way of war articulated by both Gray and Luttwak lies an internally focused

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[172] Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy,* 30.

[173] Source: Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy,* 23–24.

[174] Gray; Colin Gray, "The Strategist as Hero."

[175] Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy,* 22–23; Callwell, *Small Wars*, 42; Schaffer, *Small Wars Manual*, 15; Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*, 6.

[176] Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy,* 30; Luttwak, *Strategy*, 113–114.

[177] Luttwak "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 337–339.

military largely devoid of strategic perspective outside of military considerations and limited in its ability to adapt to highly uncertain irregular operational environments.[178]

As the next chapters' series of case studies reveal, the U.S. military's overall propensity toward an inwardly-oriented style of attrition warfare is not effective in waging irregular warfare in politically complex and uncertain operational environments. Edward Luttwak explains that effectively confronting complexity, instability, and uncertainty in irregular warfare demands an externally oriented style of warfare that can understand and adapt to the operational environment.[179]

4.   Relational Maneuver: An Analytical Framework

The guerilla thus is a relational maneuver response to superior strength.

— Edward Luttwak, 2001[180]

The core of relational maneuver is adaption. "Manoeuvre [sic] describes 'relational' action—that is, action guided by a close study of the enemy and *of his* way of doing things—where the purpose is to muster some localized or specialized strength against the identified points of weakness of an enemy that may have superiority overall."[181] Comparing this style of warfare to the complexity and uncertainty of irregular warfare, it is easy to understand why, short of extermination of entire populations, attrition warfare will not resolve politically complex and uncertain environments that require nuanced understanding to recognize and exploit threat vulnerabilities through politics and the use of violence. Luttwak further explains that "in relational maneuver, as in attrition, the goal is to incapacitate enemy weapons, structures or forces—or indeed the whole enemy entity, but in a radically different way: instead of cumulative destruction, the desired process is systemic disruption—where the 'system,' may be the whole array of armed forces, some

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[178] Gray "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters"; Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy*;" Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance," 57–58.

[179] Luttwak "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 336–337.

[180] Luttwak, *Strategy*, 153.

[181] Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance," 57–58.

fraction thereof or indeed technical systems."[182] Essentially, relational maneuver does not seek to overwhelm the enemy through mass; rather, it overwhelms the enemy through identifying, adapting, and exploiting threat vulnerabilities.[183]

While a materially stronger adversary can choose between attrition or relational maneuver styles of warfare, human and material asymmetries in irregular warfare naturally force the weaker actor to employ relational maneuver. Luttwak even goes so far as to say that "the guerilla thus is a relational maneuver response to superior strength."[184] If the weaker adversary chooses to place strength directly against strength in an attritional contest, disaster will likely result, as evidenced by Greece in the 1940s, the VC during the Tet Offensive in 1968, or, more recently, Saddam Hussein conventionally confronting the U.S. and coalition militaries during both Operation Desert Storm and during the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Although others have described similar concepts, Luttwak provides the best explanation of the principles of relational maneuver as well as their application to irregular warfare. The most original maneuver theorist was likely Sun Tzu, who famously stated that success depends on knowing your enemy as well as yourself.[185] Sun Tzu further advocated for a way of war that exploited weakness both militarily and politically to succeed.[186] More recently, the United States Marine Corps (USMC) published Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 (MCDP 1) *Warfighting*, which builds on the theories of Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, and Luttwak to operationalize the concepts of maneuver. While USMC maneuver warfare is rooted in its conceptual nature, in practice the Marine Corps mostly focuses maneuver against traditional military threats.[187] Most recently, the United States Army Special

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[182] Luttwak and Canby, *MINDSET: National Styles in Warfare*, 5.

[183] Luttwak and Canby*, MINDSET: National Styles in Warfare,* 16–17; Department of the Navy, *Warfighting*, 45–48.

[184] Luttwak, *Strategy*, 153.

[185] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 23.

[186] Sunzi trans. by Thomas F. Cleary, *The Art of War* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1988), 67–69 and 128–129.

[187] Department of the Navy, *Warfighting*, 49, 73–76; Neller, *Message to the Force 2018: "Execute,"* 3.

Operations Command (USASOC) also published their own concept, "Cognitive Maneuver," that emphasizes the human and conceptual nature of maneuvering to defeat an enemy.[188] While each of these concepts outline critical components of maneuver, Luttwak's relational maneuver most comprehensively encapsulates the way of thinking necessary for overcoming irregular threats both physically and conceptually.

As opposed to other descriptions of maneuver, relational maneuver requires four primary components that represent the most holistic conceptual understanding of adaptive maneuver in irregular warfare: 1) developing an externally focused deep understanding of the operational environment; 2) developing and implementing a political-military strategy based on a deep understanding of the operational environment; 3) properly adapting internal organizational design to confront that environment; and 4) implementing adaptive operational approaches to exploit threat vulnerabilities. Listed in numerical order, this process should be considered cyclical and interactive rather than linear, though the two most important elements are understanding and adaptability. All other components are biproducts thereof to exploit external opportunities and protect internal friendly force vulnerabilities.

The contextually unique complexity, instability, and uncertainty of irregular warfare operational environments requires equally unique and dynamic style of warfare. Short of unacceptable, illegal and immoral, genocidal attritional approaches, strategic success in irregular warfare depends on the employment of relational maneuver. As Figure 10 depicts, in irregular warfare, strategic success lies in achieving the proper balance in styles of warfare and forms of competition. The U.S. military's zone of effectiveness in irregular warfare lies in employing both political and violent competition and predominantly through relational maneuver. Ultimately, U.S. strategy and approaches must push competition into the zone of non-violent competition to achieve lasting success. The following sections develop the analytical framework to examine and assess the U.S. military's employment of relational maneuver in irregular warfare.

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[188] U.S. Army Special Operations Command, White Paper Expanding Maneuver in the Early 21st Century Security Environment, 1–11.
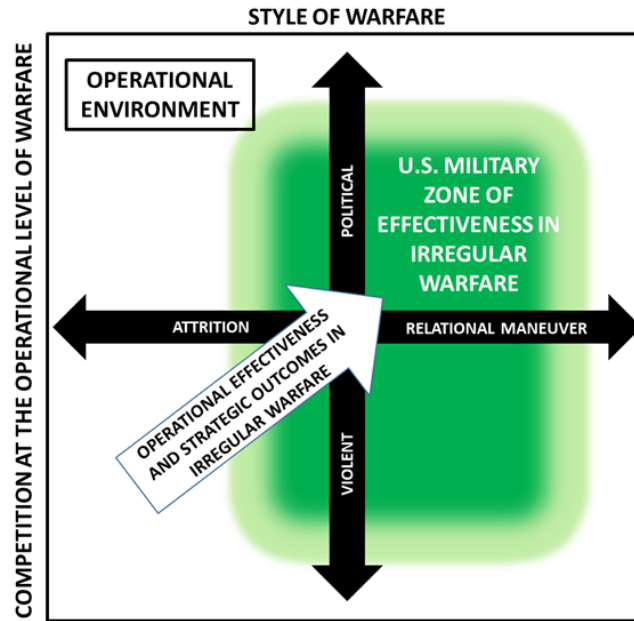
Figure 10. Zone of Effectiveness in Irregular Warfare

a.　　Deep Understanding of the Operational Environment

The difficulties which arise from this ignorance of the conditions under which the regular army will be operating really divide themselves into two main headings; difficulties arising from want of knowledge of the theater of war, and difficulties consequent upon the doubt that exists as to the strength, the organization, and the fighting qualities of the enemy. Of these the former may be said upon the whole to be the most important as a rule. For it is perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of small wars as compared with regular hostilities conducted between modern armies, that they are in the main campaigns against nature.

—C. E. Callwell, 1896[189]

Relational maneuver depends on an intimate knowledge of the operational environment, including both the threat, neutral, and friendly networks at all levels of war. Every threat, irregular or otherwise, is unique; however, irregular threats compound the number of variables that must be considered to effectively confront and overcome the threat. In irregular warfare, the complexity extends far beyond military means and centers

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[189] Callwell, *Small Wars*, 43–44.

on the political domain, which includes religious, economic, and political variables down to the tactical level of war.[190] Employment of relational maneuver requires a comprehensive PMESII analysis to understand the threat and develop the strategy, organizational design, and approaches to inform, influence, and meet U.S. political objectives.

Understanding the operational environment in irregular warfare follows an evolutionary process that takes dedicated time, attention, and adaptation. In U.S. military terms, the understanding necessary to overcome an irregular threat does not occur in a single seven-month deployment; as the forthcoming case studies reveal, this deep understanding often requires years and multiple deployments to the same operational area. As understanding evolves and deepens, a military force must also continually adapt its strategy and operational approaches.[191] In irregular warfare, this adaptation must be built into the fabric of the strategic and operational approach. While a military force develops an understanding of the threat, that threat also evolves and adapts. The military force must then adapt its understanding of the evolved environment, the developed strategy, the organizational design and structure of the forces, and the operational approaches while confronting the adversary. Unlike traditional warfare, which requires that military forces outmaneuver the enemy conceptually and physically on the battlefield, relational maneuver requires a deep understanding of the operational environment to politically and militarily outmaneuver the threat across the entire operational environment.[192]

The context of this conceptual understanding includes the international and local social-political environment across all levels of war; it is an evolutionary process that requires time, attention, and adaptation. Legitimate conceptual understanding has occurred when a military force can adequately distinguish between traditional and irregular threats and the forms of warfare best suited to confront those threats. Figure 11 depicts the

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190 Stephen Watts et al., *Countering Others' Insurgencies: Understanding U.S. Small-Footprint Interventions in Local Context* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014). https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR513.html., xviii.

191 Luttwak, *Strategy*, 117.

192 Luttwak and Canby, *MINDSET: National Styles in Warfare;* Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare."

framework that will be used to determine the level of deep and effective understanding of an irregular threat in the case studies. An effective deep understanding of the threat enables the development and implementation of a coherent political-military strategy.

Framework to determine the level of *deep understanding of the Operational Environment*
1. What historic irregular warfare doctrine, theory, or experience did the U.S. force reference prior to confronting the operational environment and threat?
2. How did the U.S. force conduct advance study of the threat to include the participating threats, neutrals, and friendly forces within the local, regional, and international operational environment (PMESII analysis)?
3. Did the U.S. force possess and develop experts of the threats and area of operations?
4. Did the U.S. force predict the length of the conflict?
5. Did the U.S. force identify the threat's means for military, economic, and political support?
6. What weaknesses within the threat system were identified?

Figure 11. Analytical Framework to Determine Deep Understanding of Irregular Operational Environment[193]

b.   *Political-Military Strategy*

This deficit [political centrality into military strategy] results in part from a tendency to focus on tactical issues, troop levels, and timelines, rather than the strategic factors that will determine a successful outcome. The U.S. military has also been reluctant to grapple with the political aspect of war, in the belief that it is either not part of war or entirely up to the civilians to address. Yet an intervention is unlikely to produce lasting results without a strategy that addresses the political factors driving the conflict and provides for enduring postwar stability. Implementing that strategy is likely to involve a combination of military and political means by the United States and local partners acting in concert—such as elections, negotiations, and power-sharing.

—RAND, 2014[194]

[193] Adapted from: from: Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare;" And Gray "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters;" And Callwell, *Small Wars*; Schaffer, *Small Wars Manual*; Trinquier, *Modern Warfare;* Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*; Kalev I. Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* 85, no. 3 (2005); Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare.*; Christopher Paul et al., *Paths to Victory*; Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*; Dan Madden et al., *Toward Operational Art in Special Warfare* RAND Corporation, 2016. http://www.rand.org/search.html?query=9780833087638. and Robinson et al., *Improving Strategic Competence: Lessons from 13 Years of War*. and Stephen Watts Et al., *Countering Others' Insurgencies;* Stephen Watts, et al., *Limited Intervention: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Limited Stabilization, Limited Strike, and Containment Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017) https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports /RR2037.html.

[194] Robinson et al., *Improving Strategic Competence*, xiv.

In irregular warfare, application of relational maneuver requires blending political-military strategy at every level of warfare to overcome the threat within the greater operational environment. This political-military strategy uses a deep understanding of the operational environment enabled by PMESII and a nuanced understanding of the range of threat, neutral, and friendly networks. Next, a military force must package this understanding into an overarching strategy that balances resources and political-military approaches to meet the political goals. Since irregular warfare is inherently political, perhaps the greatest flaw in military strategy in irregular warfare is the absence of integrating effective political-military strategy down to the tactical level. All wars require a political-military strategy, but in irregular warfare, this political-military strategy must pervade down to the most tactical level of warfare. As with every facet of relational maneuver, this strategy must not remain static; as understanding evolves, so too must the strategy evolve.

Strategy consists of the interaction of means (the resources at a force's disposal) and ways to implement an actionable approach to meet the ends (the political-military objective).[195] The construction of strategy occurs within a particular context, operational environment, and against a specific threat. Strategy enables balancing risk according to what national interests are at stake. At the operational level of war, the U.S. military refers to strategy as operational design.[196] Operational design uses strategic thinking to connect national strategy to the tactical employment of forces. This study uses strategy as opposed to operational design since, especially in irregular warfare, it expresses the same principles.

As previously discussed, the U.S. military has a "strategy deficit."[197] Colin Gray highlights this deficit in his analysis of the American way of war and its failures against irregular enemies.[198] This study's authors have observed and experienced the fragmented

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[195] Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Planning*, xii-xiii.

[196] Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Planning*, xxi.

[197] Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy,* 4–5; Robinson et al., *Improving Strategic Competence*, xiv.

[198] Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy.*

and disjointed political-military strategies in both Afghanistan and Iraq.[199] Part of this deficit of strategy includes a lack of "strategic dialogue" between the policy makers and military leaders at the national strategic level and with individuals and units at the tactical level of warfare.[200] Strategy should evolve based on the understanding of the threat, which, due to irregular warfare's uncertain character, requires comprehensive understanding of the political operational environment down to the most local district or village. This understanding should then inform the construction of strategy, influence the adaptation of strategy, and implement the adapted strategy. As the case study analyses will reveal in the succeeding chapters, the U.S. military conducts this strategic dialogue ineffectively. In Vietnam, the U.S. military did not implement a political-military strategy properly aligned to the operational environment until 1969, 14 years after it began providing military assistance and advisors to South Vietnam. In Iraq, a more effective political-military strategy did not occur until 2007, four years after the insurgency began, and in Afghanistan, it did not occur until between 2009 and 2010, eight years after the war began.

The centrality of the political competition and necessity to ensure that violence and politics are fused together at every level of irregular warfare requires that the U.S. military inform, influence, and implement political-military strategy. Veteran and author Emile Simpson explains that in contemporary irregular warfare, political and military competition occurs at all levels of warfare.[201] Unified political-military strategy elevates the importance of the operational level of war and the necessity to integrate the use of economic, informational, and violent competition over time and space.[202] The political character of irregular operational environments forces the integration of politics and violence, normally associated with the strategic level of warfare, down to the tactical level

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[199] Author's personal experiences across the Middle East: Maj Bailey's deployments to Helmand, Afghanistan (2010-2011); Herat, Afghanistan (2013-2014); Iraq (2016); and LT Woods' deployment to Iraq (2016-2017).

[200] Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*, Ch. 4.

[201] Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*; Madden et al., *Toward Operational Art in Special Warfare*, 22–23.

[202] Luttwak and Canby, *MINDSET: National Styles in Warfare*, 3; Madden et al., *Toward Operational Art in Special Warfare*, 22–23.

of warfare. For example, a squad, platoon, or SOF team assigned to stabilize a remote village in Afghanistan, becomes part of the operational level of war through the necessity to integrate both political and violent competition among indigenous partners, neutral villagers, and against threat networks to achieve intermediate political objectives that align with theater-strategic objectives. Figure 12 provides the framework to analyze the effectiveness of strategies employed through history.

Framework to determine effectiveness of the *political-military strategy*
1. What was the U.S. force's stated political-military strategy, mission, and tasks to confront the threat?
2. How was the strategy developed and what were the major ends, ways, and means?
3. Who led the development and implementation of the strategy?
4. How was unity of effort achieved between political and military efforts?
5. Did the strategy, mission and tasks change throughout the conflict and how so?

Figure 12. Analytical Framework to Determine Effectiveness of the Political-Military Strategy[203]

c.   *Organizational Design*

Manoeuvre [sic] warfare cannot be fought by standard, general-purpose forces shaped by traditional preferences and bureaucratic priorities. Instead, one must deploy forces especially tailored to cope with a specific enemy—that is, forces which are configured to exploit his particular weaknesses, rather than to maximize all-round capabilities. One allows the enemy to dictate one's force-structure and tactics; the 'organizational initiative' is conceded in order to seize the operational advantage.

—Edward Luttwak, 1979[204]

In irregular warfare, relational maneuver requires adaptation of organizational design to effectively confront and overcome irregular threats. Organizational design represents the third critical component of relational maneuver's application to irregular

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[203] Adapted from: Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare"; Gray "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters"; Callwell, *Small Wars*; Ronald Schaffer, *Small Wars Manual*; Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency;* Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*; Kalev I. Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* 85, no. 3 (2005); Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare.*; Paul and Clarke, *Paths to Victory*; Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*; Madden et al., *Toward Operational Art in Special Warfare.*

[204] Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance*," 59.

warfare, the U.S. military's effective application of which requires more research, discussion, and debate. Organizational design subject matter expert Richard Daft defines organizational design theory as "a way of thinking about organizations and how people and resources are organized to collectively accomplish a specific purpose."[205] In his article, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," Edward Luttwak argues that the "organizational arrangements" of general purpose forces are not adequate in irregular warfare.[206] Luttwak notes that the excessive bureaucracies in general purpose forces create environments where leadership often becomes more focused on internal organizational processes and politics rather than on confronting the threats that the military must overcome.[207] The high level of uncertainty inherent to irregular warfare requires continuous adaptation that conflicts with the rigid hierarchy, bureaucratic structures, and processes of conventional forces. Conventional, internally focused, attritional organizational design places a premium on organizational promotion cycles (especially among officers), logistical considerations, and technological capabilities to employ firepower and physical maneuver on the battlefield as efficiently as possible.[208]

The political complexity and uncertainty of irregular warfare requires dedicated individuals and units to gain an understanding and ability to effectively influence the operational environment. Edward Luttwak argues that "low-intensity wars, on the other hand, usually require the persistent application of one-place, one-time expertise, embodied in specific individuals with unique attributes. Thus, the normal practices of rotation cannot apply."[209] This assertion starkly contrasts with the U.S. military's practices of rotating individuals and units through billets and operational environments based on internal organizational considerations rather than strategically aligning to achieve operational

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[205] Richard L. Daft, *Organization Theory & Design*, (11th ed. Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning, 2013), 24.

[206] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 336.

[207] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 336–338.

[208] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 336; R. W. Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp, 1972); Greentree, "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: U.S. Performance and the Institutional Dimension of Strategy in Afghanistan."

[209] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 340.

success. The U.S. military typically considers its internal parts interchangeable and rotates its personnel and units in a machine-like manner.[210]

Edward Luttwak argues that in irregular warfare, the U.S. military must adapt its organizational design to fit the operational environment. While no single organizational design can adequately confront the full range of irregular threats that the U.S. military will confront, an effectively designed military force will employ four basic principles that balance the unity of effort required to implement the strategy and adaptability required to succeed. First, adaptability requires tailored organizations that simplify and streamline its bureaucracy to the minimal level necessary to accomplish the task. The larger and more complex the bureaucratic structure, the less flexible it will be. Second, an adaptable military organization must decentralize its authority to the maximum extent possible to enable flexibility and responsiveness at all levels. Third, to enable this decentralization, an organization must employ the appropriate professional political-military leadership and practitioners that possess intelligence, flexibility, maturity, competence, and experience. Professionalization enables decentralization and adaptability and mitigates the risk of authorizing tactical level commanders to wage both political and military competition. Finally, the unique character of irregular warfare requires embedding advisors into partner forces' political-military structures. For the U.S. military, the partner political-military apparatus will determine ultimate success or failure in confronting irregular threats. Embedded advisors enable the U.S. to maintain the best possible understanding of complex evolving contexts, inform and influence adaption of the current political-military strategy, and enable the operational approaches necessary to achieve strategic objectives. Figure 13 depicts the framework to determine the effectiveness of the U.S. force's organizational design.

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[210] Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam*; Greentree, "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: U.S. Performance and the Institutional Dimension of Strategy in Afghanistan"; Gentry, *How Wars Are Won and Lost*, 204–231; Richard D. Hooker and Joseph J. Collins, *Lessons Encountered Learning from the Long War* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015), Ch. 3; the personal experiences from Major Paul Bailey and Lieutenant David Woods correlates to the analysis described in these published accounts of U.S. military deployment practices.

Framework to determine *organizational design effectiveness* in irregular warfare
1. What was the composition and structure of the U.S. force, and did it change over time?
2. Who approved decisions and how were decisions made?
3. How did the force organize for intelligence collection?
4. How, and where, were imbedded political-military advisors employed?
5. What was the force rotation and deployment plan and how was continuity maintained?

Figure 13. Analytical Framework to Determine Effectiveness of
Organizational Design[211]

d.   *Operational Irregular Warfare Approaches*

'Military operations, as combat actions carried out against opposing armed
forces, are of only limited importance and are never the total conflict.' 'We
know that the sine qua non of victory in modern warfare is the unconditional
support of a population' 'we are not up against just a few armed bands
spread across a given territory, but rather against an armed clandestine
organization whose essential role is to impose its will upon the population.
Victory will be obtained only through the complete destruction of that
organization.'

—Roger Trinquier, 1961[212]

A deep understanding of the operational environment, coherent political-military

strategy, and tailored organizational design produce effective operational approaches. The

term 'operational approach' is used in this study to convey the idea of implementation of

strategy and doctrinally in the execution of "tasks and actions required to accomplish the

mission."[213] This section explores the historically proven elements that typically exist

within effective operational irregular warfare approaches and produces a framework to

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[211] Adapted from: Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare"; Gray, "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters"; Callwell, *Small Wars*; Schaffer, *Small Wars Manual*; Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency;* Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*; Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency." And Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*; Paul and Clarke, *Paths to Victory*; Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*; Madden et al., *Toward Operational Art in Special Warfare*; Robinson et al., *Improving Strategic Competence: Lessons from 13 Years of War*; Watts et al., *Countering Others' Insurgencies;* Stephen Watts et al., *Limited Intervention: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Limited Stabilization, Limited Strike, and Containment Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp, 2017), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2037.html.

[212] Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*, 6–9.

[213] Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Joint Doctrine Library," 172.

assess historical approaches. An effective U.S. led irregular warfare approach requires balancing the use of violence and political competition within the operational environment against the threat network and social-political context. For the U.S. military in irregular warfare, advisors embedded into strategic political-military units and organizations should represent the decisive effort to achieve strategic outcomes.

(1) Classic Research on Irregular Warfare

Some of the most historically influential studies on irregular warfare include Colonel C.E. Callwell's seminal work, *Small Wars*, the subsequent USMC *Small Wars Manual*, Mao Tse-tung's writings, David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, Roger Trinquier's *Modern Warfare*, Robert Taber's *The War of the Flea*, and Edward Lansdale's writings.[214] These authors and studies record irregular warfare experiences from the late 19th century, through World War II, including the period of anti-colonialism and Marxist movements in Malaya, Indochina, Algeria, and U.S. experiences particularly in Vietnam and El Salvador. More recently, subject matter expert practitioners and scholars, such as John Nagl, David Kilcullen, Kalev Sepp, Hy Rothstein, John Arquilla, current military joint doctrine, and various studies by the RAND Corporation have recirculated classic irregular warfare lessons and synthesized them with their more recent individual experiences and insights. Cumulatively, this genre provides a significant supply of knowledge and analysis to aid this study's goal of producing relevant recommendations to enhance MARSOC's effectiveness in implementing effective operational approaches in irregular warfare.

Internal state resistance, or insurgency, represents the primary venue for irregular warfare.[215] This insurgency may be transregional, as in the case of al Qaeda's war against

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[214] Callwell, *Small Wars*; Schaffer, *Small Wars Manual*; Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*; Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*; Taber, *The War of the Flea*; Lansdale, "Viet Nam Still the Search for Goals Edward Lansdale, "Memorandum to Ambassador Collins from Lansdale," (Vietnam: January 3, 1955), http://search.proquest.com/docview/1679150236/; Edward Lansdale, "Viet Nam: Do We Understand Revolution?" Foreign Affairs 43, no. 01 (1964): 75. http://search.proquest.com/docview/198195307/.

[215] Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare*; Gray, "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters," 42.

the United States and the West, or it may be a local insurgency, as in the case of a local militia group in Afghanistan. Or, as in El Salvador and Vietnam, the insurgency may be tied to a larger proxy war between global or regional powers. Doctrinally, through unconventional warfare or foreign internal defense, U.S. military may provide support to the insurgent, as in 2001 to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, or it may provide support to a partner government as it did to Afghanistan, once the Taliban regime was overthrown.

As earlier discussed, irregular threats often do not directly jeopardize U.S. vital national interests.[216] Therefore, as RAND's study on *Limited Intervention* indicates, "limited stabilization" through advisor-led light footprint approaches can provide an effective way to meet national interests while keeping human and material resource costs to an acceptable level.[217] As Andrew Mack states in his article, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," the irregular adversary is typically fighting an existential war of survival and is prepared to suffer immense human and material cost. In contrast, the United States' does not face existential fights for survival in conflicts in Vietnam, El Salvador, or Afghanistan.[218] In the context of these wars with limited objectives, the U.S. military should keep its costs, both human and material, balanced in relation to the risk imposed towards national interests or run the risk of pay a price beyond the threat posed to U.S. interests.

RAND defines limited stabilization intervention for irregular conflicts as "small-scale military operations conducted by ground forces (typically supported by airpower) intended to terminate a conflict, either by helping the supported government win or by enforcing a negotiated settlement on terms that are at least acceptable (if not favorable) to the government."[219] Although RAND defines limited stabilization within the context foreign internal defense (FID) campaigns, the same logic applies to a UW effort. In

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[216] Lord, "The Role of the United States in Small Wars," 90–97.

[217] Watts et al., *Limited Intervention: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Limited Stabilization, Limited Strike, and Containment Operations*.

[218] Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict."

[219] Watts et al., *Limited Intervention: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Limited Stabilization, Limited Strike, and Containment Operations*, xi.

America's current context, any UW effort to destabilize or overthrow a government would likely occur within the larger strategic context of achieving a future better and stable balance of power in in line with U.S. interests. Given the projected future prevalence of irregular conflict, the United States may choose to conduct massive counterinsurgency operations, similar to its efforts in Iraq between 2003 and 2011 and in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014; however, this research supports that "the enormous costs and uncertain returns of U.S. military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan have led to a widespread aversion to conducting similarly costly interventions in the future."[220]

This study emphasizes the operational level of warfare but argues that, in irregular warfare, this level extends into the the doctrinally considered tactical domain. Edward Luttwak explains that "the decisive level of warfare in the relational-maneuver manner is the operational, that being the lowest level at which the different elements can be brought together in an integrated scheme of warfare."[221] Military doctrine emphasizes levels of warfare to distinguish breadth of command, authority, and responsibility.[222] In irregular warfare, however, the operational level of war extend to the lowest units in the battlespace. Because of the highly political nature of irregular threats and warfare, the lowest tactical elements must synthesize political, military, economic, and social-cultural considerations to create an operational approach to overcome the local threat.[223] By integrating this scheme at the most tactical level, it becomes part of the operational level of warfare. Essentially, this operational approach requires developing and implementing a strategy for each unique operational environment. For this study, the tactical level of warfare is limited to individual interactions and single kinetic engagements with the enemy.[224]

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220 Watts et al*., Limited Intervention: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Limited Stabilization, Limited Strike, and Containment Operations*, 1.

221 Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance," 20.

222 Department of the Navy, *Warfighting*, 28–32.

223 Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*; Madden et al., *Toward Operational Art in Special Warfare*; Mann, *Game Changers*.

224 Luttwak, *Strategy*, 103–111.

The U.S. military has historically supported both insurgents and counterinsurgents. While the United States, in the modern era, most often supports counterinsurgents, the U.S. military and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) have also supported insurgents across Cuba, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. Support to a foreign government typically can take the form of U.S. doctrinal COIN, FID, U.S. led major combat operations (MCO), and security force assistance (SFA).[225] Ultimately, FID and UW represent two sides of the same political irregular warfare challenge. Therefore, the relational maneuver analytical framework produced here applies to both U.S. military efforts to support or suppress an insurgency. Specific application, of course, will differ in implementation depending on the operational environment and desired political objectives.

(2)   A Framework to Assess Operational Irregular Warfare Approaches

RAND's study on *Paths to Victory: Lessons from Modern Insurgencies* heavily influences this analysis on effective operational approaches in irregular warfare.[226] Effective operational irregular warfare approaches use five overarching principles to balance political and violent competition against the operational environment's threat(s) and context. First, the U.S. military force must implement a political-military approach to ensure unity of vision and effort among the military and other relevant partners.[227] Second, a military force must prioritize intelligence to pursue a deep understanding of the operational environment. Third, to enable the understanding of the context and effectively influence the partner forces actions, the military should employ embedded advisors within the partner forces' political-military structure. Fourth, the force must balance the risk towards the mission to achieve U.S. national interests against the risk to the U.S. forces participating. Finally, the U.S. force should adapt to exploit adversarial weakness and

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[225] Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Operations*, VI 9–12.

[226] Paul et al., *Paths to Victory: Lessons from Modern Insurgencies*.

[227] Luttwak and Canby, *MINDSET: National Styles in Warfare*, 8; Robinson et al., *Improving Strategic Competence*: *Lessons from 13 Years of War*, xiv.

adjust to evolutions in the operational environment.[228] Adaptation will enable the U.S. force to maintain the initiative both politically and militarily.

Using the five overarching principles, an effective operational approach balances political competition and violence against the threat(s) and context across four quadrants (See Figure 14). The first quadrant attacks the threat to U.S. interests indirectly through controlling the relevant population(s) and geography. The purpose of this quadrant is to establish control over the population and geographic area of operations to gather information, gain support of the population, and deny the adversary information and support. Actions in this quadrant include geographically sub-dividing the area of operations and assigning forces to control each sector. Traditional examples of this have included the Combined Action Program (CAP) in Vietnam and more recently the Village Stability Program (VSP) in Afghanistan, but also include more unconventional examples when U.S. Army Special forces infiltrated into Afghanistan to link up with the Northern Alliance in 2001 and later in Northern Iraq to link up with Kurdish forces in 2003.[229] For the counterinsurgent, this includes border control and checkpoints to deny material support to the adversary. For the insurgent, activities include organizing all phases of resistance, exerting control over territory, and to bolster legitimacy and support both locally and internationally.

The second quadrant directly targets the threat through violence. This quadrant includes traditional military activities and operations such as guerrilla and counter-guerrilla operations, advising and assisting major and hybrid combat operations. For the counterinsurgent, it is critical to defeat the insurgents in open pitched battle and force the guerilla to resort to guerrilla tactics.[230] For the insurgent, as Mao describes in his three phases of protracted war, the guerilla must properly identify when and how to employ his military forces given the context and strength of the counterinsurgent forces and to blend

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[228] Luttwak, *Strategy*, 117.

[229] Interview with LTG (Ret) Charlie Cleveland (August 2, 2018); Interview with MG Patrick Roberson (June 13, 2018).

[230] Paul et al., *Paths to Victory: Lessons from Modern Insurgencies*, 79.

and balance all forms of warfare.[231] Massing force improperly will result in catastrophic destruction, and conversely, not exploiting success will also undermine the insurgent's potential chances for ultimate victory.

Quadrant three directly targets the threat through political competition. Here both the insurgent and counterinsurgent seek to directly undermine the others' cause and will to fight. This quadrant can include reintegration efforts, infiltration and insider threats, and deception operations.

Finally, the fourth quadrant uses political competition to indirectly attack the threat(s) through influencing the threat's eco-system. This quadrant includes efforts to establish legitimacy among the local population and international audience as well as undermine or magnify grievances. This effort will deny or deter military and political recruitment efforts both locally and globally.

Figure 14. Operational Approach Schematic[232]

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231 Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung: On Protracted War*, 193–194.

232 Adapted from: Paul et al., *Paths to Victory: Lessons from Modern Insurgencies*, xxx (Figure S.2).

Success in irregular warfare ultimately depends on implementing adaptive and effective operational approaches that achieve political objectives. The operational approach implements the military's conceptual understanding, or lack thereof of the threat. Conceptual understanding of the threat to U.S. interests, in turn, shapes strategy. Even if conceptual understanding, strategy, and organizational design are well formulated, poor implementation will still prevent success. Here, Clausewitz's adage that "everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult" rings true.[233] Properly identifying the threat through gaining a deep understanding of the operational environment, developing an effective political-military strategy, appropriately tailoring the operational force to confront the threat does not matter if the force cannot effectively execute. The principles outlined here synthesize decades of study on irregular warfare. In 1906, C.E. Callwell captured many of these points in the context of Great Britain's colonial era. Less than 40 years later, the U.S. Marine Corps published its *Small Wars Manual*, and its lessons still apply today. Finally, RAND's insightful study, *Paths to Victory,* produces a relevant framework that this study adapts to explore effectiveness in irregular warfare for MARSOC in the present. Figure 14 schematically depicts the balance of approaches and principles necessary to develop an effective operational irregular warfare approach. Figure 15 then presents the analytical framework to interrogate historic case studies.

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[233] Clausewitz, *On War,* 119.

Framework to determine the effectiveness of the *operational irregular warfare approach*

1. **Overarching Principles:**
    1. What elements of a political-military operational approach were employed?
        a) Did the effort include the interagency and other partners?
        b) What steps were taken to ensure unity of effort?
    2. How did the operational force collect intelligence?
    3. What advisor practices were used?
    4. How was risk to force and mission balanced and what were the rules of engagement?
    5. How were adversarial weaknesses identified, and what steps did the U.S. and partner force use to adapt and maintain the initiative?
2. **Quadrant 1: Population and geographic control**
    1. How was the area of operations divided, and how was it controlled?
    2. How did the military force interact with the population?
    3. How was control of the population established, who established control?
    4. How was material support established or denied?
3. **Quadrant 2: Kinetic actions**
    1. How was military violence subordinated to political interests?
    2. What kind of military operations were conducted?
    3. How was the adversary kinetically targeted?
4. **Quadrant 3: Direct political competition against the threat**
    1. Did negotiations occur between belligerents?
    2. What methods were used to undermine the adversary's cause?
    3. How was deception employed
5. **Quadrant 4: Indirect political competition through the context**
    1. How was political competition used towards the context?
    2. What ideological narrative was used to establish legitimacy?
    3. What steps were taken to undermine grievances and deter recruitment?
- Did the U.S. political and military command claim to meet their stated campaign objectives?
- What measures of effectiveness were employed?

Figure 15. Analytical Framework to Determine the Effectiveness of an Operational Approach[234]

[234] Adapted from: Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare"; Gray "Irregular Warfare One Nature, Many Characters"; Callwell, *Small Wars*; Schaffer, *Small Wars Manual*; Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency;* Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*; Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency"; Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*; Paul et al., *Paths to Victory*; Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency;* Madden et al., *Toward Operational Art in Special Warfare*; Robinson et al., *Improving Strategic Competence: Lessons from 13 Years of War*; Watts et al., *Countering Others' Insurgencies;* Watts et al., *Limited Intervention: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Limited Stabilization, Limited Strike, and Containment Operations*.

C.   CONCLUSION

> The conditions of small wars are so diversified, the enemy's mode of fighting is often so peculiar, and the theaters of operations present such singular features, that irregular warfare must generally be carried out on a method totally different from the stereotyped system.
>
> —C. E. Callwell, 1896[235]

Sequential analysis of war, warfare, and the available styles of warfare reveals the necessity of employing relational maneuver to succeed within highly uncertain irregular operational environments. The requirement for relational maneuver in irregular warfare extends far past simple maneuver on the physical battlefield and into the domain of both political and violent competition at all levels of warfare. The politically complex character of irregular operational environments elevates the importance of political competition across all levels of warfare as opposed to traditional warfare. The elevated importance of political competition in irregular warfare occurs across a diverse array of participants that blends between the spectrum of threat, neutral, and friendly networks.

The importance of relational maneuver in irregular warfare conflicts with assessments of the U.S. military's predominant disposition toward attrition warfare. This potential misalignment between the United States' prevailing style of warfare and the needs of the operational environment suggests a need to better balance the U.S. military, or at least specific military units, toward relational maneuver. Given the pervasive nature and trend toward irregular warfare in the modern era, relational maneuver should play a central role in confronting and overcoming the irregular threats the U.S. military faces.

Relational maneuver requires an externally focused and adaptive style of warfare with four primary components that enables the agility to identify and exploit threat vulnerabilities. The first component requires a deep and comprehensive understanding of the operational environment to identify exploitable weaknesses within the threat network. The second component requires a coherent political-military strategy built on an understanding of the operational environment and the level of threat to U.S. interests. Since

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235 Callwell, *Small Wars*, 23.

strategy guides the use of political and military resources to achieve political objectives, the decision to employ attritional versus maneuver principles is inherently strategic. Colin Gray and Edward Luttwak's analysis of the U.S. military's broad strategy and approaches toward irregular warfare indicates a general lack of strategic thinking, particularly in synchronizing political and military efforts at all levels of warfare. A strategic deficiency has troubling implications for U.S. efforts in irregular warfare, where the essence of the threat within the operational environment is political, and the U.S. military way of war prefers a clear distinction between the use of violence and politics.

Furthermore, the third component adapts internal organizational design to match the operational environment to most effectively understand and overcome irregular threats. Edward Luttwak argues that inflexibly structured general-purpose forces tend to falter against highly adaptable adversaries due to those forces' propensities to favor an attritional style of warfare that focuses on internal organizational efficiency rather than effectiveness against the operational environment.[236] Finally, the output of understanding the operational environment, coherent political-military strategy, and tailored organizational design is the operational approach that exploits weaknesses within the threat network. Relational maneuver approaches in irregular warfare use five overarching principles to balance violence and political competition both directly and indirectly against the adversary and revolve around the role of the advisor.

The conceptual foundation of war, irregular warfare, and styles of warfare that this chapter presents enables examination and analysis of U.S. irregular warfare efforts. Relational maneuver provides the analytical framework, depicted in Figure 16, to enable this analysis. Furthermore, this relational maneuver framework allows internal examination of SOF, generally, and MARSOC specifically, to assess the historic and organizational challenges and opportunities that exist in employing relational maneuver in irregular warfare. Ultimately, this relational maneuver framework will inform the final recommendations to MARSOC to achieve greater adaptability and effectiveness in irregular warfare.

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[236] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare."

THEATER-
STRATEGIC

OPERATIONAL

DEEP UNDERSTANDING:
THREAT + CONTEXT

POLITICAL-MILITARY
STRATEGY

TACTICAL

Effectiveness
in Relation
to an Irregular
Threat

OPERATIONAL
APPROACHES

ORGANIZATIONAL
DESIGN
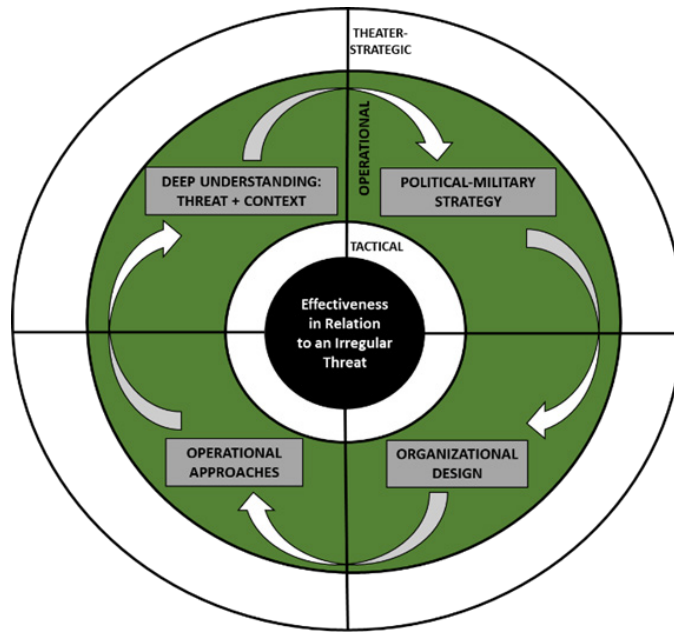
Figure continues on the next page

Figure 16. Relational Maneuver Analytical Framework

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Framework to determine the level of *deep understanding of the Operational Environment*
1. What historic irregular warfare doctrine, theory, or experience did the U.S. force reference prior to confronting the operational environment and threat?
2. How did the U.S. force conduct advance study of the threat to include the participating threats, neutrals, and friendly forces within local, regional, and international operational environments (PMESII analysis)?
3. Did the U.S. force possess and develop experts of the threats and area of operations?
4. Did the U.S. force predict the length of the conflict?
5. Did the U.S. force identify the threat's means for military, economic, and political support?
6. What weaknesses within the threat system were identified?

Framework to determine effectiveness of the *political-military strategy*
1. What was the U.S. force's stated political-military strategy, mission, and tasks to confront the threat?
2. How was the strategy developed and what were the major ends, ways, and means?
3. Who led the development and implementation of the strategy?
4. How was unity of effort achieved between political and military efforts?
5. Did the strategy, mission and tasks change throughout the conflict and how so?

Framework to determine *organizational design effectiveness* in irregular warfare
1. What was the composition and structure of the U.S. force, and did it change over time?
2. Who approved decisions and how were decisions made?
3. How did the force organize for intelligence collection?
4. How, and where, were imbedded political-military advisors employed?
5. What was the force rotation and deployment plan and how was continuity maintained?

Framework to determine the effectiveness of the *operational irregular warfare approach*
1. **Overarching Principles:**
    1. What elements of a political-military operational approach were employed?
        a) Did the effort include the interagency and other partners?
        b) What steps were taken to ensure unity of effort?
    2. How did the operational force collect intelligence?
    3. What advisor practices were used?
    4. How was risk to force and mission balanced and what were the rules of engagement?
    5. How were adversarial weaknesses identified, and what steps did the U.S. and partner force use to adapt and maintain the initiative?
2. **Quadrant 1: Population and geographic control**
    1. How was the area of operations divided, and how was it controlled?
    2. How did the military force interact with the population?
    3. How was control of the population established, who established control?
    4. How was material support established or denied?
3. **Quadrant 2: Kinetic actions**
    1. How was military violence subordinated to political interests?
    2. What kind of military operations were conducted?
    3. How was the adversary kinetically targeted?
4. **Quadrant 3: Direct political competition against the threat**
    1. Did negotiations occur between belligerents?
    2. What methods were used to undermine the adversary's cause?
    3. How was deception employed
5. **Quadrant 4: Indirect political competition through the context**
    1. How was political competition used towards the context?
    2. What ideological narrative was used to establish legitimacy?
    3. What steps were taken to undermine grievances and deter recruitment?
- Did the U.S. political and military command claim to meet their stated campaign objectives?
- What measures of effectiveness were employed?

Figure 16. (cont.)　　　Relational Maneuver Analytical Framework

INTRODUCTION TO CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

> Fools say that they learn by experience. I prefer to profit by others'
> experience… 'History is universal experience' the experience not of
> another, but of many others under manifold conditions.

> —Liddell Hart, 1967[237]

> The future has no place to come from but the past, hence the past has
> predictive value. Another element is recognition that what matters for the
> future in the present is departures from the past, alterations, changes, which
> prospectively or actually divert familiar flows from accustomed channels,
> thus affecting the predictive value and much else besides. A third
> component is continuous comparison, an almost constant oscillation from
> present to future to past and back, heedful of prospective change, concerned
> to expedite, limit, guide, counter, or accept it as the fruits of such
> comparison suggest.

> —Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, 1986[238]

Harvard professors and authors Richard Neustadt and Ernest May argue for the inescapable connection of the future and present to the past and the necessity for studying the past to understand the present and predict the future.[239] In 17 years of combined service in the Navy and Marine Corps, this study's authors have observed that studying the history of politics, war, and warfare deserves more attention in the development of the modern professional military. Although short and intermittent periods of professional military education (PME) may emphasize history to varying degrees (based on the level of PME, the individual's branch of service, and resident versus distance-learning status), military members actually spend little time studying military history in general or as it relates to specific operational environments.[240] The Marine Corps has proven to be an exception to

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[237] Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Strategy,* 2d rev. ed. (New York: Praeger, 1967), 23–24.

[238] Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-makers* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 251.

[239] Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, Ch. 14.

[240] The current Naval War College Curriculum at the Naval Postgraduate School allocates approximately 25% of its four-part class structure to the Study of History. The class 'Strategy and War' examines lessons and principles of the employment of strategy in war from a historic perspective.

this standard in its treatment of history; however, it disproportionately focuses on internal organizational history to maintain its unique cultural identity.[241] The next three chapters' exploration of U.S. military irregular warfare efforts since 1954 across Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan provide a testament to the dangers of failing to adequately learn from the breadth of history of irregular warfare. Current irregular warfare efforts across Africa, Middle East, and Asia as well as the projected future prevalence of irregular warfare suggest that the U.S. military should closely study history and adapt to achieve future strategic success.

Circumspect study of historical irregular warfare allows Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) to pursue Sun Tzu's prerequisite for success—to know the enemy and oneself. Part Two, 'Know Your Enemy,' examines three of the most important U.S. military irregular warfare experiences since 1945: Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan. Synthesized analysis across these cases provide insights into the character of irregular warfare, the U.S. military's use of relational maneuver in these environments, and lessons to apply to MARSOC's pursuit of organizational effectiveness and strategic utility to national defense.

Relational maneuver provides the analytical lens to investigate historic U.S. military irregular warfare experiences that can inform MARSOC's current and future decisions. Chapter II, "Relational Maneuver: An Irregular Warfare Analytic Framework," created and outlined a relational maneuver analytical lens to conduct case study analysis. At its core, relational maneuver employs ones' strength to adapt and exploit vulnerabilities and dismantle the threat system. In irregular warfare, identifying and exploiting vulnerabilities depends on holistically orienting on and understanding the operational environment and relevant threats. Due especially to irregular warfare's intrinsic political character, relational maneuver also requires a coherent political-military strategy that fuses

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[241] Major Bailey's personal experience as a Marine Officer for 11 years. Most representative published account of this internal focus of history is depicted in: General Victor Krulak, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984.) This account of the Marine Corps' history focuses on the internal culture and characteristics of the Marine Corps produced by its struggle to survive as an organization. In 2018, a general officer that spoke to the Marines attending the Naval Postgraduate School tasked all Marines to read *First to Fight.* This reading assignment was the only reading assignment given.

both political and violent competition together at all levels of warfare. Application further demands an appropriate organizational design to confront the threat by tailoring organizational tasks, structures, and people to the needs of the environment. Lastly, relational maneuver requires operational irregular warfare approaches that exploit adversarial weakness and achieve desired political-military objectives.

Analysis of the U.S. military's efforts in Vietnam (1954–1975), El Salvador (1979–1992), and Afghanistan (2001–2018) provides cases to employ the analytical framework to assess U.S. military effectiveness in irregular warfare. These cases also serve to validate both the analytical framework as well as Chapter II's description of irregular warfare and irregular operational environments. Lastly, the U.S. military's efforts and the environments assessed provide building blocks to continue internal analysis of SOF and MARSOC.

Each case analyzed will include an initial overview of each conflict to include primary participants, general sequence of events, and ultimate outcomes. Following the introduction, each case will use this study's relational maneuver analytical framework to assess the relative effectiveness of the U.S. military's efforts to confront each case's respective threats through relational maneuver. The chapter's conclusion ties each case together through noting significant common trends in effectiveness that the U.S. military should recognize, learn from, and adapt to better achieve strategic outcomes in irregular warfare.

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III.   CASE STUDY: VIETNAM, AN INEFFECTIVE EVOLUTION TOWARD RELATIONAL MANEUVER

> Three allies and much of our international authority were lost in the Vietnam War as well as much blood and treasure, and yet delusions of adequacy persist. Because of the characteristic ambiguities of that war, the Nation, although roundly defeated, has nevertheless been denied the customary benefit of military defeat. Little therefore was learned from the experience.

> —Edward Luttwak, 1983[242]

The United States' experience in the 1954–1975 Vietnam War scarred the U.S. military and remains controversial to this day. Unfortunately, "military leaders chose not to learn from experiences in Vietnam," and instead fostered a mindset of "no more Vietnams" without studying what happened to learn from their mistakes and successes.[243] Another military tendency has been to blame the participating politicians, like then-President Lyndon B. Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, as well as the institutional military leadership, such as the Joint Chiefs, for the failures that occurred.[244] While political-military mismanagement contributed to the failures in Vietnam, decisions in DC do not universally explain the failures by both the leaders and subordinates fighting the war in Vietnam.

Comprehensive analysis across a wide range of credible histories illustrates the U.S. military's attritional tendencies against irregular threats in Vietnam.[245] While the U.S. political and military effort in Vietnam failed to accomplish the desired strategic political objective, Historian Lewis Sorley's description of the U.S. military in Vietnam reveals that,

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[242] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 333.

[243] Gentry, *How Wars Are Won and Lost*, 199; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 269.

[244] H. R. McMaster, Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam, 1st ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1997).

[245] Max Boot, *The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale and the American Tragedy in Vietnam* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018); Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*; Sheehan Vietnam Task Force: Office of the Secretary of Defense. "Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force" (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1969. National Archives). https://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers; "A Strategic Appraisal," Folder 17, Box 3, Victor H. Krulak Papers, Archives Branch, History Division, Quantico, VA; Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*.

over time, the U.S. military did adapt in Vietnam, albeit slowly, to implement some principles of relational maneuver.[246] Nonetheless, the combination of the American military's insufficient understanding of the threat and operational environment in Vietnam with its slow and ineffective establishment of a unified political-military strategy, organizational design, and advisor-centric operational approach resulted in an overall failure to implement relational maneuver in total.[247]

Bernard Fall's acclaimed history *Street Without Joy* describes the beginnings of the U.S. political and military failure to stabilize South Vietnam and prevent Communist expansion across Southeast Asia, which can be traced to the first Indochina War between France and the Viet Minh, led by Ho Chi Minh.[248] Prior to the war between the French and the Viet Minh, the United States had supported Ho Chi Minh's guerrillas during the Second World War in their fight against the Japanese.[249] Following the end of World War II, however, the United States ignored Ho Chi Minh's pleas to support Vietnam's independence and instead allowed France to resume control in Indochina.[250]

Some accounts begin analysis of the U.S. military's experience in the Vietnam War between 1961 and 1962, when the U.S. military increased its level of aid and advisors to Vietnam.[251] The actual roots of America's involvement against Ho Chi Minh and the communists, however, date back to 1950 after China fell to Mao Tse-Tung and the communists in 1949, which initiated Chinese support to the Viet Minh as they fought the

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[246] Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1999); Headquarters MACV. "Commander's Summary of the MACV Objectives Plan" (Saigon: HQ MACV, 1969).

[247] Sorley, *A Better War*, Ch 23; Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 85, 116, 438.

[248] Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972).

[249] James M. Lindsay, "Remembering Ho Chi Minh's 1945 Declaration of Vietnam's Independence" Council on Foreign Relations, accessed October 22, 2018, https://www.cfr.org/blog/remembering-ho-chi-minhs-1945-declaration-vietnams-independence.

[250] Lindsay, "Remembering Ho Chi Minh's 1945 Declaration of Vietnam's Independence"; Fall, *Street without Joy*.

[251] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, ch. 3. Krepinevich explains that the roots of the military's escalation in Vietnam grew out of the destabilization in South Vietnam during the early 1960s.

French.[252] Between 1950 and 1954, the United States steadily escalated its economic and material aid to the French during the First Indochina War to prevent the spread of monolithic communism.[253] Chinese and Soviet support of North Korea during the Korean War had solidified this monolithic mentality and also influenced U.S. strategy and objectives to prevent China's direct military intervention later in Vietnam.[254] During the First Indochina war, France unsuccessfully waged its war on the Viet Minh insurgency which culminated in its defeat at Dien Bien Phu on May 7, 1954.[255] The resulting settlement in Geneva forced France to withdraw from all of Indochina and partitioned Vietnam at the 17th parallel, leaving Ho Chi Minh and the communists in control of North Vietnam. In South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem and the Vietnamese French Catholics retained control.[256]

Following the partition of Vietnam in 1954, approximately one million Vietnamese fled the North, while the Communists either embedded or infiltrated nearly one hundred thousand of its cadre into the South to support the future communist unification of Vietnam.[257] Between 1954 and 1959, the regimes in North and South Vietnam consolidated their rule. In the North, the communists violently purged all would-be resisters and established the political and military infrastructure to continue what General Vo Giap described as *People's War* in the south.[258] By 1955, the United States had replaced the French as the benefactors of South Vietnam and was providing military and political advisors to bolster Diem's government and military.[259] The U.S. military began its advisory effort in 1954 when it established the Military Assistance Advisory Group

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252 Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 3.

253 Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 3–5.

254 Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 4.

255 Fall, *Street Without Joy*; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 7.

256 Fall, *Street Without Joy*; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 7.

257 Boot, *The Road Not Taken*; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 10.

258 Võ Nguyên Giáp, *People's War; People's Army* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), https://www.marxists.org/archive/giap/1961-pwpa.pdf.

259 Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 11.

(MAAG) in Vietnam.[260] This evolution of U.S. support to South Vietnam would eventually encompass five U.S. Presidents including Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Richard M. Nixon. More significant military support began with President Kennedy, who in June 1956 claimed that South Vietnam represented the linchpin that held Southeast Asia together and that the United States bore direct responsibility for South Vietnam's survival.[261] While the United States increased aid to Saigon, Diem's regime oppressively consolidated political control.[262] During this time, low-level insurgency and general political unrest festered throughout South Vietnam.

In 1959, having consolidated its control in the north, the Communist Vietnam Workers Party Central Committee officially decided to pursue war to unify Vietnam.[263] This decision also created the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) as Hanoi's cover for an organic independent communist movement in the south.[264] In 1959, Hanoi expanded its infiltration of communist cadre across South Vietnam to build the NLF's political infrastructure, wage insurgency, and facilitate future major combat operations. Earlier, in 1956, the United States had relabeled the Viet Minh as the Viet Cong (VC) in an attempt to separate previous Vietnamese nationalist resistance against the French from the Communist resistance against Diem's regime in Saigon.[265] By 1960, although the U.S. military and South Vietnamese Army called the NLF guerillas VC, the communist insurgents, and the villagers throughout Vietnam still referred to the guerrillas as the Viet Minh or *Giai Phong* (liberation army).[266] Between 1959 and 1961, Hanoi rapidly expanded its strength in the south so that by 1961,

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[260] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 4.

[261] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 12–13.

[262] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 13–16.

[263] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 15.

[264] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 15.

[265] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 189.

[266] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 196.

approximately 16,000 guerillas were waging active insurgency.[267] In 1962, the level of instability in South Vietnam convinced President Kennedy to increase military aid and advisors to the Government of Vietnam (GVN) and to replace the MAAG with the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MACV).[268] This elevated the military's influence and control in South Vietnam and increased military-centric assistance to the GVN, raising the 12,000 U.S. advisors in 1963 to more than 23,000 advisors by the end of 1964.[269]

The political instability in South Vietnam, especially between 1960 and 1964, changed the course and character of the U.S. support in South Vietnam. While the NLF became increasingly strong and aggressive, Diem's government in Saigon floundered.[270] The unrest caused by the NLF, the internal corruption and incompetence, and Diem's repressive actions crushing internal resistance alienated many South Vietnamese as well U.S. political advisors to Diem.[271] As a result, many in the State Department, including then Ambassador to Saigon, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., lost faith in Diem's ability to unify the country and advocated for Diem's replacement.[272] President Kennedy ultimately allowed the CIA to support a coup initiated by several of Diem's generals to move forward.[273] In November 1963, Diem's assassination plunged South Vietnam into nearly five years of political chaos and reoccurring coups.[274] Simultaneously, the United States faced its own radical political changes when President Kennedy was assassinated less than a month later, thrusting Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson into power. Hanoi recognized the opportunities from this political turmoil and launched aggressive offensives to inspire popular revolution across South Vietnam.[275] Communist insurgency mixed with political

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[267] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 195.

[268] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 21–24.

[269] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 24.

[270] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 25–27.

[271] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 27.

[272] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 27.

[273] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 367.

[274] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 28.

[275] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 29.

turmoil in Saigon to threaten a complete governmental collapse in 1964; when the Gulf of Tonkin incidents occurred in early August 1964, President Johnson mobilized Congress to pass the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which authorized the President "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression" in Southeast Asia.[276]

President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara used the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to rapidly escalate the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War.[277] By March 1965, the U.S. military had surged conventional ground combat forces into South Vietnam and initiated a mounting bombing campaign, Operation ROLLING THUNDER, against North Vietnam.[278] U.S. strategic leadership, President Johnson, and Robert McNamara intended these bombings to convince Hanoi to cease its support to the southern insurgency and stop infiltration of conventional North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units into South Vietnam.[279] However, as recorded in the *Pentagon Papers*, the "bombing effort seemed to stiffen rather than soften Hanoi's backbone."[280] Between 1965 and 1968, the MACV Commander, General William Westmoreland, led the U.S. military in a "search and destroy" campaign to targeting the main force VC and NVA units in South Vietnam while leaving the South Vietnamese to pacify the insurgency and secure the populace.[281] By 1968, the U.S. military had surged more than 500,000 troops to Vietnam, which would

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[276]Tonkin Gulf Resolution, 88th Congress, 2nd sess (1964), https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=98&page=transcript.

[277] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 33.

[278] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 38.

[279] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 38–40; Vietnam Task Force: Office of the Secretary of Defense, "IV.C.2. (c) Military Pressures Against NVN: February – June 1964," Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1969), National Archives, https://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers.

[280] Vietnam Task Force: Office of the Secretary of Defense, "IV.C.3. ROLLING THUNDER Program Begins: January – June 1965," Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1969), National Archives, i https://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers, i.

[281] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 63; Vietnam Task Force: Office of the Secretary of Defense, "IV-C-6.(a) U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments 1965–1967," Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1969), National Archives, 16, https://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers.

later top out in 1969.[282] Ultimately, between 1965 and 1968, the U.S. military, under General Westmoreland's leadership, transformed the U.S. assistance to South Vietnam into an American-led war.[283]

Although the U.S. administration and General Westmoreland reported progressive successes in Vietnam, combat footage on the evening news of the Viet Cong's 1968 Tet offensive "caused a shock in the United States."[284] The Viet Cong achieved some initial victories during the Tet offensive in Saigon and by capturing Hue City for more than a month; however, militarily, Tet proved to be a disaster for the communists. In 1968, Hanoi lost more than 160,000 communist forces in South Vietnam, which degraded the NLF's ability to wage insurgency in the South for the remainder of the war.[285] The military defeat of the VC, ironically, resulted in a decisive political victory for Hanoi over the United States. The violence and destruction portrayed in the media did not match the promises of steady progress and imminent victory by General Westmoreland, Secretary of Defense McNamara, and President Johnson.[286] Instead, the violence of the Tet offensive bolstered the U.S. anti-war movement, caused President Johnson to cancel his bid for re-election, and forced the U.S. military to begin withdrawing its forces from Vietnam.[287]

Richard Nixon's election to the U.S. Presidency in 1968 and his promise of "peace with honor" reflected the impact of the Tet offensive on U.S. policy and set the U.S. military on the path of total withdrawal from Vietnam by 1973.[288] Under President Nixon and General Westmoreland's replacement, General Creighton Abrams, the U.S. political and military leadership changed its policy to 'Vietnamization' to force the GVN to re-

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[282] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 147.

[283] Christopher Paul et al., *Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR291z2.html.

[284] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 127.

[285] Sorley, *A Better War*, 97.

[286] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 717–719.

[287] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 717–731; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 246–251.

[288] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 735; Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam," The American Presidency Project (November 3, 1969), http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2303.

shoulder responsibility for fighting the war and to enable the United States to steadily withdraw its troops.[289] Operationally, between 1968 and 1972, MACV changed its emphasis on "search and destroy" to a "one war" approach that gave higher priority to pacifying rural Vietnam, protecting and controlling the populace, and improving and advising South Vietnam's conventional and irregular military forces.[290] This improved approach gave greater precedence to efforts started years before by the Marines through the Combined Action Program (CAP) to secure the local populace. When North Vietnam launched a conventional offensive against South Vietnam in the 1972 Easter Offensive, few U.S. combat troops remained in Vietnam;[291] the only U.S. forces available to assist the South Vietnamese units under attack consisted of embedded advisors, airpower, and naval forces.[292] The South Vietnamese did repel the NVA, though with distinctly mixed results, including the wholesale surrender or even abandonment of positions and equipment prior to being attacked.[293] Although the South defeated the Easter Offensive, the communists retained significant swaths of territory in South Vietnam that they had occupied during the offensive. The Easter Offensive also induced the United States and Saigon to sign the "Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring the Peace in Vietnam" with representatives from Hanoi in Paris on January 27, 1973.[294] This agreement, which the United States, led by former Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, pressured Saigon to sign, allowed more than 160,000 communists troops to openly remain in South Vietnam, withdrew U.S. military and political support and sealed South Vietnam's eventual fate.[295]

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[289] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, Ch. 5.

[290] Headquarters MACV, "Commander's Summary,"; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 137.

[291] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 146–147.

[292] Sorley, *A Better War*, Ch. 20; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 146–147.

[293] G. H. Turley, *The Easter Offensive, Vietnam, 1972* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1985); Sorley, *A Better War*, Ch. 20.

[294] Sorley, *A Better War*, 361.

[295] Sorley, *A Better War*, 363.

By the end of March 1973, the U.S. military had withdrawn all forces not assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Saigon.[296] As a final death knell, U.S. Congress enacted legislation eliminating all U.S. combat support to South Vietnam and, by 1975, had reduced economic aid in general.[297] By March 1975, the communists launched a final conventional offensive that, in the absence of U.S. support, destroyed the weakened Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and achieved Hanoi's objective to unify Vietnam under communist rule.[298] In total, the United States suffered more than 58,000 killed and over 300,000 soldiers wounded, and expended upwards of $111 billion, equivalent to $738 billion as of 2011.[299] Vietnam's collapse to communism was quickly followed by the collapse of both Laos and Cambodia by 1977.[300] Although significantly abridged, this synopsis of the major events and overall outcome of America's involvement in Vietnam allows for a closer analysis of the U.S. military's employment of relational maneuver.

A.   EXTERNAL ORIENTATION: DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

> The situation in South Vietnam (SVN) has seriously deteriorated. 1966 may well be the last chance to ensure eventual success. "Victory" can only be achieved through bringing the individual Vietnamese, typically a rural peasant, to support willingly the Government of South Vietnam (GVN). The critical actions are those that occur at the village, district and provincial levels. This is where the war must be fought; this is where that war and the object which lies beyond it must be won.
>
> —Department of the Army, 1966[301]

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[296] Sorley, *A Better War*, 362.

[297] Sorley, *A Better War*, 364–367.

[298] Sorley, *A Better War*, 376.

[299] "Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics," National Archives, accessed October 12, 2018; Stephen Daggett, *Costs of Major U.S. Wars,* CRS Report No. RS22926 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2010),2, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22926.pdf,.

[300] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 427.

[301] U.S. War Office, A Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam, Volume I-II, (1966), 1.

In 1972, the former head of the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program, Robert Komer, argued that the U.S. military failed as an institution to understand and adapt to the operational environment in Vietnam.[302] This lack of understanding, both for the general character of irregular warfare and for Vietnam's operational environment, was the foundation for the U.S. military's failure to achieve strategic policy objectives in Southeast Asia. Coming from successes in World War II and experiences in Korea, both of which depended predominantly on attrition-based material and firepower advantages, General Westmoreland epitomized the military's attritional mindset in Vietnam, focusing on the NVA and Viet Cong main forces and relegating pacification to the South Vietnamese and other U.S. organizations.[303] Failing to learn from the French, who also attempted to wage traditional attrition warfare against an irregular threat, the United States set itself on a costly path of strategic failure in Vietnam.[304]

Instead of recognizing that the operational environment in Vietnam consisted of a wide range of participants across the spectrum of threats, neutrals and friendlies, the military chose to focus predominantly on the overt and most traditional military enemies, the NVA and VC main force units. In reality, the threats in Vietnam consisted of the NVA regulars that infiltrated from the North throughout the conflict and the VC main forces that operated in safe havens throughout South Vietnam and the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia; the local VC guerillas that conducted low-level hit and run terrorist attacks throughout the countryside as well as in urban areas; and the VC infrastructure (VCI) that provided the political and military leadership and guidance to the violent activities throughout the South from Hanoi. Global threats influencing the operational environment in Vietnam included both the Chinese and the Soviet adversaries who supported Hanoi for the duration of the war in their effort to spread Communism and undermine the United States. In January 1961, the Soviet Premier, Nikita Khrushchev, overtly publicized this

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[302] Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*, Ch. 1.

[303] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam,* Ch. 6–8.

[304] Fall, *Street Without Joy*; Boot, *The Road Not Taken*.

global state-sponsored irregular proxy-war effort.[305] Although Vietnam's operational environment contained a wide range of relevant threats, until 1968, General Westmoreland led MACV in an attritional effort to defeat the Main Force VC and NVA units while leaving the local VC and VCI as problems for the Vietnamese to solve.[306] Prior to 1968, other design approaches provided the opportunity to gain the necessary understanding of both political and traditional military threats. Early in the war, General Westmoreland changed the Army Special Forces Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) mission to pacify the mountain tribesmen to more traditional offensive military strike-force operations. Similarly, General Westmoreland actively sought to shut down the Marine Corps' CAP.[307] Both the Special Forces' CIDG mission and CAP provided locally attuned options to understand the operational environment and adapt that understanding to implement approaches to exploit the VC and NVA political and military vulnerabilities.[308] General Westmoreland leadership, reflective of post World War II mainstream thinking, and design choice to atrite the military threats without understanding the local social and political environment missed the opportunities presented. By disproportionally focusing on the overt traditional military threats, the U.S. military mostly ignored and, therefore, failed to develop an adequate understanding of the underlying political competition within the operational environment that spawned the NVA and VC threats.

In addition to MACV's over-prioritization of the most apparent military threats—the main force VC and NVA—military leaders from General Westmoreland down to tactical level commanders also failed to understand the interrelation between the overt military threats and the social-political context in Vietnam or how to approach these

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305 U.S. Congress, Legislative Reference Service, Library of Congress, *Khrushchev's Speech of January 6, 1961, A Summary and Interpretive Analysis,* Congressional Document, Washington, DC: February 22, 1961), 4, https://search.proquest.com/congressional/view/app-gis/serialset/12348_s.doc.14.

306 Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 87.

307 John Arquilla and Nancy C. Roberts, "Design Warfare" (Unpublished Monograph, 2017), Section III.

308 Arquilla and Roberts, "Design Warfare," Section III.

challenges.[309]The conflict in Vietnam after 1954 included a civil war between the governments in Saigon and Hanoi, the Soviet- and Chinese-sponsored proxy war against both Saigon and the United States, the Hanoi-sponsored insurgency, organic resistance movements such as the Buddhists' protests in 1963 and from Vietnamese warlords, and coups from the South's own military leadership. The inspiration for many of these underlying internal threats came from the corruption, oppression, and incompetence within the GVN, the anti-colonial movement of the time, and efforts by external state actors including the United States, Soviet Union, and China. Moreover, Saigon's regime retained characteristics of the former French colonization and opened Saigon up to accusations of puppet status under the United States.[310] Saigon struggled to overcome this narrative, and the U.S. exacerbation of this political turmoil between 1963 and 1968, by enabling the coup against Diem, significantly contributed to the lack of Vietnamese military and political willpower to unify and politically and militarily resist the communists.

Although numerous U.S. military official reports identified many of the interrelated social, political, and military problems in Vietnam, the U.S. military actions in Vietnam largely ignored the social-political ecosystem in which the military threats existed.[311] Instead, MACV, led initially by Generals Paul Harkins and William Westmoreland, gave primacy to directly combating the military threat—the VC and NVA.[312] Some capable political and military advisors correctly diagnosed and recommended viable solutions to overcome Vietnam's uncertain operational environment. Both Edward Lansdale and John Paul Vann spent significant time in South Vietnam as U.S. military and or political

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[309] Francis J. West, *The Village* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 311–319;Evans, *U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare*, 151–152; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam,* 232–233; Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War,* 1st ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), xix-xx (Caputo's entire book is an excellent representation of the meaningless sense of attrition combat within an irregular warfare operational environment where the 'body-count' is the measure of performance and effectiveness, but does not lead to strategic outcomes.);Doyle D. Glass, *Lions of Medina* (Louisville, KY: Coleche Press, 2007), 285–287.

[310] Vo Nguyen Giáp. *Vo Nguyen Giap--Selected Writings,* rev. and suppl. (Hanoi: Gioi Publishers, 1994), 220.

[311] U.S. War Office (*A Program for the Pacification*), Edward Lansdale and John Paul Vann all recognized and recommended prioritizing the political internal threats to the GVN and strengthening and influencing the development and employment of the GVN military forces. To quell the internal threats required to defeat the more overt military threats from Hanoi.

[312] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 287–289, 651.

advisors.[313] Lansdale and Vann's prolonged investment of time and effort enabled them to more effectively understand the range of threats and recommend appropriate solutions. As early as 1955, Lansdale diagnosed the primary issues as political in nature.[314] Later in 1965, after initially considering Vietnam's problems mostly military in nature, Vann's understanding evolved and he proposed a political-military strategy by "harnessing the Revolution in South Vietnam" to prioritize the contextual threats while simultaneously confronting the direct military threats posed by the VC and VCI.[315] Ultimately, the top military and political leaders in Saigon and Washington, General Harkins, General Westmoreland, Ambassadors Lodge and Maxwell Taylor, the Joint Chiefs, and Secretary McNamara, virtually ignored these recommendations, as well as those advocated for in the 1966 Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam (PROVN). Only the political defeat brought about by the 1968 Tet offensive forced a changeover of leadership who began to implement earlier recommendations. Even then, the U.S. military only slowly adapted and implemented the new strategy approved by General Abrams.[316]

MACV's failure to effectively understand, diagnose, and properly balance the political and military threats in Vietnam's operational environment led to misidentifying the necessary operational approaches or timeframe, for confronting the threat and achieving success.[317] At all levels of command, the U.S. military struggled to identify and exploit available political and military threat vulnerabilities due to a fixation on traditional methods of warfare.[318] As late as 1967, U.S. military leadership still promised positive

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[313] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*; Boot, *The Road Not Taken*.

[314] Edward Lansdale, "Memorandum to Ambassador Collins."

[315] John Paul Vann, "Harnessing the Revolution in South Vietnam," (September 10, 1965).

[316] U.S. War Office, A Program for the Pacification; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 252–257.

[317] Vietnam Task Force: Office of the Secretary of Defense, "IV.C.6. (c) U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments: 1965–1967," Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1969), National Archives, 56–57, https://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers6.

[318] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam,* Ch 6–8.

near-term improvements and impending success.[319] In doing so, they wrongly assessed the depth of the internal weaknesses of South Vietnam's political and military forces. Furthermore, General Westmoreland's search and destroy operational approach ignored the necessity for establishing control of the rural populace who provided critical intelligence and logistical support, voluntarily or by force, to the NVA and VC main force units. This support enabled both guerilla and large-scale attacks throughout the South.[320] In 1967, the military's search and destroy strategy had left the rural populace under the control of the VC. The essence of the U.S. military's failure in Vietnam lay in a design failure which prevented proper understanding, and application of that understanding to effectively support the South Vietnamese in establishing functional political-military control from Saigon down to the village level which would ultimately determine internal political success in South Vietnam. The U.S. military did not appreciably recognize and adapt to confront the reality of political competition at all levels of warfare in Vietnam until the 1968 Tet offensive forced course corrections.[321] The literature on Vietnam reveals, however, that these U.S. military course corrections mattered little by that point, because, although they suffered defeat on the battlefield in 1968, the communists had won a decisive psychological and political victory against the United States.[322] Although, the better U.S. political-military effort after 1968 slowly improved the situation in South Vietnam, after 1973 when the U.S. Congress cut off all military, and most financial aid, North Vietnam, supported by the Soviet Union and China, successfully defeated South Vietnam through conventional military force.[323]

Synthesized analysis from Bernard Fall, Edward Lansdale, Neil Sheehan, John Paul Vann, Andrew Krepinevich, Guenter Lewy, and others indicates that the U.S. military failed to learn from the French Indochina War, failed to recognize that the traditional

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[319] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 75; Vietnam Task Force: Office of the Secretary of Defense, "IV.C.6. (c) U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments: 1965–1967," 1–2.

[320] Vietnam Task Force: Office of the Secretary of Defense, "IV.C.6. (c) U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments: 1965–1967,"16–17.

[321] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, Ch. 9.

[322] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 717.

[323] Sorley, *A Better War*, Ch. 23.

operational environments of World War II and the Korean War were distinct from the irregular operational environment in Vietnam, and failed to follow the recommendations of U.S. advisors who did possess a better understanding of the operational environment.[324] Instead, their internal attritional tendencies stunted the development of an effective understanding of the highly complex, dynamic, and uncertain operational environment and delayed the steps necessary to confront and overcome the various threats in Vietnam. Although certain individuals within the U.S. military recognized the range of threats and political nature that existed in Vietnam, their understanding did not translate into the necessary relational adaptation until 1968. Even when General Abrams and other theater-strategic leaders listened to the recommendations of those who possessed better understanding of and insights into the operational environment, the evidence suggests that the U.S. military's ingrained attritional perception of Vietnam only transformed slowly over the course of several years, and under the U.S. domestic pressures to remove U.S. troops from Vietnam.[325] Credible research indicates that the deficiencies in understanding Vietnam's complex and uncertain operational environment by the early senior MACV Commanders, but also institutionally throughout the U.S. Marines and soldiers fighting at all levels in Vietnam, inhibited the development and implementation of unified political-military strategy necessary for achieving strategic success.[326]

B.   FAILURES IN POLITICAL-MILITARY STRATEGY

> Corruption was the clear enemy from within. It was a cancer eating away at the Vietnamese government. Corruption violated the people's hope for fair treatment under their laws and made them cynical about the legitimate needs of the government. Corruption helped create a necrotic culture for the germ of revolution, and the major inoculation of honesty required from the Saigon government was never administered.
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> —David Donovan, 1985[327]

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[324] Boot, *The Road Not Taken*; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*; Vietnam Task Force: Office of the Secretary of Defense.

[325] Sorley, A Better War; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 252–256.

[326] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 252–256; Evans, U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare, 151.

[327] David Donovan, *Once a Warrior King: Memories of an Officer in Vietnam* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 251.

The U.S. military, led by MACV Commanders General Harkins and Westmoreland, failed to inform, influence, or implement effective political-military strategy in Vietnam.[328] U.S. theater-strategic leadership, General Abrams, CORDS Director William Colby, and Ambassador Bunker, did not implement a better relational maneuver strategy in support of U.S. policy until after 1968, 14 years after U.S. military advisors arrived and three years after conventional military units deployed to the country.[329] Even after formulating an effective strategy, it took nearly two years to actually implement that strategy.[330] For those who argue that the political leaders in DC were responsible for this gap in strategy, the publicly-stated political objectives for Vietnam remained mostly constant from 1954 through withdrawal of the U.S. military in 1973. President Johnson clearly stated these objectives in his "Peace Without Conquest" speech in April 1965:

> Over this war—and all Asia—is another reality: the deepening shadow of Communist China. The rulers in Hanoi are urged on by Peking. This is a regime which has destroyed freedom in Tibet, which has attacked India, and has been condemned by the United Nations for aggression in Korea. It is a nation which is helping the forces of violence in almost every continent. The contest in Viet-Nam is part of a wider pattern of aggressive purposes… Why are we in South Vietnam? We are there because we have a promise to keep. Since 1954 every American President has offered support to the people of South Vietnam. We have helped to build, and we have helped to defend. Thus, over many years, we have made a national pledge to help South Vietnam defend its independence. And I intend to keep our promise… We are also there to strengthen world order. Around the globe, from Berlin to Thailand, are people whose well-being rests, in part, on the belief that they can count on us if they are attacked. To leave Viet-Nam to its fate would shake the confidence of all these people in the value of an American commitment and in the value of America's word. The result would be increased unrest and instability, and even wider war… Our objective is the independence of South Viet-Nam, and its freedom from attack. We want nothing for ourselves--only that the people of South Viet-Nam be allowed to guide their own country in their own way. We will do

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[328]Vietnam Task Force: Office of the Secretary of Defense, "IV.C.6. (c) U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments: 1965–1967,"; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*; and Lewy, *America in Vietnam.*

[329] Headquarters MACV, *Commander's Summary*.

[330] Sorley, *A Better War*, Ch. 10.

everything necessary to reach that objective. And we will do only what is absolutely necessary.[331]

President Lyndon Johnson set clear objectives for the political-military mission in Vietnam to ensure the self-determination and independence of South Vietnam. These objectives had remained virtually unchanged from more than a decade prior. President Johnson's speech explained that Vietnam fit into the larger effort to limit the aggressive and subversive spread of communism, stabilize the global order, and prevent "wider war."[332] Responsibility for the failure to construct and implement an effective political-military strategy fell on the U.S. political-military leadership, ranging from Secretary of Defense McNamara to the Ambassadors to Vietnam, but most centrally on the military leadership led by MACV down to tactical level commanders in Vietnam. Across much of South Vietnam, military personnel were the only U.S. forces who had personal contact with the Vietnamese people and who could determine the achievability of military or political objectives.[333]

The *Pentagon Papers* records General Westmoreland's strategy of attrition as "the defense of military bases, the conduct of offensive operations against VC forces and bases, the conduct of clearing operations as a prelude to pacification, provision of permanent security for areas earmarked for pacification, and the provision for reserve reaction forces."[334] The papers go on to state that General Westmoreland directed U.S. military forces to hunt down and destroy the enemy's main forces while leaving the task of pacification to Vietnamese regular and paramilitary units. While rightly seeking to "search and destroy" communist main force units, General Westmoreland failed to establish political and military unity of effort between the numerous interagency components, including the CIA, Department of State (DoS), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the United States Information Service (USIS); nor did General

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[331] Lyndon Johnson, "Address at Johns Hopkins: 'Peace Without Conquest,'" (April 7, 1965), http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26877.

[332] Johnson, "Address at Johns Hopkins."

[333] West, *The Village*; Donovan, *Once a Warrior King*.

[334]Vietnam Task Force: Office of the Secretary of Defense, "IV-C-6. (a) U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments 1965–1967," 16; MACV Directive 525–4, September 1965.

Westmoreland effectively emphasize advising South Vietnamese military forces or synchronizing efforts.[335] Instead, while the U.S. military rapidly expanded and pushed the Vietnamese military units out of the way, the South Vietnamese allowed the U.S. military to shoulder the primary warfighting burden and shifted their efforts to pacify the rural areas essential to the communist insurgency.[336]

While MACV, led by General Westmoreland, directed the war of attrition in Vietnam, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's exclusion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) from the decision-making process prevented the development of sound political-military strategy in Washington, DC.[337] Even though, as author and former National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster explains, the Joint Chiefs recommended many courses of action that may have better confronted the traditional warfare threats posed by North Vietnam, there is little evidence that the service chiefs considered or recommended a unified political-military strategy to simultaneously wage political and violent competition at each level of warfare in the operational environment.[338] Instead, The chiefs focused on estimates of traditional military mass and firepower.

Both Army Chief of Staff, General Harold Johnson, and Marine Commandant, General Wallace Greene, estimated in 1965 that success in Vietnam would take up to 700,000 men and would last approximately five years.[339] McMaster further explains that, in 1965, "there was virtually no discussion of how the additional troops would be employed or how their actions might contribute to achieving policy goals."[340] These estimates and accompanying deficiency in strategic thought for employment, and General Westmoreland's claim that the "enemy 'was too deeply committed to be influenced by anything but [the] application of overpowering force,'" indicate that the U.S. military

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[335] Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*, 84–102, 159.

[336] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 84–90.

[337] McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 301.

[338] McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 302–304.

[339] McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 304.

[340] McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 314–315.

national and theater-strategic leadership viewed Vietnam through a traditional warfare attritional lens, reinforcing the flawed premise that mere presence of overwhelming American force and firepower would secure victory.[341]

Ultimately, although better synchronization between the senior military leadership, Secretary of Defense McNamara, and President Johnson would have likely established a more unified political-military strategy, there is little evidence that this alternative strategy would have better addressed the irregular political challenges in South Vietnam. Instead, the strategies proposed would have likely either resulted in following Under Secretary of State George Ball's recommendations to "cut and run" or in immediately escalating the war in 1965 to the troop levels seen in 1969 at the height of the military's involvement.[342] Although McMaster claims that "the relationship between the president, the secretary of defense, and the Joint Chiefs led to the curious situation in which the nation went to war without the benefit of effective military advice from the organization having the statutory responsibility to be the nation's 'principle military advisers [the Joint Chiefs],'" the efficacy of the Joint Chiefs' advice, even if there was proper civilian and military strategic integration, is uncertain.[343]

The Joint Chiefs' recommendations essentially bifurcated the situation in Vietnam into two options: either commit to an unlimited use of force to achieve military victory through annihilating the enemy, or do not engage military force at all. Both options epitomized an attritional mindset and either ignored the real interests that the U.S. pursued in Vietnam or overestimated Vietnam and the region's political worth.[344] Given a dearth of nuanced relational maneuver options from his military advisors, President Johnson's strategy reflected the realities of domestic politics.[345] He escalated the war using the

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[341] McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 305.

[342] McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty,* 300, Ch. 15.

[343] McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 325–326.

[344] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 423.

[345] McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 326.

military's attritional mindset to attempt to convince Hanoi that the price of militarily intervening in the South was not worth the attritional cost they would incur.[346]

As political scientist Andrew Mack explains, President Johnson and Robert McNamara miscalculated North Vietnam's level of commitment to its cause.[347] Ho Chi Minh, General Vo Giap, and the Communists fought a people's war with total objectives for what they perceived to be national survival.[348] In contrast, notwithstanding Johnson's presidential rhetoric the United States would "do everything necessary to reach that objective," the United States fought a limited war by limited means, with limited political objectives, and with limited political willpower. Between the birth of MACV in 1962 until General Westmoreland's departure in 1968, neither McNamara nor the senior military leaders, between the Joint Chiefs and MACV, offered strategic relational maneuver options that balanced an understanding of the realities of Vietnam's operational environment with the true level of U.S. political interests. The United States' strategy defaulted to escalating military attrition. Those in power, politically and militarily, up to 1968 did not adequately heed the voices arguing for a relational maneuver strategy that would address the political and military challenges and exploit the communists' vulnerabilities.

Relational maneuver recommendations voiced by Edward Lansdale, John Paul Vann, and USMC Lieutenant General Victor 'Brute' Krulak began to gain traction in 1967 when MACV established the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program.[349] CORDS, led initially by Robert Komer and followed by former CIA station chief William Colby, merged all civilian and military pacification efforts as a deputy command within MACV.[350] Even after establishing CORDS, General Westmoreland continued to pursue his attrition strategy to reach a "cross over point" where

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[346] McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 326–327.

[347] Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars"; *Giap--Selected Writings,* 15.

[348] Giáp, *Vo Nguyen Giap--Selected Writings*, 15.

[349] "A Strategic Appraisal," Folder 17, Box 3, Victor H. Krulak Papers, Archives Branch, History Division, Quantico, VA; Lansdale, "Memorandum to Ambassador Collins;" Vann, "Harnessing the Revolution in South Vietnam"; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 652–653.

[350] Evans, U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare,163.

Hanoi could not sustain its military losses.[351] This attrition strategy had long ago been proven as impractical and self-defeating by Lieutenant General Krulak, whose 1965 "Strategic Appraisal" noted the futility and errors of an attritional strategy in Vietnam.[352]

U.S. leadership in Washington and Saigon did not establish an effective political-military strategy until the 1968 Tet offensive spurred a chain of events that contributed to a changeover of both political and military leadership, including President Johnson, General Westmoreland, CORDS director Robert Komer, and Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. In their places, President Nixon, General Abrams, William Colby, and Ambassador Bunker forged a unified strategy that correctly identified and prioritized the primary threats and sought to overcome both adversarial and contextual threats. Even pursuing a more unified strategy later articulated in the 1969 MACV Objectives Plan, the U.S. military only slowly adapted to implement the improved strategy.[353] From the historical accounts of the U.S. military between 1969 and 1973, it appears that a primary forcing function for adaptation was the politically mandated withdrawal of conventional forces.[354] While the withdrawal may have incentivized the U.S. military to better adapt to the environment, the U.S. withdrawal under enemy pressure in 1969 likely also had detrimental impacts to the confidence and morale of the South Vietnamese populace, military, and government.[355]

The new U.S. political-military strategy in Vietnam between 1969 and 1973 retained the original overt objectives for an independent South Vietnam; however, history proves that the true political objective became to completely withdraw from Vietnam while retaining as much domestic and international credibility as possible.[356] The means and ways to reach this political objective transitioned during this time as well. The withdrawal

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[351] Sorley, *A Better War*, 1.

[352] "A Strategic Appraisal," Folder 17, Box 3, Victor H. Krulak Papers.

[353] Headquarters MACV, *Commander's Summary*;" Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 252–257.

[354] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 164–166.

[355] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 257; Sorley, *A Better War*, 135; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 741–742.

[356] Sorley, *A Better War*, Ch. 22; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 127–139.

of military forces and the "Vietnamization" approach, to turn the war back over to the South Vietnamese, forced the U.S. military to more heavily prioritize CORDS and the military advisory effort to assist the Vietnamese in politically and militarily competing with the communists.[357] The U.S. military-led effort in Vietnam only implemented a coherent political-military strategy 15 years after the first advisor arrived. Political defeat and the revelation of grave errors leading up to the Tet offensive initiated the U.S. military's adaptation. While the U.S. military ways and means had better adapted to the operational environment, the real political objectives for Vietnam had changed. The U.S. military had failed Clausewitz's most important task for the statesman and military commander: to recognize the true level of U.S. political interests in Vietnam and to understand the nature of the war in which they were involved.[358] The U.S. military adapted over time, but not before the communists had politically defeated the United States. The next section explains how U.S. military organizational design flaws, institutionally and within MACV, directly undermined the U.S. military's ability to understand the operational environment and adapt that understanding to inform, influence, and implement a relational maneuver political-military strategy to succeed in Vietnam.

C.   FLAWS IN ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN

> The army bureaucracy tended to view Vietnam as an educational exercise and rationalized the six month rule as a way of seasoning more officers for the "big war" yet to come with the Soviets in Europe and for more of these "brushfire wars." The real reason, which held true for the Marine Corps too and which explained why the practice was derisively called "ticket punching," was a mechanistic promotion process and the bureaucratic impetus this created.
>
> —Neil Sheehan, 1988[359]

In 1972, Robert Komer argued that the U.S. political and military institutions engaged in Vietnam failed to adapt to the complexities of the operational environment.[360]

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357 Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 164–166.

358 Clausewitz, *On War*, 30.

359 Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 650.

360 Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*.

Synthesized analysis of the U.S. military involvement in Vietnam from Robert Komer, Guenter Lewy, Neil Sheehan, Victor Krulak, Edward Lansdale, John Paul Vann, Andrew Krepinevich, and Lewis Sorely reveals that the overarching tasks and structures were not aligned to the uncertainties of Vietnam's operational environment. This misalignment inhibited the understanding necessary to develop proper strategy or implement proper approaches to overcome the political and military threats.[361] The cumulative effect produced Robert Komer's "gap between policy and performance."[362]

A cross-comparison between the character of general irregular operational environments and the conduct of the U.S. military in Vietnam reveals that, institutionally, the U.S. military forces viewed their role too narrowly. With limited exceptions from the Army Special Forces, the Marine Corps' CAP, elements of MACVSOG, and later CORDS, the U.S. military at all levels of command pursued a predominantly traditional task in Vietnam: to 'search and destroy' through mass and firepower.[363] The uncertain character of Vietnam's operational environment, however, demanded tasks that developed an understanding of the environment to compete politically and militarily across all levels of warfare.

The experiences and writings from Edward Lansdale, John Paul Van, Colonel (Ret) Gerald Turley, USMC, and Major General (Ret) Ray Smith, USMC illustrate that the best way to enable the understanding and competition necessary for Vietnam and irregular warfare lie in the role of the political and military advisors.[364] When employed properly, these advisors understood the operational environment, assisted partner-nation forces, and ensured unity of effort between the United States and the partner nation. Advising

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[361] Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*.

[362] Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*, 8.

[363] West, *The Village*; Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*.

[364] Interview with Colonel G. H. Turley (July 21, 2018); Interview with Major General Ray Smith (August 9, 2018); Boot, *The Road Not Taken*; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*.

represents an inherently relational maneuver activity; it recognizes the necessity to sacrifice organic organizational advantages and work with and through another nation's forces.[365]

In Vietnam, from the mid-1950s, the military employed advisors including Lansdale, Vann, the USMC's CAP, Army Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) teams, the Marine Advisory Unit (MAU), MACV Studies and Observations Group (MACVSOG), and the CORDS program, which included both Provincial Advisor Teams (PAT) and the Phoenix Program.[366] These units and programs represent some of the most effective organizational design elements of the military's involvement in Vietnam. These units allowed military and civilian advisors to embed directly with their Vietnamese counterparts and the civilian population to develop an externally oriented deep understanding of the environment and to influence their counterparts to adapt and overcome both conventional NVA forces and irregular VCI threats. The decisive role that U.S. advisors could have played throughout the entire war is best illustrated by Army and Marine advisors enabling the South Vietnamese to defeat the communist invasion during the 1972 Easter Offensive.[367] If the advisors had not been present to leverage U.S. supporting naval and aviation assets, South Vietnam may have collapsed as early as 1972, as intended by General Giap.[368]

The histories of Robert Komer, Andrew Krepinevich, Max Boot, and others indicate that, institutionally, the U.S. military never appropriately understood or valued the role of the advisor in Vietnam.[369] Even between 1955 and 1964, when advisors ostensibly led the U.S. military effort in Vietnam, the U.S. military did not grasp the full range of responsibilities for advisors in irregular warfare, did not intentionally select advisors, and did not heed warnings from advisors such as Edward Lansdale and John Paul Vann. Both

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[365]Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 336.

[366]West, *The Village*; Evans, U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare; Adams, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in Action*; Turley, The Easter Offensive; Donovan, *Once a Warrior King*.

[367] Turley, *The Easter Offensive*; Sorley, *A Better War*, Ch. 20.

[368] Turley, *The Easter Offensive*; Sorley, *A Better War*, Ch. 20.

[369] Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*; Boot, *The Road Not Taken*.

Lansdale and Vann attempted to inform and influence MAAG, MACV, and other strategic leadership toward more effective employment of advisors, a better understanding of Vietnam, and better operational approaches.[370] Even at the height of U.S. direct engagement, when more than 500,000 U.S. troops fought in Vietnam, only 14,300 civilian and military advisors were in Vietnam, of which only a mere 3000 were combat advisors.[371] In 1969, these 14,300 advisors were responsible for advising approximately 897,000 regular and territorial Vietnamese forces as well as approximately two million local peoples self-defense forces (PSDF), an extraordinary ratio considering the size of the U.S. presence.[372]

With the exception of the advisory period up to 1965, and the Army Special Forces, Andrew Krepinevich explains that advisory duties did not enhance military careers.[373] Of the Army's advisors in Vietnam, less than 25% were volunteers while the rest were assigned to their duties.[374] Furthermore, the level of preparation for advisory assignments represented a mixed bag with less than one-third of advisors receiving specialized training to prepare for their mission.[375] By and large, the military viewed advisors as an unfortunate requirement and distraction from real soldiering within conventional U.S. units.[376] Furthermore, relatively few advisors were selected due to their potential to work with a foreign force effectively, nor were they provided adequate training to prepare them for their responsibilities.[377] Especially up to the late 1960s, advisors were selected, trained, and assigned on an ad hoc basis with correspondingly mixed results in the execution of their assignment.[378]

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[370] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, Part 1.

[371] Sorley, *A Better War*, 182.

[372] Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Peoples Self-Defense Force Handbook," (San Francisco,1969), 1; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 455.

[373] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 208.

[374] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 207–210.

[375] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 207–210.

[376] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 118–119, 168–169.

[377] Sorley, *A Better War*, 182–184.

[378] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 207–210.

In addition to the military's failures to understand and value advisory tasks, historical analysis reveals inherent flaws in the U.S. military's structure and task organization in Vietnam.[379] The military's inability to implement a coherent political-military strategy in Vietnam directly related to the lack of a unified theater-strategic command structure.[380] Without a coherent structure, the U.S. effort could not achieve unity of vision and effort between political goals and the use of military violence based on an effective and common understanding of the threat in Vietnam. The U.S. political-military effort did not achieve cohesion until 1968, when General Abrams and William Colby better unified CORDS' and MACV's efforts under the 'one war' approach.[381]

Aside from the theater-strategic structural problems, MACV and the military services' rotational policies degraded the military's ability to understand the operational environment and influence and implement effective political-military strategy.[382] The Army and the Marine Corps viewed fighting in Vietnam as a short-term distraction from preparing to fight a far more important war with the Soviets in Europe.[383] This attitude, combined with MACV's decision to rotate personnel individually rather than as units, further degraded cohesion and damaged morale.[384] The military instead treated Vietnam as an opportunity to gain experience and rotate officers through command and combat positions to ensure competitiveness for promotions to advance their careers.[385] U.S. military personnel coveted combat leadership of conventional U.S. military units because these positions made the individual officer competitive for the next command responsibility, reportedly regardless of the officer's effectiveness in command.[386]

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[379] Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*, 75–105.

[380] Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*, 75–105.

[381] Sorley, *A Better War*, Ch. 8; William Egan Colby and James McCargar, *Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America's Sixteen-year Involvement in Vietnam* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989), Ch. 17.

[382] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 205–210.

[383] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 650; Allan Reed Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, rev. and exp. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1991), Ch. 18.

[384] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 118–119.

[385] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 651.

[386] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 650.

Guenter Lewy explains that since the military services did not consider Vietnam as a truly important war, and progress and competence were more difficult to measure than in more traditional wars like World War II or Korea, few commanders were held accountable for sub-par performance.[387] The cumulative effect became that the military, which failed to properly understand the nature of the war it fought and failed to implement a coherent political-military strategy until late in the war, did not adequately adapt to organize itself to confront the irregular and conventional threats within the operational environment.

While the communists presented a massed conventional threat during the Tet Offensive in 1968 and the Easter Offensive in 1972, the core of South Vietnam's problems lay in their internal political vulnerabilities which Hanoi exacerbated and exploited.[388] After the VC suffered debilitating losses to their guerrilla forces due to their massed attacks and holding terrain, MACV's one war approach and CORDS efforts degraded the communists' internal insurgency in the South by the end of 1970.[389] By 1972, the Easter Offensive was almost purely a traditional conventional attack in which significant gains occurred when entire ARVN units abandoned their equipment, fled, and surrendered before the attacks were repulsed with U.S. advisory assistance. In 1975, when the Communists seized Saigon, the offensive once again was a conventional military attack.[390]

When the U.S. military structured its efforts to combat both conventional and irregular threats, success followed. Early programs, such as the CIA-sponsored CIDG led by SF ODA teams, saw success between 1961 and 1963 prior to MACV's attrition strategy pulling the program in a different direction that decreased its effectiveness.[391] Early individual advisors like Lansdale and Vann embedded with their counterparts and began to develop a real grasp of the war's complexities, which fostered creative recommendations that were ultimately belatedly implemented. The Marines created and implemented the

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[387] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 119.

[388] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 90–95.

[389] Sorley, *A Better War*, Ch. 13.

[390] Sorley, *A Better War*, 376–380.

[391] Adams, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in Action*, 109.

CAP combined unit program to embed Marine squads with territorial forces in villages to assist in pacification. The Marines even employed CAP after Westmoreland instructed General Walt, Commander of Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ) 1, later renamed Military Region (MR) 1, to direct his attention to the destruction of the enemy main force units.[392] Although never adequately supported within MACV or the Marine Corps itself, CAP represented one of the most effective models for understanding and countering the complex and uncertain threats in Vietnam. Also highly cost effective, the MAU consistently, although in small numbers, advised their partner Vietnamese Marine Corps (VNMC) units from 1954 until their departure in 1973. Their consistent advising contributed to the VNMC's reputation as one of the elite GVN military units. The MAU's efforts made critical impacts late in the war in delaying and ultimately stopping the Easter Offensive attacks in 1972.

MACVSOG represented another innovative approach to structural design in Vietnam, but one that MACV under General Westmoreland and the military services in Washington strove to limit to a conventional employment of special operations capabilities.[393] Initially a project developed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) after the Bay of Pigs failure in Cuba, the military assumed control over the covert paramilitary programs in Vietnam by 1964.[394] A unique military program, SOG's chain of command bypassed Westmoreland and MACV and led straight to the newly formed Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA) in Washington, DC[395] Formally established in November 1963 under Operations Plan 34 Alpha (OPLAN 34A), SOG was composed of Army Special Forces, SEALs, and Marine Reconnaissance personnel as a compartmentalized program designed for the "conduct of covert operations that would convince Hanoi that its support and direction of the conflict in the South and its violation of Laotian neutrality should be reexamined and halted."[396]

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[392] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 566–567.

[393] Robert M. Gillespie, *Black Ops, Vietnam: The Operational History of MACVSOG* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 82–85; *Adams, U.S. Special Operations Forces in Action*, 127.

[394]394 John L. Plaster, *SOG: The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 22.

[395] Plaster, *SOG*, 23.

[396] Gillespie, *Black Ops*, 31.

In its tenure between 1963 and 1973, SOG worked with South Vietnamese indigenous forces to primarily conduct reconnaissance missions along the borders of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia to identify and disrupt the communists' infiltration along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.[397] Additionally, SOG conducted a host of other operations including personnel recovery, deception and psychological operations, raids, quick reaction force responses, and, along with the CIA, managed the failed effort to infiltrate and control Vietnamese resistance and intelligence teams into North Vietnam.[398]

SOG's relational maneuver contributions reveals a mixed legacy in Vietnam. Although a fractional element of the entire U.S. military effort in Vietnam, SOG produced a tremendous kill ratio against communist fighting force of more than 100:1, reportedly tied down significant communist forces in rear areas, and, although suffering high casualty rates, only represented a small cost measured against the casualties inflicted upon the enemy.[399] SOG's attritional success against the communists, however, are counterweighted against its difficulties. Analysis of SOG's efforts reveals that the U.S. military leadership, led by MACV in Vietnam and the Joint Chiefs in the United States, never intended for SOG to pursue efforts other than traditional military practices to search and destroy the enemy.[400] Within this attritional mindset, only the basic reconnaissance mission that SOG predominantly executed along the Ho Chi Minh Trail "seemed to fit into the American command structure's view of operational utility."[401] The other lines of effort for waging irregular warfare through psychological operations and winning the political competition across South Vietnam or in Laos and Cambodia were underdeveloped. While SOG tactical operations provide many excellent examples of tactical and physical relational maneuver against large-scale North Vietnamese forces, due to a convoluted chain

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[397] Plaster, *SOG*, 18–20.

[398] Plaster, SOG; Gillespie, *Black Ops*; Adams, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in Action*.

[399] Plaster, *SOG*, 195.

[400] Adams, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in Action*, 116–127; Gillespie, *Black Ops*, 114.

[401] Gillespie, *Black Ops*, 302.

of command and an attritional military mentality within MACV and in DC, SOG "failed to achieve the goals that its masters set for it."[402]

Arguably, CORDS was structurally the most successful relational maneuver program executed in Vietnam. The CORDS program, which contained both Provincial Advisor Teams (PAT) and the more compartmentalized Phoenix Program, made substantial contributions to quelling the internal insurgency in South Vietnam and preventing its resurgence following the 1968 Tet Offensive.[403] PAT represented a similar program to CAP and established an advisory structure from the central government in Saigon down to the district and village levels.[404] Within the larger CORDS effort, the controversial Phoenix Program advised the GVN and Vietnamese Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU) in targeting the VCI through reintegrating, imprisoning, or killing key communist personnel and leaders.[405] Aside from the more militaristic programs, CORDS also led the reform and reconstruction efforts to strengthen the GVN, wage psychological and political warfare, and address grievances through reform, including the Land to the Tiller program that addressed the long-standing land reform.[406] While each unit or program did not achieve universal success, they did represent elements of more effective structural alternative to the heavy-handed U.S. unilateral and more traditional military approach of merely destroying the communist military threats.

When compared to North Vietnam's design, led by Vo Nguyen Giap, and use of relational maneuver to exploit U.S. reliance on technology and firepower and South Vietnam's political vulnerabilities, the U.S. military's design in Vietnam adapted too slowly and ultimately failed. As authors' John Arquilla and Nancy Roberts explain in their

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[402] Gillespie, *Black Ops*, 302.

[403] Evans, U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare, 16; Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 52.

[404] Donovan, *Once a Warrior King*, 37–38.

[405] Evans, *U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare,* 160–171; Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey*; Colby and McCargar, *Lost Victory*, Ch. 16–17; Internet Archive, "Full Text of 'Phoenix Program Documents,'" accessed October 22, 2018, https://archive.org/stream/PhoenixProgramDocuments/Phoenix%20Program/5%20MACV%20381-41%209%20July%2067_djvu.txt.

[406] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 188.

2017 monograph, "Design of Warfare," the U.S military design in Vietnam failed to adequately locate the communist political and military threats, failed to halt the flow of communist manpower and supplies into the South, and failed to seize the initiative from the Communists in the south through programs like CAP, early versions of the CIDG, and later through CORDS and the Phoenix Program.[407] The design failures from the U.S. failed to enable the understanding and adaptation to exploit communist vulnerabilities while sumlutaneously leaving the U.S. and South Vietnamese exposed to exploitation by resolute leadership through Giap and others.[408] Overall, and especially early in the war, the serious flaws in the military's design in Vietnam severely crippled the military's ability to implement effective operational irregular warfare approaches.

D.   OPERATIONAL APPROACHES DOMINATED BY ATTRITION

> Shift the thrust of the GVN and U.S. ground effort to the task of delivering the people from guerilla oppression, and to protecting them adequately and continually thereafter; meanwhile, seeking out and attacking main force elements when the odds can be made overwhelmingly in our favor.

> —General Victor Krulak, 1965[409]

According to Guenter Lewy and others, MACV's operational approaches in Vietnam generally displayed an attritional style of warfare. The military's inability to understand, diagnose, and appropriately prioritize the threats it faced laid the foundation for its faulty approaches. Until 1968, the military predominantly focused on the overt military VC and NVA adversaries and underprioritized the political warfare effort. This approach is most adequately illustrated by MACV's desire to mass U.S. forces and firepower against the enemy's main forces.[410] Demonstrating the misalignment of this predominant attrition strategy within a highly uncertain irregular operational environment,

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[407] Arquilla and Roberts, "Design Warfare," Section III.

[408] Arquilla and Roberts, "Design Warfare," Section III.

[409] "A Strategic Appraisal," Folder 17, Box 3, Victor H. Krulak Papers, 14.

[410] Krepinevich, *The Army in Vietnam*, 164–165.

even at the height of the search and destroy phase between 1965–1969, the communists still initiated combat the majority of the time.[411]

The search and destroy strategy tied down significant resources as they were diverted to unpopulated areas, leaving the enemy with significant freedom of maneuver until 1969.[412] This freedom of maneuver derived from the majority of the unattended populace, whom the communists exploited for information and sustenance.[413]Instead of studying the enemy as a political-military system and identifying and exploiting weaknesses to dismantle that enemy, an attritional operational approach—overwhelming the enemy through mass and firepower—consumed U.S. strategy in Vietnam. [414] Even under a more effective strategy and organizational design after 1968, the U.S. military still naturally tended toward attritional application of military force.[415]

South Vietnam, assisted by MACV, did not control the population or geographic area of operations in Vietnam until nearly 1971, and then with only limited effectiveness. Irregular warfare requires controlling the populations who support either the government or insurgent both materially and with information. The military's failure to prioritize population control resulted in a lack of timely intelligence prior to the 1968 Tet Offensive and enabled the VC to mass and seize significant territory, contributing to the psychological and political defeat of the United States. Furthermore, the political and military failure to counter and deny the communists' safe havens in Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam, until 1970 and 1971, further contributed to the GVN's lack of geographic and political control.[416]

When the military did pursue effective pacification strategies to control the populace within South Vietnam, U.S. military ethnocentric attitudes often undermined

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[411] Krepinevich, *The Army in Vietnam*, 188.

[412] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 77–82.

[413] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 137.

[414] Krepinevich, *The Army in Vietnam,* Ch. 6.

[415] Krepinevich, *The Army in Vietnam,* 256–257.

[416] Sorley, *A Better War*, Ch. 13, 15.

positive implementations of more effective approaches.[417] Difficulties in effectively interacting and building rapport with the local populace and among partnered Vietnamese units represented a widespread problem among Army and Marine Corps units.[418] Many advisor units and personnel did, however, effectively interact and influence their counterparts throughout the war. For individuals like Edward Lansdale and John Paul Vann, cultural aptitude occurred through their own natural inclination. Units like the Army Special Forces, who specially selected, educated, and trained irregular warfare advisors, cultivated the criticality of developing relationships with the partner forces and local populations in order to meet political-military objectives. In sum, geographic and population control approaches did improve after the 1968 Tet Offensive; however, the military continued to falter when operating with the local populace or partner forces on a widespread basis.

Between 1961 and 1968, U.S. military units, at nearly every level of command, consistently prioritized military violence over solving underlying political threats in South Vietnam.[419] Aside from the limited employment of the early CIA and Army Special Forces' CIDG program, the Marine Corps' CAP, and later CORDS program, the U.S. military units in Vietnam fought with the methods in which they had been trained, to find and destroy the enemy.[420] Given the U.S. political decision to fight a limited defensive war in South Vietnam, the unbalanced attritional approach failed to confront the political problems to create a politically stable South Vietnamese government. If the U.S. leadership had decided to conduct a ground invasion of North Vietnam, the attritional approach may have produced strategic success. Based on the Chinese intervention in the Korean War, however, President Johnson and his advisors feared that a direct ground invasion of North

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[417] Evans, U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare, 151–152.

[418] Evans, U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare, 151–152; West, *The Village*; Donovan, *Once a Warrior King*; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 168–169.

[419] Krepinevich, *The Army in Vietnam,* Ch. 5–7.

[420] Caputo, *A Rumor of War*; Interview with Major General Ray Smith (August 9, 2018).

Vietnam would again risk direct Chinese intervention.[421] Nonetheless, given the U.S. decision to fight in South Vietnam, the attritional operational approach prevented the total collapse of the GVN, while failing to achieve U.S. theater political objectives.

Westmoreland's search and destroy offensive approach epitomized this imbalance. He assessed that the U.S. military could unilaterally reach a "crossover point" where, through air and ground maneuver and firepower, the military could kill more communists than Hanoi could replace.[422] The problem was that the center of gravity for the enemy threat in South Vietnam was the VCI, who functioned as the brain to guide military and political action, recruit and intimidate the local populace and undermine the GVN's political stability.[423] While defeating the VC Main Forces and NVA in conventional battle represented an important facet of the Vietnam War, military victories between 1965 and 1969 only prolonged inevitable defeat because of the internal social-political instability. Furthermore, General Westmoreland's approach called for the GVN forces, with little U.S. assistance, to defeat the VCI.[424] This approach fundamentally failed to recognize the critical shortfalls of the GVN political and military forces, which faced widespread corruption and incompetence especially from the residual politically destabilizing effects of the 1963 Coup.[425] Advisors like Lansdale and Vann had preached about South Vietnamese failings for more than a decade and recommended that the U.S. must assist, influence, and carefully guide the GVN to correct their failings and eliminate the VCI.[426] Accounts of effective political-military advisors like Lansdale and Vann, and programs such as CIDG, CAP, and PAT, illustrate that U.S. advisors often became respected and trusted individuals who could effectively influence the local populace and partner forces,

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[421] Vietnam Task Force: Office of the Secretary of Defense, "IV.C.2. (b) Military Pressures Against NVN: November - December 1964," National Archives, https://www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers.

[422] Vietnam Task Force: Office of the Secretary of Defense, "IV.C.6. (a) U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments: 1965–1967,." Volume I: Phase II, Program 3, Program 4, 61.

[423] Sorley, *A Better War*, 59–63.

[424] Vietnam Task Force: Office of the Secretary of Defense, "IV.C.6. (a) U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployments: 1965–1967," Volume I: Phase II, Program 3, Program, 5–16.

[425] Vann, "Harnessing the Revolution"; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 170–177.

[426] Vann, "Harnessing the Revolution"; Lansdale, "Memorandum to Ambassador Collins."

These individuals and programs strengthened the Vietnamese political and military forces to pursue effective operational approaches while still leading the war effort.

Instead of placing the greatest priority on advisor-centric operational approaches throughout the war, MACV overused violence through establishing free-fire zones in civilian-populated areas and assisting South Vietnamese forces in forcibly removing civilians from ancestral homes, creating widespread internally displaced refugees.[427] These practices were employed, in part, because the GVN and U.S. forces focused on large-scale offensive operations, maneuvering through populated and unpopulated areas to attack communist forces that often maintained complete control over the local populace. In reference to this approach, a U.S. military commander allegedly argued that "it became necessary to destroy the town to save it."[428] VC control of much of the South Vietnamese populace up to 1969 led to general perceptions that whole villages were VC sympathizers and collaborators and thus could be treated (often with indiscriminate firepower) as combatants.[429] The indiscriminate action and immature responses from both the GVN and U.S. forces indicated a fundamental lack of understanding and resulted in inappropriate approaches to dealing with the VC insurgency and the South Vietnamese populace. The history of irregular warfare indicates that whichever side—government or insurgent—establishes physical and cognitive control will typically benefit from the population's forced or voluntary support and will achieve eventual victory.

Later, as Guenter Lewy explains, the political-military Vietnamization and MACV Strategic objectives plan established under President Nixon, General Abrams, CORDS director William Colby, and Ambassador Bunker improved military operational approaches and began to enable the U.S. military to better adapt to and confront the operational environment.[430] From 1969 until the departure of U.S. forces in 1973, the

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[427] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 95–112.

[428] Stephen L. Carter, "Destroying a Quote's History in Order to Save It," *Bloomberg News* (February 9, 2018), https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2018-02-09/destroying-a-quote-s-history-in-order-to-save-it.

[429] Vann, "Harnessing the Revolution," 8.

[430] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 137.

military prioritized the pacification of the populace. Under CORDS, the PAT and Phoenix programs made discernable progress in prioritizing the elimination of the VCI and establishing control over the populace.[431] Better prioritization of improving the GVN political and military forces strengthened the GVN political position, and in conjunction with communist casualties, between the 1968 Tet Offensive and the attacks of Tet 1969, prevented the reconstitution of the insurgent threat and forced Hanoi to change its operational approach to conventional warfare.[432]

As part of this improved operational approach, in line with the nature and character of the threat in South Vietnam, General Abrams guided his subordinates to more carefully apply violence by limiting indiscriminate firepower and avoiding antagonization of the local populace.[433] Unfortunately, although progressive steps were taken in the later parts of the war, the overall U.S. political priority became the withdrawal of troops rather than the stabilizing of Vietnam. This withdrawal of U.S. forces occurred under direct pressure from communist forces still infiltrating the South from across the DMZ as well as from Laos and Cambodia. Therefore, starting in 1969, the rapid withdrawal of forces undoubtedly played a critical role in undermining the GVN's political and military morale even as progress and stabilization occurred between 1970 and 1971.[434]

In addition to the success achieved by CORDS, U.S. military and CIA efforts within SOG had considerable potential for relational maneuver success in Vietnam. SOG's employment of small teams of special operations forces partnered with indigenous South Vietnamese forces produced significant tactical relational successes in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.[435] The impact of these successes could have been far greater, with far less cost to the United States, had the military integrated and utilized military strategy, political competition, and violence in concert with its partners in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

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[431] Evans, U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare, 166–169.

[432] Sorley, *A Better War*, 271; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 137; Evans, U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare, 169–170.

[433] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 137.

[434] Sorley, *A Better War*, 289.

[435] Plaster, *SOG*, 340.

According to Guenter Lewy, the U.S. political and military leadership never effectively competed politically against the communist forces in Vietnam.[436] Early after the defeat of the French, Edward Lansdale and the CIA led an effort to infiltrate teams into North Vietnam to foment a resistance movement and to psychologically attack communist morale.[437] While this effort did reportedly facilitate a mass migration of Vietnamese to the south in fear of the new communist regime, the migration may have also assisted the communists in solidifying their control over the North.[438] Furthermore, all U.S. CIA and military efforts to infiltrate and support teams into North Vietnam failed. By 1968, it was clear that all infiltrated teams had either been killed, captured, or were controlled by Hanoi.[439] Although SOG continued to attempt to exploit previous infiltration attempts by transmitting false communications signals to fictitous ghost teams in North Vietnam using fictitious radio stations and programs to transmit false or deceptive propaganda into North Vietnam, it is unclear whether any of these efforts achieved any meaningful impact.[440]

Later, under the successful CORDS and Phoenix Program, MACV incorporated some of John Paul Vann's recommendations from "Harnessing the Revolution in South Vietnam" and Edward Lansdale's proposed principles for success.[441] These efforts, in tandem with the atrocities committed by the Communists during Tet Offensive of 1968 in Hue City, served to alienate the South Vietnamese populace and politically undermined the communist narrative of widespread resistance in South Vietnam.[442] The CORDS program stands as the line of effort that most closely adapted and employed an operational approach to confront the communists politically as well as militarily. CORDS politically competed with the communists by advising Vietnamese military and political counterparts in bettering the lives of the populace, countering VC propaganda, and disrupting VC activities

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[436] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 85, 110–112, 136.

[437] Boot, *The Road Not Taken*, 227–228.

[438] Boot, *The Road Not Taken*, 227.

[439] Plaster, *SOG*, Ch. 12.

[440] Plaster, *SOG*, 229.

[441] Vann, "Harnessing the Revolution"; Boot, *The Road Not Taken*, 359–360.

[442] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 720.

across South Vietnam.[443] While political competition played a more significant role in the U.S. military's operational approaches in the latter parts of the war, the U.S. military largely continued to conduct business as usual and focused on its traditional activities.[444]

In contrast, Hanoi placed political competition at the center of its strategy and operational approaches. In an editorial published in Hanoi in February 1973, a high-level member of the communist Vietnamese Workers Party(VWP) Central Committee praised the unity in political-military efforts as the key to forcing the U.S. military withdrawal from South Vietnam.[445] Among the factors the communists listed as responsible for defeating the United States were the weakening of political will and internal dissension inside the United States that undermined the war effort.[446] Interviews with General Giap and documentation of communist efforts throughout the war indicate that the communists placed a premium on employing violence in a way that aligned with their own propaganda and ultimate political goals. Examples of this prioritization include the Tet Offensive of 1968, in which the communists won the decisive political victory by convincing the U.S. population and political leaders that the war was unwinnable and that the United States needed to withdraw its forces and support from South Vietnam, even though the Tet Offensive was a military defeat for the communists.[447]

Long before the 1968 Tet Offensive, dating back to the aftermath of World War II, Ho Chi Minh borrowed extensively from the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Constitution to psychologically appeal to the U.S. leadership to support Vietnamese independence from the French.[448] Later, the communists' political maneuvers throughout the war contrasted with the inability of the U.S. or GVN to politically compete. This

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[443] Evans, U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare, 159–171.

[444] Krepinevich, *The Army in Vietnam,* Ch. 9.

[445] PhạmVăn Đồng, *Pham van Dong: Selected Writings*, rev. ed. (Hanoi: Gioi Publishers, 1994), 302–305.

[446] PhạmVăn Đồng, *Pham van Dong: Selected Writings*, 258–261.

[447] "Interview with Vo Nguyen Giap Viet Minh Commander," PBS, accessed July 27, 208,http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/peoplescentury/episodes/guerrillawars/giaptranscript.html.

[448] Lindsay, "Remembering Ho Chi Minh's 1945 Declaration of Vietnam's Independence."

political warfare success for the communists and corresponding defeat for the United States was ultimately seen in the Paris Peace Accords signed in 1973, which removed American forces from Vietnam in exchange for the promise to cease aggression against South Vietnam.[449]

In addition to successfully politically competing against the United States and the government of South Vietnam, the communists successfully waged political competition toward an international audience. In South Vietnam, the communists created the NLF as a front organization separate from the communist VWP in North Vietnam.[450] Although merely a front for the VWP, the NLF was successful enough in appearing as an organic political resistance movement in the South that it was allowed to participate in the Parris accords of 1972 and 1973 as a distinct entity from Hanoi's control.[451] Furthermore, the communists attempted to exploit and influence the internal anti-war movement in the United States and help break the political will to remain engaged in Vietnam.[452] Furthermore, Hanoi's ability to label the United States as neo-colonists that had merely replaced the French to continue to control and exploit Vietnam undermined the political will internal and external to South Vietnam.[453]

Throughout the Vietnam war, and especially until 1969, MACV forces overemphasized the traditional warfare characteristics of Vietnam. While this attritional approach produced tactical military victories when U.S. military forces were able to mass on enemy units, it failed to produce desired U.S. political outcomes and, in the process, expended significant blood and treasure. Throughout the majority of the war, the U.S. military either misunderstood or ignored the centrality of political competition across all levels of the operational environment. This misunderstanding, ignorance, or negligence

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[449] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 202.

[450] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 15–18.

[451] Robert K. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Viet Nam War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), Ch. 6; Tom Valentine, "What was the Paris Peace Accords?" *Vietnam War* (blog) May 22, 2013, https://thevietnamwar.info/what-was-paris-peace-accords/.

[452] Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 436.

[453] Võ Nguyên Giáp, *People's War; People's Army*, 1–11; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 251.

contributed to failures in unifying political-military strategy, command, and approaches to the U.S. political-military effort as well as between the United States and the GVN.

E.   CONCLUSION

> Perhaps Americans will never learn the simplicity of fighting a political war. As our forefathers knew so well in the American Revolution and even in the Civil war. Maybe our schooling in power politics… and our marriage to the computer have disabled us from acting within our own heritage.

—Edward Lansdale, as quoted by Max Boot, 2018[454]

The U.S. military's efforts in Vietnam reveal a strong tendency toward attrition warfare as well as the consequences of this style of warfare in irregular operational environments. Although early advisors, including Edward Lansdale and John Paul Vann, among others, clearly articulated a more accurate understanding of the irregular political-military threats in South Vietnam, organizational predispositions toward traditional structure, military violence, and material strength left over from World War II and Korea set the U.S. military on poorly framed and executed political-military strategy and approaches. Although President Johnson and other high-level political leaders retain ultimate responsibility, the military is responsible for transforming political objectives into achievable military objectives. The military's poor understanding and prioritization of threats within the operational environment caused it to prioritize the overt military threats at the expense of strengthening and stabilizing the GVN both politically and militarily. Furthermore, the military did not establish an effective organizational design in the interagency CORDS program to wage political competition until 1967 and did not start implementing more effective approaches until closer to 1969.

Throughout the war, the military did apply various relational maneuver approaches to the range of complex and uncertain threats in Vietnam. Advisors as far back as 1954 recognized that South Vietnamese political and military forces would ultimately decide the fate of an independent South Vietnam, the primary proximate U.S. political-military objective in Southeast Asia The CIA and Special Forces CIDG pacification effort among

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[454] Boot, *The Road Not Taken*, 599.

minority groups in the Vietnamese highlands saw significant success between 1961 and 1963 in preventing the communists from establishing control over these tribes. When MACV took over command of the CIDG program from the CIA, however, Special Forces' efforts were quickly reoriented on more traditional military tasks. Even then, SF units successfully employed the CIDG forces and other Vietnamese irregular and special forces units as guerrilla and long-range raid forces, which achieved significant success relative to their cost.[455] Later, between 1965 and 1971, the Marine Corps implemented CAP with Vietnamese territorial forces, which also achieved some significant, albeit limited, success in pacifying regions within Military Region 1. When the primary communist threats did morph into conventional NVA forces by 1972, the advisory effort paid significant dividends in halting the Hanoi's conventional invasion during the Easter Offensive. Lastly, the successful CORDS effort, which contained the Phoenix program, made progress in degrading the critical VCI threat and preventing the recovery and resurgence of an internal threat in South Vietnam following the Tet Offensive in 1968. The advisor programs employed in Vietnam represent the most successful relational maneuver practices the U.S. military employed. The early MAAG advisors, MAU, CIDG, CAP, and CORDS programs all produced significant successes relative to their human and material investment and facilitated deeper understanding of the operational environment as well as the flexibility to adapt to the threat and needs of the environment.

The immediate central goal in Vietnam was to stabilize the GVN to enable their independence from communism and to prevent communist expansion in South East Asia. This goal required prioritizing assisting the GVN without creating a dependence on the United States, a difficult task in the best of circumstances. The U.S. military simultaneously failed to stabilize the GVN or prevent dependency on the United States. In Americanizing the war and over-prioritizing the NVA and VC military threats, the United States overspent in blood and treasure while failing to meet its political objectives.

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[455] Patrick Roberson, *Understanding Advisory Roles in Large Scale Counterinsurgencies* (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2011), http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a547904.pdf.

If the U.S. military, at every level of command, had better implemented relational maneuver through political and violent competition, it would not have guaranteed U.S. political-military success by stabilizing South Vietnam under a Nationalist Government. It would, however, have likely produced a better outcome at far less cost than what actually occurred. The U.S. military's failures in Vietnam did not merely occur at the political strategic level in Washington or at the theater-strategic level at MACV in Saigon, but pervaded the most tactical levels where regimental, battalion, company, and platoon leadership often defaulted to implementing military solutions for inherently politically-centric problems. Recognizing the centrality of the political nature of the threat down to the most tactical level reveals that perhaps the military, or at least certain military units, must better prepare to confront these reoccurring problems by refocusing on the principles of relational maneuver in irregular warfare. Figure 17 depicts the approximate balance of styles of warfare and modes of competition by the U.S. military before and after the 1968 Tet Offensive in Vietnam. While the U.S. military adapted and better employed relational maneuver, its earlier attritional deficiencies, particularly in properly advising the South Vietnamese to politically compete, significantly contributed to the political defeat of the United States, and the total defeat of the South Vietnamese.
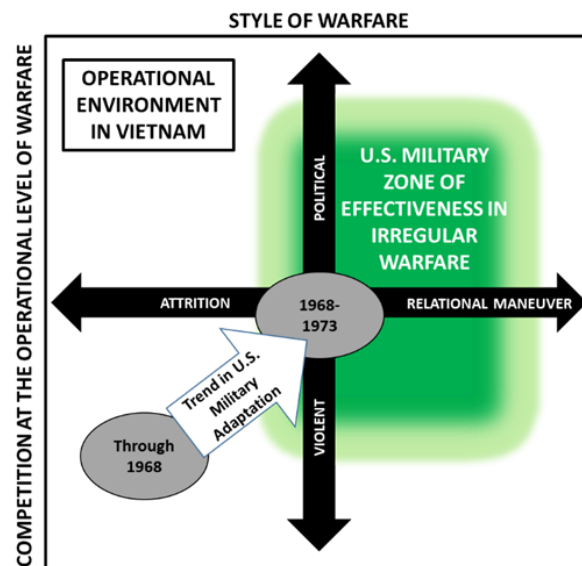
Figure 17. U.S. Military Adaptation in Vietnam

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IV. EL SALVADOR: "NOT A MILITARY WAR"[456]

> Despite the American near obsession with learning the lessons of Vietnam and applying them to low-intensity conflict doctrine and practice in El Salvador, perhaps U.S. officials once again allowed their efforts to be influenced by an assumption that had proven to be a principal source of our frustration in Vietnam: namely, that it is relatively easy to ensure that an ally does what American policymakers deem necessary to eliminate an insurgency. This has once again proved false. In El Salvador as in Vietnam, our help has been welcome, but our advice spurned.
>
> —Benjamin C. Schwarz, 1991[457]

In 1981, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff J-5 directorate charged Brigadier General (BGEN) Frederick Woerner to assess the insurgency in El Salvador.[458] He recommended strong support for the Salvadoran government and the necessity to defeat the Marxist-Leninist *Frente Farabundo Martí para Liberación Nacional* (FMLN).[459] The goal of the United States was an indisputable victory for the existing Salvadoran regime.[460] Unfortunately, the ends, ways, and means were ill-defined, which led to a prolonged effort without commitment to a coherent, defined strategy.

A successful Marxist-Leninist revolution in Nicaragua made the U.S. fearful that the Sandinistas threatened stability in Central America.[461] The fear generated by Nicaragua led to analogous anxiety about the situation in El Salvador. El Salvador would become the site of the United States' most important and extensive "low-intensity" conflict

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[456] Attributed to an unnamed senior American officer in: Andrew J. Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars: The Case of El Salvador*, Special Report for the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1988), 1.

[457] Benjamin C. Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador: The Frustrations of Reform and the Illusions of Nation Building* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp., 1991), viii.

[458] Fred F. Woerner, *Report of the El Salvador Military Strategy Assistance Team (Draft)* (San Salvador, El Salvador, September 12-November 8, 1981), 2.

[459] Austin Long et al., *Locals Rule: Historic Lessons for Creating Local Defense Forces for Afghanistan and Beyond* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp., 2012), 97; Bacevich et al., American Military Policy in Small Wars, 4–5.

[460] Schwarz, American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador, v.

[461] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 3.

since the Vietnam War[462]—that is, if 75,000 Salvadorans killed and nearly 1,000,000 displaced over ten years can be considered "low-intensity."[463] The U.S. military's irregular warfare effort in the Salvadoran conflict would also be the longest for the U.S. military since Vietnam and, until the Persian Gulf conflict, the costliest financially: nearly $6 billion over 10 years.[464]

As per Brigadier General Woerner's recommendation, a U.S. Military Group (MILGRP) was sent to El Salvador to advise on the expansion of the El Salvadoran Armed Forces' (ESAF) to create a force capable of defeating the insurgency.[465] The MILGRP was composed of a colonel in command, with a small operations staff. The MILGRP's advisors and trainers were made up of a roughly ten-man medical team, twenty-man national-advisor team, and six three-man Operations Planning and Training Teams (OPATTs).[466] Despite the 55-man limit on U.S. trainers, it did not prevent them from quickly increasing the size and capability of ESAF.[467]

An analyst of the Salvadoran conflict, RAND researcher Benjamin Schwarz, highlighted the difficulties with the Salvadoran military, including "a disengaged officer corps, a garrison mentality, forced service by conscripts with little will to fight, excessive reliance on firepower and helicopters for resupply rather than on group troops to hold territory, and a highly motivated enemy."[468]

U.S. strategists, policymakers, and advisors focused their approach in El Salvador in two key areas: supporting the Salvadoran armed forces to counter the insurgents in

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[462] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, iii.

[463] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, 3.

[464] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, v, 2.

[465] Long et al., *Locals Rule*, 97; Robert J. Coates, "The United States' Approach to El Salvador," Global Security, accessed November 1, 2018, https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1991/CRJ.htm.

[466] Scott W. Moore, "Gold, Not Purple: Lessons from USAID-MILGRP Cooperation in El Salvador, 1980–1992" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1997), 39, https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/8449.

[467] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, v.

[468] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, vi.

combat, and supporting democratic political development to diminish the FMLN's claims of political legitimacy.[469] As Schwarz wrote in his 1991 RAND study, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, "America urged the government and armed forces of El Salvador to provide what the guerrillas could only promise: a just and equitable society."[470] This would be no small task, as the government and ESAF were both guilty of numerous injustices and crimes over the years. In order to achieve a just and equitable society, Schwarz notes the U.S. effort focused on influencing El Salvador in three specific aspects: "the reform of the Salvadoran armed forces, land redistribution, and democratization."[471]

After years of initially working to stabilize the military situation, American advisors worked to convince their counterparts that they had to address the grievances of the Salvadoran people to provide legitimacy to their government, which was the underlying issue.[472] However, implementation of necessary practices to address the principle causes of turmoil were met with resistance, and ESAF continued to focus on violence against the FMLN.[473] As of the 1988 publishing of the *American Military Policy in Small Wars: The Case of El Salvador*, written by four Army Lieutenant Colonels and dubbed the "Colonels' Report," it seems that the fixation on killing guerrillas had not waned, and there was no Salvadoran strategy for winning the war or popular support.[474]

While not explicitly stated in U.S. policy, according to a 1989 survey, individuals associated with the American effort in El Salvador agreed that "the U.S. wanted to achieve three things: a measure of peace, the respect for human rights, and the institutionalization of democratic process," all of which the survey participants saw as failed objectives.[475]

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[469] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, v.

[470] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, vi.

[471] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, vi.

[472] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 5–6.

[473] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 6.

[474] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 6.

[475] Brook Larmer, "Extremists Gain the Upper Hand," Christian Science Monitor (November 20, 1989), cited in: Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, 57.

The U.S. military, executive and congressional branches, as well as the Salvadoran government and military displayed a lack of relational maneuver principles during the civil war, particularly prior to 1985. Effort was rightly put toward traditional military objectives during the early stages of the war but too slowly shifted toward addressing the endemic political issues and objectives. With a better understanding of the environment, both the United States and El Salvador could have implemented more effective military and political strategies that may have been able to bring the civil war to an end years sooner and with much less violence. Instead, despite lessons learned in previous irregular and small wars, too much emphasis was put on the wrong objectives, and too little was put on strategies that exploited police and military threat vulnerabilities and that were necessary for waging irregular warfare.

A.   EXTERNAL ORIENTATION: DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

> Despite their appreciation that winning popular support remains the ultimate strategic aim in a counterinsurgency, American officials have yet to devise adequate mechanisms to achieve that aim…. The United States has yet to grasp fully what it will take to win such a contest and how to go about doing it. Failure to solve that riddle will condemn Americans to recurring frustration in future small wars.

> —A.J. Bacevich, James Hallums, Richard White, Thomas Young, 1988[476]

At the beginning of the conflict, U.S. government officials displayed only a cursory understanding of the situation in El Salvador. This lack of even surface-level knowledge, let alone deep comprehension of the Salvadoran people and the issues they faced, was a major contributing factor to the lackluster performance and efficiency of the U.S. effort. Schwarz called attention to this deficiency, particularly regarding the acknowledgment of human rights violations committed by members of ESAF and the Salvadoran government. He wrote, "…in the early years of the Reagan administration some officials had what could

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[476] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 45.

most charitably be described as a callous disregard of the sources, intent, and consequences of rightist violence in El Salvador." [477]

Finding aspiring, competent U.S. service members to serve in El Salvador was difficult at the onset of the war. In the 1988 "Colonels' Report," the analysis indicates that there was no incentive for talented military personnel to view service in El Salvador positively, as all of the prestige was placed on participation in "big war."[478] Furthermore, the report's authors explained that "the services showed limited interest in developing officers with the regional expertise relevant to the conduct of small wars."[479] Just as irregular warfare analysists Edward Luttwak, Colin Gray, Susan Marquis, and others have argued, the "Colonels' Report" specifies that the U.S. military's education on small wars is deficient, and that counterinsurgency is still not taught sufficiently in military schools.[480] However, they do make an exception for the Army's Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program, remarking that the contextual understanding FAOs can provide was a "priceless advantage."[481] First-hand accounts of how valuable a FAO, with a profound grasp of their surrounding culture, can be to strategy makers and executors are not new. This lesson of the necessity for specific cultural knowledge of the operational environment has been learned and relearned time and again throughout the U.S. military's experiences in irregular warfare.

Schwarz details how the Salvadorans could easily misinterpret the strategic policy message sent from America. His point was that by taking a strong stance against the leftist FMLN in El Salvador and providing $6 billion in government and military aid, the Salvadoran government would likely view that as an endorsement of its *status quo* of fighting the insurgents with oppressive violence.[482] The U.S. government's inability or

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[477] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, xii.

[478] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, vii.

[479] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, vii.

[480] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 15.

[481] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 15–16.

[482] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, xiii.

unwillingness to understand how deeply this malpractice was ingrained in the political culture of the Salvadorans explains why the United States was bewildered by the continued savagery of the government and military in El Salvador.

In an interview special with the *New York Times*, then MILGRP commander Colonel John Waghelstein acknowledged the political culture of El Salvador and how it led to political tension among its citizens. He surmised that "the reason there was an insurgency is because there were deep-rooted social, political, and economic imbalances."[483] This recognition of political volatility was missed by U.S. strategists in Washington who failed to integrate a thorough political warfare campaign that targeted the underlying instability in El Salvador.

By 1991, failure to address political grievances and bring the civil war to a close unfortunately generated more Salvadorans who believed that "radical policies and solutions" were the only means for stability.[484] The absence of broad and extensive understanding of the operational environment combined with a lack of progress led strategists away from what should have been the obvious course: a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy aligned with correcting the political deficiencies in El Salvador.

In 1991, more than 10 years after the U.S. became involved, it was still unclear whether they would achieve what the U.S. military considered success. Schwarz concluded his assessment of the counterinsurgency effort noting the continued lack of political stabilization: "Despite the prospect of an externally imposed settlement, too many Salvadorans remain all too eager to kill each other rather than to compromise in the Assembly. If the U.S. goal in El Salvador is still, despite the end of the Cold War, to alter this fundamental fact, the American project there is a long way from over."[485]

OPATT personnel were largely an exception to the lack of deep understanding. In Cecil Bailey's 2004 article for *Special Warfare* magazine, "OPATT: The U.S. Army SF Advisers in El Salvador," he outlined the selection for OPATT operators, noting that "most

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[483] Linda Chavez, "U.S. Colonel in Salvador Warns Congress on Aid" *New York Times*, Jun 29, 1983.

[484] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, ix.

[485] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, x.

OPATT officers were hand-picked to ensure they had the maturity and leadership skills required to operate alone in the countryside for months on end."[486] Language proficiency was also a requirement for OPATT personnel.[487] However, not all training for OPATT personnel was created equal. In a 1997 interview with Scott Moore, retired Lieutenant Colonel Jeff Cole was critical of the training he received as a Marine officer before being tasked as an OPATT advisor. Cole entered an on-the-job training scenario while working with the almost exclusively SF OPATT. Cole stated, "the OPATTs were supposed to be training the ESAF. Marines are less suited for that. SF guys are trained to be the trainer."[488] In comparison to the SF who provided weapons and tactics training, the Marine Corps advisors focused on "influencing the larger political-military strategy."[489] After his tour with OPATT, Cole would serve a second tour in the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador as the Naval Attaché. At the risk of diverting from the standard career path, and forgoing future promotions, he elected to return to El Salvador (not a priority of the Marine Corps), to support the Salvadoran's cause, in which he had personally invested.[490]

Moore goes on to explain the importance of the cross-cultural communication skills for which SF are specifically trained. Many non-SF U.S. personnel were shut out of communications for trying to "cut to the chase" too early with the Salvadorans, who preferred to talk about food, family, or the weather prior to any "agenda" items.[491] SF personnel training specifically to cultivate a deep understanding of their environment proved more effective than the approaches taken by other, untrained U.S. military personnel. Because of their training to understand and work in irregular operational

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[486] Moore, "Gold, Not Purple," 41.

[487] Cecil E. Bailey, "OPATT: The U.S. Army SF Advisers in El Salvador" *Special Warfare* 17, no. 2 (December 2004), 22.

[488] Moore, "Gold, Not Purple," 42, footnote no. 71.

[489] Interview with LtCol (Ret) Jeffery Cole, July 18, 2018.

[490] Cole, "Assisting El Salvador," 6.

[491] Moore, "Gold, Not Purple," 42, footnote no. 73.

environments, OPATTs were able to adequately train counterinsurgency forces in El Salvador and defeat the FMLN to a greater degree.[492]

OPATT personnel's capacity to understand the environment improved in 1985 when they transitioned from six-month to one-year assignments. This was deemed a "tremendous improvement" as the continuity allowed for deeper knowledge of the environment, improved relationship building, and enhanced operational effectiveness.[493]

Not all U.S. personnel had command of the nuanced environment in El Salvador. This gap created frustration among OPATT, who understood how the subtleties of the environment affected their missions. One OPATT advisor criticized a MILGRP staff officer, stating, "he does not understand. I am on the practical level of trying to figure out how to get things done, he is talking theory."[494] Bailey, a retired Special Forces officer who served two tours in El Salvador, wrote of counterpart relations in El Salvador, "the SF maxim about the necessity of establishing rapport with one's counterpart in order to be effective was never truer than for brigade advisers in El Salvador."[495]

B.   FAILURES IN POLITICAL-MILITARY STRATEGY

> Even when militarily defeated on all fronts, an insurgency continues to operate from the sanctuary of the minds of citizens who feel aggrieved.
>
> —LtCol Jeffrey Cole, 1989[496]

Before acting on the recommendations of Brigadier General Woerner, the U.S. ought to have tempered their fear of a Central American state government collapsing to communism, further developed an objective perspective of the situation, and come to a rational decision regarding whether or not to provide assistance. Instead, the U.S. prematurely committed effort in support of the Salvadoran regime. With their ill-conceived

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[492] Bailey, "OPATT," 18–29.

[493] Bailey, "OPATT," 21, 27.

[494] Bailey, "OPATT," 23.

[495] Bailey, "OPATT," 23.

[496] Cole, "Assisting El Salvador," 60.

efforts, Schwarz suggests that "…both sides have succeeded…in systematically destroying the political center."[497]

Writing from a counterinsurgency perspective, Schwarz details the importance of a comprehensive analysis of the host government before committing assistance. He wrote,

> if a regime is incapable of governing…it then becomes necessary to question not only whether that regime will survive but whether indeed it deserves to survive. If political development in El Salvador requires that the regime must be coached by foreigners in how to treat its own people, then perhaps low-intensity conflict doctrine's pursuit of its noble goal can only be described as quixotic.[498]

To assess a regime's survivability, Schwarz points to its "ability to deal effectively with internal unrest by the discriminate application of force and the amelioration of conditions that engender it."[499] Whether or not this assessment was conducted became irrelevant in 1979 as the U.S. political leadership committed to assisting El Salvador.

Facing reelection in 1980, President James (Jimmy) Carter felt pressured by Republican candidates to act in El Salvador for the "loss" of Nicaragua to Communism.[500] The hurried origin of U.S. involvement in El Salvador can explain the initial lack of an adequate irregular warfare strategy, but the prolonged absence of a coherent strategy represents a collective failure from the U.S. executive and legislative political branches as well as the U.S. military leadership.

According to the "Colonels' Report," there was no "overarching strategic vision" in El Salvador from the beginning. The colonels wrote that "American involvement in the Salvadoran war took shape without well-defined objectives, a comprehensive plan of action, or a clear appreciation of the resources likely to be required. Unable to see the war as a whole, Americans improvised addressing problems in isolation as they appeared."[501]

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[497] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, ix.

[498] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, x.

[499] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, xii.

[500] Arthur Keith Miller, "Jimmy Carter's Policy toward the El Salvador Civil War: The Demise of Human Rights as a Priority" (master's thesis, Harvard University, 2017), 6.

[501] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, vi.

While there were many effective U.S. programs in El Salvador, in general, they were only effective locally and did not all drive toward a singular end.

Despite financial support from Congress, U.S. military leaders in El Salvador did not feel like Washington was taking the problem in El Salvador seriously.[502] The lack of whole-hearted commitment was unhelpful to waging a winning war and handicapped the advisors in the country.

While the capability to employ military violence to kill insurgents existed, those serving in El Salvador recognized that political, social, and economic reform remained the under-addressed action necessary for winning the war.[503] American advisors sought to persuade ESAF that, despite their newfound tactical ability, the path to victory lay in respecting human rights and winning popular support.[504] The longstanding "authoritarian culture, economic structure, and political practices" of El Salvador were held in place by the very malpractice of their judicial system, land distribution, and lack of advocacy for human rights. Political success would rely upon resolution of these challenges.[505] Because of this, American advisors sought to develop a new generation of ESAF not corrupted by the traditions of the senior officer corps.

Although U.S. presence undoubtedly had a positive impact on the professionalization of ESAF, there remained exceptions among the ESAF who continued to carry out unlawful acts of violence that hindered Salvadoran progress. Many of the most egregious human rights violations were carried out by foolhardy U.S.-trained ESAF officers who politically aligned with the extreme right.[506] Perhaps the training they received once again led to perceived justification for their actions. Additionally, the slow progress of judicial reform and punishment for human rights violations allowed the cruelty

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[502] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 8.

[503] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 12.

[504] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, vi.

[505] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, vii-ix.

[506] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, vi.

to continue. The U.S. did eventually prioritize these reforms, acknowledging that "the rule of law is a cornerstone of democracy."[507]

Outside of efforts within ESAF and the Salvadoran government, the U.S. military also pursued reconciliation between the general population and the regime. The U.S. financed civil-military pacification programs that undermined the FMLN and portrayed ESAF and the Government of El Salvador as having the public's best interests in mind. However, these programs reportedly failed due to the public's lack of trust in ESAF.[508] This mistrust was likely due to the lack of focused political warfare efforts by both the U.S. and Salvadorans.

The need for a strategy that emphasized the primacy of political competition over violence was evident in El Salvador, just as it was in Vietnam. The similarities between the conflicts are identified in Schwarz' analysis: "the creation of responsive, legitimate government and the winning of the voluntary support of the population through redistribution and reform – and not main-force military operations – were perceived to be the keys to success in the Vietnam conflict, just as they are today in El Salvador."[509] Every conflict is unique, and there are always new lessons to be learned. However, the general concepts have remained the same for generations. To win/reach conflict resolution in irregular conflicts, emphasis must eventually be placed within the political spectrum.

One of the successes in U.S. political-military strategy within the conflict was OPATT. In 1983 Colonel John Waghelstein, MILGRP commander, commissioned Major Peter Stankovich, SF team leader, to organize a task force in support of the National Campaign Plan to accelerate the "reconstruction of Salvadoran public services and infrastructure," and improve popular support for the government.[510] The effects of Stankovich's 10-man Joint Task Force on the progress of the National Campaign Plan

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[507] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, vii.

[508] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, viii.

[509] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, xi.

[510] Bailey, "OPATT," 19.

generated confidence for the employment of advisor practices in El Salvador, which would ultimately lead to the creation of OPATT.[511]

Beginning in 1984 and lasting nearly eight years, OPATT was one of the most enduring facets of the 12-year U.S. military's participation in the Salvadoran Civil War.[512] OPATT helped transition ESAF from a static defense force, protecting critical governmental and economic sites, into a potent counterinsurgency force while also reducing their incidence of human-rights violations.[513] However, the OPATT maintained its limited size throughout the conflict and could only help to better ESAF to the extent of its authorized force limitations.

C.   FLAWS IN ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN

> The American foundation for conducting small wars is defective. Prominent among the defects is the American difficulty in accepting the requirement to fight small wars during what is ostensibly peacetime.
>
> —A.J. Bacevich, James Hallums, Richard White, Thomas Young, 1988[514]

The "Colonels' Report" brings attention to the fact that "in El Salvador…congressional mandate requires that military policy and U.S.-supported development programs remain separate."[515] Additionally, the components of the U.S. Country Team (CIA, AID, USIA, and MILGRP) all reported to the Ambassador as well as to their respective parent commands, which led to mixed guidance (see Figure 18).[516] This bureaucratic barrier created a dangerous situation for USAID and limited the effectiveness of the U.S. military on the ground, as well as ESAF, who were knowledgeable of the situation and capable of supporting the development programs. The report continues,

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511 Bailey, "OPATT," 20.

512 Bailey, "OPATT," 18.

513 Bailey, "OPATT," 18.

514 Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, vi.

515 Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 12.

516 Cole, "Assisting El Salvador," 63.

in organization terms, this means that in an insurgency-wracked country where the military represents the closest thing to an effective national institution, the Agency for International Development (AID) is expected to carry on as if neither the war nor the military existed. All of the philosophizing about popular support and praise for civic action as a counterinsurgent tactic counts for little when Congress enjoins American officials fighting small wars from using the local military force to help implement U.S. development programs.[517]

The congressional mandate essentially eliminated the possibility of adherence to counterinsurgency doctrine and practices.
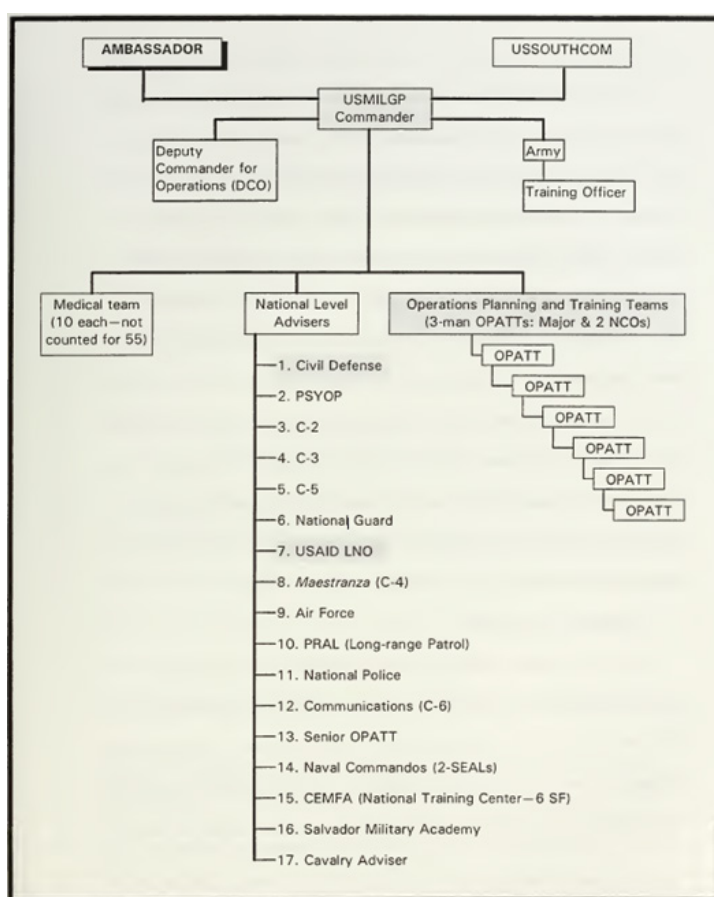
Figure 18. U.S. Military Group (USMILGRP), El Salvador from Moore Thesis[518]

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[517] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 12.

[518] Source: Moore, "Gold, Not Purple," 43 fig 1.

Due to the rapid expansion of ESAF, from 10,000 to 40,000 in five years, most battalion commanders were captains rather than lieutenant colonels and were also lacking experienced non-commissioned officers.[519] While the U.S. effort helped to grow the force through recruitment and training, experience and professionalization would take more time.

Another flaw was the lack of control of both funds and policy regarding security assistance. Security assistance funding and policy belongs to the host nation. Funding provided by the U.S. for security assistance was appropriated to and immediately available to El Salvador; the DoD was not allowed to control those funds. In addition, while Commander in Chief Southern Command (CINCSOUTH) and the MILGROUP commander and advisors provided guidance, the responsibility was ultimately that of the Salvadorans, who made decisions, without, or against the advice provided. [520]

The confusing organizational decisions led to efforts being wasted on fixing structure in lieu of being put toward operational objectives. "Rather than questioning and testing the assumptions that underlie the doctrine, there is a constant tinkering with techniques and organizational charts," Schwarz wrote.[521] He continued, describing America's involvement in El Salvador and Vietnam as "self-flagellation," but does offer that "the cures offered are as familiar and simplistic as the diagnosis: ensure that low-intensity conflict is not relegated to the periphery of military education, or manipulate the organization of the "country team" to guarantee interagency coordination."[522]

The "Colonels' Report" also outlined the distraction caused by organizational shortcomings,

> Overlapping lines of civil and military authority within the theatre caused friction between the ambassador and the responsible unified commander, impeding coordination until senior officials with a fortuitous 'personal chemistry' arrived on the scene. Perhaps the most irritating to those serving

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[519] Cole, "Assisting El Salvador," 61.

[520] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 13.

[521] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, x.

[522] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, x-xi.

in El Salvador, a cumbersome, unresponsive intensely bureaucratized system of security assistance hampered American efforts to supply ESAF what they needed and reduced the utility of what might otherwise have provided an important source of American leverage.[523]

Poor unity of command can create parallel efforts, and more projects and processes that receive little attention or are abandoned altogether due to lack of communication.

A further organizational design failure was molding ESAF in the image of the U.S. military. The "Colonels' Report" points out that over the course of the war, "structurally, ESAF emerged as a force better suited for conventional war than counterinsurgency."[524] During the early stages of the war this tactical ability helped to shift the power balance toward ESAF, but once the battle became a true insurgency, ESAF's efforts began to flounder. The U.S. advisors would later try to sway ESAF from the conventional preference they instilled, but were unable to succeed; ESAF was capable at fire and maneuver, while deficient in politically competing with the FMLN.[525]

A lack of access to chain-of-command and reinforcement of what their mission statement was left some OPATT advisors to rely solely on the information and lessons their predecessors passed down to them. [526] Bailey notes that "it is rare to find a brigade adviser who recalls having seen what he considered a mission statement" and that in one particular instance, an advisor still had not met the MILGRP commander after the first 100 days of his assignment.[527] The lack of communication and uncertainty of strategic purpose limited the effectiveness of U.S. advisors in El Salvador.

In terms of Salvadoran organizational design flaws, the *tanda* system utilized by ESAF promoted all officers of each graduating class of the military academy together regardless of performance.[528] This system not only made military proficiency irrelevant

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[523] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, vi.

[524] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, vii.

[525] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, vii.

[526] Bailey, "OPATT," 23.

[527] Bailey, "OPATT," 23.

[528] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, vi.

among ESAF officers, but also allowed the corruption and criminal behavior to continue unchecked as these officers joined the entitled association of senior ESAF officers. While not all senior ESAF officers acted unprofessionally, unethical behavior was endemic to much of the corps. Corruption among Salvadoran officer corps included "commanders collecting the salaries of nonexistent 'ghost soldiers,' selling goods at inflated prices to their men, siphoning funds from food and clothing budgets, and leasing their troops as guards and laborers [which] served to vitiate the morale and fighting effectiveness of the Salvadoran military."[529]

D.   OPERATIONAL IRREGULAR WARFARE APPROACHES

> A counterinsurgency effort must be fought with equal fervor throughout the country as part of a coordinated civil-military campaign. It must be waged at every level of the contested society.

> —LtCol Jeffrey Cole, 1989[530]

Despite frequent comparisons to the Vietnam War and other small wars, the "Colonels' Report" points out that "U.S. policy toward El Salvador represents an attempt to formulate a new approach to a painfully familiar problem."[531] The new approach was to provide weapons, ammunition, equipment, economic aid, intelligence, strategic counsel, and tactical training "while preserving that the war remains ultimately theirs to win or lose." [532] They would reinforce this principle by restricting U.S. footprint and activities. Washington insisted that it was "peacetime" and, because of this, did not give the Salvadoran problem appropriate attention.[533] Dean Hinton, ambassador to El Salvador from 1981-1983, claimed that many policymakers were hesitant to employ methods that made the situation look similar to Vietnam, including the use of local defense forces.[534]

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[529] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, vi.

[530] Cole, "Assisting El Salvador," 66.

[531] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, v.

[532] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, v.

[533] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, vi.

[534] Interview with Deane Hinton in BDM International, 1988, Vol. 1, pp. 22–23. As cited in: Long et al., *Locals Rule*, 97.

The principles of relational maneuver were understood, but not put into practice. The "Colonels' Report" stated that "American officers in the field recognized that the solution to the Salvadoran problem was not to be found strictly in military terms." [535]In El Salvador, and irregular warfare in general requires overlapping lines of effort in combat operations, civic action, psychological operations, stability operations, and civil defense force integration – all driven by intelligence – to achieve success.[536] A relational maneuver style of warfare enables these overlapping lines of effort.

Many viable political approaches were left unused by the United States for years, including assistance from the United Nations. Schwarz reveals that "until 1990, America did not seek a compromise brokered by the United Nations but pressed for a clear victory through a combination of military and reform measures. In these terms, American policy failed."[537] The feared instability in Central America and civil war in El Salvador was a perfect scenario for UN assistance whose principal goal is "the maintenance of international peace and security."[538]

In Schwarz's evaluation, the U.S. efforts and "low-intensity conflict policy has merely achieved a prolonged and costly stalemate."[539] In El Salvador, just as in Vietnam, inadequate application of relational maneuver led to a drawn-out conflict with overemphasis on battlefield performance and underachievement in socio-political warfare/ endeavors, leaving the situation no closer to conflict resolution.

The U.S. effort to create local defense forces began in 1983 with the Civil Defense program.[540] The Civil Defense force would be composed of *campesinos* (peasant farmers) who lacked any prior formalized military training and would be led by ESAF NCOs.[541]

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[535] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, v.

[536]Interview with LtCol (Ret) Jeffery Cole.

[537] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, xii.

[538] United Nations, "What We Do," accessed October 19, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/sections/what-we-do/.

[539] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, xiii.

[540] Long et al., *Locals Rule*, 98.

[541] Cole, "Assisting El Salvador," 61.

Recruitment was difficult as the *campesinos* were fearful of retribution from the guerrilla forces.[542] Due to the continued size limitation of MILGRP, they utilized a "train the trainer" approach in the Civil Defense program, which led to a lackluster quality of the local defense forces.[543] In addition, the Civil Defense personnel were composed of lower-class locals who were barely able to meet their basic subsistence necessities, making it improbable that they would ever succeed as a proper defense force.[544]

There is also evidence that neither ESAF nor the Salvadoran government ever truly supported Civil Defense. Duarte's personal mistrust for Civil Defense dates back to the 1970s when he was arrested and tortured by ORDEN (Order), a former local defense organization that maintained similar membership to Civil Defense.[545] ESAF units also failed to provide adequate quick reaction force for the Civil Defense units.[546] While there was little support from the Salvadorans, the Central Intelligence Agency did assist Civil Defense to a degree. In the event of Civil Defense forces being killed in action, the CIA provided a "death benefit" to the member's family.[547] However, this support could do nothing to make up for the lack of trust by the Salvadoran regime.

Local defense forces were never meant to replace the military or police, but rather to supplement them by slowing the advance of insurgents and notifying the appropriate authorities who can respond with force. Some Salvadoran military officer recognized this, stating that Civil Defense should be "informers not combatants," yet their advice was never heeded.[548] The ESAF trainers further contributed to limiting the capability of Civil

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[542] Cole, "Assisting El Salvador," 63.

[543] Long et al., *Locals Rule*, 99.

[544] Max Manwaring and Court Prisk, eds, *El Salvador at War: An Oral History of the Conflict from the 1979 Insurrection to the Present* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1988), 337, cited in: Long et al., *Locals Rule*, 99.

[545] Jose Napoleon Duarte, *Duarte: My Story* (New York: Putnam, 1986), cited in: Long et al., *Locals Rule*, 103.

[546] Long et al., *Locals Rule*, 104.

[547] Moore, "Gold, Not Purple," 66.

[548] Interview with Colonel Sigfredo Ochoa Perez in BDM International, 1988, Vol. 6, p. 15, cited in: Long et al., *Locals Rule* 105.

Defense by stockpiling boots, rifles, and ammunition that were meant for issue to Civil Defense units. ESAF units were holding the equipment for themselves in the event that the U.S. abandoned El Salvador.[549] It was also the sporadic nature of congressional funding, not knowing if more money was en route or if the U.S. would pull out, that led to increased stockpiling. Instead of funds being strategically focused, they were spent on items that would sustain the force for a prolonged time, rather than those that would increase effectiveness and drive success.[550]

While there are some examples of Civil Defense successes, the majority of the assessments range from skeptical to negative.[551] A 1986 examination of Civil Defense units revealed that only 30 percent were rated as being in "good condition."[552] The result of limited and localized success of Civil Defense sustained the mistrust by ESAF and the government.[553] In their RAND study, *Locals Rule: Historical Lessons for Creating Local Defense Forces for Afghanistan and Beyond*, Austin Long, Stephanie Pezard, Bryce Loidolt, and Todd C. Helmus point out that due to the mistrust of other Salvadorans, the valuable intelligence accessible to Civil Defense went unutilized.[554] Local defense forces are crucial to maintaining stability in counterinsurgency environments, but must be supported by their nation's government and military to provide tangible benefits, otherwise they remain disconnected from the main effort. There needs to be a mutual relationship between supporting and supported elements as depending on the circumstances, these roles will transition.

The OPATT mission of ESAF expansion between 1984 and 1985 focused on creating a tactically proficient force that would be "capable of preventing an FMLN

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[549] Moore, "Gold, Not Purple," 66, footnote no. 140. See also: Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, 55.

[550] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 13.

[551] Long et al., *Locals Rule*, 100–105.

[552] Long et al., *Locals Rule*, 99.

[553] Long et al., *Locals Rule*, 106.

[554] Long et al., *Locals Rule*, 106.

victory."[555] Helicopters and close-air-support aircraft were provided to the Salvadoran Air Force by the U.S. military, and training focused on the battlefield component of counterinsurgency. Despite enhancing ESAF tactical ability, the OPATTs found it difficult to maintain credibility with ESAF due to restrictions on U.S. personnel accompanying ESAF operations.[556] OPATT disagreed with these restrictions, but Congress felt they were necessary to prevent a "full engagement of American forces in a ground war in Central America."[557]. These restrictions displayed U.S. policymakers' lack of appreciation for the significant role advisors and rapport-building can play. This failure was reinforced by guests from SOUTHCOM, the Pentagon, and Congress, who would routinely show up to El Salvador without a comprehensive understanding of the situation on the ground.[558] Advisors need to prove their resolve for the mission to their partners continually, and leadership by example is a powerful method for achieving such ends.

After improving the tactical ability of ESAF and preventing a military coup by the FMLN, American advisors sought to convince their ESAF counterparts that "winning popular support" should become their new primary focus.[559] This operational shift by the advisors came with little support from the Salvadorans or the U.S. The Salvadoran regime was now capable of defending itself against the FMLN militarily, and the U.S. still had not implemented a comprehensive political-military strategy. This left the small number of American advisors as the driving force for the stabilizing effort.

Had U.S. strategy makers or the Salvadoran regime understood relational maneuver or had studied past irregular wars, they would have recognized the necessary transition away from violence and toward a stabilizing political effort. The historical precedent of the U.S. efforts in Vietnam display that success in irregular warfare depends on establishing legitimate control of the population, not simply attrition of enemy forces. More

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[555] Bailey, "OPATT," 21.

[556] Bailey, "OPATT," 24. See also: Cole, "Assisting El Salvador," 64.

[557] Bailey, "OPATT," 24.

[558] Cole, "Assisting El Salvador," 66

[559] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, 22.

specifically, political reform of principle grievances may be necessary to undermine the insurgency and gain popular support.[560]

With this in mind, the U.S. political efforts sought to "deprive the FMLN of its appeal."[561] After ESAF battlefield victories, they would target guerrilla forces with psychological operations campaigns, distributing pamphlets and posters of guerrillas killed in action to the guerrilla camps that were "carefully worded not to provoke anger, but rather feelings of remorse and hopelessness."[562] In certain circumstances, these pamphlets led to the surrender of guerrilla fighters who would be exploited for the target of additional guerillas.[563]

State Department officials agreed with the assessment in the 1984 Kissinger Commission report that the decisive factor for success in El Salvador was a fair and functional judicial system and stable democratic establishments, such as labor unions and the press.[564] As long as the lack of accountability for the death squads and other human rights violations remained a constant, El Salvador would remain locked in civil disputes between opposing factions.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) created the *Municipios en Acción* (MEA/Municipalities in Action) program in 1987 to make development funds directly accessible to local mayors.[565] Mayors would hold town meetings to prioritize projects and request funding from the Salvadoran government's National Commission for Area Restoration (CONARA), which acquired funding from USAID. MEA was generally considered a success but, like other programs, was not without its downsides. MEA succeeded in fulfilling the locals' priority projects and many Salvadoran officials noted a positive correlation between municipalities with a Civil Defense force and MEA success,

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560 Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, v.

561 Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, v.

562 Cole, "Assisting El Salvador," 62.

563 Cole, "Assisting El Salvador," 62.

564 Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, 58.

565 Long et al., *Locals Rule*, 102.

bolstering support for both programs.[566] However, others are skeptical, citing that the insurgents were unlikely to disrupt projects requested by locals, that there was no improvement to Civil Defense after MEA was introduced, and that the definition of "success" was skewed because completion of MEA projects did not lead to trust and support of the Salvadoran government or military.[567]

E.   CONCLUSION

> Look beyond the functions of security assistance, training, and advice. Call it war, and having done so, act accordingly.

> —A.J. Bacevich, James Hallums, Richard White, Thomas Young, 1988[568]

The combined lackluster U.S. and Salvadoran partner effort prolonged a conflict that could have been alleviated had relational maneuver been better implemented. However, despite the poor understanding and lack of unified effort by President Ronald Reagan's administration, Schwarz reminds those assessing the conflict that they "must also recognize, however, that it is impossible to imagine any point in the past decade or in the future when El Salvador would not be a far more violent and unjust place, but for the American effort."[569] Some place the blame solely on the Salvadorans as it was their war to win or lose. Schwarz provides a valid rationale for this argument: "In tracing the frustrations of the efforts to reform El Salvador, it would seem that the fault lies not in ourselves, but in the Salvadorans. El Salvador's rightists and its military have often rejected the reforms that America deems necessary to counter the insurgency, and the United States has time and again been met with frustration as El Salvador's armed forces adopt Washington's language even as they ignore its principles."[570]

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[566] Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc, "Evaluation of the Social Stabilization and Municipal Development Strengthening Project," Report to USAID, June 1994, cited in: Long et al., *Locals Rule*, 102.

[567] Moore, "Gold, Not Purple," 66. See also: the comments of Gerardo Le Chevallier in Larmer, "AID Stragety Targets Salvadoran Villages" (1989), cited in: Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, viii.

[568] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 51.

[569] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, xii.

[570] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, viii.

By 1989, those in El Salvador agreed that political reforms to fix the broken justice system and redistribute land were needed to stabilize the country and end the decades-long civil war.[571] Many people unfairly place the blame on the United States, citing a perceived lack of effort and commitment.[572] The Colonels' Report also cites that "the U.S. government as a whole mustered enough commitment only to prevent El Salvador's demise."[573] The truth is that U.S. strategy failed to find a way to solve the endemic political instability in El Salvador.

Once the U.S. government was no longer fearful of Central America collapsing to communism, it turned over the responsibility of mediation to the UN.[574] Although the U.S. military advisors in El Salvador recognized that establishing legitimate control of the relevant population was the necessary criteria for victory in irregular warfare, the larger U.S. military was yet to implement strategies that align to these ends. Bacevich believes that this mismatch of understanding and practice "will condemn Americans to recurring frustration in future small wars.[575]

Those who oppose the U.S. view small wars as high-stakes, and they apply maximum effort to them.[576] On the importance of "commitment," the Colonels' Report explains that it is not a commitment of scale, but rather a commitment of intensity. As was the case in Vietnam, the guerillas in El Salvador were wholly and unequivocally determined to wage and win their war, for which 'small' never equated to 'inconsequential'. This enemy recognized and capitalized on the reality that force could be used "as a legitimate political instrument," a lesson the United States still had not internalized.[577]

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[571] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, 58.

[572] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, 58.

[573] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 13.

[574] Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, xiv.

[575] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 45.

[576] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, ix, 50.

[577] Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 50.

Despite MILGRP and Congress not clearly conveying the mission or the means to accomplish it, OPATT were of notable excellence and effect during the Salvadoran Civil War.[578] A small band of SF and Marine advisors cultivated a deep understanding of their environment and were able to execute a counterinsurgency campaign with minimal guidance or interference. While the lack of interference allowed advisors to rapidly adapt, the lack of guidance left the military effort detached from national political objectives and strategic leadership. Retrospective analyses have concluded that OPATT was the principal source for ESAF's improvements, both tactically and civilly.[579] OPATT's influence was confirmed by FMLN commander Joaquin Villalobos who, upon reflection, noted that American advisors played the largest role in the deterioration of the FMLN. OPATT's professionalization of ESAF, particularly in minimizing their abuses, served to undermine FMLN propaganda and as a result, their recruitment dwindled.[580] Cecil Bailey puts OPATT's impact into perspective, noting that between 1985 and 1992 "just over 140 SF officers and NCOs served as advisors to a 40-battalion army of 40,000 men scattered across the country in 14 garrisons with responsibilities for the security of dozens of critical sites and hundreds of civil-defense units."[581] A small number of advisors made a tremendous impact that led to the demobilization of the FMLN, displaying a remarkable return on investment. However, this did not come without a cost. OPATT advisors served one-year assignments and many returned to El Salvador for multiple tours.

Bailey concluded his article writing, "It was one of those rare assignments that attracted SF Soldiers because they believed the mission was important and that it was "theirs" to accomplish. They knew that they could make a difference, and they were willing to pay the price to do it."[582] Waging irregular war effectively should include utilization of advisors similar to OPATT. Given that OPATT received little support from Congress and

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[578] Bailey, "OPATT," 27.

[579] Bailey, "OPATT," 27–28. See fn 50.

[580] Frank Pedrozo interview with Cecil Bailey. As cited in: Bailey, "OPATT," 27.

[581] Bailey, "OPATT," 28.

[582] Bailey, "OPATT," 28.

minimal direction from MILGRP, their performance is a testament to the effectiveness of the advisory practice.

When questioned about lessons learned during the Salvadoran insurgency, General Woerner, then Commander-in-Chief of United States Sothern Command, said "my gut feeling is that there is nothing new."[583] To reiterate, the recommendations from the "Colonels' Report," which states that they hardly seem noteworthy or groundbreaking but bear noting due to failure of implementation, are as follows:

- Make room for the study of small wars in military schools.

- Clarify organizational responsibilities for fighting small wars, in Washington and the field.

- Overhaul the procedures governing security assistance.

- Before undertaking any intervention, establish a vision of what you hope to accomplish and a consensus of political support to sustain that vision.

- Put someone in charge, vesting that official with real authority.

- Send your first team and permit its members the latitude needed to get the job done.

- Foster institutional change only where it will make a difference.

- Avoid inappropriate technology.

- Weight the "other war" as the tougher part of the proposition.[584]

These recommendations embody relational maneuver. The argument can be made that it is commitment that matters most. If the United States political leadership decides to go to war, small or big, to achieve its ends, it should do so understanding the nature of the operational environment, assess the level of threat in relation to U.S. interests, and align its level of support appropriately to achieve its objectives. The level of commitment should not be disproportional to the level of interests at stake; however, war and warfare require the dedication of specific personnel and resources who can employ relational maneuver by

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583 Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 49.

584 Bacevich et al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars*, 49.

developing an appropriate understanding of the environment; informing, influencing, and implementing political-military strategy; tailoring the force's organizational design; and applying the appropriate operational approaches led by embedded advisors. In El Salvador, although not expending excess blood and treasure as in Vietnam, the U.S. military still failed to adequately apply the principles of relational maneuver.

Just as in Vietnam, it took years of U.S. involvement in El Salvador to transition toward the principles of relational maneuver. Figure 19 depicts the style of warfare and modes of competition during the Salvadoran Civil War. Violence and attrition were necessary early on to prevent an insurgent coup, but lasted far too long due to the lack of understanding of the Salvadoran environment and failure to develop a sound political-military strategy to address the core grievances of the Salvadorans. However, by the end of the conflict, U.S. advisors were advocating for the appropriate policies and actions that would lead to stability in El Salvador. However, in comparison to the excessive cost, both financially and of human life by MACV, the congressionally mandated restraints in El Salvador through an adaptive small footprint approach produced much better strategic outcomes than in Vietnam.
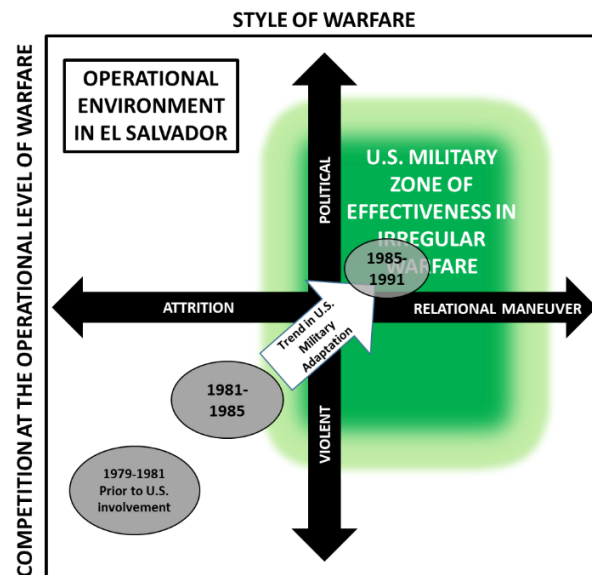
Figure 19. U.S. Military Adaptation in El Salvador

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V.   AFGHANISTAN: "STILL A QUESTION MARK"[585]

> We had no idea of the complexity of Afghanistan—tribes, ethnic groups, power brokers, village and provincial rivalries. So our prospects in both countries were grimmer than perceived, and our initial objectives were unrealistic. And we didn't know that either. Our knowledge and our intelligence were woefully inadequate. We entered both countries oblivious to how little we knew.
>
> —Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, 2014[586]

Al Qaeda's attacks on September 11th, 2001, galvanized the United States to a degree unknown since December 7th, 1941. Osama Bin Laden's attack also launched the United States into a global war that began in the mountains of Afghanistan. While then-President George W. Bush described the new war as one of good versus evil that echoed World War II and the fight against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, the war in Afghanistan quickly proved to be radically different, composed of a complex network of threats that the United States has struggled to effectively understand, confront, and overcome.[587] The U.S. military has played a leading role in Afghanistan and has met both success and failure in its quest to defeat al Qaeda, deny terrorist safe-havens, and leave behind a legitimate form of self-sustaining governance. Ultimately, however, the U.S. military's struggles to effectively employ relational maneuver mirror many of its struggles 30 years prior in the jungles and highlands of Vietnam.[588] Unlike Vietnam, the final verdict in Afghanistan has not been reached. Applying this study's analytical framework to the U.S. military's irregular warfare effort in Afghanistan since 2001 reveals that it has failed to adequately understand the complex network of threats in Afghanistan, failed to

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[585] Flash News, DFN: U.S. Army Gen. Scott Miller Gives First Speech as Resolute Support Commander KABUL, AFGHANISTAN, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEIBU3sE10c.

[586] Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 589.

[587] "President George W. Bush's Speech to Both Houses of Congress Thursday, 20 September 2001," *European Security* 10, no. 4 (December 1, 2001): 112–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662830108407517.

[588] M. Chris Mason, *The Strategic Lessons Unlearned from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan Why the Afghan National Security Forces Will Not Hold, and the Implications for the U.S. Army in Afghanistan* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2015); Greentree, "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing," 1–32.

implement an effective political-military strategy until nine years after its initial invasion, failed to appropriately tailor its organizational design to overcome the confronted threats, and overemphasized attritional operational approaches at the expense of addressing root political problems within Afghanistan and the region.[589] As retired Foreign Service officer and author Todd Greentree explains, "as in Vietnam, fundamental difficulties persist in adapting enduring institutions to the requirements of strategy."[590]

A.   BACKGROUND

The literature on the U.S. military's effort in Afghanistan reveals five general phases from 2001 until the present day.[591] As with the previous Vietnam and El Salvador case studies, relational maneuver provides the analytical framework to examine and assess the effectiveness of the U.S. irregular warfare effort in Afghanistan. While the U.S. military, and especially special operations forces (SOF), did adapt over time and implement some effective relational maneuver principles based on understanding Afghanistan's operational environment and the relevant threats, overall, the U.S. political-military irregular warfare efforts in Afghanistan reflect unbalanced tendencies toward attritional warfare that have proved detrimental to producing desired strategic outcomes.

Phase One began immediately following the attacks on 9/11, with the overthrow of Mullah Omar's Taliban Regime, and lasted until the military shifted to planning and

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589 Daniel P. Bolger, *Why We Lost: A General's Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014); Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan. (Arlington, VA, 2017); Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Viking, 2008); Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan: RAND Counterinsurgency Study* (Volume 4. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008). https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG595.html; Francis J. West, *The Wrong War: Grit, Strategy, and the way out of Afghanistan* (1st ed. New York: Random House, 2011); Hy S. Rothstein, and John Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames Strategy and Policy Choices for America'sLlongest War* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012); Long, Austin et al*., Building Special Operations Partnerships in Afghanistan and Beyond: Challenges and Best Practices from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Colombia* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015); Steve Coll, *Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018); Richard D. Hooker, and Joseph J. Collins, *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015).

590 Greentree, "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing," 325.

591 Coll, *Directorate S*; Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*.

executing the invasion of Iraq in the Spring of 2003. Phase Two spanned from the shift in priority to Iraq until President Barak Obama took office and authorized a change in strategy for Afghanistan in 2009. Phase Three included President Obama's surge of forces and resources and lasted until mid-2011 when U.S. forces began to withdraw. Phase Four started with the withdrawal of U.S. forces and ended when the U.S. mission changed from Operation Enduring Freedom to Operation Freedom Sentinel and the NATO-led Operation Resolute Support in January 2015.[592] Currently in Phase Five, the United States continues to support the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) within Operation Freedom Sentinel.

1.   Phase 1: Invasion

Following the attacks on 9/11, President George W. Bush and his administration quickly identified that al Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden, had orchestrated the attacks from its safe-haven in Afghanistan.[593] On 7 October 2001, the U.S. military began bombing al Qaeda and Taliban positions in Afghanistan.[594] Shortly after, initial Army Special Forces teams linked up with CIA elements across Afghanistan, including the Northern Alliance as well as Pashtun leaders in the south such as Hamid Karzai.[595] The subsequent destruction of al Qaeda and Taliban forces occurred rapidly, as less than 100 CIA and 350 SOF personnel, along with aviation assets, supported Afghani partners in seizing Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat, Jalalabad, and Kabul by mid-November.[596] The rapid collapse of the Taliban Government most visibly culminated when the Mullah Omar abandoned the capital of Kandahar and fled to Pakistan in December 2001.[597] From December through March 2002,

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[592] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan* (Arlington, VA, 2017), 109; NATO, "NATO and Afghanistan," accessed 30 July, 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8189.htm.

[593] Bolger, *Why We Lost*, 32–33; "President George W. Bush's Speech"112–121.

[594] Jones, In the Graveyard of Empires, 91.

[595] Schroen, *First In*, 209–244; Coll, *Directorate S*, 98–102.

[596] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 444; Doug Tanton, *Horse Soldier*s: The Extraordinary Story of a Band of U.S. Soldiers Who Rode to Victory in Afghanistan, large print ed. (Detroit, MI: Thorndike Press, 2009), 671.

[597] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 445.

the remnants of al Qaeda and the Taliban retreated to the eastern mountains between Afghanistan and Pakistan and fought a series of battles at Tora Bora and later in the Shah-i-Kot Valley as part of Operation Anaconda.[598] Although suffering tremendous losses, much of al-Qaeda and Taliban senior leadership escaped into Pakistan and would later reconstitute.[599]

Meanwhile, between November 2001 and June 2002, the United Nations (UN) facilitated a meeting in Bonn, Germany, between non-Taliban Afghan political leaders to form an interim Afghan government.[600] After the Afghan leaders agreed to establish this interim government, the UN Security Council passed Resolutions 1383 and 1386, which formed the foundation to support the new government in Afghanistan.[601] During this same time, the newly-formed Afghan Interim Authority in December 2001, followed later in June 2002 by the Loya Jirga, chose Hamid Karzai to lead the interim Afghan government and provided a two-year mandate to oversee the reconstruction of Afghanistan and an initial series of presidential and constitutional elections.[602] In April 2002, following Operation Anaconda, President Bush announced that the United States would invest in Afghanistan through a Marshall Plan-like strategy to allow the Afghan people to rebuild.[603] Although President Bush stated his intent to implement a reconstruction plan, the National Security Council (NSC), State Department, and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) did not actually request the funding from Congress necessary to carry out

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[598] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 445.

[599] Hooker and Collins, Lessons Encountered, 445; Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in* Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia (New York: Viking, 2008), 91–93.

[600] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 94.

[601] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 94; UNSCR 1383, http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1383; UN Security Council Resolution 1386, (2001), http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1386.

[602] Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan: RAND Counterinsurgency Study*, Volume 4. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008), 30, https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG595.html; Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 94.

[603] George W. Bush, "President Bush Speaks at VMI, Addresses Middle East Conflict," accessed 30 July, 2018, http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0204/17/se.02.html.

such a plan.[604] Instead, the majority of the funding actually requested went to the military.[605]

Within the NSC, a debate also raged between Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Colin Powell regarding the proper levels of force required to accomplish U.S. objectives in Afghanistan.[606] Secretary Powell argued for the application of overwhelming force in line with what was known as the "Powell Doctrine" and similar to former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger's requirements for the application of U.S. military force.[607] Secretary Rumsfeld, meanwhile, argued and ultimately succeeded in employing a light-footprint approach. The invasion and subsequent insurgency in Iraq, however, soon overwhelmed any consideration of the situation in Afghanistan.

2. Phase 2: Prioritization of Iraq, Lack of Direction, and a Growing Insurgency

After the U.S. military achieved rapid military success by overthrowing the Taliban regime and driving al Qaeda from Afghanistan, the U.S. political-military leadership, led by President George W. Bush, Vice President Richard Cheney, and Secretary Rumsfeld, quickly shifted attention toward regime change in Iraq.[608] Within hours after the 9/11 attacks, Secretary Rumsfeld had begun looking for connections between the attack and Iraq and, by November 2001, had ordered the military to begin developing options for invading Iraq.[609] Even before the decision to invade Iraq became public, the administration's and military's priorities had shifted to Iraq by the end of 2002.[610] While the American military and political efforts in Afghanistan proceeded, the U.S. military launched Operation Iraqi

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[604] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 115–124.

[605] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 117.

[606] Jones, In the Graveyard of Empires, 123–124.

[607] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 123–124; Caspar Weinberger, "The Uses of Military Power," National Press Club Speech, November 28, 1984.

[608] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 24.

[609] Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 64–65.

[610] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 129.

Freedom (OIF) in March 2003. Less than 45 days later, in remarks to reporters in Kabul, Rumsfeld announced the end of major combat operations in a secured Afghanistan that had moved toward stability and reconstruction.[611] Later that same day, President Bush announced the end of combat operations in Iraq.[612]

The history of Afghanistan and Iraq immediately following Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's and President Bush's announcements that major combat operations had ended reveals a significant gap in understanding of actual conditions within Afghanistan's and Iraq's operational environments. Instead of the end of war and combat, insurgency and widespread violence began to grow in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Between 2003 and 2005, Afghanistan saw initial progress toward establishing a central government.[613] Hamid Karzai handily won the nation's first elections in 2004, while the international coalition worked to disarm the warlords and militias that had overthrown the Taliban.[614] Simultaneously, however, al Qaeda and the Taliban had reconstituted in Pakistan and had begun to re-infiltrate and reorganize in southern and eastern Afghanistan in traditional Pashtun tribal areas to conduct low-level insurgency and regain control of the populace.[615] Since U.S. and coalition efforts primarily focused on the urban seat of government around Kabul, as well as the border areas with Pakistan, the resurgence of the Taliban across the rural south and east of Afghanistan went virtually undetected and unaddressed due, in part, to the the coalition and Afghan leaders' disproportional focus on establishing centralized governance in the larger urban centers around Kabul.[616] By 2005, the Taliban began to openly amass conventional company- and battalion-sized forces to attack and overrun

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[611] CNN, "Rumsfeld: Major Combat Over in Afghanistan," http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/ asiapcf/central/05/01/afghan.combat/.

[612] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 459.

[613] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, Ch. 8.

[614] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 144–145; *Rashid, Descent into Chaos*, 171–218.

[615] Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 48–60.

[616] Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Terrorism, Insurgency, and Afghanistan," in *Counter Terrorism in the 21st Century, Volume III: Lessons Learned from the Fight Against Terrorism*, edited by James J.F. Forrest (New York: Praeger, 2007), 456–458.

poorly prepared Afghan security forces, and violence began to spill over into the larger population centers.[617]

In the summer of 2003, NATO officially assumed leadership of the International Security Assistance Force mission and gradually expanded ISAF's centralized footprint from Kabul to the more rural areas.[618] Simultaneously, the U.S. military faced mounting casualties from an aggressive insurgency in Iraq and placed mounting pressure on the NATO coalition to provide more forces and take more direct ownership for security on the ground in Afghanistan.[619] While ISAF gradually expanded its ownership of Afghanistan's operational environment, the growing insurgency nearly tripled the number of foreign security forces killed from 58 in 2004 to 129 in 2005.[620] In response, ISAF leadership surged more forces to the south and particularly into the heartland of the insurgency in Helmand and Kandahar provinces.[621]

The increased ISAF pressure forced the insurgents to revert to more traditional guerrilla tactics by the end of 2007.[622] The Taliban significantly increased their use of improvised explosive devices (IED), previously rare suicide attacks, assassinations, and harassment attacks between 2005 and 2009.[623] While both civilian and coalition military casualties mounted, the U.S. and coalition leadership in Afghanistan struggled to confront and reverse the Taliban's momentum, which threatened a complete collapse of Karzai's fragile government.[624] By the end of 2008, a strategic review of Afghanistan ordered by President Bush had revealed that major changes in Afghanistan needed to occur to avoid

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[617] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 33; Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 51.

[618] NATO, "ISAF's mission in Afghanistan (2001-2014) (Archived)," accessed July 30, 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69366.htm.

[619] William Maley, Susanne Schmeidl, and Jonathan Goodhand, *Reconstructing Afghanistan: Civil-Military Experiences in Comparative Perspective,* Contemporary Security Studies (New York: Routledge, 2015), 15.

[620] Johnson and Mason, "Terrorism, Insurgency, and Afghanistan," 457.

[621] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 243–255.

[622] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, Ch. 12–13.

[623] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 126.

[624] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 113–118.

complete failure.[625] With the U.S. presidential election looming in 2008, however, President Bush decided to withhold the public release of his review, enabling the new administration to determine the path forward.[626]

3. Phase 3: A More Unified Effort and the Surge

President Barack Obama proceeded to order his own strategic review of Afghanistan, which confirmed the requirement of providing additional forces and resources as well as new leadership to oversee the effort.[627] General Stanley McChrystal arrived in Afghanistan in 2009 and soon assessed that additional troops would be necessary to reverse the insurgency's momentum.[628] The ensuing policy and strategic debate lasted nearly a year, after which President Obama surged an additional 30,000 troops and bolstered the level of civilian support.[629] These additional personnel and resources provided relief but came with the controversial public caveat that these forces would begin to withdraw in the summer of 2011.[630]

As Phase Three of the U.S. military effort in Afghanistan continued, the new strategy, bolstered by a more unified political-military leadership, moved the additional forces into the rural Taliban strongholds, especially in Kandahar and Helmand.[631] By moving into these Taliban strongholds, the U.S. and coalition forces intended to reverse the Taliban momentum and buy time for the developing Afghan National Security Forces

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[625] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered.*

[626] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 113–114.

[627] Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 117–282.

[628] Francis J. West, *The Wrong War: Grit, Strategy, and the Way out of Afghanistan*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2011), Ch. 11.

[629] West, *The Wrong War,* 189–190.

[630] West, *The wrong war,* 189–190; Office of the Press Secretary "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan" December 1, 2009, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan.

[631] West, *The Wrong War,* ch. 12; Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 126–127.

(ANSF) to take the lead in security and reconstruction.[632] This phase reversed many of the Taliban's gains through severe attritional force, but it did not break the insurgency.[633]

4.   Phase 4: Force Reductions and the "End" of Operation Enduring Freedom

In June 2011, President Obama ordered the U.S. military to withdraw 33,000 troops by the summer of 2012 and a complete transition to Afghan authority by the end of 2014.[634] As ordered, the U.S. military began the steady withdrawal of forces, which lasted until the end of 2014. At the height of the surge in 2011, the U.S. military had nearly 100,000 troops in Afghanistan; by the end of 2014, that number reduced to approximately 10,000.[635] During the retrograde, conventional and SOF military forces worked feverishly to train, advise and assist their ANSF partners to expand security and control of key districts in advance of timed withdrawal.[636] By the end of 2014, most coalition military bases had been handed over to Afghan counterparts, and U.S. and coalition forces had withdrawn to only a few remaining bases, mostly to the east near Kabul and Kandahar, acting as a residual counterterrorism force as well as provide mentorship for select ANSF units.[637]

5.   Phase 5: Operation Resolute Support/Freedom Sentinel

Phase Five began on January 1, 2015, when OEF transitioned to Operation Freedom Sentinel.[638] By the beginning of 2015, following the withdraw of U.S. combat troops,

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[632] Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 335; Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan."

[633] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 126–127.

[634] "Text of President Obama's Speech on Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, June 22, 2011. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/23/world/asia/23obama-afghanistan-speech-text.html

[635] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security,* 70, 109.

[636] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security Forces*, Ch. 4.

[637] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security Forces*, Ch. 5; Coll, *Directorate S*, 667–669.

[638] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security Forces*, 109; NATO, "NATO and Afghanistan," https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8189.htm.

Taliban forces launched significant offensives across Afghanistan.[639] While suffering significant casualties, the ANSF successfully fended off these assaults and reclaimed major population centers that the Taliban had temporarily seized.[640] The residual U.S. and NATO military forces and supporting assets have since enabled the ANSF and the government in Kabul to hang on, but the future stability of Afghanistan remains very much in doubt as of 2018. Since taking office, President Donald Trump affirmed an indefinite U.S. commitment to securing a stable Afghanistan and preventing a safe-haven for terrorist operations against the United States.[641] This brief synopsis of the major milestones in the opening and continuing front of the global war on terror enables a deeper analysis of the U.S. military's employment of the principles of relational maneuver in Afghanistan.

B. MISUNDERSTANDING THE THREAT: THE FOUNDATION FOR FAILURE IN AFGHANISTAN

Neither national-level figures nor field commanders fully understood the operational environment, including the human aspects of military operations. To fight, in Rupert Smith's term, war among the people, one must first understand them. We were not intellectually prepared for the unique aspects of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. In both conflicts, ethnic, religious, and cultural differences drove much of the fighting. Efforts to solve this problem—Human Terrain Teams and the Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands Program, for example—came too little and too late. Our intelligence system was of little help here primarily because the Intelligence Community did not see this as its mission. The need for information aggregation stands as an equal to classical all source intelligence. Our lack of understanding of the wars seriously retarded our efforts to fight them and to deal with our indigenous allies, who were often more interested in score-settling or political risk aversion than they were in winning the war.

—Richard D. Hooker, Jr., and Joseph J. Collins, 2015[642]

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[639] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security Forces*, 111–112.

[640] Seth Jones, "Why the Taliban Isn't Winning in Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs*, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2018-01-03/why-taliban-isnt-winning-afghanistan.

[641] NPR, "Full Text and Analysis: Trump's Address on Afghanistan, Plans for U.S. Engagement," accessed October 31, 2018, https://www.npr.org/2017/08/21/545038935/watch-live-trump-s-address-on-afghanistan-next-steps-for-u-s-engagement.

[642] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 10–11.

The initially successful unconventional warfare effort led by the CIA and U.S. Army Special Forces to overthrow the Taliban Regime in 2001 belied a lack of understanding of the operational environment in Afghanistan. Claims from Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and military practitioners who participated in this military victory ignored the underlying political complexities that allowed the U.S. military to unify Afghan warlords to overthrow the Taliban.[643] Once the Taliban and al Qaeda had fled by early 2002, shared interests of uniting Afghans ostracized or oppressed by the Taliban began to dissipate, revealing the shallowness of the original military victory.[644] Not only did the military not understand the complexity of the threats going into Afghanistan, as described by Secretary Gates, institutionally, the military has failed to develop and maintain a deep understanding of the myriad of threats in the social-political context rife with interwoven religious, ethnic, tribal, economic, foreign and domestic variables.[645] History indicates that the U.S. military forces deployed and assigned to overcome the challenges in Afghanistan have never adequately understood the operational environment or threats in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the military has been largely unable to produce effective ways to overcome those threats. The root of this institutional gap in understanding has been the failure to grasp the political nature and character of the war and operational environment in Afghanistan or how the U.S. military needed to adapt to succeed strategically.[646] This gap in understanding appears to remain in 2018.

As former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates explained in his personal memoir, the U.S. political and military leadership lacked a comprehensive understanding of the operational environment in Afghanistan.[647] This gap became readily apparent immediately after 9/11. When it became evident which organization had orchestrated 9/11, al Qaeda became the focal point for retaliation and the prevention of future attacks. Since al Qaeda operated under the umbrella of the Taliban government's protection, President Bush

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[643] Coll, *Directorate S*; Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*.

[644] Coll, *Directorate S*; Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*.

[645] Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*.

[646] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 227; Greentree, "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing."

[647] Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 589.

quickly demanded that the Taliban hand over bin Laden and the other al Qaeda leaders, shut down all extremist training camps, and allow U.S. forces to physically inspect these camps for compliance.[648] When Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, a personal friend of bin Laden, did not immediately comply with U.S. demands, the Taliban quickly became part of the group that were "with the terrorists."[649] This linkage between the Taliban and al Qaeda soon became a central point of contention for U.S. strategy in Afghanistan that continues into 2018. Throughout the war, the majority of the U.S. military and political leaders in DC and in Afghanistan understood neither the character and breadth of the relationship between al Qaeda and the Taliban, nor the exploitable gaps in that relationship.[650] Due in large part to this lack of understanding, the political and military leaders, at all levels of command in Afghanistan, could not effectively maneuver to develop, adapt, or implement unified and effective strategic approaches to exploit vulnerabilities between or internal to either group to produce the desired political outcomes in Afghanistan.[651]

Fueling this lack of understanding, in 2001 the military possessed little expertise or resident knowledge of Afghanistan.[652] Instead the CIA, with their relationships dating back to members of the Northern Alliance who had fought the Soviets in the 1980s and the Taliban in the 1990s, provided the only resident local and regional expertise within the initial U.S. response to 9/11.[653] After the collapse of the Taliban in December 2001, the U.S. military, and especially SOF, did not prioritize Afghanistan aside from counterterrorism efforts.[654] These counterterrorism efforts translated to high-value kill or capture missions as the CIA targeted al Qaeda along the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan

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[648] "President George W. Bush's Speech."

[649] "President George W. Bush's Speech" 116; Coll, *Directorate S*, 60–61.

[650] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 11–12.

[651] Greentree, "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing," 331–338.

[652] Coll, *Directorate S*, 78–80; Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 241.

[653] Coll, *Directorate S*, 78–80.

[654] Linda Robinson, *One Hundred Victories,* Ch 1.

(Af-Pak).[655] The military's lack of understanding of the operational environment severely hampered America's political-military efforts in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.[656] While the military saw al Qaeda as a threat, it did not appropriately understand or prioritize the complex social-political rifts between the political groups in Afghanistan.

Exacerbating the fragmented social-political situation in Afghanistan, the international community and Interim Afghan Government determined to construct a centralized democratic government, even though no precedent existed for this model of government in a country like Afghanistan.[657] Although other opportunities existed to restore the Afghan monarchy or explore options for a decentralized federalized systems, the U.S. and international political leadership rejected these options for a the revolutionary option to rapidly institute western-style democracy.[658] The lack of precedent for a centralized-democratic-capitalistic form of government compounded with deep ethnic divisions entrenched by the brutality imposed by the predominantly Pashtun-led Taliban government during the mid-to-late 1990s.[659] The Taliban was especially ruthless in its oppression and alienation of ethnic minorities across Afghanistan, including the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and Pashtun tribal outgroups.[660] Further stressing the strained ethnic divisions, Afghanistan's complex web of social-political power consisted of an array of tribe, subtribe and clan relationships and alliances that extended across arbitrarily created national borders.[661] Certain tribes and clans in Afghanistan's austere Hindu Kush mountains had remained ungoverned by central Afghan power for centuries and possessed a long tradition of resisting outsiders' attempts to rule dating back to Alexander the Great,

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[655] William Maley, Susanne Schmeidl, and Jonathan Goodhand, *Reconstructing Afghanistan*, 14–16.

[656] Coll, *Directorate S*; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*.

[657] Lewis G. Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means: Learning from America's Struggle to Build an Afghan Nation* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2012), Ch 1.

[658] Kenneth Katzman and Clayton Thomas, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*. CRS Report No. RL30588. (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 13, 2017). https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf.

[659] Ahmed Rashid*, Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), Ch. 16.

[660] Rashid*, Taliban*, 63–64.

[661] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, xxv-xxviii, 3–8.

the British, and, most recently, the Soviets in the 1980s.[662] These factors complicated the social-political power structure and presented a highly dynamic and uncertain political environment to the U.S. military.

Throughout the conflict, one of the U.S. political and military leaders' most significant gaps in understanding in Afghanistan has been the difficulty in adequately understanding the degree to which Pakistan's domestic and foreign interests overlapped with conflict resolution in Afghanistan.[663] Steve Coll and Ahmed Rashid's histories of the conflict in Afghanistan has exposed that Pakistan has wittingly and unwittingly provided the primary safe-haven to insurgent-terrorists since 2001.[664] The most public representation of this safe-haven occurred in 2011 when U.S. special operations forces killed Osama bin Laden in a raid in Abbottabad, Pakistan. This challenge of safe-haven in Pakistan still undermines U.S. strategy in 2018.[665] Within America's covert unconventional warfare support of the mujahideen in the 1980s, the vast amount of American support funneled through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency.[666] The extent of Pakistan's intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as its relationship with India, should have better informed the present-day U.S. military and political effort in Afghanistan. Instead, the U.S. political, military, and intelligence leadership seemed ready to accept Pakistan's pledges of support to defeat both al Qaeda and the Taliban at face value.[667] Since 2002, each U.S. president and senior U.S. military commander in Afghanistan has unsuccessfully attempted to deny the Afghan insurgency safe-haven in Pakistan.[668] Thus far, the U.S. strategy and approaches in Afghanistan have

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[662] Hy S. Rothstein and John Arquilla, eds., *Afghan Endgames Strategy and Policy Choices for America's Longest War* South Asia in World Affairs Series (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), Ch 2–3; Theo Farrell, Frans P. B. Osinga, and James A. Russell*, Military Adaptation in Afghanistan* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), Ch. 2.

[663] Coll, *Directorate S*; Coll, *Ghost Wars*.

[664] Coll, *Directorate S*; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*.

[665] Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations, *Operation Freedom's Sentinel Report to The United States Congress*, January 1, 2018–March 31, 2018, 4.

[666] Coll, *Ghost Wars*.

[667] Coll, *Directorate S*; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*.

[668] Coll, *Directorate S*.

not aligned the interests of the United States, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.[669] This conflict with Pakistani interests has created steady support and safe-havens to Pashtun insurgent groups focused on overthrowing a Kabul government that has friendly inclinations toward India. Fundamentally, Pakistan appears committed to ensuring that government power in Afghanistan supports its interests in countering India and providing an outlet for Pakistani Islamists.[670]

In addition to ineffectively confronting the ever-present Pakistani safe-haven for Afghan insurgents, the U.S. military has not institutionally developed a comprehensive understanding of the operational environment's relevant participants inside Afghanistan. The Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan started as early as 2002 and came from the traditional Pashtun areas that originally facilitated their seizure of power in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s.[671] This Pashtun base of power extended past the artificial Durand border with Pakistan and into the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) and Balochistan in western Pakistan.[672] The Arab and, especially, Saudi financial and Jihadist support to these areas during the Soviet-Afghan war created a fertile area for Salafi Jihadists to plot both global and local insurgencies against Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir-India, and the United States. Although each insurgent group possessed many unique characteristics, many of these factions also formed relationships that were strengthened and united by America's invasion of Afghanistan and the perceived illegitimate emplacement of an apostate regime in Kabul.[673] The United States', and particularly its military's, inability to distinguish between hardline insurgent groups and locally inspired insurgents severely degraded the military's ability to identify exploitable weaknesses between factions within the Taliban-led insurgency. Without a nuanced understanding, the U.S. military generally followed a

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[669] Coll, *Directorate S*; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*.

[670] Coll, *Directorate S*, 337.

[671] Johnson and Mason, "Terrorism, Insurgency, and Afghanistan," 462–469.

[672] Johnson and Mason, "Terrorism, Insurgency, and Afghanistan," 455.

[673] Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 283; Coll, *Ghost Wars;* Johnson and Mason, "Terrorism, Insurgency, and Afghanistan."

blunt-instrument approach to find and destroy the most readily identifiable insurgents.[674] This deficiency appeared to pervade the military, from the highest theater-level commanders to the most junior military personnel on the ground.[675]

Institutionally, the U.S. military possessed a relatively shallow institutional understanding of the complex operational environment, which extended to the spectrum of threats to U.S. interests, including the enemies, adversaries, belligerents, and opportunists in Afghanistan.[676] While the high-level al Qaeda leadership, known as al Qaeda Central, resided in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the Quetta Shura, Afghan Taliban, led the overall insurgency, numerous other interconnected threat networks also existed. Dating back to their resistance days against the Soviets, individual tribal, clan and political groups, such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami, the Haqqani family and network, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Pakistani Taliban, and most recently ISIL, have created an uncertain picture, the recognition of which is essential to understanding the overall environment and relevant threats.[677] Beyond this array of active insurgent groups, other belligerents and opportunists range from local warlords that helped overthrow the Taliban, such as Ismail Khan in Herat, the drug and criminal network, and active direct participation from both Pakistani and Iranian agents.[678] These disparate participating groups contained overlapping yet divergent agendas that could have been exploited to various degrees; yet the U.S. military's limited or often non-existent understanding of these differences relegated much of the war to a kinetic war of attrition against the simplistically labeled Taliban or, more narrowly, against al Qaeda and its most direct affiliates.[679]

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[674] Coll, *Directorate S*, 134, 391.

[675] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 72–74.

[676] Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP.3-25: *Countering Threat Networks* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2016), III-15 - III-17.

[677] Jones, Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, 30–46.

[678] Jones, Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, 28, 47, 56, 61.

[679] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*; Coll, *Directorate S*; Major Bailey's multiple deployments to both Helmand and Herat Provinces between 2010 and 2014 indicate a predominant attritional style of warfare within conventional and SOF that focuses on finding and destroying the overt enemy forces within an area of operations.

Irregular warfare expert David Kilcullen argues that U.S. political-military leaders missed an opportunity to reconcile with various Taliban factions after the fall of the Taliban Regime.[680] This missed opportunity did not result from an official policy, but rather occurred due to a lack of understanding and "naiveté."[681] The policy of no-reconciliation issued by Secretary Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney ensured a united Pashtun-Taliban insurgency.[682] As the Taliban regime collapsed in the winter of 2001-2002, various former Taliban leaders attempted to reconcile with the newly formed Karzai-led government.[683] Their reconciliation efforts were not exploited by U.S. leaders. In fact, some Taliban leadership were arrested while attempting to reintegrate into Karzai's newly formed government.[684] The U.S. military, led by SOF, instead of developing a comprehensive appreciation for the contextual environment, chose to employ a simplistic and heavy-handed counterterrorism direct action approach to capture and kill al Qaeda and Taliban leadership.[685] This attritional mindset prevailed and dominated until 2009, eight years after the initial invasion. More recently, in 2017, 16 years after invasion, returning to this attritional mindset, President Trump stated in his updated Afghanistan strategy, "We are not nation building again. We are killing terrorists."[686]

The U.S. military did eventually develop a deeper understanding and adapt to the operational environment in Afghanistan. By 2009, ISAF Commander, General McChrystal, recognized that stabilization in Afghanistan could only occur by comprehensively addressing the roots of the insurgency in rural Pashtun Taliban-controlled areas.[687] McChrystal and his successor, General David Petraeus, employed historical lessons recently relearned in Iraq and determined that the decentralized violent social-

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[680] William Maley, Susanne Schmeidl, and Jonathan Goodhand, *Reconstructing Afghanistan*, 13–14.

[681] Coll, *Directorate S*, 140–144.

[682] Coll, *Directorate S*, 141.

[683] William Maley, Susanne Schmeidl, and Jonathan Goodhand, *Reconstructing Afghanistan*, 14.

[684] Coll, *Directorate S*, 140–142.

[685] Coll, *Directorate S*, 143–144.

[686] NPR, "Full Text and Analysis: Trump's Address on Afghanistan, Plans for U.S. Engagement."

[687] Coll, *Directorate S*, Ch. 22; Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 115–121.

political problems could only be effectively addressed through controlling the population across the heartland of the insurgency.[688] During this same time, SOF commander, then-Brigadier General Miller, created the Afghanistan and Pakistan Hands (Af-Pak Hands) program to institutionalize critical cultural knowledge necessary to understand and confront the complexity of the operational environment and threat networks throughout the region.[689] Although achieving only limited success, the effort represented an institutional attempt to adapt and develop the deep level of understanding necessary to overcome the complex irregular warfare challenges in Afghanistan.[690]

Although military leaders, such as Generals McChrystal and Petraeus, improved the military's institutional understanding of the operational environment over time, the military personnel waging the war typically only possessed a superficial understanding of Afghanistan's complex social-political problems at the root of the insurgency.[691] These root-problems centered on power and control that spanned the various tribal, ethnic, regional, religious, and general cultural dimensions in Afghanistan. Ultimately, the U.S. military's inability to truly recognize and understand the major power brokers' interests and goals, and lack of appreciation for the centrality of political warfare, prevented effective policies and theater strategy to adapt and achieve U.S. interests in the region.[692] Between 2009 and 2013, some military personnel, especially from SOF units that had deployed multiple times within the same region, gained a deep understanding of the operational environment through relationships with the various power brokers, but adequate understanding proved to be the exception, rather than the norm.[693]

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[688] West, *The Wrong War*; Linda Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*; William Maley, Susanne Schmeidl, and Jonathan Goodhand, *Reconstructing Afghanistan*, Ch. 4; Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, Ch. 2.

[689] Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*, 24.

[690] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 72–73.

[691] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered,* 10–11.

[692] Gentry, *How Wars Are Won and Lost*, 199–206

[693] Major Bailey's personal observations between 2010–2014; Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*; Daniel R. Green, *In the Warlords' Shadow: Special Operations Forces, the Afghans, and Their Fight Against the Taliban* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017).

In summary, the U.S. military in Afghanistan did not adequately meet relational maneuver's foundational requirement to develop a deep understanding of Afghanistan's operational environment, including both the relevant threat, neutral, and friendly participants internal to Afghanistan and within the regional context. Fundamentally, this lack of understanding translated into uncertainty as to who the adversaries were and how the U.S. political-military leadership should develop a strategy to overcome these adversaries. Specifically, the uncertainty regarding the connection between the various factions of the Taliban, as well as their relationship with al Qaeda, led to fundamental flaws in assuming that the United States could focus on al Qaeda while ignoring the Taliban early in the conflict.

The U.S. military also failed to recognize the politically centered core of the irregular threat in Afghanistan. This failure further included the attempt to implement an unprecedented centralized form of government across a fragmental socio-political landscape and across areas traditionally governed only at the village or local level.[694] Moreover, the military did not acknowledge that the primary resistance to a stable Afghanistan would come from the recently disempowered Pashtun-Taliban and affiliated groups, supported by Pakistan. Not recognizing the Taliban's and their affiliates' resurgence and insurgency across the south and east of Afghanistan constituted an unmitigated failure of understanding on the part of U.S. military leadership at every level of command in Afghanistan. Finally, the United States failed to comprehend that the primary threat facing any Afghan government, in any form, would most likely come both from internal sources of instability and subversion from Pakistan.[695]

Instead of studying and understanding Afghanistan's operational environment as it actually existed, Presidents Bush and Obama, the NSC, the U.S. military, and coalition U.N. and NATO partners chose to focus on building the Afghanistan that they wanted to exist.[696] In line with the attempts to build a centralized central government, the U.S.

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[694] Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means*, Ch. 1.

[695] Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*; Coll, *Directorate S*; Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*.

[696] Synthesized analysis from: Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*; Rothstein and Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames*; Coll, *Directorate S*; Gentry, *How Wars Are Won and Lost*, 199.

military under General Eikenberry began a military assistance effort to create an Afghan military that mirrored the U.S. military.[697] This effort has created one of the world's most ineffective armies encumbered by military technology that Afghanistan realistically cannot maintain, field, or employ.[698] Except for a brief improved period between 2009 and 2013, the U.S. political-military leadership—from the theater-strategic to tactical level—failed to effectively orient within the operational environment or gain a deep understanding of Afghanistan's context, its threats, or the inherent political nature of the conflict. The military's comprehensive failure to grasp the adversarial and social-political context in Afghanistan laid the foundation for the ensuing failures to establish coherent political-military strategy, which suffered from negligent organizational design and fueled a wide range of both effective and ineffective operational approaches over 17 years of war.

C.   POLITICAL-MILITARY STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN

> The United States was often unable to knit its vast interagency capabilities together for best effect. The implementation of national decisions by various agencies and departments was a continuing problem for senior officials. The inability to integrate, direct, prioritize, and apply capabilities in the optimal manner diminished success as much as any faulty strategy or campaign plan. The converse is also true: our greatest successes were those pockets of interagency collaboration stimulated by innovative leaders.
>
> —Richard D. Hooker, Jr., and Joseph J. Collins, 2015[699]

The evidence indicates that the attempts of the United States, UN, and NATO to construct and implement a political-military strategy in Afghanistan lacked unity of effort and have not produced the intended stable democratic nation or government.[700] In the aftermath of the attacks on 9/11, NATO invoked Article 5 of its charter and the United Nations adopted Resolution 1368, calling for swift justice against "the perpetrators, organizers and sponsors of these terrorist attacks and *stresses* that those responsible for

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[697] Rothstein and Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames*, 77–78; Mason, *The Strategic Lessons Unlearned from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan*, 87–88.

[698] Mason, *The Strategic Lessons Unlearned from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan*.

[699] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 10.

[700] Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means*; Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 241.

aiding, supporting or harboring the perpetrators, organizers and sponsors of these acts will be held accountable."[701] Even long-time U.S. adversaries, such as Iran, condemned the attack and expressed support for U.S. reprisals.[702] While internationally widespread support aided and legitimized American efforts to respond in Afghanistan, when the United States, and particularly the military led by Secretary Rumsfeld, abdicated its leadership role in Afghanistan, it created a chaotic environment of conflicting national command authorities and lines of effort.[703] Since, 40 individual nations participated in stabilization and reconstruction underneath the umbrella of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the NATO-led ISAF Command, and the U.S. unilateral efforts to target al Qaeda leadership, disunity, corruption, and ineffectiveness prevailed.[704] To make matters worse, equally significant disunity prevailed within just the internal U.S. efforts. The Department of State (DoS), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the CIA, U.S. conventional military, and SOF all pursued disaggregated lines of effort that satisfied each organization's individual interpretation of the mission and priorities.[705]

The international community's incoherent assistance to Afghanistan prevented Afghan officials or its newly-established military from developing competence and legitimacy.[706] Furthermore, this chaotic environment enabled Afghan corruption that exploited the assistance provided.[707] As financial and material assistance poured into Afghanistan, no system of accountability existed to ensure the legitimate use of that assistance. Strategic incoherence from the National Security Council (NSC) and President Bush also significantly contributed to the strategic chaos inside Afghanistan. Although the Department of Defense (DoD) had already begun to shift priorities toward planning for

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[701] United Nations Security Council Resolution 1368, 2001[emphasis in original].

[702] Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 66; Rothstein and Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames*, 119–120.

[703] Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 173–4.

[704] Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, Ch. 9.

[705] Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*; Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means*; Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*.

[706] Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means*.

[707] Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means*, 250–251.

invading Iraq as early as January 2002, the President's speech in April 2002 expressed an expansive set of goals for Afghanistan that included the creation of a westernized democracy.[708] On the ground in Afghanistan, however, the U.S. military pursued a narrow strategic approach to find, capture, and kill al Qaeda leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan.[709] Even when the U.S. officially handed over responsibility for Afghanistan's future to NATO-led ISAF, the CIA and U.S. military retained forces independent of ISAF to unilaterally hunt and attrite al Qaeda and Taliban leadership.[710]

For a short period between 2003 and 2005, Afghan expert Seth Jones argues that the U.S. Ambassador and native-born Afghan Zalmay Khalizad and senior U.S. military commander in Afghanistan, U.S. forces commander Lieutenant General David Barno, pursued a unified U.S. political-military strategy, centered on countering the developing insurgency and strengthening Afghanistan's governance.[711] This strategy, encapsulated in Khalizad's "accelerating success" focused on strengthening Afghan governance and reducing the strength of the warlords and residual militias throughout Afghanistan.[712] Although notable, this strategy never actually united U.S. political-military efforts within Afghanistan, and only met limited success in strengthening the central government while virtually leaving the rural countryside exposed to Taliban control.[713] Furthermore, this effort did not unify or reflect the greater UNAMA or ISAF efforts.[714] In 2005, both Khalizad and General Barno rotated out of Afghanistan, thereby undermining the continuity in relationships and the progress they achieved during their period of leadership.[715]

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[708] George W Bush, "President Bush Speaks at VMI, Addresses Middle East Conflict."

[709] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 192.

[710] Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 106; Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*, xviii; William Maley, Susanne Schmeidl, and Jonathan Goodhand, *Reconstructing Afghanistan*, 18–19.

[711] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 139–140.

[712] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 139–141.

[713] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 163–164.

[714] Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 176–190.

[715] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 150.

Political-military strategic coherence improved when General Stanley McChrystal assumed command of all U.S. and ISAF efforts in Afghanistan in 2009, but implementation of a unified political-military strategy did not occur until General Petraeus took command a year later.[716] And, when political goals and strategy did align, President Obama had fundamentally undermined its strength by publicly announcing a pre-set timeline for withdrawal of U.S. forces.[717] Accounts of the insurgency's and Pakistan's responses to President Obama's withdrawal timeline signify the seriousness of this mistake.[718]

In his 2009 speech at West Point, President Obama explained that America's core goals in Afghanistan were to defeat Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to stabilize the region to ensure that nuclear weapons would not fall into the hands of terrorists: "We must deny al Qaeda a safe-haven. We must reverse the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government. And we must strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan's security forces and government, so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan's future."[719] President Obama further explained that to achieve those goals, the United States would pursue "three core elements of our strategy: a military effort to create the conditions for a transition; a civilian surge that reinforces positive action; and an effective partnership with Pakistan."[720] Although this strategy clearly directed the U.S. political-military effort to confront the situation in Afghanistan, President Obama jeopardized its political strength when he announced that the United States would "begin the transfer of our forces out of Afghanistan in July of 2011."[721] Intended to inspire the Afghans to take ownership of their conflict and assure the U.S. public that the United States would not expend more than what national interests demanded, the publicly-announced

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[716] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 243.

[717] Coll, *Directorate S*, 410–425.

[718] Coll, *Directorate S*, 425–427.

[719] Barack Obama. "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan." https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan.

[720] Obama. "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan."

[721] Obama. "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan."

withdrawal timeline instead reinforced the narrative of America's weak political resolve to the Afghans and Pakistanis and bolstered the insurgency's will to outlast the United States.[722]

Although the U.S. and international efforts in Afghanistan finally reached a more coherent political-military strategy, the time allotted, shallow understanding of the operational environment, and organizational design flaws produced primarily military gains while not developing or supporting the requisite paths to political resolution.[723] During this same time, the transition between presidential administrations and leaks of classified documents effectively destroyed the relationship between Hamid Karzai and much of the senior U.S. political-military leadership.[724] This broken relationship became publicly exposed as Karzai ranted over coalition-caused civilian casualties and ill-conceived tactical techniques such as SOF night raids.[725]

Simultaneously, while U.S. military forces surged across Afghanistan, taking over leadership in Kandahar and Helmand Provinces, military forces expanded security through applied lessons from the military surge in Iraq, but often did so in rushed and formulaic ways that made no lasting contributions to political success.[726] Without an appreciation for the unique complexities in Afghanistan to affect the political challenges, merely adding more military forces in Afghanistan only provided temporary stabilizing effects.[727]

In Helmand Province, Bravo Company 1st Battalion, 8th Marines deployed just south of the Musa Qala District Center between 2010 and 2011 to clear, hold, and allow the Afghan local security forces to build within the area of operations.[728] While the Marines fought to expand security, the lack of in-depth knowledge or effective partners,

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[722] Coll, *Directorate S*, 425–435, 486.

[723] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, Ch. 3.

[724] Coll, *Directorate S*, Ch. 21.

[725] Coll, *Directorate S*, Ch. 21.

[726] Major Bailey's observation between 2010–2011 in Helmand Province; West, *The Wrong War*, 111.

[727] William Maley, Susanne Schmeidl, and Jonathan Goodhand, *Reconstructing Afghanistan*, Ch. 5.

[728] Major Bailey deployed as the Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 8th Marines Executive Officer.

combined with the relatively short deployment cycle, produced few lasting results.[729] While the security bubble expanded as of May 2011, no credible Afghan security forces or local officials were able to bolster meaningful support toward the central, or even local, Afghan government. In 2010, one talented Marine platoon commander, First Lieutenant (1stLt) (Ret) Robert Rain, earned the trust and respect of the local Pashtun villagers and leadership and established local security in one of the most violent areas in the district. This relationship only extended to 1stLt Rain's Marines and not to the squad-sized contingent of poorly trained and motivated Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers at the Marines' platoon patrol base.[730] After fighting hard to expand the security bubble around Musa Qala in line with the theater strategy, the Marines knew that only a few months later, forces across Afghanistan would begin to withdraw, leaving no lasting political or military stabilization in Musa Qala.[731] The status of those villagers who collaborated with the Marines south of the Musa Qala district center is unknown since insurgent forces reportedly possessed complete control of the district in 2017.[732]

Military and civilian advisors did innovate by countering the Afghan insurgency at the village and local level. By 2010, a combination of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT), Village Stability Platforms (VSP) and Local Defense Force Afghan Local Police (ALP) initiatives along with District and Provincial Advisory Teams (DAT/PAT) sought to expand and connect governance across Afghanistan in a systematic manner.[733] Although producing mixed levels of success across areas ranging from Kunar, Urzgan, Herat, and Baghdis Provinces, these efforts were intended to produce enduring security and stable governance by developing deeper understanding of local problems and

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[729] By the end of 2014, all Marine had withdrawn from Helmand Province, and insurgent force had reestablished control over areas previously cleared of Insurgent control; Bill Roggio, "Taliban takes key district in Helmand province," *FDD Long War Journal*, March 23, 2017, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/03/taliban-takes-key-district-in-helmand-province.php.

[730] Major Bailey's personal observations in Helmand, south of Musa Qala District Center in 2010–2011.

[731] Major Bailey's personal knowledge and observations in 2010–2011.

[732] Roggio, "Taliban takes key district in Helmand province."

[733] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan, *Reconstruction, Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security Forces*; Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*.

solutions.[734] While significant, since these efforts only operationally expanded in 2010, and began to slowly retract in 2011, much of the progress achieved merely dissipated once coalition forces withdrew from areas not sustainable by the ANSF.[735] Furthermore, aside from the SOF-led VSP program, none of the other advisor programs were ever given precedence by the services that provided the manning personnel.[736] Like in Vietnam, non-standard advisory billets were outside of the military's standardized career path and considered inconvenient and temporary requirements.[737]

By the end of 2013, the military strategy primarily focused on withdrawing forces and turning over responsibility to ANSF partners.[738] Furthermore, the U.S. military forces remaining in Afghanistan in 2013 mostly reverted to a kinetic attrition strategy, which provided time and space for the withdrawing forces and secured the Afghan national elections in the spring of 2014.[739] Guidance provided to the SOF in Afghanistan mirrored the guidance 12 years before: find, capture, or kill al Qaeda and its affiliates in Afghanistan.[740] While some continued to advise and assist their Afghan partners after most U.S. forces departed, other SOF leadership spoke openly of how Afghanistan was no longer a priority and how the military and SOF should turn their attention toward new missions in other regions.[741] Once OEF ended and the U.S. Operation Freedom Sentinel and NATO

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[734] Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*; Green, *In the Warlords' Shadow*; Scott Mann, *Game Changers: Going Local to Defeat Violent Extremists* (Leesburg, VA: Tribal Analysis Publishing, 2015); Interview with Jonathan Ringlein, July 20, 2018.

[735] Major Bailey's personal observations between 2013–2014.

[736] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 319–323.

[737] Interview with LTC (Ret) Joseph McGraw, August 31, 2018.

[738] Major Bailey's personal observations in Western Afghanistan between 2013–2014.

[739] Major Bailey's personal observations in Western Afghanistan between 2013–2014.

[740] Command level guidance from the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force in 2014.

[741] Major Bailey's personal observations in 2014.

Resolute Support began, the U.S. military limited its strategy to counterterrorism operations and limited advising of Afghan units.[742]

Overall, the U.S. military's superficial understanding of the social-political operational environment, and of irregular warfare in general, prevented institutional recognition of the U.S. military's role in informing, influencing, or implementing a political-military strategy in Afghanistan.[743] Throughout the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. military provided the majority of the ISAF forces, and were often the only international forces present throughout much of Afghanistan, in the U.S. military bears the preponderance of responsibility for the application of strategy in Afghanistan.[744]

Finally, even when coherent strategy was developed and approved at the strategic level, the U.S. military demonstrated only limited ability to effectively implement the strategy in concert with other coalition and interagency partners inside Afghanistan. This implementation was mostly dominated by the traditional application of military violence and did not attend enough to political competition within the war.[745] After 2013, the successes achieved to-date were virtually abandoned, and the U.S. military pursued other missions. The military's evolution toward unity of effort and command in Afghanistan reveals a lack of institutional capability to develop and implement effective political-military strategy in irregular warfare operational environments. One description of the lack of effective strategy in Afghanistan argued that "our greatest, most persistent, most deleterious implementation problem was our inability to integrate the vast capabilities

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[742] Charles Barham, "The Case for Counter Insurgency 'Light' in Afghanistan," Small Wars Journal, accessed October 31, 2018, http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/case-counter-insurgency-light-afghanistan; Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations, *Operation Freedom's Sentinel Report*, 23–32.

[743] Rothstein and Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames*; Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means*; Coll, *Directorate S*; Bolger, *Why We Lost*; Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*; Gentry, *How Wars Are Won and Lost*.

[744] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 138–139; Ian Livingston and Michael O'Hanlon, "Afghanistan Index: Also Including Selected Data on Pakistan," Brookings, January 10, 2014, 4–5.

[745] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 138–139.

resident in the national system for best effect. Indeed, we were not even able to achieve unified command of all *military* forces in Afghanistan until 10 years of war had passed."[746]

D.   ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN: IMPEDIMENTS TO ADAPTATION

> Upon taking command in Afghanistan in 2009, General Stanley McChrystal made the rounds of his subordinate units and asked each of us, 'What would you do differently if you had to stay until we won?' At the time I was in charge of operations for a brigade in the middle of tough fight in eastern Afghanistan. It was absolutely the right question, but in retrospect it was also a trick question. The answer was to get the right people into the fight, keep them there long enough to develop an understanding of the environment, and hold them accountable for progress, but that was not something the military was interested in doing. Instead, we stuck with a policy that rotated leaders through the country like tourists.

—Jason Dempsey, 2016[747]

The U.S. military's inability to influence and implement a coherent political-military strategy directly resulted from not adequately tailoring its organizational design to overcome the threats in Afghanistan's operational environment.[748] Four primary deficiencies exposed the lack of appropriate design for the forces tasked with confronting the threats in Afghanistan. First, the complex international and U.S.-internal chains of command prevented unity of command and unity of effort for much of the conflict.[749] Second, the rotation of forces, based on internal bureaucratic constraints rather than the needs of the operational environment, delayed understanding the threats and conceiving potential solutions.[750] Third, military forces under-prioritized intelligence collections and overemphasized traditional military threats rather than understanding the political

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[746] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 243.

[747] Thomas E. Ricks, "Our Generals Failed in Afghanistan: The United States Displayed a Failure of Leadership in Afghanistan;" *Foreign Policy*, October 18, 2016, https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/18/our-generals-failed-in-afghanistan/.

[748] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 9–10, 173; 244–249.

[749] Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means*, Ch. 6.

[750] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, Ch. 3; Greentree, "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing," 337–338.; Major Bailey's deployment experience in both conventional and SOF Marine units.

framework and context that produced and enabled the traditional threats.[751] Lastly, while the military effort did evolve toward employing embedded political-military advisors, this evolution took far too long to become effective and, even then, did not adequately emphasize the political role of the advisor in irregular warfare.[752]

The lack of U.S political-military leadership, both strategic and operational, undermined strategic objectives in Afghanistan.[753] After the fall of the Taliban Regime in 2002, Afghanistan experienced a short-lived respite from violence and a measure of peace and stability. During this early phase and throughout the entire conflict, the U.S. military deployed the largest number of forces to Afghanistan even while the UNAMA and ISAF mission expanded and NATO took the lead.[754] As a wide range of military and civilian partners and non-governmental aid organizations arrived, no coherent chain of command existed to direct the aid or advise the newly appointed Afghan civilian and military leadership.[755] In Afghanistan, the United States and its military, based on its available personnel and resources, was the only nation that could have unified assistance to the Afghans.

Not until 2010 did unity of command and effort begin to improve in a meaningful way.[756] Furthermore, unity among SOF efforts did not occur until Major General Thomas assumed command of the newly constructed Special Operations Joint Task Force Afghanistan (SOJTF-A) in 2012. Major General Thomas unified all SOF missions including: U.S. special missions units, ISAF SOF, and Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) conducting combat advising missions across Afghanistan.[757] Even after improvements better unified command and

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[751] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 11–12.

[752] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security Forces,* 165–197.

[753] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 242.

[754] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 115.

[755] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 9–10.

[756] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 72.

[757] Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*, 241–242.

synchronized efforts, as forces withdrew in 2013, the complex U.S. and international chains of command continued to contribute to uncertainty, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness in pursuit of theater objectives.[758] The high levels of internal bureaucracy elevated priority of time and attention toward managing internal coalition relationships and command approvals rather than focusing on the partner force Afghans or understanding and confronting the adversaries throughout the areas of operation.[759]

Exacerbating Lewis Irwin's description of America's "disjointed ways and disunified means" in Afghanistan, the lack of continuity due to short deployment rotations and the U.S. military's institutional failure to dedicate individuals and units to resolve the challenges in Afghanistan perpetuated a cyclical model of relearning old lessons and rebuilding relationships, all of which ultimately undermined effectiveness.[760] The most comprehensive analysis of the U.S. failures in Afghanistan, *Lessons Encountered* explained that "in Afghanistan, neither generals nor sergeants had much time for on-the-job learning and even less for reflection. The lack of information on local people and conditions hampered counterinsurgency efforts, which were further complicated by troop rotations."[761]

For military forces, unit tours lasted between three to fifteen months, with the longer tours being the exception rather than the rule, over the course of 17 years of war.[762] A typical eight-month deployment required nearly three months to gain an adequate basic appreciation for the threats, relationships, and partners—essentially relearning what the

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[758] Between 2013 and 2014, in Herat Province, Afghanistan, Major Bailey was assigned to advise the 4th Special Operations Kandak (SOK) based in Shindand Airbase. The official battle space owner was the Italian led Regional Command West (RC-W) based out of Herat City. The Deputy Commander for RC-W as an U.S. Army Colonel. The SOF regional command was Special Operations Task Force West (SOTF-W) based out of Camp Leatherneck in Helmand Province. The conflux of chains of command between the Italians, U.S. Army, and SOTF provided multiple layers of approval and notification to conduct operations throughout the region.

[759] Major Bailey's personal observations between 2013–2014.

[760] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 36–37.

[761] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered,* 36.

[762] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 333; David Cloud, "U.S. is Extending Tours of Army in Battle Zones" *New York Times,* Apr 12,2007. https://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/12/world/middleeast/12military.html.

last unit knew. In the following three months, the deployed unit would reach its max operational effectiveness, while it spent the last two months preparing to turn over to the next unit and redeploy.[763] Unless a specific unit happened to possess experienced individuals who had previously deployed to that specific area of operations, its effectiveness in understanding the geography, partners, threats, and its own chain of command, let alone influencing long-term outcomes, remained limited and repeated itself on a cyclical basis with every new unit that arrived.[764] With certain exceptions among coalition and U.S. SOF, especially from Army Special Forces (SF), U.S. military units rarely deployed to the same location or with the same partner forces, and if they did, the U.S. unit had often faced dramatic turnover in leadership and personnel, which contributed to gaps in understanding and effectiveness.[765]

Another deficiency in organizational design, the U.S. military only slowly prioritized intelligence efforts over time and mostly overemphasized collections against the most superficial military insurgent targets. Early in OEF, the military saw its mission narrowly as a counterterrorist mission.[766] This narrow view meant that understanding the basic social-political system across Afghanistan was generally not important. Therefore, by 2010, in areas like Musa Qala, Afghanistan, where U.S. and coalition forces had operated since 2006, basic counterinsurgency tasks, such as conducting a census, were left unattended.[767] Furthermore, even when the military leadership did instruct and supervise its subordinates to gain an understanding of the power and social dynamics in the area of operations, it often produced marginal results. Within one Marine rifle company, 50% of the company's platoon and squad officer and enlisted leadership made only superficial

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[763] Major Bailey's personal observations between 2010–2014.

[764] Major Bailey's personal observations between 2010–2014; Green, *In the Warlords' Shadow*; Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*.

[765] Major Bailey's personal observations between 2010–2014; Green, *In the Warlords' Shadow*; Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*.

[766] Coll, *Directorate S*, 134.

[767] Major Bailey's personal observations between 2010–2011.

efforts to appear to follow the company commander's orders to closely integrate with their partner force and develop an understanding of the local social-political environment.[768]

While in theory more mature and better trained for understanding more than just the enemy on the battlefield, SOF were not immune to a kinetically attritional mindset. This mindset pervaded both tactical senior enlisted leadership and officers. Some SOF teams in Afghanistan made negligible efforts to engage with or understand the political dynamics within their areas of operations, since it was not a specific task for their team.[769] Other units and programs did incentivize intelligence collections beyond the basic requirement to find and destroy the enemy on the battlefield. The Village Stability Operations (VSO) program represents one such program that did prioritize the necessary intelligence to succeed politically and militarily across Afghanistan's unique geopolitical landscape through embedding at the most local level with Afghan partners and the populace. In 2010, while directing all U.S. intelligence collections in Afghanistan, Major General Michael T. Flynn wrote:

> Eight years into the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. intelligence community is only marginally relevant to the overall strategy. Having focused the overwhelming majority of its collection efforts and analytical brainpower on insurgent groups, the vast intelligence apparatus is unable to answer fundamental questions about the environment in which U.S. and allied forces operate and the people they seek to persuade. Ignorant of local economics and landowners, hazy about who the powerbrokers are and how they might be influenced, incurious about the correlations between various development projects and the level of cooperation among villagers, and disengaged from people in the best position to find answers—whether aid workers or Afghan soldiers—U.S. intelligence officers and analysts can do little but shrug in response to high level decision-makers seeking the knowledge, analysis, and information they need to wage a successful counterinsurgency.[770]

The fourth major design flaw in Afghanistan consisted of the military's underappreciation for the criticality of the advisory role. This underappreciation was

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[768] Major Bailey's personal observations between 2010–2011.

[769] Major Bailey's observations of SOF teams in Afghanistan 2013–2014.

[770] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 36.

epitomized by not recognizing the political role of military advisors in irregular warfare in shaping and influencing both indigenous military and political partners. This gap in concept and execution inhibited the military's understanding of the context as well as its ability to achieve strategic objectives. Although historical experiences make clear the requirement for effective advisors to train, advise, assist, and accompany partner nation forces in irregular warfare, the U.S. military did not properly incentivize or provide enough capable advisors to improve the capabilities of Afghan partner forces to confront the relevant threats in Afghanistan.[771] Instead, the U.S. military attempted to build an Afghan military in its own image, which has resulted in an Afghan National Army (ANA) unable to sustain itself and barely able to retain defensive positions.[772] Afghanistan does possess some more-capable SOF units, but similar to the U.S. SOF who trained them, most, such as the Special Operations Kandak's (SOK), are designed to conduct light infantry raids and conventional combat and do not understand the necessity of waging political and violent competition to overcome the insurgency.[773] Another side effect of molding Afghan security forces in the image of the U.S. military was the production of a military that could not sustain itself. By 2014, the SOKs' logistical system was almost completely dependent on U.S. financial, contractor, and military systems. The units' motor pools were more like junk yards than functioning support centers. Additionally, the dependence on U.S. systems and support was reflected throughout the larger Afghan government, threatened by collapse without external U.S. political backing.

In February 2010, when President Obama surged thirty thousand additional forces into Afghanistan, the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) had only filled 1,810 out of the requisite 4,083 trainers.[774] Furthermore, at the same time, the United States only

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[771] Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*; Green, *In the Warlords' Shadow*; Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security Forces*, Ch. 7.

[772]Johnson and Mason, "Terrorism, Insurgency, and Afghanistan"; Major Bailey's first hand observations of ANA performance between 2010 and 2014 across Helmand and Herat Provinces.

[773] Major Bailey partnered with 4th SOK between 2013 and 2014.

[774] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security Forces,* 73.

contributed 13% of the total NATO training effort.[775] Another example of the inattention to critical advisory efforts included the lack of development of the Afghan National Police (ANP). When the initial plan for military assistance was established in 2002, Germany took the lead in building the Afghan police system.[776] By 2003, the United States grew impatient with Germany's lack of progress in developing the national police force and assumed primary responsibility, but contracted training out to DynCorp.[777] When this failed to produce a quality police force, the U.S. military assumed total responsibility for police development. In 2010, the Afghan police remained incompetent and corrupt.[778]

Beyond the purely training mission, U.S. military forces often did not properly prioritize the advise and assist role with partnered Afghan units, the very role that is fundamentally essential for long-term strategic success in U.S. irregular warfare missions. U.S. conventional forces especially struggled due to lack of education, training, and experience in these missions. In Helmand Province between 2010 and 2011, Marine infantry squads and platoon patrolled and operated with local ANSF, but not typically due to the necessity of the mission or an understanding of the long-term desired strategic end states. Rather, these units worked together due to the mandatory requirement that Afghan partners accompany every operation.[779] Although the more mature leaders in these units understood the intent behind these requirements, and built the necessary relationships to facilitate success, an equal or greater number of U.S. military forces displayed open disdain for their Afghan partners and made only marginal efforts to advise and assist.[780] These forces preferred instead to take the lead in combat, either for the sake of the thrill of combat or merely because direct combat operations constituted the extent of their knowledge of

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[775] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security Forces,* 74.

[776] Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 30.

[777] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 116.

[778] Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 68–72.

[779] Major Bailey's observations in Helmand Province between 2010–2011.

[780] Major Bailey's observations in Helmand Province between 2010–2011.

warfare, and they believed that killing the enemy could directly translate to mission success.[781]

Although typically more effective in advising and assisting their partners, SOF units demonstrated varied levels of effectiveness in bridging kinetic violence and political effects throughout Afghanistan.[782] After 2009, like Vietnam's Combined Action Program (CAP), the VSO/ALP program, led by Brigadier General Austin Miller, made headway in designing a framework that focused on advising partner forces and achieving strategic objectives in Afghanistan.[783] Although VSO is most famous at the tactical level, its program extended through District and Provincial Augmentation Teams (DAT/PAT), which connected to Village Stability Coordination Centers (VSCC) that were designed to manage regional stabilization efforts across Afghanistan's most critical districts.[784] These VSCCs in-turn reported up to the theater command in Kabul.[785] Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) also existed to facilitate reconstruction and stability efforts and had mixed effects based on assigned leadership, individual national caveats, and short rotational assignments.[786] The net effect of all these political-military advisory efforts never achieved full potential. Aside from various SOF units that prioritized the VSO mission between 2010 and 2013, the U.S. and coalition efforts in Afghanistan never fully invested in adequately partnering with or advising the indigenous civilian and military forces to politically compete at all levels of warfare in Afghanistan.[787]

Overall, the U.S. military has never adequately tailored its organization to the needs of the campaign in Afghanistan. Like Vietnam, in Afghanistan, the U.S. military displayed an apparent inability to adapt and appropriately tailor its organizational structure to

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[781] Major Bailey's observations in Helmand Province between 2010–2011.

[782] Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*; Green, *In the Warlords' Shadow*.

[783] Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*, Ch. 2.

[784] Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*, Ch. 2.

[785] Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*, 32.

[786] Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 198–200.

[787] Synthesized analysis from: Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*; Coll, *Directorate S*; Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*; Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*; Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security Forces*.

overcome the conflict. Lack of unity of command and effort, lack of continuity, insufficient and misallocation of intelligence, and failure to prioritize the advisory effort severely undermined the entire effort and contributed to ineffective operational approaches. Christopher Lamb's and Megan Franco's analysis in 2015 encapsulates the design failures in Afghanistan: "the U.S. national security system is not well organized to conduct extended irregular warfare missions. The departments and agencies dislike irregular warfare and resist creating organizations and programs to provide capabilities tailored to its demands."[788]

E. OPERATIONAL IRREGULAR WARFARE APPROACHES: THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL TOWARD ATTRITION

> When conventional warfare or logistical skills were called for in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Armed Forces generally achieved excellent results. At the same time, the military was insensitive to needs of the postconflict environment and not prepared for insurgency in either country. Our lack of preparation for dealing with irregular conflicts was the result of a post-Vietnam organizational blindspot.

> —Richard D. Hooker, Jr., and Joseph J. Collins, 2015[789]

Overall, the operational approaches employed by the U.S. military in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2018 have ranged from highly ineffective to highly effective. Generally, however, the U.S. military, as well as SOF, gravitated toward an attritional approach that emphasized traditional military kinetic actions and the destruction of the enemy at the expense of the approaches necessary to balance political and violent competition and achieve acceptable political outcomes.[790] At the root of this flawed approach lay a widespread fundamental lack of understanding of the politically complex irregular environment and threat networks in Afghanistan. This lack of understanding prevented the employment of relational maneuver principles to identify and exploit adversarial military

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[788] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 249.

[789] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 13.

[790] Gentry, *How Wars Are Won and Lost*, 200–206.

and political weakness through advisory roles that fused political-military objectives and approaches down to the tactical level of warfare.

After toppling the Taliban Regime in 2001, history indicates that the U.S. military failed to establish or facilitate adequate control over the population in Afghanistan or along its borders.[791] During this time, the relative stability in the aftermath of the major fighting in early 2002 may have allowed small teams of U.S. or coalition advisors spread throughout the country to facilitate control through locally available Afghan partners.[792] Early in the Afghanistan war, polls indicated that most Afghans had positive perceptions of the international mission in Afghanistan and would not have resisted light-footprint advisory approaches spread throughout the countryside.[793] If the U.S. military had better cooperated with partner Afghan forces to gain control over vulnerable areas in southern Afghanistan and combined this effort with enhanced border security, especially along Pakistan, it may have mitigated the widespread insurgency that went unchecked in most of the south and east until 2006.

Later, by 2009, when the Afghan government faced collapse due to the insurgency, the U.S. military adapted but was forced to surge a large number of troops in a deteriorated situation to attempt to establish control with undertrained and poorly motivated Afghan partners.[794] Nonetheless, the surge of trainers and combat troops did facilitate seizing control of many areas previously under Taliban control.[795] In many cases, however, this control was only temporary, and when U.S. forces left by 2015, the ANSF were often incapable or unwilling to retain control.[796] Furthermore, even at the height of the surge in

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[791] Coll, *Directorate S*; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*.

[792] Coll, *Directorate S*, Part 2; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, Ch. 12.

[793] Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 88, 108–109.

[794] Woodward, *Obama's Wars;* Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, Ch. 2; Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security,* Ch. 4.

[795] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, Ch. 2; Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan Defense and Security,* Ch. 4.

[796] Bill Roggio, "Taliban takes key district in Helmand province," *FDD Long War Journal*, March 23, 2017, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/03/taliban-takes-key-district-in-helmand-province.php.

2011, the U.S. military never effectively controlled the borders of Afghanistan, especially along Pakistan, which acted as the primary insurgent safe-haven and material support base.[797] This vulnerability allowed the insurgency to freely move weapons, equipment, and personnel between Afghanistan and Pakistan throughout the conflict.

From 2001 until late 2009, the U.S. military's kinetic approach in Afghanistan sought to find and destroy the Taliban and al Qaeda. In early 2002, these operations consisted of large-scale operations to mop up resistance from al Qaeda and the Taliban along the border with Pakistan in Tora Bora followed later by Operation Anaconda.[798] Later between 2002 and 2005, the primary operations consisted of SOF raids along the border with Pakistan as well as targeted operations inside Afghanistan.[799] Once the coalition recognized how large the insurgency had become, especially in areas like Kandahar and Helmand, Canadian and British forces moved into smaller outposts and conducted large sweeping operations with only temporary success.[800] The U.S. military, in places like the Korengal Valley in the mountains along eastern Afghanistan, attempted to secure segments of the populace and target the Taliban's, the Haqanni network's, and al Qaeda's attempts to infiltrate into Afghanistan and wage insurgency.[801] Most of these efforts possessed neither sufficient partner forces nor the right U.S. or coalition forces to fight the irregular threats they confronted. To compensate for lack of understanding or sheer numbers, the U.S. and coalition forces tended to rely on aviation or supporting firepower to overwhelm enemy attacks.[802]As a result, this period saw the numbers of civilian casualties caused by coalition forces escalate, and the early positive perceptions of international assistance from many Afghans began to erode.[803]

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[797] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 38; Coll, *Directorate S*, Part 4.

[798] Coll, *Directorate S*, 106–127.

[799] Coll, *Directorate S*, 142–145.

[800] Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 210–213.

[801] West, *The Wrong War*, Ch. 1.

[802] Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 361.

[803] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 40–41.

Later in 2009, when General McChrystal took command of ISAF, he significantly changed the Rules of Engagement (ROE) to prioritize protecting the populace, even if it meant conceding tactical victories to the enemy.[804] Some felt that his restrictions placed undue risk on the tactical forces and damaged the credibility of coalition forces, since they would concede to the enemy to prevent civilian casualties.[805] Once General Petraeus assumed command, the overemphasis on preventing casualties rebalanced. Between 2010 and 2013, U.S. forces emphasized local-level security and stabilization operations to facilitate control of the population. During this time, SOF continued to conduct both targeted raids as well as drone strikes across the border into Pakistan to attempt to stem the flow of lethal aid into Afghanistan.[806] By 2013, U.S. forces limited civilian casualties and still effectively targeted the active insurgency.[807] Throughout the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. military, and especially SOF, grew increasing tactically competent and lethal in destroying or disrupting identified insurgents.[808]

That said, between 2001 and 2018, the U.S. military, at all levels of command, has not effectively politically competed against the insurgent threats in Afghanistan.[809] Dating back to between 2001 and 2002, the U.S. military and political leadership ignored the opportunities to coopt the fragmented Taliban leadership.[810] Instead, the military overemphasized attrition against insurgent fighters, kinetically targeting those individuals.[811] Although at the national-strategic level attempts were later made in the conflict to negotiate with the Taliban, these attempts were mostly ineffective and were

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[804] Rothstein and Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames*, 66–67.

[805] Rothstein and Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames*, 66–67.

[806] Coll, *Directorate S*, Part 4.

[807] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 34.

[808] Linda Robinson et al., *Improving Strategic Competence*, 112.

[809] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 9–12.

[810] Coll, *Directorate S*, 141–142.

[811] Coll, *Directorate S*, 391.

conducted at odds with the other primary stakeholders who were necessary to implement a political resolution, namely the Afghanistan Government and Pakistan.[812]

At a more tactical level, some units, especially among SOF, were able to identify and exploit rifts between various disenchanted Taliban leaders.[813] In some cases, these efforts contributed to intra-insurgent violence or the reconciliation of former Taliban Commanders along with their local fighting force.[814] One notable high-level defection occurred in 2016 when Gulbuddin Hekmatyar overtly changed allegiance from the Taliban to the Afghan Government.[815]Although notable examples of success occurred, the understanding and sensitivity required to work with the appropriate Afghan partners and effectively exploit these opportunities did not align with the force rotation model in Afghanistan.[816] Recently in 2018, at a time where military stalemate may have been reached and recognized from both the Government and Taliban insurgency, negotiations have taken place.[817]

Like the deficiencies in competing directly against the Taliban and other threats, the U.S. political-military leadership, at all levels, has not waged effective political competition among the relevant stakeholders within the operational environment. These struggles contrasted sharply with America's success in uniting the members of the UN and NATO to build the largest coalition effort since the first Gulf War.[818] While the narrative

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[812] Coll, *Directorate S*, Ch. 31.

[813] Major Bailey's personal observations in Herat Province between 2013–2014.

[814] Green, *In the Warlords' Shadow*, Ch. 15.

[815] Andrew E. Kramer, "Once-Feared Afghan Warlord is Still Causing Trouble, but Talking Peace," *New York Times,* Mar 4, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/04/world/asia/afghanistan-gulbuddin-hekmatyar.html.

[816] Austin Long et al., *Building Special Operations Partnerships in Afghanistan and Beyond: Challenges and Best Practices from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Colombia* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp, 2015), 39–40, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR713.html.

[817]Anthony Wanis-St. John and Scott R. Worden, "Can the Afghan Cease-Fire Pave the Way for Peace?" *The Hill,* Jun 13, 2018 http://thehill.com/opinion/international/392085-can-the-afghan-cease-fire-pave-the-way-for-peace; Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations, *Operation Freedom's Sentinel Report*, 6.

[818] Ian S. Livingston and Michael O'Hanlon. *Afghanistan Index*, 5.[819] Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means*, Ch. 1.

of providing freedom, secular democracy, and human rights resonated among many nations around the world, the same narrative conflicted with the social and political reality in Afghanistan and Pakistan.[819] Furthermore, when early promises of economic development and reconstruction were replaced with corruption, a return of the Taliban and violence, and escalating civilian casualties, hopeful sentiments within Afghan society became replaced by negativity or outright hostility toward the central Afghan government and coalition forces.[820]

In Afghanistan, much of the population embraced the initial overthrow of the Taliban and the promise of aid and development to stop the continuous oppression and fighting that had occurred since 1979. This optimism proved short-lived since the Taliban returned virtually unimpeded and expanded its influence throughout the country. Even in areas controlled by the government and coalition forces, the corruption and extortion imposed by the ANSF alienated the population and undermined efforts to bolster the population's support to the central government.[821] Moreover, the traditional decentralization within much of the rural Afghan countryside often conflicted with attempts by the ANSF and the coalition to bolster a centralized government controlled by politicians or security forces representing outside ethnicities that were often perceived as a foreign occupation force.[822]

Since the military did not understand the context in Afghanistan, U.S. military and political forces failed to develop or implement locally attuned influencing narratives.[823] Typically, these U.S. narratives only extended as far as developing simplistic pamphlets for distribution among the local populace with no associated process for determining

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[819] Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means*, Ch. 1.

[820] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 40–41; Anthony H. Cordesman, *Afghan Public Opinion and the Afghan War: Shifts by Region and Province*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 10, 2009, 5–6.

[821] Mason, *The Strategic Lessons Unlearned from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan*, 30–58.

[822] Mason, *The Strategic Lessons Unlearned from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan*.

[823] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 223–230.

measures of effectiveness for desired influence objectives.[824] Overall, since U.S. military forces in Afghanistan predominantly focused on attritional kinetic operations, political competition to influence local populations on an operational scale remained unrealized. Furthermore, many of the strategic influence efforts that were employed were not connected to local tribal, religious, or military leaders who could appropriately tailor the message to influence the populace.[825] Since political competition in counterinsurgency often begins by establishing physical or geographic control, the U.S. military did not pursue an operational approach that enabled political control of the operational environment until between 2009 and 2010, under Generals McChrystal and Petraeus.[826]

Like the U.S. political-military failure to influence the internal Afghan population to support political objectives, the U.S. Ambassadors and other political leadership also failed to use political competition to influence critical regional power brokers to align with U.S. interests. While the U.S. successfully negotiated agreements with several of the central Asian states, including Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the U.S. failed to manage the relationships with Iran and Pakistan necessary to achieve U.S. interests.[827] Although openly adversarial since the hostage crisis in 1979, Iran initially expressed sympathy and indirect support to the United States following the attacks on 9/11.[828] Throwing away a potential opportunity, President Bush's label of Iran as part of the "axis of evil" destroyed any chance to cooperate in Afghanistan.[829] Instead, Iran has provided steady material aid to insurgent elements along western Afghanistan.[830]

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[824] Major Bailey's personal observations in Afghanistan between 2010–2014.

[825] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 223–230.

[826] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, Ch. 2.

[827] Rothstein and Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames*, Ch. 7; Coll, *Directorate S*; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*.

[828] Rothstein and Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames*, 120.

[829] Office of the Press Secretary, "President Delivers State of the Union Address," accessed October 31, 2018, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html.

[830] Major Bailey's personal observations in Herat and Farah provinces between 2013–2014; Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 273–275.

More significantly, slow recognition and underestimation of Pakistan's role within Afghanistan continues to undermine U.S. stability objectives in Afghanistan.[831] Immediately following 9/11, the United States gave Pakistan an ultimatum that Pakistan was either with the United States or with the terrorists.[832] Pakistan affirmed its public support to the United States internationally but then pursued its own national interests domestically.[833] These interests centered on Pakistan's struggle with India for regional power and influence. Pakistan did see and still sees, India's economic and political expansion into Afghanistan as a direct attempt to destabilize Pakistan.[834] To confront this threat, Pakistan has pursued active support to the U.S. efforts to target al Qaeda and other foreign terrorist organizations while simultaneously supporting Pashtun Taliban insurgents intent on destabilizing Afghanistan and regaining power.[835] The U.S. political-military leadership in both Washington and in Afghanistan only slowly grasped the extent of Pakistan's duplicitous commitment to pursuing their domestic national interests while publicly maintaining support to the U.S.-led mission in Afghanistan. Throughout the conflict, Pakistan has provided the primary insurgent safe-haven from Baluchistan and the FATA.[836] U.S. political efforts to engage and influence Pakistan to take positive actions toward stability in Afghanistan have failed to significantly decrease insurgent support at least up to 2018.[837] Until U.S. political-military leaders can better account for and engage Pakistan's vital interests in the region, stability in Afghanistan will not likely occur.[838]

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[831] Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations, *Operation Freedom's Sentinel Report to The United States Congress*, January 1, 2018–March 31, 2018, 4.

[832] Coll, *Directorate S*, 52–53.

[833] Coll, *Directorate S*.

[834] Coll, *Directorate S*; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, Ch. 11.

[835] Coll, *Directorate S*, particularly 266–267.

[836] Coll, *Directorate S*; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, Ch. 11.

[837] Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations, *Operation Freedom's Sentinel Report*, 21–22.

[838] Coll, *Directorate S*; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*; Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations, *Operation Freedom's Sentinel Report*, 21–22.

F.   CONCLUSION

> The U.S. military establishment, with civilian leaders' acquiescence, organized for wars military leaders wanted to fight—not those actually underway. In Vietnam, most obviously, the generals maintained the conventional force structure and tactics they developed to fight the Warsaw Pact and tightly controlled forces well equipped for counterinsurgency operations—like Army Special Forces. Military leaders chose not to learn from experiences in Vietnam, only to find themselves in Iraq and Afghanistan in unwanted counterinsurgency wars they again were unprepared to fight. U.S. government leaders in general, including senior military officers, in the last five cases learned and adapted more slowly than most of their adversaries—with negative consequences for the wars' strategic outcomes.

> —John Gentry, 2012[839]

Analysis of the U.S. military's irregular warfare efforts in Afghanistan reveals significant gaps in employing relational maneuver against irregular threats within a contemporary operational environment. The foundation for the U.S. political-military flaws is a pervasive lack of understanding of the operational environment and threat networks. Afghanistan's operational environment has included a wide range of threats and a complex and dynamic contextual threat eco-system. Based on flawed understanding, the U.S. military has largely pursued a disjointed political-military strategy that initially simplistically focused on al Qaeda without recognizing that denying Afghanistan as a terrorist safe-haven required addressing the array of politically destabilizing factors. Even when the U.S. military largely unified the political-military chain of command by 2012, serious flaws in understanding, strategy, and design remained. Furthermore, the U.S. military only possessed a relative minority of units that were designed to confront the type of uncertain political-military threats present in Afghanistan.

Overall, even by the time military force began to draw down in Afghanistan in 2011, the military remains poorly organized to pursue advisor-led operational approaches to overcome the threats in Afghanistan. The military did elevate its prioritization of advisors, both political and military; however, many advisory billets remained unfilled, let

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[839] Gentry, *How Wars Are Won and Lost*, 199.

alone filled with competent personnel. Furthermore, even as the SOF adapted to confront the irregular political challenges through the VSO program, its rushed implementation met with mixed results. Even among SOF, lack of understanding and continuity among leaders and individual units diminished success. Echoing the challenges and failures from Vietnam more than 30 years before, it took military leadership nearly a decade to develop a depth of understanding, implement a more unified political-military strategy, adapt its organization, and employ effective operational approaches. Even then, earlier military ineptitude had eroded U.S. domestic political confidence to resolve the conflict. After improving its strategy and operational approaches in Afghanistan between 2010 and 2013, the U.S. military has reverted to predominantly an attritional strategy and approach.[840] Figure 20 depicts the U.S. military's trends in blending relational maneuver across political and violent competition between 2001-2018.

Just as in Vietnam, the fundamental U.S. lack of understanding of the operational environment and its inability to adapt to exploit threat vulnerabilities through political and violent competition has led to more than 2,300 U.S. service members killed, 20,000 wounded, and $686 billion spent without achieving U.S. political objectives to deny terrorists safe-havens in Afghanistan and Pakistan or stabilize the region.[841] Analysis of the U.S. efforts in the contemporary irregular warfare environment reveals the U.S. military's failures to focus dedicated personnel and resources on accomplishing strategic objectives. Without focused attention, the military's employment of relational maneuver has been, at best, limited to the tactical employment of violence.

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[840] Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Afghan War of Attrition: Peace Talks Remain an Extension of War by Other Means," accessed October 31, 2018, https://www.csis.org/analysis/afghan-war-attrition-peace-talks-remain-extension-war-other-means.

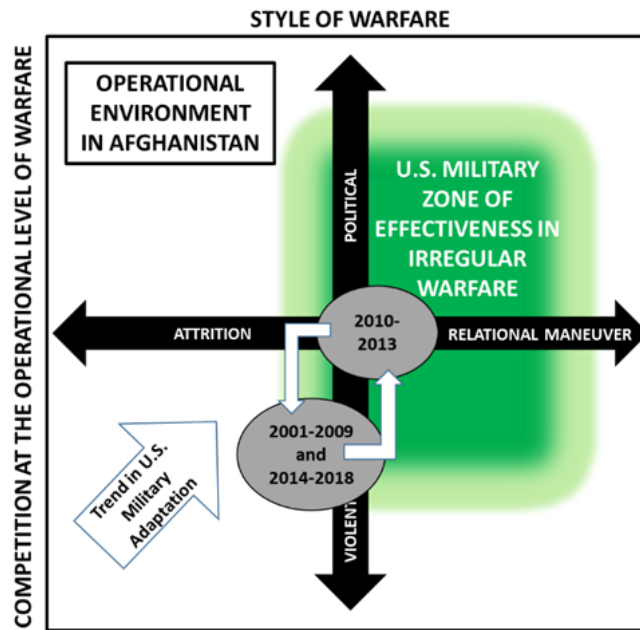[841] Hooker and Collins, *Lessons Encountered*, 424–425.

Figure 20. U.S. Military Adaptation in Afghanistan

PART 2: TO KNOW ONESELF

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VI. SOF ADVANTAGES—INTRODUCTION

> Our "new normal" is a persistently engaged, forward-based force to prevent and deter conflict and, when needed, act to disrupt and defeat threats. Long-term engagement is a hedge against crisesthat require major intervention, and engagement positions usto better sense the environment and act decisively when necessary. The "new normal," however, translates into increased demand for SOF.The pace of the last ten years is indicative of what we expect for the next ten years.[842]

—Admiral William H McRaven, 2011

This study presents a multi-faceted argument involving relational maneuver's application in irregular warfare. Part 1: "To Know One's Enemy" explained the necessity of applying relational maneuver in irregular warfare in general and established an analytical framework to better understand the components that enable the application of relational maneuver. Part 1 further applied this framework to the U.S. military's irregular warfare experiences in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. Case study analysis revealed persistent U.S. military institutional deficiencies in applying relational maneuver to succeed in irregular warfare. Together, Part 1 examined the nature and character of the irregular warfare operational environment, the threats the U.S. military has faced in these environments, and exposed deficiencies in military strategic effectiveness.

Part 2 builds on the foundation and analysis constructed in Part 1 and now focuses internally to examine Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) to identify deficiencies in the application of relational maneuver. Chapter VI examines the comparative relational maneuver advantages that Special Operations Forces (SOF) possess in comparison to conventional forces, before examining MARSOC through an organizational design analysis in Chapter VII. Part 1's analysis, which reveals the military's institutional deficiencies in irregular warfare, and Chapter VI's examination of

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[842] U.S. Army Special Operations Command, "ARSOF Operating Concept 2022" (U.S. Army Special Operations Command, September 26, 2014), 21.

SOF advantages explain why MARSOC should organizationally specialize in applying relational maneuver to irregular warfare.

SOF's organizational strengths better align with relational maneuver requirements to succeed in uncertain irregular operational environments, more so than those of conventional forces. Case study analysis of SOF in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan illustrates these strengths and advantages, but also reveals inhibitors and disadvantages to SOF's relational maneuver effectiveness both internally and within the larger U.S. military. Chapter VI is broken into three sections using relational maneuver's analytical framework depicted in Figure 21. Section A briefly discusses SOF's relational maneuver evolution since World War II as the force of choice in irregular warfare. Section B then highlights eight relational maneuver advantages that SOF generally possess to effectively confront irregular warfare. Section C identifies disadvantages of employing SOF in irregular warfare. Chapter VI closes highlighting the relative relational maneuver advantages SOF possess compared to conventional forces, drawing from the challenges conventional forces have faced in Vietnam and Afghanistan.
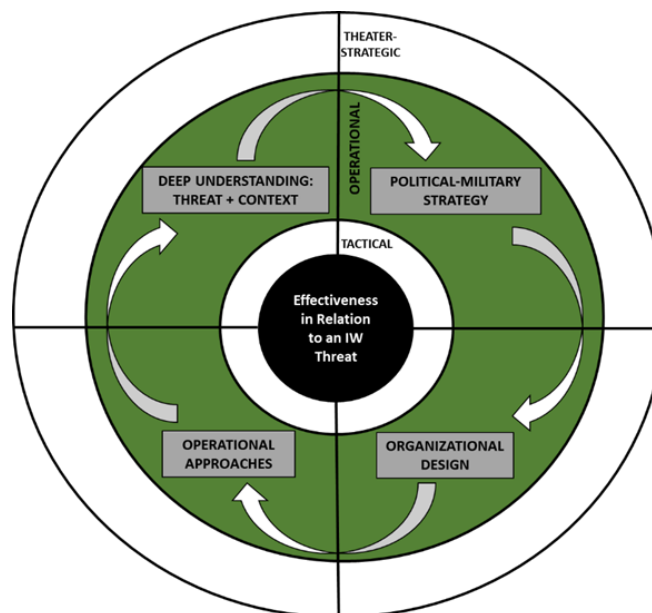

Figure 21. Relational Maneuver Analytical Framework

A. SOF AS THE FORCE OF CHOICE IN IRREGULAR WARFARE

> SOF are less model for information-age transformation of conventional forces than they are a model for how to fight irregular warriors with discrimination, at low cost, and through emphasis on indirect.
>
> —David Tucker and Christopher Lamb, 2007[843]

Author Thomas Adams argues that 'Modern' SOF began in June 1952, when Major General Robert McClure recruited Colonel Arron Bank, an Office of Strategic Services (OSS) officer during WWII, to become the first commander of the 10th Special Forces Group (SFG).[844] General McClure, who at the time was serving as Commander, Office of the Chief of Psychological Warfare (OCPW), believed that 'psychological warfare' included much more than had been previously utilized, which primarily consisted of simply handing out leaflets. Colonel McClure believed that commando raids, partisan support, covert and clandestine activities are all part of 'psychological warfare' and should be included in strategic efforts.[845] Led by former OSS officers, the 10th SFG would become the first Army peacetime unit dedicated to special operations and irregular warfare. The 'psychological warfare' tactics they incorporated fall under today's political warfare spectrum. The 10th SFG set the precedent for using a combination of direct and indirect approaches to affect strategic outcomes that continues today.

Adams later explains that Unconventional Warfare (UW) and guerrilla warfare had been largely ignored by Army doctrine, despite lessons learned in World War II and Korea, until it was incorporated in Special Forces training in the early 1960s.[846] Army Special Forces were specifically identified and designed to counter irregular threats, for which conventional forces were not well suited.[847] During Vietnam, President Kennedy and Secretary McNamara recognized the need for smaller units capable of effectively waging

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[843] David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 237.

[844] Thomas K. Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action: The Challenge of Unconventional Warfare* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 54.

[845] Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action*, 54.

[846] Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action*, 59, 64.

[847] Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action*, 64–65.

irregular warfare.[848] The U.S. Army also began to see the need for a unit that could operate along the same lines as Great Britain's Special Air Service (SAS).[849]

Throughout their evolution, SOF's advantages have remained critical to the U.S. military's ability to wage irregular warfare; however, no easy consensus exists on what constitutes Special Operations or who Special Operations Forces are. In the history of the United States, SOF have fought in both traditional and irregular wars, using both direct and indirect approaches spanning from unilateral direct action violent raids to covert and clandestine political operations. The vast employment of SOF has led to flexible, adaptable organizations, but has also created misconceptions about how SOF should be employed. In his 1978 book *Commandos and Politicians: Elite Military Units in Modern Democracies*, Eliot Cohen posed four questions; What is the purpose of a SOF unit; political, military, or both? What are the political and military costs of SOF units? How do national character and security predicaments affect a common phenomenon of civil-military relations? What should U.S. policy be with respect to SOF units?[850] Cohen assesses that what makes SOF different from general purpose is simply that SOF fulfill "specialized function[s]" that "are non-technical but different from those of the ordinary soldier – reconnaissance and raiding, for example."[851] In addition to military justifications, Cohen also states that SOF must offer some sort of political benefits to justify its existence.[852]

Regarding the political and military cost of SOF, Cohen answers his questions by explaining that SOF provide "superior quality and performance" and serve as symbols of military strength; but that their advantages come with risks, such as "misallocation and misuse of manpower," "demoralization of non-elite troops," "skimming off the cream,"

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[848] Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action*, 64–65.

[849] Charlie A. Beckwith and Donald Knox, *Delta Force* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1983), 94–95.

[850] Eliot A. Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians: Elite Military Units in Modern Democracies*, Harvard Studies in International Affairs 40 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 27–28.

[851] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 30.

[852] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 52.

and the potential for "inappropriate use of elite units."[853] National character and security can have dramatic effects on the utilization, size, authorities, and trust of SOF. Cohen provides case studies that illuminate how SOF can fall into or out of favor depending on the political and security climate within individual nations. In general, the less secure a nation is, the less comfortable its government will be with its SOF units.[854] In order for the U.S. to safely reap the most benefit from SOF, Cohen recommends strictly defining what missions SOF should be given, limiting SOF's "institutional autonomy," and keeping publicity and size to the minimum necessary.[855]

Modern strategist and author Colin Gray wrote in his 1999 article "Handful of Heroes on Disparate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed?" that "the American way of war has not accommodated SOF as an important strategic instrument."[856] Gray argues that the strategic culture in the United States has not always understood or embraced the advantages of SOF in waging irregular conflicts and generating long-term success. Gray points out that because of misunderstandings by policymakers, "SOF can find themselves misused as shock troops…or wasted on missions that make no strategic sense."[857] Authors David Tucker and Christopher Lamb support Luttwak and Cohen with their conclusions in their 2007 study, *United States Special Operations Forces*. Tucker and Lamb assess that "irregular threats are the proper strategic focus for SOF and the area where SOF can provide the greatest strategic value."[858]

Just as conventional forces are trained specifically to wage traditional warfare, Edward Luttwak argues that irregular warfare needs specially trained forces to achieve strategic success.[859] T.L. Bosiljevac, author of *SEAL: UDT/SEAL Operations in Vietnam*,

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[853] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 53, 54, 56, 58, 60.

[854] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 81–94.

[855] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 97–102.

[856] Colin S. Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed?" *Parameters*, Spring 1999, 4, accessed August 16, 2018, http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/99spring/gray.htm. Gray is referencing Weigley, *The American Way of War*.

[857] Gray. "Handfuls of Heroes," 5.

[858] Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, 237.

[859] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 340.

reiterates Luttwak's point using Vietnam as a case study. He points out that in Vietnam, SOF has proved itself as the ideal force for guerrilla warfare, whereas U.S. general purpose forces were not trained to wage irregular war or face the guerrilla tactics in Vietnam.[860] Luttwak wrote that the United States needs a force wholly dedicated to irregular warfare, specifically trained to utilize the relational maneuver, stating that "it is unprofessional to try to fight low-intensity war with forces structured and built for the opposite requirement."[861] He continues, that in low-intensity warfare, "the keys to success are first the ability to interpret the external environment in all its aspects…and then to adapt one's own organizational formats, operational methods, and tactics to suit the requirements of the particular situation."[862] Analysis of SOF's advantages reveals that SOF is well tailored to meet the demands of applying relational maneuver in low-intensity, irregular environments.

Luttwak describes why general purpose forces, what he calls "attrition forces," are not ideal for irregular, "low-intensity," warfare and why relational maneuver focused forces are ideal: Attritional forces optimize for standard operating procedures, but low-intensity conflicts are unique and require skilled operating procedures unique to the environment; Attritional forces do not meet the unique requirements of operations in irregular environments; Attritional forces are mostly trained to employ violence while adhering to political guidance, whereas irregular environments are political in nature with a smaller militaristic element; Attrition forces rely on logistics and upkeep to maintain effectiveness, but irregular wars cannot be won via these means, instead often relying upon generation of local forces with minimal capability to acquire even the most basic military and subsistence requirements.[863]

Luttwak continues, "The sublime irony is, of course, that the United States already has such a dedicated body, although not sufficiently autonomous to offer a separate career

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[860] T.L. Bosiljevac, *SEAL: UDT/SEAL Operations in Vietnam* (New York: Ivy Book, 1990), 13.

[861] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 340.

[862] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 336.

[863] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 340.

track. By nature "relational," by nature adaptive, the Special Forces should be exactly what we need. Their very existence is an implied recognition that low-intensity war is not a lesser-included case…"[864] SOF's advantage in irregular warfare has been recognized for years, but are still not fully actualized in current irregular wars. Both SOF organizations and U.S. strategy makers should understand SOF's relational maneuver advantages in order to maximize their impact moving forward.

Luttwak provides additional reasoning for the importance of using relational maneuver in low-intensity warfare, citing that "between armed forces of equal competence, the closer they stand to the relational-maneuver end of the spectrum, the greater will be their effectiveness."[865] Relational maneuver provides a refined method that complements Ivan Arreguín-Toft's theory of strategic interaction. Arreguín-Toft proposes that the strong actor should adopt the approach of the weak actor to achieve victory, which, in the case of low-intensity conflict, is the indirect approach.

The aim of Arreguín-Toft's Strategic Interaction Thesis is to provide a theory of asymmetric conflict that explains when and why weak actors are capable of defeating strong actors. Arreguín-Toft first defined direct and indirect strategies for strong actors (direct attack and barbarism) and weak actors (direct defense and guerilla warfare strategy).[866] Arreguín-Toft then proposed that when weak and strong actors engage in same-approach interactions, strong actors are more likely to win, and when they engage in opposite-approach interactions, weak actors are more likely to win (see Figure 22).

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[864] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 341.

[865] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 337.

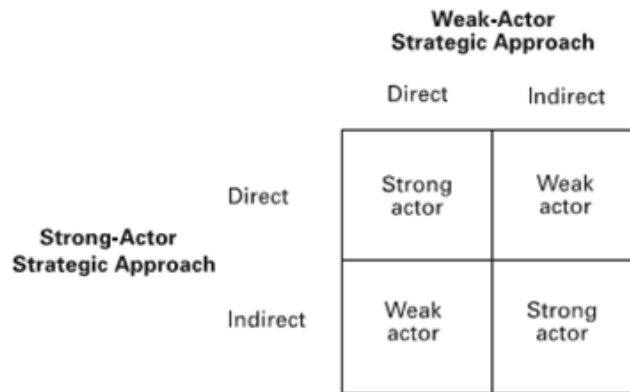[866] Arreguin-Toft. "How the Weak Win Wars," 100.

Figure 22. Arreguín-Toft's Strategic Interaction Thesis[867]

He went on to conclude that weak actors seeking victory should rely on an indirect strategy implementing guerrilla warfare techniques, as it would be difficult to defeat. Arreguín-Toft closed with two recommendations for future U.S. conflicts: "(1) preparation of public expectations for a long war despite U.S. technological and material advantages, and (2) the development and deployment of armed forces specifically equipped and trained for COIN operations."[868]

Prolific author on U.S. Special Operations, Linda Robinson describes why the indirect approach has the most enduring effect and makes clear that SOF are the ideal force to facilitate sustained political-military effects. [869] She goes on to state that the direct approach only achieves limited effects within an irregular conflict.[870] Additionally, like many others, she reiterates that the prevalence and increasing probability of irregular threats in the future will put a high demand on SOF for years to come.[871] In an attempt to demystify the problem that policy and strategy makers have regarding direct and indirect

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[867] Source: Arreguin-Toft. "How the Weak Win Wars," 108.

[868] Arreguin-Toft. "How the Weak Win Wars," 123.

[869] Robinson, *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces*, 4.

[870] Robinson, *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces*, 4.

[871] Robinson, *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces*, 6.

special operations, the army adopted surgical strike and special warfare to distinguish between direct and indirect approaches (see Figure 23).[872]

	Special Warfare	Surgical Strike
Population Viewed As	The Environment	An Obstacle
Population Dealt With By	Engagement	Avoid/Control
PE Focus	Enduring Network Development	Target Centric
Time Horizon	Mid to Long Term	Short to Mid Term
Speed of Execution	Gradual	Near Instantaneous
Prime Requirement	Patience	Speed
Communications	Low Signature	Robust
Measure of Effectiveness	Systemic Change	Threat Eliminated
Risk Tolerance	Significant	Minimal

Figure 23. Characteristics of Special Warfare and Surgical Strike[873]

Author of *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces*, Susan Marquis explains that, since its inception, SOF have spent years fighting to earn a positive reputation with conventional forces and the U.S. government. SOF's ability to showcase their flexibility and variety of mission sets eventually led to USSOCOM being funded to grow and support the SOF community.[874] Low-intensity conflict and instability have increased throughout the years, and since the fall of the Berlin wall, SOF has been the United States' most deployed force.[875] Marquis is quick to point out that what makes SOF such a valuable force is their ability to perform a variety of mission sets.[876] However, despite lessons learned from previous SOF engagements, misunderstanding SOF capabilities led to SOF being under-utilized for indirect approaches and over-utilized for direct approaches, in the 1990s, a trend that persists today.[877]

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[872] Robinson, *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces*, 11.

[873] Source: U.S. Army Special Operations Command, "ARSOF Operating Concept 2022" (September 26, 2014), 12.

[874] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 250–270.

[875] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 250.

[876] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 252.

[877] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 254.

When General Wayne Downing took over USSOCOM in 1993, he made it a priority to advertise SOF capabilities properly and transitioned USSOCOM from a simple unified command to a more service-like organization.[878] Downing's mission was to create special operators who were ready to fight both in today's wars and the wars of the future in support of national security objectives.[879] Downing acted to increase interagency cooperation through SOF providing "reliable and, in most cases, low visibility support for…regional programs" with the Drug Enforcement Agency, National Security Agency, and Central Intelligence Agency.[880] With Downing's leadership, USSOCOM secured its future by working with Locher, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, to have SOF participate in the DoD planning and resource allocation process as well as by providing, at the recommendation of Locher, "peacetime engagements" that addressed "national security policy for the arena outside of global major regional war."[881]

Marquis warns that SOF must fight the urge to become more like the four services; it must remain flexible and innovative.[882] She recommends that SOF break away from their respective services in some ways, such as joint basing, citing the operational command structure advantages and quick response time allowed by being stationed together.[883] She also offers a potential solution being "joint, regionally orientated permanent task forces," similar to, but more permanent than, the Theater Special Operations Commands the U.S. military has today.[884]

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[878] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 255.

[879] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 256.

[880] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 256.

[881] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 256, 257.

[882] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 259.

[883] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 260.

[884] Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare*, 260.

B. SOF'S RELATIONAL MANEUVER ADVANTAGES IN IRREGULAR WARFARE

> It is not sufficient to have just resources, dollars, and weapons systems: we must also have an organization which will allow us to develop the proper strategy, necessary planning, and the full warfighting capability.

—David C. Jones, 1982[885]

At its core, relational maneuver depends on understanding the threat operational environment, identifying vulnerabilities, and adapting to exploit those vulnerabilities to achieve strategic objectives. Section B outlines eight general SOF characteristics that better enable SOF to be effective in highly uncertain and political irregular operational environments. Many of these eight characteristics blend between the four relational maneuver components that enable understanding, identification, and exploitation of threat vulnerabilities. Comprehensively, these eight elements provide a special adaptable capability well suited to achieving success in irregular warfare.

1. Intelligence/Special Activities Capabilities

Intelligence drives operations. The importance of accurate and timely intelligence cannot be overestimated. There are many examples of operations that failed not because of tactics or executions, but because of inaccurate or old intelligence. That being said, one of SOF's greatest advantages is their integration of intelligence collection and operators. SOF not only have the ability to generate intelligence through similar means as general purpose forces, but also through special activities capacities that can enhance their organization's ability to generate timely intelligence that is difficult to attain via traditional means.

The U.S. Air Force in the Korean War displayed SOF's ability to leverage special activities to generate intelligence that led to successful operations. USAF special operations units conducted all manner of special operations during the Korean War, principally organized by MSgt. Donald Nichols, who was responsible for the 6004th Air Intelligence Service Squadron deemed "the most successful special operations unit of the

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[885] As cited in: James R. Locher, *Victory on the Potomac: Goldwater-Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon* (College Station, TX. Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 34.

[Korean] war."[886] Their inclusion of various SOF mission sets gave them the versatility they needed to be successful in their environment. The USAF worked unilaterally and with the CIA to conduct intelligence, counter-intelligence, sabotage, espionage, demolition, and guerrilla operations.[887] Nichols referred to the intelligence, counter-intelligence, and human intelligence he led as "positive intelligence," only possible via deep penetration and political contacts throughout North and South Korea.[888] The Air Force units coordinated and shared information with UN intelligence agencies.[889]

The Air Force Special Activity Units started training programs, run by American and Korean personnel, that focused on interrogation, intelligence gathering, guerrilla warfare, and paratrooper basics.[890] The Special Air Mission Units accepted the challenges of working in an amphibious theater and used both Naval and Air Force seaborne and amphibious vessels to penetrate North Korean and Chinese Seas to launch saboteurs, spies, partisans, and psychological warfare teams.[891]

Special activities played a significant role in Vietnam as well. The Phoenix Program, run by the CIA and Army SF, was responsible for espionage and intelligence operations. The Phoenix Program enabled the CIA and SF to have a force operating in a grey zone between legal and non-legal military-style operations.[892]

Richard Shultz's book, *The Secret War Against Hanoi: Kennedy's and Johnson's Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam*, details how the Kennedy and Johnson administrations sought to play the game using "Hanoi's rules."[893] He outlines

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[886]Michael E. Haas, *In the Devil's Shadow: UN Special Operations During the Korean War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 78.

[887] Haas, *In the Devil's Shadow*, 78–79, 82.

[888] Haas, *In the Devil's Shadow*, 78–79.

[889] Haas, *In the Devil's Shadow*, 82.

[890] Haas, *In the Devil's Shadow*, 87.

[891] Haas, *In the Devil's Shadow*, 91, 107–114.

[892] Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action*, 135–136.

[893] Richard H. Shultz Jr, *The Secret War Against Hanoi: Kennedy's and Johnson's Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999), xvii.

how the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam – Studies and Observations Group (MACVSOG) was used to conduct covert-action operations that played a significant role in the strategic plan for Vietnam. MACVSOG operations included inserting spies for deception operations, psychological warfare (fabricating a North Vietnamese guerrilla movement, propaganda, kidnapping), covert maritime interdiction, and cross-border covert reconnaissance (identifying future targets, wiretapping, rescuing POWs).[894] MACVSOG's core missions became to collect intelligence and employ deception against enemy networks, perform covert maritime operations, "black" psychological warfare, and covert operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail.[895] Shultz points to the warning/guidance of former OSS Chief Bill Donovan that "covert operations must be carried out under the auspices of senior military leadership and integrated into the overall strategy for fighting the war."[896]

SOF train and fully integrate with their own organic intelligence capability and, over time, have developed into permanent groups of forces able to conduct operations and provide intelligence and support.[897] Lucien Vandenbroucke, author of *Perilous Options: Special Operations as an Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy,* calls attention to the synergy created by the intel-ops fusion that "achieve[s] the cohesion and teamwork indispensable for success."[898] He postulates that the Sontay Raid (Operation Ivory Coast 1970), or the Iran hostage rescue attempt (Operation Eagle Claw 1980), may have turned out differently had they not been ad hoc groups of forces put together for a single mission.[899] The breakdown among these operations' leadership, and in particular their connection with integrated and familiar intelligence cells, displays just how important SOF's intelligence capability is.

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[894] Shultz Jr, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, x-xi.

[895] Shultz Jr, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 57–65.

[896] Shultz Jr, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 332.

[897] Lucien S. Vandenbroucke, *Perilous Options: Special Operations as an Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 171.

[898] Vandenbroucke, *Perilous Options*, 171.

[899] Vandenbroucke, *Perilous Options*, 171.

2. Proponent for Transregional Threats

SOF's flexible organizational design is well suited to respond to the transregional threats that the United States faces today. In his 1943 edited book, *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, Edward Earle suggests that modern strategists must consider economic, political, social, and technological phenomena to analyze military conflicts critically.[900] Multiple other scholars and authors, such as Walter Lippmann and Walter Mills, suggest that modern strategists must consider the whole of the environmental picture when planning for conflict. This concept has endured time, dating back to Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, and at least 100 years of American thought. Many American authors have weighed in on this concept. Walter Lippmann wrote that "diplomacy and strategy, political commitments and military power, are inseparable; unless this be recognized, policy will be bankrupt."[901] American military historian Walter Mills simplifies Lippmann, writing "[war] challenges virtually every other institution of society."[902] Earle calls attention to the fact that "Under modern conditions, military questions are so interwoven with economic, political, social, and technological phenomena that it is doubtful if one can speak of a purely military strategy."[903]

Many SOF organizations were intended to be able to operate both in the political and military spectrums at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. Bridging the political-military gap has consistently been difficult for American strategy. Today's threats have been more complex and demand a force that is capable of understanding and operating in the political and military domain. Just as the U.S. needs a force capable of producing political and military effects within nations, the U.S. also needs a force capable of waging war against transregional threats in transregional environments.

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[900] Edward Mead Earle, *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1943), vii-xi.

[901901] As quoted in: Earle, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, vii.

[902] As quoted in: Earle, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, x.

[903] Earle, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, xi.

Terrorist organizations without conventional borders, proxy threats, and the rise of the 4+1 (Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and violent extremists) demand a "trans-regional, multi-domain, and multifunctional approach"[904] from the United States. Chad Pillai brought attention to this problem in his 2017 article "Reorganizing the Joint Force for a Trans-Regional Threat Environment." Pillai wrote that "unless reforms are implemented, the United States will remain a global power that thinks and acts regionally, while our state challengers are regional powers that think and act globally."[905] According to the National Intelligence Council's (NIC) publication, "Global Trends: Paradox of Progress," the rise of the information age and global trends are making it easier for organizations and nations to connect and interact with one another while simultaneously making it more difficult for governments to provide the security and prosperity that citizens expect.[906] The National Intelligence Council explains that "growing global connectivity amid weak growth will increase tensions within and between societies."[907] The availability, ease of use, and ubiquity of social media platforms have allowed like-minded individuals across the globe to connect and share ideas on a much larger scale than ever before. Connected organizations will make governing more difficult around the world.

Not only do countries today have to be concerned with what is happening inside their borders, they now also have to manage the security of their citizens from global threats. The NIC points out that "managing global issues will become harder as actors multiply."[908] It is becoming easier for international actors to form organizations, and to scale the size of their organizations. If these organizations do not align with the values of their nation, or nations globally, they can cause problems and lead to instability, particularly in already weak states.

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[904] Chad Pillai, "Reorganizing the Joint Force for a Trans-Regional Threat Environment," The Strategy Bridge, accessed August 15, 2018, https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2017/1/4/reorganizing-the-joint-force-for-a-transregional-threat-environment.

[905] Pillai, "Reorganizing the Joint Force for a Trans-Regional Threat Environment."

[906] National Intelligence Council (U.S.), ed, "Global Trends: Paradox of Progress," January 2017, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/nic/GT-Full-Report.pdf.

[907] National Intelligence Council (U.S.), ed., "Global Trends: Paradox of Progress," 6.

[908] National Intelligence Council (U.S.), ed., "Global Trends: Paradox of Progress," 6.

With USSOCOM being the designated lead for countering violent extremists, the SOF community already has the authority to operate across Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC) and has begun its focus on transregional threats, whereas the general purpose forces who still rely on GCCs lag behind.[909] Kelly McCoy suggests in his article, "The World the Combatant Command was Design for is Gone," that GCCs no longer meet the demands of the current operating environment and should be replaced with functional threat-based commands similar to but even more robust than the current USSOCOM construct.[910] Pillai imagines McCoy's functional commands to be titled *Counter-Russia Combatant Command*, *Counter-China Combatant Command*, and *Counter-Iran Combatant Command* and would be able to prioritize their forces geographically how they deem fit to counter their respective threat.[911] General Dunford, current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has emphasized that current collaboration and integration between combatant commanders is inadequate regarding combating transregional threats.[912] Regional GCCs efforts to preserve the sanctity of their respective commands undermine transregional coordination. Future approvals from policymakers will continue to make SOF's advantage in transregional environments stronger.

3. Authorities and Financial Capabilities

Colin Gray has pointed out that "SOF prosper when conventional operations are prohibited by political factors, ruled out as too expensive, or otherwise are deemed inappropriate."[913] SOF are encouraged to operate within the political and military domains simultaneously, which has led some to use the phrase 'warrior diplomat' when referring to SOF. Authorized to work as advisor-diplomats and warriors, SOF are able to directly impact the political space as well as the battlespace.

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[909] Kelly McCoy, "The World the Combatant Command was Designed for is Gone," *War on the Rocks*, October 7, 2016, https://warontherocks.com/2016/10/the-world-the-combatant-command-was-designed-for-is-gone/.

[910] McCoy, "The World the Combatant Command was Designed for is Gone."

[911] Pillai, "Reorganizing the Joint Force for a Trans-Regional Threat Environment."

[912] Pillai, "Reorganizing the Joint Force for a Trans-Regional Threat Environment."

[913] Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes," 12.

Specialties that differentiate SOF from general purpose forces include conducting counterguerrilla, unconventional and psychological warfare in irregular environments. Based on the reports of then Brigadier General Edward Lansdale, it was noted that counterguerrilla forces and social reform programs were needed in Vietnam. The idea was to counter NVA/VC using their own tactics against them. Lansdale had experience running this type of campaign in the Philippines and was able to convince the Kennedy administration that "special warfare," in particular, counterinsurgency, unconventional warfare, and psychological operations, was the solution.[914] The Kennedy administration made "several bureaucratic and policy moves in order to be able to 'make every possible effort to launch guerrilla operations in North Vietnam territory."[915]

By the end of 1962, the CIA's efforts to perform covert operations against North Vietnam were moving slowly and did not meet President Kennedy's standard.[916] The Pentagon stepped in and by January of 1964, had created a new covert division of MACV called the Studies and Observations Group (SOG), which would be tasked with what Kennedy had envisioned for covert operations in Vietnam.[917] Although SOG was initially intended to advise, assist, and train South Vietnamese, this never truly materialized. Instead of planning operations for the South Vietnamese, SOG began planning and executing covert operations of their own against North Vietnam.[918] Author Richard Shultz points out the numerous problems that MACVSOG faced while conducting covert operations during the Vietnam War; however, his recommendation remains that the United States should strive to fix those issues and continue to utilize all aspects of special warfare in future conflicts, including covert-action missions.[919]

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[914] Shultz Jr, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 3–4.

[915] Shultz Jr, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 23.

[916] Shultz Jr, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 31.

[917] Shultz Jr, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 40.

[918] Shultz Jr, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 49.

[919] Shultz Jr, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 254.

Training authorities have also proven to be a unique advantage to SOF. Initial OSS training authorities allowed them to conduct mock espionage and sabotage missions on 'live' U.S. targets such as local bridges and dams.[920] Some OSS operators were caught in the act during training missions and ended up in the hands of lawmen. Today's SOF authorities keep operators out of the hands of local law enforcement and the FBI but allow for greater flexibility overseas than do those of general purpose forces.

Financial authorities for SOF have changed over the years and derive from both their parent service and from SOCOM. SOF has had a history of acquiring funding differently than general purpose forces. This began with Delta in late 1977, whose funding was unique within the Army. Colonel Bob Mountel, who worked closely with Colonel Charles Beckwith, procured funding directly from Department of the Army to Delta for weapons, ammo, equipment, transportation and other technologies they deemed necessary for their missions.[921] Today, SOF organizations receive their funding both from their respective service as well as from SOCOM.

4.   Economy of Force/Low Footprint (Political Viability)

Adaptability and flexibility share a close correlation with economy of force. Forces that possess a wider variety of skill sets are force multipliers capable of reducing the need for manpower on the ground. Having a small footprint while providing operational success in the military and political spectrum is ideal for irregular conflicts, where a large footprint can create unnecessary political disruptions and will not necessarily lead to greater success. If the appetite for military presence is extremely low or nonexistent, SOF can operate as low-visibility intervention force capable of covert and clandestine operations for which general purpose forces are not built.[922]

Today, and dating back to at least the 1950s, politicians have been concerned about the costly nature of small wars. President Eisenhower once recounted, "I saw no sense in

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[920] John Whiteclay Chambers, "Office of Strategic Services Training During WWII," *Studies in Intelligence* 54, no. 2 (June 2010), 7–8.

[921] Charles A. Beckwith and Donald Knox, *Delta Force* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1983), 111.

[922] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 47.

wasting manpower in costly small wars that could not achieve decisive results under the political and military circumstances then existing."[923] This was before adequate doctrine existed for fighting small or irregular wars. Unfortunately, today, U.S. leadership continues to make costly strategic errors, both in terms of finance and effectiveness. Small wars need not be overly costly when employing a strategy that utilizes SOF appropriately.

As discussed previously, irregular warfare's criteria for victory are based on intra-state political control and influence from indigenous partners, not attrition like the territorial or border disputes of traditional wars past.[924] SOF focus specifically on being able to generate popular support in irregular warfare. Cohen points out that the qualities of general purpose soldiers, even in an all-volunteer force, may not be suited to irregular warfighting.[925] Cohen, like Luttwak and others, identifies the necessity of a purpose-built irregular warfare force differentiated from a general purpose force. Cohen claims that conventional forces are specifically trained to fight as an element of a large conventional machine and are not trained to disaggregate into the smaller units that are required to fight in guerrilla or revolutionary conflicts. Cohen also notes that small units of professional soldiers (SOF) are capable of performing 'deniable' missions that large conventional units are too cumbersome to perform.

In Donald Fiske's 1993 assessment of the OSS selection process, he noted that the goal of the OSS program was such that "the (i) *amount saved* plus (ii) the *amount of harm prevented* plus (iii) the *amount gained* is greater than the cost of the assessment program."[926] A successful OSS training pipeline would result in an organization that provided a net gain both financially and temporally. This net gain is what SOF continue to deliver. While the success of clandestine and covert operations is inherently difficult to measure, history has shown that small numbers of specially trained personnel can accomplish tasks equal to or unachievable by larger numbers of general purpose forces.

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[923] Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action*, 61.

[924] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 45.

[925] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 46–47.

[926] Donald W. Fiske, *Selection of Personnel for Clandestine Operations: Assessment of Men* (Laguna Hills, CA: Aegean Park Press, 1993), 8–9.

Colin Gray has publicized the need for Americans to "plan and act smarter," citing the cost-effectiveness of adequately waging irregular operations when compared to the conventional American way of war.[927] With the current focus on decreasing the quantity of general purpose forces available during peacetime, SOF play a critical role in containing small wars in Phase 0 and beyond.

As pointed out by Francis Kelly in *U.S. Army Special Forces 1961-1971*, Special Forces were conducting unconventional operations, such as prisoner recoveries, while simultaneously conducting counterinsurgency operations, such as the CORDS program.[928] The authors' experiences and observations of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown similar displays of SOF's economy of force. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, SOF elements are tasked with the full spectrum of special operations core activities, illustrated in Figure 24, and have achieved results beyond their organizational size.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS CORE ACTIVITIES

- Direct action
- Special reconnaissance
- Counterproliferation of weapons of mass destruction
- Counterterrorism
- Unconventional warfare
- Foreign internal defense
- Security force assistance
- Counterinsurgency
- Information operations
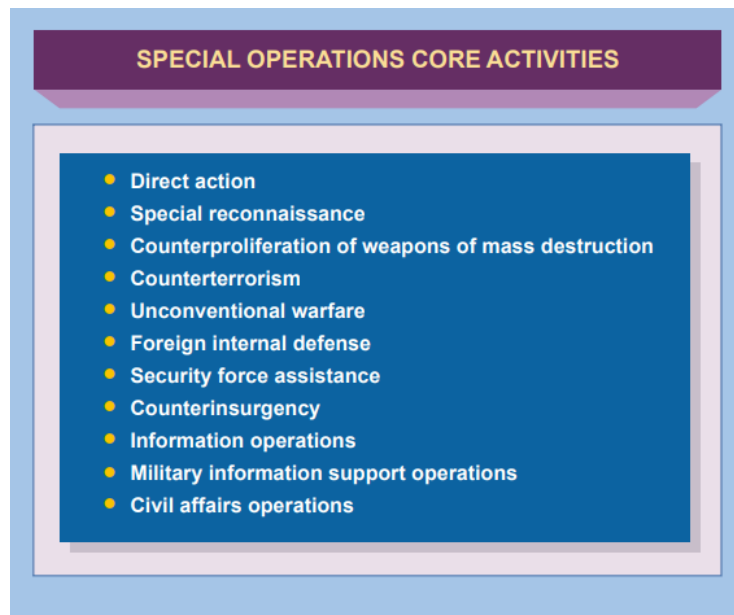- Military information support operations
- Civil affairs operations

Figure 24. Special Operations Core Activities[929]

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927 Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes."

928 Francis J. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces 1961–1971* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1985), 148.

929 Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3–05: *Special Operations*, Figure II-2.

Tactical-level SOF elements are expected to conduct a combination of these core activities throughout their employment in a country. When compared to general purpose forces, SOF require orders of magnitude less manpower to conduct the gamut of their core activities. A general purpose force conducting Foreign Internal Defense (FID) can easily number in the hundreds and be solely dedicated to that mission, whereas SOF teams of two to twenty can sustain training of thousands of foreign personnel while simultaneously conducting numerous other mission sets.

Admiral William McRaven's Naval Postgraduate School thesis, much of which would later be republished in *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*, had a strong focus of SOF's ability to leverage economy of force via the concept he coined as relative superiority. McRaven defines relative superiority as "a condition that exists when an attacking force, generally smaller, gains a decisive advantage over a larger or well-defined enemy."[930] McRaven wrote that relative superiority is the unique component that allows SOF to achieve victory over larger adversaries. McRaven lists six principles of special operations that he deems "unique elements of warfare that only special forces possess and can employ effectively."[931] Although many general purpose forces can likely conduct special operations and employ McRaven's principles, the time and preparation required to be mission ready will likely far exceed established special forces.

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[930] William H McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: The Presidio Press, 1995), 4.
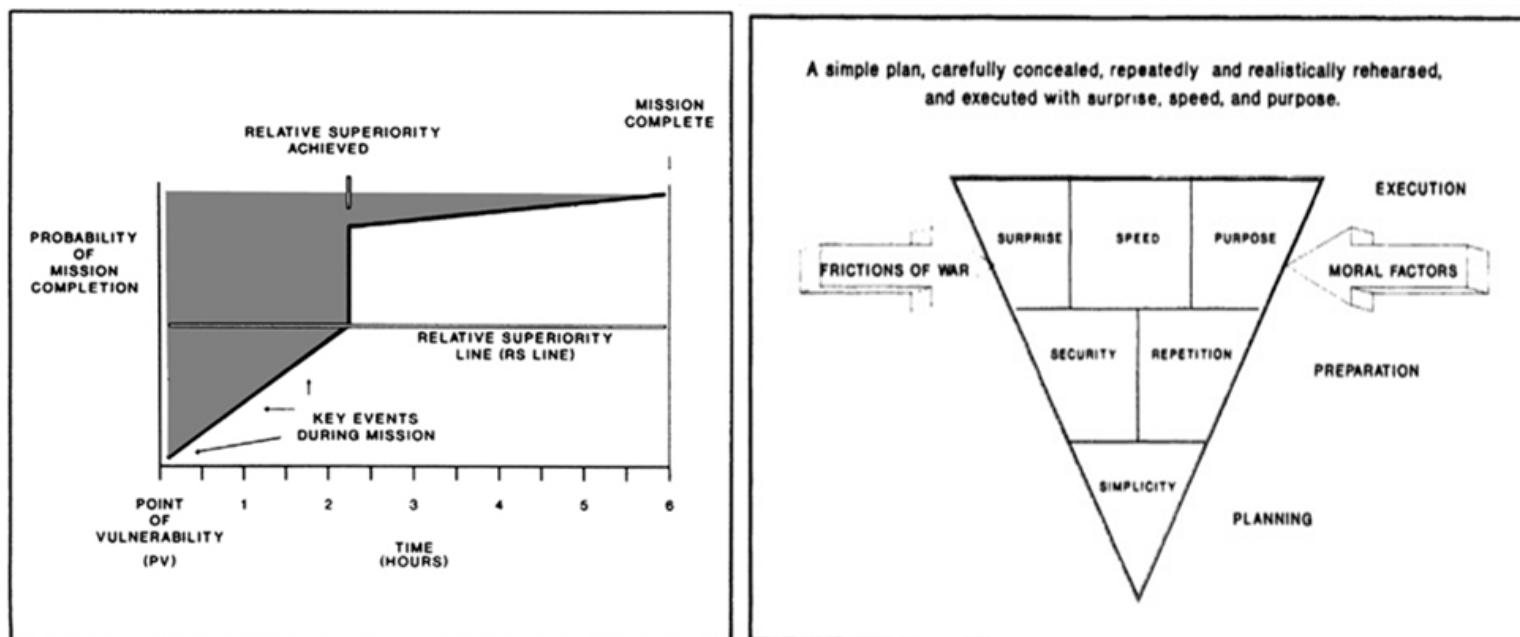
[931] McRaven, *Spec Ops*, 23.

Figure 25. Relative Superiority and Principles of Special Operations, McRaven[932]

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[932] Source: McRaven, *Spec Ops*, 7 and 11.

Admiral McRaven's concept of relative superiority and principles of special operations apply the principles of relational maneuver to direct action commando-style operations (See Figure 25). The concept of relative superiority depends on exploiting vulnerabilities within an enemy's physical and cognitive defenses. Success occurs when these vulnerabilities are exploited through the principles McRaven outlines even though the SOF unit executing the mission is likely much smaller and possesses far less firepower than the defending force. Within irregular warfare, McRaven's theory and principles still apply, but should be support a larger indirect strategy and approach that applies similar relative superiority principles with and through indigenous partners using both politics and violence to achieve the strategic mission.

5.   Integration with Joint and Interagency Partners

In March of 1944, Admiral Ernest King ordered a Joint Strategic Survey Committee to evaluate an army plan recommending a single Department of National Defense.[933] The Joint Strategic Survey Committee's evaluation noted that "the outstanding lesson of [WWII] is that modern warfare is made up of…'unified' operations, [and] all military elements should be closely interlocked and interrelated that the concept of one whole is preferable to articulated units."[934]

While SOF excel working independently, their success is not limited to unilateral operations. Colin Gray wrote that "SOF benefit from a supportive strategic context, particularly one in which regular forces need assistance."[935] SOF can be used to accelerate progress or delay defeat in a supporting role to general purpose forces. SOF do not rely on a particular roadmap or doctrine to achieve mission success. Instead, in irregular warfare, as Gray points out, they must maintain "a state of mind that can innovate nonstandard solutions to problems" particularly focused on turning an enemy's strength into weakness.[936]

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[933] Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 23.

[934] As cited in: Locher. *Victory on the Potomac*, 23.

[935] Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes," 9.

[936] Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes," 13.

SOF's ability to work jointly combined with their authority and capability to conduct a multitude of mission sets is another aspect that separates them from general purpose forces. The Goldwater-Nichol Act, considered the most sweeping military reform in nearly 40 years, approved the operational reorganization and joint leadership role that SOF needed.[937] Prior to Goldwater-Nichols, no one entity had enough authority to adequately lead joint operations.[938] The Joint Army-Navy Board's official recommendation regarding inter-service action during and before WWII was "mutual cooperation," a method that was seldom heeded.[939] In his book, *Victory on the Potomac: Goldwater-Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon*, James Locher discloses that skeptics felt that the Goldwater-Nichols Act would "rob the service chiefs of their proper authority, denigrate their role, and complicate their administration of the services."[940] The services were more interested in preserving their independence than in developing a joint force capable of winning modern irregular wars.[941] In fact, Goldwater-Nichols streamlined the chain-of-command and reduced some of the bureaucracy that persisted post-World War II.[942]

Operation Eagle Claw, the failed 1980 attempt to rescue U.S. Embassy hostages in Tehran, marked the tipping point of necessity for organizational change within the DoD. Military historian Richard Gabriel wrote that in the eyes of global spectators, Operation Eagle Claw "clearly marked the decline of American military prestige and confidence."[943] Despite Delta being ready to conduct the hostage rescue in Iran, the lack of joint planning, coordination, and execution, in addition to the aircraft mishaps, led to mission failure.[944]

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[937] Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 4.

[938] Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 17.

[939] Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 18.

[940] Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 3.

[941] Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 15.

[942] Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 4.

[943] Richard A. Gabriel, *Military Incompetence: Why the American Military Doesn't Win* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 85, cited in: Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 31.

[944] Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah: The First Battle in America's War with Militant Islam* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006), 224–233, 441, 450–452.

Around the same time, Luttwak expressed his disdain for the confusion and absence of unity caused by the lack of adequate joint organization.[945] General David C. Jones, then Chairman of the JCS, briefed both the Senate and House Armed Services Committee in February of 1982 regarding the need for organizational change and a more unified joint force. It was at this briefing where the Chairman made it clear that organizational change was imperative. Jones declared that "we do not have an adequate organizational structure today…. To be able to fight in today's environment…will require concerted efforts of all four services. The services can't operate alone."[946]

Despite providing an incomplete problem description and recommendations, the message was clear; strengthen the position of joint officers, especially the chairman, unified commanders, and members of the Joint Staff, to improve interoperability among the services.[947] This would alleviate some of the issues that the leaders of Operation Eagle Claw and other joint operations faced. The JCS and mission commanders would no longer have to create an ad hoc Joint Task Force from scratch for future joint operations, enabling the unity SOF needed to maximize their integration capabilities.

Operation Eagle Claw serves as a reminder of possible failures resulting from a lack of adequate integration and communication among partners. Delta had intelligence specific to the location of the American hostages within the building and had constructed a model to conduct planning and rehearsals.[948] Delta centered their focus on training to the target area without proper integration with the CIA or with the Navy aircraft chosen as their delivery method.[949] Despite tactical readiness for the politically sensitive mission, joint planning failure led to mission failure. SOF have come a long way since 1980 regarding integration with each other, general purpose forces, and interagency and local

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945 Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 338–339.

946 Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 34–35.

947 Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 38.

948 Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah*, 224.

949 Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah*, 226.

partners. Through these difficult lessons, integration as both supporting and supported element has become one of the SOF community's most beneficial strengths.

Without discounting SOF's unilateral successes, scholars like Cohen point to interoperability as one of SOF's chief advantages. Cohen describes how counterinsurgency and covert operations pose problems for SOF because they overlap with and may be better suited to intelligence operatives.[950] However, SOF have a long history of integration with intelligence agencies, particularly the relationship between Green Berets and the CIA during Vietnam. Throughout Vietnam, SOF were less restricted in their mission set relative to general purpose forces, allowing them to conduct combined and joint operations with the CIA, Navy, and Air Force.[951] For example, the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) program was planned and funded by the CIA, but executed by Army Special Forces beginning in 1961.[952]

In Laos, SOF personnel worked hand in hand with the CIA to train the Laotian Army in counterinsurgency and created the '*Armee Clandestine*,' comprised on Laotians and North Vietnamese to subvert the Pathet Lao guerrillas and North Vietnamese government.[953] Additionally, the Mobile Strike Force Command (MIKE) Force, which operated under MACV, came into high demand because of the extensive training they had received from U.S. Army SOF and often became supporting elements of conventional operations.[954] This displays SOF's ability to not only integrate with other agencies themselves but also to preach integration to their partners while conducting FID.

In reference to irregular environments, Tucker and Lamb state that "SOF are a good hedge against uncertainty because their skills allow them to work well with impromptu allies and counter unconventional threats."[955] This capability differentiates

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[950] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 97.

[951] Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action*, 66–68.

[952] Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action*, 84.

[953] Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action*, 66.

[954] Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action*, 129.

[955] Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, 185.

SOF from general purpose forces. Being able to quickly and effectively integrate with partners is a key relational maneuver advantage in irregular environments.

6.   Indirect Approaches

> For SOF to be effective in circumstances where they need to work with civilians at immediate risk to the enemy, it is essential that the locals believe both that our side will be the inevitable victor and that they, the locals, will be on the winning side.
>
> —Colin S. Gray, 1999 [956]

In his postgraduate thesis, *The Utility of Freedom: A Principal-Agent Model for Unconventional Warfare*, Tyler Van Horn writes about the difficulties surrounding proxy warfare, which he equates to unconventional warfare. He states that "the successful employment of surrogate forces depends to a significant degree on the relationship cultivated between the sponsor and the insurgent, and the various actors between the two."[957] SOF are designed to be capable of cultivating those strong relationships and provide training and employment of indigenous forces to conduct their own operations. Van Horn explores potential solutions for "counterinsurgents to indirectly topple the insurgency by destabilizing the relationships between the principal and its agents."[958] Van Horn's case study analysis of the CIA-supported Tibetan insurgency from 1956-1974 revealed that supporting the Tibetan insurgency was a cost-effective way to sufficiently inflict damage to and create a significant distraction for the Chinese military.[959] While this case study was of a CIA-led unconventional warfare campaign, the SOF community is trained to conduct similar operations.

The OSS selection process deliberately sought foreigners and first-generation Americans for their "familiar[ity] with the language, people, and territory of their

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[956] Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes," 6.

[957] Tyler G. Van Horn, *The Utility of Freedom: A Principal-Agent Model for Unconventional Warfare* (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2011), v.

[958] Van Horn, *The Utility of Freedom*, v.

[959] Van Horn, *The Utility of Freedom*, 33, 35, 37.

respective lands of origin."[960] SOF operators most familiar with an environment can provide beneficial insight to the other operators with whom they work as well as to strategy makers. The impact environmental experts can have, particularly on the more nuanced indirect approach, should not be underestimated.

The advantage of the SOF's FID mission, including advise, or advise and assist, is a true force multiplier. Special Forces units in South Vietnam had the unique capability to conduct operations with locals inside territory dominated by the enemy. The Special Forces trained to conduct unconventional warfare via advise and assist operations of mobile guerrilla forces and provided logistical and administrative support through the CIDG program.[961] This was a crucial capability in their unconventional operations, which, with few exceptions, were most frequently conducted in enemy-controlled areas.[962]

The Special Forces learned many valuable FID and combat lessons in irregular environments during their beginnings in the Pacific theater of operations. That experience became the foundation for future SOF success in irregular environments.[963] At the beginning of the Vietnam War (in early 1956) the 14th Special Forces Operational Detachment (SFOD) was activated to lead an Asian resistance force in conducting unconventional warfare against Sino-Soviet forces in the event of general war. Author and military historian Shelby Stanton sums up the Special Forces' role:

> The Special Forces was composed of a small number of specially selected and highly trained soldiers…able to master critical military skills needed to train and lead guerrilla warriors…. In order to control and lead irregular partisan fighters, they had to understand people, languages, and foreign cultures. Most important, Special Forces warriors had to possess the intelligence, knowledge, tact, and acumen to successfully transform ordinary civilians into an effective military threat to a strong and cunning occupation army.[964]

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[960] Fiske, *Selection of Personnel*, 11.

[961] Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces 1961–1971*, 134.

[962] Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces 1961–1971*, 134.

[963] Shelby L. Stanton, *Green Berets at War: U.S. Army Special Forces in Southeast Asia 1956–1975* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1985), 1–34.

[964] Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 3.

Working under the cover of the 8251st Army Service Unit, they would develop mobile training teams to organize and task indigenous Asian civilians in Taiwan, Thailand, and South Vietnam.[965] Special Forces arrived in 1959 and created four training sites for the Laotian forces.[966] U.S.-Asian strategy relied on Laos as a buffer between communist North Vietnam and friendly Vietnam.[967] The U.S. supported Laotian forces, but unfortunately did not adequately train them. In December of 1960, the Special Forces led a Laotian countercoup force that was ultimately defeated, resulting in the capture and death of U.S. and Laotian forces.[968] Despite the Special Forces training, the Laotian forces had low esprit de corps caused by the language barrier, hasty assignment of team members, and rapid turnover of U.S. personnel (many of whom served 6-month tours).[969]

Special Forces continued to spread their mobile training teams across Taiwan, Thailand, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and China to provide proximity to areas of interest, a diversity of cultural influence, and access to diversified training locations.[970] The demand for the Special Forces skillset grew rapidly through 1961, so much so that they were unable to keep up with the training needs of their own personnel.[971] While the Special Forces did not achieve all of their goals in Laos, the frustrations and complexities of leading indigenous forces in irregular environments, as well as the experience they gained in establishing relationships with other U.S. military and government agencies, would constitute the lessons that would set them up for future success.[972]

In the modern context, the United States should wish to avoid indefinite occupation in regions where it fights irregular wars. No colonization will take place, and as such, the

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965 Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 1.

966 Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 18.

967 Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 16.

968 Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 18.

969 Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 31.

970 Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 4, 6–7.

971 Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 13.

972 Stanton, *Green Berets at War*, 16.

only way to enable enduring long-term success is via the indirect political approach through indigenous partners.

7.   Competence and Capability

As mentioned previously, Eliot Cohen remarked that undoubtedly, SOF provide "superior quality and performance" and serve as symbols of military strength.[973] The selection process of SOF organizations has more rigorous standards of performance when compared to that of general purpose forces. Proficient SOF operators allow the formation of ad hoc groups while retaining competence and capability across mission sets. In July and August of 1950, Navy Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT) and Marine Reconnaissance operators were combined in an ad hoc joint Special Operations Group (SOG) with little time to train, yet they exemplified SOF's ability to perform at high levels despite non-ideal circumstances.

Their performance in Korea during that time "provided an impressive display of navy-marine professionalism… [and] performance far beyond that which could reasonably have been expected for its drastically abbreviated joint-training schedule."[974] Putting together an ad hoc group of general purpose forces who are not specifically selected and trained for the ability to adapt and overcome would likely result in disaster, particularly if given minimal time to plan, train, and rehearse for the upcoming mission. Yet this is exactly what SOF are able to provide, particularly is irregular warfare. SOF are specialized to overcome obstacles in the irregular environment and are able to rely on the principles of relational maneuver for guidance. The competence, capability, and credibility of SOF also creates fear among U.S. enemies and allows SOF to be used as a deterrent in future low-intensity conflicts.[975] SOF's competence and capability must be maintained in order for them to be feared and used as a deterrent.

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[973] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 53.

[974] Haas, *In the Devil's Shadow*, 147.

[975] Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes," 17.

8. Adaptable, Flexible, and Unorthodox

In general, Americans overemphasize the military's technical skills, engineering, and science, overlooking the idea of a military profession.[976] SOF are selected specifically for their ability to be adaptable, flexible, and unorthodox. Dating back to the OSS, these traits were prioritized to give SOF an advantage in all types of conflicts. The diversity of skillsets paired with ingenuity of operators allow SOF to overcome unexpected obstacles not previously faced in conflict or training.

Bill Donovan is credited with formulating OSS training to involve so many different types of enterprises that require more diverse skills than any general or special purpose force in U.S. history.[977] He preached the importance of unorthodox warfare, particularly prior to assigning OSS operators to serve as advisors in Greece from 1942-1944.[978] Anthony Cave Brown's book, *Wild Bill Donovan: The Last Hero* provides Donovan's list of units and reasons for the formulation of a force specifically designed to perform unorthodox warfare (what some today may call unconventional warfare):[979]

> His Morale Operations organization existed to destroy the will to resist of the enemy forces

> His Secret Intelligence branch was there to keep the commander-in-chief informed of the enemy's capabilities and intentions

> His Special Operations existed to destroy or disturb the enemy's lines of communication before, during, and after the main attack

> His Operational Groups would prepare the way for the main forces

Cave Brown explains why this concept of unorthodox warfare was so special: "the novelty of this conception existed in two factors: (1) Nobody in the United States had thought to adopt such "ungentlemanly" practices as a weapon of war and, if anyone had, nobody in the United States had the political power necessary to persuade, or force, the

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[976] Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 16.

[977] Fiske, *Selection of Personnel*, 10.

[978] Anthony Cave Brown, *Wild Bill Donovan: The Last Hero* (New York: Times Books, 1982), 429.

[979] Cave Brown, *Wild Bill Donovan*, 436.

President…and Chiefs of Staff to adopt the concept and (2) the entire organization was under one roof."[980] Instead of opting for a European model of maintaining small departments with single, specialized functions, Donovan strived to create a wholesale package of specialized capabilities. Employing this unorthodox warfare practice in Greece in 1944 allowed a small number of American "special troops" working in partnership with former Greek Army personnel to tie up a large number of German soldiers for many weeks.[981] Donovan's unorthodox approach and willingness to defy conventional U.S. military practices is what allowed him to prove the advantages of a special operations force. The tradition of small units utilizing a multitude of military specialties under one roof started with Donovan and continues to this day.

The histories of the OSS neglect the challenge of training individuals selected into America's first central intelligence and covert operations agency, but Donovan was able to overcome these issues.[982] OSS records indicate that training was focused on the individual's "initiative, personal courage and resourcefulness" and that the goal was the "development of [an] agent as an individual and not as a fighter who is only effective when under close leadership. The guerrilla concept of warfare will be the guiding principle."[983] OSS training strived anticipate the unknown and unknowable. How do you train a special force for a mission that does not yet exist? The OSS pipeline focused on selecting the individual based on a diverse variety of skills and traits that would achieve successful results despite the circumstances.[984] Delta considered selecting for these traits by recruiting solely out of infantry but instead chose once again to model after the SAS, who found good candidates throughout all service components.[985] More so than general purpose forces, training for SOF is both physical and psychological.[986] Psychiatric tests

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[980] Cave Brown, *Wild Bill Donovan*, 436.

[981] Cave Brown, *Wild Bill Donovan*, 442.

[982] Chambers, "Office of Strategic Services Training During WWII," 1.

[983] Chambers, "Office of Strategic Services Training During WWII," 5.

[984] Fiske, *Selection of Personnel*, 11, 16.

[985] Beckwith and Knox, *Delta Force*, 119.

[986] Beckwith and Knox, *Delta Force*, 120.

were given particular gravity as it was known that what was asked of OSS personnel would be stressful and one could not rely on intelligence and skill alone.[987] The OSS selection process and training was a defining factor for their eventual success and laid the groundwork for the selection that continues today.

Because of their unique and diversified training and operational experience, SOF have acted as both "tactical laboratories" and "leadership nurseries" for the military writ large.[988] SOF have been able to provide tactical guidance and testing and evaluation of equipment and practices that provided benefit to general purpose forces. Historically within the Army and Marine Corps, special operators also routinely cycle back into the general purpose forces, bringing with them a wealth of knowledge and experience to better the force.

In Vietnam, the Army Special Forces displayed their ability to operate across the spectrum of warfare. By the end of 1968, the Special Forces' core missions had become: advise and assist Vietnamese SF, advise their respective geographic sectors, provide intelligence to MACV, conduct special operations, run MACV Recondo School, running the Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU), the action arm of the Phoenix Program and man, train, and equip the MIKE Force. [989]

Naval Special Forces have also been employed throughout modern U.S. military history to provide SOF expertise in the maritime and amphibious domain. While there had been previous ad hoc naval special forces previously, in March of 1961, the SEALs were permanently established to "develop a naval guerrilla/counterinsurgency capability, develop elements of tactical doctrine, and help to develop special equipment to support these roles."[990]

SEAL Team ONE was initially assigned to Vietnam to survey how the unit could best provide maritime and amphibious support to Vietnamese and other U.S. forces'

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[987] Fiske, *Selection of Personnel*, 11.

[988] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 31–33.

[989] Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action*, 99, 119.

[990] Bosiljevac, *SEAL: UDT/SEAL Operations in Vietnam*, 15.

advisors. Initially, they focused on riverine operations but would expand their utility throughout the war. When SEAL Team TWO arrived, they focused on instructing the Vietnamese in clandestine maritime operations. SEAL Teams ONE and TWO eventually combined to run a Mobile Training Team (MTT) that would train South Vietnamese naval commandos in a periodic rotation. They would conduct commando raids with the Vietnamese they trained in order to dismantle North Vietnamese highway and rail systems.[991]

The above examples of SOF's adaptability and flexibility exemplify the key attribute of SOF that connects them to relational maneuver. Using relational maneuver SOF organizations are able to leverage both the responsive nature of reactive agility and the shaping nature of proactive agility. Responding to unknowns and unknowables in irregular environments will typically be related to violent interactions whereas shaping the environment is a proactive, primarily political endeavor. SOFs advantages collectively allow SOF to understand, adapt, and overcome complex, dynamic, and uncertain irregular warfare operational environments.

C.   SOF'S DISADVANTAGES

> Faulty intelligence, poor interagency and interservice cooperation and coordination, provision of inadequate advice to decisionmakers, wishful thinking, and overcontrol of mission execution by officials far removed from the theatre of operations have repeatedly jeopardized the ability of the United States to conduct [Special Operations] missions successfully.
>
> —Lucien S. Vandenbroucke, 1993[992]

Not all of the disadvantages below are inherent to SOF; some are due to the understanding and improper employment of SOF by senior political and military leadership. Colin Gray's 1999 article, "Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed?," points out that the path to successful SOF operations is dependent on the type of warfare and hinges on a competent understanding of what SOF

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[991] Bosiljevac, *SEAL: UDT/SEAL Operations in Vietnam*, 16–17, 19.

[992] Vandenbroucke, *Perilous Options*, 152.

are capable of, as well as a consistent strategy throughout a given conflict.[993] Not all politicians and military leaders understand how to employ SOF properly. For example, at the expense of their core UW mission set, SF was routinely integrated into conventional operations during the war in Vietnam.[994]

Misunderstanding of SOF combined with SOF's character flaw of not turning down a challenge can and has created dangerous situations in the past. When SOF are tasked and accept an inappropriate mission, it creates an irresponsible and unmitigated risk to the force and the mission. Gray details the need for "an educated consumer, political and military patrons who appreciate what SOF should, and should not, be asked to do."[995] Gray provides the conditions for successful SOF operations (See Figure 26):

Special Operations: Categories of Conditions for Success	
Policy Demand	Enemy Vulnerabilities
Politics	Technological Assistance
Feasible Objectives	Tactical Competence
Strategy	Reputation
Flexibility of Mind	History
Absence of Alternatives	

Figure 26. Colin Gray's Categories of Conditions for Success[996]

Until consumers can adequately understand the importance and relevance of the above conditions for success, SOF will continue to struggle with wrongful employment. Linda Robinson correctly points out that policymakers still have questions regarding "who

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[993] Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes," 2–24.

[994] Adams, U.S. *Special Operations Forces in Action*, 78–115.

[995] Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes."

[996] Source: Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes."

SOF are?" and "what does SOF do?"[997] She writes that "most Americans are not aware of how widely and intensively SOF have been employed, or of how diverse their missions are."[998] However, she notes that civil affairs, informational, and advisory roles are not frequently enough included in the indirect approach that SOF should maintain.[999]

Eliot Cohen contends that while SOF are essential units of a strong military, they come with significant costs and risks of which politicians and military leaders must be aware.[1000] Cohen lists some SOF risks as damaging civil-military relations by subverting the chain of command, courting favor with politicians, and distorting perceptions of military affairs for politicians.[1001] Politicians having direct access to SOF leadership truncates the chain of command and can be equally tempting and dangerous for higher level SOF leadership as well. When SOF are able to circumvent the normal chain of command, there is a greater risk of non-compliance or even coups. Cohen warns to be wary of this depending on the security environment of the given nation.[1002] Cohen asserts that SOF are subject to "undue prominence when politicians support them for either romantic or political reasons" and this prominence can undermine military efficiency and civil-military relations.[1003] As he points out, people often fear military involvement in politics, but the problem is often the reverse.[1004] Technology often encourages politicians to skip chain of command and interact directly with the local commander, limiting their autonomy.[1005] It is politicians' duty to help develop strategy and maintain awareness of military action, but this should only occur at the appropriate strategic level and avoid micromanagement. Cohen advocates for the de-politicization of SOF in order to preserve their effectiveness.

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[997] Robinson, *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces*, 8.

[998] Robinson, *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces*, 10.

[999] Robinson, *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces*, 14.

[1000] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*.

[1001] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 79.

[1002] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 65–66, 70–72.

[1003] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 96.

[1004] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 7.

[1005] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 48.

SOF must also be wary of growing out of control and of increased publicity, as this demoralizes non-elite troops.[1006]

SOF can potentially lead politicians and strategy makers into a grandiose sense of military capability. Cohen suggests that more military capability can potentially lead politicians into precipitous conflicts.[1007] Some politicians may feel that if the military has a particular capability, it should be continuously employed, when in fact it may be more advantageous to avoid conflict or pursue it via other means. Politicians and military leaders alike should not feel obliged to employ all available assets constantly. This will merely lead to wasted resources and an exhausted, overworked force.

The internal hubris of SOF organizations has also led them to make mistakes of their own. Culturally, the SOF community has a tendency to run toward the sound of gunfire and focus on mission sets that do not drive conflict resolution. While direct action raids do play an important role in beating back enemy organizations, it is political competition that will determine the outcome of the conflict. In order to maintain relevance in future conflicts, the SOF community should shift from a tactical, direct approach, to an indirect approach that focuses on long-term enduring political-military effects.[1008] Neglecting the indirect approach remains SOF's most severe operational shortfall.[1009]

Additionally, the history of distrust between SOF and other organizations has limited and continues to limit cooperation, joint operations, and information sharing. For example, during the Vietnam War, the CIA fought to keep MACVSOG out of Laos because it feared anyone intruding on its "damn near all-powerful" position in the country."[1010] Lucien Vandenbroucke points to excessive secrecy and wishful thinking that negatively impact special operations.[1011] Vandenbroucke also cites "inappropriate intervention in

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[1006] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 53–54.

[1007] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 100.

[1008] Robinson, *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces*, 3–27.

[1009] Robinson, *The Future of U.S. Special Operations Forces*, 4.

[1010] Shultz Jr, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 74.

[1011] Vandenbroucke, *Perilous Options*, 159, 164.

mission execution" by the White House and senior military headquarters that limits the mission commanders' ability to make decisions how he, the expert, deems fit.[1012] He also notes that perceived 'elitist' attitudes of SOF creates distrust among general purpose forces.[1013]

Hy Rothstein's article "Less is More: the problematic future of irregular warfare in an era of collapsing states," details the inverse relationship between success against irregular threats and the priority attached to the conflict by senior U.S. officials. Rothstein cites two case studies, the current Global War On Terror effort in the Philippines and the Salvadoran Civil War during the 1980s. Both in the Philippines and El Salvador, U.S. forces operated with minimal budgets and oversight, yet achieved lasting success; whereas, in Iraq, with nearly unlimited resources, they have yet to affect similar success.[1014]

In spite of all SOF's advantages, risk and disadvantage will always exist. Both SOF and politicians must be keenly aware of these advantages and risks while planning. However, what can be certain is the importance of SOF's role in irregular warfare. As noted previously, relational maneuver combined with SOF's advantages allows them to deliver positive results across the entire spectrum of irregular warfare, but the United States must still be careful to employ SOF appropriately and mindful of potential pitfalls in employment.

D. CONCLUSION

Both SOF and general purpose forces have advantages and disadvantages that lend toward them playing the lead role in a given conflict. Where to draw the line of roles and responsibilities in a given conflict is an exercise in relational maneuver. The eight characteristics this chapter detailed demonstrate SOF's relational maneuver advantages over general purpose forces in irregular warfare. In irregular environments, relational

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[1012] Vandenbroucke, *Perilous Options*, 166.

[1013] Vandenbroucke, *Perilous Options*, 176–177.

[1014] Hy S. Rothstein, "Less is More: The Problematic Future of Irregular Warfare in an Era of Collapsing States" *Third World Quarterly*, 28, no. 2, 275.

maneuver's principles of understanding, identifying, and exploiting the adversary to achieve strategic objectives align with SOF's advantages.

The environment will dictate whether SOF should be the supporting or supported element. The strategy, organizational design, and warfare approaches will follow. Whichever element is in the supported role should chair the chain of command and assign responsibilities as to achieve success throughout the conflict. There are appropriate times for both SOF and conventional leadership to assume command. More often than not, SOF are better-suited leadership in irregular conflicts. The State and Defense Departments should analyze each conflict together to determine who should take the commanding role. Additionally, leadership should remain for a long enough period to ensure adherence to strategy, creating a reasonable chance of taking effect.

The United States is geared toward fighting large-scale wars and has failed to adequately adapt to the ever-increasing low-intensity warfare.[1015] The United States failed to learn valuable lessons of low-intensity warfare during Vietnam and other conflicts.[1016] However, the United States has a force that is capable of overcoming these errors. Luttwak suggests the United States provide SOF with more strategic autonomy in order to more effectively wage low-intensity conflict.[1017]

Politicians and policymakers need to be wary of the temptations of elite units. They must understand the capabilities and consequences of using elite units before considering their use for operations.[1018] In addition, they should heed Cohen's advice that future success depends on secrecy, not publicity.[1019]

SOF should also be kept small. Cohen advocates for SOF units to maintain a size too small to be deployed as regular infantry units, citing that they should remain smaller

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[1015] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 335.

[1016] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 333-335.

[1017] Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," 333-342.

[1018] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, Ch.5, 95–102.

[1019] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 101.

than a brigade, roughly 3000-4000 personnel.[1020] The U.S. political and military leaders should furthermore heed the SOF Truths as advertised by USSOCOM (See Figure 27). Adherence to these truths can ensure readiness, capability, and performance when SOF is called upon to act.

SOF Truths

Humans are more important than hardware

Quality is better than quantity

Special Operations Forces cannot be mass produced

Competent Special Operations Forces cannot be created after emergencies occur

Most special operations require non-SOF assistance

Figure 27. SOF Truths[1021]

While SOF's advantages demonstrate their relational maneuver abilities to understand, identify, and exploit the enemy to achieve strategic objectives over general purpose forces in irregular warfare, SOF may not be the appropriate solution in every irregular environment or conflict. Relational maneuver should be applied to each individual conflict to determine the best strategy in each case. As Neustadt and May illuminate in their book *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers*, while historical study provides the great benefit of case studies with similar circumstances, each case remains unique and nuanced and must be assessed with both the past and present in mind.[1022]

[1020] Cohen, *Commandos and Politicians*, 100.

[1021] Source: "SOF Truths," United States Special Operations Command, accessed October 29, 2018, https://www.socom.mil/about/sof-truths.

[1022] Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 247–270.

A stable long-term war strategy, particularly in irregular conflicts, allows SOF to make their most significant impact.[1023] This, however, must be balanced with the concept of relational maneuver. Using relational maneuver, strategy should be continually reevaluated and adapted to ensure it is feasible and will achieve the overall objectives. SOF's inherent advantages enable the conceptual agility to inform, influence, and implement adaptive strategy. Regarding irregular warfare, Tucker and Lamb point out that the U.S. has failed to recognize SOF's role and has "paid repeatedly over the course of its history."[1024] Recognition of SOF as the appropriate choice for irregular warfare should no longer be in question given their inherent relational maneuver advantages.

Recognizing SOF alignment with irregular warfare now enables an internal organizational design analysis of MARSOC. Based on the advantages of SOF in irregular warfare and MARSOC's current design, subsequent chapters will conduct analysis and provide detailed recommendations for how MARSOC can better confront irregular threats.

[1023] Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes," 10.

[1024] Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, 183.

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VII. ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN AND MARSOC

Analysis until now has focused on understanding and constructing a relational maneuver framework for irregular warfare; using that framework to analyze the U.S. military's efforts in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan; and describing the general Special Operations Forces' relational maneuver advantages within irregular operational environments. This chapter transitions from an external examination outside Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) to internal organizational analysis to identify organizational inhibitors of relational maneuver effectiveness in irregular warfare. An open systems analysis assists in identifying specific inhibitors within MARSOC's inputs, throughputs, and outputs. These inhibitors prevent the employment of relational maneuver's requirements to develop a deep understanding of the operational environment; inform, influence, and implement political-military strategy; adapt unit organizational design to the operational environment; and implement operational approaches that ultimately identify and exploit threat vulnerabilities in the irregular operational environment.

To identify misalignment to the irregular operational environment, this chapter is broken into two primary sections. Section A describes the basics of organizational design and organizational theorist Richard Daft's goal approach to determine effectiveness using an open systems model. This study's relational maneuver analytical framework gauges effectiveness through adherence to its four main enabling principles. Together, these elements enable a military organization to identify threat vulnerabilities and adapt to exploit those vulnerabilities to achieve strategic objectives. Section B then conducts an open systems analysis of MARSOC's operational elements. The conclusion forecasts the following chapter's recommendations to address and overcome the identified organizational inhibitors of effectiveness. The conclusion ties together Part 2's effort "To Know Oneself" and forecasts the synthesized analysis and recommendations in Part 3: "Success in Irregular Warfare."

A.   ORGANIZATION DESIGN AND OPEN SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

Subject matter expert Richard Daft defines organization design theory as "a way of thinking about organizations and how people and resources are organized to collectively accomplish a specific purpose."[1025] Daft further explains that "organizations are (1) social entities that (2) are goal-directed, (3) are designed as deliberately structured and coordinated activity systems, and (4) are linked to the external environment."[1026] These definitions of organizations and their design enable an open systems analysis of MARSOC.

Richard Daft explains that "organizations are open systems that exist for a purpose."[1027] An open system has inputs from an external environment, transforms those inputs into throughputs within the organization, and produces outputs back into the external environment to achieve the organization's purpose and goals.[1028] Each open system can possess a significant number of sub-systems. An open systems analysis requires drawing boundaries around the organization of interest or focal organization to distinguish between the environment's inputs, the organizational system's throughputs, and evaluate the organizational outputs that produce outcomes within the environment.[1029] For this chapter and study, the focal system for analysis are MARSOC's operational elements that most directly command or wage irregular warfare in deployed irregular operational environments such as Afghanistan and Iraq. For example, the focal system for analysis is MARSOC itself; however, its primary sub-systems included for analysis consist of the MARSOC Component headquarters, the Marine Raider Regiment (MRR), Marine Raider Battalions (MRB), Marine Special Operations Companies (MSOC), and Marine Special Operations Teams (MSOT).

[1025] Richard L. Daft, *Organization Theory & Design*, 11th ed. (Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning, 2013), 24.

[1026] Richard L. Daft, *Organization Theory & Design*, 10th ed. (Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning, 2010), 11.

[1027] Daft, 10th ed, 37.

[1028] Richard L. Daft, *Organization Theory and Design,* 8th ed. (Mason, OH: Thomson/South-Western, 2004), 14.

[1029] Daft, 10th ed, 35.

As depicted in Figure 28, an organizational design open systems analysis holistically examines how an organization internally functions and interacts with the external environment to achieve its purpose and goals. This interaction occurs across the organizational system and sub-system's environmental inputs and throughputs, and produces outputs back into the environment. Figure 28's red call-out box depicts the primary design elements for this open systems analysis of MARSOC.
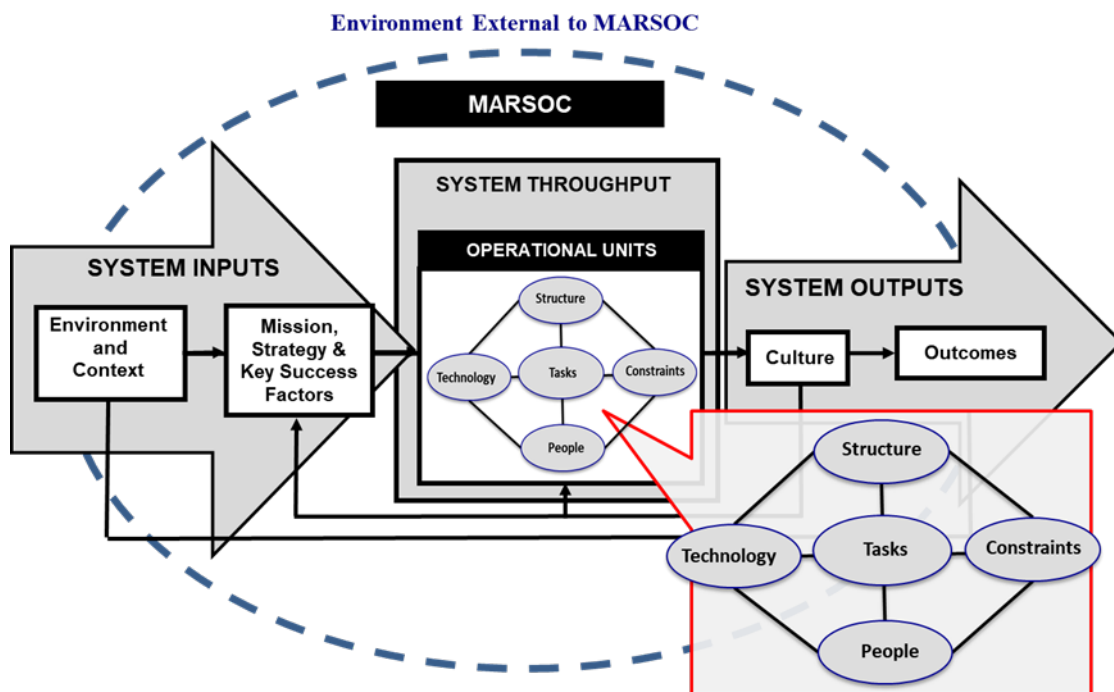

Figure 28. Adapted Dotterway Open Systems Model[1030]

1.   Environment, Environmental Uncertainty, and Context

The system's environment and context consist of the focal organization's general and task environment over time.[1031] For this study, the task environment includes everything that most directly impacts MARSOC in irregular operational environments. The

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    1030 Adapted from Kristen Ann Dotterway, *Systematic Analysis of Complex Dynamic Systems: The Case of the USS Vincennes* (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1992), 132.

    1031 Daft, 10th ed, 140–143.

task environment, here, is further categorized between internal U.S. factors; those elements that directly support, enable, or command the organization in training for and deployment to the task environment; and foreign factors within the operational environment itself. The general environment describes anything that more indirectly influences MARSOC outside of the task environment both internal and external to the United States. The context consists of MARSOC's history up to the present. Analysis of the environment identifies how well MARSOC understands its task operational environments. The relational maneuver analytical framework and the three previously analyzed historical case studies (During Part 1) provide MARSOC's irregular warfare task environment for this chapter, which will emphasize the environmental characteristics in terms of organizational theory and design.

Determination of how well an organization fits its task-environment depends on the task environment's complexity, instability, and uncertainty and how internal design fits that level of uncertainty. According to Daft, uncertainty in the environment is a function of complexity and instability, as depicted in Figure 29.[1032] Complexity pertains to the number and inter-relation of factors within the environment.[1033] Instability is related to complexity and pertains to how dynamic or how often and much the environment changes.[1034] Since uncertainty is a function of complexity and instability, the greater the complexity and instability, the higher the uncertainty will be. Determining the level of environmental complexity, stability, and resulting uncertainty is important to understand how an organization should function and align to its environment. MARSOC faces complex, volatile, and uncertain irregular warfare task environments around the world.

[1032] Daft, 8th ed, 141.
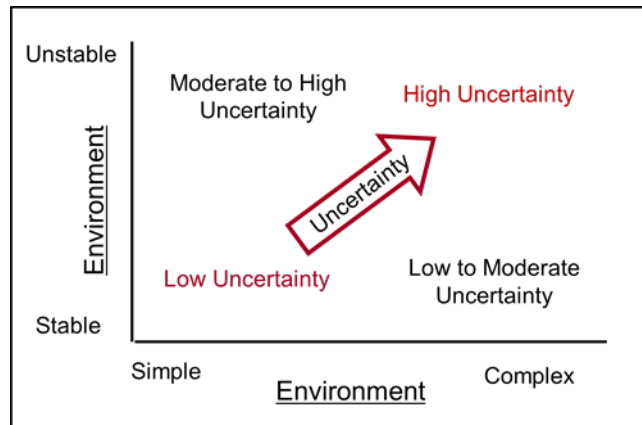
[1033] Daft, 8th ed, 141.

[1034] Daft, 8th ed, 142.

Figure 29. Interrelation of Complexity, Instability, and Uncertainty[1035]

2. Mission, Strategy, and Key Success Factors

An organization's **mission and strategy contain key success factors** that translate the environment to the internal organizational design elements and provide the guidance necessary to succeed in that environment.[1036] Together, the organizational mission and strategy should outline the purpose of the organization as well as the ways and means the organization will employ to reach its purpose within the task environment.[1037] Organizational key success factors are the internal measures of performance that guide how an organization plans to ensure that its strategy accomplishes the mission in the task environment.

3. Internal Design Elements: Tasks, Structures, People, and Constraints

The most critical internal design factors for assessing effectiveness in irregular warfare include organizational tasks, structures, and people. Additionally, this chapter describes important constraints that limit design decisions and interactions within a focal organization. Although technology is also represented in Figure 28, and is an important

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[1035] Source: Dr. Erik Jansen, "A Strategic Frame of Reference: Organizational Fit with the External Environment" (PowerPoint, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA) Unpublished Adaptation of Henry Mintzberg's Interrelation of Complexity, Instability, and Uncertainty.

[1036] Dotterway, *Systematic Analysis of Complex Dynamic Systems*, 131–133.

[1037] Daft, 10th ed, 17.

general internal design element, the study's focus on irregular warfare excludes technology from its analysis of the most critical factors for effectiveness. Therefore, this study will not analyze technology's role within MARSOC, leaving it instead for future research.

Design **tasks** represent the work, skills, and capabilities that MARSOC conducts to achieve the organizational mission in the task environment.[1038] Examples of organizational tasks range from educating, training, and deploying each operational unit to an operational environment. The stated and implied tasks within a focal organization are how an organization reaches its mission and implements its strategy.[1039] This analysis discusses the most pertinent education, training, and deployment tasks within each focal organization.

Structure is how a group or system organizes itself to accomplish its mission and strategy within its task environment.[1040] An organization that fits its task environment effectively communicates, coordinates, and accomplishes its mission in the task environment. Conversely, organizational misfit with the environment creates conflict, inefficiency and ineffectiveness.[1041] Henry Mintzberg analyzes organizations as four primary configurations, depicted in Figure 30: Simple Structure, Machine Bureaucracy, Professional Bureaucracy, and Adhocracy; with a fifth, Divisional, that can contain the other four configurations.[1042] Since organizational agility and adaptability are necessary to employ relational maneuver in irregular operational environments, MARSOC's structural analysis will assess departmentation, division of labor, formalization, specialization, and levels of centralization to find inhibitors to agility. The analysis on structure and its relationship to agility also discusses the differences between global responsiveness and proactive shaping of operational environments within the context of

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[1038] Dotterway, *Systematic Analysis of Complex Dynamic Systems*, 133.

[1039] Dotterway, *Systematic Analysis of Complex Dynamic Systems*, 133.

[1040] Henry Mintzberg, "Organization Design: Fashion or Fit?" *Harvard Business Review* 59 (1981), 2–3; Dotterway, *Systematic Analysis of Complex Dynamic Systems*, 134.

[1041] Mintzberg, "Organization Design: Fashion or Fit?"

[1042] Mintzberg, "Organization Design: Fashion or Fit?" (Figure 30 is taken directly from unpublished material provided by Dr. Erik Jansen's class on organizational design at the Naval Postgraduate School in 2018.)

U.S. SOF.[1043] Structural analysis will particularly focus on identifying structural redundancies within MARSOC that inhibit employment of relational maneuver. Further, analysis will examine MARSOC's personnel, billet, and unit assignments to determine impacts on professionalization and mission accomplishment in the operational environment.
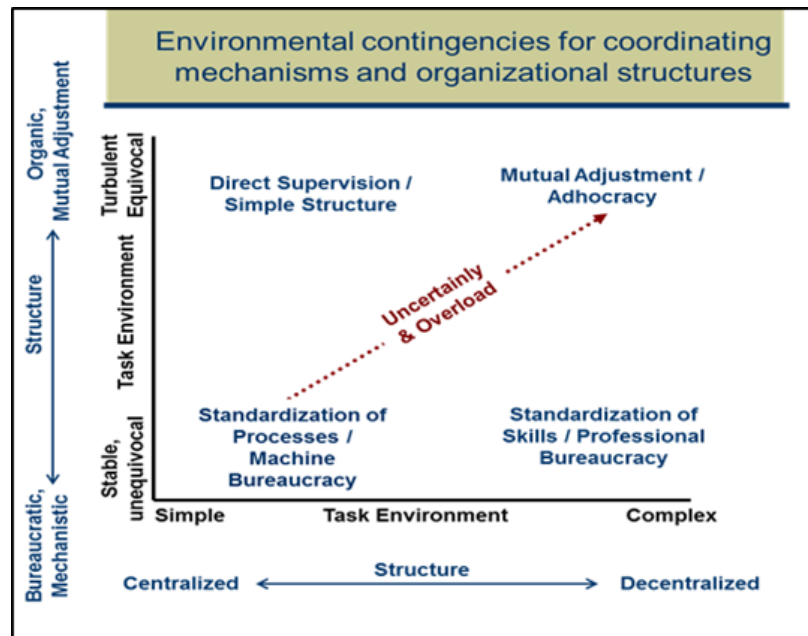

Figure 30. Mintzberg's Structural Configurations in Relation to Environmental Uncertainty[1044]

The analysis of MARSOC's **people** will focus on the **professionalization** and the **incentive rewards system**. Professionalization represents the level of skills, experience, and education of the personnel and units tasked with accomplishing the organizational mission. The incentive rewards system assesses how each organization incentivizes

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    [1043] Thomas S. Szayna and William Welser IV, "*Developing and Assessing Options for the Global SOF Network*" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp, 2013), 2–4, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/ RR340.html.

    [1044] Source: Dr. Erik Jansen, "Environmental contingencies for coordinating mechanisms and organizational structures" (PowerPoint, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA) Unpublished Adaptation of Henry Mintzberg's Interrelation of Complexity, Instability, and Uncertainty.

individual behavior. This chapter analyzes MARSOC's balance between internal, administrative, and external factors from the operational environment that drive its performance and behavior. Environmental focus is a key determining factor to assess MARSOC's attrition versus relational maneuver organizational style of warfare.

Significant **constraints** govern how MARSOC can structure, incentivize, and task its personnel. While constraints represent an input into the system, constraints also interact with the structure, tasks, and people and significantly affect decisions within MARSOC or any U.S. military organization. This section analyzes the most pertinent constraints imposed on MARSOC and differentiates between constraints that can be internally influenced or removed and those that require external assistance to influence or remove. MARSOC's primary organizational constraints are imposed by the Department of Defense (DoD), the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC), and Special Operations Command's (SOCOM) administrative and operational manpower assignment, promotion, and deployment orders and policies.

Technology in organizational design represents the technical systems for accomplishing tasks. This can include information technology, communications systems, weapons, methods of transportation, and other tools. This chapter will not assess the impacts of technology within each organization and recommends that further research examine the extent of its impacts on MARSOC. Clearly information and communication technologies and their place in command and control is changing rapidly and affecting organizational design of the future. Addressing these topics would seem to deserve a thesis all to itself.

4.   Outputs: Culture, Outcomes, and Analysis

An open system transforms inputs into outputs that interact with the system's environment. For this section, outputs are represented by organizational **culture** and **outcomes** with the external environment. Richard Daft defines culture as the "set of values, norms, guiding beliefs, and understandings that are shared by members of an organization

and taught to new members as the correct way to think, feel, and behave."[1045] Richard Daft depicts culture as an iceberg, as illustrated in Figure 31.[1046] Below the surface lies the true organizational culture. These values, beliefs, and ways of thinking are not so easily recognized unless something challenges the underlying elements. The manifestations of those underlying elements exist above the surface and include behaviors and practices such as ceremonies, rituals, and rites of passage.[1047] Organizational culture is an output manifestation of the interaction between inputs interacting with internal design elements. The resulting cultural output can be a powerful force multiplier that unifies and drives an organization if properly aligned with the environment, or it can detract or impede if significant organization misfit exists. Here, cultural analysis discusses the core subsurface and visible behaviors that represent MARSOC's culture. The subsurface and visible elements of culture include shared values and beliefs; behaviors, ceremonies, rituals, and rites of passage; and mental models.[1048]

[1045] Daft, 10th ed, 374.

[1046] Daft, 10th ed, 375.

[1047] Daft, 10th ed, 375.

[1048] Daft, 10th ed, 374–375; the term 'mental model' is taken from unpublished material from Dr. Erik Jansen's class on organizational design (Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 2018).
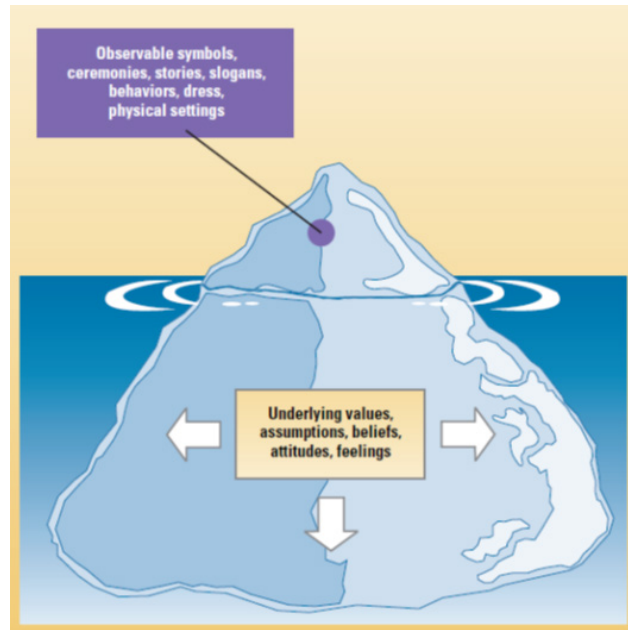
Figure 31. Organizational Culture[1049]

Organizational culture and task-related outputs produce outcomes in the external environment.[1050] The goal approach, visualized in Figure 32, for determining organizational effectiveness provides the best option for determining areas of misalignment inhibiting effective outcomes because task performance in an irregular operational environment ultimately determines U.S. military success or failure. According to Daft, "the goal approach to effectiveness consists of identifying an organization's output goals and assessing how well the organization has attained those goals."[1051] MARSOC's effectiveness ultimately depends on measuring outcomes within an operational environment and aligning itself internally to achieve strategic success.

[1049] Source: Daft, 10th ed, 375.

[1050] Dotterway, *Systematic Analysis of Complex Dynamic Systems*, 132–134.

[1051] Daft, 10th ed, 75.

**Effectiveness can be conceptualized
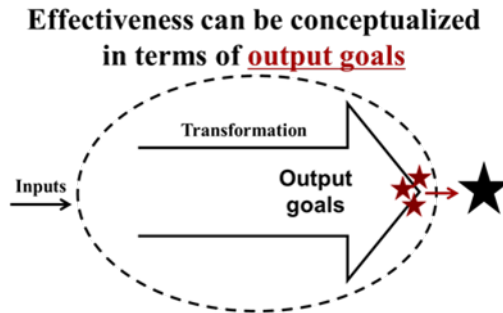in terms of output goals**

Figure 32. Goal-Based Approach to Assessing Effectiveness[1052]

This chapter superimposes the four principles of relational maneuver in irregular warfare as MARSOC's measures of effectiveness, depicted in Figure 33. By superimposing relational maneuver as MARSOC's measures of effectiveness in the task environment, this chapter measures how well MARSOC's inputs, throughputs, and outputs align to the principles necessary to achieve success in irregular warfare. These measures of effectiveness expose areas of organizational misalignment and inhibitors to employing relational maneuver and achieving strategic outcomes in the irregular operational environment. This examination especially emphasizes MARSOC's alignment of its organizational mission and strategy, tasks, structure, and people to determine whether the organization is producing relational maneuver outputs.

[1052] Source: Dr. Erik Jansen's adaptation of Daft, 10th ed, 75; David P. Hanna, *Designing Organizations for High Performance* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1988).

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1. Understanding the Irregular Operational Environment:
   • Foundational Understanding of War, Warfare, and Relational Maneuver
   • Understanding of the threat and context
   • Recognizing critical vulnerabilities in the operational environment
2. Political-Military Strategy:
   • Strategy in general: Ends, Ways, Means
   • Strategy in irregular warfare: Political and Violent Competition at all
     levels of warfare
3. Organizational Design:
   • Does Design enable Understanding of the Operational Environment
   • Does Design enable Agility/Adaptability
     ○ Reactionary versus Proactive Adaptation
   • Does Design enable continuity in understanding, strategy, and approaches
   • Characterization of organizational design and culture: internal versus
     external orientation
4. Effectiveness of Operational Approaches:
   • Political-military approaches
   • Prioritization of intelligence
   • Employment of imbedded advisers
   • Balance of risk to force and risk to mission
   • Adaptation of approaches to exploit threat vulnerabilities
   • Approaches across all Operational Approach quadrants
5. Organizational Direct influence and contribution to strategic outcomes in
   irregular warfare
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Figure 33. Measures of Effectiveness

Ultimately, a goal approach through open systems analysis provides insight as to how well MARSOC's inputs, throughputs, and outputs fit the irregular warfare task environment. Henry Mintzberg describes organizational fit as how well an organization's goals, internal design, and outputs align to the intended environment. Organizational misfit occurs when there are internal inconsistencies and a lack of alignment of goals and internal design elements with the external environment. Relational maneuver provides the framework to compare each of MARSOC's inputs, throughputs, and outputs to assist in identifying areas of misalignment and misfit with irregular operational environments.

B. MARINE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND (MARSOC)

The MARSOC Headquarters, the Marine Raider Regiment (MRR), Marine Raider Battalions (MRB), Marine Special Operations Companies (MSOC), and Marine Special Operations Teams (MSOT) represent the cumulative focal organization for analysis. Section B analyzes MARSOC's inputs, throughputs, and outputs to identify areas of organizational misfit with MARSOC's irregular task environment. The conclusion consolidates these misfits and contrasts with the identified relational maneuver MOEs

required for successful strategic outcomes in irregular warfare. Figure 34 depicts MARSOC's current task organization.
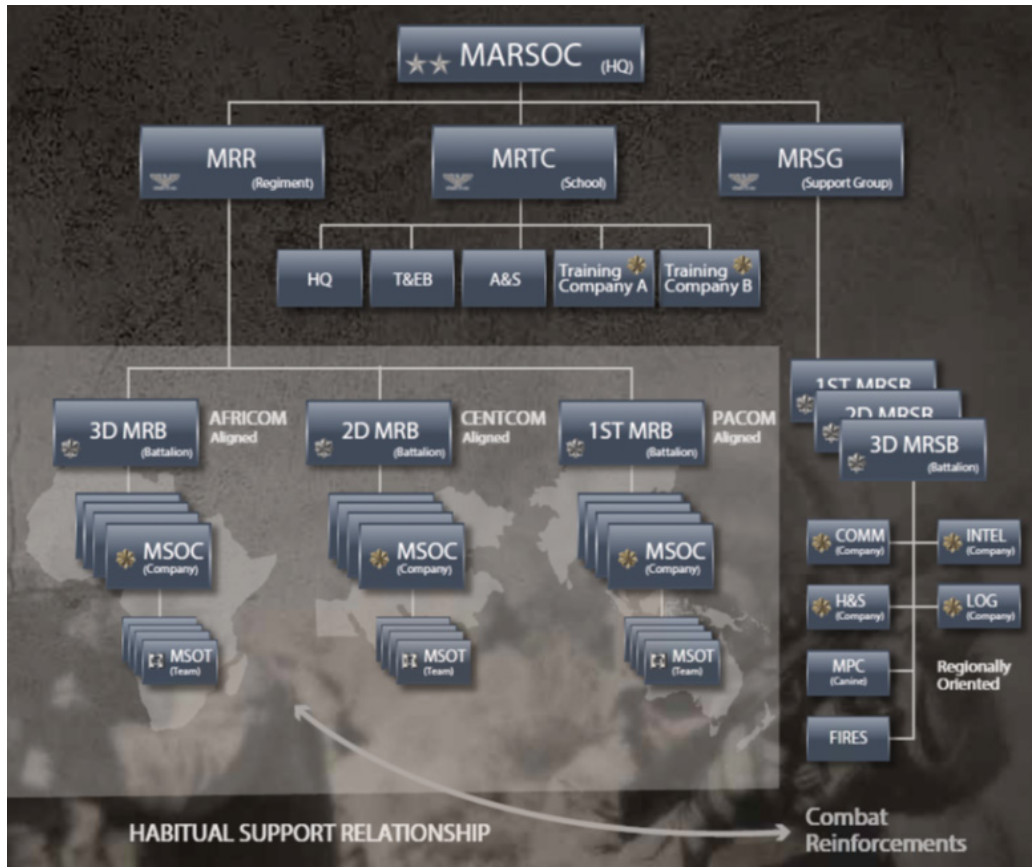

Figure 34. MARSOC Table of Organization[1053]

1. Inputs

a. *The Environment, Environmental Uncertainty, and Context*

(1) MARSOC's Environment

MARSOC's environment consists of all factors that directly or indirectly impact the organization's ability to complete its mission. This study simplifies the environment by

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[1053] Source: "MARSOC Command Pamphlet," Marine Special Operations Command (September 6, 2017), 14 https://static1.squarespace.com/static/50911f6ce4b08a6452e3cde0/
t/5a31674a085229bad0f9a97c/1513187150250/marsoc_command_pamphlet-web.pdf.

distinguishing between the task and general environment as well as the U.S. internal and external foreign factors that impact the environment in relation to the United States as depicted in Figure 35. The most critical sectors that impact MARSOC's mission accomplishment lie within the internal and external task environment. The internal U.S. task environment provides inputs—later described as missions, strategies, and key success factors—to guide and transform organizational throughputs into outputs that confront the threats, neutrals, and friendlies that MARSOC encounters in deployed irregular task environments. MARSOC's general environment consists of everything else that more indirectly affects its success in the task environment.

ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT	INTERNAL U.S. FACTORS	EXTERNAL FOREIGN FACTORS
TASK ENVIRONMENT	-USMC Chain of Command -SOCOM Chain of Command -Theater Geographic Combatant Command -Department of Defense -Pre-deployment training	DEPLOYED OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: -Threats -Neutrals -Friendlies
GENERAL ENVIRONMENT	Examples: -U.S. Economy -U.S. Domestic Politics -U.S. Civilian Population	Examples: -World Economy -Global Politics -World Population -Global weather and climate

Figure 35. MARSOC's Internal and External Task and General Environment

(2)   Environmental Uncertainty

MARSOC's deployed task environments tend to be complex, dynamic, and uncertain environments. In these uncertain task environments, illustrated by analyses of Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan in Part 1, higher-level guidance from the U.S. and coalition chains of command can quickly become complex. Command guidance directly from the U.S. president, U.S. Ambassador-led Country Teams, U.S. Military Conventional and SOF chains of command, coalition partners, and partner nations quickly create a complex web of guidance that must be untangled to understand the task operational environment and ensure unity of vision and strategic effort. In addition to the number of friendly participants both internal to the United States and among foreign partners, the

number of relevant neutral and threat participants, as well as the factors influencing their decision-making processes, can exponentially elevate the complexity of MARSOC's deployed task environment.

Moreover, MARSOC also faces a highly dynamic external task environment. Prior to deployment MARSOC's internal task environment tends to be more stable than on deployment. This internal stability is still subject to changes from U.S. political and military leaders and commanders who can alter training, education, and deployment. Furthermore, MARSOC's general environment can also contribute to instability within the task environment. The global political and economic environment can evolve rapidly between or internal to nations. The intersection between internal and external task and general environmental conditions results in rapidly changing and unstable environments. MARSOC's deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq over the last ten years illustrate the dynamic nature of the irregular foreign task environment where allegiances of villages and populations have changed, like in western Iraq during the Al Anbar Sunni Awakening, or in Afghanistan where changes in Afghan presidential, provincial, and district leadership often created unstable effects within a geographic, social, and political area of operations.[1054]

Since uncertainty is a function of complexity and instability, MARSOC faces the greatest uncertainty in its deployed task environments. Case study analysis of Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan reveal this uncertainty. Established in 2006, MARSOC's experiences since then in both Afghanistan and Iraq are evidence of the uncertainty of these irregular operational task environments. In Afghanistan, the significant number of relevant actors, including the Afghan central government, provincial and district leaders, regular and irregular Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), local tribal leaders, external Pakistani and other regional neighbors, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) coalition partners, the tribal and ethnically diverse local population, Taliban, al Qaeda,

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[1054] Douglas A. Ollivant, *Countering the New Orthodoxy Reinterpreting Counterinsurgency in Iraq* (Washington, DC: New America Foundation, 2011); Theo Farrell and Antonio Giustozzi, "The Taliban at War: Inside the Helmand Insurgency, 2004–2012," *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (July 2010): 845–871, 847–854.

local warlords, and drug traffickers, presented a complex political and military challenge. The complexity in number of participants was then exponentially exacerbated by their interactions, which dynamically shifted allegiances' political objectives. The cumulative effect has created highly uncertain irregular environments for MARSOC's operational elements.

MARSOC's internal and external environmental threats to accomplishing its mission in the task environment elevates complexity, instability, and uncertainty. MARSOC's internal U.S. threats pertain to its ability to provide relevance to SOCOM, the USMC, DoD, and U.S. Congress to retain funding. MARSOC faces four significant internal threats. First, within SOCOM, MARSOC will always face competition from other similar SOF organizations to bid for relevant and highly desirable combat-related missions. Second, like any organization, MARSOC must sustain its manpower to support its missions. One example of this resourcing challenge includes the lack of qualified U.S. Navy medical personnel to meet the designed organizational requirements for its units. The lack of manpower resources, in this case Navy medical personnel, has threatened MARSOC's ability to deploy units to the task environment.[1055] Third, MARSOC's annual budget considerations represent a reoccurring internal threat that must be managed like any military organization. Fourth and finally, MARSOC faces uncertainty within the rest of the Marine Corps and within SOCOM as to MARSOC's utility to the Marine Corps, SOCOM, and the DoD in comparison to like-units.[1056] One author and former member of MARSOC stated in 2014 that "MARSOC's principal issue [is] — to what ends does the organization

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[1055] At 2d Marine Raider Battalion between 2013 and 2017, there were not enough Special Amphibious Reconnaissance Corpsmen (SARC) available to provide the intended two SARCs per MSOT. Although by MARSOC's standard task organization, each MSOT rates two SARCs, the shortage of personnel caused MARSOC leadership to institute a by-billet justification to assign two SARCs to an MSOT. Furthermore, many SARCs within 2d MRB were deploying on a shorter, 18 month or less, rotation cycle than the standard 24-month rotation cycle.

[1056] Hope Hodge Seck, "MARSOC and Recon: Does the Corps Need Both?" Military Times, November 7, 2017, https://www.militarytimes.com/2014/02/04/marsoc-and-recon-does-the-corps-need-both/; MARSOC internal discussions between Maj Bailey and other members of MARSOC between 2013 and 2018; Sadcom Via Happycom, "Part Three: What's Wrong with the Rest of SOCOM?: WARCOM, AFSOC, and MARSOC," *What's Wrong with SOCOM* (blog), *Small Wars Journal*, accessed October 24, 2018, http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/what%E2%80%99s-wrong-with-the-rest-of-socom-warcom-afsoc-and-marsoc.

serve?"[1057] This uncertainty of purpose and utility threatens MARSOC's organizational existence, epitomized by one anonymous author on a reputable online journal arguing in 2018 that MARSOC should be disbanded completely.[1058]

Externally, MARSOC's threats come from the task environment in two primary forms. First, like any combat unit, MARSOC units confront enemies and adversaries on the battlefield. Second, and more broadly, MARSOC, like any military unit, must prove that it can accomplish its stated mission in the task environment. Failure in mission accomplishment will result in the removal of organizational leadership, or potentially, the entire organization.

(3)   MARSOC's Context

One cannot understand MARSOC without understanding its historical context. As with any organization, its history has led to MARSOC's current Mission, Strategy, and organizational design. This section briefly discusses MARSOC's historical lineage but focuses predominantly on the immediate events that led to its birth in 2006 up to the present.

The U.S. Marines have a long and storied history dating back to 1775. Established as soldiers from the sea serving aboard ships and as landing parties, the Marines evolved over the years to fighting irregular conflicts against the Barbary Pirates, Seminole Indians, and revolutionaries in China, Central America, and the Philippines. Their participation in these numerous small wars even gave the Marines a reputation for being the nation's State Department or colonial troops.[1059] The Marine Corps condensed the doctrinal output of these experiences in the *Small Wars Manual* of 1940, which outlined lessons learned in fighting irregular warfare.[1060] In World War I, the Marines began to solidify their

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[1057] Billy Birdzell, "Understanding the Marine Corps' Special Operators," *War on the Rocks*, June 5, 2014, https://warontherocks.com/2014/06/understanding-the-marine-corps-special-operators/.

[1058] Sadcom Via Happycom, "What Can Be Done About SOCOM?" *What's Wrong with SOCOM?* (blog), *Small Wars Journal*, accessed October 24, 2018. http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/what-can-be-done-about-socom.

[1059] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 157–263; Ronald Schaffer, *Small Wars Manual,* ix.

[1060] Ronald Schaffer, *Small Wars Manual*.

conventional warfighting reputation through a combination of competence and public affairs acumen.[1061]

Prior to 2001, MARSOC's direct lineage began in 1942 during World War II, when President Roosevelt directed the Marine Corps to form a "commando" style unit mirrored after the British model.[1062] This creation met internal resistance within the Marine Corps, which opposed the concept of having an elite force within what Marine leadership advertised as an already elite force.[1063] The Marine Raiders only lasted for two years and were disbanded in 1944 after conducting several commando-style raids but being predominantly conventionally employed as Marine infantry battalions.[1064] Additionally, a relatively significant number of Marines served in the precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Army Special Forces, the Office of Strategic Service (OSS). These OSS Marines served, often with distinction, across Europe, North Africa, and South East Asia in support of clandestine and irregular efforts against both Germany and Japan.[1065]

Throughout its history, the Marine Corps faced repeated organizational attacks, especially from the Army, aimed to amalgamate the Marine Corps into the Army.[1066] The Marines survived and continued to serve in Korea, Vietnam, and other limited contingency operations around the world. During this time, the Marines employed specialized Reconnaissance Marines in a direct support role of conventional Marine units, and a limited number of Marines operated under external organizations such as Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observations Group (MACVSOG). These Reconnaissance Marines received specialized training and were considered 'elite' within

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[1061] Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 317.

[1062] Dick Couch, *Always Faithful, Always Forward: The Forging of a Special Operations Marine*, 1st ed. (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2014), 21.

[1063] John F. Wukovits, *American Commando: Evans Carlson, His WWII Marine Raiders, and America's First Special Forces Mission* (New York: NAL Caliber, 2009), 62.

[1064] Charles L. Updegraph, *U.S. Marine Corps Special Units of World War II* (Washington, DC: Historical Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1972), Ch. 1.

[1065] Robert E. Mattingly, *Herringbone Cloak-GI Dagger Marines of the OSS* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps), 1989.

[1066] Krulak, *First to Fight*.

the Marine Corps, but rarely operated outside of the Marine Corp's direct operational chain of command.

In 1987, when Congress created SOCOM, the Marines chose not to establish a contingent within SOCOM.[1067] Instead, the Marine Corps chose to establish its own concept of a special operations capability separate from SOCOM.[1068] This choice occurred due to multiple reasons, but a significant contributing factor included the Marine Corps' strongly protective internal culture and fear that "non-Marine image may take hold of MARSOC Marines without the direct supervision by the Marine Corps."[1069] The Marine Corps' culture espoused that all Marines are elite and special.[1070] The Marine Corps, therefore, resisted external attempts to alter this culture by diluting the Marine brand or creating a unit outside of the organic chain of command.[1071]

Instead of joining SOCOM, the Marines created the concept of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF), which remains its guiding organizational concept to this day. The MAGTF is an internally self-sufficient and scalable task force that maintains its own support, ground combat, aviation, and command components that come in three standard packages: the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), Brigade (MEB), and Force (MEF), respectively centered on an infantry battalion, regiment, and division. Additionally, the Special Purpose MAGTF (SPMAGTF) enables the Marine Corps to doctrinally task-organize to specific missions and environments. The MAGTF is designed to be a general-purpose expeditionary force that can respond to a range of contingencies, from an embassy evacuation to major combat operations. Furthermore, to prove that basically trained Marines could conduct special operations, the Marines created the concept of the Special

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[1067] John P. Piedmont, *Det One U.S. Marine Corps U.S. Special Operations Command Detachment, 2003–2006* (Washington, DC: History Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 2010), 1.

[1068] Piedmont, *Det One*, 1–6.

[1069] S. A. Huesing, *Forced to Be Special* (Quantico VA: Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 2005), 4, http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA506033.

[1070] Huesing, *Forced to Be Special*.

[1071] Moyar, *Oppose Any Foe*, 181.

Operations Capability (SOC). The Marines argued that the MEU (SOC) could conduct a wide range of special operations missions due to a unique certification process.[1072]

Following al Qaeda's attacks on September 11th, 2001, the new level of demand and reliance on SOF caused a chain of events that forced the Marines to join SOCOM.[1073] Although the Marines moved multiple MEU-SOCs within striking position of Afghanistan following 9/11, the Marines were not as rapidly employed as SOF.[1074] Once actually employed early in the conflict, the Marines were often not employed as designed—as organic units—but were parceled out, often in support of SOF units.[1075]

In the aftermath of 9/11, then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld directed the Marine Corps and SOCOM to explore the feasibility for a permanent Marine unit within SOCOM.[1076] This directive produced a memorandum of agreement (MOA) between the Marines and SOCOM to test the concept.[1077] The result, Detachment One (Det 1), formed between 2002 and 2003 by a combination of reconnaissance and other Marines consolidated from units across the Corps. Det 1 deployed to Iraq in 2004 within a larger Naval Special Warfare Task Group (NSWTG).[1078]

Following this deployment and assessment of Det 1 as a successful proof of concept, Marine Commandant General Charles Krulak recommended that the Marine discontinue the experiment and not provide a permanent contribution to SOCOM.[1079]

[1072] Piedmont, *Det One*, 1–6; Interview with General (Ret.) Alford Gray, July 17, 2018.

[1073] Wade Priddy, "Marine Detachment 1. (Marine Corps Special Operation Command Detachment 1) (Agency Overview)," *Marine Corps Gazette* 90, no. 6 (2006): 58–61; Dennis J. Hejlik, Cliff W. Gilmore, and Matthew Ingram, "Special Operations Marines and the Road Ahead: MarSOC, the Marine Corps Component of USSOCom, Was Activated on 24 February. (Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command)." *Marine Corps Gazette* 90, no. 8 (2006.): 39–40.

[1074] Priddy. "Marine Detachment 1," 58.

[1075] Priddy. "Marine Detachment 1," 58.

[1076] Susan L. Murray, *The United States Marine Corps and Special Operations: A Nineteen Year Convergence Toward a Marine Component Command*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College, 2006), 13, http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA449405.

[1077] JSOU, "MCSOCOM Proof of Concept Deployment Evaluation Report," (Hurlburt Field, FL: Joint Special Operations University), Appendix A.

[1078] Piedmont, *Det One*, Ch. 4.

[1079] Piedmont, *Det One*, 201, 93.

Officially, the Marines referenced funding concerns, yet, undoubtedly, a major factor for the open resistance to a permanent SOCOM unit was resentment toward the idea of creating a special class of Marines that would operationally report external to the Corps. In 2005, ignoring the Marine Corps' resistance, Rumsfeld directed that the Marines form a permanent Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC).[1080] Inexplicably, after Rumsfeld's directive, the Marines deactivated Det 1 and distributed its members across the Marine Corps in the same manner as the original Raiders in 1944.[1081] Instead of using Det 1 as the nucleus of MARSOC and by incorporating the previous two years of lessons learned, the Marine Corps opted to start from scratch.

In 2006, 1st and 2d Force Reconnaissance Companies reflagged as 1st and 2nd Marine Special Operations Battalions (MSOB) and MARSOC was born.[1082] In addition to the battalions formed from the Reconnaissance community, MARSOC also merged the previously formed Foreign Military Training Unit (FMTU) into MARSOC from the rest of the Marine Corps.[1083]Shortly thereafter, MARSOC reflagged FMTU as the Marine Special Operations Advisory Group (MSOAG).[1084] By 2009, MARSOC again reflagged MSOAG as the Marine Special Operations Regiment (MSOR) to operationally command 1st, 2nd, and 3rd MSOB.[1085]

Although Det 1 deployed to Iraq, MARSOC was born and forged in Afghanistan; from 2006 through 2014, MARSOC deployed primarily to Afghanistan. While MARSOC's core activities include Direct Action (DA), Special Reconnaissance (SR), Foreign Internal Defense (FID), Counterinsurgency (COIN), and Counterterrorism (CT),

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[1080] Piedmont, *Det One*, 93.

[1081] Piedmont, *Det One*, 96–97.

[1082] Marine Special Operations Command, *Publication 1: MARSOF*, (Camp Lejeune, NC: Marine Special Operations Command, 2011), 1–4 – 1–5, https://www.marsoc.marines.mil/Portals/31/Documents/MARSOFPub1.pdf.

[1083] Marine Special Operations Command, *Publication 1: MARSOF*, 1–4.

[1084] Marine Special Operations Command, *Publication 1: MARSOF*, 1–4.

[1085] Marine Special Operations Command, *Publication 1: MARSOF*, 1–5. 3rd MSOB was constructed from Marines from the original FMTU structure drawn from Marines across the Marine Corps.

its primary missions have mostly fallen underneath the umbrella of COIN and FID.[1086] Between 2012 and 2013, as the U.S. and SOF presence in Afghanistan drew down, MARSOC transitioned into a regional deployment model with 1st MSOB aligned to the Pacific Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC), 3rd MSOB, toward Africa, and 2d MSOB focused on the Middle East. In 2014, Headquarters Marine Corps approved the alignment of MARSOC with the Marine Raider heritage from World War II. Between 2015 and 2017, MARSOC's Regimental and Battalion commands reflagged as the Marine Raider Regiment, Marine Raider Battalions, Marine Raider Support Group, and the Marine Raider Training Center.[1087]

Culturally, MARSOC's history merges the general Marine infantry heritage, Marine Reconnaissance heritage (which provided many of its initial senior enlisted and officer leadership), and SOCOM's influence, particularly from the Army Special Forces.[1088] Most notably, MARSOC has forged a unique culture blending SOCOM with the Marine Corps. Due to its organizational youth, this blend of cultures has produced internal cultural tensions within MARSOC.

[1086] Couch, *Always Faithful, Always Forward*, 44–47.

[1087] Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, "MARSOC Re-Designates Subordinate Commands," accessed October 24, 2018, http://www.marsoc.marines.mil/News/News-Article-Display/Article/601236/marsoc-re-designates-subordinate-commands/; Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, "A Legacy Inherited: Marine Raider Training Center Reactivates,." accessed October 24, 2018, http://www.marsoc.marines.mil/News/News-Article-Display/Article/1226601/a-legacy-inherited-marine-raider-training-center-reactivates/.

[1088] Couch, *Always Faithful, Always Forward*, 38–41.

b. *Mission, Strategy, and Key Success Factors*

(1) Mission and Strategy

MARSOC's organizational mission, strategy, and key success factors are best examined through MARSOC official unit mission statements, *MARSOC Publication 1: MARSOF*, a recent official command presentation, and its newly published strategic vision, *MARSOF 2030*.[1089] MARSOC's official mission statement represents its official organizational end goal:

> MARSOC recruits, organizes, trains, equips and deploys task organized, scalable, expeditionary Marine Corps special operations forces to accomplish the full spectrum of special operations missions assigned by the commander, USSOCOM and/or the geographic combatant commanders via the Theater Special Operations Commands.[1090]

Virtually identical to its sister SOF command's general mission statements, this mission statement provides little useful information, other than to say that MARSOC forces need to be prepared to do any SOF missions directed by SOCOM and the Geographic Combatant Commanders. Slightly more useful in understanding MARSOC's practical mission and strategy, in 2014, Author Dick Couch reported that MARSOC's official core activities included DA, SR, FID, COIN, CT, as well as support to unconventional warfare (UW), support to counterproliferation, and support to information operations.[1091] More recently, within the SOCOM's 2018 Factbook, however, MARSOC limits its advertised capabilities to FID, SR, and DA.[1092] Furthermore, a 2018 Congressional Research Service Report adds both CT and Information Operations to MARSOC's repertoire of capabilities.[1093] Lastly, the Command's official recruiting pamphlet includes Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD), Support to UW, and Security Force Assistance

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[1089] Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030,* 2018.

[1090] U.S. Special Operations Command, "USSOCOM Factbook, 2018," 30, https://www.socom.mil/FactBook/2018%20Fact%20Book.pdf.

[1091] Couch, *Always Faithful, Always Forward*, 44.

[1092] U.S. Special Operations Command, "USSOCOM Factbook, 2018," 30.

[1093] Andrew Feickert, *U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background and Issues for Congress,* CRS Report No. RS21048. (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 20, 2018), 6, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS21048.pdf.

(SFA) to the list of MARSOC's core activities.[1094] Aside from confusion over MARSOC's exact official capabilities, official core activities provide little useful insight for analysis, since equivalent SOF organizations, Army Special Forces and Navy SEALs, perform the same core activities.[1095]

Somewhat dated based on MARSOC's rapid organizational development since 2006, in 2011, MARSOC published *MARSOC Publication 1: MARSOF*.[1096] MARSOC published this booklet as a "foundational publication for MARSOC" to guide its vision moving forward.[1097] While MARSOC has evolved since 2011, *MARSOF* provides insight into the organization's development within the Marine Corps. *MARSOF* emphasizes the value of traditional Marine ethos, an expeditionary MAGTF heritage, the traditional Marine emphasis on doing more with less and fighting "above our weight class."[1098] Figure 36 encapsulates the key components of the strategy, philosophy, and vision articulated in *MARSOF*.

[1094] "MARSOC Command Pamphlet," 13.

[1095] U.S. Special Operations Command, "USSOCOM Factbook, 2018," 30.

[1096] Marine Special Operations Command, *Publication 1: MARSOF*.

[1097] Marine Special Operations Command, *Publication 1: MARSOF*, Forward.

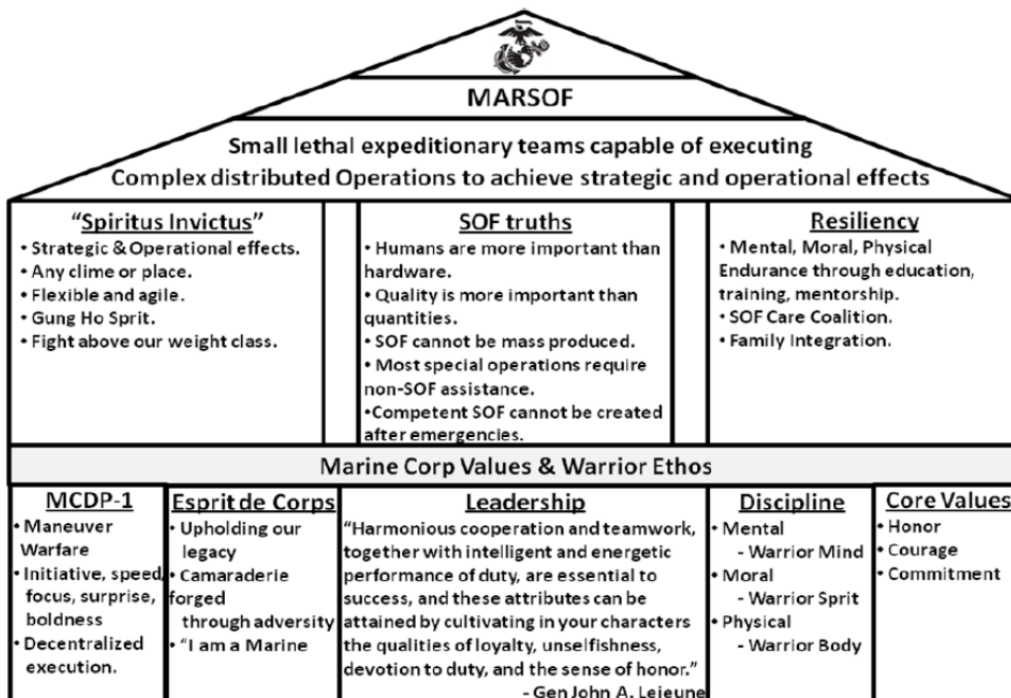[1098] Marine Special Operations Command, *Publication 1: MARSOF*, 2–5.

Figure 36. MARSOF 2011 Organizational Vision[1099]

MARSOC's official command brief to Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in July 2017 more clearly outlines what MARSOC considers as its strategy for success in the task environment.[1100] This command brief outlines that MARSOC provides a variety of capabilities listed in Figure 37. The same brief states that "our value to the SOF enterprise is our Marine ethos, C2 capability, and MAGTF approach to operations and organization," and that MARSOC's "preferred unit of employment is the MSOC (Rein)."[1101] Essentially, the primary way that MARSOC distinguishes itself from the other SOF services is through the Company-level command led by a Major, O-4, as well as the self-assessed benefits of the Marine ethos.[1102] The MSOC contains four MSOTs as well as uniquely robust logistics, intelligence, and communications sections within the headquarters element. The

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1099 Source: Marine Special Operations Command, *Publication 1: MARSOF*, 2–3.

1100 Paul Webber, "U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command: NPS Component Week" (Power Point, Monterey, CA, July 25, 2017).

1101 Webber, "U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command," 3.

1102 Webber, "U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command," 3.

simplest way to understand the MSOC and its difference between a Special Forces Operational Detachment Bravo (ODB) or SEAL Troop is that the MSOC essentially contains the same capabilities of a traditional SOF battalion-level Special Operations Task Force (SOTF) within a smaller force package.

- Persistent Presence Forward,
- SOF Mission Command
- Trans-Regional C2/Operations and Synchronization
- Organize and prepare for operations in Competition Short of Armed Conflict
- Increased clandestine capabilities
- Increased ISR/sensing capabilities (human and platform)
- Operations in the Human Domain
- Future SOF Operator preparation, education, and management.

Figure 37. MARSOC's Focus Areas[1103]

The MSOC is designed to mirror the conventional Marine MAGTF concept to produce an organic, self-sustaining SOF command that operates in a task-force like operational capacity at a lower level than its sister services. While MARSOC has and continues to deploy regimental- and battalion-level commands, MARSOC advertises the MSOC as its organizationally distinguishing feature. In essence, the MSOC represents MARSOC's primary structural bid for success similar to the MAGTF-like expeditionary packages. Similar as to how the larger Marine Corps presents the MAGTF, MARSOC advertises that the MSOC can be tailored to any mission SOCOM desires.

Below the component level, commanded by a Colonel, the Marine Raider Regiment's (MRR) mission states that:

> The Marine Raider Regiment consists of a Headquarters Company and three Marine Raider Battalions (1st, 2d and 3d). The Regiment provides tailored military combat-skills training and advisor support for identified foreign forces in order to enhance their tactical capabilities and to prepare the environment as directed by USSOCOM as well as the capability to form the

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[1103] Source: Webber, "U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command," 3.

nucleus of a Joint Special Operations Task Force. Marines and Sailors of Marine Raider Regiment train, advise, and assist friendly host nation forces - including naval and maritime military and paramilitary forces - to enable them to support their governments' internal security and stability, to counter subversion and to reduce the risk of violence from internal and external threats. Regiment deployments are coordinated by MARSOC, through USSOCOM, in accordance with engagement priorities for Overseas Contingency Operations.[1104]

The MRR's stated official mission favors the indirect FID or COIN mission sets more specifically than any other official MARSOC strategic mission or document.

Each of the three subordinate Marine Raider Battalions (MRB) use a variation of the following mission: "2d Marine Raider Battalion is organized, trained and equipped to deploy globally for missions as directed by MARSOC. Each Marine Special Operations Company (MSOC) is task-organized with personnel and equipment capable of executing the full spectrum of special operations in support of the geographic combatant commanders."[1105] Currently, each MRB deploys an MSOC on six-month rotations as part of a 24-month rotation cycle to each Battalion's respective geographic area of responsibility.

(2) MARSOC's Key Success Factors

The DoD and SOCOM, and Headquarters Marine Corps, provide relevant guidance and success factors to MARSOC. MARSOC then takes this guidance and produces its own internally developed factors for success.

Department of Defense: The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) currently provides the DoD's primary strategic guidance to all U.S. military units. The 2018 NDS explains that the U.S. military faces the primary challenge of competition with "revisionist," "rogue," and violent extremist organizations (VEO) that seek to undermine

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[1104] U.S. Marine Corps, "Marine Raider Regiment," accessed February 18, 2018, http://www.marsoc.marines.mil/Units/Marine-Raider-Regiment/.

[1105] U.S. Marine Corps, "2d Marine Raider Battalion," accessed October 24, 2018, https://www.marsoc.marines.mil/Units/2d-Marine-Raider-Battalion/.

and attack America's interests, allies, and the current global order.[1106] While the NDS explains that revisionists and rogues are the primary threats to U.S. interests, it also explains that these powers are employing competitive means and methods less than open warfare and below the level of armed conflict with the United States to achieve their goals. These efforts under the threshold of direct armed conflict with the United States often take place within environments such as Syria, Ukraine, Iraq, and Yemen, where local, regional forces are involved in direct and proxy warfare with the U.S. military and its partners. Therefore, while the 2018 NDS guides the military to refocus on great power competition, it also describes how this competition is taking place within irregular warfare environments. While the NDS does not expressly guide SOCOM to focus on these irregular threats, SOCOM's access, placement, and skills make SOF more ready and relevant to confront U.S. irregular threats than the rest of the military.[1107]

SOCOM: SOCOM's key success factors include its mission, core activities, and its most recent 2017 and 2018 Posture Statements before Congress.[1108] SOCOM's mission states that "USSOCOM synchronizes the planning of special operations and provides special operations forces to support persistent, networked and distributed global combatant command operations in order to protect and advance our Nation's interests."[1109]

SOCOM's 12 core activities, depicted in Figure 38, represent the capabilities that SOCOM provides to the United States for its defense.[1110] From a training and deployment

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[1106] Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*.

[1107] General Raymond A. Thomas III, "Statement of General Raymond A. Thomas, III, U.S. Army Commander United States Special Operations Command before the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities May 2, 2017." (May 2, 2017). http://www.socom.mil /Pages/posture-statement-hasc.aspx.

[1108] General Raymond A. Thomas, III, "Statement of General Raymond A. Thomas, III, U.S. Army Commander United States Special Operations Command before the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities May 2, 2017"; General Raymond A. Thomas, III, "Statement of General Raymond A. Thomas, III, U.S. Army Commander United States Special Operations Command before the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities Feb 15, 2018" https://www.socom.mil/Documents/Posture%20Statements/ 2018%20USSOCOM%20Posture%20Statement_HASC%20Final.pdf#search=posture%20statement.

[1109] U.S. Special Operations Command, "USSOCOM Factbook, 2018," 14.

[1110] U.S. Special Operations Command, *"USSOCOM Factbook, 2018,"* 14.

standpoint, these core activities comprise the skills that MARSOC and the rest of SOCOM currently prepare for, execute, and provide as options for DoD priorities.

- Direct Action (DA)
- Special Reconnaissance (SR)
- Unconventional Warfare (UW)
- Foreign Internal Defense (FID)
- Civil Affairs Operations (CAO)
- Counterterrorism (CT)
- Military Information Support Operations (MISO)
- Counter-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (C-WMD)
- Security Force Assistance (SFA)
- Counterinsurgency (COIN)
- Hostage Rescue and Recovery (HRR)
- Foreign Humanitarian Assistance (FHA)

Figure 38. SOCOM Core Activities[1111]

The 2017 and 2018 SOCOM posture statements provide insight into the current SOCOM commander's view of SOF's strategic utility to the DoD and the key factors that enable SOF success. In 2017, SOCOM Commander General Raymond Thomas emphasized four key pillars of SOF's strategic utility to national defense. First, he explained that SOF provides the greatest value in pre-crisis, "left of bang" situations.[1112] Second, he stated "that specialized application of SOF alongside partner nations, the Joint Force, and the Interagency conducting activities across the spectrum of conflict allows us to present options that best serve our national interests."[1113] Third, SOF provides a

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[1111] Source: U.S. Special Operations Command, *"USSOCOM Factbook, 2018,"* 14.

[1112] Thomas, III, "Statement of General Raymond A. Thomas, III, U.S. Army Commander United States Special Operations Command before the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities May 2, 2017," 10.

[1113] Thomas, III, "Statement of General Raymond A. Thomas, III, U.S. Army Commander United States Special Operations Command before the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities May 2, 2017," 10–11.

transregional and networked capability unlike any other military capability. Fourth, SOF is continuously forward-deployed, and in conjunction with the global SOF and partner network, "assists us in rapidly repositioning and focusing–providing enhanced options and effects."[1114]

In his updated posture statement in 2018, General Thomas incorporated guidance from the 2018 NDS and reaffirmed that SOCOM's highest priority remains countering irregular VEOs.[1115] General Thomas also affirmed SOF's strategic utility in its transregional networked approach to counter VEOs, CWMD proliferation efforts, and revisionist and rogue efforts to compete under the threshold of armed conflict. He stated that "SOF is uniquely capable of effectively competing below the level of traditional armed conflict and across the spectrum of conflict as part of the Joint Force."[1116] General Thomas' 2017 and 2018 posture statements provide a vision predominantly oriented toward irregular operational environments against both state and non-state threats and emphasize SOF's proactive and forward-deployed forces, organizational agility, and globally networked relationships.

The Marine Corps: The Marine Corps' recipe for strategic success is found within three primary organizational documents: the 2016 Marine Operating Concept (MOC); the Commandant's 2017 Message, "Seize the Initiative"; and the Commandant's 2018 Message, "Execute."[1117] The Marine Operating Concept (MOC) published in 2016 outlines the current path and measures of success for the Marine Corps. It states that:

> As a warfighting organization, we must recognize the challenges of the future and develop an operational approach to fight and win. The MOC

[1114] Thomas, III, "Statement of General Raymond A. Thomas, III, U.S. Army Commander United States Special Operations Command before the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities May 2, 2017," 10.

[1115] Thomas, III, "Statement of General Raymond A. Thomas, III, U.S. Army Commander United States Special Operations Command before the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities Feb 15, 2018," 2.

[1116] Thomas, III, "Statement of General Raymond A. Thomas, III, U.S. Army Commander United States Special Operations Command before the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities Feb 15, 2018," 4.

[1117] General Robert Neller, *Message to the Force 2018: "Execute,"* (Washington, DC: United States Marine Corps, 2018).

embraces our naval character, expeditionary mindset, and professional approach to constantly improve and build on our foundations of maneuver warfare and fighting as a combined arms force. The challenges of the future will impact how we organize our Corps and ultimately fight our Nation's battles. The MOC describes the steps we will take to design, develop, and field a future force for the 21st century. The success of this concept depends on our Marines and Sailors. Our people have always been the Marine Corps center of gravity and the key to our success as warfighters. Their ability to think critically, innovate smartly, and adapt to complex environments and adaptive enemies has always been the key factor we rely on to win in any clime and place.[1118]

The Commandant's 2017 Message outlines a number of priorities, but its essence is best captured when General Robert Neller states:

Remember, our enemies will never rest. In our business, there's no prize for 2nd Place. That's why we must remain a "Gold Medal Organization." And that's why we all need to bring our A-Game every day. Learn your job, and do it with maximum intensity and skill. The next fight will evolve rapidly, and it will force us to be more agile, flexible, and adaptable. To win, we need Marines who are smart, fit, disciplined, resilient, and able to thrive in the face of uncertainty and the unknown.[1119]

The central tenets of both documents outline the core principles necessary for the Marine Corps to succeed as the nation's maritime expeditionary force in readiness that employs maneuver warfare and adapts to defeat the nation's enemies. Ultimately, the Commandant, General Neller, articulates the Marine Corps' principle element for success in his January 2018 message to the Marine Corps when he encapsulated all other principles by stating: "We are warfighters within a warfighting organization. Our Corps performs two important functions for our Nation—we *Make Marines* and we *Win Battles*."[1120] The central message expressed across all three guiding Marine Corps documents center on warfighting competence, adaptability, expeditionary character, and mission success.

[1118] U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Operating Concept: How an Expeditionary Force Operates in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Department of The Navy Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 2016), i.

[1119] Robert B. Neller, *Message to the Force 2017: "Seize the Initiative"* (Washington, DC: United States Marine Corps, 2017).

[1120] Neller, *Message to the Force 2018: "Execute,"* (Washington, DC: United States Marine Corps, 2018), 2.

MARSOC Component: MARSOC's most current desired measures of performance are found within its recently published organizational vision, *MARSOF 2030*. *MARSOF 2030*'s success factors are the "Cognitive Raider," "MARSOF as a Connector," "Combined Arms for the Connected Arena," and "Enterprise Level Agility."[1121] Each one of these concepts contain a distinct, but interconnected, set of principles that MARSOC sees as required for current and future success. The 'Cognitive Raider' describes an individual or unit able to blend experience and education and to adapt across any environment to effectively influence and overcome. 'MARSOF as a Connector' builds on the 'Cognitive Raider' by articulating a vision where MARSOC integrates, coordinates, and partners with joint, combined, interagency, partnered and civilian entities to overcome operational challenges. The 'Combined Arms' principle mirrors the 'Connector' principle across information, weapons, cyber, and technology to synthesize capabilities. Lastly, 'Enterprise Level Agility' articulates an adaptive and innovative culture that identifies and evolves to meet requirements in complex environments.

To oversee the quality of MARSOC units, MARSOC uses its Training and Education Section G7-led "RAVEN" exercise to assess and evaluate all deploying units. This deployment occurs shortly before each MSOC and MSOT deploys, and the performance results for each deploying unit has been traditionally briefed up to the MARSOC Commanding General, MRR Commander, and other senior leadership. This culmination exercise and assessment is the primary significant driver of MARSOC unit-level training.

A major cultural measure of success for MARSOC is to retain a distinctive Marine cultural identity. Base on MARSOC's history, a major concern from senior Marine leadership when standing up MARSOC was the impact of creating 'special' Marines upon the general Marine culture. Therefore, MARSOC doctrine, MARSOC recruiting, and command guidance letters issued by commanders consistently reinforces the tradtitional Marine cultural identity.[1122] The most recent guidance from MARSOC Commander Major

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[1121] Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030,* 10.

[1122] Marine Special Operations Command, *Publication 1: MARSOF,* 8–1.

General Daniel Yoo states, "Remember, "*Marines are who we are – Special Operations is what we do.*"[1123] This cultural measure of success is typically officially stated within guidance from Component down to the MRB.

Regiment and Battalions: At the MRR and MRB levels in MARSOC, success factors can be considered measures of performance. MARSOC measures of performance for the task environment is officially based on the MARSOC Training and Readiness Manual, which lists performance steps for each MARSOC official core activity, as of 2011.[1124] While the official handbook for all performance steps for core activities, the manual does not provide the detailed, necessary information to actually apply in training in general. Therefore, although the manual is used to fiscally justify training, in practical application, MARSOC units do not typically actually use the Training and Readiness Manual to train, preferring to rely on personal experience, official schools training, and contracted subject matter experts.[1125]

Aside from MARSOC's broad mission statements already listed, specific additional guidance is personality- and mission-dependent and issued by individual commanders, typically upon assumption of command. The personality-based guidance rotates with new command leadership every two years, and mission-specific guidance varies based on individual missions. Essentially, the MRRs and MRBs oversee and prepare MARSOC's primary deploying units at the MSOC and below. Because the MARSOC component traditionally conducts all primary direct coordination with SOCOM to allocate missions, the regiment does not typically influence the deployment process until after the primary decisions are made by the component and when deploying units move into final planning, preparation, and deployment.[1126] Guidance at the regimental level is dependent on the individual Regimental commander and his stated priorities.

[1123] Major General Daniel Yoo, "Philosophy of Command," (unpublished).

[1124] "NAVMC 3500.97: MARINE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND TRAINING AND READINESS MANUAL," (Headquarters Marine Corps, January 2011).

[1125] Major Bailey's observations as a MSOT Commander, MSOC Executive Officer, and Headquarters Company Commander between 2013–2017.

[1126] Inteview with Undisclosed Senior Military Officer, Phone, September 2018.

Guidance at the battalion level is similar to the Regimental guidance. Battalion commanders outline individual priorities to staff and subordinate leadership within the constraints emplaced by the component and regiment headquarters. Stylistically, individual guidance differs based on the commander as well as the assigned missions and required skillsets depending on deployment location. Aside from assigning personnel to individual MSOC's or MSOT's, the Battalion level's guidance influences the culture of the battalion but does little to influence deploying units' missions other than rotating MSOCs and managing personnel and logistics support. Overall, the guidance from the Regiment and Battalion vary little and are mostly designed to enable the direction from the component and to support and oversee each unit's deployment.

MSOC and Below: At the MSOC and below, the guidance varies based on the leadership, the assigned mission, and the analysis and planning for each deployment. During training, performance is measured by internal MRB, MSOC, and MSOT level training as well as the final G7 RAVEN exercise. On deployment, success depends on the individual mission and chain of command and varies significantly.

Analysis: When comparing MARSOC's mission, strategy, historical context and primary stakeholder's performance measures, four major trends emerge. First, MARSOC is a relatively young organization imposed on the Marine Corps by external political forces. This history remains a significant factor to this day and has created underlying tensions between a Marine Corps cultural identity and a SOCOM or SOF identity. Second, up to now, MARSOC has chosen a broad mission and strategy, which mimics the broader Marine MAGTF strategy, to confront its task environment. This concept is designed to provide the greatest level of organic capability at a low level of command, the MSOC, which is designed to act as a self-contained operational command in deployed environments. Third, MARSOC has avoided specialization and instead advertises that MARSOC can execute nearly any SOCOM mission. Uncertainty, however exists as to what MARSOC's core missions are and what differentiates MARSOC from other SOF units. Fourth, all relevant stakeholders examined, namely the DoD, USMC, SOCOM, and MARSOC, highly value agility, adaptability, and innovation.

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2. Internal Organizational Design: Tasks, Structures, People, and Constraints

a. *Tasks*

(1) Component

At MARSOC's Component level, the Commanding General primarily drives unit tasks through the G3, Operations Division. This staff section's work involves the coordination and selection of specific MARSOC missions in conjunction with SOCOM, oversees the planning for future missions, as well as provides the guidance to the MRR for the planning and execution of assigned missions. The execution of this work is centralized at the Component level. The Component receives feedback from the MRR and uses that feedback, as well as the staff's analysis, to make recommendations to the commander for future missions and guidance.[1127] The Component takes this guidance to annual coordination meetings with SOCOM to bid for and coordinate future missions.[1128] Finally, the Component provides the assigned missions and guidance to the MRR for execution. With unique exceptions, the component does not actively deploy personnel or units to the task environment.

Within the Component, the G7 directly oversees the final training certification exercise for all primary units' deployments to the task environment. This control is centralized, and the G7 receives input and feedback from the MRR and subordinate units but retains control and authority for the organization and execution of the exercise. This certification exercise, RAVEN, assesses all deploying units and individuals to provide the Component Commander and subordinate leaders an indication of quality control and maintenance of standards across the force.[1129]

[1127] Inteview with Undisclosed Senior Military Officer, Phone, September 2018

[1128] Inteview with Undisclosed Senior Military Officer, Phone, September 2018

[1129] Bryann K. Whitely, "Gulf Coast Hosts Realistic Military Training RAVEN," Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, accessed October 24, 2018, http://www.marsoc.marines.mil/News/News-Article-Display/Article/1370828/gulf-coast-hosts-realistic-military-training-raven/.

(2)   MRR

The MRR is the first deployable unit in MARSOC's chain of command and provides oversight and guidance to the MRBs either directly or through the Regimental Operations Section, the S3. The MRR conducted its first operational deployment in 2016 to lead Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Iraq (CJSOTF-I) within Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR). Outside of deploying as a CJSOTF, the primary tasks for the MRR includes the oversight of the primary deployable elements from the MRBs.

(3)   MRB

The battalions directly oversee MARSOC's primary deploying elements, the MSOC and subordinate MSOTs. MARSOC also regularly deployed complete battalion headquarters to Afghanistan as Special Operations Tasks Forces (SOTF) between 2006 and 2014. Following 2014, MARSOC has deployed reduced, task-organized command elements from its battalions in support of OIR. These task-organized command elements have been emplaced on top of an existing deployed MSOC headquarters in northern Iraq.

In garrison and training environments, battalion headquarters assigns personnel and establishes the rotation cycle for deploying MSOCs. The MRBs follow the Component and MRR's guidance for maintenance of standards and rules and regulations for both training and deployments. Each battalion operates slightly differently, but the RAVEN exercise, and the MRR's formal and informal guidance, acts as the standardization mechanism for tasks in pre-deployment training environments.

In the deployed task environment, the battalion's role depends on the assigned mission, the personality of the command leadership, and the higher chain of command. Generally, in Afghanistan and more recently in Iraq, the MRB headquarters appeared to predominantly focus internally on the management of subordinate units and the coordination with higher headquarters and adjacent U.S. and coalition forces. While not restricted from partnering with and advising host nation forces, MARSOC SOTFs, with

exceptions, have often focused internally on command and control rather than partnering with indigenous forces.[1130]

(4)   MSOC/MSOT

The MSOC represents MARSOC's primary bid for success in the task environment. Unlike Army Special Forces and SEAL equivalent levels of command, the MSOC is designed, and enabled in training and deployment, to function as an operational unit with operational command authorities, equivalent to a Battalion Command, over forces in the deployed operational environment.[1131]

The MSOC is designed to integrate the support assets and command and control capabilities normally associated with a SOF battalion. This approach is designed to employ the Marine Air-Ground Task Force's (MAGTF) self-contained concept down to a lower level than comparable SOF organizations, which place similar administrative, intelligence, logistics, and communications resources at the battalion level. Furthermore, this concept is intended to enable flexibility and adaptability to the MSOC and below due to the allocation of supporting assets and capabilities, typically critical within irregular operational environments.[1132] These support capabilities are then designed to better enable the subordinate MSOTs to meet their mission in the task environment in the execution of MARSOC's primary core activities.

In training environments, the MSOC coordinates with its parent MRB and the MRR to provide guidance to MSOTs to develop an 18-month training package in preparation for six-month rotational deployments. Each MSOC's training pipeline varies depending on mission analysis and planning, headquarters' guidance, and individual leadership personalities. The Component's overall strategy to interact with the task environment is

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[1130] Major Bailey's observations between 2013–2017; Interview with LtCol Ronald Norris, September 6, 2018.

[1131] Major Paul Bailey's experiences in MARSOC; Webber, "U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command," 5; LT David Woods' experiences in Naval Special Warfare Command; Dirk H. Smith and Kirk E. Brinker, *Operational Detachment-Bravo an in-Depth Analysis of the ODB's Advisory Role in Support of FID/COIN Operations* (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2009).

[1132] Webber, "U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command," 5.

based on a MAGTF-like general purpose capability across all core activities. Therefore, an individual MSOC and MSOT training cycle often includes a wide variety of standard training packages to cover the spectrum of requirements, including special reconnaissance exercises, DA helicopter raids, parachute or dive insertion techniques, standard light infantry fire and maneuver training, FID with an exercise partner force, and maritime visit-board search seizure (VBSS) training. Ultimately, since the RAVEN exercise heavily focuses on holistically assessing the MSOC, MRB and MSOC training exercises tend to mimic the full spectrum SOF skills assessed at RAVEN.

On deployments, depending on the mission, the MSOC's tasks vary significantly. In Afghanistan, depending on the year, the MSOC exerted various levels of operational control, though overall the MSOC assumed a predominantly administrative and logistical support role in Afghanistan.[1133] In Iraq between late 2015 and early 2016, the MSOC exercised limited operational control within a politically constrained task environment.[1134] This limited control consisted of planning, coordination, and administrative movements within the area of operations, but did not include employment of combat-related authority like kinetic strike approvals. This limited control then disappeared after approximately six months when a battalion level headquarters was emplaced on top of the MSOC headquarters element in the spring of 2016. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the MSOC exercised little direct operational command and control as intended and designed.

Starting in February 2017, MSOCs from 1st MRB assumed the lead U.S. SOF advise and assist role for the Philippine armed forces in a role aligned to the designed purpose of the MSOC. In an interview with this study's authors, Former MSOC B Commander, Major Steven Keisling recounted how MARSOC has assumed primary mission lead and U.S. advise and assist activities with the Philippine armed services in

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[1133] Major Bailey's observations between 2013–2017; Interview with LtCol Ronald Norris, September 6, 2018.

[1134] Major Bailey deployed to northern Iraq between January and July, 2016. He assisted in establishing the Special Operations Task Force North (SOTF-N) as the Operations Officer. He assumed this position from the MSOC G, Executive Officer. MSOC G had operated independently in the North but was commanded by SEAL Team THREE Headquarters (SOTF West) based out of Baghdad. MSOC G only possessed administrative and logistical control of its subordinate elements in Northern Iraq. All operational missions were approved by SOTF West.

support of their fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) expansion into the Philippines.[1135] In May 2017, ISIL- affiliatedmilitants seized control of the city of Marawi prompting a five-month long effort to recapture the city.[1136] In the lead for U.S. military, SOTF 511.2, led by MSOC B provided the primary U.S. assistance to help the Philippine forces retake the city by October 2017.[1137] To the present, MSOCs continue to advise and assist Joint Task Force level commanders and forces consisting of approximately 20,000 indigenous members of the Philippine armed forces in their fight against ISIL. The scope of the tasks assigned to each MSOC includes operational level planning, command and control, limited training, and technical support. The assistance provided through 2018 has not included accompanying Philippine forces in combat, although other assistance which MARSOC forces have provided exceeds the classification of this study.

The MSOT's task is to plan and conduct core activities and operations within its assigned task environment. MARSOC's core activities form the basis for the skillsets to effectively confront threats and interact with the environment based around the specific assigned mission. Since 2006, these specific missions have gravitated toward irregular warfare FID and COIN missions.[1138] Within these missions, CT, DA, and SR skillsets have been employed to varying degrees, but typically teams have supported a partner or host nation military force in advise and assist roles ranging from training to combat. With limited exceptions, MSOTs have not operated unilaterally.[1139] Instead, MSOTs have predominantly worked with indigenous partners to conduct and advise training and planning, advise local political leaders, and operate in coordination with joint, combined,

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[1135] Interview with Major Steven Keisling. Phone, November 8, 2018.

[1136] Michael Hart, "A Year After Marawi, What's Left of ISIS in the Philippines?," The Diplomat, October 25, 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/a-year-after-marawi-whats-left-of-isis-in-the-philippines/.

[1137] Hart, "A Year After Marawi, What's Left of ISIS in the Philippines?"; Todd South, "Pentagon to Spend Nearly $5M on Marine Corps Mission in the Philippines," Marine Corps Times, August 9, 2018, https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2018/08/09/pentagon-triples-military-spending-in-philippines/.

[1138] Couch, *Always Faithful, Always Forward*, 296–297.

[1139] Couch, *Always Faithful, Always Forward*, Ch. 10–11.

and host-nation military and civilian personnel across the spectrum of kinetic operations. MSOTs have advised partner forces across the Middle East, Africa, and the Pacific theaters of operations between 2006 and 2018. Examples of these partners range from sister service SF, SEALs, Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), as well as U.S. interagency, coalition SOF, U.S. conventional forces, and indigenous conventional, irregular, and SOF military units.[1140]

In summary, a task analysis of MARSOC's operational organizational design closely overlaps with its structure. MARSOC currently maintains a wide range of skills across all primary core activities using a MAGTF-like concept based on the MSOC deployment model. For quality control, MARSOC employs a centralized process led by the Component to determine what missions MARSOC will pursue and to drive training through the RAVEN exercise. MARSOC's missions have mostly occurred at the MSOC and below and have typically involved advise and assist style missions in FID and COIN environments, and predominantly with indigenous partners at the MSOC and below.

b. Structure

To assess MARSOC's organizational configuration and fit for its mission and environment, this section assesses its departmentation, division of labor, formalization, specialization, and centralization. MARSOC possesses a divisional structure that gravitates toward machine and professional bureaucracy configurations above the MSOC, while the MSOT tends more closely to a simple structure or adhocracy.

(1) Departmentation and Division of Labor

Previous sections have already outlined MARSOC's operational departmentation. In military terms, departmentation consists of MARSOC's task organization among the component, MRR, MRB, MSOC, and MSOT. The division of labor pertains to the roles where the component, MRR, and MRB provide oversight, guidance, and supervision to the primary deploying units, the MSOC and MSOT. MARSOC's units above the MSOC are primarily administrative and focused internally to MARSOC's bureaucracy. The MSOC

[1140] Couch, *Always Faithful, Always Forward*, Ch. 10–11.

balances between an administrative focus and preparation for the external task environment. The intelligence assets at the MSOC level specifically enable a better external focus on the operational environment than other levels of command. MSOTs should be focused on the task environment; however, as later sections reveal, lack of personnel continuity within MSOTs creates a continual requirement to focus on building basic skills through qualification schools and training. The net outcome results in MSOTs also primarily focused internally on training, with less time dedicated to preparing for specific operational environments.

(2) Formalization

The component, MRR, and MRB strongly emphasize formalization of rules, regulations, and standards. Official formal message traffic is enforced by the component and used by all levels of command to request support equipment and personnel prior to deployment. The MRR employs a formal tracker of individual and unit training proficiency, that is maintained by each deploying MSOC. The MRR also enforces a pre-deployment checklist of major events and milestones that each deploying unit updates throughout pre-deployment training cycles. The MRB level of command mostly enforces the timelines and requirements from the Component and MRR and supervises and supports training and readiness. 2d MRB uses a training cell cadre to manage and execute a basic skills training package for each deploying MSOC. These basic skills packages evolve based on guidance from the battalion and MSOC leadership but remain mostly consistent to establish basic levels of proficiency in shoot, move, and communicate skills within each MSOC. At the MSOC level and below, formalization reduces. In MSOTs, basic standard operating procedures are often formally written, but many procedures are also more informally disseminated and followed.

(3) Specialization

At the higher levels of command, functional specialization dominates. At the component, MRR MRB, and even MSOC, each command possesses specialized functional departments including standard military administration, intelligence, operations, logistics, and communication sections. These functions require interoperability to achieve most

operational missions in the task environment. At the MSOT, specialization still occurs, including medical, communications, weapons, and other skills, but interoperability is even more important due to each MSOT's small size and the necessity for each individual to execute a wide range of skills. Overall, MARSOC is a divisional structure, but each division contains functional elements that require interoperability and coordination to operate effectively, especially in deployed task environments.[1141]

For deployable units, MARSOC employs a broad approach to unit specialization. MARSOC seeks to build skills and capabilities to produce a MAGTF-like capability to accomplish any core SOF activity. Although each MRB currently regionally specializes in the Pacific, Middle East, or Africa theater of operations, aside from language training and some differences in battalion internal pre-deployment theater-specific training, MARSOC has chosen to rotate individuals between MRBs and throughout regions with no discernable effort to produce tailored threat or regional expertise. This approach has produced a more general-level experience base but has prevented area or threat specialization across the organization. Although its regionalization model has not changed, MARSOC is currently exploring other deployment models.[1142]

(4) Assignment and Rotation

MARSOC's structural assignment and rotation policies are based on the Marine Corps' promotion system outlined for officers and enlisted in Marine Corps Orders (MCO) P1400.31C and P1400.32D as well as the Marine Corps official Assignment Policy found

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[1141] MARSOC's divisional structure is self-evident from its traditional wire diagram by unit designator. Within each unit designator are standard military staff functions. Mission success, especially within deployed operational environments requires close coordination and synchronization across staff sections vertically up and down the chain of command but also horizontally within each unit. At the most tactical unit level, in an MSOT, tactical skills such as Snipers, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), and Joint Tactical Air Controllers (JTAC) are highly specialized, but many skills require interoperability among team members due to the unit size and types of mission executed. Traditional staff responsibilities are distributed across the team as collateral duties.

[1142] Interview with MARSOC G3, Colonel Travis Homiak, 20 July 2018.

in MCO 1300.8.[1143] Because MARSOC is a relatively small command, with 2,742 active duty Marines assigned as of March 2018, and MARSOC pipeline graduates receive a primary military occupational specialty (MOS), the organization tends to have internal flexibility for 0370/0372 Special Operations Officers (SOO) and Critical Skills Operators (CSO) who make up approximately 1000 of the 2700 personnel.[1144] Support personnel assigned to MARSOC that are not 0370/0372 have far less flexibility and will typically spend a standard three- to five-year assignment at MARSOC.

MARSOC rotates its personnel based on 'key' command billets that are essential to remain competitive for promotion. For officers, these key billets are MSOT Commander, MSOC Commander, either MRB or Marine Raider Support Battalion (MRSB) Command, MRR, Marine Raider Support Group (MRSG), or the Marine Raider Training Center (MRTC).[1145] For enlisted CSOs, key billets parallel the officer key billets as each commander's senior enlisted advisor. To advance and remain competitive, officers and enlisted typically serve in each key billet.[1146]

Since at least 2013, MARSOC operational units at the MSOT, MSOC, and MRB have experienced high levels of turnover.[1147] Every two years, every officer billet at the MSOC and MSOT experiences a 100% turnover rate, and enlisted personnel turnover at

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[1143] Department of the Navy, "MARINE CORPS ORDER 1300.8: MARINE CORPS PERSONNEL ASSIGNMENT POLICY" (Headquarters United States Marine Corps, September 2014), https://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/MCO%201300.8.pdf; Department of the Navy, "MARINE CORPS ORDER P1400.31C: MARINE CORPS PROMOTION MANUAL, VOLUME 1, OFFICER PROMOTIONS" (Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, August 2006), https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/135/MCO%20P1400.31C.pdf; Department of the Navy, "MARINE CORPS ORDER P1400.32D: MARINE CORPS PROMOTION MANUAL, VOLUME 2, ENLISTED PROMOTIONS" (Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, June 14, 2012), https://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/Publications/MCO%20P1400.32D%20W%20CH%201-2.pdf.

[1144] Hope Hodge Seck, "MARSOC Poised to Grow Despite Personnel Caps," Military.com, accessed October 24, 2018, https://www.military.com/daily-news/2017/02/16/marsoc-poised-grow-despite-personnel-caps.html.

[1145] MARSOC, "MARSOC SOO Career Path PME" (Power Point, 2018).

[1146] MARSOC, "MARSOC SOO Career Path PME."

[1147] Interviews with LtCol Norris; MGySgt Shawn Disbennett, 17 October 2018; MSgt Master Donovan Petty, July 19, 2018; MSgt (Ret) Jon Jett, July 19, 2018.

approximately 75%.[1148] The reasons for this high turnover are related to a variety of factors outside of the scope of this research, except for the assessment that MARSOC contains too much bureaucratic structure for its organizational size and missions.

(5) Centralization

MARSOC possesses a high degree of centralization from the component through the MSOC levels of command. A single component, the unit's strategic apex, sits directly on top of the single operational regiment, which sits on top of three operational MRBs. The component controls all direct coordination with Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC) and SOCOM to plan and arrange future personnel movements, budgets, and operational missions. The MRR is left with little choice but to turn over the guidance to the MRBs along with additional guidance by the MRR Commander and staff to enforce training and readiness standards. The MRB remains predominantly internally focused on working with the MRR and MSOCs to arrange and oversee future deployments and to arrange personnel and equipment to support those deployments.

The Component, MRR, and MRB direct the accomplishment of established administrative and operational requirements that the MSOC must complete to deploy. These constraints tend to drive the MSOC toward operating in a centralized manner so that it can ensure that it meets all standards to execute the wide range of core activity skills that will be tested at the RAVEN exercise. Especially with the exceptionally high turnover rate of leadership and personnel, this leads to MSOCs spending a significant amount of time to achieve proficiency in basic shoot, move, and communicate skills before training to more SOF-specific skills. Because all MSOCs are expected to achieve basic proficiency at all the same skills across the component, and due to the high personnel turnover, deploying MSOCs focus on generic basic skills and proportionally less training and preparation directly in preparation for their deployed mission.

At the MSOT, the level of centralization depends on its MRB, MSOC, and team leadership as well as the internal experience, cohesion, and competence within the team.

[1148] Interviews with LtCol Norris; MGySgt Shawn Disbennett, 17 October 2018; MSgt Master Donovan Petty, July 19, 2018; MSgt (Ret) Jon Jett, July 19, 2018; Major Bailey's personal experience.

Depending on these interrelated factors, an MSOT will often take Mintzberg's simple structure approach to provide direct supervision to ensure that rules and standards are followed and capabilities produced. If more flexible approaches are encouraged, teams can also gravitate toward the professional bureaucracy model that enables each individual to execute his/her specialized skill-set independently but with less effective teamwork overall. The most successful teams blend direct supervision and professionalization to organically collaborate and creatively adapt and innovate solutions to complex problems in an adhocracy model. This level of collaboration typically requires experienced, mature, and talented MSOT leadership to avoid centralization or disaggregated specialization. The high rate of turnover within MSOTs degrades the level of experience and continuity that contribute to collaborative teams.

(6) Horizontal/Vertical Communication

Since authority in MARSOC is mostly centralized, the majority of communication occurs vertically between levels of command. However, since each unit also contains functional departments, effectiveness for each respective unit also depends on effective horizontal communication. At the MSOC and below, horizontal communication becomes more necessary and prevalent. The highest degree of horizontal communication occurs within the MSOT.

Deployed operational environments require greater horizontal communication. In deployed task environments, this horizontal communication occurs among partner nation forces, coalition partners, interagency relationships, and adjacent joint forces, and within the U.S. chain of command. The high requirement for horizontal communication in deployed environments contrasts with the primarily vertical communication in pre-deployment training and preparation.

(7) Assessment of MARSOC's Structural Configuration

Overall, MARSOC is a divisional structure with mostly machine bureaucracy characteristics. MARSOC gravitates toward a machine bureaucracy structure enabled by centralized procedures and standardization at all levels of command. Each division at the Component, MRR, MRB, and MSOC levels also possesses significant characteristics of a

professional bureaucracy. Each staff section specializes according to its section's purpose: administration, intelligence, operations, etc. At the MSOC and especially the MSOT, the level of collaboration increases, with MSOTs blending characteristics between simple structures, professional bureaucracies, or adhocracies.

Structural analysis also reveals potential bureaucratic redundancies between the Component and MRR as well as between the MRB and MSOC. Given its relatively small size, the levels of hierarchy, and associated manpower requirements, appears to have resulted in high turnover within and among units to fill key billets. The overlap in tasks and responsibilities, especially between the Component and MRR indicates that the MRR provides little to the organization in its current structure. Apparent redundancies also exist between the MSOC and MRB level of command. Although designed to be an operational element with full spectrum command and control, the MSOC has largely not operated in this manner, and has been superseded by O-5 and O-6 level commands in both Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) in Africa. Since February 2017, However, MSOCs in the Philippines have conducted a mission and tasks in line with the MSOC's structural design purpose, however, this mission has also contained significant limitations on combat related authorities and permissions. It appears that redundancies in bureaucracy and high turnover has further contributed to producing mechanistic standards and rules to ensure a stable output of deployable, basically trained MSOCs and MSOTs.

MARSOC's structural configuration indicates misfits with its task environment and desired goals. MARSOC desires to be agile, adaptive, and innovative within its task environment. MARSOC currently possesses significant levels of machine and professional bureaucracy characteristics at all levels of command, which inhibits the agility and adaptation required for success in uncertain operational environment. Furthermore, MARSOC possesses a 'tall' vertical structure and hierarchy that also inherently reduces agility. To more effectively confront its uncertain irregular task environments, MARSOC needs to review redundancies in bureaucracy and hierarchy, and interrelated high turnover of personnel, which contributes to centralization, prevents continuity in experience and capabilities and ultimately inhibits agility.

c.   ***People***

Analysis of the people in MARSOC's organization focuses on "human resource policies of…training and development."[1149] This section discusses these elements in terms of MARSOC's professionalization and rewards system. Overall analysis indicates that MARSOC's structural configuration and high turnover is degrading its professional ability to build and maintain capability as well as apply the principles of relational maneuver. Furthermore, the Marine Corps rewards system incentivizes an internal bureaucratic orientation across the organization and degrades the employment of relational maneuver.

(1)   Professionalism

MARSOC's developmental program is tied to a semiformal career track for enlisted and officers. This includes training that is mostly managed by the MRR and below, and professional military education (PME) that is controlled by Headquarters Marine Corps and influenced by the Component. MARSOC heavily depends on Headquarters Marine Corps to provide formal education to its personnel. For example, unlike other SOF services who send dozens, or hundreds, of officers to receive dedicated SOF and irregular warfare education at NPS each year, MARSOC currently sends 1-2 individuals every two years. While service PME enables broad education, PME's primary goal is to prepare "future leaders for greater responsibilities," or, in the case of an O-4, to be a staff officer who is prepared to participate in or lead the Joint Planning Process (JPP).[1150] Little time in these general PME courses is spent specifically studying irregular warfare since these courses cover the wide range of military activities, operations, and planning processes necessary for education as a well-rounded staff officer and commander.

Efforts to professionalize MARSOC's personnel start in the Individual Training Course (ITC). ITC is a nine-month qualification pipeline where individuals are trained and certified in basic special operations skills in line with SOCOM's core activities. For

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1149 Jay Galbraith, "The Star Model" (Galbraith Management Consultants, June 2016), 4, https://www.jaygalbraith.com/services/star-model.

1150 Austin Duncan and Adam Yang, "Exploiting the Wellspring: Professional Military Education and Grassroots Innovation," *War on the Rocks*, July 19, 2018, https://warontherocks.com/2018/07/ exploiting-the-wellspring-professional-military-education-and-grassroots-innovation/.

officers, ITC has traditionally included a Team Commanders Course (TCC) to prepare special operations officers for their future responsibilities as a Team Commander. In 2013, the TCC prepared officers by holding lectures from guest speakers on negotiations, mediations, public speaking skills; conducted small planning vignettes; and held other decision-making exercises to encourage and evaluate critical thinking and mental agility. MARSOC also partners with the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) to host special operations courses for MARSOC personnel. MARSOC senior enlisted leadership also attend the Joint Special Operations Forces Senior Enlisted Academy (JSOFSEA) as PME for E-8/E-9s.[1151] Outside of education and PME opportunities, MARSOC sends its Marines to internal MARSOC training courses, general Marine Corps training schools, and other SOF service schools. These training courses provide certification in specialty skills ranging from combat diver, sniper, joint tactical air controllers (JTAC), military freefall (MFF), and many other technical or tactical skill-based schools. Lastly, the MARSOC Component will sometimes invite relevant guest speaker from academia, business, or the military to spur critical thought and discussion within the command.

The MRR and MRBs facilitate training opportunities but do not regularly formally professionalize their units or individuals. The MRR informally professionalizes its force through commander-led training and discussion groups and supervision of training. Similarly, the MRB oversees training of MSOCs and MSOTs to a greater degree than the MRR but does not formally professionalize its deploying units. To varying degrees, MRBs use internal training cells to oversee and instruct training of deploying MSOCs and MSOTs.

The MSOC and MSOTs formally and informally professionalize their personnel. Formally, virtually each deploying MSOC hosts a pre-deployment academics week where guest and internal speakers hold training and discussion to prepare the unit for the deployed operational environment. Each MSOC and subordinate MSOTs design detailed individual and unit training plans to meet the requirements of higher headquarters and their own

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[1151]"Senior Enlisted Professional Military Education Opportunities" (United States Marine Corps Marine Corps University Enlisted Professional Military Education, April 20, 2012), 11–12.

internal requirement for the deployed operational environment. How this professionalism occurs through training and education varies per MSOC based on the command climate from the MRB, MRR, and Component. If the MSOC operates in a centralized manner, centralization can often leave the MSOT with little ability to control its training and education schedule except within the plan created by the component, MRR, MRB, or MSOC.

The extraordinarily high turnover rate among personnel between deployments is a challenge to professionalism within MARSOC. The high turnover rate means that MSOCs and MSOTs must continually train to achieve proficiency in baseline shoot, move, and communicate skills.[1152] The demand to re-establish basic skills proficiency every deployment cycle leaves proportionally less time for theater-specific training and education.

Even though significant professionalism concerns exist, MARSOC pipeline has produced intelligent, mature, and talented Raiders who meet expectations in difficult environments. One particular retired special forces SOTF commander spoke highly of the subordinate MSOTs assigned to his command between 2013 and 2014 stating "your teams [MSOTs] got it."[1153] He explained that the Marine Raiders under his command understood the operational environment as well as or better than their Army and Navy SOF counterparts and matched that understanding with effective performance. This commander's assessment of MARSOC's performance is reinforced by side-by-side comparisons of Marine Raiders and SOF counterparts deployed around the world.[1154]

[1152] MSOC and MSOT training cycles are driven predominantly by building team level core activity basic skills and less by the unique requirements of the deployed operational environment. This is a broad generalization, and some units will better tailor their pre-deployment training and preparation for the deployed environment than others. Ultimately, the RAVEN exercise, which assesses basic skills, is mostly not tailored to each unit's future operational environment.

[1153] Interview with LTC Joseph McGraw, 31 Jul 2018.

[1154] Couch, *Always Faithful, Always Forward*, 291–294.

(2)   Rewards and Incentives

The MARSOC rewards system primarily incentivizes behavior based on internal organizational considerations and not based on the external operational task environment. Key billets and promotion cycles, especially among officers, drive assignments.[1155] Furthermore, because the Marine Corps values well-rounded MAGTF-like officers and leaders, this mindset has transferred over to MARSOC. The most recent internal MARSOC guidance on the officer career path states:

> Experience/trends show that those deemed best and most fully qualified for promotion have successfully served within their PMOS at each rank and have a broad base of MAGTF experience from which to draw from while in more senior ranks. This creates a dilemma for some non-infantry SOOs, or other non-infantry officers desiring to focus a career within the MARSOF network/SOF enterprise. On the one hand it is advantageous to do well in each and every assignment regardless if within your PMOS or not, but on the other, it's generally not advantageous to focus a career within a narrow specialty. MARSOC and PO-SOD are actively advocating HQMC to acknowledge and enforce recurring SOF related tours. When deciding your career track balance these issues to achieve a career that includes both PMOS credibility and broad-based MAGTF experience.[1156]

While performance in the operational environment is expected, performance evaluations for MARSOC leaders in deployed distributed environments are often written by superiors far away from the area of operations who have little direct oversight on actual performance or effectiveness. Therefore, as long as a MARSOC commander does not get fired while deployed, it appears that deployed operational experience is what matters, with little weight placed on performance from measures of effectiveness in the deployed environment. Some MARSOC units and commanders appear to have spent more time managing a public affairs campaign directed toward their MARSOC superiors in North Carolina than in leading an information warfare campaign within the operational environment and against the threat networks.[1157]

1155 MARSOC, "MARSOC SOO Career Path PME," Slide 3 Notes.

1156 MARSOC, "MARSOC SOO Career Path PME," Slide 3 Notes.

1157 Major Bailey's personal observations within MARSOC between 2013–2017.

Overall, the demands of MARSOC's hierarchy of key billets perpetuates high turnover rates within units and billets and reduces overall professionalism, which is further compounded by an incentive structure focused internal to the organization. Individuals are rewarded for occupying key billets, deploying, and gaining a broad range of experience. The cumulative effect results in gaps in continuity and a short-term perspective that perpetuates individual and organizational interests but does not emphasize effectiveness in the operational environment.

d.   *Constraints*

MARSOC, like the larger Marine Corps, is the smallest military service with a corresponding relatively small set of financial and personnel resources.[1158] Therefore, it is especially important for MARSOC to recognize and account for organizational constraints and risks in determining how and where to use its limited resources. MARSOC's constraints directly influence its internal organizational design and its interaction with the deployed task environment.

(1)   Component

The primary constraints affecting the component level consists of MARSOC's budget, its Marine Corps Driven Manpower promotion cycle, military Authorities and Permissions, Service level Chain of Command and Culture, and SOCOM's Chain of Command and Culture. At the component and every level below, the financial budget enables MARSOC to man, train, equip, and deploy its forces. Since expanding the Marine Corps and MARSOC's budget exceeds the scope of this analysis, this study's analysis focuses on adaptation within current financial constraints.

Currently, MARSOC's manpower promotion and assignments follow HQMC policies along with the rest of the Marine Corps. Official policies follow three to five-year assignments before rotating to another assignment. Since MARSOC is a specialized unit with its own enlisted and officer Military Occupational Specialties (MOS), there is a generally greater latitude to assign personnel within MARSOC for those MOS. The

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[1158] Seck, "MARSOC Poised to Grow Despite Personnel Caps."

promotion process, however, remains the same as the rest of the Marine Corps, where board members from across the Marine Corps determine promotions for individuals eligible for a set number of MOS slots each year.[1159] Currently, there is no deviation within the Marine Corps and general military up-or-out promotion cycle.

Legislated U.S. military authorities provide a stable set of rules that ordain what a Title X military organization can and cannot do. While there are special circumstances and exceptions, MARSOC falls underneath standard Title X Authorities.[1160] Unique permissions to execute Title X authorities on deployment, however, vary significantly based on assigned missions, the chain of command, and especially the U.S. interagency partners.[1161]

MARSOC is also constrained by the Marine Corps' chain of command and culture. Administratively, all Marines in MARSOC still fall within the traditional Marine chain of command. This chain controls pay, the awards system, uniforms, service-wide training and education, as well as the manpower management system. In addition to the formal chain of command, Marine Corps culture provides an informal set of expectations as well. Since the Marine Corps possesses a uniquely independent culture, any MARSOC attempts to adapt must frame adaptation in a way that fits within its service culture. Since the Marine Corps, and military at large, manpower system is an up-or-out promotion system, the futures of all Marines, and especially Marine officers, are tied to the manpower system. Past the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, officers have limited command opportunities within MARSOC. For command, they can lead the MRR, MRTC, or the MRSG. Among the staff, there are several non-command opportunities as well some joint service billets. As with

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[1159] MARSOC, "MARSOC SOO Career Path PME."

[1160] Office of the Law Revision Counsel: United States Code, "Title 10," accessed October 24, 2018, http://uscode.house.gov/browse/prelim@title10/subtitleC&edition=prelim; U.S. Special Operations Command,"USSOCOM Factbook, 2018,"14.

[1161] "10 U.S. Code § 333 - Foreign Security Forces: Authority to Build Capacity," LII / Legal Information Institute, accessed October 25, 2018, https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/333; Todd Huntley, "Authorities in a Complex Environment" (PowerPoint lecture for DA3201 Strategic Decision Making for Special Operations), Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 2018, https://cle.nps.edu/portal/site/a2938be4-2486-4a34-b17d-94a1aeac3abb/tool/c6881476-f30f-4b4e-a1a2-69ed945ee3c8?panel=Main.

any U.S. military unit, these senior ranks become highly competitive and are carefully screened and controlled by HQMC. Performance in key command billets at all ranks and completion of all required PME are typically baseline requirements for promotion.[1162]

While the Marine Corps provides the majority of MARSOC's administrative related constraints, SOCOM's chain of command and culture more significantly constrains MARSOC operationally. Since Admiral McRaven expanded SOCOM's authority as a global combatant command with associated authorities in 2013, SOCOM's operational influence has expanded.[1163] Outside of JSOC nation mission force units, other SOF units primarily continue to deploy in support of the Theater Special Operations Commands, which reports to both the Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) and SOCOM.[1164] Although authorities and permission in this environment can often become complex, MARSOC units have primarily deployed underneath a SOCOM chain of command. In theaters such as Afghanistan and Iraq, these SOCOM chains of command have consisted of Special Operations Joint Task Force (SOJTF), Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF), and SOTFs commanded by a MARSOC, SF, or SEAL officer as in Iraq or Afghanistan. Or in the case of units deploying to primarily training and non-combat related missions, deployed MARSOC units will often report directly to a Special Operations Command Forward (SOCFwd) Commander, who is often a Colonel. In the recent past, these SOF task forces have been normally led by an O-5 or above. These SOTF or SOCFwd commanders typically retain all major operational decisions above the team level ground force commanders (GFC). These decisions include the authority to establish or move a forward operating base (FOB), non-defensive aviation kinetic strike authorities, and approval of movements and operations outside of preapproved operations boxes.

[1162] MARSOC, "MARSOC SOO Career Path PME."

[1163] Feickert, "U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF)," 2; Moyar, *Oppose any Foe*, 309–315; Donna Miles, "Defense.Gov News Article: New Authority Supports Global Special Operations Network," *DoD News*, accessed October 25, 2018, http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=120044.

[1164] Miles, "Defense.Gov News Article: New Authority Supports Global Special Operations Network"; Emily LaCaille, *Optimizing Global Force Management for Special Operations Forces*. (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2016), 2–4.

(2)   MRR/MRB/MSOC/MSOT

Until deployment, the MRR and lower operational units are primarily constrained by internal MARSOC Component controlled considerations. While deploying units have the latitude to develop their own training outside of the RAVEN exercise, a unit's task organization, deployment location, budget allocation, and manpower assignments are ultimately controlled by the Component and MRR. At the subordinate level, each unit commander exerts a reduced level of influence and control in non-deployed environments. However, the latitude to make significant changes is relatively small.

On deployment, constraints are completely dependent on the operational environment. At the regimental level, the two MARSOC deployed CJSOTF level commands have formally reported directly to the one-star Special Operations Joint Task Force (SOJTF) command in Iraq but have also been heavily influenced by the conventional force Battle Space Owner Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command (CJFLCC).[1165] For an MRB headquarters in both Iraq and Afghanistan, MARSOC SOTFs have reported to a CJSOTF level command. Similarly, in Iraq and Afghanistan, each MSOC has reported to a SOTF headquarters that, with limited exceptions, maintained direct operational control over the MSOTs. Outside of Iraq and Afghanistan, MSOCs deploying to Africa have embedded within Special Operations Command Africa and have not maintained operational control over their organic MSOTs.[1166] In the Pacific, MSOTs have primarily conduct joint and combined training exercises with partner nation forces as well as sister service SOF units in bilateral training exercises and reoccurring missions, like those advising Philippine security forces.[1167] In the Philippines beginning in 2017, MSOC's from 1st MRB assumed command of the SOTF responsible for advising and assisting Philippine armed forces in combatting internal insurgency and terrorism.[1168] While the operational environment is highly restrictive in terms of the authorities and

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[1165] Major Bailey and LT Woods' experiences in support of Operation Inherent Resolve in 2016.

[1166] Interviews with Major Paul Webber; LtCol Ronald Norris.

[1167] Interviews with Major Paul Webber; LtCol Ronald Norris.

[1168] Interviews with Major Paul Webber; LtCol Ronald Norris; Major Steven Keisling.

permissions available to MARSOC personnel, this mission most closely aligns to the intended purpose of the MSOC since MARSOC's birth.

Overall, the primary constraints affecting the MARSOC component includes the Marine Corps administrative and cultural considerations, legislated authorities and operational permissions, and SOCOM's operational command. For subordinate MARSOC units, the primary constraints come from the component. Although these subordinate units possess varying levels of flexibility to tailor their training, MARSOC's operational budget, manpower assignments, promotions, future deployments, and task organization are all controlled at the Component or Headquarters Marine Corps.

Operationally, given its intended purpose, the MSOC does not maximize efficiency or effectiveness within the Marine Corps or SOCOM's administrative or operational constraints. Although MARSOC presents the MSOC as its base unit and bid for success, both in deployed and non-deployed environments, it has not, with the exception of the Philippines since 2017, been provided the authority or permissions to achieve its purpose. Even within the Philippines, the MSOC's operational authority is restricted and does not extend to combat authorities.[1169] This misfit between the MSOC's purpose and employment has significant implications for MARSOC's organizational efficiency and effectiveness and creates redundant bureaucracy without significant operational advantage.

3. Outputs: Culture and Outcomes

MARSOC's inputs transform into organizational culture and task-related outputs that interact with the task environment to produce outcomes. This section analyzes both outputs and MARSOC's outcomes compared to the principles of relational maneuver.

a. *Culture*

MARSOC's culture is an amalgamation of traditional mainstream Marine Corps culture, Marine Reconnaissance subculture, and SOCOM cultural influences. This amalgamation has produced cultural divisions that will likely evolve over time into a

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[1169] Interviews with Major Paul Webber; LtCol Ronald Norris; Maj Steven Keisling.

unique unified MARSOC culture. The evidence suggests that MARSOC currently possesses a fragmented organizational culture due to its organization youth, lack of unified purpose, and sub-cultures.

(1)   Shared Values and Beliefs

MARSOC's fragmented culture can be most clearly observed through its organizational context, which produced the current seams in organization culture. Each of MARSOC's subcultures share many similarities. At the heart of the Marine Corps; values are the values of honor, courage, commitment, and a tenacious desire to succeed and win regardless of the mission. Both the sub-cultural reconnaissance and SOCOM cultural influence align with these traditional Marine Corps values. In addition to these shared values, the reconnaissance cultural influence particularly values the individual competence of enlisted personnel with reduced direct supervision in a more professional bureaucracy model that expects individual autonomy. SOCOM, while possessing similar values to Marine Reconnaissance units, adds a greater emphasis on teamwork and blends the strict hierarchy of the traditional Marine Corps and the professional model of Marine Reconnaissance into a more diffused adhocracy-like power-sharing structure.[1170] SOCOM values further emphasize flexibility, creativity, and innovation in working with indigenous partner forces, whereas the Reconnaissance community traditionally executes unilateral reconnaissance tasks or direct-action missions.[1171] At its core, with some variation, traditional Marine, reconnaissance, and SOCOM values align well with each other. Conflicts between subcultures begin to occur due to the interaction between established beliefs and ways of thinking driven by separate historical contexts, missions, and organization structures.

Throughout its history, the Marine Corps has developed an internal culture as elite warfighters.[1172] The Corps has used this elite culture to distinguish itself from the Army

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[1170] Couch, *Always Faithful, Always Forward*, 38–39.

[1171] U.S. Marine Corps, *MCRP 5–12D: Organization of Marine Corps Forces* (Washington, DC: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 1998), 6–17 - 6–19.

[1172] Piedmont, *Det One*, 14.

to ensure organizational survival throughout its history.[1173] Furthermore, the Marine Corps retains a strong sense of its warfighting history, which has served as a powerful narrative to recruit future Marines. This history is ruthlessly reinforced through strict external practices relating to appearance, customs, ceremonies, and education, such as the ritualistically celebrated Marine Corps Birthday, reinforced during Marine Corps PME. The formal adherence to tradition conflicts with reconnaissance and SOCOM cultural influences. The Marine Reconnaissance community created a sub-culture within the Marine Corps that placed a higher value on individual-level task competence and developed a belief of eliteness above the general Marine Corps.[1174] Unlike MARSOC, however, the Marine Corps maintained administrative and operational control by rotating officers in and out of the community and by keeping the Reconnaissance community to the O-5 command. This rotation of officers enabled a decentralized enlisted-led culture within Reconnaissance units.

SOCOM-infused culture integrated Army Special Forces ways of thinking, structure, and missions into MARSOC that required organic, flattened communications and interoperability to accomplish its missions. Traditional Special Forces missions are best encapsulated through the Army internal doctrinal term Special Warfare: "The execution of activities that involve a combination of lethal and nonlethal actions taken by a specially trained and educated force that has a deep understanding of cultures and foreign language, proficiency in small-unit tactics, and the ability to build and fight alongside indigenous combat formations in a permissive, uncertain, or hostile environment."[1175] The requirement to understand and work with indigenous partners and populations, notably, specialized understanding of the operational environment beyond the enemy, transformed the type of professionalization for success. Along with Special Warfare, SOCOM culture also elevated the status of national mission force units as the pinnacle of SOF organizations,

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[1173] Krulak, *First to Fight*, 222–223.

[1174] R. Scott Moore, "Reconnaissance Battalion: Myths and Realities," *Marine Corps Gazette*, April 1988, https://www.mca-marines.org/gazette/reconnaissance-battalion-myths-and-realities.

[1175] U.S. Army Special Operations Command, "ARSOF Operating Concept 2022" (U.S. Army Special Operations Command, September 26, 2014), 53.

missions, and culture. The national mission force cultural influence, however, does not emphasize the indirect approaches of Special Warfare, but rather more closely aligns to the direct cultural influence of the Marine reconnaissance community.

Aspects from traditional Marine Corps, Reconnaissance, and SOCOM beliefs and culture are all present within MARSOC. While the underlying beliefs are similar across all subcultures, the outward cultural manifestations significantly distinguish the traditional Marine Corps from the Recon- and SOCOM-based beliefs and cultures. MARSOC's historical context produces pressure from within the Marine Corps to ensure that traditional Marine beliefs and culture dominate MARSOC. Many Marines in MARSOC view the mantra 'Marines are who we are, special operations are what we do' as internal propaganda that does not reflect why they joined a more selective and specialized unit.[1176] This does not mean that MARSOC Marines are not proud to be Marines, but it reflects normative perceptions of the Marine ideal versus the SOF ideal. For example, although the Marine Corps advertises itself as America's elite expeditionary force in readiness that is the *First to Fight,* after the attacks on 9/11, SOF is clearly the force of choice as the first to fight. [1177]

(2) Visible Behaviors, Ceremonies, and Rituals

MARSOC's fragmentation in beliefs plays out through visible behaviors. The Marine Corps places a significant emphasis on visual indicators of culture such as traditional promotions, awards, and change of command ceremonies. Wherein the larger Marine Corps these events contain large formations that range from a hundred to more than a thousand Marines at a time for a regimental change of command ceremony, at MARSOC, a comparable regimental change of command might contain a tenth of a comparable conventional Marine regiment. Aside from structural size, MARSOC's greater emphasis

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[1176] Major General Daniel Yoo, "Philosophy of Command," 2018; Marine Special Operations Command, *Publication 1: MARSOF*, 8–1; Nico, "MARSOC: Conquering the Mission, Failing the Men," OAF Nation, accessed October 25, 2018, http://oafnation.squarespace.com/the-book-of-eli/2014/4/10/marsoc-conquering-the-mission-failing-the-men; Interview with MSgt Jon Jett, July 19, 2018.

[1177] Priddy, "Marine Detachment 1," 58; Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces,* 192.

on individual work standards and competence conflict with the Marine Corps' wide emphasis on traditional military ceremonies and formations.

In the reconnaissance community, the nature of the missions contributed to a culture where enlisted leadership led mission execution while officers tended to manage from a remote command and control location. Reconnaissance officers typically rotated out of a unit after a standard 3- to 5-year assignment, leaving the core of the primary-MOS enlisted leadership to maintain continuity and lead the organizational culture. The SOCOM influence on MARSOC's behaviors have resulted in changes in structure, tasks, and people that created significantly different culture for either the larger Marine Corps or reconnaissance community. SOCOM's culture brought a more significant blend in roles between officers and enlisted who screen, train, deploy, and remain in the same organization together. This culture became solidified in MARSOC once the Marine Corps approved the primary MOS for both enlisted and officers.

Both Marine reconnaissance- and SOCOM-based cultures gravitate toward more informal outward symbols and behaviors. In MARSOC, typically the highest symbol of respect and admiration occurs when an individual is recognized privately by other team members with legacy symbols, such as an individually wrapped paddle or stiletto modeled after items issued to Marine Raiders in World War II and later within the Reconnaissance community. Symbols from the World War II Raiders are the most unifying symbol within MARSOC. Elements from the traditional Raider 'Jack' patch with a white skull and Southern Cross are found both formally and informally across all MARSOC current units. Recent developments, such as including 'Raider' within unit names and providing the Marine Special Operations Insignia (MSOI), represent significant deviations from the traditional Marine culture and are indicative of a distinctive MARSOC culture.

(3)   Mental Models

MARSOC gravitates toward an internally focused culture. Recently, the MRTC proposed a "sample MARSOC ethos" statement to represent the internal mental model:

> MARSOC's competitive advantage is our people, who are first and foremost Marines that are specially assessed, selected and trained to

conduct our nation's most demanding missions. We are a team of teams who are committed to our profession of arms and an uncompromising pursuit of excellence. We embrace the concept of "team" and are characterized by consistent professionalism and tireless work ethic.

Our philosophy is Spiritus Invictus – an unconquerable spirit – and through hustle, grit and commitment to professionalism we will accomplish any mission. We are a small organization that does more with less.

MARSOC values people, quality over quantity, and mission accomplishment. We honor our legacy and Marine Corps values. We master the fundamentals, consistently display integrity, and pursue excellence with the utmost professionalism.[1178]

This sample represents the operational environment as general mission accomplishment, and is little different than what the larger Marine Corps advertises as its ethos in the Marine Operating Concept, and Commandant Neller's messages, *Seize the Initiative,* and *Execute!*.[1179]

The Marine Corps has successfully confronted its historical bureaucratic threat environment by creating a unique Marine Corps culture through indoctrination, structure, and outward symbols that attracted support of Congress. While the Marine Corps advocates for warfighting effectiveness, this effectiveness is practically accomplished through training and self-improvement with an internal orientation on tactical capabilities. This all produces what Daft classifies as a Mission or Bureaucratic cultural focus.[1180] According to Daft, a Bureaucratic or Mission culture assumes a stable external environment and only focuses on the environment enough to gain efficiency within the organizational inter-workings to enhance its ability to focus on its defined mission. In traditional warfare against

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[1178] Marine Raider Training Center, "MARSOC Organizational Culture Survey Results," June 8, 2018, Slide 28.

[1179] Neller, Message to the Force 2018: "Execute"; Neller, Message to the Force 2017: "Seize the Initiative."

[1180] Daft, 10th ed, 383.

Iraq in the 1990s and 2003, this Marine culture appears to have produced effective outcomes in combat on the battlefield.[1181]

The Reconnaissance mental model focuses more externally but retains the stability of standardized task-related reconnaissance or direct-action activities. The mental model is most similar to Daft's mission culture. Recon's relatively small size and selectivity and competence of its people decreases the level of bureaucratic focus and enables a more external focus on the environment and work-related tasks. Reconnaissance units are still designed to operate underneath Marine Corps command and control to meet the relatively stable needs of the traditional warfare operational environment in training and deployment.

In contrast, SOCOM influenced MARSOC by providing different mission-related tasks and different unit structure, which added training and professionalism requirements due to the emphasis on irregular operational environments. These changes required more maturity to work with partner forces and added irregular warfare related tasks, which all required a more externally focused and flexible culture. The complexity of advisor-related missions within highly complex, dynamic, and uncertain operational environments required adaptability. The infusion of SOCOM culture and mental models, which place less rigid emphasis on defined roles and responsibilities and more emphasis on collaboration and mutual adjustment to accomplish tasks, has shifted MARSOC toward what Daft defines as a more entrepreneurial culture. As depicted in Figure 39, an adaptability culture strategically focuses externally on the task environment and demands a high degree of flexibility due to the level of complexity, instability, and uncertainty in that environment.[1182]

[1181] Francis J. West and Ray L. Smith, *The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the 1st Marine Division* (New York: Bantam Books, 2003); Otto Kreisher, "Marines' Desert Vict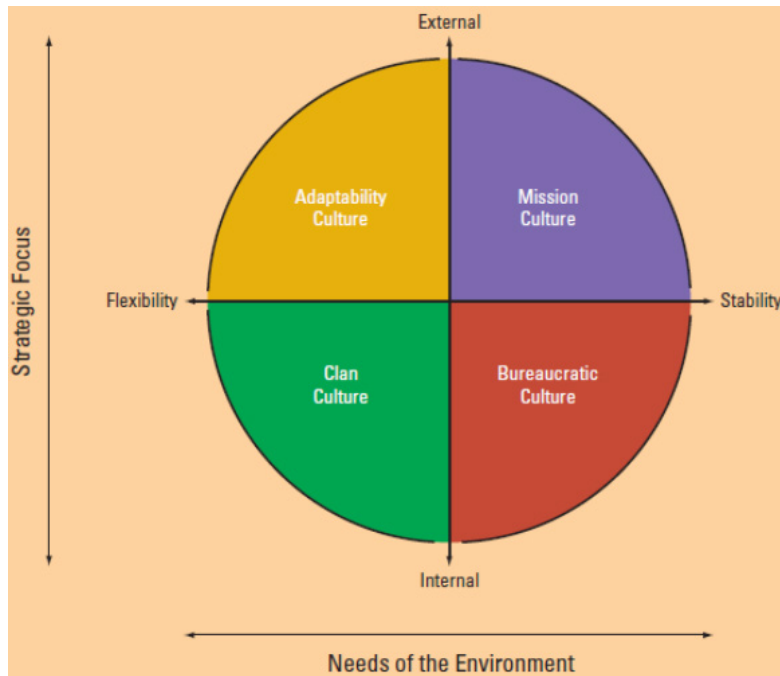ory," *Naval History Magazine* 30, no 1 (February 2016), https://www.usni.org/magazines/navalhistory/2016-02/marines-desert-victory.

[1182] Daft, 10th ed, 383.

Figure 39. Organizational Culture and the Environment[1183]

b. *Outcomes: Assessment of Relational Maneuver Effectiveness*

(1) Inputs: Organizational Mission, Strategy, and Success Factors

MARSOC's organizational strategic inputs expose a tension between its guidance to adapt to any environment and the requirement to understand and adapt to specific operational environments. Constraints out of MARSOC's control (threats to U.S. interests, U.S. domestic politics, and other service SOF capabilities) and the requirement to understand specific operational environments for strategic success suggests that MARSOC should gravitate toward strategically chosen operational environments to balance reactive agility to readily conduct any military mission and proactive agility to employ relational maneuver within irregular operational environments. Currently, MARSOC's organizational inputs are too unfocused to produce organizational unity, capability, or alignment with irregular operational environments to be strategically successful or achieve *MARSOF 2030*'s stated intent.

[1183] Source: Daft, 10th ed, 383.

MARSOF 2030 effectively describes the complex, dynamic, and uncertain current and future operational environments, and provides guiding concepts that align to those environments, but needs to better orient and focus its broad guiding principles within MARSOC. Given its small organizational size and limited available resources, MARSOC must carefully focus its personnel and resources, or it runs the risk of not achieving strategically desirable outcomes. The complexity of the operational environment demands focused understanding of that environment to adapt and develop strategy and approaches to overcome the environment.

The underlying principle within *MARSOF 2030* is the "imperative to change" and adapt.[1184] This principle aligns with the overarching concept of relational maneuver and the needs of the irregular operational environment. *MARSOF 2030* explains that "to succeed organizations will be required to change their modes of thinking about problems, how they see themselves, and their willingness to pursue adaptations."[1185] *MARSOF 2030* encapsulates change and adaptability as a core guiding concept, Enterprise Level Agility: "with a component that can rapidly orient, focus, or retool capabilities to meet emerging requirements or work a discrete transregional problem set with full spectrum SOF from onset through resolution."[1186] An underlying tension, however, in *MARSOF 2030*'s guidance to adapt and change is the distinction between reactively adapting to any operational environment, and proactively adapting within specific operational environments. *MARSOF 2030* states that:

> Success will require SOF that is adaptable to changing environments and versatile across a diverse range of challenges. An institutionally agile MARSOC provides USSOCOM with a component that can rapidly orient, focus, or retool capabilities to meet emerging requirements or work a discrete transregional problem set with full spectrum SOF from onset through resolution. This tactical adaptability and operational agility will enable MARSOC to contribute more meaningfully within USSOCOM and

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[1184] Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030*, 1.

[1185] Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030*, 10.

[1186] Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030*, 21

be a bid for strategic success against rapidly emerging and changing threats.[1187]

The tension in *MARSOF 2030*'s desired agility is that proactively adapting to specific threats requires a deep understanding of the complexities of unique operational environments across the range of political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure (PMESII) considerations, which requires dedicated resources over a long time period in which technology cannot substitute for human understanding. In contrast, reactively adapting to any threat requires broad knowledge and analytical frameworks to adapt. A force that gravitates toward reactively adapting to any new threat will be less effective in specific environments, but a force dedicated to specific environments used to react to threats outside of its specialty will also be less effective. While MARSOC's path forward should balance reactive versus proactive agility, it must decide which side to gravitate toward or run the risk of providing a mediocre capability in all forms of agility.

Environmental constraints outside of MARSOC's control, in the form of enduring stable national threats, U.S. domestic politics, and other military capabilities, suggest that MARSOC could more narrowly focus its broad desired guidance to adapt to any threat as well as to understand any threat. The United States' current top five adversarial threats (Russia-Soviet Union, China, N. Korea, Iran, and jihadist VEOs) have existed since at least 1979 when Islamist radicals overthrew the U.S.-backed Shah in Iran. While other threats, such as Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, have come and gone, the primary threat actors have mostly remained constant. This stability in national strategic threats could translate to a relatively stable focus for MARSOC.

The U.S. presidential and congressional election cycles can significantly influence the employment of SOF around the world. U.S. presidents deploy or withdraw SOF around the world due to a host of foreign and domestic considerations outside the sphere of influence of individual SOF units. Over the last several decades, U.S. general purpose forces and SOF have been withdrawn from scores of countries, including Somalia in the

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[1187] Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030,* 21.

1990s, Iraq in 2011, and Yemen in 2015.[1188] The shifting tides of domestic and international politics can quickly alter or end direct SOF involvement within a particular area of operations.

Other SOF services' orientation toward reactive versus proactive agility should also inform how MARSOC views and pursues its own organizational agility. Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) national mission force units possess the legislative authorities and operational command structure to reactively deploy anywhere in the world more responsively than any other SOF to conduct high-priority direct-action hostage rescue and counterterrorism operations. Some in MARSOC even argue that the force should reorganize under JSOC to realize its potential agility. For more proactive agility, Army Special Forces Group commands are regionally aligned and primarily deploy their forces to their specialized region and combatant command. Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM) has previously been regionally aligned, but its most recent Organizational Strategy, "Force Optimization," gravitates toward reactive agility to quickly respond to any crisis across the globe.[1189] The reality of these other SOF current capabilities is that MARSOC will not be able to compete with JSOC national mission forces in terms of reactive agility to respond to emerging crises. Furthermore, the Special Forces regional alignment give them an edge for proactive agility within their specific individual regions to understand and adapt to specific regional operational environments. MARSOC has been regionally aligned to the Pacific, the Middle East, and Africa, but is in the midst of reassessing this alignment.[1190]

Overall, external to MARSOC, the primary threats to U.S. interests are strategically stable; whereas, the domestic and internal politics in relation to SOF deployments are often dynamically unstable, and the adjacent SOF units' organizational strategies are stable. Recognition of these external factors should influence how MARSOC views and pursues

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[1188] Dion Nissenbaum, "U.S. Confirms Military Withdrawal from Yemen," *Wall Street Journal*, March 22, 2015, sec. World, https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-confirms-special-operations-forces-withdrawal-from-yemen-1427046997.

[1189] Classified Briefing from the Naval Special Warfare N5 (September 2018) on the NAVSPECWARCOM's "Force Optimization" strategic vision for the future.

[1190] Interview with MARSOC G3, Colonel Travis Homiak, July 20, 2018.

implementation of its own strategic agility and how it should organizationally orient on the operational environment.

Analysis of the U.S. military's historical irregular warfare efforts in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan reveal the necessity for understanding the specific operational environment, and the consequences for failing to develop the necessary understanding. In Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan, shallow and ineffective understanding contributed to poor strategy, flawed operational approaches, and strategic ineffectiveness. The evidence revealed through case study analysis, during Part 1: "To Know One's Enemy," suggests that the U.S. military gravitates toward an attritional style of warfare that does not pursue a deep understanding of specific operational environments, preferring instead to prepare for any traditional warfare contingency. Within the military, the only unit that orients on specific operational environments is the Army Special Forces. Operational experience and academic literature illustrate that the Army Special Forces approach has enabled better understanding and agility and has been more effective within irregular warfare environments such as Iraq and Afghanistan.[1191] Focusing on specific operational environments and threats better supports strategic outcomes by meeting the requirement to wage political and violent competition across all levels of warfare.[1192]

Since (1) understanding specific operational environments is essential for strategic success, (2) the U.S. military historically struggles to develop an effective understanding of those specific operational environments, and (3) the U.S. adversaries are strategically stable, MARSOC should pursue organizational agility relative to specific operational environments and threats within a long-term strategic transregional outlook. This study's specific recommendations will further discuss potential models to balance MARSOC's pursuit of agility while correcting deficiencies within the U.S. military's approach to agility.

[1191] Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, 212–213.

[1192] Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, Ch. 7; Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*.

Better aligning MARSOC's organizational inputs to irregular operational environments requires nuanced understanding of those environments. Conceptual understanding represents the foundational enabling element for *MARSOF 2030* and its other guiding concepts to adapt to current and future operational environments. *MARSOF 2030* states that "the Raiders we send into such environments must be able to understand them and then adapt their approaches across an expanded range of solutions."[1193] *MARSOF 2030* encapsulates conceptual understanding as a guiding organizational principle, the "Cognitive Raider," defined as the ability "to seamlessly integrate a wide range of complex tasks; influencing allies and partners; developing an understanding of emerging problems; informing decision makers; applying national, theater, and interagency capabilities to problems; and fighting as adeptly in the information space as the physical."[1194] MARSOC simply cannot achieve its desired Enterprise Agility, Combined Arms for the Connected Arena, and MARSOF as a Connector without comprehensively understanding specific operational environments.

Overall, *MARSOF 2030*'s objective to equally adapt to any environment, *and* "orient, focus, or retool capabilities" to "work a discrete transregional problem set" are admirable but will not likely "ensure that MARSOF are the premier forces to meet tomorrow's challenges."[1195] Other SOF units possess more reactively agile forces or regionally aligned forces more attuned to specific operational environments. Attempting to be the best of both worlds will likely produce something less than a 'premier force.'

The complexity of the operational environment and lack of strategic success in irregular warfare should drive MARSOC to achieve a balance between agility relative to general versus specific operational environments. The next chapter will present specific recommendations for how MARSOC can achieve this balance, while the remainder of this chapter assesses MARSOC's organizational throughputs.

[1193] Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030*, 17.

[1194] Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030,* 17.

[1195] Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030,* 34.

(2) Throughputs: Task, Structure, and People

MARSOC possesses organizational design inhibitors that consist of misaligned tasks, redundant bureaucracy, and misaligned incentives, which produce high personnel turnover, reduced professionalization, and hierarchical centralization. These inhibitors restrict organizational agility, cognition, and the ability to implement operational approaches that connect partners and combine capabilities to effectively influence the operational environment. MARSOC should address each deficiency to achieve the guiding principles of relational maneuver and *MARSOF 2030,* and to achieve effective outcomes in irregular operational environments.

Currently, MARSOC's internal tasks focus on building "tactical excellence" but do not adequately prepare deploying MARSOC units to:

> thoughtfully combine intelligence, information, and cyber operations to affect opponent decision making, influence diverse audiences, and counter false narratives. Furthermore, we must be able to synchronize operations, activities, and actions in the information environment with those across operational domains and, when necessary, fuse cognitive and lethal effects.[1196]

The actions, ascribed to principles of 'Combined Arms for the Connected Arena,' describe the activities necessary to develop operational approaches that use political and violent competition in irregular warfare. MARSOC's high turnover of personnel and resulting insufficient individual and unit professionalism causes MARSOC to internally focus on basic tactical unit capabilities in preparation for RAVEN and to build necessary tactical capabilities to employ violence. Forced to primarily focus internally, MARSOC units deploy without effectively understanding the operational environment and without the fundamental understanding or capability to politically compete against irregular threat networks.

Furthermore, although MARSOF 2030 effectively describes the character of the future operational environment, it does not adequately define its nature, which is intrinsically political. Effectiveness in future irregular operational environment across

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[1196] Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030,* 17, 13.

physical and information domains requires recognition of the political implications of the use of information, economics, and violence in the operational environment. The environment described by *MARSOF 2030*'s 'hybrid warfare' and the 'Gray Zone' represent synonyms for the mixed tactics, participants, and murky political environment in irregular warfare. MARSOC should better align its tasks by placing the use of information, economics, and violence within the context of political competition. This context better allows for understanding why and how MARSOC should act as a connector and employ combined arms across all domains and capabilities.

MARSOC tasks its individuals and units with building general tactical capabilities, not with directly producing or influencing strategic outcomes in specific operational environments. This lack of strategic alignment is likely a result of confusion between levels of warfare and the role of SOF "to both 'sense' and 'make sense of' what is happening in diverse and multi-dimensional environments" and to inform and influence strategy.[1197] Although, most MARSOC units fall within the tactical level of warfare, political competition at all levels of warfare in the 'Gray Zone' or irregular warfare requires that MARSOC not only inform military strategy, but also inform the political strategy of indigenous partners and of the United States. Furthermore, friendly force strategy should exploit political and military vulnerabilities through both MARSOC's use of political and violent competition, unilaterally and through harnessing external capabilities.

Internal design inhibitors have created second-order effects that undermine MARSOC's organizational agility, understanding, and ultimate effectiveness. Broad organizational tasks, internal incentives, and redundant bureaucracy has contributed to a high level of personnel turnover within MARSOC. The high turnover rate, throughout all operational units, has exacerbated short billet assignments, decreased the level of experienced officer and enlisted leadership at each level of command, reduced unit proficiency and capabilities, and undermined the ability to understand uncertain operational environments. The net effect of these implications mirrors this study's analysis of the larger U.S. military's failures in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan. In fact, the

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[1197] Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030,* 8, 13.

internal examination of MARSOC's design and high turnover is representative and revelatory of the wider problems that exist across the military. Ultimately, high turnover degrades professionalism, which forces MARSOC to take a hierarchical and centralized approach to ensuring the maintenance of foundational tactical skillsets across the force. This explains, in part, why MARSOC employs its RAVEN exercise to ensure basic quality control across the force even though it does not prepare deploying units for their operational environment. The complexity, instability, and uncertainty of the operational environment necessitates reducing this cyclical process of misaligned tasks, internal incentives, and redundant bureaucracy that drives high turnover and produces degraded professionalism and centralization.

Another significant design inhibitor consists of MARSOC's redundant bureaucracy between the Component headquarters, MRR, MRB, and MSOC operational levels of command. MARSOC's Component sits on top of a single operational regiment. The component manages the MARSOC deployment assignments as well as the RAVEN exercises. This control of authority leaves the MRR with little meaningful additional authority or influence.

Below the MRR, the MSOC has largely not achieved its intended design purpose within its task environment. Instead, administratively it is redundant within the Marine Corps promotion system and adds an unnecessary set of billets that makes the organization less agile while adding additional bureaucratic requirements. Operationally, the MSOC has also proven to be redundant and its contributions do not justify its tax on personnel and resources. Designed to conduct organic operational command and control for its own MSOTs as well as other SOF teams, with limited exceptions, the MSOC has not received the permissions on deployment to meet this intent.[1198] The SOCOM deployment model focuses on the team level, the O-5 led SOTF, and O-6 led CJSOTFs and SOCFwds. Although the MSOC provides capabilities at a level that other SOF units do not, this capability does not effectively fit within its environment. Instead, the MSOC employs the

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[1198] Major Bailey's experiences; Interviews with LtCol Norris; MGySgt Shawn Disbennett, October 17, 2018.

majority of MARSOC's operational manpower and equipment. This resourcing further tends to result in MARSOC attempting to deploy large SOF formations, and MSOC of approximately 120 personnel, into environments that potentially requires less manpower and resources.

When the MARSOC-led CJSOTF in Iraq had the opportunity to employ the MSOC as designed in early 2016, it opted to emplace an O-5 on top of the MSOC due to the requirements of the operational environment as well as the bureaucratic incentive to create opportunity for operational battalion level command deployments. Based on its organizational size, MARSOC could potentially compress its vertical organizational structure to reduce its manning requirements and improve organizational agility. Given the constraints from the Marine Corps and SOCOM, the only logical place this transformation could happen is at the O-4 command level. The next chapter's recommendations to MARSOC will more closely explore options for flattening MARSOC's structural design by creating a second regiment, defusing certain current responsibilities in the MRB up to the regimental level, and transforming the intent behind the MSOC model into an O-5 command better aligned to the administrative and operational environment.

What the MSOC has successfully demonstrated is that pushing typical SOTF level support capabilities down to the team level has produced an advantage for MSOTs within their complex task environments. This advantage should be maintained and enhanced. While other SOF units employ an O-4 level command largely in an administrative, support, and mentorship role, MARSOC should examine whether this level of command maximizes its advantages and whether it should exist at all. The future structural recommendations will outline an alternative to gain efficiencies internal to MARSOC and maximize its advantages to gain operational effectiveness.

(3)   Outputs: Culture and Outcomes

MARSOC's inputs and internal design inhibitors have produced an internally focused organizational culture and centralized machine-like bureaucracy that is not optimized for its operational environment, which requires agility, nuanced cognition, and operational approaches that connect partners and combine capabilities. Traditional Marine,

reconnaissance, and SOCOM cultural influences have primarily produced MARSOC's current culture. Due to its youth and infusion of cultures, MARSOC's culture is still solidifying and possesses internal conflicting subcultures. During the height of MARSOC's involvement in Afghanistan between 2006 and 2014, continuous combat deployments focused the organization. Starting in 2013, however, as MARSOC's engagement in Afghanistan diminished, MARSOC's broadly framed mission and strategy has not sufficiently fused its internal subcultures. Along with organizational maturity that will occur naturally over time, MARSOC should seek ways to actively bridge its internal cultural seams and align that culture with the Marine Corps, SOCOM, and irregular operational environments to produce a cohesive culture.

MARSOC's internally focused, machine-like bureaucratic tendencies do not align well with the operational environment. MARSOC's redundant levels of command, centralization, and internal orientation undermine its ability to understand and effectively adapt to its environment. The fact that MARSOC functions as well as it does, given its misfits, is a testament to the leaders and individuals within the organization, but it also suggests perhaps why so many of its most talented leaders become frustrated and choose to leave the organization.[1199]

The larger Marine Corps' machine bureaucracy better fits its environment and mission, which prepares brand new Marines for traditional warfare. In contrast, MARSOC confronts more complex, dynamic, and uncertain irregular task environments. To achieve the goals articulated in *MARSOF 2030*, which are largely aligned to the principles of relational maneuver, MARSOC needs to rebalance away from its machine-like tendencies optimized for internal efficiency and toward a team-like adhocracy model optimized for greater effectiveness in the operational environment. Transformation should start by recognizing that this machine bureaucracy is still necessary in certain aspects of the command, most likely at the component level and in functional areas where standardized

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[1199] Between 2015–2017, 2d MRB alone lost three of its highest performing post-MSOT Commander Officers: Major Andrew Markoff, Major Tyson Stahl, and Major Gerard Van Amerongen. Note based on personal conversations with all three officers on the circumstances surrounding their decision to leave MARSOC.

tasks, like armory maintenance, should operate like a machine. For those units that must interact directly with the task environment, however, this machine needs to morph more into a more structural adhocracy where commanders and leadership collaborate and have the authority to adapt structure, training, and approaches to achieve effectiveness in the deployed environment.

C.   CONCLUSION

An Open Systems Analysis of MARSOC reveals organizational inhibitors to the employment of relational maneuver in irregular operational environments. MARSOC's broad mission and strategy, hierarchical and centralized organizational structure, and high turnover of personnel inhibit the institutional development of a deep understanding of irregular warfare in general and of specific threat operational environments, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, this gap in understanding irregular warfare is exacerbated by an internally focused organizational culture that does not incentivize understanding the external operational environment.

MARSOC's current level of institutional understanding of irregular operational environments does not effectively enable its units to inform, influence, develop, or implement political-military strategies in irregular operational environments. This gap in determining MARSOC's role in political competition in the operational environment is not unique to MARSOC. As modern strategist Colin Gray explains, the predominant traditional American Way of War is apolitical, which does not align with the requirements of irregular operational environments.[1200]

Driving these inhibitors, MARSOC's organizational design possesses a highly centralized structure that can be better aligned to the operational environment. Redundancies between the component and MSOC reduce efficiency and effectiveness and inhibit organizational agility. MARSOC's endstate for the MSOC, specifically, does not effectively align with either the Marine Corps' administrative constraints or SOCOM's operational constraints. Furthermore, the bureaucratic requirements create incentives for

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[1200] Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy*, 5.

high turnover across the force that decreases professionalization, capabilities, and understanding of the operational environment. The net effect of these internally focused organizational misfits and redundancies reduces MARSOC's relational maneuver effectiveness within the operational environment.

A flawed understanding of the operational environment produces flawed strategy, which, enabled by flawed organizational design, produces flawed operational approaches. MARSOC's and the U.S. military's bias for action leads to the execution of machine-like attritional approaches, tactics, or activities to use in the operational environment. MARSOC would be better served by tailoring its organization to adapt to specific strategic threats that will enable MARSOC's limited resources to understand, strategize, and implement effective approaches. In irregular warfare, working with and through indigenous partners as advisors, both militarily and politically, creates operational approaches that achieve strategic outcomes.

MARSOC's recent organizational vision, *MARSOF 2030*, seeks to implement the principles of relational maneuver and recognizes the complexity and uncertainty of MARSOC's predominantly irregular operational environments. At the same time, MARSOC possesses significant internally and externally imposed constraints and misfits that will severely limit MARSOC's ability to achieve agility and effectiveness. At the heart of these misfits lies an internal bureaucratic focus. Paradoxically, to improve itself internally, MARSOC should stop looking inward and focus externally. MARSOC's small size, which could be an organizational strength, does not automatically translate into agility; MARSOC should closely review the areas of misfit identified in this analysis and use these recommendations and others to pursue strategic effectiveness. General (Ret) Stanley McChrystal's book, *Team of Teams*, provides insight on what an externally focused unit can accomplish when it learns from its environment and adapts itself to enhance effectiveness.[1201] General McChrystal explains in his book how he guided his unit to adapt the way they shared information, their tasks, and their structural processes to gain effectiveness in Iraq's irregular operational environment.

[1201] McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*.

A common misperception within MARSOC right now is that, to achieve agility, MARSOC should align itself under JSOC. While likely true in terms of responsive agility, the evidence suggests that success in irregular warfare does not derive from complex authorities or the latest high-tech weaponry and equipment, but rather from understanding the operational environment and proactively using political and violent competition to adapt and shape the operational environment through indigenous partners. Instead of reorganizing under JSOC, MARSOC could adapt internally to obtain the agility necessary to achieve strategic success in irregular warfare. Through identifying where MARSOC can focus its strengths within the task environment and reorganizing to enhance effectiveness and efficiency, MARSOC can transform itself and, organizationally, apply the principles of relational maneuver to succeed in irregular warfare with no additional external authorities or funding. Even if MARSOC does align under JSOC, it should not seek to replicate existing responsive agility characteristics, but instead, better infuse the ability to shape strategic outcomes.

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PART 3: SUCCESS IN IRREGULAR WARFARE

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VIII. SYNTHESIS, ANALYSIS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

> The history of past military campaigns, of past military innovation in times of peace, and of the very nature of war is the only reliable source on which we can draw, if we indeed do want to understand what warfare or combat may look like. Thus, any one who wishes to understand the profession of arms *must* study history. History does suggest a number of things about war. The first is that it is always about politics.
>
> —Williamson Murray, 2006[1202]

To this point, in Part 1: "To Know One's Enemy" this study explored the nature and character of warfare, irregular warfare, irregular operational environments, and produced and used a relational maneuver analytical framework to analyze U.S. military efforts in three of the most consequential irregular conflicts since World War II. Part 2: "To Know Oneself" turned the focus of study internally to assess SOF's general relational maneuver advantages in irregular warfare and conducted an open systems organizational design analysis of MARSOC's operational elements. Following Sun Tzu's sage wisdom that success in war depends on knowing yourself and your enemy, Part 3: "Success in Irregular Warfare" synthesizes Part 1's and 2's comprehensive analyses to illuminate some of the fundamental flaws in the U.S. military's and MARSOC's record in waging irregular warfare. This illumination produces important insights that can aid MARSOC in more effectively confronting irregular threats, waging irregular warfare, and achieving strategically successful political objectives. These insights and their utility begin in recognition of the enormity of the problem confronting the U.S. military; that politically-centric irregular warfare conflicts will likely dominate the U.S. military's future operational environment indefinitely.

Intelligence predictions of the future and current wars across Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, the Philippines, Somalia, and others support this

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[1202] Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich, eds., *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 87.

conclusion.[1203] In fact, even as the United States, as described in the 2017 National Security Strategy and the 2018 National Defense Strategy, reorient on great power competition with Russia and China, the Defense Strategy also explains that America's adversaries are predominantly using irregular approaches, while also bolstering their conventional power, to subvert U.S. interests around the world.[1204] The history of great power competition since World War II further supports the premise that competition "below the level of armed conflict" and irregular warfare, through supporting and using proxies, will be the most likely venue for this competition.[1205] In these irregular conflicts, regional adversaries, such as Iran as well as Salafi Jihadist Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO), will likely provide the opportunity, fuel, and leverage for great power competition just as Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Soviet-Afghan War did during the Cold War.

[1203] Szayna, Et al., *Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers*; Moran, ed. "Global Trends and the Future of Warfare 2025"; Dupuy and Rustad, "Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2017"; National Intelligence Council (U.S.), *Global Trends 2030*; "State-USAID-DoD Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR)," U.S. Department of State, accessed October 27, 2018, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/06/283334.htm.

[1204] National Security Strategy of the United States of America; Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*.

[1205] National Security Strategy of the United States of America; Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*, 6.
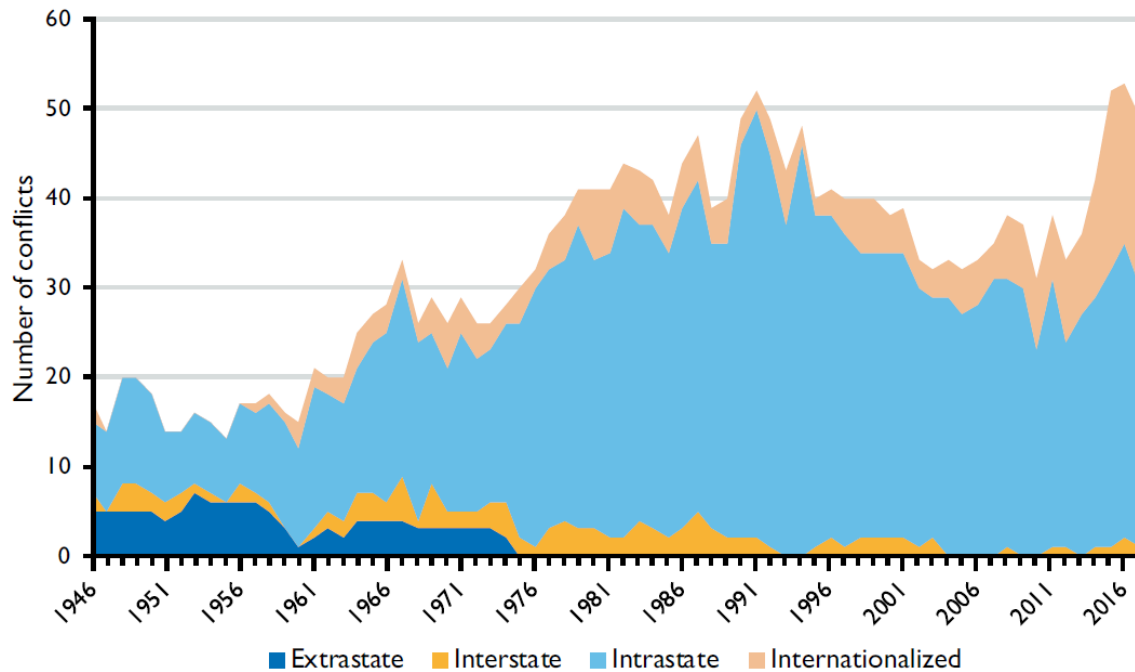
Figure 40. Trends in Conflict between 1946–2017[1206]

Conflict during the Cold War appears to support the idea that irregular conflict will provide the primary venue for great power violent competition. Following the end of World War II, depicted and described in Figure 40, intrastate irregular conflict has increased in prevalence and in duration, especially during the Cold War era.[1207] After a substantial decline in military conflict after the end of the Cold War, the general trend of conflict is again increasing and the prevalence of irregular warfare is significantly higher than interstate, traditional warfare, conflict.[1208] After the Vietnam War, some United States political-military leaders wishfully believed that they could avoid indecisive irregular conflict in the future.[1209] In the following few decades, however, the United States became involved in an array of irregular conflicts, including El Salvador, Nicaragua, Afghanistan,

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[1206] Source: Dupuy and Rustad, "Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2017," 2.

[1207] Dupuy and Rustad, "Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2017," 2.

[1208] Center for Systemic Peace, "CSP Conflict Trends, Figure 3"; Center for Systemic Peace, "Codebook: Major Episodes of Political Violence (MEPVv2016)," accessed October 27, 2018, http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/MEPVcodebook2016.pdf.

[1209] Gentry, *How Wars Are Won and Lost*, 199; Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 269.

the Philippines, Somalia, Haiti and others. Until the fall of the Soviet Union, great power competition fueled many of these conflicts.

The high probability for the continuation of irregular warfare should ring warning bells within the U.S. military, its Special Operations Forces (SOF), and within Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC). This study's analysis of three of America's most significant irregular warfare conflicts since World War II, and internal analysis of MARSOC, indicates a need to better understand, adapt, and exploit irregular threats' vulnerabilities through political and violent competition.

At best, the U.S. military's record of successfully meeting national political objectives in irregular warfare is mixed. The U.S. military's efforts throughout most of the Vietnam War were strategically ineffective, and later adaptation occurred too late after the United States was politically defeated by the North Vietnamese. The U.S. military's experience in El Salvador represents a mixed bag, but also the most successful strategic experience with the least incurred cost. Interestingly, the overall outcome was perhaps the most strategically successful in terms of an increase in favorable stability toward U.S. interests—the end of destabilizing violence and a strategic ally.[1210] Before too much credit is afforded to the U.S. military in this conflict, however, the simultaneous collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of their moral, financial, and material aid may have more decisively tipped the balance of conflict than the U.S. military's successes.[1211]

The U.S. military in Afghanistan has seen a wide range of successes and failures, but overall, the outcomes of these conflicts are not resolved, and certainly not in the United States' favor given the level of residual instability and violence that threatens America's interests in the region.[1212] Like in Vietnam, in Afghanistan the U.S. military adapted its approaches over time to better employ the principles of relational maneuver through political and violent competition; however, the flagging level of national political will,

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[1210] Department of State, "El Salvador," accessed October 27, 2018, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2033.htm.

[1211] Linda Robinson, "The End of El Salvador's War," *Survival* 33, no. 5 (September 1991): 388–89, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396339108442608.

[1212] Arquilla, Perils of the Gray Zone, 119.

expressed through President Barak Obama's publicly announced timeline for withdrawal, retracted many of the resources and ended the approaches that were improving the situation in Afghanistan.[1213] Although the strategic outcomes in Afghanistan, and Iraq, are still uncertain, the educated observer will have a difficult time arguing that America's strategic position across the Middle East is better than on September 10th, 2001.[1214]

For the U.S. military, this study links ineffectiveness in irregular warfare to ineffectively employing relational maneuver. Case study analysis indicates that the U.S. military, including SOF generally and MARSOC specifically, gravitates toward an attritional style of warfare and the employment of relational maneuver in largely a traditional military sense through the use of violence. This gravitational pull is especially evident within the military's conventional forces in Vietnam and Afghanistan. SOF, however, also tend toward attrition in irregular warfare. Experience in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan reveal that SOF generally and MARSOC specifically can and should improve their application of relational maneuver to more effectively wage irregular warfare and produce better politically strategic outcomes against irregular threats.

Chapter VIII is composed of two sections. The first section synthesizes the seven primary areas degrading effectiveness in irregular warfare. These challenges are rooted at the conceptual level and must be addressed to adapt and implement the changes necessary to produce better outcomes. Section B takes these challenges, incorporates the general SOF advantages and MARSOC's organizational design, recommends seven implementable relational maneuver recommendations to overcome the identified challenges. The most important element of this chapter is recognizing the strategic problems and endstate-related challenges that SOF and MARSOC face to enhance efforts contributing to national defense. The specific implementable recommendations are merely options, grounded in the research of this study, to overcome the identified challenges, but this study does not claim that other effective solutions do not exist. This study merely offers these recommendations as a

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[1213] Coll, *Directorate S*, Part 4; Robinson, *One Hundred Victories,* Ch. 12–13.

[1214] Arquilla, Perils of the Gray Zone, 119.

platform to spur discussion, debate, and ultimately adapt to better overcome the threats facing the United States.

A. INHIBITORS TO RELATIONAL MANEUVER

> SOF's primary strategic value is not their ability to support conventional forces in major combat operations but their ability to produce strategic effects through the highly discriminate and proportional use of force that avoids politically unacceptable collateral damage or escalation in ways that conventional forces cannot duplicate.
>
> —Christopher Lamb and David Tucker, 2007[1215]

There are seven general challenges, depicted in Figure 41, inhibiting the U.S. military's, SOF's, and MARSOC's ability to recognize vulnerabilities in threat networks, adapt internally, and exploit those threat vulnerabilities to achieve strategic success. The foundation for these inhibitors is conceptual. As General (Ret) A. M. Gray expressed, "you must out-think your enemy before you can out fight him."[1216]

[1215] Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, 197.

[1216] Interview with General Alford Gray interview, July 17, 2018.
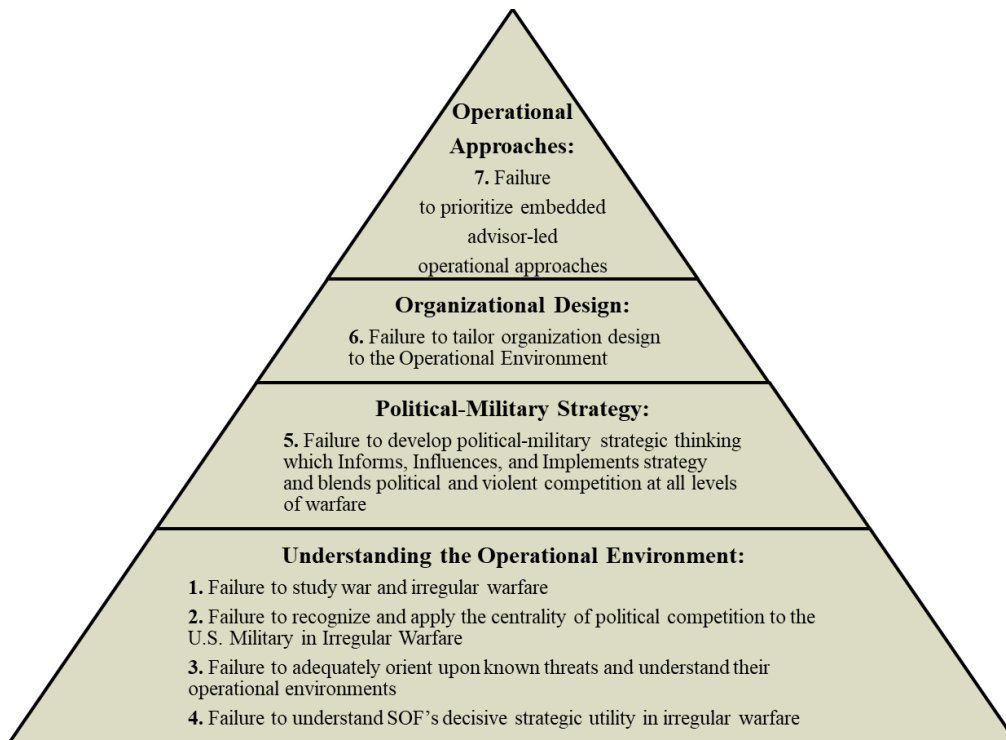
Figure 41. Challenges Inhibiting SOF's Application of Relational Maneuver in Irregular Warfare

1. Failure to Study War and Irregular Warfare

The conceptual foundation for the failures inhibiting effectiveness and the employment of relational maneuver in irregular warfare derive from a lack of broad and deep professional understanding of war and warfare. In 2006, military historians Williamson Murray and Richard Sinnreich commented that "few current civilian and military leaders seem willing to indulge in systematic reflection about the past."[1217] Throughout each case examined in this study, the military, at the institutional level, poorly understood the general character of irregular warfare as well as the principles that tend to apply to these conflicts. By the time the U.S. military invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, an exhaustive amount of literature and first-hand experience had revealed lessons from El Salvador, Vietnam, the post-colonial era, and even further back to

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[1217] Murray and Sinnreich, eds., *The Past as Prologue*, 1.

Thucydides' epic, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*.[1218] Instead of reaping the benefits of drawing upon the study of war, the U.S. military tended to revert to what it institutionally valued—traditional warfare and the direct employment of violence against a clear enemy.

However, drawing too narrowly upon history and past experience and robotically applying lessons from one context and operational environment to another can be equally dangerous. The history of irregular warfare teaches that generic application of principles from previous conflicts is doomed to fail. Instead, history and theory of previous conflicts provide an analytical framework on which to assess the particular circumstances and threats currently confronted. History and theory provide no silver bullet and adapting to an actual situation using a shallow understanding or rote application of specific lessons without current contextual knowledge can be worse than not studying at all.

The U.S. military, writ large, has demonstrated a lack of an appreciation of the history of irregular warfare.[1219] This lack of professional understanding of war, and especially of irregular warfare, leaves the military professional a prisoner of narrow personal experience and doctrine that, while valuable, does not show the precise path to success particularly in the complexities and uncertainty of irregular warfare. Without a historical study, every problem is completely new and more complex than previously encountered without realizing that similar patterns and experiences have occurred since the beginning of warfare. Operational complexity, fueled by technology that proliferates information and compresses decision timelines, elevates the criticality for understanding history and theory even more. Without a foundation and appreciation of the past that connects to the present, the military is left intellectually unprepared, as Part 2's analysis of the U.S. military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan revealed. As the U.S. military reorients on great power conflict, as it did in the aftermath of Vietnam, and attempted to

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[1218] Thucydides, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, ed. Robert B. Strassler and Richard Crawley (New York: Free Press, 1996).

[1219] Murray and Sinnreich, eds., *The Past as Prologue*, Ch. 1,6,8,14; Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor, *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Gray, "Irregular Enemies."

do in 2011 with a "pivot" to the Pacific, the history of warfare especially since World War II and projections of the future indicate that irregular warfare will likely continue to indefinitely represent the primary mode of warfare.[1220]

Clausewitz taught that war is an extension of politics through violent force.[1221] While the U.S. government legally defines war only when it is formally declared by Congress or, in more often than not, under an official congressional authorization of military force, regardless of the legal descriptive title, war exists when political competition overlaps with organized violence. War, therefore, can range from barely discernable violent protests through nuclear confrontation. The U.S. military is charged with meeting political objectives across all forms of war and warfare; however, the U.S. military's slowness to understand and adapt to irregular warfare suggests that its leadership at every level of command, and especially SOF's leadership, should more broadly and deeply study its history to influence and achieve better outcomes.

2. Failure to Apply the Centrality of Political Competition in Irregular Warfare

The study of war and warfare reveals the centrality of political competition. Unlike traditional warfare, in irregular warfare, this political competition occurs at all levels of warfare and blends with the use of military violence.[1222] Across Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan, U.S. military forces, and particularly SOF, were the only available or present U.S. government forces with the ability to influence and wage political and violent competition. Often, the U.S. military forces present in these situations merely waged competition through violence due to a lack of understanding, training, desire, or all the above. Not understanding the war in political terms, often the U.S. military was at best using relational maneuver in its most simple and overt form, against the visible enemy on the battlefield.

[1220] Mark E. Manyin, et al., *Pivot to the Pacific? the Obama Administration's "Rebalancing" Toward Asia,* CRS Report No. R42448 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012).

[1221] Clausewitz, *On War*, 28.

[1222] Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*.

The failure to recognize the centrality of political competition in irregular warfare likely represents the single most important conceptual failure inhibiting the U.S. military's success in those environments. Deployments across the Middle East have revealed that the military clouds the political pore of irregular warfare with overemphasizing economic development through the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) in Afghanistan, or with favoring overt cultural niceties such as drinking tea, believing that "sharing their tea, no matter how many cups, will result in a trusting relationship that is sufficient to lead an Afghan to tell any outsider about his son or uncle who meets at night with the Taliban."[1223] These elements, while important, miss the central pillar of war, and its application to irregular warfare: the political competition to impose one nation's will on other groups or nations. The factors influencing this competition can be complex and uncertain across social, religious, economic, ethnic or other dimensions, but these variations all return to the question of who has power and how are they using it.

Proficiency in employing traditional military violence, of course, is foundational to the military profession, whether among conventional forces or among SOF. Therefore, SOF must continue to innovate and train to be the most lethal force on the battlefield. This lethal proficiency, however, is not enough in irregular warfare. Although all war is inherently political, in irregular warfare, political warfare must be the main effort at all levels of war. In irregular socio-political fragmented environments, political competition will take place down to the village level. Within these complex and fragmented contexts, SOF should recognize the centrality of politics and play a critical role in advising and assisting indigenous political-military forces to inform and influence strategy to achieve political goals aligned with U.S. interests.

Although SOF leadership might attest to the centrality of the political problem, this recognition often does not effectively translate down to the operational and tactical levels. In Afghanistan, SOF theater-strategic, operational, and tactical leadership has often possessed merely superficial understanding of the ethnic-religious-social-political power structures within their area of operations. As a result, the more junior SOF personnel often

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[1223]Rothstein and Arquilla, *Afghan Endgames*, 64.

lacked any understanding or appreciation of political warfare. Without this basic understanding, SOF have often underperformed in translating military action to political success. This lack of understanding and appreciation for the centrality of political warfare must change, or the U.S. military and SOF will continue to under-deliver the results necessary for strategic success in irregular warfare.

3. Failure to Orient on and Understand Known Threats and Operational Environments

The U.S. military's and SOF's failures compound upon each other. The failure to broadly study war and warfare leads to a failure to recognize the centrality of political competition in irregular warfare and the role that the U.S. military should play in that competition. Without a proper understanding of how the political nature and character of irregular warfare creates complexity, instability, and uncertainty, the U.S. military neglects to pay persistent conceptual attention at both the individual and unit levels to overcome that character in the operational environment. Because irregular wars tend to last longer than interstate wars, the U.S. military's and SOF's individual and unit rotational policies have directly undermined the understanding of uncertain irregular operational environments, especially in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq.[1224]

Although the primary U.S. enemies and adversaries have not changed significantly since at least 1979, the U.S. military, largely, does not focus its personnel and units on specific threats, regions, or operational environments. That said, some exceptions do exist. Army Special Forces Groups are regionally aligned to Geographic Combatant Commands and some Special Forces soldiers remain geographically focused on their region throughout their careers. MARSOC has also followed a similar path by aligning its three operational battalions against three different combatant commands. A closer analysis of MARSOC, however, reveals that its regional orientation is only surface deep. For numerous reasons, MARSOC has chosen to rotate its personnel throughout each battalion, reportedly to instill cross-regional experience and capabilities across the force. While this practice may achieve

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[1224] Although this study does not conduct a detailed case study analysis of Iraq, authors Major Bailey and LT Woods both deployed to Northern Iraq in 2016. Major Bailey also deployed to western Iraq in 2009.

that purpose, it has also prevented functional regional specialization. Even for individuals and units that have deployed within a geographic region, MARSOC units have intentionally not redeployed individuals and units to the same locations. While this study does not examine internal Army Special Forces rotational practices, informal interaction with Special Forces officers indicates that the same practices occur in that organization. Therefore, even among SOF, purportedly better attuned to the specific geographic locations and partners, service- and unit-level policies and practices undermine strategic effectiveness.

Furthermore, the U.S. military often prefers to prepare for future traditional warfare with another great power over ongoing irregular warfare operations. This challenge revealed itself within the Vietnam conflict and more recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq,[1225] to which the military never actually dedicated individuals and units. Instead, the military rotated individuals and units through these conflicts as if it were a part-time job and distraction. Because irregular warfare conflicts are often seen by the military as temporary and lesser priorities than potential major combat operations against the Soviet Union, China, or more recently Russia, military forces often only dedicate minimal time, effort, and resources to confronting irregular threats.

SOCOM's most recent published organizational vision in 2016 even states that "we must guard against becoming overly focused on the skill sets of a single theater or AOR to the detriment of others. We are willing to accept some risk in this area."[1226] This statement, which is representative of the U.S. military's larger perspective, ignores the primary gap in U.S. military experiences in waging irregular warfare: the lack of dedicated subject matter experts that understand the operational environment, possess strategic relationships within indigenous partners, and can adapt to the demands of the local environment to achieve strategic outcomes. This does not mean that the U.S. military, or SOF, needs to dedicate a number of threat and area specialists disproportionate to the relative strategic

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[1225] Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 114.

[1226] U.S. Army Special Operations Command, *SOCOM 2035: Commander's Strategic Guidance*, March 7, 2016, 11–12.

importance, but it does mean that the U.S. military and SOF have typically not dedicated enough individuals and units to solve uncertain irregular challenges. The evidence suggests that the military needs to dramatically rebalance its forces to gain a deeper understanding of specific adversaries and strategic geographic partners and locations.

Within the Department of Defense (DoD), SOF are well suited to take the lead in rebalancing toward specialization against specific irregular threats and operational environments. The Army Special Forces (SF) have demonstrated the tremendous impact a force can provide when a crisis or requirement arrives to address a localized threat. In Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan, SF forces either possessed standing relationships with indigenous forces or quickly developed the necessary relationships to influence their partners or context to confront the identified adversaries and wider threats. The regional focus within SF, and more recently within MARSOC, is not enough, however. SOF does not currently adequately prioritize the development of long-standing focused relationships and partnerships to confront well-known threats presented by Russia, China, Iran, Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO), and North Korea. Instead, SOF tend to gravitate toward the missions that emphasize counterterrorism and direct-action-centric tasks, accepting the risk of not emphasizing specific threat or regional expertise. U.S. SOF can and should develop threat-specific cadres with a long-term orientation on these adversaries and their context at a cost-effective price in terms of manpower and general resources.

The history of U.S. irregular warfare indicates that success requires understanding the operational environment. This understanding can only occur through the focused dedication of individuals and units at the expense of broad and general experience. The U.S. military, and SOF, gives too much primacy toward broad experience and short-term focus on the most complex and uncertain problems facing the military.

4.   Failure to Understand SOF's Strategic Utility in Irregular Warfare

In irregular warfare, SOF's decisive strategic utility is in the indirect operational approaches working with and through indigenous political and military partners.[1227] This is due to the fact that the achievement of long-term U.S. strategic interests typically depends on the indigenous partners and not on U.S. unilateral efforts. Although this fact is well known in the current U.S. military context, the U.S. military and SOF often pursue approaches that do not adequately work with and through indigenous partners.

Case study analysis and the review of SOF's relational maneuver strengths indicate that SOF are well suited and generally more effective in irregular warfare than conventional forces. However, U.S. SOF often gravitate too far toward the most conventional and attritional aspects of irregular warfare. As a prime example of attritional warfare, counterterrorism has become virtually synonymous with direct actions raids and special reconnaissance without directly connecting short-term tactical effects to an indigenous political strategy. After 17 years of this SOF-led counterterrorism effort across North Africa and the Middle East, which has many thousands of enemy combatants, the U.S. finds itself no closer to defeating al Qaeda or achieving politically stable outcomes than when it began. In fact, in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), more recognized terror groups exist now than did on 9/11.[1228] This result has occurred, in no small part, because of the U.S. military's lack of understanding of the threats and their operational environment across Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere. These conflicts are irregular wars where military violence and political warfare become blurred, and where the U.S. military should inform, influence, and implement strategy to achieve intermediate and ultimate political objectives across all levels of warfare.[1229] This indirect approach requires refined understanding of politics, strategy, the operational environment, and the U.S. military's role to support and achieve U.S. interests.

[1227] Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, ch. 7–8.

[1228] Coll, *Directorate S*, 677.

[1229] Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*, Ch. 4–5.

Although U.S. SOF have achieved tactical proficiency in killing and capturing enemy leadership and fighters, SOF have been less effective in producing strategic outcomes. While SOF do not solely bear responsibility, they are often the primary action-arm of the military that operates in these environments. The popular saying goes that all politics are local. That mantra especially applies to irregular warfare. The greatest U.S. military successes achieved across Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan typically occurred when SOF or conventional forces integrated with and assisted indigenous partner forces to develop military and political solutions compatible with the indigenous population and powerbrokers. SOF significantly contributed to outcomes in El Salvador and had led the way toward similar success in Afghanistan through the Village Stability Operations (VSO) program.

Greater direct SOF strategic utility in irregular warfare requires more indirect operational approaches that advise and assist local forces to achieve long-term political objectives. This rebalancing will apply differently across SOCOM's diverse array of forces. This study does not advocate for abandoning the tactical proficiency gained in efficiently killing or capturing enemy forces. It does advocate for the clear evidence presented throughout history, that while attritional military violence is typically required, it is insufficient for producing strategically successful outcomes in irregular warfare, and that SOF should take a leading role in this domain. The alternative options for addressing irregular threats used by Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Tse-Tung, including state terrorism, genocide, and extermination, do not provide a morally or politically acceptable path for the U.S. military.[1230]

U.S. SOF also need to explore more closely how to support or wage political competition against irregular threats. The overused generic call for the State Department to 'do more' is unrealistic, especially given the trend in reducing rather than increasing its capabilities.[1231] Furthermore, regardless of whether the State Department, or the U.S.

[1230] Luttwak, "Dead end," 40–41.

[1231] Joshua Foust, "Gutting the State Department what the Proposed Budget Cuts Say about the Growing Militarization of U.S. Foreign Policy," PBS, April 15, 2011, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/security/gutting-the-state-department/8608/.

Agency for International Development (USAID), possesses more capabilities, it will not alleviate the need for U.S. military participation in political competition in irregular warfare. Dating back to at least the Vietnam War, the State Department and USAID have been typically unable to operate in volatile irregular warfare environments without U.S. military security and support.[1232] Since Vietnam, the State Department has never had the manpower or resources to politically compete below the provincial level in conflict.[1233] Even at the generic provincial level, the record is unclear on how effective their efforts were, or whether the State Department merely attempts to construct American-style democracy regardless of its suitability for the local conditions.

USAID, on the other hand, has traditionally focused on local development projects, which, although a component of political competition, do not comprehensively address political competition.[1234] Furthermore, in irregular warfare environments, it is generally in U.S. interests to maintain as small a footprint as possible to be able to accomplish the given mission.[1235] Aside from desiring to avoid perceptions of occupation, conventional forces are not generally designed to operate effectively in these sorts of environments, and are not well trained to politically compete in irregular warfare, as demonstrated across Vietnam and Afghanistan. While SOCOM possesses specialized civil affairs forces, this study identifies a shortfall across SOF in effectively waging political competition or advising and assisting their political-military partners to compete against the relevant threat networks. In irregular warfare environments, SOF leadership will often be the senior U.S. political-military representative between the village, provincial, and perhaps up to the national level leadership. U.S. SOF officer and senior enlisted leadership should recognize the critical importance of their political-military role in these environments and understand the decisive role of indirect efforts to work with and through indigenous partners.

[1232] Lewis G. Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means*,182-189.

[1233] Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means*, Ch 5.

[1234] Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means*, 182.

[1235] Watts et al., Countering Others' Insurgencies, xiii-xiv.

5. **Failure to Develop Strategic Thinking That Informs, Influences, and Implements Strategy and Blends Political and Violent Competition at All Levels of Warfare**

In irregular warfare, the nature and character of operational environments require the U.S. military to inform, influence, and implement strategy that blends political and violent competition at all levels of warfare. This requirement of the military necessitates mature and informed professionals, especially since the U.S. policy and strategy from the U.S. government has been notoriously vague in irregular warfare, such as in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan. This lack of clarity, however, reflects the uncertainty of what is actually occurring or what is possible to achieve within the operational environment. This uncertainty, in turn, illustrates the need for an active role by the military, and especially SOF, to engage in what author Emile Simpson calls "strategic dialogue" between tactical-level units and strategic-level decision makers.[1236]

The last 17 years of war in Afghanistan have revealed a gap in strategic thinking within the U.S. military and especially among SOF.[1237] U.S. strategic-level leaders in Washington DC continue to rely heavily upon SOF to confront complex problems around the world, but it appears that SOF in Afghanistan and other current operational environments often become more focused on employing tactical direct action capabilities than on employing their skills in line with a broader strategic plan.[1238] Exceptions certainly exist. In Afghanistan, theater-strategic leaders like General Stanley McChrystal, General David Petraeus, and Brigadier General Austin Miller worked to unify the political-military chain of command and effort and align military operational approaches to meet political objectives. At the tactical level, however, the larger strategic framework often became unclear and poorly understood. In its place, too often, SOF leadership reverted to overly simplistic attritional missions, and focused on destroying the Haqqani network in

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[1236] Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*, Ch. 4–5.

[1237] Robinson et al., *Improving Strategic Competence*.

[1238] Robinson, *One Hundred Victories*.

Afghanistan or ISIS in Iraq.[1239] Of course, the attrition of the enemy on the battlefield plays a critical role in strategic success, but attrition will rarely be decisive in itself. In politically-centric irregular warfare environments like Afghanistan and Iraq, SOF leadership and personnel should possess an understanding of what strategy is, what the current U.S. political-military strategy is, what the adversaries' strategies are, what the partner forces' host nation government's strategies are, what the local powerbrokers' strategies are, and what that individual SOF unit's strategy should be to influence the other strategies to achieve long-term success.

The requirement to recognize, understand, and influence these strategies extends far past basic military strategy to employ violence. Instead, in irregular warfare, SOF require grand-strategic thinking to consider all means of power projection to appropriately inform and influence theater or national strategy development and adaptation as well as to advise partnered indigenous political-military leadership. In irregular warfare, including proxy warfare environments, SOF personnel will often provide the only unfiltered assessment of the feasibility or progress of strategy at the local level. SOF cannot effectively provide this analysis or assessments if their own personnel do not grasp their role within policy and the theater-strategic context.

This level of strategic understanding in SOF does not currently exist to the extent necessary. There are many within SOF, both officer and enlisted, who believe that SOF's role is merely to employ military force at a more elite level than conventional forces to kill or capture the enemy on the battlefield. This simplistic mindset is detrimental to achieving successful outcomes in irregular warfare and indicates why a direct-action approach toward counterterrorism has achieved only tactical results, if not worsened the strategic situation for the United States in much of the Middle East and around the world.

[1239] Theater-strategic operational guidance provided to SOF in Afghanistan in early 2014 and in Iraq in 2016.

6.   Failure to Adapt Organization Design to the Operational Environment

This study's analysis indicates that organizational design often acts as the limiting factor that prevents successful strategic outcomes in irregular warfare. Organizational design that does not adapt and align to the operational environment prevents identifying and adapting to exploit threat vulnerabilities. Finally, a design that misfits with the environment will find it difficult to assess the effectiveness of its own strategy and approaches. The evidence presented across Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan indicates that the U.S. military and SOF have failed to effectively adapt their organizational design to irregular operational environments.

Within organizational design, three design components stand out among the others as the most critical elements in producing effective outcomes in irregular warfare: tasks, structures, and people. More than any other, misalignment of these elements with the operational environment have significantly degraded SOF's, and the U.S. military's, effectiveness in irregular warfare.

In irregular warfare, the U.S. military has over-prioritized conventional or traditional military tasks at the expense of political competition. Proper prioritization should emphasize the centrality of political competition as the decisive effort for any strategic outcome with military violence in a supporting role. For the U.S. military, tasks of political competition start with understanding the local power structures, including overt and covert influencers. Developing this deep understanding requires a mature study of the general history of war, irregular warfare, and political competition as well as the specific social, political, economic, and military history of each unique war. Another essential task requires prioritizing advisor-centric missions to develop the understanding and relationships necessary to succeed. Finally, the tasks the U.S. military pursues must achieve unity of command, or at least unity of vision and effort to achieve strategic success.

Greater effectiveness and better outcomes in irregular warfare also require adapting structural organizational models. In irregular warfare, an effective structural model dedicates specific individuals and units to specific operational environments over time. The U.S. military structural approach to irregular conflicts, however, typically attempts to not

interrupt the machine-like administrative model for personnel management and promotion cycles.[1240] This model has prevented the continuity within leadership, personnel, and units that is necessary for understanding complex irregular warfare threats and for effectively influencing those environments. Well documented in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq, it is clear that this system has prevented the necessary understanding, vision, and effort as well as undermined critical relationships, and enabled adversaries and opportunistic indigenous partners to exploit the gaps in understanding and operational approaches to benefit their own survival and power.

Furthermore, military structures in irregular warfare have often not facilitated effective interagency collaboration and unity of effort. The U.S. military efforts in Vietnam and Afghanistan provide ample evidence of inefficient and ineffective structural chains of command. In both Vietnam and Afghanistan, the U.S. military did adapt but only slowly and not enough to achieve desired strategic endstates. While SOF unilaterally cannot solve this problem, SOF are uniquely suited for better bridging divides with interagency partners and building constructive relationships that facilitate unity of vision and effort, if not command. The Vietnam Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program and Afghanistan's Village Stability Operations (VSO) and Afghanistan Local Police (ALP) programs are prime examples. While neither program was executed long enough to ensure strategic success, both programs represent U.S. military structural adaptation to the realities in the operational environment and better-integrated military and interagency efforts.

Irregular warfare operational environments are complex, dynamic, and require a high degree of structural agility to exploit fleeting opportunities. While compared to conventional forces, SOF are typically more agile, but improvements can still be made.

[1240] The evidence supporting this assertion is overwhelming across the U.S. military experiences in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Within the Marine Corps in conventional and special operations units, units assigned to deploy to either Iraq or Afghanistan trained rigorously for the months leading up to deployment, but upon completion of deployment, individuals rotated out of their unit based on their own individual career path, units rarely deployed to the same exact location, and even when they did. The units had often turned over and possessed little continuity. Between 2009 and 2017, it was clear to Major Bailey that this primary priority for the military was maintaining continuity in the personnel management and promotion system.

SOF organizations must be ruthless in identifying and reducing redundant structural bureaucracy that decreases organizational agility and the ability to adapt to recognize and exploit threat vulnerabilities. SOF should also identify ways to decentralize authority to the lowest levels in irregular warfare. True decentralization allows delegated authority to make decisions and allocate resources. This decentralization also requires properly professionalizing the people tasked with operating within irregular environments. Structurally decentralizing authority to advisors in austere environments is crucial to enable agility to produce strategic outcomes. While SOF typically better decentralize authority than conventional forces, SOF should continually search for ways to reduce unnecessary and redundant bureaucracy within the chain of command, which will facilitate greater delegation of authority and enable better communication and unity of effort.

Along with providing the right tasks and adapting the right structures for irregular warfare, success requires professionalizing the SOF leadership and personnel that will operate in irregular environments. Professionalizing SOF for irregular warfare requires education, continuity, and incentives. Educating SOF for irregular warfare requires study and debate on the history of war, strategy, politics, economics, anthropology and religion to prepare them prior to operating in these environments. This education needs to inform the role of these factors broadly in irregular warfare, as well as narrowly in particular threat and operational environments, such as in Iraq, Afghanistan, or elsewhere. This education cannot replace the foundational requirement for tactical skills to conduct raids or major combat operations, but should supplement them for better implementation within strategy.

Education enables SOF's individual operators, leaders, and units to match the study of past experiences to their present situation. This match between education and experiences will not likely occur in a single six-month deployment rotation and will develop at different rates for each individual. Continuity in assignments and billets will mesh education and experience as well as allow the development of relationships among military, interagency, coalition, and indigenous partners necessary for success.

SOF should provide incentives to individuals and units to pursue the necessary education and continuity to succeed against irregular threats. Analysis indicates that the U.S. military incentivizes a broad focus on conventional military activities, combat

experience, and internal organizational billets necessary for promotion. Military services also generally disincentivize temporary advisor structures or billets developed, outside of the normal career path, to confront specific threats.[1241] The military promotion system rewards a standard career path that satisfies the major command billets, such as company, battalion, regimental and division levels of command. Although this system is not designed for highly contextual unique irregular warfare environments, SOF units can take steps, within the existing system, to incentivize the more regional and threat-specific billets and responsibilities.

Without addressing the tasks, structures, and people within organizational design at an institutional level, any improvements to effectiveness in irregular warfare implemented by capable leadership can disappear when those leaders are no longer in place. For instance, a unit that decentralizes significant authority to SOF individuals who are not properly educated nor given the continuity or incentives to confront a distributed environment will most likely implement similar approaches that were used repeatedly early in Afghanistan and Iraq—direct action capture or kill missions—at the expense of political-competition actions that are more decisive in irregular warfare. Temporary successes produced by individual leaders and units will succumb to the institutional baseline, which is currently detrimental to success in irregular warfare.

7. Failure to Prioritize Embedded, Advisor-Led Operational Approaches

Operational approaches are the product of the level of understanding of the operational environment, the policy objectives and national interests at stake, and the resources available. Effective operational approaches in irregular warfare depend on understanding the threat, developing and implementing a unified and coherent political-military strategy, and tailoring organizational design to the threat and operational environment. Appropriate operational approaches are the natural byproduct of aligning the other elements of relational maneuver to specific threats and environments. Alignment

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[1241] Interview with LTC (Ret) Joseph McGraw on August 31, 2018; numerous other sources indicate that organizational structures, such as Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) and other advisor teams, were rarely adequately resourced or manned with the highest quality personnel.

requires an iterative and adaptive process of trial and error and demands time and focused attention. Furthermore, successful operational approaches from one environment will require modification before application to a different operational context.

The two primary elements required for U.S. operational success in irregular warfare consist of unified political-military approaches and advisor-centric approaches that span the tactical to theater-strategic levels of war. Because irregular warfare is distinct from traditional warfare primarily due to the centrality of political competition at all levels of warfare, a unified political-military approach is essential. The unity in vision and effort required for the U.S. military to succeed in irregular warfare depends on embedded military advisors that can fuse U.S. strategy and the indigenous partner(s) strategy together to achieve U.S. national interests.

Because the U.S. operational approach must also align with the indigenous partners' operational approaches, U.S. military embedded advisors to the indigenous partners are the only way, short of assuming direct political and military control, to synchronize both U.S. and partner approaches. The United States does not seek to colonize or occupy other nations longer than it must. Therefore, advisory operational approaches that embed with the indigenous forces, and develop close relationships and understandings of these operational environments are decisive to strategic success. Furthermore, at a relatively low cost of human and material resources, embedded advisors offer the highest return on investment. If selected properly, these advisors can gain a deep understanding of the operational threat, develop strategic relationships, inform U.S. strategy, and influence strategic outcomes. The precise form of a unified political-military approach and how embedded the advisors are in a given environment will vary significantly, but both pillars should play a central role in U.S. military efforts in irregular warfare. For the U.S. military and SOF, advisors who can deftly understand and employ political and violent competition should lead U.S. military efforts in irregular warfare.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT

> Irregular threats are the proper strategic focus for SOF and the area where SOF can provide the greatest strategic value. SOF are less a model for information-age transformation of conventional forces than they are a model for how to fight irregular warriors with discrimination, at low cost, and through emphasis on indirect methods.
>
> —Christopher Lamb and David Tucker, 2007[1242]

B1. MARSOC should focus its organizational strategy on the intersection of strategic utility between the DoD, Marine Corps and SOCOM. MARSOC can best achieve this strategic utility by employing indirect irregular warfare approaches to influence and support national level objectives against prioritized threat networks and within select operational environments.

B2. MARSOC should establish proponency for irregular warfare within the Marine Corps and build institutional expertise within SOCOM. To directly support the 2018 Defense Strategy's guidance, MARSOC should especially study proxy competition within irregular warfare.

B3. MARSOC should develop the cognition and capability to inform, influence, and implement strategy within irregular operational environments.

B4. MARSOC should recognize the centrality of political competition in irregular warfare and develop the capabilities to better wage this competition. These capabilities should not replace tactical skills and core activities but rather serve to align their strategic use.

B5. MARSOC should prioritize and orient on specific threat networks, partners, and operational environments. One of the most direct ways that MARSOC can provide strategic utility is through focused attention on relevant enduring threats, partners, and operational environments.

B6. MARSOC needs to better align MARSOC's organizational design to irregular operational environments. This alignment should focus primarily on organizational tasks, structures, and people to better understand and exploit threat vulnerabilities. MARSOC should eliminate redundant bureaucracy through flattening the organization, decentralize authority, build capability through better enabling continuity in personnel and unit assignments, and create a learning organization through rigidly structuring agility.

B7. MARSOC should better apply embedded advisor-led operational approaches. These approaches should examine and apply historical embedded advisor models and existing military programs.

Figure 42. Summary of Recommendations

In war, conceptual understanding does not matter if it is not practically applied. Section A outlined the seven primary challenges inhibiting the U.S. military and SOF community in employing relational maneuver to recognize threat vulnerabilities, adapt internally, and exploit those vulnerabilities to achieve realistic and desirable political outcomes. Section B translates these challenges directly to MARSOC's organizational design. The purpose of this section is to creatively explore and offer courses of action that MARSOC could implement to overcome the challenges identified in Section A. These recommendations simultaneously address three interactive categories that comprehensively provide a unified strategic direction for MARSOC. First, and most importantly, these recommendations counsel MARSOC to address the U.S. military's

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1242 Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, 237.

vulnerabilities in strategic effectiveness in irregular warfare (See Figure 42). Second, these recommendations, from a stakeholder standpoint, seek to align MARSOC's strategic utility among the DoD, the Marine Corps, and SOCOM, to produce an organizationally strategic vision to unify MARSOC culturally and drive MARSOC toward achievable endstates. Third, these recommendations seek to better implement the principles of relational maneuver wherever possible. Relational maneuver is merely an expanded form of *Warfighting*'s philosophy of Maneuver Warfare brought to the Marine Corps by General (Ret) A.M. Gray. The innovation here lies in applying tenets of Maneuver Warfare more directly to irregular warfare and to MARSOC organizationally. For MARSOC, these recommendations are attuned to the four primary guiding concepts and pathways for innovation established by *MARSOF 2030* and depicted in Figure 43. This study assesses that these pathways and the guidance in *MARSOF 2030* overlap with relational maneuver concepts and are well attuned to the current and future operating environment for MARSOC. In many ways, the recommendations found here also provide direct insight for how to focus *MARSOF 2030*'s distinct pathways and integrate them into a cohesive strategic vision with achievable strategic objectives.

MARSOF 2030 Guiding Concepts:
-Cognitive Raider
-Enterprise Level Agility
-Combined Arms for the Connected Arena
-MARSOF as a Connector
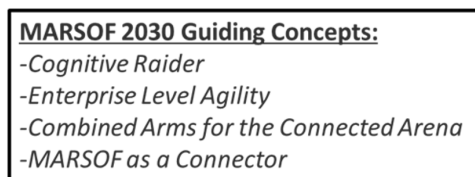
Figure 43. MARSOF 2030 Guiding Concepts[1243]

Adapting MARSOC to achieve greater effectiveness starts with remembering the overall objective for the U.S. military: to overcome the threats to U.S. security in line with U.S. policy. Military force is merely a means to this end, and military means must align with as well as inform strategic goals to achieve success. The alignment of military means makes this challenge inherently strategic in nature. The following recommendations, depicted in Figure 44, outline options for implementing relational maneuver.

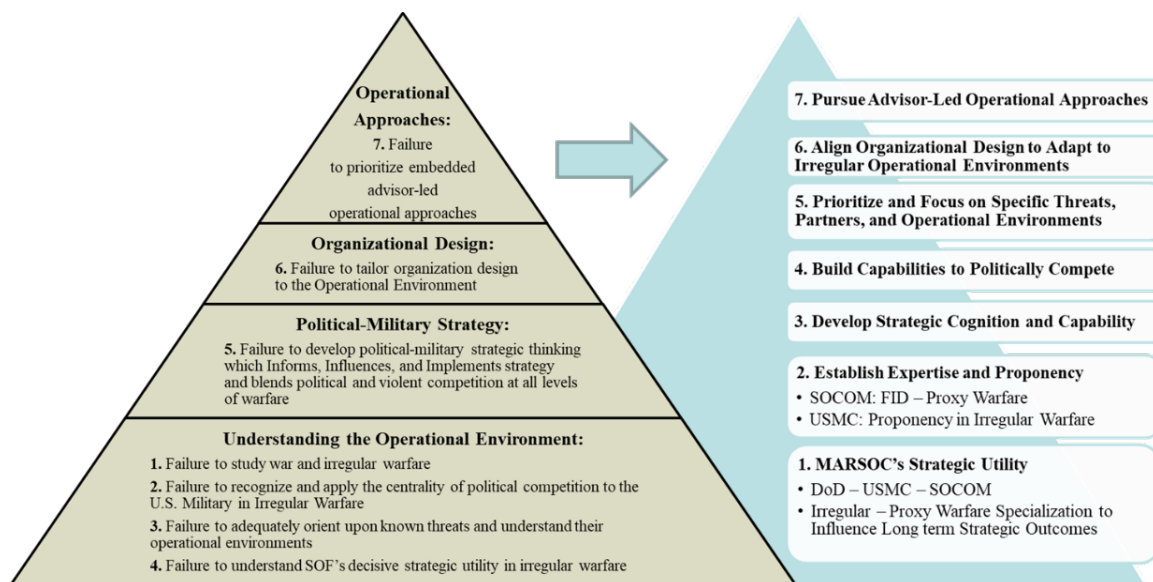[1243] Source: Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030*, 9.

Figure 44. MARSOC's Path to Strategically Implement Relational Maneuver

1. MARSOC's Strategic Utility and Organizational Strategy

The single most important decision that MARSOC can make to enhance its organizational effectiveness is to focus its vision and organizational strategy. As of 2018, MARSOC's strategic vision is too broad and vague to establish superior organizational relevance within SOCOM, the Marine Corps, or the Department of Defense (DoD). MARSOC currently produces a comparable capability to the SEALs and Army Special Forces (SF). MARSOC has yet, however, to realize its potential given the level of talent within its organization. Throughout the DoD, SOCOM, Marine Corps, and internally, MARSOC's strategic utility and organizational strategy is vague and unclear.[1244]

As depicted in Figure 45, this study assesses that the intersection of MARSOC's strategic utility between its three primary stakeholders—SOCOM, the Marine Corps, and the DoD—lies in irregular warfare. This study has demonstrated that SOCOM could improve its strategic utility by moving past its predominant tactical focus to better

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[1244] Seck, "MARSOC and Recon: Does the Corps Need Both?"; MARSOC internal discussions between Maj Bailey and other members of MARSOC between 2013 and 2018; Sadcom Via Happycom, "Part Three: What's Wrong with the Rest of SOCOM?"; Billy Birdzell, "Understanding the Marine Corps' Special Operators"; Sadcom Via Happycom, "Part Four: What Can Be Done About SOCOM?"; Major Bailey's personal interactions across MARSOC between 2013 and 2018.

understanding the nation's threats, thinking strategically, understanding and waging political competition, prioritizing advisor approaches, and more directly influencing strategically successful outcomes in irregular warfare. Right now, the primary organization that focuses on irregular warfare through indirect methods to better understand unique operational environments is the Army Special Forces.[1245] Authors David Tucker and Christopher Lamb, as well as author and Retired Army Special Forces Colonel Hy Rothstein, argue that SOF's greatest strategic utility in irregular warfare lies in the indirect approach: training, advising, and assisting indigenous partners to achieve strategic goals.[1246] These authors' assertions align with analysis of the most strategically successful practices and approaches in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan.
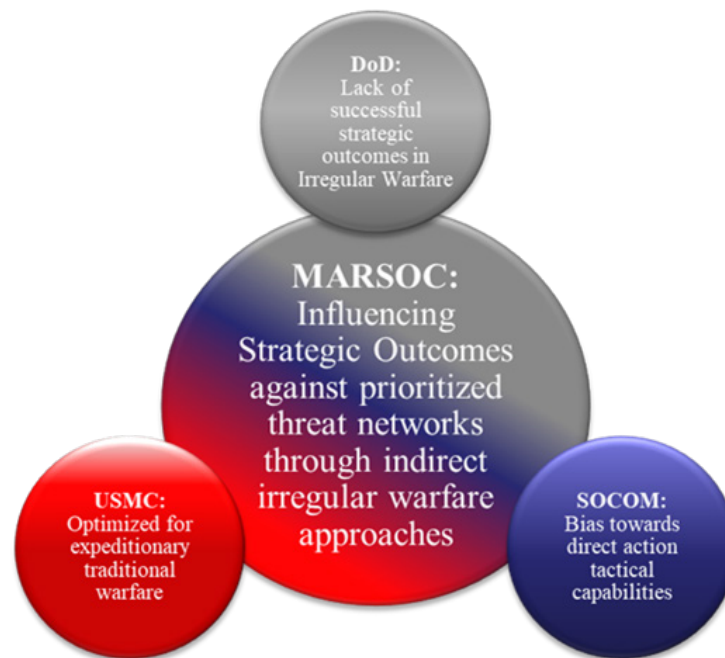
Figure 45. Intersection of MARSOC's Strategic Utility

[1245] U.S. Army Special Operations Command, "ARSOF Operating Concept 2022" (September 26, 2014).

[1246] Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, 202; Hy Rothstein, "History of Special Operations," (Lecture, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, class, 2017).

While MARSOC currently conducts the same types of missions as Special Forces around the world, there is still substantial debate within MARSOC regarding its current and future strategic direction and utility within SOCOM. The evidence from case study analysis and analysis within SOCOM reveals that, at large, SOCOM is unbalanced, gravitating too far toward direct approaches that achieve short-term tactical effects without long-term strategic outcomes. MARSOC can provide the greatest strategic utility within SOCOM to better balance indirect approaches.

The Marine Corps possesses a long and storied history of fighting small irregular wars; however, organizationally, the Marine Corps general purpose forces are designed to provide a Marine Air Grand Task Force (MAGTF) infantry-centric capability that can fight accross the spectrum of conflict. While effective for a wide range of activities, these general-purpose, conventional forces have limited effectiveness in irregular warfare, where light footprints and advisory approaches are often essential. Furthermore, in practice, the Marine Corps does not organizationally value assignments outside of the primary command billets. While general-purpose force Marines may adapt faster in irregular warfare than other services' counterparts, many, if not the majority of, Marines at the tactical level do not gain an appropriate understanding of the nature and character of irregular warfare to achieve effectiveness. By focusing on irregular warfare, MARSOC can provide and retain small, irregular warfare expertise and continuity within the Marine Corps as the rest of the Corps predominantly focuses on traditional warfare activities. Moreover, MARSOC can provide insight in competing more indirectly against China and Russia.

Lastly, The U.S. military has historically oriented on preparing for fighting major wars through traditional warfare against peer competitors since at least World War II.[1247] Other 'lesser' conflicts, described as small wars, people's wars, revolutionary wars, brushfire wars, military operations other than war, low-intensity conflict, or irregular warfare, are typically seen as distractions from the U.S. military's primary responsibilities. This attitude has a degree of merit due to the necessity for the military to deter or defeat

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[1247] Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy,* 42–44.

other great powers' traditional military threats. However, with exceptions, the military has underprioritized the most prevalent form of war with correspondingly poor results.

This study recommends that MARSOC focuses its organizational vision and strategy to **employ indirect irregular warfare approaches to influence and support national level objectives against prioritized threat networks and within operational environments**. By strategically focusing on the desired endstate, this vision enables employment of relational maneuver to decentralize and adapt to leverage resources to meet the commander's intent. Focusing on strategic outcomes still allows MARSOC to retain its ability to accomplish all SOCOM core missions, but it automatically enables prioritization of effort and propels MARSOC toward the ultimate objective of providing capabilities that the nation needs but that the military has not consistently delivered. This focused organizational strategy contains three primary elements: a long-term focus to influence strategic outcomes, oriented against prioritized transregional threat networks in associated operational environments, and through indirect irregular warfare approaches led by embedded advisors. Among the DoD, the Marine Corps, and SOCOM, this approach would be unique and would better align MARSOC to the requirements for employing relational maneuver to influence and achieve strategic outcomes.

2. Establish Expertise in Irregular and Proxy Warfare

To implement an organizational strategy focused on achieving strategic outcomes in irregular warfare, MARSOC should become the Marine Corp's proponent for irregular and proxy warfare and establish its institutional expertise within SOCOM. The realities of the growing power of China and Russia, as well as regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Iran, make the requirement to understand proxy warfare within irregular operational environments especially important. Expertise in irregular and proxy warfare requires more than experience in the modern operational environment; it requires studying history and formalizing organizational professionalism. Developing irregular and proxy warfare expertise directly supports implementation of the Cognitive Raider concept outlined in *MARSOF 2030*. MARSOC can take six steps that will have dramatic impacts on

developing its individual and institutional cognition in support of its focused organizational strategy.

a.   *Proponent for Irregular Warfare*

First, MARSOC should establish itself as the proponent for irregular warfare in the Marine Corps. This proponency should include gaining and maintaining the primary expertise for Foreign Internal Defense (FID), Counterinsurgency (COIN), and Unconventional Warfare (UW), as well developing a non-doctrinal concept of proxy warfare.[1248] While MARSOC already contains much of the expertise within the Marine Corps for these mission sets, this formal designation will assist in recognition, funding, and establishing utility and interoperability between MARSOC and the Fleet Marine Forces (FMF) for doctrine, education, and training.

As the proponent in the Marine Corps for irregular warfare, MARSOC could lead the development of lessons learned, advisory practices, and other relevant considerations within the Marine Corps Training and Education Command. This effort could then tie into critical nodes of learning within Infantry Officers Course (IOC), Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS), and other officer and enlisted education venues.

b.   *Establish an Irregular Warfare Group*

To establish MARSOC's irregular warfare expertise within SOCOM and achieve institutional professionalization within the Marine Corps, MARSOC should create an Irregular Warfare Group from existing command structure. More specific recommendations for the structure of this proposed Irregular Warfare Group will occur within a future section, but it should be the conceptual hub for education, lessons learned, innovation, and adaptation that also interacts directly with the operational environment where MARSOC individuals and units deploy. This organizational construct should collaborate with joint, interagency, coalition, private sector, and academic communities of interest to confront prioritized irregular threats and operational environments. Ultimately,

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[1248] Department of the Navy, "Marine Corps Order 5311.6: Advocate and Proponent Assignments and Responsibilities" (Headquarters United States Marine Corps, December 2013), 3.

this construct would enable the MARSOC commander, the operational chain of command, and the Marine Raider Training Center (MRTC) to enhance the professional cognitive concepts essential for confronting the complex range of irregular threats through relational maneuver.

c. *Initial Development and Education: Individual Training Course (ITC) and the Team Commander's Course*

A decisive effort for developing the initial cognitive foundation necessary for confronting irregular threats begins at ITC and the Team Commander's Course. These courses already provide an excellent foundation, especially for essential tactical skills, but a review should take place to verify that both ITC and the Team Commander's Course are providing and encouraging a deep study and understanding of war, irregular warfare, political competition, strategy, the strategic utility of SOF, and the strategic importance of advisors. The Irregular Warfare Group in conjunction with the MRTC could conduct this review, in consultation with the faculty from the Naval Postgraduate School's (NPS) Defense Analysis Department, to recommend adjustments to the MRTC Commanding Officer. The NPS Defense Analysis Department already plays a direct role in the Naval Special Warfare (NAVSPECWARCOM) Platoon Leader's Course, helping prepare future SEAL platoon leaders for their operational environment. This type of partnership between academia and the MARSOC Team Commander's Course has occurred previously and reviewing opportunities for discussion and debate is essential to developing the Cognitive Raider and the level of understanding necessary to employ relational maneuver.

d. *Annual Irregular Warfare Symposium*

Another way to develop the Cognitive Operator and support MARSOC's proponency and expertise in irregular warfare is to establish a jointly sponsored annual irregular warfare symposium with the Naval Postgraduate School's (NPS) Defense Analysis Department. Intellectual development requires engaging in debate and critical thought from multiple perspectives, and an annual MARSOC-led symposium could establish MARSOC as a center for professional learning to make MARSOC, SOF, and the United States more effective, especially in irregular warfare. An annual symposium could

offer a research-based platform to directly interface with the rest of the Marine Corps, SOCOM, and academia. The proposed Irregular Warfare Group could lead this effort and work with NPS faculty and other communities of interest to develop the topics each year to apply conceptual research organizationally.

e.   *Maximize Opportunities with the NPS Defense Analysis Department*

Another simple but effective way to expand MARSOC's cognitive abilities includes increasing the personnel sent to study in the NPS Defense Analysis Department. This department allows for the flexibility in research that MARSOC requires to produce thorough and relevant analysis for direct application in support of command's priorities. Each year, the other SOF services send dozens, or even hundreds, of SOF officers and senior enlisted through the Defense Analysis program. MARSOC needs to take better advantage of this under-utilized opportunity. This study recommends sending additional officer, and enlisted, Marine Raiders through this program each academic cycle.

Additionally, the Defense Analysis department could provide a vital partnership with MARSOC, beyond resident degree-oriented studies to develop short courses of study that can be tailored to the operational requirements of MARSOC. Currently, Army Special Forces regularly send Operational Detachment Alphas (ODA) for specially built courses of instruction prior to deployment or other operational assignments. These opportunities and more exist at NPS.

f.   *Maturing beyond Doctrine and Definitions*

Becoming the Marine Corps' and one of the DoD's leading experts on irregular and proxy warfare will require more than merely knowing doctrine or basic DoD definitions. This knowledge is important but insufficient for deep study and expert understanding. For example, modern counterinsurgency doctrine outlines a basic 'shape, clear, hold, build, and transition' formula for the U.S. military to apply to an insurgency.[1249] The reality is that this sequence, although useful, will never be exactly applied in the way it is outlined.

[1249] Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Counterinsurgency*, JP.3-24 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 25 April 2017), Ch. VII.

Application will always require adapting it to the actual threat context. Authoritative doctrine in counterinsurgency may actually provide as much hindrance as help if it is applied generically without taking the actual context into consideration.[1250] In irregular warfare, where the threats and contexts are especially unique and uncertain, MARSOC should combine experience with a professional understanding of the history of war, warfare, politics, religion, economics, and anthropology to recognize vulnerabilities within the threat system and to employ relational maneuver to defeat that system. This level of professionalism will require moving past a cursory understanding of doctrine and definitions of irregular warfare.

3.   Develop Strategic Cognition and Capability

To implement an organizational strategy that desires to influence and achieve strategic outcomes, MARSOC should improve its strategic thinking. MARSOC commanders and leaders in irregular operational environments should think in terms of grand strategy. Grand strategy is typically reserved for the policy or strategic level. In the United States, the National Security Council (NSC) is responsible to the president for recommending and implementing national or grand strategy. Hall Brands defines grand strategy as "the intellectual architecture that gives form and structure to foreign policy."[1251] He further states that grand strategy requires "a clear understanding of the nature of the international political environment, a country's highest goals and interests within that environment, the primary threats to those goals and interests, and the ways that finite resources can be used to deal with competing challenges and opportunities."[1252] MARSOC individuals and units operating in fragmented social-political irregular warfare environments need to understand grand strategy and advise military and political indigenous partners on their national, provincial, district, or village level grand strategy in concert with interagency partners. Given the complexity within U.S. internal grand

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[1250] Simons, "Got Vision?" 15–25.

[1251] Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014), 3.

[1252] Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*, 3.

strategy, requirement represents the most complex possible task for a military leader, and one for which MARSOC is not currently adequately prepared, especially at the most tactical-operational levels of command.

Transforming MARSOC into a strategic organization starts with its organizational vision and strategy. Making MARSOC directly strategically relevant requires recognizing SOF's greatest strategic utility, focusing MARSOC's vision on strategic outcomes as opposed to tactical capabilities, and aligning MARSOC's resources and capabilities to those strategic outcomes. To focus its vision on strategic outcomes, MARSOC needs to move past the insufficient concept that MARSOC is merely a force provider. Moving past this concept requires MARSOC to prioritize specific threat networks so that MARSOC can orient its resources on understanding complex environments and influence successful outcomes. Obviously, MARSOC cannot influence strategic outcomes unilaterally. MARSOC operates within the established Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) structure and SOCOM and DoD force deployment model. Even without this model changing, MARSOC can internally adapt and align itself to the strategic needs of the operational environment by better understanding the threats therein and forecasting its needs to more effectively contribute to this model. Aligning MARSOC better with the operational environment, with the intent to achieve strategic outcomes, then allows MARSOC to internally prioritize its education, training, and missions to the threats it will confront. This will enhance MARSOC's professionalization, organizational agility, and capability to influence strategic outcomes.

Beyond transforming its organizational vision and strategy, MARSOC should educate and indoctrinate its people on what strategy is and how to employ strategic thought. This education and indoctrination should occur in at least four specific ways. First, MARSOC leadership at every level should develop strategic thought within their command. Second, MARSOC should familiarize strategic cognition and capabilities within the Individual Training Course (ITC) and should teach grand, or national, strategy at the MARSOC Team Commander's Course. Third, MARSOC should make strategy a reoccurring theme for discussion and debate in the proposed annual Irregular Warfare Symposium sponsored by Defense Analysis and MARSOC. Fourth and finally, MARSOC

should increase its throughput in the Defense Analysis program with an emphasis on strategic studies as well as pursue other academic opportunities to study and research strategy's relevance to SOF and MARSOC.

4. Recognize the Criticality, and Developing the Capabilities, to Politically Compete

Strategic outcomes, and operational effectiveness in irregular warfare depend on understanding the centrality of political competition in irregular warfare and balancing political and violent competition at every level of warfare. Further research should specifically study the most effective ways for MARSOC to engage in political competition and contribute to strategic outcomes, but six general implications are clearly evident. First, MARSOC must understand the U.S. and coalition political interests at stake. Second, MARSOC must seek to connect and work with interagency and coalition entities to achieve unity of vision, effort, and command. Third, MARSOC must gain an understanding of the complex distribution of power within a given conflict. Dedicated study of a specific conflict will slowly reveal the primary drivers of the political conflict as well as the seams and gaps that can be pursued and exploited to resolve the conflict in favor of U.S. interests. This understanding will then enable MARSOC to work with the appropriate political-military partners to influence successful outcomes. This understanding must include local power interests as well as proxy warfare goals from regional and global adversaries. Fourth, MARSOC must understand the necessity to connect local political and military efforts to the extent appropriate for the given indigenous context. Fifth, MARSOC must establish relationships with the appropriate political and military powerbrokers to properly influence outcomes politically acceptable to the relevant groups and populations. Sixth and lastly, MARSOC should consider all tools at their disposal, including deception, negotiations, mediations, direct military violence, and information warfare, to balance short- and long-term goals to effectively wage political competition and produce strategically successful outcomes.

Additionally, MARSOC can take four specific steps to better wage political competition in irregular warfare. First, MARSOC leaders at every level should facilitate a better understanding of political competition's centrality in irregular warfare and how

military violence should be used to set conditions for political success at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of warfare. This will likely be the most significant challenge. There are many in SOF, and likely in MARSOC, who have their minds made up that SOF's job is to find and kill the enemy and let other people worry about political effects and resulting outcomes. Changing this mindset can only occur over time with persistence, education, and study. Second, the study, discussion and debate over MARSOC's role in political warfare should begin in ITC, be researched at NPS and other academic institutions, and should be a reoccurring theme in symposiums and other educational forums. Third, MARSOC, led by the proposed Irregular Warfare Group, should more closely develop ongoing dialogue and relationships with U.S. interagency, including the State Department, CIA, USAID, coalition partners, and strategically prioritized threat environments. This development of institutional relationships should include opening up the possibility for new or additional liaisons attached to MARSOC to enhance dialogue. Fourth, MARSOC should sponsor research to further develop the concept of political competition, political-military advisors and their relevance to MARSOC, the Marine Corps, SOCOM, and the DoD.

5. **Prioritize and Focus on Specific Threats, Partners, and Operational Environments**

The most unique, and arguably the most important, element of this study's proposed strategy is for MARSOC to prioritize and focus on specific threats, partners, and operational environments. From examining relational maneuver and the U.S. military's experiences in irregular warfare, this recommendation should also be the most obvious for success in irregular warfare. Recognizing vulnerabilities, adapting internally, and exploiting those vulnerabilities requires understanding the threat and the operational environment. This understanding cannot occur without prioritization and focused attention from specific personnel and units. MARSOC has an opportunity to lead within SOCOM by adapting itself internally to address DoD- and SOCOM-wide problems to become more strategically effective.

Prioritization requires a decision-making criterion to ensure that MARSOC does not waste its personnel and resources on threats, partners, and operational environments

that are not strategically relevant or desired. Furthermore, MARSOC provides the smallest contribution to SOCOM, making its decision-making process all the more important. This study recommends that MARSOC use a decision-criteria that synthesizes five elements depicted in Figure 46. First MARSOC should examine the relevant guidance from the DoD, SOCOM, and Marine Corps. Second, MARSOC should prioritize the list of known strategic adversarial threats to U.S. interests. Third, MARSOC should identify the enduring strategic partners essential to confronting the priority threats. Fourth, MARSOC should consider the operational environments and conflict zones that will allow MARSOC personnel and units to work with and through partners to confront the threats. Fifth, and lastly, MARSOC should consider its organizational culture, design, and strengths to identify the best fit for its missions and units as well as the principles of relational maneuver required for success.
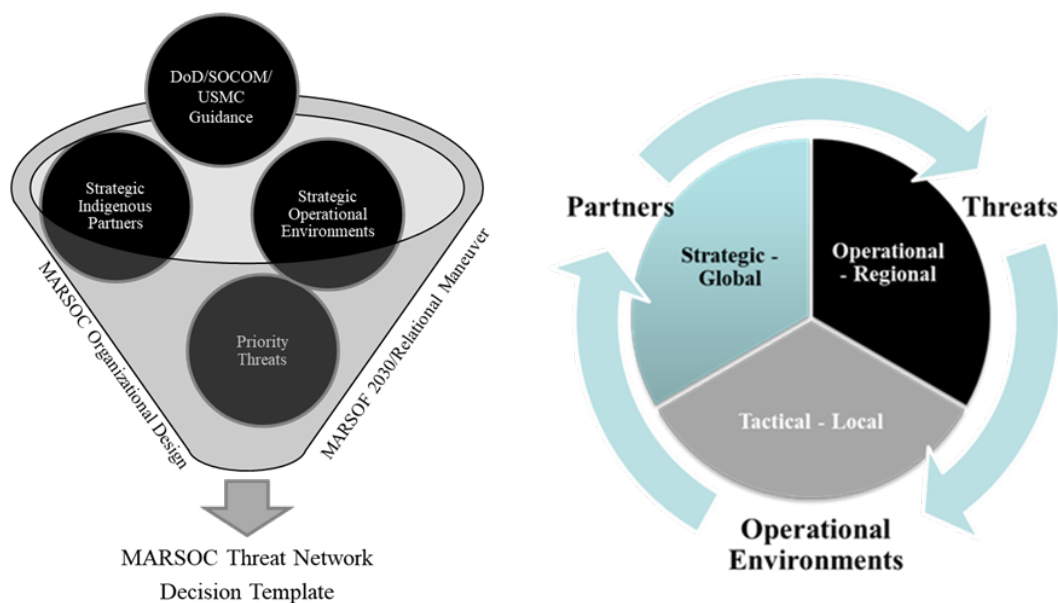
Figure 46. Template for MARSOC's Strategic Threat-Network Decision Making Process

To aid its decision making, MARSOC should consider guidance from the DoD, the Marine Corps, and SOCOM. A brief review of the broad guidance from each entity demonstrates differences that MARSOC should synthesize to make the best possible

decision where to allocate its resources. The 2018 National Defense Strategy states that "Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security."[1253] The defense strategy further places the revisionist powers of Russia and China as America's top security concerns, the "rogue regimes" of North Korea and Iran as the next echelon of threats, and finally non-state terrorists and irregular threats as the third and lowest level of threat to U.S. security interests.

The Marine Corps has translated the guidance from National Defense Strategy to predominantly prepare for traditional warfare against the militaries of Russia, China, North Korea, or Iran.[1254] Within its preparation to confront these state adversaries, the Marine Corps has further emphasized its direction toward the Pacific, China, and North Korea.[1255] This shift to the Pacific makes sense from the Marine Corps' amphibious tradition and relationship to the U.S. Navy. In 2018, a Marine flag officer's classified brief to the Marine students at NPS reinforced the Corps' emphasis on the Pacific area of operations and integration with the Navy.

Finally, while the DoD and the Marine Corps have shifted higher emphasis on interstate warfare, "USSOCOM's priority effort continued to be Countering Violent Extremist Organizations (CVEO)."[1256] Among these VEO, al Qaeda and ISIL top the list of SOCOM's priority threats.[1257] After VEOs, the SOCOM Commander's most recent congressional posture statement shows that SOCOM is actively countering the list of DoD's priority threats—Iran, North Korea, Russia, and China.

[1253] Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy* 1.

[1254] Amy B. Wang, "Top General Tells Marines to Be Prepared for a Big Fight," Washington Post, accessed October 28, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/12/23/theres-a-war-coming-top-marine-corps-general-tells-u-s-troops/.

[1255] Seck, "Marines Want to 'Pull Back' From Middle East as Russia, Pacific Loom," Military.com, December 20, 2017, https://www.military.com/daily-news/2017/12/20/marines-want-pull-back-middle-east-russia-pacific-loom.html.

[1256] Thomas, III, "Statement of General Raymond A. Thomas, III, U.S. Army Commander United States Special Operations Command before the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities Feb 15, 2018," 2.

[1257] Thomas, III, "Statement of General Raymond A. Thomas, III, U.S. Army Commander United States Special Operations Command before the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities Feb 15, 2018," 5.

Although there are differences in the order of priority, what is clear from the guidance of DoD, Marine Corps, and SOCOM is that the primary security threats to the U.S. military are clearly defined, at least at the strategic level of warfare (See Figure 47). Although the world is complex and dynamic, in fact, the nation's primary strategic adversaries have remained consistent, with Russia, China, and North Korea having been America's adversaries since at least 1949. Iran became a strategic adversary in 1979, and global Islamic Jihadists began to mobilize and gain traction during the 1980s across the Middle East.[1258] Therefore, strategically recognizing history and conducting a simple network analysis of these adversaries provides a relatively clear picture of where our primary adversaries are and where they will likely remain for the foreseeable future. This simplicity and stability can enable MARSOC's long-term strategic planning.

U.S. Priority Adversaries
1. Russia since 1945
2. China since 1949
3. N. Korea since 1950
4. Iran since 1979
5. Jihadist VEOs since 1980s

Figure 47. America's Strategic Threats

To prioritize the list of threats, MARSOC should use an interconnected level of understanding and approach that meshes global, regional, and local threats, partners, and operational environments and choose the threats, partners, and operational environments that best align to MARSOC's organizational culture, strengths, and capabilities. This integrated understanding and approach will allow MARSOC units and personnel to provide strategic utility, not only advising and assisting partners in overcoming local or regional challenges, but also ensuring that these efforts are nested with strategic level interests.

[1258] David Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," in Audrey Kurth Cronin and James Ludes, eds., *Attacking Terrorism*, 61–63.

MARSOC's current culture, capabilities, and strengths best align with confronting threats in kinetic, expeditionary, austere operational environments. MARSOC possesses a Marine-Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) heritage that integrates capabilities in a combined arms manner across physical and cognitive domains. Particularly, MARSOC possesses the resources and capabilities to integrate intelligence and operations down to its most tactical unit, the MSOT.[1259] MARSOC's prioritization of organic intelligence collection capabilities and its cultural tradition of the MAGTF concept lends itself to the holistic approaches required to strategically succeed in irregular warfare. MARSOC's culture and capabilities can likely adapt to most operational environments, but is especially suited to countering the threats, and working through partners, in dangerous and remote operational environments, especially across North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe.

While many options exist for MARSOC to apply these decision-making criteria to identify specific threats, partners, and operational environments to strategically influence, this study provides three recommended courses of action to MARSOC. Due to scoping, only the primary recommended option will be described in detail, but the same methodology could be used to apply to the other recommended options. The most important takeaway is not the specific recommended options, but the methodology and the importance for MARSOC to more greatly focus its personnel and units on specific threats, partners, and operational environment to apply relational maneuver and influence strategic success.

a. Course of Action 1: Violent Extremist Organizations, Iran, and Russia

When juxtaposed to the array of primary threats, MARSOC's organizational strengths appear most closely suited to confront VEO, Iran, and Russian threat networks since these networks are interconnected to operational environments that play to MARSOC's organizational strengths. Furthermore, these three threat networks are carefully nested within the DoD, Marine Corps, and SOCOM's prioritization of threats. A

[1259]Webber, "U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command."

quick network analysis, depicted in Figure 48, of these threat networks and irregular warfare conflict zones indicates that they are relatively geographically aligned and may support a threat networked approach from MARSOC.
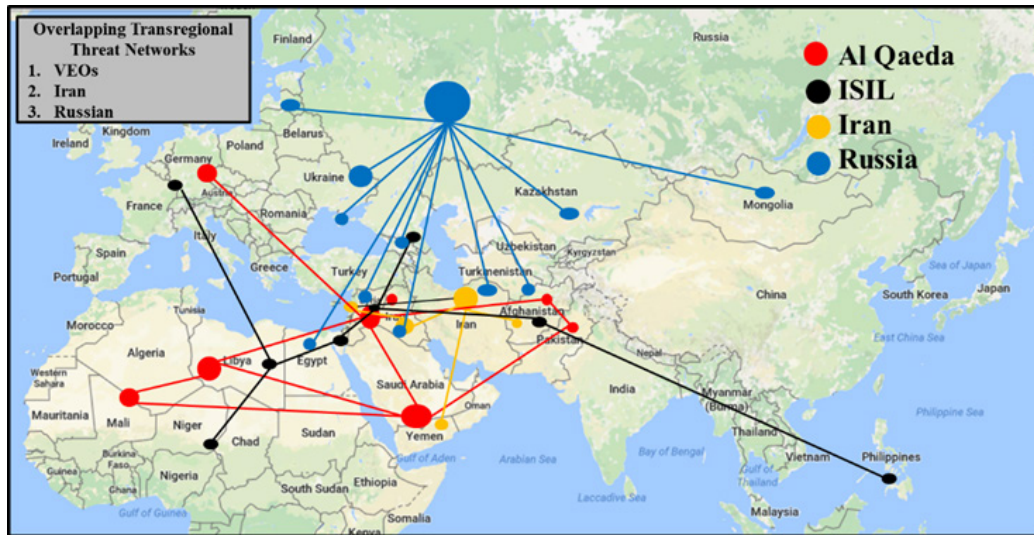

Figure 48. COA 1 Overlapping Threat Networks

Currently, jihadist VEOs wage irregular warfare and terrorist operations throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia. These conflict zone and infected areas, depicted in Figure 49, contain al Qaeda and ISIL violence and war ranging from political instability to outright civil war and insurgency in areas like Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, and elsewhere.[1260] Across this vast space, transregional VEOs like al Qaeda and ISIL overlap with more locally focused jihadist insurgents and other combatants. National security expert Seth Jones' 2014 congressional testimony provides an effective framework (see Figure 49) to identify and prioritize the sub-threat networks within the larger VEO threat network according to the level of threat to U.S. interests.[1261]

[1260]Seth G. Jones, *The Future of Irregular Warfare*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp, 2012), 3, https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT374.html.

[1261] Seth G. Jones, *Counterterrorism and the Role of Special Operations Forces*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp, 2014), 3, https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT408.html.
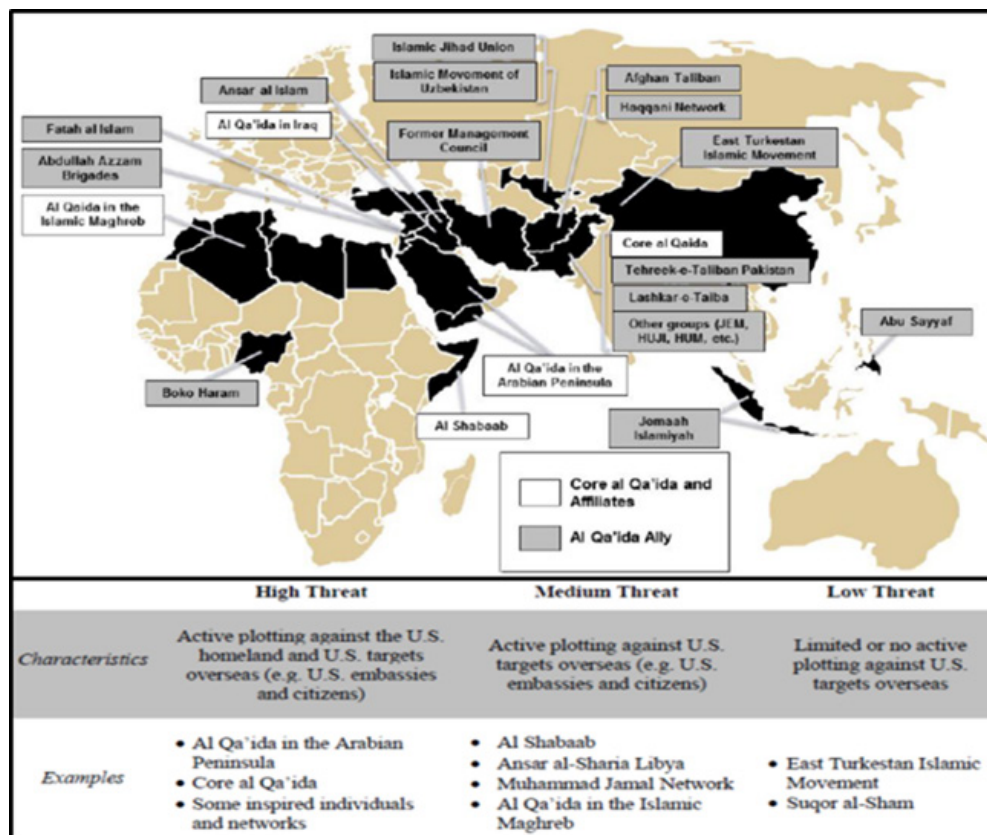
Figure 49. Global al Qaeda and ISIL VEO Threat Network with Corresponding Threat Level to the United States[1262]

Across the same geographic space, Iran's network of state-sponsored proxies overlap and often directly fight against local and transregional VEO networks.[1263] Figure 50 depicts some of the most significant areas of overlap where fighting is occurring.[1264] Many of these areas currently contain deployed elements from MARSOC and the rest of SOCOM and are vital to both confronting VEO and maligned Iranian efforts counter to U.S. interests. Although not directly represented, Iranian interests and influence efforts also overlap into neighboring Afghanistan.

[1262] Source: Jones, *The Future of Irregular Warfare*, 3; Jones, *Counterterrorism and the Role of Special Operations Forces*, 3.

[1263] Colin Clarke and Phillip Smyth, "The Implications of Iran's Expanding Shi`a Foreign Fighter Network," *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 10 (November 2017): 14–18.

[1264] Council on Foreign Relations, "Middle East Battle Lines," accessed October 27, 2018, https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/battle_lines/.
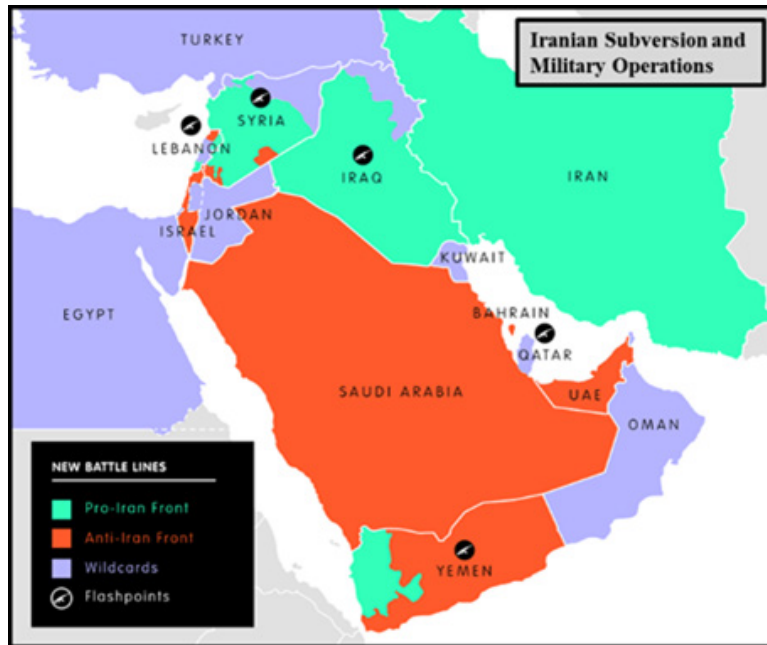
Figure 50. Iranian Threat Network[1265]

Finally, the Russian threat network and primary sphere of influence also overlaps with many of the geographic regions and partners necessary to confront the primary VEO and Iranian threat networks. Some of the most well-known instances of Russian subversion and irregular warfare operations are depicted in Figure 51 in Syria, the Caucasus region in Georgia, Ukraine, and in the Baltic region.[1266] These Russian activities and spheres of influence, particularly across Syria, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and perhaps Eastern Europe, overlap with both VEO and Iranian threat networks and provide key intersection points that will likely remain strategically relevant to counter all three threat networks indefinitely.

1265 Source: Council on Foreign Relations, "Middle East Battle Lines."

1266 James Carafano, "U.S. Comprehensive Strategy Toward Russia," The Heritage Foundation, accessed October 27, 2018, https://www.heritage.org/europe/report/us-comprehensive-strategy-toward-russia.

Figure 51. Russian Threat Network[1267]

MARSOC's focus on Jihadist VEOs, Iran, and Russian threat networks would enable development of enduring relationships with strategic partners throughout the Middle East, North Africa, the Central Asian States, Caucasus region, and potentially Eastern Europe. MARSOC should determine which partners and conflicts that it will prioritize for investment of forces and resources. To make these choices, MARSOC should assess where other U.S. military and SOF are currently operating as well as where the interesting key points are that allow MARSOC to simultaneously confront the range of prioritized threats globally, regionally, and locally. These decisions should reflect the 2018 National Defense Strategy, Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) campaign plans, and coalition and interagency efforts in these areas. As Seth Jones explains in his 2014 congressional testimony, indirect SOF assistance should also consider the level of direct threat to the United States as well as the internal state capacity to address the internal threat.[1268] MARSOC could use a similar framework, depicted in Figure 52, to identify the most strategically relevant partners to create enduring relationships and expertise.

[1267] Adapted from: Carafano, "U.S. Comprehensive Strategy Toward Russia."

[1268] Jones, *Counterterrorism and the Role of Special Operations Forces*, 6.
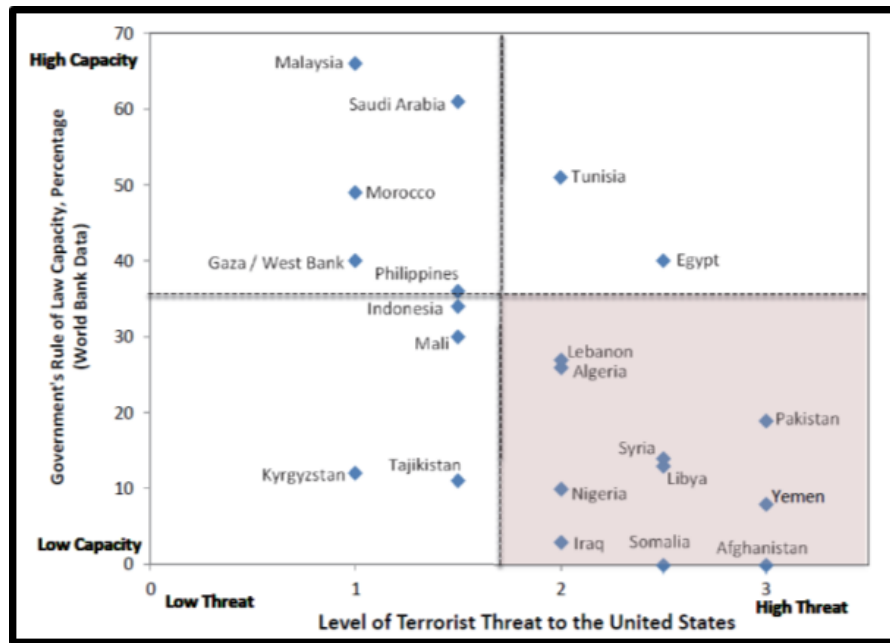
Figure 52. Framework to assess Level of VEO Threat to the United States and Host Nation's Rule of Law Capacity[1269]

A 2013 RAND report, *Developing and Assessing Options for the Global SOF Network*, provides a useful visual depiction for MARSOC to guide strategic identification of threats and partners.[1270] Using the input factors of higher-level guidance, prioritized threats, strategic partners and operational environments that contain key intersection points across the prioritized global, regional, and local threat networks and strategic partners, MARSOC can orient and focus its strategy against these threats, partners, and operational environments. As analysis throughout this study indicates, paradoxically, the lowest priority local threats in many operational environments, relative to U.S. strategic interests, will be the highest priority threat to the indigenous partners and to the political stability and success within the operational environment. Therefore, MARSOC and SOF must be able to understand strategy, threats, partners, across overlapping global, regional, and local operational environments. Figure 53 depicts COA 1's prioritized threats, partners, and operational environments.

1269 Source: Jones, *Counterterrorism and the Role of Special Operations Forces*, 6.

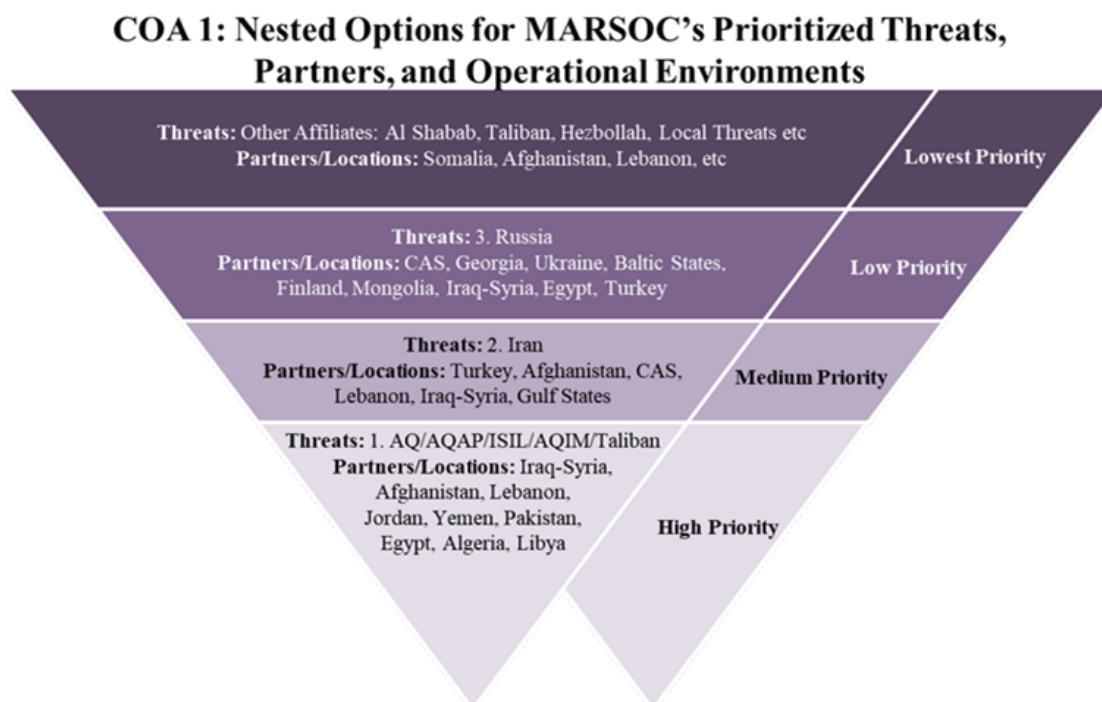1270 Szayna and Welser, "*Developing and Assessing Options for the Global SOF Network*," 3.

COA 1: Nested Options for MARSOC's Prioritized Threats, Partners, and Operational Environments

Threats: Other Affiliates: Al Shabab, Taliban, Hezbollah, Local Threats etc
Partners/Locations: Somalia, Afghanistan, Lebanon, etc — Lowest Priority

Threats: 3. Russia
Partners/Locations: CAS, Georgia, Ukraine, Baltic States, Finland, Mongolia, Iraq-Syria, Egypt, Turkey — Low Priority

Threats: 2. Iran
Partners/Locations: Turkey, Afghanistan, CAS, Lebanon, Iraq-Syria, Gulf States — Medium Priority

Threats: 1. AQ/AQAP/ISIL/AQIM/Taliban
Partners/Locations: Iraq-Syria, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen, Pakistan, Egypt, Algeria, Libya — High Priority

Figure 53. Analytical Tool for Prioritizing and Nesting Strategic Threats, Partners, and Operational Environments[1271]

b.   *Course of Action 2: China, Russia, and Pacific VEOs*

MARSOC could also primarily focus on China, Russia, and irregular threats in the Pacific. This option provides several significant advantages. First, the rest of the Navy-Marine Corps team appears to be shifting its focus and priorities toward Asia, Russia, and China especially.[1272] MARSOC could pursue this alignment to more strongly emphasize its amphibious heritage and bridge the broader Marine Corps' conventional force's emphasis on traditional warfare with a more indirect, irregular warfare approach to China and Russia.

Since China's threat network overlaps with Russia and Pacific-oriented VEOs, a Pacific-focused MARSOC could seek to develop partnerships with allies and in irregular

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[1271] Adapted from: Szayna and Welser, *Developing and Assessing Options for the Global SOF Network*, 3.

[1272] Neller, Statement of General Robert B. Neller.

conflicts relevant to strategic competition with China and Russia. These opportunities include the Philippines, where MARSOC already operates, Vietnam, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Mongolia, the Central Asian states, and other Southeast Asian partners. While this option potentially aligns well with the wider Marine Corps and its amphibious heritage, the general stability within this theater of operations will provide less direct opportunity to maintain kinetic combat experience within MARSOC or maximize its organizational advantages operating in more austere and kinetic environments. Nonetheless, MARSOC could significantly contribute to national, Marine Corps, and SOCOM level priorities through orienting primarily on China, Russia, and Indo-Pacific partners and operational environments. This orientation could further develop potentially groundbreaking opportunities for MARSOC to partner with Vietnam, Mongolia, and especially India as the United States seeks to expand largely untapped strategic relationships.[1273]

c. *Course of Action 3: Iran, North Africa, and VEOs*

As much of the DoD orients directly on competition among the great powers, MARSOC could provide strategic utility by prioritizing its attention and resources on the Iran and the jihadist VEO networks across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Although the United States appears to desire to marginalize these less strategically important regions in favor of direct great power conflict, the irregular conflict zones in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere show little signs of ending. These irregular operational environments will also likely continue to provide venues for proxy conflict both for regional powers, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran, as well as among Russia, China, and the United States. Remaining focused on these destabilized areas fits well within MARSOC's organizational culture and capabilities. The primary risks for a predominant orientation on Iran and VEOs include the gap between the primary focus of the most recent defense strategy as well as the Marine Corps' orientation on direct great power conflict and the Pacific region.

[1273] Department of Defense and Department of State, *Enhancing Defense and Security Cooperation with India: Joint Report to Congress*, 2017. https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA-India-Joint-Report-FY-July-2017.pdf.

Orienting on Iran and VEO threat networks, however, aligns well with MARSOC's organizational strengths and contains the irregular mission sets within which SOCOM will likely continue to operate, while conventional forces return to preparing for major combat operations. Orientation toward Iran and VEOs also provides the opportunity to confront these threats with a strategic perspective through relational maneuver.

Ultimately, regardless of the chosen course of action, MARSOC can better contribute to gaps in America's defense and provide direct strategic utility by focusing its organizational strategy on specific threat networks, partners, and operational environments. At the strategic and operational levels of warfare, the threats and relevant partners are relatively clear and stable.[1274] This clarity and stability enables MARSOC to strategically plan and prioritize its allocation of personnel and resources. The next section discusses the adjustments that MARSOC needs to make within its organizational design to implement this study's proposed strategy and to implement the principles of relational maneuver and *MARSOF 2030.*

6. Aligning Organizational Design to Adapt to Irregular Operational Environments

The next step in implementing a more effective MARSOC strategy is to better align MARSOC's organizational design to irregular operational environments. This alignment will enable the agility to adapt and implement relational maneuver to exploit threat vulnerabilities. Alignment should occur through adjusting MARSOC's organizational tasks, structures, and people. Improving these three pillars of organizational design will in turn build a more cohesive organizational culture attuned to the requirements to strategically succeed in irregular warfare.

a. Tasks: Focusing MARSOF 2030's Four Guiding Concepts

A focused MARSOC vision and strategy allows prioritization of core tasks and activities that will guide education, training, and resource allocation. A focus on irregular

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[1274] General Joseph Dunford, "Posture Statement of 19th Chairman of The Joint Chiefs of Staff before The 115th Congress Senate Armed Services Budget Hearing," 2–7.

threats and irregular warfare places a premium on foreign internal defense (FID), counterinsurgency (COIN), and unconventional warfare (UW) core activities. Other, more direct core activities, such as direct action (DA) and special reconnaissance (SR), support the essential irregular warfare tasks of supporting or defeating an insurgency through or against proxies. SOCOM's core activities, however, are necessary but not sufficient to effectively focus MARSOC's capabilities to implement and achieve its revised organizational strategy. In addition to specialization in FID and COIN activities, MARSOC should also research and develop core capabilities to politically compete in irregular warfare and to understand counter-proxy warfare efforts by adversaries such as Russia and Iran in Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine.

(1)   Foreign Internal Defense/Counterinsurgeny/Proxy Warfare

MARSOC should identify FID-COIN and proxy warfare as the main effort for education, training, and deployment. Although, not a doctrinal SOF mission, understanding and specializing in proxy wars directly supports the guidance in the 2018 NDS and can contribute to the way SOF and the DoD understands great power conflict and irregular warfare. Within FID-COIN-proxy war core activities, MARSOC should further specialize in political warfare, counter-guerilla warfare, including local defense force missions like in the CAP and VSO program, as well as more direct-action centric missions such as partnered raids with forces like the Afghan Commando Kandaks.

MARSOC should also seek to progress in an under-studied subset of FID, the use of UW methods in a larger FID/COIN irregular conflict. As described in Chapter V's analysis of the U.S. military's irregular warfare effort in Afghanistan, often times indigenous government forces do not have the personnel or resources to physically control their territory.[1275] In those situations, governance is often provided by the insurgent political apparatus such as the Taliban, local warlords, criminal networks, or ISIL. In these situations, MARSOC should study and implement UW approaches in support of a larger FID-COIN effort. While Army Special Forces continue to take the lead in doctrinally

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[1275] Farrell and Giustozzi, "The Taliban at War: Inside the Helmand Insurgency, 2004–2012," *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (2013): 845–871, 862–864.

defined UW efforts, such as the Toppling of the Taliban Regime in 2001 or the 2003 efforts working with the Kurds to defeat Saddam Hussein, MARSOC could enhance the understanding and employment of UW methodology against the insurgency in Afghanistan, Iraq, or other similar operational environments.

(2) Unconcentional Warfare

As the original design function for the Army Special Forces, this study recommends that MARSOC not try to duplicate or replace but, rather, complement Special Forces UW efforts in developing and working with guerillas, auxiliaries, and underground networks. Since both FID and UW represent opposite perspectives on the same basic problem—insurgency—MARSOC should develop and maintain the skills sets and understanding to lead a UW effort, but will likely play a supporting role in these operations to Special Forces. More appropriately, MARSOC should seek to take the lead in studying and implementing UW operational approaches in larger FID operational environments.

Furthermore, MARSOC should expand its analysis of the required tasks to achieve strategic outcomes in either FID or UW environments. This expansion should include a prioritization of activities and practices that are historically grounded subsets of irregular warfare. These activities should focus on training and education, including Advise, Assist, and Accompany (AAA) of indigenous SOF, irregular local defense forces, police, or general-purpose forces. MARSOC should also explore the education and training required for AAA in raids, clandestine support activities, major combat operations, and traditional pacification activities such as Village Stability Operations (VSO). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, MARSOC should review the requisite capabilities to effectively overcome the root of irregular warfare: political competition.

(3) Support to U.S. Conventional Major Combat Operations

Even when supporting U.S. conventional major combat operations, MARSOC should support primarily through and with partner forces. This study further advocates for the following criteria for supporting major U.S. conventional combat operations. First, as Major General Patrick Roberson argued in 2011, MARSOC should seek to partner with

indigenous SOF or irregular-militia forces.[1276] Second, MARSOC could partner with indigenous general-purpose force units. Third, in situations where applicable, MARSOC should conduct unilateral raids or special reconnaissance missions in support of conventional U.S. military operational objectives.

(4)   Training

Advise and assist missions in FID or UW environments generally require some level of training or instruction with their indigenous partner force. This study recommends that MARSOC consider training partner forces a necessary supporting, but not the main, effort, with two significant exceptions. First, MARSOC should prioritize training and advising forces on the importance of political competition and connecting military efforts and political efforts to achieve success. Second, MARSOC is well suited to training and advising partner forces on planning and integrating intelligence and operations. Training and advising partner forces on political competition and operations and intelligence integration are a natural fit for both MARSOC's organizational strengths as well as the requirements for strategic success in irregular warfare. While some level of tactical training will undoubtedly occur, this training should be carefully tailored to the skills that the partner force needs to confront the threats it faces, so as to avoid merely creating a military in the image of the U.S. forces.

In each case, whether conducting FID, UW, or supporting major combat operations, MARSOC should seek to employ as little personnel and units as possible to accomplish its mission. Small footprints are a hallmark of special operations within irregular warfare, and MARSOC's small size should incentivize small footprints and embedded advisory approaches to do more with less. MARSOC's small size and limited resources calls for tasks, structures and people that can do more with less to achieve greater organizational agility and strategic outcomes.

[1276] Roberson, *Understanding Advisory Roles in Large Scale Counterinsurgencies*, 51–52.

b.   Structure: Achieve Enterprise Agility

To achieve enterprise-level agility, MARSOC should address structural challenges inhibiting its ability to adapt to irregular operational environments. By better focusing its organizational strategy and tasks, MARSOC will enhance its relational agility, but this enhancement is insufficient. MARSOC should also reduce redundant bureaucracy, decentralize authority, build continuity, and rigidly institutionalize agility into its structure.

(1)   Agility

To structure to achieve agility, MARSOC should first decide whether to prioritize responsive agility to react to unforeseen military contingencies, or proactive agility to deeply understand the operational environment and adapt to overcome political and violent competitive challenges. RAND's 2013 report on options for the global SOF network generally categorized this agility between responsive direct-action options for counterterrorism, hostage rescue or other "contingencies that may erupt with little or no warning."[1277] On the other end of the agility spectrum, the report provided small footprint advising and capacity building options to proactively shape the environment in support of strategic objectives.[1278] RAND's analysis aligns well to David Tucker and Christopher Lamb's argument that SOF capabilities can be broadly distinguished between direct and indirect approaches, and that in irregular warfare, indirect approaches are more strategically significant than U.S. unilateral direct approaches.[1279] Analysis to this point, depicted in Figure 54, reveals that the U.S. military and SOF gravitate toward the responsive type of agility that focuses on responsive direct approaches.[1280] Because strategic outcomes in irregular warfare depend on indirect approaches and proactive agility to adapt to the environment, this study recommends aligning with the strategic needs of the environment. The section on how MARSOC can rigidly structure agility will further discuss how MARSOC can still retain responsive agility within this approach.

[1277] Szayna and Welser, *Developing and Assessing Options for the Global SOF Network*, 3.

[1278] Szayna and Welser, *Developing and Assessing Options for the Global SOF Network*, 2.

[1279] Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, ch. 5–6.

[1280] Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operations Forces*, 174.
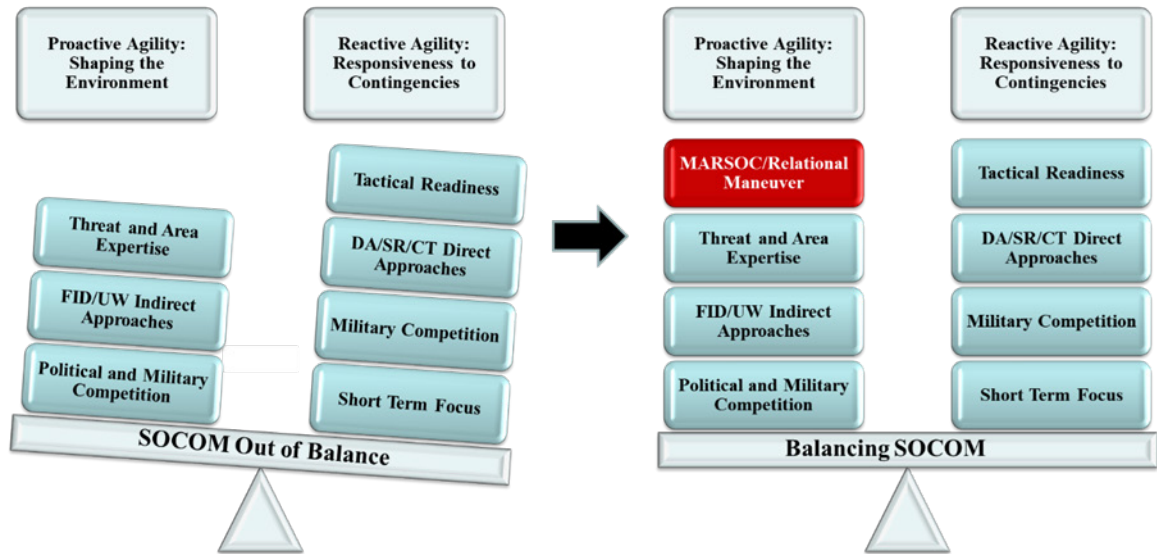
Figure 54. Option for Better Balancing SOCOM Application of Agility

(2)   Reduce Redundant Bureaucracy

To achieve better agility, MARSOC should ensure that it eliminates unnecessary bureaucracy. MARSOC has redundant bureaucracy that does not significantly contribute to organizational effectiveness in the operational environment. Reportedly, MARSOC is currently evaluating options to address the first of two major structural redundancies that undermine organizational agility. The first major issue is the separation between the Marine Raider Regiment (MRR) and the Marine Raider Support Group (MRSG). This separation between two O-6 commands creates unnecessary bureaucratic processes and chokepoints for operational commanders to receive essential support personnel and equipment for unit deployment. MARSOC, has already identified this as a problem and is reviewing solutions to create a second MRR and streamline its structure through subordinating support battalions under each O-6 command.[1281] This adaptation will likely significantly reduce unnecessary formal communication, processes, and administrative approvals required for each deploying unit to receive known support requirements.

[1281] Interview with Colonel Travis Homiak, July 20, 2018; MARSOC, Working Papers, "MARSOC Reorganization Working Group Update," July 11, 2018.

The second, and currently unaddressed, major structural redundancy lies within MARSOC's operational chain of command. According to organizational design theory, generally, more bureaucracy and vertical hierarchy leads to less organizational agility.[1282] Therefore, an organization that requires agility to confront uncertain environments should seek ways to eliminate redundant bureaucracy and hierarchy that inhibits agility.

Given its organizational size, MARSOC does not need each level of its current operational structure and could achieve greater organizational agility through combining two levels of its current command. Process of elimination demonstrates that the Marine Special Operations Company (MSOC), in its current form, does not maximize MARSOC's operational advantages and has proven largely redundant within SOCOM's deployed global network as well as within the Marine Corps' administrative environment. The current construct of the Marine Raider Battalion (MRB) and the MSOC should be combined to retain an O-5 led MSOC-like battalion modeled after the operational experience of Special Operations Task Force North (SOTF-N) in Northern Iraq between 2016 to the present.

During Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) and prior to SOTF-N, MSOC-North was established by MSOC G in Northern Iraq to lead the U.S. SOF advise and assist effort with the Kurdish forces as well as the, mostly, Sunni tribes in their fight against the Islamic State. Six months after MSOC North was established, the MARSOC-led Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force- Iraq (CJSOTF-I) created SOTF-N by emplacing an O-5 headquarters on top of MSOC-North, then manned by MSOC H, to better facilitate leadership among the coalition SOF partners, the Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command-Iraq (CJFLCC-I), and to provide deployed command positions for MARSOC battalion commanders. This structure proved to be more effective for the SOCOM deployed structure, the Marine Corps' administrative promotion structure, and for the operational environment. In this environment, SOTF-N led the coalition SOF effort in Northern Iraq, and the MSOT and SEAL task elements reported directly to the SOTF. While, doctrinally, a SOTF, does not have to be led by an O-5, in reality, the SOCOM

1282 Mintzberg, "Organization Design: Fashion or Fit?"

culture has embedded the concept of the O-5 led SOTF into its deployed environments, especially within combat areas of operation. MARSOC could better employ its resources by adapting to the culture of SOCOM in the area, while maintaining the best elements of the MSOC concept, within an O-5 Command structure.

In the Philippines, starting in 2017, the MSOC has achieved a measure of its intended purpose. Led by an O-4, MARSOC MSOC's command a SOTF responsible for advising a large indigenous force in their fight against violent extremist organizations. In the Philippines, the MSOC has demonstrated agility, however, its value is still limited. In the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the authority to employ fire support from artillery or aircraft has been limited to the ground force commander in combat or the first O-5, or higher, in the chain of command. Current fire support doctrine states that "the supported commander may delegate target engagement authority to the lowest level of command of the supported forces."[1283] In the Philippines, Africa, Afghanistan, Iraq and in most foreseeable irregular warfare environments, except in rare circumstances, O-4 commanders have not been delegated engagement authority. Therefore, it is difficult to foresee an operational environment where O-4 MSOC commanders possess the necessary delegated target engagement authority to exercise full spectrum military assistance in irregular warfare. MARSOC can improve its operational agility by streamlining and replacing the O-4 command billet with an O-5 who is far more likely to receive delegated target engagement authority and exercise the full spectrum of military capabilities.

Administratively, since MARSOC operates within the larger Marine Corps promotion system, MARSOC should ensure that it operates as efficiently as possible within those constraints. In the future, MARSOC should research ways to modify the basic career path outside of the rest of the Marine Corps to better align with its organizational needs and the operational environment, however, MARSOC should also seek ways now to become more efficient and effective within the Marine Corps' cultural and administrative constraints. One of the most significant administrative constraints is the officer promotion

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[1283] Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Fire Support* JP 3–09 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014), IV-7.

system, which revolves around command opportunities. In the Marine Corps, key commands are the platoon (O-1), Company (O-3), Battalion (O-5), and Regiment (O-6). Although O-4 commands do exist, they are considered as enhancing but not essential. Instead, key O-4s in the Marine Corps generally occupy staff positions. By eliminating a key command billet at the O-4 level, MARSOC could also greatly expand the operational opportunities and capabilities for MARSOC O-5 Command, which would create further opportunities for career retention and for more greatly integrating within SOCOM and the rest of the Marine Corps.

An alternative is to take the operational advantages that the MSOC currently provides and mesh them with the SOCOM and Marine Corps' structural operational and administrative command level norms at the O-5 level of command. This fusion requires restructuring MARSOC's operational commands around the proposed two MRRs. This transformation of the MSOC-MRB command would have significant organizational benefits, including flattening the organization, defusing authority, reducing unnecessary communication, enabling task, billet, and unit continuity, and decreasing communication lag time across the organization. The exact model deserves additional study, but Figure 55 provides a potential option for how this reconfiguration could work. Currently, MARSOC's operational units are structured around one MRR, three MRBs, 12 MSOCs, and 48 MSOTs. MARSOC could shift to two MRRs, eight MRBs (SOTF-N Model), and 5-6 MSOTs per MRB for a total of 40-48 MSOTs. Aside from the agility gained from flattening the organization, reducing 15 MRB/MSOC headquarters to eight headquarters would reduce the resources, and manpower required to fill these levels of command.
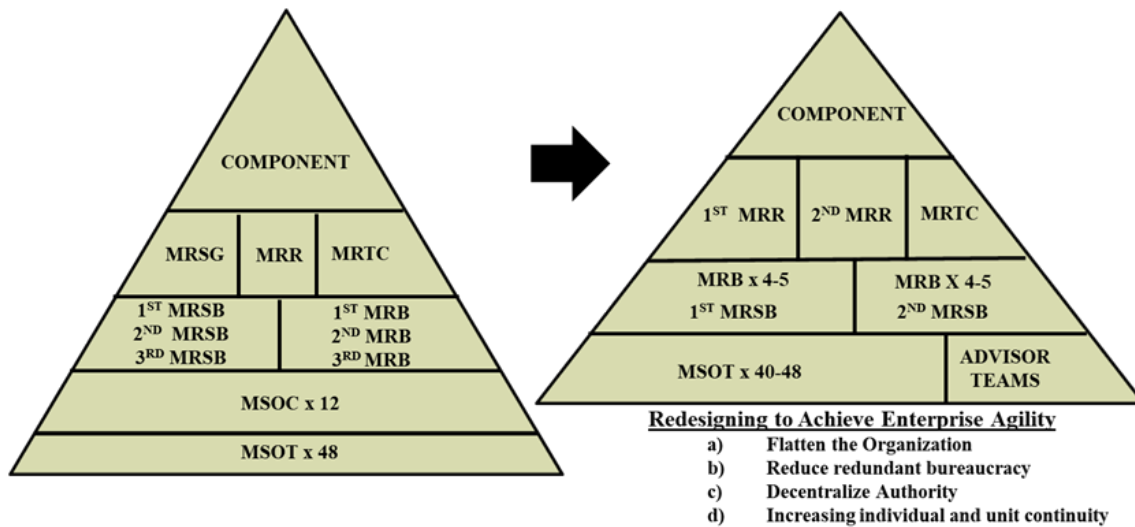
Figure 55. Flattening MARSOC's Organizational Structure

MARSOC has faced deficiencies since 2006 in providing the manpower and equipment to deploying MSOCs or SOTFs. One root cause for this deficiency lies in a quantitative shortage of material resources and support personnel to staff and supply all deploying units simultaneously. This shortage has forced MARSOC to rotate high demand equipment and support personnel between deploying units.[1284] Transforming the current MSOC into an MRB headquarters would allow the MRR level of command to absorb many administrative and logistic responsibilities and allow the O-5 level of command to orient more directly on global, regional, and local operational environments. This structure adaptation would also increase the number of O-5 operational levels of command available within MARSOC. When accounting for the two additional support battalions under the proposed two MRRs, MARSOC would increase from six current O-5 commands to ten commands, a 66% increase of MARSOC internal command opportunities.

Two primary counterarguments arise from this proposed transformation of the MRB and MSOC. First, some might argue that the MSOC provides invaluable mentorship and supervision of MSOT leadership. Second, some might question what to do with the left-over O-4s and senior enlisted leadership formerly within the MSOC structure.

[1284] Major Bailey's observations between 2013–2016 as an MSOT Commander, MSOC Executive Officer, and Headquarters Company Commander.

Mentorship of the MSOT-level leadership is a valid concern; however, the risks incurred can be surmounted. First, in the rest of the Marine Corps, an O-3 reports directly to an O-5 with no intervening command. If a company commander cannot handle that responsibility, he is relieved. Furthermore, the Battalion executive officer and operations officer both play a significant role in mentoring company commanders in conventional Marine Battalions. The same can apply to the transformed MRB/MSOC. This new structure could enable more, not less, mentorship more directly between both O-4s, O-5s and their senior enlisted leadership. The second issue of what to do with the additional O-4s and senior enlisted leadership in lieu of MSOC command will be addressed further in the section on "Rigidly Structuring Agility."

(3) Decentralizing Authority

Reduction of redundant bureaucracy will allow MARSOC to decentralize authority, a key principle to enhancing agility.[1285] Condensing MSOC and MRB together will automatically require defusing authority in terms of manpower, resources, and the ability to coordinate between each level of command. MARSOC can take advantage of this diffusion by decentralizing authority down to the MSOT level as well as enable a more external operational focus for the new concept of the MRB headquarters. Right now, the MSOC absorbs the majority of the operational intelligence collections assets within MARSOC. Meshing the MRB and MSOC together would reduce the sourcing requirements for high-demand intelligence personnel and equipment from 15 MSOCs and MRBs down to 10 MRBs, a 33% reduction. Decentralization, however, requires professionalizing the force to effectively wield the additional authority.

(4) Continuity in Tasks, Billets, and Units

Professionalism requires time and continuity in tasks, billets, and units. A major problem in the U.S. military's approach to irregular warfare has been the lack of continuity in individuals and units assigned to an operational environment, whether in Vietnam, El

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[1285] Daft, 10th ed., 30–31.

Salvador, Afghanistan, or Iraq.[1286] This gap in continuity, and resulting lack of professional understanding and expertise begins at the service level, since SOF services provide the forces that deploy. Irregular threats and environments require greater continuity in assignment of leadership, billets, and units. This requirement for continuity translates to keeping more people in place for longer periods of time at every level of command and, whenever possible, applying the same individuals and units to the same missions in the same locations. Ultimately, this continuity will enable and incentivize long-term strategic thinking and effectiveness. By 'flattening' the organization, MARSOC can improve continuity throughout the Component, which could translate into better individual and unit tactical and strategic capabilities. These capabilities can then more effectively orient on the operational threats, partners, and environments, rather than on rapid rotation. The greater continuity and expertise will, in turn, enhance institutional capabilities and professionalization at all levels of command.

(5)   Rigidly Structuring Agility

Reducing redundant bureaucracy, decentralizing authority, and enhancing continuity is not enough to achieve enterprise agility; MARSOC needs to also rigidly structure agility into its organization. Although, as Hy Rothstein explains, "there is no 'one best way' to organize," MARSOC can build-in greater agility to adapt within operational environments.[1287] MARSOC can structure this agility by establishing and incentivizing an experimental culture. This study recommends fusing existing elements within MARSOC to create an agile command structure and experimental culture to lead a strategy focused on specific threats, indirect approaches, and strategic outcomes. This study proposes naming this concept the Irregular Warfare Group (IWG). Experimental, or learning, organizations innovate through adapting and learning from success and failure.[1288] They

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1286 Chapters 3–5 discuss the gaps in continuity in the U.S. military's experiences in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan. Derek Eaton et al., *Supporting Persistent and Networked Special Operations Forces (SOF) Operations*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp, 2017), 13–14, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1333.html.

1287 Rothstein, "A Tale of Two Wars," 253.

1288 Daft, 10th ed., 31.

also task-organize for missions that require adaptability and innovation to overcome complexity and uncertainty in the environment.[1289] This experimental culture must be led by mature and capable individuals who can think strategically, collaborate, adapt, and innovate, produce and implement new approaches. This experimental concept can apply to technology but is grounded in the cognitive domain and can apply to organizational design or operational approaches. Figure 56 depicts a graphic of what the Irregular Warfare Group could look like to implement rigidly structured agility within MARSOC.

This study recommends creating the Irregular Warfare Group from existing infrastructure that merges their functions under a single authority. The Irregular Warfare Group could potentially exist within each MRR or directly within the component headquarters. Either way, the intent and endstate would be the same, to implement a relational maneuver way of war and *MARSOF 2030*'s guiding concepts, focused on influencing strategic outcomes against specific irregular threat networks.

[1289] Mintzberg, "Organization Design: Fashion or Fit?," 10–12.
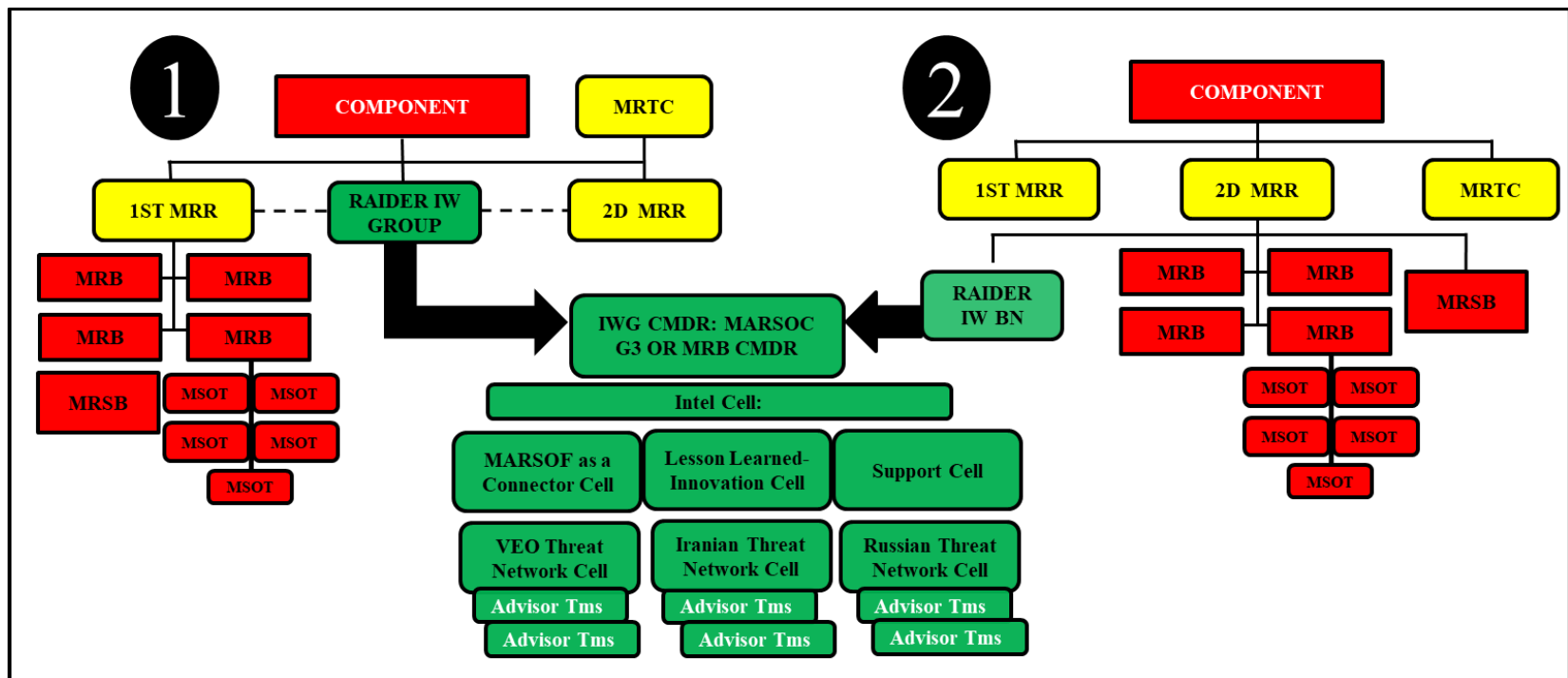
Figure 56. Options for Restructuring MARSOC to include an Irregular Warfare Group

MARSOC's updated organizational vision, centered on confronting irregular threats should drive this proposed Irregular Warfare Group. For illustrative purposes, this section will use jihadist VEOs, Iran, and Russia as MARSOC's prioritized threat networks. For this example, the IWG could orient around these three threat networks in a task-force cell-like structure that includes an intelligence cell, interagency and coalition force integration cell, lessons learned and technological innovation cell, and the, main-effort, advisory cell. The advisory cell would consist of tested and proven O-4/O-5 level officers and E-7/E-8 level senior enlisted, made available through meshing the MSOC-MRB. These advisors would then embed with strategically relevant indigenous partners confronting the prioritized threat networks through existing military and SOF exchange and liaison programs. Because these threat networks will have significant network overlaps, this model would require close collaboration between each transregional cell within the group to inform and influence desired national strategic outcomes. The IWG would further represent the central hub for developing the institutional knowledge and expertise to effectively confront these threats. At the component level, the IWG could fuse the intelligence capabilities, force development and modernization, and other functions into an mission-focused operational construct that informs the MARSOC Commanding General, facilitates persistent presence against national and organizational priority threats, and connects with deploying MARSOC MRBs, MSOTs, conventional forces, interagency, and coalition partners oriented on the same threats, partners, and operational environments. This team or task-force like structure would better focus resources and facilitate collaboration, innovation, and adaptation to overcome national threat priorities.

(6)   People: Incentivizing Professionalization

To improve effectiveness in irregular warfare, MARSOC needs to incentivize professionalization in three ways. First, MARSOC can significantly incentivize its people by focusing on the external threats facing the nation. Currently, internal bureaucratic considerations, rather than strategic effectiveness in the operational environment, too often

drive MARSOC's decision making.[1290] This internal bureaucratic focus clashes with the intrinsically motivated individuals in MARSOC and SOF in general. MARSOC Marines will generally be better incentivized to stay in MARSOC if the organization rebalances priorities toward confronting external threats over internal administrative concerns. Second, MARSOC should recognize the advantages of remaining a small organization. SOF's strategic advantages in irregular warfare come, in large part, from its professional ability to operate in austere and dangerous environments with a small footprint. In organizational design terms, as organizational size increases, agility and flexibility decrease. MARSOC should embrace its small size and embrace the agility that small size enables.

Third, and finally, MARSOC should incentivize embedded advisor billets. The U.S. military's experiences in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan demonstrate that the military, including SOF, generally reward traditional billets in standard career paths. These conflicts also demonstrate that basic military structures are often tailored in irregular warfare to create new structures built around advisor constructs like Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT), District or Provincial Augmentation Teams (DAT/PAT), or the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program in Vietnam. MARSOC should recognize this trend and incentivize embedded advisor positions through the IWG concept, making these positions selective and elevating their status within MARSOC and the Marine Corps' promotion system.

Overall, these organizational design recommendations reflect the need for proactive agility to adapt within irregular operational environments. This proactive agility aligns with the principles of relational maneuver and will enable MARSOC to recognize threat vulnerabilities, adapt internally, and exploit those vulnerabilities to influence strategic success. Figure 57 depicts that MARSOC can be most strategically relevant by gravitating toward proactive agility while retaining reactive agility characteristics through its MSOTs and transformed MRB levels of command.

[1290] Interview with Col Travis Homiak, July 20, 2018; Interview with LtCol Ronald Norris, September 6, 2018; Major Bailey's personal observations between 2013–2017.
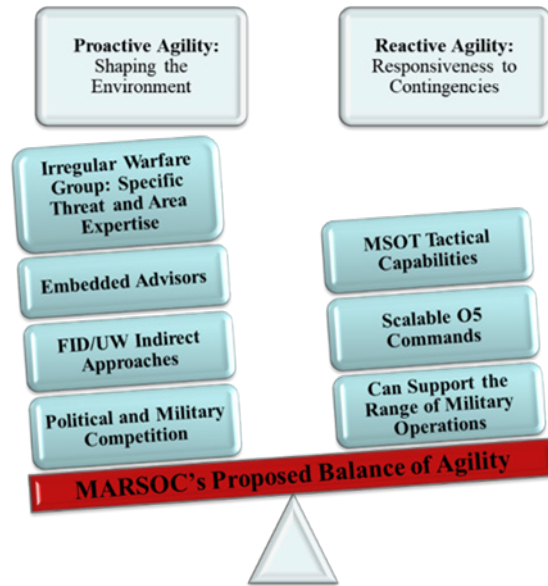
Figure 57. MARSOC's Balance of Agility

7.   Pursuing Effective Operational Approaches

The output of strategy is the approach implemented. Although irregular warfare and real-world operational environments are too unique, complex and uncertain to provide standardized approaches for success, what is evident from the history of irregular warfare in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan is that strategic success requires advisors that can understand and balance political and violent operational approaches. To achieve greater strategic effectiveness in irregular warfare, MARSOC should invest more heavily in the role of advisors. This section explores models that MARSOC should consider for more heavily investing in advisor-led approaches as well as existing military programs to facilitate these models.

a.   Models for Embedded Advisors

MARSOC should consider four models for its expanded strategic use of advisors, including Edward Lansdale, John Paul Vann, Lieutenant Colonel Ed Norris, and the use of MSOTs across Iraq and Afghanistan. These models span from the theater-strategic down to the tactical level of war. The consistent thread across all four models is the ability to

embed with the partner political and military forces to develop a deeper understanding of the threat(s) and operational environment and develop paths to achieve strategic outcomes.

Edward Lansdale's advisor experiences provides a useful and powerful example of the theater-strategic political-military advisor. He represents an important model for MARSOC to consider because he recognized and prioritized political competition to overcome the irregular threats both in the Philippines and Vietnam. His effectiveness stemmed from his embedded understanding of the social-political causes of conflict, his ability to forge strategic relationships, and his work with the indigenous partners to pursue strategic political-military outcomes.[1291]

John Paul Vann's experience as a political-military advisor provides another useful model which spanned the tactical through operational levels of warfare in Vietnam.[1292] Initially as an Army advisor to tactical Vietnamese infantry units, Vann saw the problem in Vietnam as primarily military, that could be solved through the better use of violence.[1293] Over his persistent engagement for nearly 10 years, however, Vann's understanding of the threat and operational environment evolved, and he came to recognize the social-political roots of the threats in Vietnam. Along with his understanding, his recommended approaches to overcoming the threat in Vietnam adapted as well.[1294] Vann's multiple prolonged deployments and dedicated focus contributed to the adjustments that U.S. military made after 1968 which assisted in stabilizing South Vietnam up to the U.S. abandonment of Vietnam by 1973.[1295] John Paul Vann's model reveals the advantages achieved through dedicated focus on a specific threat and operational environment, and how this enhanced his understanding and ability to adapt and influence strategic outcomes.

[1291] Boot, *The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale*.

[1292] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*.

[1293] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 66, 317.

[1294] Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, 66–317.

[1295] Colby and McCargar, *Lost Victory*, 235–58; Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, Book 7.

More recently, Lieutenant Colonel (LtCol) Ronald Norris provides MARSOC an internal example of the SOF political-military advisor's role in recent irregular warfare.[1296] As an MSOC commander in Herat Province, Afghanistan between 2013 and 2014, LtCol Norris determined that he could best strategically contribute to the mission in Western Afghanistan by forging relationships with the Provincial Governors in Herat and Farah provinces and connecting these political leaders to his primary indigenous military partners, the 2nd Afghan National Army Special Operations Brigade (ANASOB) Commander. On his own initiative, LtCol Norris guided his subordinate MSOT Commanders to develop relationships with district-level governance and connect this governance to their partnered Afghan Commando Kandaks. This development of relationships enabled the MARSOC units operating across western Afghanistan to gain situational awareness across the provincial levels of governance. This awareness enabled his Marines' ability to partner with Afghan leadership, respond to military crises across Farah and Herat, as well as to influence their partners to meet U.S. military objectives in Western Afghanistan. LtCol Norris provides a model for embedding experienced SOF leadership in political-military positions to effectively understand and influence the threat and contextual environment.

The MSOT provides a fourth example for effective adviser practices in irregular warfare. The MSOT model is historically rooted in the Vietnam Combined Action Program (CAP) in Vietnam as well as the Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA). Like other models, the MSOT proved itself in Afghanistan and Iraq as an effective and adaptive model that facilitates advising across the range of train, advise, assist, and accompany (TAAA) missions in irregular warfare environments. The adaptability of this model is further demonstrated by the fact that MSOTs often subdivide into two or more smaller elements often for entire deployments to adapt to the challenges faced. This agility, and the effectiveness it facilitates, demonstrates that the MSOT should be retained for its versatility for both responsive and proactive agility. The professionalization advocated in

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[1296] Analysis of LtCol Norris in Afghanistan by his subordinate Team Commander, then Captain Paul Bailey, who served under his command in western Afghanistan between 2013 and 2014.

this study will only further enhance the ability of the Marine Raiders in MSOT to succeed in political-military complexity and uncertainty.

b.   *Existing Military Programs to Implement Embedded Advisors*

To implement a great emphasis on advisor-led operational approaches, MARSOC should leverage the Army Special Forces Volckmann Program and existing Marine Corps Partnership Exchange Programs (PEP) and SOCOM liaison opportunities. In 2011, then-Colonel Eric Wendt argued that the Army Special Forces should adopt a long-term small footprint strategy and indirect approaches to confront and overcome irregular VEO threats around the world.[1297] He offered as the core of this strategy the Volckmann Program, named after an Army officer serving in the Philippines in World War II that organized and led a 22,000 man guerrilla army and waged insurgency against the Japanese occupiers between 1942 and 1945.[1298] In the modern era, this program would consist of virtually the exact approach advocated in this study to MARSOC. The application of dedicated personnel to become subject matter experts to particular countries would advise and assist that country to confront and overcome the political and military threats as part of a larger global strategy and approach. Colonel (now Lieutenant General) Wendt explained that this approach would not require additional authorities, headquarters or funding since the program would tap into existing programs. Whenever possible, the Volckmann operators would live in their assigned country as part of the U.S. embassy in the Security Cooperation Office (SCO) as a normal PCS duty assignment. Colonel Wendt further explained that, for this approach to be strategically effective, it would require participation of the Joint Force and SOCOM.[1299]

A MARSOC equivalent could perhaps be named the Carlson Program, after plank-owning Raider Evans Carlson's time serving in China, and the IWG could manage it by persistently rotating individuals through its strategically prioritized operational environments using selected officers and senior non-commissioned officers to source these

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[1297] Wendt, "The Green Beret Volckmann Program: Maximizing the Prevent Strategy."

[1298] Wendt, "The Green Beret Volckmann Program: Maximizing the Prevent Strategy."

[1299] Wendt, "The Green Beret Volckmann Program: Maximizing the Prevent Strategy."

billets. These individuals and billets would provide the forward-deployed personnel to lead MARSOC's influence of strategic outcomes. Ideally, these individuals would then directly interact with MSOTs and SOTFs that deploy to the region for short duration rotations. In 2015, *Special Warfare* republished Lieutenant General (LTG) Wendt's original article along with a follow up article that explained that the Army Special force has begun a "pilot phase" implementation of the Volckmann Program.[1300] MARSOC should borrow and tap into the concepts identified by LTG Wendt to pursue its own organizational strategy.

To implement a Volckmann-like persistent engagement advisor-led operational approach, MARSOC's IWG should integrate the available Marine Corps and SOCOM programs already in place. The Marine Corps currently employs Foreign Area Officers (FAO) and limited partnership exchange programs each year.[1301] MARSOC should tap into and expand these programs to apply its threat-specific transregional networked strategy and approach.

SOCOM also possesses several liaison programs and commands within its global network, well suited to enable a Volkmann-like operational approach. MARSOC could strategically use the Special Operations Liaison Officer (SOLO), Special Operations Forces Liaison Elements (SOFLE), Special Operations Command Forward (SOCFWD), and Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs) overlaid on its prioritized threat networks, partners, and operational environments.[1302] In 2017, RAND produced a research report synthesizing the lessons learned, challenges, and options for improving SOF's "unity and continuity of effort to achieve U.S. strategic objectives."[1303] This report states that:

[1300] Maurice Duclos and Ronald Dempsey, "The Volkmann Program: Maximizing the Prevent Strategy - Version 2.0," *Special Warfare* 28, no. 3 (2015): 18.

[1301] William D, Chesarek Jr., "Foreign Personnel Exchange Programs: A Supporting Effort in Building Partnership Capacity," (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 2008); Department of the Navy, "Marine Corps Order 1520.11F"; Department of the Navy, "Marine Corps Order 5700.4E."

[1302] John Leitner, Cory Bieganek, and Phillip Madsen, *Special Operations Liaison Officer: Looking Back to See the Future* (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2014); Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations* JP.3-05.

[1303] Eaton et al., *Supporting Persistent and Networked Special Operations Forces (SOF) Operations*, 21.

With the exception of such positions as SOLOs, SOF deployments rarely extend to one year. SOF personnel identified short deployments with very few mechanisms to ensure continuity of effort as an important challenge to building effective, persistent presence and meeting U.S. strategic objectives. For phase 0 and phase 1 missions in which SOF personnel build on the work that previously deployed personnel have done, lack of detailed knowledge of past operations and future planned operations can undermine the long-term trajectory and ultimate achievement of GCC objectives.[1304]

RAND further "identified SOFLEs, such as SOLOs and other liaison officers, as linchpins for improving unity and continuity of effort."[1305] Figure 58 identifies the mechanisms, produced by RAND, that MARSOC could use to build its threat network advisor led approach.[1306] The bullets highlighted in yellow are especially relevant to the recommendations outlined in this chapter. Of particular note, the SOLO and SOFLE programs provide two of the potentially most critical small footprint options for MARSOC to establish deep understanding of the operational environment and strategic relationships necessary for strategic success.

[1304] Eaton et al., *Supporting Persistent and Networked Special Operations Forces (SOF) Operations*, 15.

[1305] Eaton et al., *Supporting Persistent and Networked Special Operations Forces (SOF) Operations*, 21.

[1306] Eaton et al., *Supporting Persistent and Networked Special Operations Forces (SOF) Operations*, 4.
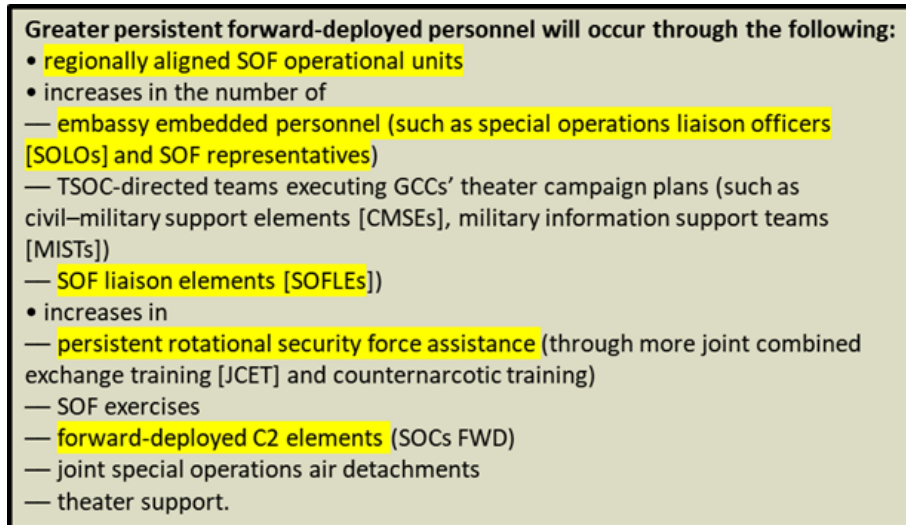
Figure 58. Options to Apply Advisor-Led Operational Approaches[1307]

Overall, this study advocates that MARSOC expand its advisory tasks and structures beyond the MSOT and make it a priority effort to emplace strategically embedded advisors, down to the individual level, oriented on MARSOC's prioritized threat networks, partners, and operational environments. These enduring advisors can provide the best pathway for MARSOC to achieve enduring institutional understanding, relationships, and ability to influence strategic outcomes.

C.   CONCLUSION

This chapter consolidated seven of the major challenges that SOF faces in producing strategic outcomes in irregular warfare. Section A outlined these challenges broadly relevant to SOF as well as MARSOC. Section B then translated these seven challenges to MARSOC and offered specific recommendations to overcome these challenges. The paths to adapt and overcome these challenges all derive from the principles of relational maneuver, applying them to irregular threats and warfare. MARSOC reflects many of the challenges that confront SOF and the U.S. military writ large. The U.S. military shows a gap in producing strategically successful outcomes against threats in irregular

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    1307 Source: Eaton et al., *Supporting Persistent and Networked Special Operations Forces (SOF) Operations*, 4.

warfare. At the heart of this gap lies deficiencies in understanding both the threat and the larger social-political context by too narrowly focusing on violence rather than politically centered strategic thinking, and a failure to properly wage political and violent competition at all levels of warfare. The unbalanced military tendencies toward internal administrative bureaucratic constraints drive short billet assignments, short deployment rotations, and degrade focused long-term attention on known strategic threats to U.S. interests.

The guiding principles in *MARSOF 2030* closely mirror the principles of relational maneuver applied to irregular warfare. To effectively pursue *MARSOF 2030*'s four guiding concepts, MARSOC should focus its organizational strategy. Each of the four pathways, "Cognitive Raider," "Enterprise Agility", "MARSOF as a Connector," and "Combined Arms for the Connected Arena," represent effective pathways to apply to MARSOC; however, left unfocused, these pathways will not be effectively realized and will leave MARSOC without a sense of organizational purpose, which will impede its ability to provide superior strategic utility to the DoD, Marine Corps, or SOCOM. MARSOC needs an achievable strategy and commander's intent with a clearly defined purpose and endstate. If that endstate is left vague or undefined, as it currently is, MARSOC will not achieve its potential.

This study concludes that MARSOC is well suited to provide strategic utility to this nation's defense by better balancing the military's short-term tactical focus with a longer-term strategic perspective oriented toward specific transregional threats. Taking into account its organizational culture and design, as depicted in Figure 59, MARSOC needs to use the principles of relational maneuver to move away from an internal attritional focus and move toward an externally focused strategic warfare that understands the relevant threat networks, recognizes U.S. and indigenous political interests, and influences strategic outcomes.
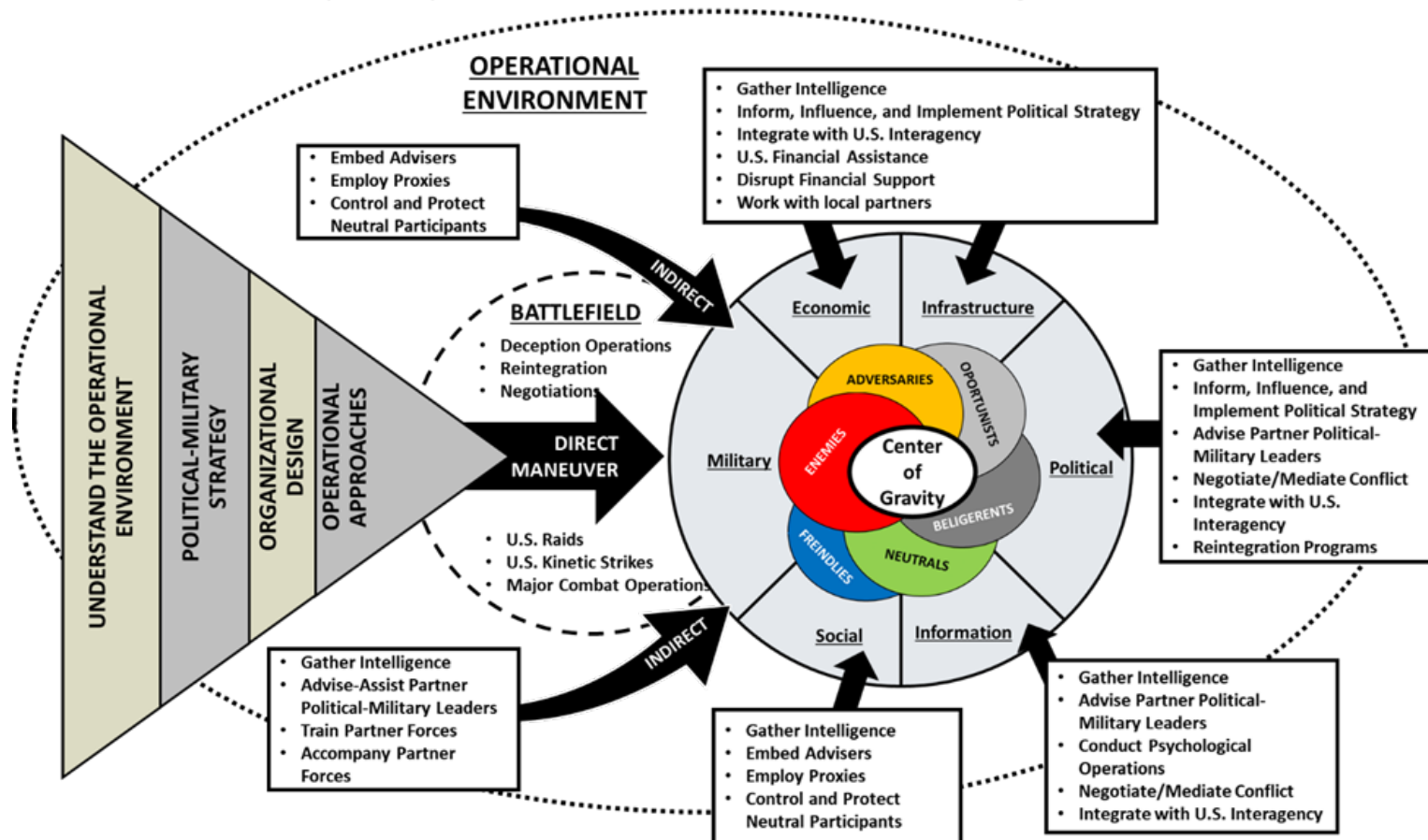
Figure 59. MARSOC's Application of Relational Maneuver

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IX. DISCOVERIES, DISCLAIMERS, AND FURTHER RESEARCH

> Manoeuvre, by contrast, is not a familiar practice in recent American military operational form. In fact, in the language of the US Army, manoeuvre is frequently confused with mere movement, or at least offensive movement. Manoeuvre may well call for movement but it is very much more than that. It can be applied not only in ground combat but in all warfare, and indeed in all things military, even research and development. Manoeuvre describes 'relational' action - that is, action guided by a close study of the enemy and *of his* way of doing things – where the purpose is to muster some localized or specialized strength against the identified points of weakness of an enemy that may have superiority overall.
>
> —Edward Luttwak, 1979[1308]

The ultimate goal of this study has been to provide implementable recommendations to enhance MARSOC's strategic utility through better applying relational maneuver in irregular warfare. To get to these recommendations, Part 1: "To Know One's Enemy" first defined irregular warfare, irregular operational environments, and relational maneuver. In doing so, Part 1 revealed how the uncertainty caused by political fragmentation in irregular environments require relational maneuver's nuanced understanding of the environment, a unified strategy that addresses politics and violence, adaptive organizational design, and operational approaches that balance political and violent competition. Relational maneuver, overall, subordinates internal organizational preferences to an external orientation on the threat and operational environment, identifies vulnerabilities in the threat system, adapts, and leverages internal strengths against external weakness (See Figure 60). The net effect of properly employed relational maneuver is the achievement of desired strategic policy objectives. However, the military's employment of relational maneuver provides no guarantee of ultimate strategic success.

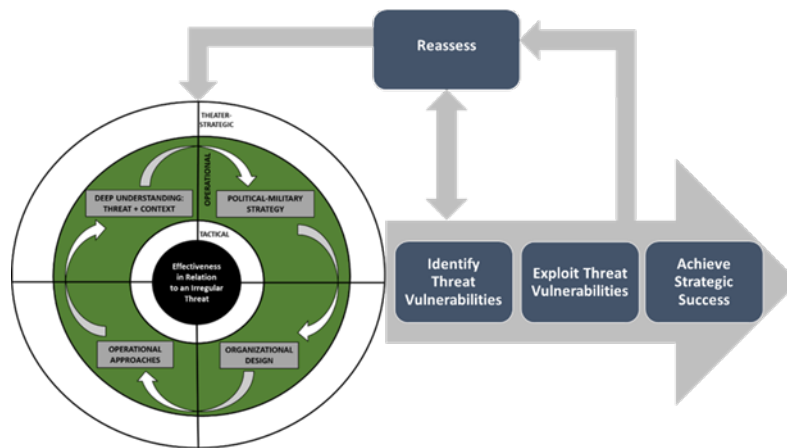[1308] Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance*,"* 57–58.

Figure 60. Relational Maneuver in Irregular Warfare

Part 1 then applied the relational maneuver analytical framework to the U.S. military's irregular warfare efforts in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan. The analysis of the military's efforts in these conflicts validated relational maneuver's strategic effectiveness in irregular warfare. These cases also revealed that the U.S. military at large gravitates more toward a traditional conception of warfare, more similar to attritional warfare, than relational maneuver. An attritional style of warfare focuses internally to gain efficiency, depends on technological innovation and mass production of firepower, and views the enemy as a "mere inventory of targets and warfare is a matter of mustering superior resources to destroy his forces by sheer firepower and weight of materiel [sic]."[1309] To the extent that the military employs relational maneuver, it does so on the physical battlespace in combat. These attritional tendencies have prevented the U.S. military, including special operations forces (SOF), from gaining an understanding of, or adequately adapting itself to, the political and military operational environment. Ultimately, the U.S. military has been largely unable to inform and influence strategy or implement operational approaches that exploit threat vulnerabilities to achieve strategic success. In irregular warfare, operational and strategic success derives from the use of

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[1309] Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance," 57.

relational maneuver and from the understanding that irregular warfare is best considered as "armed politics" (See Figure 61).[1310]
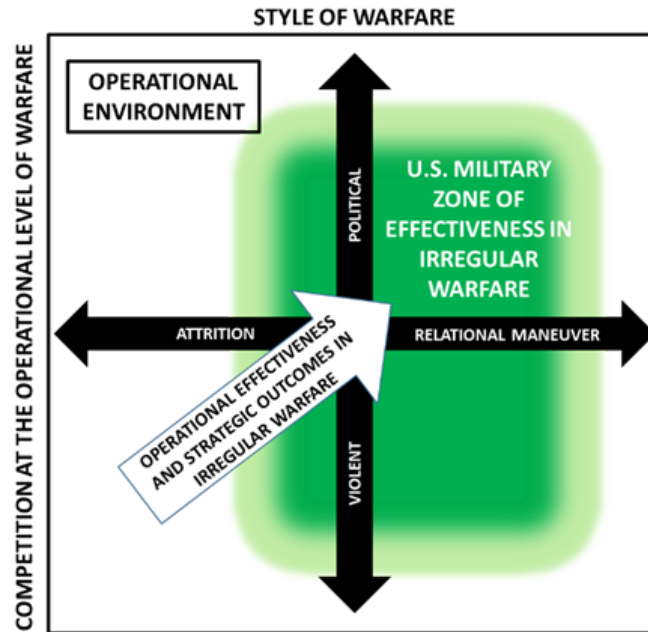

Figure 61. Zone of Effectiveness in Irregular Warfare

Part 2: "To Know Oneself" transitioned from assessing the external irregular operational environment and threats to analyzing SOF's relational maneuver advantages as the force of choice in irregular warfare. Part 2 then conducted an open systems analysis of MARSOC's operational organizational design, viewed through the lens of relational maneuver and the transposed goal for achieving strategic effectiveness within irregular operational environments. The results of this analysis identified that MARSOC possesses many relational maneuver advantages, but also suffers inhibitors to the implementation of relational maneuver. Perhaps most significantly, the examination demonstrated that uncertainty, misalignment, and fragmentation exists within MARSOC's organizational strategy, design, and culture, which inhibit its general cohesion, effectiveness, and strategic utility to the Department of Defense (DoD), Marine Corps, and SOCOM.

[1310]Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*, 11.

The external analysis of Part 1 and internal analysis in Part 2 then enabled Part 3's: "Success in Irregular Warfare" synthesis of the challenges faced by U.S. military, SOCOM, and MARSOC and the production of specific recommendations to overcome these challenges. These recommendations and the study as a whole have basically produced three intermediate arguments that support the final objective argument. First, this study has argued and demonstrated that irregular warfare is primarily different from traditional warfare due to the existence of political competition that permeates to the most tactical levels of warfare. This competition produces complexity, instability, and, most importantly, uncertainty as to who the relevant political actors are, what their objectives are, and how to influence the actors and objectives to achieve U.S. interests. Second, because of the character of irregular warfare, strategic success requires the U.S. military to pursue a relational maneuver style of warfare to properly influence the environment and achieve strategic objectives. Third, this study demonstrated that most of the U.S. military, including MARSOC, needs to rebalance its attritional style of warfare to implement more relational maneuver, especially given the current and future prevalence of irregular and proxy warfare.
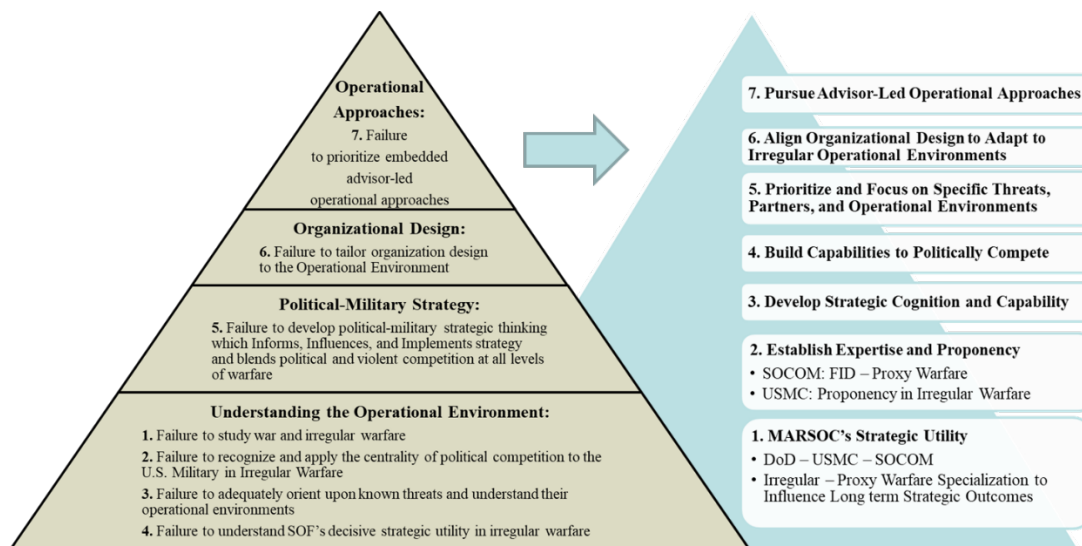

Figure 62. MARSOC's Path to Strategically Implement Relational Maneuver

These three intermediate arguments produced seven nested recommendations within a proposed MARSOC strategy, founded on Relational Maneuver, that seeks to directly align MARSOC's utility to influence and achieve strategically successful outcomes in irregular warfare (See Figure 62). The seven recommendations predominantly require merely focusing the stated principles in MARSOC's newly published organizational vision, *MARSOF 2030*.[1311] *MARSOF 2030* already properly identifies MARSOC's strategic operational environment now and in the future. What it lacks is how to harness the Relationally Maneuver-attuned guiding concepts in *MARSOF 2030* while focusing and directing them in a way that provides strategic utility to MARSOC's primary stakeholders (DoD, Marine Corps, SOCOM) and enables MARSOC's internal unity of purpose to realize its strategic potential.

This concluding chapter synthesizes the primary points determined in this study, outlines the discoveries identified by this research that were not originally identified in its scope and purpose, provides several significant disclaimers and limitations within the study, and finally provides areas for further research in areas relevant to the scope of this study. This chapter and study conclude with a challenge to SOF leaders and operators at all levels to more deeply explore the historical challenges faced by the U.S. military and SOF at large to better balance the development of 'special' tactical capabilities and the strategic thinking and approaches that this nation needs to translate special skills into strategic outcomes.

A.   DISCOVERIES

Beyond tailoring recommendations to MARSOC through case-study insights, this study produced three specific insights not previously considered when research began. First, research re-discovered the centrality of politics in irregular warfare and reconsidered how to frame political competition and its decisive role in irregular warfare. This study arrived at the conclusion that all warfare is political, and that calling irregular warfare political warfare in the George Kennan sense is accurate, but also potentially

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[1311]Marine Special Operations Command, *MARSOF 2030*.

misleading.[1312] Since, as Clausewitz taught, all war is political, calling some warfare political and other not, seems incomplete. Instead, using the DoD's definitions of traditional and irregular warfare, this study identified that in traditional warfare, non-violent political competition occurs primarily at the interstate strategic levels of warfare, whereas in irregular warfare, political competition occurs at every level of warfare. This distinction has important implications for the U.S. military fighting irregular warfare. It means that strategic-level policy-makers and military leaders are not the only ones who need to understand and implement strategy as well as employ political competition.

The U.S. military, and particularly SOF, are often the only representatives from the United States with access to some of the remote and violent areas embroiled in irregular warfare. Regardless of whether another agency in the U.S. government should be conducting political competition with and through indigenous partners in these areas, the U.S. military is often the only available option to lead and conduct this effort. Furthermore, it is irrational to expect that policy-makers in Washington, DC, or even diplomats in a partner's national or provincial capital, would understand the feasibility or application of strategy throughout a diverse country like Afghanistan. This reality makes political competition in irregular warfare a U.S. military problem in all phases of an operation. This study's analysis of the U.S. military's overall efforts in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan strongly supports the assertion that the U.S. military has poorly understood political competition's decisiveness in irregular warfare and has struggled to translate its level of understanding into application and strategic success.

Since strategic success directly depends on the alignment and balance of violence and politics to strategic objectives, this study recommends that MARSOC more fully invest in understanding and waging political competition within the bounds of its legal authorities. Synthesized analysis of several credible studies suggests that political competition can be

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[1312]"George F. Kennan on Organizing Political Warfare," April 30, 1948, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Obtained and contributed to CWIHP by A. Ross Johnson. Cited in his book Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, Ch1 n4 – NARA release courtesy of Douglas Selvage. Redacted final draft of a memorandum dated May 4, 1948, and published with additional redactions as document 269, FRUS, Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320.

thought of as the "making or breaking of coalitions" to influence a certain "distribution of power."[1313] Using this framework for understanding political competition, MARSOC can better consider how to institutionally integrate this capability.

Second, and based on the centrality of political competition in irregular warfare, this study identified the strategic nature of the challenge in irregular warfare. A primary thread presented in the study of the U.S. military experience in irregular warfare has been the problem of strategically aligning military violence to solve political problems. This study re-identified that strategic thinking needs to pervade all levels of command, especially in irregular warfare.[1314] It is not merely the strategic political leaders at the National Security Council or the theater-strategic commander who must employ strategy. The most tactical-level leaders in irregular warfare must think in strategic terms to understand the complex array of U.S., coalition, local partner, and adversarial strategic interests. Military leadership, including within MARSOC, is underprepared for this level of strategic thinking. This strategic thinking, in fact, is closer to national, or grand, strategic thinking than it is to military strategy in traditional warfare, which primarily considers the use of military violence to achieve an objective. This study concludes that MARSOC needs to better develop strategic cognition and capabilities, especially at the most tactical levels of command.

Third, and finally, this study rediscovered the extent to which flawed organizational design can constrain a military from employing relational maneuver in irregular warfare. Misaligning tasks to the operational environment undermines the military's ability to succeed in irregular warfare. Furthermore, organizational structure, which includes individual and unit rotations and assignments, has significantly inhibited strategic effectiveness in irregular warfare and could continue to do so. If there is misalignment to the operational environment, individuals and units do not have the continuity of understanding or unity of effort to overcome complex and uncertain irregular warfare

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[1313] Madden et al., *Toward Operational Art in Special Warfare*, xiii and 22; Department of the Navy, *Warfighting*, 23.

[1314] Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*, 120.

challenges. Across each case study, the military, including SOF, rotated individuals and units through the conflict in a manner that made sense bureaucratically but not strategically. This lack of structural continuity must be corrected to produce more effective outcomes in irregular warfare.

B.   DISCLAIMERS

The size and scope of this research study were the most significant challenges, resulting in its most significant weakness. Since this study seeks to produce timely, relevant, and implementable recommendations to MARSOC, it synthesized and addressed a wide range of the topics deemed most relevant. This breadth of analysis enabled exploring a preponderance of the issues necessary to produce the recommendations, but the large scope also limited the depth of specific analysis in each subject. While confident of the synthesized analysis and recommendations, the scope of this study creates opportunities to debate specific interpretations within each case study and in the internal organizational design analysis of MARSOC. The challenge of scope and size, however, also offers an opportunity for MARSOC, the Marine Corps, and other SOF units to use this analysis and the frameworks as jumping-off points achieve greater strategic effectiveness.

C.   FURTHER RESEARCH

The size and scope of this study provide many further research opportunities. These research opportunities fall into two basic categories, research to implement the recommendations identified in this study and relevant research opportunities that did not fall within this study's scope. Between both categories, this study identifies 15 critical areas for additional research, relevant to MARSOC, relational maneuver, and Irregular Warfare (See Figures 63-64). Additionally, all future research topics can and should be applied to both Naval Special Warfare (NAVSPECWARCOM), Army Special Forces, and potentially the rest of the Marine Corps.

Figure 63. Future Research: Implementation of Recommendations

First, additional study should research how MARSOC should wage political competition in conjunction with conventional, interagency, and indigenous partners within irregular warfare. Political competition, as defined in this study, represents the decisive effort in irregular warfare. An entire thesis should study this topic in line with the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the interagency 2018 Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR) published by the Department of Defense (DoD), State Department (DoS), and United States Agency for International Development (USAID).[1315]

Second, drawing from the guidance from the 2018 NDS and the projected prevalence of irregular warfare, additional research should study how MARSOC should understand and wage proxy warfare within irregular warfare.

Third, research should explore how MARSOC can and should wage unconventional warfare within a larger foreign internal defense campaign.

Fourth, further inquiry should study how MARSOC should implement the transregional threat-centric model of employment recommended in this study. While the

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[1315] Mattis, *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*; "State-USAID-DoD Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR)," U.S. Department of State, accessed October 27, 2018, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/06/283334.htm.

necessity for this approach is explained, scope did not allow for a full investigation on all the relevant factors surrounding its implementation.

Fifth, and related to research Topic Four, research could examine how MARSOC should realign itself structurally to implement the concept of the Irregular Warfare Group (IWG) based on a threat, partner, and operational environment organizational strategy. This study provides two options for implementing the concept of the irregular warfare group and for flattening the organization through merging the Marine Special Operations Companies and Marine Raider Battalions into a single level of command. While the advantages for structurally realigning under two regiments, battalions, and teams is closely researched, the administrative implications for this realignment are not fully examined. Further research is needed to align the number of battalions, teams, and the IWG within the strategy proposed in this study.

Sixth, discussed but not addressed closely enough, MARSOC should examine options for developing a more effective manpower rotation, incentive, and promotion system that better suits the requirements of MARSOC in irregular warfare. This research could examine this question through identifying how to most efficiently and effectively work within the current manpower, incentive, and promotion system. It may also discover options for creating exceptions, memorandums of agreement, or even explore the use of a warrant officer program within MARSOC.

Seventh, MARSOC should more closely study how to implement the concept of advisor-led operational approaches through existing and new Marine Corps and SOCOM models and programs. This research should more fully build and expand upon the ideas outlined in this thesis.

Eighth and finally, research should investigate how MARSOC can achieve proponenecy for irregular warfare within the Marine Corps and in what way MARSOC could better interface to provide strategic utility to the Corps through organizationally maintaining and integrating its expertise of Small Wars. A significant finding from this study indicates that there is still uncertainty about the strategic utility that MARSOC brings to the Marine Corps. MARSOC's assumption of the responsibility for subject matter

expertise within irregular warfare and small wars provides that direct utility. The Marine Corps is largely reorienting on traditional warfare and expeditionary core competencies outside of the scope of irregular warfare. The Marine Corps still recognizes the importance and probability for future operations in irregular warfare. MARSOC can provide that residual expertise and maintain core advisor skills, practices, and lessons learned from its study and continued application around the world.

1. **What are pseudo operations and how are they relevant to MARSOC in contemporary irregular warfare?**
2. **Should SOCOM pursue a threat, partner, and operational environment centric model of employment recommended to MARSOC in this study?**
3. **Threat network studies on Russia, China, N. Korea, Iran and VEOs, and what are the ways that SOF can exploit vulnerabilities within these networks? How are these adversaries waging irregular warfare?**
4. **What role should information technology and cyber capabilities play within MARSOC?**
5. **Using historical examples from the CIA and OSS, how can MARSOC build an enduring female capability to ensure access and understanding across the entire operational environment in irregular warfare?**
6. **Based on the British and French colonial experiences, what are the relevant implications for U.S. SOF persistent engagement around the world?**
7. **Classified research**

Figure 64. Further Research of a Broader Nature

First, for research topics not within the scope of this study, MARSOC should examine pseudo operations and determine how they are relevant to MARSOC in contemporary irregular warfare. This research would directly support MARSOC's efforts to become subject matter experts in irregular warfare and support both better understanding of proxy warfare and how to conduct unconventional warfare within a larger foreign internal defense campaign.

Second, building on the research and recommendations from this study, MARSOC should examine whether SOCOM should pursue a threat, partner, and operational environment centric model of employment.

Third, in support of the relational maneuver requirement to externally orient on the threats, MARSOC should sponsor threat network studies on Russia, China, N. Korea, Iran and VEOs, and determine the ways that SOF can exploit vulnerabilities within these networks. This research should include how these adversaries are waging irregular warfare against the United States as well as historical practices these networks have employed.

Fourth, virtually completely left out of this study, MARSOC should examine what role should information technology and cyber capabilities play within MARSOC. This research opportunity might provide an excellent example to tap into outside research from the Naval Postgraduate School and connect to the rest of the Marine Corps to ensure that its efforts are aligned to the growing necessity to employ these capabilities in the modern and future operating environment.

Fifth, using historical examples from the CIA and OSS, MARSOC should examine how to build an enduring female capability to ensure access and understanding across the entire operational environment in irregular warfare. The controversy surrounding women in combat and special operations should not detract from the fact that men cannot access segments of the operational environment without women. Research should examine how to build an internal enduring MARSOC capability for women outside of the Individual Training Course (ITC) qualification pipeline.

Sixth, MARSOC should examine the British and French colonial experiences to identify the relevant implications for U.S. SOF persistent engagement around the world.

Seventh, and lastly, this study solely conducted unclassified research to ensure the widest possible distribution and access. Future research from MARSOC should include classified studies, particularly for the implementation of recommendations.

D.   CONCLUSION

The 2018 NDS outlines a picture of the current and future operational environment. It is an environment where the U.S. military faces growing conventional military strength from peer and regional competitors; however, it is also an environment where peer, regional, and extremists' networks are employing proxy and irregular warfare to undermine U.S. interests. Current indications reveal that this trend of irregular warfare will likely increase in the future. The U.S. military's and SOF's efforts reveal substantial challenges in understanding irregular warfare and adapting to overcome those challenges. The secrets to success in these environments are not secrets at all. These have been extensively studied, yet their lessons lay largely unimplemented. Relational maneuver provides the style of warfare and philosophy requisite for success. This style of warfare ultimately sacrifices

internal efficiency for the external understanding necessary to identify and exploit threat vulnerabilities to defeat the enemy system. In irregular warfare, this enemy system is often indistinguishable from the larger operational environment.

Relational Maneuver is basically an expanded version of the Marine Corps' Maneuver Warfare applied more directly to the realities of irregular warfare. Maneuver Warfare depends on unity of vision through a clear commander's intent to enable decentralized adaptation and implement the best approaches to achieve the commander's purpose and endstate. MARSOC does not currently possess a strategy and clear commander's intent to apply the foundational tenets of relational maneuver. In all war, but especially applicable in irregular warfare, Clausewitz reminds us of the enduring truth that "the political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and the means can never be considered in isolation from their purposes."[1316] For MARSOC in irregular warfare, this political understanding requires its forces to blend political competition and violence to influence complex, dynamic, and uncertain threats, partners, and operational environments.

Ultimately, as the primary intended audience, this study suggests that MARSOC should more effectively employ relational maneuver to guide its organizational strategy to influence and achieve strategic outcomes. To do so, MARSOC needs to use relational maneuver to more externally orient on the known threats facing the U.S. to develop a **deep understanding of strategic threats, partners and social-political operational environments.** MARSOC must also understand that irregular warfare is **armed politics, and strategy must reflect that political competition is the main effort**. MARSOC should also adjust its organizational design to enable continuity, proactive agility, and decentralization on its prioritized threats partners and environments. Finally, MARSOC should give higher priority to SOF's primary strategic utility in irregular warfare through **advisor-led operational approaches** to influence and achieve strategic outcomes.

[1316] Clausewitz, *On War*, 29.

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