

# **Leveraging Capabilities: The Integration of Special Operation Forces and Conventional Forces**

**A Monograph**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

**LEVERAGING CAPABILITIES: THE INTEGRATION OF SPECIAL OPERATION FORCES AND CONVENTIONAL FORCES** by MAJOR Richard M. Finfera, U.S. Army, 65 pages.

Since September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, Special Operation Forces (SOF) and Conventional Forces (CF) have been increasingly working together throughout the world against numerous asymmetrical threats. However, operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown that there are many situations where SOF and CF do not fully leverage each other's capabilities because they operated along parallel lines of operations, where neither force had any degree of certainty of what the other was doing. In 2009, General McChrystal adopted a strategy for Afghanistan that focuses on the needs of the populace and places Afghan forces in the lead of every effort. If both forces are going to succeed in implementing General McChrystal's new strategy, as well as in future conflicts where they are operating jointly then both forces must learn to leverage each other's capabilities. Specifically, SOF and CF must learn to take an integrated approach to joint operations so that both forces will be able to leverage each other's capability strengths to compensate for their own internal capability limitations, which will allow both forces to operate in the most efficient and effective manner possible. In order to ensure that this transpires changes must occur in how both forces conduct joint operations and changes must be institutionalized in doctrine, education, training, and leadership. Through a DOTMLPF (Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel, and Facilities) comparison of both forces and two case studies, this monograph shows how both forces should leverage each other's capabilities, as well as provides recommendations for the implementation of General McChrystal's new strategy for Afghanistan.

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## Introduction

Since the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, Special Operation Forces (SOF) and Conventional Forces (CF) have been increasingly working together throughout the world against numerous asymmetrical threats. In places like Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Philippines both forces are operating jointly in an attempt to achieve the same operational or strategic end state, but the degree to which they leverage each other's capabilities and integrate their plans and operations varies greatly. In 2009, General McChrystal adopted a new strategy for Afghanistan which focuses on securing the population, building the capacity of the Afghan National Security Force, and ensuring effective governance by the Afghan national government. To implement this strategy, General McChrystal plans to work effectively with the local populace to address their grievances, focus his resources at the critical areas where the population are most threatened, and take the initiative away from the insurgents.<sup>1</sup> If SOF and CF are going to succeed in implementing General McChrystal's new strategy, as well as in future in conflicts where both forces are operating jointly, then they must learn to leverage each other's capabilities.

Thorough research and analysis shows that the optimal method for SOF and CF to leverage each other's capabilities is for both forces to take an integrated approach to joint operations and use each other's capability strengths to compensate for their own internal capability limitations. Operating in this capacity will allow both forces to achieve optimal efficiency and effectiveness. As the two forces integrate their plans, operations, and/or activities, more opportunities will present themselves in specific areas where they can leverage each other's capability strengths, making the sum greater than the whole. By combining these two factors, integration and capability leverage, both forces will operate in the most efficient and effective manner possible, as there will not be duplications in effort. In doing so, the two

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<sup>1</sup> GEN Stanley A. McChrystal, August 30, 2009, *COMISAF'S Initial Assessment*, United States Forces-Afghanistan/International Security Assistance Force-Afghanistan, [http://media.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/politics/documents/Assessment\\_Redacted\\_092109.pdf](http://media.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf) (assessed November 2009).

forces can be maximized to their fullest potential.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, SOF and CF must learn to take an integrated approach to joint operations so that they will be able to leverage each other's capability strengths to compensate for their own internal capability limitations, which will allow both forces to operate in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown that there are many situations where SOF and CF did not fully leverage each other's capabilities because they operated along parallel lines of operations,<sup>3</sup> where neither force had any degree of certainty of what the other was doing. However, joint operational experience between SOF and CF has also shown that both forces are more successful when they work along the same, or complimentary, lines of operations because both forces' plans, operations and activities are mutually supporting to each other. For example, in 2001, SOF and CF were able to remove the Taliban regime from power because their operations were well integrated, which enabled both forces to successfully leverage each other's capabilities. Through integration, CF was able to use SOF's ability to act as a force multiplier by leveraging the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, and SOF was able to use CF's ability to provide close air support by employing the U.S. Air Force against key Taliban targets. Yet, for every successful operation between the two forces there are just as many, if not more, examples of unsuccessful operations where they were not well integrated, and the results were less than optimal.

Part of the reason why both forces have difficulty leveraging each other's capabilities is that joint doctrine and various defense publications do not define how this should be accomplished. In addition to this problem, these bodies of literature also do not adequately address the need for both forces to synchronize and/or nest their plans and operations, which is a key component to integration. When joint

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<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this monograph, capability strengths are defined as any specific task, activity, or action directly supported by the force's DOTMLPF (doctrine, organization, training, material, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities) construct.<sup>2</sup> Capability limitations can be defined as any specific task, activity, or action in which either force's DOTMLPF construct does not directly support. In some cases, a capability limitation may in fact represent a capability which one or both forces do not possess.

<sup>3</sup> Joint Publication (JP) 3-0 defines line of operation as "a logical line that connects actions on nodes and/or deceive points related in time and purpose with an objective." Department of Defense, JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington D.C.: Government Publishing Office (GPO), 17 September 2006, incorporating change 1, 13 February 2008), GL-19.



doctrine discusses joint SOF and CF operations, it mainly focuses on topics such as interdependency, interoperability, and integration. Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, defines integration as “the arrangement of military forces and their actions to create a force that operates by engaging as a whole.”<sup>4</sup> When doctrine addresses this topic, it mainly focuses on the best practices, procedures, and mechanisms to facilitate optimal integration (i.e. command and control relationships, Liaison officer placement, reporting procedures, de-confliction measures, etc.). The problem is that doctrine fails to adequately address the necessity for both forces to nest, synchronize and coordinate their operations, which are all key components to true integration. This problem is further complicated by how doctrine defines synchronization.

JP 1-02, defines synchronization as “the arrangement of military actions in time, space, and purpose to produce maximum relative combat power at a decisive place and time.”<sup>5</sup> This definition is strictly oriented to combat operations and does not adequately describe the need for both forces to nest their activities through the full range of military operations (i.e. offensive, defensive, and stability operations). In irregular warfare, the need “to produce maximum relative combat power at the decisive point” is substantially less than it is during full combat operations.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, when SOF and CF operate in this environment, both forces tend to focus predominantly on synchronizing in time and space and less on purpose. This in-turn causes both forces to operate along parallel lines of operations and never seek to fully leverage each other’s capabilities.

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 12 April 2001, as amended through 17 March 2009), 269.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 536.

<sup>6</sup> JP 1-02 defines irregular warfare as “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over relevant population(s). Irregular warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacity, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will. In terms of combat power, JP 1-02 defined it as “the total means of destruction and/or disruptive force which a military unit/formation can apply against the opponent at a given time.” *Ibid.*, 282, 100.

Regarding interoperability, JP 1-02 defines it as “the ability to operate in synergy in the execution of assigned tasks.”<sup>7</sup> When doctrine addresses this topic it mainly focuses on interoperability as it relates to the specific technical ability needed to facilitate synergy between the two forces (i.e. the interoperability of communication systems, command and control networks, force tracking systems, etc.). This does guide the two forces to work together, but by focusing on the technical aspects of interoperability doctrine fails to properly address how both forces should cooperate in a manner that allows each organization to achieve their objectives in the most efficient and effective manner possible. In terms of interdependency, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, defines it as “the purposeful reliance by one Service’s forces on another Service’s capabilities to maximize the complementary and reinforcing effects of both.”<sup>8</sup> Here doctrine focuses on the need for both forces to leverage each other’s capabilities, but does not adequately define how to accomplish this.

Lastly, when doctrine discusses all of these topics (i.e. integration, interoperability, and interdependency) it predominantly does so in terms of how SOF can support CF operations and not the other way around. Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated the need for both forces to support each other’s operations in different capacities. In failing to address all of these issues, the two forces often operate along parallel lines of operations and never fully exploit each other’s capabilities.<sup>9</sup> In order for both forces to become truly integrated, then doctrine must be updated to address the issues mentioned above. For the purpose of this monograph, SOF and CF integration can be defined as when

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<sup>7</sup> JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 278.

<sup>8</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington D.C.: GPO, February 2008), 1-10.

<sup>9</sup> Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) William Carty speaks of this problem in the article, “Joint Training Must Reflect Combat Realities,” when he stated: “Current conventional service doctrine on employment of SOF is limited. The most significant problem is that the majority of doctrine and traditional planning has primarily focused on coordination and deconfliction of SOF and conventional assets. No official, reference, traditional training, or formal planning framework exist that address true SOF and conventional force integration with the theater in any significant detail. According to current doctrine, SOF and conventional forces operations are conducted primarily in parallel...” LTC William Carty, “Joint Training Must Reflect Combat Realities,” *National Defense*, April 2004, [http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/ARCHIVE/2004/APRIL/Pages/Joint\\_Training3601.aspx](http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/ARCHIVE/2004/APRIL/Pages/Joint_Training3601.aspx) (accessed January 28, 2009).

their plans, operations, activities, and/or actions are coordinated, synchronized, and properly nested so that they are striving towards the same operational and strategic end state.

Beyond doctrine, flaws in training, education, and leadership in both forces further complicate the issue of integration and capability leverage. Both forces are currently undertrained and undereducated on each other's capabilities, as well as the optimal method for employing each other's forces. This can be attributed to a lack of SOF and CF integrated training prior to joint operational deployments, which is mainly due to the high operational tempo both forces have experienced since 2001. In regards to leadership, both forces do not have enough leaders that are willing to enforce stronger integration. It should be intuitive to each leader to coordinate, synchronize, and nest their operations with all forces on the battlefield. All leaders know that this must be accomplished in order to ensure that SOF and CF operations mutually support each other and do not detract from what the other force is trying to accomplish. However, a military organizational culture that promotes personal and organizational agendas sometimes prevents both forces from properly integrating their operations. In other words, the need to receive credit for mission success due to personal or organizational agendas prevents both forces from fully nesting their operations. This specific issue is a research topic all in itself, therefore this monograph will not go into detail on this subject, however it is a key aspect that prevents integration and deserves to be mentioned here. Lastly, the sum of these three issues (education, training, and leadership) has hindered proper integration between the two forces; and has prevented both forces from fully leveraging each other's capabilities.

To address these issues, this monograph is organized as follows: First, SOF and CF are compared using the DOTMLPF (Doctrine, Organization, Training, Material, Leadership and Education, Personnel, and Facilities) construct. This comparison identifies the critical differences between both forces, as well as their internal capability strengths and limitations. Therefore, this comparison serves as a starting point for analyzing SOF and CF joint operations. After the comparison, two case studies are examined in which the two forces operated jointly. These case studies demonstrate how SOF and CF should leverage each other's capabilities through taking an integrated approach to their operations, thus allowing both forces to

operate in the most efficient and effective manner possible. The first case study focuses on the tactical level of war, analyzing SOF and CF joint operations in Afghanistan (2002) during Operation ANACONDA. The second case study focuses on the operational level of war, analyzing how the two forces conducted joint operations in Afghanistan during 2004. Both of these case studies were chosen because of their operational relevance to operations in Afghanistan today and the possibility that the lessons learned in these case studies could be applied to General McChrystal's current strategy which focuses on winning the will of the Afghan populace. Additionally, these case studies are also relevant to any future conflict where SOF and CF are operating jointly against an asymmetrical threat. Lastly, this paper concludes with a summary of key findings and a brief discussion of how organizations could employ their forces under General McChrystal's new strategy. At this point, it is important to note that while there are a number of different U.S. SOF organizations across all services, this monograph primarily focuses on U.S. Army Special Operation Forces, with emphasis on Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operation units.<sup>10</sup> In similar fashion, while U.S. convention forces encompasses a number of different organizations throughout all the services, this monograph primarily focuses on U.S. Army infantry, armor and field artillery units, as well as U.S. Air Force aviation units. Other SOF and CF organizations are mentioned within this monograph, but only in limited fashion. While this does narrow the depth of analysis, the concepts and lessons learned in this monograph still directly apply to any joint operations between SOF and CF units, regardless of their organization.

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<sup>10</sup> Generally speaking the following units make up U.S. Special Operation Forces: Army Special Operation Forces consists of the Ranger, Special Operation Aviation, Psychological Operations, and Civil Affairs units. Marine Special Operation Forces consists of a Marine Special Operation Advisor group and two Marine Special Operations Battalions. Air Force Special Operations Forces consist of Special Tactics, Combat Controller, Pararescue, and Combat Weather units. Navy Special Operation Forces consists of Sea-air-land teams (SEAL), SEAL delivery vehicle teams, and special boat units. Additionally, all special operation units also have designated logistical support organizations at different levels of command.

## DOTMLPF Comparison

Before discussing how both forces should leverage each other's capabilities, there must be a general understanding of the internal capabilities and limitations of each force. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3170.01G<sup>11</sup> defines capabilities as "the ability to achieve a desired effect under specified standards and conditions through combinations of means and ways across the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF) [construct]..." Special operation forces and conventional forces have distinctly different DOTMLPF constructs and these fundamental differences are the sources of both forces' inherent capability strengths and limitations. To understand these differences, this section provides a general overview of both forces' DOTMLPF construct by comparing and contrasting them against each other.

### Doctrine

According to joint doctrine, the purpose of the military is to "fight and win the Nation's wars and effectively carry out all other missions assigned across the range of military operations,"<sup>12</sup> which includes offensive, defensive, and stability operations.<sup>13</sup> In this capacity, CF are required to conduct large scale, force on force military operations against an adversary who employs a variety of conventional military capabilities, as well as conduct small-scale operations that are asymmetrical in nature.<sup>14</sup> Conventional

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<sup>11</sup> Department of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3170.01G, *Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System* (Washington, DC: GPO, March 2009), GL-3, [http://www.dtic.mil/cjcsdirectives/cdata/unlimit/3170\\_01.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/cjcsdirectives/cdata/unlimit/3170_01.pdf) (accessed September 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Department of Defense, JP 1-0, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington D.C.: Government Publishing Office, 20 May 2007, incorporating change 1 March 2009), I-2.

<sup>13</sup> FM 3-0 defines these operations as follows: Offensive operations as "combat operations conducted to defeat and destroy enemy forces and seize terrain, resources, and population centers. They impose the commander's will on the enemy. Defensive operations as "combat operations conducted to defeat an enemy attack, gain time, economize forces, and develop conditions favorable for offensive and stability operations." Stability Operations as "encompassing various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief." FM 3-0, *Operations*, 3-7, 3-10, 3-12.

<sup>14</sup> JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*, xi.

forces are also required to conduct humanitarian operations, peace operations, and a number of other missions. These tasks run across the full range of military operations and CF are expected to execute them simultaneously. Although, FM 3-0 states that the amount of emphasis placed on offensive, defensive, and stability operation is weighted differently according to the operational conditions and tasks CF are required to perform.<sup>15</sup> Generally speaking, each operational environment requires a different amount of emphasis on offensive, defensive, and stability operations. For example, in irregular warfare less emphasis is placed on offensive operations and more on stability and defensive operations because the conditions in this environment requires the population to be protected and their needs to be addressed. In contrast, major combat operations requires more emphasis on offensive operations and less on defensive and stability operations because this environment requires CF to face a heavily armed and large opposing force. However, once the opposing force has been defeated, doctrine calls for CF to place more emphasis on stability and defensive operations and less on offensive operations. The priority of effort is shifted in order to facilitate the establishment of the recognized host nation government as soon as the operational conditions permit.

Doctrine also requires SOF to operate across the full range of military operations, but further refines how SOF should be employed. According to joint doctrine, special operations differ from conventional operations by the environmental and operational circumstances in which SOF operates. JP 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations*, states that special operations are “conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to achieve military, diplomatic, informational, and/or economic objectives employing military capabilities for which there is no broad conventional force requirement.” JP 3-05 further states, “SO [special operations] must complement – not compete with nor be a substitute for conventional operations.”<sup>16</sup> Lastly, JP 3-05 notes that “SOF should not be used for

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<sup>15</sup> FM 3-0, *Operations*, 3-19.

<sup>16</sup> Department of Defense, JP 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 17 December 2003), I-1.

operations whenever conventional forces can accomplish the mission,”<sup>17</sup> unless the risk to mission and force are too great for CF to accept. These distinctions are important to bring forward because while both forces are expected to operate across the full range of military operations there are fundamental differences between how the two forces should be employed.

JP 3-05 provides specific operational mission criteria, which is a set of guiding questions, to help SOF and CF planners when considering the employment of SOF. The operational mission criteria are:

- (1) Is this an appropriate SOF mission?
- (2) Does this mission support the JFC’s campaign or operational plan?
- (3) Is this mission operationally feasible?
- (4) Are required resources available to execute the mission?
- (5) Does the expected outcome of the mission justify the risk?<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, the distinction of when each force is employed is determined by level of risks associated with the mission and the operational criteria stated above. As such, these factors guide the analysis throughout this paper when determining how both forces should leverage each other’s capabilities.

Lastly, as stated in JP 3-05, “SOF are specifically organized, trained, and equipped to accomplish the following nine core tasks: direct action, special reconnaissance, foreign internal defense, unconventional warfare, counterterrorism, counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, civil affairs operations, psychological operations, and information operations.”<sup>19</sup> These core tasks help to guide the employment of SOF and significantly shape their DOTMLPF construct. However, SOF’s employment should not be limited just to these tasks because they do not represent the total characteristics and capabilities of the force.<sup>20</sup> If SOF is only employed according to these specific mission tasks, then the full potential of their capabilities will not be exploited to the fullest extent possible. In other words, SOF’s true utility exceeds beyond their assigned tasks and lies within their capabilities. If their maximum

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<sup>17</sup> JP 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations*, II-2.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, I-10.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, II-3, II-4.

<sup>20</sup> Robert G. Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations: The Origin, Qualities, and use of SOF*, JSOU Report Vol 07-7 (Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2007), 24.

potential is going to be realized, then SOF must not only be employed along their assigned tasks, but also in accordance with their capability strengths.<sup>21</sup>

## Organization

One of the primary differences between the two forces are the size of their maneuver units. Conventional forces have a large organizational structure that allows them to operate over a large geographical area, as well as facilitates large-scale operations that require extensive planning, coordination, synchronization, and command and control prior to and during execution. In contrast, SOF has a smaller organizational structure based on the nature of their core missions, which limits the geographical area they can cover. However, their smaller organizational structure allows them to be more agile and flexible than CF units, making it easier for SOF to operate over a large non-contiguous geographical area. Because SOF has a smaller organization structure than CF, they are able to quickly react to a changing operational environment with relative ease compared to that of CF, who generally requires a longer time span to react to the same situation. Additionally, SOF's smaller organizational structure allows them to conduct detailed planning and rehearsals down to the individual level, making

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<sup>21</sup> There are a number of books that discuss the optimal manner in which SOF should be employed. The two most notable are *Special Operations and Strategy: From World War II to the War on Terrorism* written by James Kiras and *Untied States Special Operations Forces* written by David Tucker and Christopher Lamb. In James Kiras' book, he asserts that SOF is best utilized when the intended effect is to improve conventional military capabilities through targeting enemy vulnerabilities. Specifically, Kiras states, "the challenge is to use special operations, in conjunction with conventional forces, in an unorthodox but sustainable manner over time to wear down the resolve and resources of an adversary over the course of a conflict without one's own forces succumbing to attrition." The primary assertion is that SOF should always be in support of CF's operations. David Tucker and Christopher Lamb argue the opposite in their book. The two authors contend that strategic choices will dictate whether SOF is employed directly or indirectly, as well as if SOF is employed in support of conventional operations or as the leading effort. They assert that SOF's greatest strategic value is when they are employed independently because it frees CF to conduct other operations. Moreover, the authors state that SOF should always take the lead on addressing unconventional threats because of their unique capabilities. However, when SOF is employed in support of conventional operations, the authors assert "SOF indirect action missions make a comparatively larger strategic contribution in SOF's supporting role to conventional force operations because they differ the most from conventional force operations and are more difficult to substitute for if not provided by SOF." James D Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy: From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 5, 63; David Tucker and Christopher J. Lamb, *United States Special Operation Forces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 143, 158, 176-178, 161.



SOF better structured to conduct small-scale operations that require a timely and precise manner of execution in politically sensitive environments.

Conventional forces also have a large logistical and medical infrastructure that allows them to conduct sustained military operations for an extended period of time. This large infrastructure allows CF to be self-sustaining, as well as potentially support coalition operations that might have otherwise been impossible to conduct because of limited resources found within both the coalition force infrastructure and the operational environment. In contrast, SOF has a smaller logistical and medical infrastructure that often limits the duration of independent special operations. For this reason, SOF often relies upon CF and/or local resources found within their operational environment to support their operations. In contrast, CF are unable to primarily rely upon local resources because their large organizational structure creates a large demand on resources that often exceed the supply found within the local environment.

## **Training**

Both forces receive basic military training upon entering into their perspective branch of service (e.g. Army, Navy, or Air Force). However, one of the distinct differences between SOF and CF is the type of training SOF receives in terms of degree and kind. As noted in Chapter 2 of David Tucker and Christopher Lamb's book, *United States Special Operations Forces*, Special Operations Command's forces can be generally divided into two elements, direct action units and indirect action units.<sup>22</sup> Rangers and SEALs fall into the direct action category, whereas Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operation units fall into the indirect action category. The Rangers and SEALs fall into the direct action category because they mainly conduct offensive operations against a known enemy target. Whereas Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operation units fall into the indirect action category

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<sup>22</sup> Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operation Forces*, 149-150.

because they seek to achieve objectives through the population and are capable of influencing, advising, training, and conducting operations with foreign forces.<sup>23</sup>

The direct action units differ from CF in terms of the degree of training. Tucker and Lamb noted that SOF's direct action units are most like CF in terms of their skills and capabilities, but SOF differentiates itself from CF in terms of specialization.<sup>24</sup> In other words, both forces can conduct a raid against a hard target (i.e. a building structure with known enemy forces inside), but they differentiate themselves in terms of the level of risks each unit assumes and the degree of sophistication (i.e. the precision in which the mission is executed) in which SOF can execute the mission. As a part of the SOF institutional training process, the service members are required to receive extensive training that exponentially expands upon the basic skill sets they have acquired from their conventional service components.<sup>25</sup> The intensive and high degree of specialized training continues and remains constant once the SOF member enters his unit and through their career. The SOF training process is one of many variables that allows them to assume more risks and execute a target with a greater degree of precision, as well as serves as one of the factors that separates the two forces from each other.

SOF indirect action units differ even further from CF in terms of the kind of training they receive. CF mainly focuses their training on the direct approach as discussed above, whereas SOF indirect action forces (i.e. Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operation forces) focus their training on working by, with, and through the indigenous population. In this regard, SOF's training primarily focuses on warrior-diplomat skills making the force "capable of influencing, advising, training, and conducting

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<sup>23</sup> Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operation Forces*, 15, 150, 215.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>25</sup> JP 3-05 expands upon this point when it states "In addition to the common education and basic individual military skills training provided by the Services to SOF personnel, each Service component of USSOCOM has a school to provide education and/or training to its personnel in their combat specialties. These schools are the US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, the Naval Special Warfare Center, and the Air Force Special Operations School." JP 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations*, A-1.

In addition to these schools, the Marine Special Operations Command recently established the Marine Special Operations School to screen, assess, and train their special operation forces.

operations with foreign forces, officials, and populations.”<sup>26</sup> Like the training of the SOF direct action units, the training process starts in their qualification courses and continues through various specialty courses and unit level training throughout the service member’s career. Additionally, it should be noted that while some units like Special Forces focus on the indirect approach, they are also required to maintain a broad range of capabilities, including direct action activities similar to those commonly conducted by the Rangers and the SEALs.

For both CF and SOF, institutional training is only the first part of the training process. Both organizations conduct unit training to increase their individual and organizational proficiency. This training includes individual and collective unit training at various levels. Both forces also conduct pre-mission training prior to an operational deployment. However, due to the limited amount of time both organizations have between deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, both organizations tend to focus on unit specific training with little regard to joint SOF and CF training. Like institutional training, SOF and CF unit level training is differentiated in terms of degree and kind. However, with deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, the degree of differentiation is significantly reduced because both organizations are conducting missions in the same operational environment (i.e. both units conduct training focused on the direct and indirect approach, because their mission requires them to operate in this capacity). What differentiates the training between both organizations is the degree of specialization. Like institutional training, SOF’s unit level training tends to be more specialized to enable them to accomplish the various tasks they are required to perform.

## **Material**

Firepower, protection, maneuver, self-sustaining, and quantity may be the best words to describe the equipment of the CF. For example, the Army has tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery, Stryker fighting vehicles, High Mobility Multi-purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV), personnel carriers, cargo

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<sup>26</sup> Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operation Forces*,151.

vehicles, recovery vehicles, and engineer vehicles. The Navy has patrol boats, submarines, aircraft carriers, amphibious transport ships, rescue and salvage ships, destroyers, and amphibious assault ships. The Air Force has cargo aircraft, fighter jets, long-range bombers, aerial refueling aircraft, and unmanned aerial vehicles.<sup>27</sup> These are just a few examples of the various types of equipment found within each of the services. From these examples, it is easy to see that CF have the capability to maneuver and employ a large amount of firepower while at the same time protecting its own force. These examples also begin to show the large quantity of material found within CF and their ability to be self-sustaining.

As stated earlier, SOF is organized, trained, and equipped to conduct nine core tasks.<sup>28</sup> JP 3-05 states that “SOF requires equipment and support that are tailored to specific mission requirements, yet flexible enough to respond to changing employment parameters.”<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, the equipment used by the special operations community can be characterized as specialized, unconventional, and technologically advanced. A large amount of the materiel used by SOF is acquired from its parent service that has the responsibility to provide service-common equipment to all of its forces.<sup>30</sup> However, there is also a large demand for SOF-specific equipment to support specific mission tasks for which there is no service-common requirement. In these circumstances, the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) either acquires new equipment or modifies service-common equipment so that the desired capabilities are produced, thus further enabling SOF to conduct its assigned tasks. An example of this is the modification of the M4A1 carbine through the Special Operations Peculiar Modification program. Because SOF lacks heavy organic weapons and have limited ability to carry a large amount of resupply ammunition, success in an operation often depends upon the SOF operator to quickly identify and engage

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<sup>27</sup>Information used in this section was found at <http://www.military.com/> (accessed October 2009).

<sup>28</sup> These core tasks are: direct action, special reconnaissance, foreign internal defense, unconventional warfare, counterterrorism, counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, civil affairs operations, psychological operations, and information operations. JP 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations*, II-3- II-4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, IV-2.

their target with a great deal of accuracy.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the intended purpose of modifying the M4A1 was to “enhance the weapon’s operational effectiveness through increased target recognition/acquisition, speed of engagement, and accuracy from Close Range Engagements (CRE 0-50m) to the maximum effective range of the weapon (600m) during both day and night conditions.”<sup>32</sup> The modified M4A1 carbine is just one example of many different types of SOF specific equipment tailored to meet specific mission requirements, and serves to show how the material found within both forces can be distinctly different from each other.

In terms of materiel, it is important to note that SOF often serves as a test component of new equipment for CF. Admiral Eric T. Olson, the USSOCOM commander, noted that, “We [SOF] also serve as kind of control group for experimentation within the department [Department of Defense]. We are a place to bring new equipment online, do tests, and experiment with new tactics, techniques, and technologies along the way[;]...what we are really doing is providing the wherewithal for the force to develop and operate.”<sup>33</sup> The modification of the M4 is a perfect example of this. Various components of the Special Operations Peculiar Modification M4 “kit” were eventually fielded to the larger force and have become general issue, rather than SOF-peculiar. Currently, the special operations community is testing the new Special Operations Combat Assault Rifle, with the possibility of fielding this weapon system to CF once SOF has validated its effectiveness.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Department of the Navy, “58—Special Operations Peculiar Modification Kit (SOPMOD),” Naval Sea Systems Command, <https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=be6aa1c5eebb51243b8fe7b72545ea19&tab=core&cvview=1&cck=1&au=&cck> (accessed September 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Colonel(R) David H. Gurney and Dr. Jeffrey D. Smotherman, “An Interview with Eric T. Olson,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, issue 56 (1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009): 63, [http://www.ndu.edu/inss/Press/jfq\\_pages/editions/i56/7.pdf](http://www.ndu.edu/inss/Press/jfq_pages/editions/i56/7.pdf) (accesses January 20, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> The Special Operations Command is looking to replace the M4A1 with the SCAR L, a 5.56mm assault rifle, and the M14/Mk11 sniper rifles with the SCAR H, a 7.62mm assault rifle. However, testing is still ongoing.

## Leadership and Education

Leadership may be one of the most difficult aspects to distinguish between the two forces. One could easily make the argument that the same leadership attributes that make a good conventional leader are the same leadership attributes that make a good special operations leader. This is especially true given the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, where both forces are focused on the same asymmetrical threat. For example, leaders in both forces need to be adaptive, agile, and flexible in order to be successful in either Iraq or Afghanistan. A different way of looking about this issue is the way in which leaders in each organization critically think through a problem situation. The way a leader thinks through a problematic situation is fundamentally shaped not only by their experiences but also by the education and training they have received.<sup>35</sup> As noted by Admiral Olson, “I think there is a general sense that we [SOF] are troops who have gone through more schools and been issued different types of equipment, but my cliché response to that would be, we’re more a mindset than a toolset for the department.”<sup>36</sup> This statement highlights one of the fundamental differences between SOF and CF leaders, which is the mindset in which the two forces approach a problematic situation.

In the Army, CF leaders have been trained to think through a problem using the Troop Leading Procedures and the Military Decision Making Process.<sup>37</sup> Field Manual 5-0, *Army Planning and Orders*

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<sup>35</sup> As defined in JP 3-05, “Military education is the instruction of individuals in subjects that will enhance their knowledge of the science and art of war. Military training, on the other hand, is the preparation of individuals or units to enhance their capacity to perform specific military functions, tasks, or missions. In other words, education provides an individual with the ability to determine **what** to do in a given circumstance while training provides the **how**. SOF require a combination of education and specialized training to achieve operational proficiency. Education enhances the understanding of joint special operations and fosters disciplined thought and creativity to develop solutions to complex problems in dynamic and ambiguous situations. Training is designed to produce SOF personnel and units that have mastered the tactics, techniques, and procedures through which SOF units accomplish their missions.” JP 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations*, A-1.

<sup>36</sup> Gurney and Smotherman, “An Interview with Eric T. Olson,” 63.

<sup>37</sup> The Troop Leading Procedures steps are: Step 1. Receive the Mission; Step 2. Issue a warning order; Step 3. Make a tentative Plan; Step 4. Initiate movement; Step 5. Conduct reconnaissance; Step 6. Complete the Plan; Step 7. Issue the order; Step 8. Supervise and refine. The Military Decision Making Process steps are: Step 1. Receive the Mission; Step 2. Mission analysis; Step 3. Course of Action (COA) development; Step 4. COA analysis; Step 5. COA comparison; Step 6. COA approval; Step 7. Orders production. Headquarters. Department of the Army, FM 5-0, *Army Planning and Orders Production* (Washington D.C.: GPO, January 2005), 4-1, 3-3.

*Production*, provides the best example of this process when it states: “Army problem solving provides a standard, systemic approach to define and analyze a problem, develop and analyze possible solutions, choose the best solution, and implement a plan of action that solves the problem. Problem solving applies to all Army activities and provides the basic logic for the Army two tactical planning process: MDMP [Military Decision Making Process] and TLP [Troop Leading Procedures].”<sup>38</sup> The standardization of these procedures is necessary because it enables both forces to uniformly plan, coordinate, synchronize, execute, and command and control large-scale operations that involve a number of different moving elements.

Army Special Operations Forces are trained in the same procedures, but what differentiates some Army Special Operations Forces leaders from CF leaders is the way in which they are educated in their qualification course. This is particularly true of the leaders in the indirect Army Special Operations Forces units such as Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operations, who are all trained under the same schoolhouse, the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. These leaders are taught to critically think through problems in a different way because their units are often required to work by, with, and through the indigenous population to achieve their mission, which requires a different mindset than when conducting direct action missions. In contrast, Rangers are primarily trained to approach a problematic situation in the same manner as CF are. For example, in the Special Forces Qualification Course, the leaders are taught to use the Troop Leading Procedures and Military Decision Making Process just like CF. However, they are also educated on the Army Special Operations Forces imperatives:

- Understand the operational environment
- Recognize the political implications
- Facilitate interagency activities
- Engage the threat discriminately
- Consider the long-term effects
- Ensure the legitimacy and creditability of special operations
- Anticipate and control psychological effects
- Apply capabilities indirectly

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<sup>38</sup> FM 5-0, *Army Planning and Orders Production*, 1-2.

- Develop multiple options
- Ensure long-term sustainment
- Provide sufficient intelligence
- Balance security and synchronization.<sup>39</sup>

Special Forces leaders are taught to apply the SOF imperatives not only throughout the planning process but in the execution phase as well. These imperatives, combined with the fact that Special Forces primarily works by, with, and through the indigenous population fundamentally shapes the way a Special Forces leader critically thinks through a situation, and differs greatly from CF. The same can be said for Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations.

Another distinct difference between SOF and CF leaders is special operation leaders inherently think in terms of joint operations. As discussed previously, CF are a large self-sustaining organization, whereas SOF is a small organization that often relies upon the other services to provide support.<sup>40</sup> Because of this, SOF is inherently joint and has a different mindset than CF in terms of leveraging additional capabilities to support their missions. For most special operation leaders, in both direct and indirect units, it is inherent in their problem solving process to ask the question: “What additional capabilities are out there and how can we effectively leverage those capabilities to facilitate mission accomplishment?” In other words, SOF’s small organizational structure has preconditioned their leaders to think in terms of leveraging additional capabilities. This is not to say that conventional leaders do not also think in these terms, but it is not as a critically as it is for SOF. This is mainly because CF have the ability to be self-sustaining and does not require the tremendous amount of support that SOF needs. Therefore, conventional leaders are not preconditioned to think in these terms. This is an important factor

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<sup>39</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 3-05, *Army Special Operations Forces* (Washington D.C.: GPO, September 2006), 1-13 - 1-15.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., I-2.



to understand because the mindset of leaders in both organizations fundamentally shapes how they seek to leverage each other's capabilities.

It should be noted that while there are some distinct differences in the way that leaders in both forces critically think through a problem, this gap is slowly closing due to the current operational environment. Out of necessity, in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines, and numerous other spots throughout the world, leaders in both organizations are now forced to think in terms of joint operations and the need to work by, with, and through the indigenous population. However, what will continue to separate the two forces is the amount of time and effort that SOF will continue to invest in training and educating its leaders to deal with the asymmetrical threat found in today's operating environment. This capability will be difficult to replicate by CF given the large organizational structure in which it resides, as well as the fact that this need is not as necessary to accomplish the broad organizational missions of CF.

## **Personnel**

As noted by Robert G. Spulak, what defines special operations is not its missions but rather its personnel.<sup>41</sup> A special operation soldier is often required to operate far forward of friendly lines, in high-risk situations (to mission and personnel), and in an environment that is extremely complex and ambiguous. In order to excel in this environment, SOF must have service members that has a strong will to succeed in every task they perform regardless of what resources they are provided. For the most part, the average performing service member in the conventional units would be unable to operate under these conditions. That is not to say that CF do not have high caliber soldiers, they absolutely do, which is why SOF primarily recruits from them. However, because SOF is a smaller force and can afford to be selective, the average soldier in their organization tends to be of a higher quality than the average soldier found within the conventional units. One of the major reasons for this is the SOF selection process.

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<sup>41</sup> Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations*, 13.

The SOF selection process starts out with an individual volunteering to join their organization. For Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations, the next step is for a review committee to approve the prospective candidate to attend their qualification course. For the majority of the other special operation units, the selection process goes far beyond that. For the Rangers, Special Forces, SEALs, and United States Air Force Combat Controllers the selection process includes assessing and selecting those service members that possess the necessary physical and mental abilities to execute the tasks that will be expected of them as a special operations soldier.

MAJ Michael Hastings' monograph, "The Integration of Conventional Forces and Special Operations Forces," does an excellent job of describing not only what personal attributes SOF are looking for in the selection process, but also in describing what the fundamental difference is between a special operations and conventional soldier:

The SOF soldier is philosophically different than the conventional soldier. The SOF environment thrives on individuals who are free thinkers with tremendous skills and capabilities and who do things in an unconventional manner. To the conventional commander, this counters the very structure of the military environment; order, precision, checklists, and procedure are the foundation upon which they rely. Commanders, not subordinates, make decisions. SOF, however, are nonconformists and critical thinkers who are encouraged at every level to conceive innovative concepts and challenge assumptions. Their survival on the battlefield relies upon their ability to adapt to unsteady to unpredictable situations and to develop different methods coupled with tactics and equipment. This is the strength of SOF, and the greatest difference with conventional forces.<sup>42</sup>

The attributes described above by MAJ Hastings are a major part of what allows the special operations soldier to excel while operating far forward of friendly lines, in high-risk situations, and in an environment that is extremely complex and ambiguous. Again, this is not to say conventional soldiers do not possess these attributes, it merely implies that the preponderance of these attributes are found within the average special operations soldier and is a part of what distinguishes them from conventional soldiers.

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<sup>42</sup> Michael D. Hastings, "The Integration of Conventional Forces and Special Operation Forces" (Monograph, Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2005), 65.

## **Facilities**

Just as with service-common equipment, both forces use the same facilities where there is a common requirement for both forcers. Although, when CF facilities do not have the capacity to accommodate SOF, USSOCOM will build their own facilities. The main difference between both forces' facilities lies in USSOCOM's requirement to train their forces on specialized skills or mission specific tasks. Under these circumstances, just like special operations specific materiel, USSOCOM will construct facilities that will enable the force to develop and maintain the capacity to execute their nine core tasks. Some examples of these facilities are advanced marksmanship ranges, SCUBA dive lockers, free fall wind tunnels, and "mock-up" mission rehearsal sites.

## **Summary**

Both organizations draw their capability strengths and limitations from their DOTMLPF construct. Based on the information presented in this section, some inferences can be made about SOF and CF capability strengths and limitations. Conventional forces capability strengths are their ability to operate over a large geographical area, conduct self-sustaining operations, provide a large amount of resources (i.e. forces, firepower, maneuver assets, logistical supplies, etc.), and conduct large-scale activities over the full range of military operations. Special operations forces capability strengths are their ability to operate in a non-contiguous environment, act as a force multiplier through indirect means, strategically strike targets in high risk non-permissive environments, and operate in politically sensitive environments. Conventional forces capability limitations are their limited capacity to rely upon local resources to sustain operations, operate in a non-contiguous environment with a limited number of personnel, operate far forward of friendly lines in extremely non-permissive / politically sensitive environments, and conduct low signature offensive operations. Special operation forces capability limitations are their limited capacity to internally self-sustain over a long period of time, command and control large scale operations, internally provide a large amount of firepower to support their operations, and internally provide a large amount of additional resources (i.e. personnel, maneuver assets, logistical

supplies, etc.). While none of these capability strengths and limitations are not absolutes, they do provide a general description as to the inherent capability strengths and limitations found within both forces.

<b>Table 1. Summary of SOF and CF Inherent Capability Strengths and Limitations</b>	
<b>SOF</b>	<b>CF</b>
<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operate in a non-contiguous environment</li> <li>• Act as a force multiplier through indirect means</li> <li>• Operate in Politically sensitive environments</li> <li>• Strategically strike targets in high risk non-permissive environments</li> </ul>	<p><b>Limitations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operate in a non-contiguous environment with a limited number of personnel</li> <li>• Operate far forward of friendly lines in extremely non-permissive/politically sensitive environments</li> <li>• Limited capacity to rely upon local resources to sustain operations</li> <li>• Conduct low signature offensive operations</li> </ul>
<p><b>Limitations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited capacity to internally self-sustain over a long period of time</li> <li>• Command and control large scale operations</li> <li>• Internally provide a large amount of fire power to support their operations</li> <li>• Internally provide a large amount of additional resources (i.e. personnel, maneuver assets, logistical supplies, etc.)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct self-sustaining operations</li> <li>• Operate over a large geographical area</li> <li>• Provide a large amount of resources (i.e. forces, firepower, maneuver assets, logistical supplies, etc.)</li> <li>• Conduct large-scale activities over the full range of military operations</li> </ul>

## Case Studies

The purpose of these case studies is to demonstrate that both SOF and CF can operate in a more efficient and effective manner by integrating their operations and leveraging each other's capacity strengths to compensate for their capability limitations. These case studies will also demonstrate how both forces tend to operate along parallel lines of operations, which directly hinders their ability to fully exploit each other's capabilities and to effectively achieve the overall operational objectives. In order to provide depth to this analysis, this monograph looks at two case studies from two different levels of war. The first case study focuses on the tactical level of war analyzing SOF and CF joint operations in Afghanistan during Operation ANACONDA. This case study was chosen because it was the first major operation, and perhaps the largest operation to date, in which the two forces conducted joint operations in Afghanistan. Additionally, if the current trend in Afghanistan does not reverse its course, both forces may have to conduct more large-scale operations to deny Taliban and al Qaeda insurgents a safe haven. If this situation should materialize, the lessons learned from this case study can be directly applied to enable joint operations between conventional and special operation forces. The second case study focuses on the operational level of war analyzing how the two forces conducted joint operations in Afghanistan during 2004. This case study was chosen because of its relevance to current operations in Afghanistan today. As discussed in the conclusion of this monograph, the lessons learned from this case study can be applied when implementing Gen McChrystal's new strategy.

### **Case Study #1: Operation ANACONDA (Afghanistan, 2002)**

This first case study analyzes how U.S. SOF and CF conducted joint operations in Afghanistan during Operation ANACONDA. Although other coalition SOF and CF did participate in this operation, their involvement will not be discussed in detail because this paper focuses solely on joint operations between U.S. SOF and CF. Overall, it appears that both forces tried to leverage each other's capability strengths to complement their own internal capability limitations. However, they were still unable to operate in the most efficient and effective manner possible, which can be partially attributed to a lack of

integration, coordination, synchronization, and overall situational awareness by both forces. This case study will begin with a brief background on the battle at Tora Bora in order to give the reader an understanding of the mindset SOF and CF leaders had for the planning and execution of Operation ANACONDA. After the background, a brief overview is provided on the events leading up to and during Operation ANACONDA, which will include an overview of the terrain around the objective area and the estimated enemy situation. Following the overview, this case study provides an analysis of the operation in order to demonstrate where the two forces were able to successfully leverage each other's capability strengths to substitute for their own internal capability limitations, as well as where there were missed opportunities to do so. This case study concludes with a discussion on why both forces did not operate in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

## **Background**

On November 30, 2001, an extensive military operation took place against a Taliban and al Qaeda stronghold in the Tora Bora Mountains of Afghanistan, located south of Jalalabad near the Afghanistan/Pakistan border.<sup>43</sup> Intelligence analysts believed that after the fall of Kabul in November 2001, al Qaeda and Taliban forces fled to this area. Locals reported that al Qaeda was operating in an elaborate cave network in the Tora Bora mountains, which were extremely well fortified with a large stockpile of weapons and ammunition.<sup>44</sup> There were also numerous reports that Osama bin Laden was in the area. The intelligence estimates on the number of enemy forces in Tora Bora varied from 500 to 3,000.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Charles H. Briscoe et al., *Weapon of Choice: ARSOF in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2003), 13-14.

<sup>44</sup> Richard W. Stewart, *Operation Enduring Freedom: October 2001-March 2002* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 2004), 26.

<sup>45</sup> Briscoe et. al., *Weapons of Choice*, 14.

Due to US policy that “dictated the use of indigenous forces in ground operations as much as possible,”<sup>46</sup> local Afghan forces were designated to attack this fortification.<sup>47</sup> The coalition assault force consisted of U.S. Special Forces and CIA officers who advised elements of the Northern Alliance and local Afghan militia forces. The operation lasted several days, during which the al Qaeda forces put up stiff resistance. When the operation began, SOF occupied two observation points on the ridgelines leading up to the cave networks. From the observation points, the SOF elements directed close air support and B52 bombing runs against fixed enemy positions.<sup>48</sup> Each day the al Qaeda operatives put up a stiff resistance as the local Afghan forces made their way up the mountain. However, every evening, the local Afghan forces would fall back, forcing them to retake the same territory the following day. At the conclusion of the operation in mid-December, numerous Taliban and al Qaeda operatives were killed; although it is believed that a far greater number escaped. As a part of the operation, Pakistani forces were used to secure the border, but they were of little use. Some reports indicated that the Pakistani forces captured approximately 300 al Qaeda forces, while allowing nearly 1000 to escape. It was also reported that al Qaeda forces were able to escape by bribing the local Afghan forces that were used to attack the fortification.<sup>49</sup>

The overall opinion at the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM)<sup>50</sup> was that the operation was a failure because numerous Taliban and al Qaeda operatives avoided capture and were able to flee across the border. Additionally, it was widely believed at USCENTCOM that if CF had been used

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<sup>46</sup> Stewart, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 26.

<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that during the time of this operation, the majority of the US conventional forces were being used for base security in Baghram Air force Base (Afghanistan), Uzbekistan, and Pakistan. Some of these forces were eventually made available for Operation ANACONDA.

<sup>48</sup> Briscoe et. al., *Weapons of Choice*, 215.

<sup>49</sup> Josh Levinger, “Taking Tora Bora,” May 6, 2005, <http://www.levinger.net/josh/files/writing/tora-bora.pdf> (accessed January 03, 2010), 14.

<sup>50</sup> USCENTCOM is an organization in the Department of Defense that has the overall responsibility for commanding and controlling U.S. military actions in Afghanistan and various other counties in that region.

to seal off the border this could have been prevented.<sup>51</sup> This conclusion played a significant part in determining how SOF and CF employed their forces during Operation ANACONDA.

### **Operation ANACONDA**

In late January 2002, Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha (SFODA) 592 was conducting a combat reconnaissance patrol in the vicinity of Shan-i-Kot Valley. They were warned by their Afghan security force counterparts not to proceed any further because the local villagers stated there was a significant Taliban and al Qaeda presence located in that area. As a result, the SFODA turned around and informed their higher headquarters, Joint Special Operation Task Force – North (JSOTF-N), who began focusing their intelligence collection assets on this area to confirm or deny this report.<sup>52</sup> Through multiple intelligence sources, JSOTF-N determined that there was a significant amount of al Qaeda and Taliban forces present in the Shan-i-Kot valley, numbering between 150 to 200 fighters.<sup>53</sup> These estimates were never confirmed and continued to vary from as low as 20 to as high as over 1000 up to the day of the operation.<sup>54</sup> Intelligence analysts also believed that the al Qaeda and Taliban forces located in the Shan-i-Kot valley had escaped from the battle at Tora Bora and were seeking refuge in this area because of its defensible terrain.<sup>55</sup> They further believed these forces were preparing for a spring counter-offense against the Afghan government and coalition forces.

The Shan-i-Kot valley is located in the Paktia Province between the towns of Gardez, Khowst, and Orgun. The area in which Al Qaeda and Taliban forces were operating encompassed three villages

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<sup>51</sup> Sean Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda* (New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 2005), 21.

<sup>52</sup> JSOTF-N is also known as TF Dagger

<sup>53</sup> After Operation ANACONDA, it was reported that al Qaeda operatives consisting of Arabs, Chechens, Uzbeks, and Pakistanis moved into the area six weeks prior to the battle. It was also reported that the al Qaeda operatives offered the villagers 700 sheep for their troubles and others bus fare to leave if they wanted. Unknown to the coalition forces planning the operation at that time, most of the villagers decided to leave. Adam Geibel, "Operation Anaconda, Shah-i-Khot Valley, Afghanistan, 2-10 March 2002," *Military Review*, vol. 82, issue 3 (May/June 2002): 73; Briscoe et. al., *Weapons of Choice*, 279.

<sup>54</sup> MAJ Roger Crombie, interviewed by John McCool, March 30, 2006, Operational Leadership Experiences Project, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*, 65.



(Serkhankhel, Zerki Kale, and Babulkhel), and several mountain ridgelines with extensive cave networks and numerous trails leading into and out of the valley. The numerous trails were believed to be the primary lines of communication to resupply, infiltrate, and exfiltrate the area.<sup>56</sup> In total, the area covers more than 60 square miles. The surrounding terrain is extremely rugged with numerous peaks, spurs, and ridgelines. The mountain peaks range from 8,500 to 12,000 feet high with the snowline beginning around 1000 feet.<sup>57</sup> The major terrain feature in the valley was a large ridgeline to the west of the villages called Terghul Ghar or what otherwise came to be known as the Whale by coalition forces.<sup>58</sup> To the south of the villages was a high mountain peak, named Takur Ghar, which offered an extensive westward view of the valley.

In mid to late January of 2002, JSOTF-N began planning an operation into the Shan-i-Kot valley, which came to be known as Operation ANACONDA. However, as the intelligence picture became clearer it was determined that al Qaeda was well entrenched in the valley with prepared defensive positions. The JSOTF-N commander, COL Mulholland, soon realized that attacking a well-organized defensive position with multiple infiltration and exfiltration routes exceeded his unit's capabilities. Taking the lessons of Tora Bora into consideration, COL Mulholland turned to CF for support.<sup>59</sup>

After the concept was briefed to the USCENTCOM commander, General Tommy Franks, the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division was placed in charge of the operation. On February 11, 2002, COL Hagenbeck, the TF Mountain commander,<sup>60</sup> was notified to take command of the Coalition Forces Land Component

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<sup>56</sup> LTC Christopher F. Bentley, "Afghanistan: Joint and Coalition Fire Support in Operation Anaconda," *Field Artillery*, (Sep/Oct 2002): 11.

<sup>57</sup> Geibel, "Operation Anaconda, Shah-i-Khot Valley, Afghanistan, 2-10 March 2002," 72-73.

<sup>58</sup> Terghul Ghar became known as the "Whale" because of its resemblance of the dominate terrain feature located at the National Training Center (NTC) in Fort Irwin, California.

<sup>59</sup> Briscoe et. al., *Weapons of Choice*, 280.

<sup>60</sup> In Operation ANACONDA, TF Mountain forces consisted of "3 U.S. Army infantry battalions 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain and 101<sup>st</sup> Air Assault divisions, and a aviation task force with 24 helicopters 98 AH-64s)." Richard L. Kugler, Michael Baranic, and Hans Binnendijk, *Operation Anaconda: Lessons for Joint Operations*, Defense & Technology Paper (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2009), 4.

Command (Forward)<sup>61</sup> in Afghanistan and oversee the planning and execution of Operation ANACONDA. However, USCENTCOM insisted on making JSOTF-N's Afghan force, advised by SFODAs, the main effort of the operation in order to reinforce the legitimacy of the new interim Afghan government,<sup>62</sup> but they would be under the operational control of TF Mountain.

The consensus of the intelligence community was that the enemy in the Shan-i-Kot valley was not going to stay and fight. It was further estimated that once the coalition forces entered the valley, the enemy would have three objectives in priority order. Their top priority would be to put up stiff resistance in order to allow their senior leaders to flee the area, as they had done in Tora Bora. Second, they would remove as many fighters as possible before they were trapped and if the opportunity presented itself, take an American prisoner. Their last priority would be for the remaining fighters to flee the valley and regroup when the conditions permit. The TF Mountain intelligence staff believed that the senior and mid-level al Qaeda leaders were the key and without them their defensive operation would fall apart.<sup>63</sup>

With this enemy situation in mind, the plan for Operation ANACONDA was developed. The plan called for the "isolation and encirclement of the valley area, followed by converging attacks to destroy al Qaeda forces."<sup>64</sup> Three sets of concentric rings were to be established across the enemy escape routes before the main attack moved into the valley to clear the three villages, which became known as Objective Remington (See "Figure#1. Plan for Operation Anaconda" and "Figure#2, Three-Dimensional Map of the Plan for Operation Anaconda" for a graphical depiction of the plan). On D minus 3, elements from TF 64 (Australian Special Air Service) and TF K-Bar (SEALs and Special Forces units assigned to Joint Special Operation Task Force-South), would infiltrate into surveillance positions approximately five

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<sup>61</sup> Coalition Forces Land Component Command (Forward) is a subcomponent of USCENTCOM.

<sup>62</sup> Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*, 82-88.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121.

<sup>64</sup> Stewart, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 32.

to seven kilometers from Objective Remington.<sup>65</sup> These surveillance positions would include snipers and could be used to direct close air support. Additionally, TF 11 would provide three special operations reconnaissance teams to cover the southern mountain peaks overlooking the Shan-i-Kot valley.<sup>66</sup> On D minus 1, TF Anvil, a 600-man Afghan force advised by Special Forces soldiers from JSOTF-N, would move into blocking positions to the south and the west with the intent of preventing the escape of enemy forces from the objective area. On D-day, TF Rakassan (elements from the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division and the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division) would air-assault to the east of the valley in order to establish the inner most blocking positions. Simultaneously, TF Hammer, a 260-man Afghan force advised by Special Forces soldiers from JSOTF-N, would attack from the south as the main effort around the southern end of the Whale into the valley. A 40-man Afghan force led by Special Forces soldiers would split off from the main effort to establish blocking positions at the northern end of the valley.<sup>67</sup> Preceding the main effort attack and the air assault, an intensive “aerial bombardment of the valley villages, the proposed helicopter LZs [Landing Zones], and suspected enemy positions surrounding the area” was to occur.<sup>68</sup> The intent behind the plan was to eliminate as many al Qaeda forces in the objective area as possible and to force the remaining threats into the blocking positions so they could be eliminated. Any enemy force that could potentially circumvent the blocking positions were to be tracked and interdicted by the air and ground surveillance positions along their escape route into Pakistan.<sup>69</sup> Due to lack of artillery assets in theater,

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<sup>65</sup> D is short for D-Day. JP. 1-02 defines D-Day as “the unnamed day on which a particular operation commences or is to commence.” JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 559.

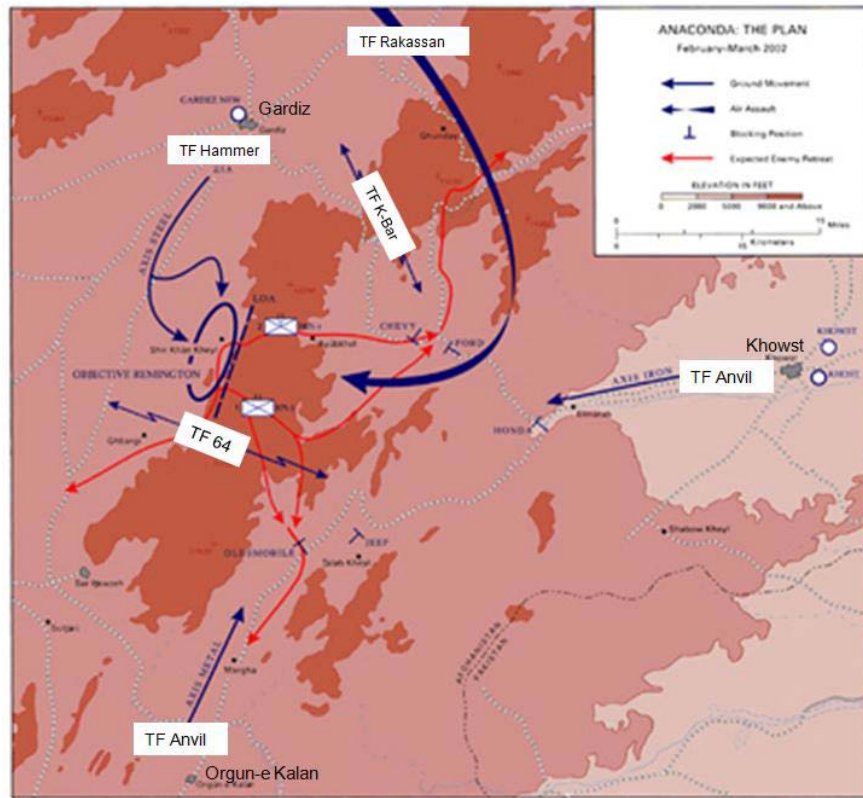
<sup>66</sup> TF 11 was a direct action SOF unit who was focused on the terrorist threat in Afghanistan. During Operation ANACONDA, TF 11 inserted elements from their reconnaissance team to assist in the intelligence collection effort. TF 11’s reconnaissance teams were habitually tasked with supporting TF 11’s direct units by conducting high-risk reconnaissance missions in enemy-held territory. Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*, xvi.

<sup>67</sup> Stewart, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 32.

<sup>68</sup> Briscoe et. al., *Weapons of Choice*, 386.

<sup>69</sup> Stewart, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 33.

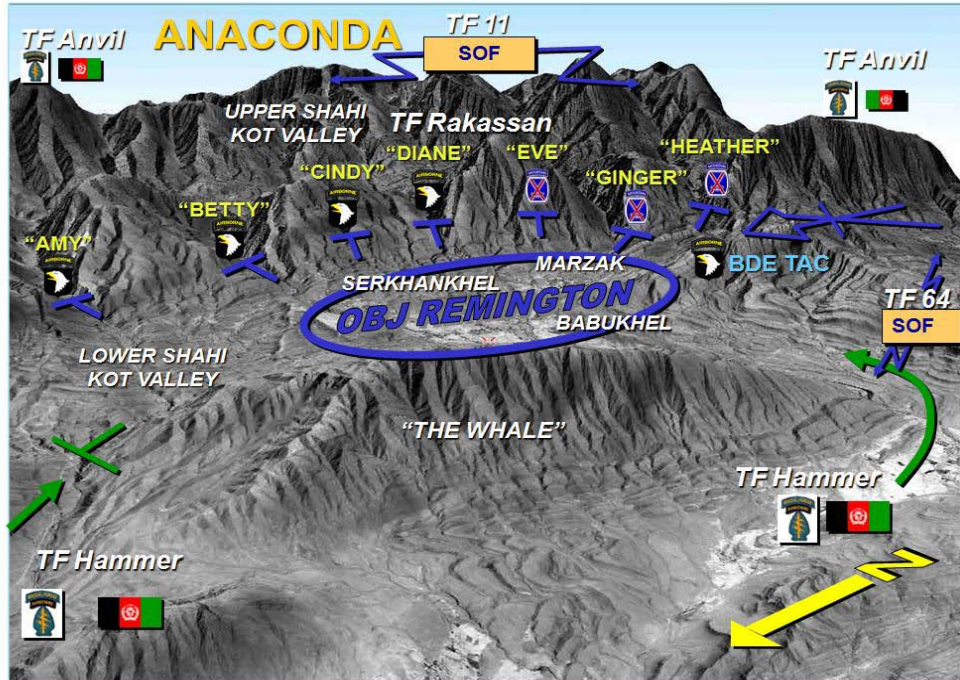
SOF and CF would have to rely completely upon their organic mortar systems for indirect fire support and close air support from the Air Force, Army, and Marine Corps aircrafts.<sup>70</sup>



Figure#1. Plan for Operation ANACONDA

Source: Richard W. Stewart, *Operation Enduring Freedom: October 2001-March 2002* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 2004), 35. Copyright reprint permission for this figure was granted on February 18, 2010 by Command and General Staff College copyrights coordinator.

<sup>70</sup> Briscoe et. al., *Weapons of Choice*, 386.



Figure#2. Three-Dimensional Map of the Plan for Operation Anaconda

Source: Command and General Staff School Brief, *W343: SOF Enablers to the BCT or SOF/BCT Integration*, undated, slide 71. Copyright reprint permission for this figure was granted on February 18, 2010 by Command and General Staff College copyrights coordinator.

The operation was initially scheduled for February 27, but due to poor weather conditions it was postponed to March 2. On February 28, D minus 2, the special operations reconnaissance elements moved uncompromised into their positions. However, a roving enemy patrol nearly discovered TF 11's reconnaissance elements in the southern mountain ranges on the night of the 28<sup>th</sup>, indicating that a greater number of enemy forces might be located in the mountains than originally thought.<sup>71</sup> This information was transmitted back and the TF Mountain headquarters was notified, but had little effect on the overall plan. On March 1, D minus 1, TF Anvil moved into position with little to no problems. On March 2, D-Day, TF Hammer departed Orgun for their objective areas, but the combined Special Forces and Afghan task force encountered numerous problems along the way. First, a jinga truck tipped over and it took several hours to medically evacuate the wounded afghan soldiers and cross load equipment. Once the task

<sup>71</sup> Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*, 169-170.

force was back on the move, several vehicles became stuck in the mud-filled roads, requiring the task force to pull them free, thus further delaying the operation. As TF Hammer's northern and southern units approached the Whale, they both came under intense enemy mortar and artillery fire. The northern unit's lead vehicle was hit by what was thought to be a mortar round, but subsequent investigations determined it was friendly fire from a supporting AC-130 aircraft. In this incident, one American and two Afghans were killed, as well as three Americans and twelve to fifteen Afghans were wounded. In total, of the 40-man blocking force, nearly half were taken out of the fight as the rest of the unit was under continuing enemy fire.<sup>72</sup>

While TF Hammer was receiving enemy fire in the vicinity of the Whale, TF Rakassan began their air assault into their battle positions. After the pre-planned aerial bombardment of the landing zones and sequent gun runs from the AH-64 Apache helicopters in the valley, the CH-47 Chinook helicopters dropped off their infantrymen at their designated landing zones. However, just before the TF Rakassan loaded their aircraft for the air assault, over half of the pre-planned aerial sorties (against 22 enemy gun emplacements and more than 40 enemy cave hideouts) were cancelled when U.S. SOF reported their presence near the target area.<sup>73</sup>

As TF Rakassan off-loaded their aircraft they almost immediately came under heavy enemy fire. As a result, the majority of the close air support was shifted away from the main effort, TF Hammer, to support TF Rakassan's movement to their blocking positions. Due to a change in weather conditions, the second lift with the remainder of the troops was delayed several hours, forcing TF Rakassan to fight with less manpower than they had originally anticipated. Nonetheless, by noon, the task force occupied six of their seven planned blocking positions. Throughout the day, the al Qaeda forces tried to out flank the blocking positions held by TF Rakassan, but they were repeatedly repelled back by the infantrymen with the assistance of the special operations reconnaissance forces who directed close air support on enemy

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<sup>72</sup> Stewart, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 37-38.

<sup>73</sup> Kugler, Baranic, and Binnendijk, *Operation Anaconda: Lessons for Joint Operations*, 5.

positions. At the end of the first day, twenty-five soldiers from TF Rakassan were wounded. The hardest hit was the conventional forces at Blocking Position Heather, who had almost a fifty percent casualty rate. It soon became clear that the enemy was not going to flee, but instead stay and fight a well-coordinated defensive battle.

By the end of the first day, TF Hammer realized that their initiative was lost and they would not be able to make any progress unless they received additional close air support, which seemed unlikely due to assets being diverted to support TF Rakassan. As a result, the Afghan leader, Commander Zia, decided to fall back and regroup at their home base in Gardez. This decision proved to be critical because it took away the threat from the main effort and allowed the Taliban and al-Qaeda forces to concentrate all their efforts on TF Rakassan.<sup>74</sup>

On March 3, the TF Rakassan inserted additional troops into the Shah-i-Kot Valley that immediately came under direct and indirect enemy fire, but were able to successfully repel the attack. Throughout the day, TF Rakassan were under constant attack from the Taliban and al-Qaeda forces located on the high ground above them. However, each attack was successfully repelled with the help of both rotary and fixed wing close air support. That night, TF Rakassan repositioned to higher positions in order to take advantage of the mountainous terrain. By the end of the second day, it was estimated that there were around 600 Taliban and al-Qaeda forces in the area.<sup>75</sup>

On March 4, TF Mountain inserted its reserve battalion, which consisted of two infantry companies, into the northern most landing zone. Their mission was to move from blocking position to blocking position, north to south, and clear the ridgeline between each position. On the same day, TF

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<sup>74</sup> Briscoe et. al., *Weapons of Choice*, 386.

It should be noted that while TF Rakassan was reposition to the higher ground, a six-man reconnaissance team of Navy SEALs was being positioned on the ridgeline of Takur Ghar in order to overlook a major al-Qaeda supply line. Due to stiff enemy resistance during the insertion, the SEAL commander decided to abort the mission. During the extraction, Navy Seal Neil C. Roberts fell from his aircraft. A Ranger quick reaction force eventually recovered his body after a series of complications due to enemy activity. The rescue operation resulted in a seven U.S. Service members killed. Stewart, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 42.

<sup>75</sup> Robin Moore, *The Hunt for Bin Laden* (New York: Random House, 2003), 281.

Hammer deployed a small reconnaissance element consisting of Special Forces and Afghan militia forces to the northern entrance of the valley so that they could overwatch enemy movement into that area. For the next few days, CF systematically cleared the ridgeline from north to south. The enemy forces offered significant resistance, but were overcome by the large conventional force with direct and indirect fire support assets. During this part of the operation, CF “killed numerous al Qaeda forces, cleared over 129 caves and 40 buildings, and destroyed 22 heavy weapons emplacements.”<sup>76</sup>

With the reserve committed, CF did not have enough manpower to clear the entire valley. Therefore, the Afghan forces would have to be relied upon to accomplish what they were originally tasked to do. However, with the stiff enemy resistance that TF Hammer received on the first day, it was determined that armor and mechanized forces would be needed to sweep around the Whale.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, JSOTF-N contacted the Afghan minister of Defense who provided a 700-man Tajik mechanized /armor task force from the Northern Alliance to assist. From 10 to 12 March, TF Hammer and units from the Northern Alliance, advised by Special Forces soldiers, deployed into the area. The combined joint task force of infantry, mechanized, and armor units received little resistance. The Special Forces advised unit was able to quickly clear the Whale and the three villages located in the valley.<sup>78</sup> While this was occurring, the outer blocking position, consisting of the Afghan and Special Forces soldiers, tightened the circle that encompassed Operation ANACONDA.<sup>79</sup> Subsequently, a Canadian Light Infantry unit was air-assaulted into the area and from 13 to 19 March conducted a series of sensitive site exploitation missions on both the Whale and the passes around Objective Ginger. This follow-on operation resulted in a large amount of intelligence gathered from the numerous caves in those areas.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Stewart, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 41-43.

<sup>77</sup> Briscoe et. al., *Weapons of Choice*, 319.

<sup>78</sup> Stewart, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 43.

<sup>79</sup> Moore, *The Hunt for Bin Laden*, 291.

<sup>80</sup> Stewart, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, 44



The Pentagon officially declared Operation ANACONDA over on 18 March. The intelligence estimates vary greatly as to the number of Taliban and al Qaeda forces killed, with estimates ranging as high as 800 to as low as 100.<sup>81</sup> However, what is clear is that the enemy fought a well-coordinated defensive battle using forward observation posts to guide mortar and artillery attacks on the coalition forces entering the battle. As a result, it took over sixteen days for the SOF and CF units to accomplish their objectives. Overall, the operation was declared a success due to the large amount of intelligence gathered, the high enemy body count, and the forced withdrawal of the enemy from the area. Most notably, it is believed that al Qaeda suffered a major setback from this operation due to the loss of their most aggressive and experienced fighters.

### **Strengthening CF Capability Limitations with SOF Capability Strengths**

Normally speaking, CF's large organizational structure is a capability strength because of the large amount of resources that they can employ on the battlefield. However, the amount of resources they could provide for Operation ANACONDA was both a capability strength and limitation. Due to political considerations, USCENTCOM significantly limited the number of conventional units that could be allowed in Afghanistan, which hindered the amount of troops TF Mountain could employ in ANACONDA. This resulted in a capability limitation for CF because they did not have enough soldiers to conduct this mission unilaterally. On March 4, the limited number of troops proved to be a significant problem for TF Mountain when they committed the reserve because they did not have enough forces to clear the Whale and secure the valley, as TF Hammer was originally tasked to do. To make up for this capability limitation, SOF's capability strength as a force multiplier<sup>82</sup> was successfully leveraged by CF when Commander Zia's forces were committed back into the fight in conjunction with other elements from the Northern Alliance. The combination of these two units gave the Special Forces advisors enough combat

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<sup>81</sup> Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*, 375-377.

<sup>82</sup> JP 1-02 defines force multiplier as "a capability that, when added to and employed by a combat force, significantly increases the combat potential of that force and thus enhances the probability of successful mission accomplishment." JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 213.

power to quickly clear the Whale and secure the valley. This action prevented the need for TF Mountain to reposition and perform this task themselves, which would have presented additional opportunities for al Qaeda and Taliban forces to move in and out of the valley area unhindered.

Another example of SOF's capability strength as a force multiplier was the use of a tactical Psychological operations team at Forward Arming Refueling Point (FARP) TEXACO, which also helped to compensate for the limited number of CF available for the mission. The SOF and CF used the FARP to rearm and refuel helicopters that were providing direct support for the ground troops in Operation ANACONDA.<sup>83</sup> The constant flow of helicopters in and out of the FARP attracted curious locals from the surrounding villages who want to see what the commotion was about. However, the TF Mountain only committed a platoon size element to guard the FARP's inner perimeter. With the limited number of forces committed to guard the perimeter, security could have proved to be a challenge considering that the FARP was located next to a large village with 30,000 residents and four other villages which were within a 5-mile radius. Conventional forces were able to successfully use the Psychological Operation team to broadcast "stay away" messages in the Afghan's native language which helped prevent curious local Afghans from approaching the FARP. As the villagers approached, the Psychological Operation team would broadcast through their loudspeakers a prerecorded message that warned the locals to stay back and explained why the coalition force was in the area. The local villagers would stop, listen for a few minutes, and then move away from the airfield.<sup>84</sup> In an interview with the FARP commander, MAJ Mark Quander, he confirmed that the Psychological Operation team was extremely helpful in keeping the local populace away from the FARP.<sup>85</sup> Through leveraging the Psychological Operation team's capability

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<sup>83</sup> Due to the distance from the rotary wing staging points which is located in either Bagram or Kandahar, the CF established a FARP to increase the amount of time the rotary wing platforms had on station to support the ground forces. However, only a platoon size element could be spared to secure this outstation because of the limited number of soldiers available for the operation.

<sup>84</sup> Briscoe et. al., *Weapons of Choice*, 287-289.

<sup>85</sup> MAJ Mark Quander, interviewed by John McCool, March 07, 2007, Operational Leadership Experiences Project, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 10.

strength to act as a force multiplier, a capability which the CF did not possess, the CF did not have to commit a larger force to secure the FARP, and were able to concentrate the majority of their forces on the blocking positions.

In terms of intelligence gathering, there was a missed opportunity to employ SOF assets to further develop the enemy picture in and around the objective area. One of SOF's primary missions is to conduct strategic reconnaissance and their small organizational structure, personnel, training, and organic materials support this capability strength. Conventional forces have the capability to conduct reconnaissance missions, but have limited capability to operate far forward of friendly lines. As such, this task represents a capability limitation of CF. Prior to Operation ANACONDA, numerous SOF technical assets were used, such as unmanned aerial vehicles, in an attempt to refine the enemy picture, but had little success. As a result, the location and estimated number of enemy personnel in and around the objective area fluctuated with each intelligence report. Special operation forces' ability to use multiple sources of intelligence such as human intelligence and signal intelligence could have been better leveraged if more time was available prior to the execution of the operation. As discussed, SOF elements were inserted two days prior to the operation, but by that time it would have been extremely difficult for the large conventional force to completely change their plan. This is mainly due to the large amount of coordination and synchronization it takes to conduct a large-scale air assault operation which has multiple moving parts. A missed opportunity occurred in that TF Mountain could have delayed the operation in order to insert more ground SOF elements into the objective area. In doing so, the special operations reconnaissance assets could have gathered more information on the enemy's disposition, composition, and strength. As later summarized by the Deputy Fire Support Coordinator of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division during Operation Anaconda, "it was apparent that imagery intelligence and the Predator were not going to identify robust target sets to engage when facing an enemy employing asymmetrical operations. Once we put our SR teams in and established a more intricate human intelligence network we did a better job of

confirming or denying targets and particular enemy courses of actions.”<sup>86</sup> All intelligence reports indicated that the enemy was preparing to conduct a spring offensive. Therefore, there was little reason to believe that the operation could not have been delayed in order to further leverage SOF’s intelligence gathering capabilities. It should also be noted that enemy actions up to that point in the war did indicate they would not stay and fight, but rather flee the area to avoid being captured. Accordingly, all of the intelligence analysts predicted that the same pattern would transpire during Operation ANACONDA, which may have influenced the decision to proceed with the operation even though the intelligence reports varied greatly. Nonetheless, an opportunity was missed which could have been capitalized on.

### **Strengthening SOF capability limitations with CF capability strengths**

After the battle at Tora Bora, it was widely believed at USCENTCOM that the escape of Taliban and al Qaeda operatives could have been prevented if CF were used to seal off the Pakistan border. The inability of SOF to accomplish this task represents a significant capability limitation. Even with SOF’s ability to act as a force multiplier, TF Hammer and Anvil still did not have enough forces to completely seal off the objective area in Operation ANACONDA. This capability limitation was a direct result of SOF’s small organizational structure which inhibits their ability to conduct large-scale operations. A capability strength of CF is the large amount of resources and personnel they can provide, which is a direct result of their DOTMLPF construct. Even though the amount of personnel CF could employ was limited due to political considerations, their ability to produce three infantry battalions for the operation in short notice, still represented a capability strength. Through leveraging CF to establish blocking positions, they were able to compensate for SOF’s lack of forces; a lesson learned during the battle at Tora Bora.

As JSOTF-N began their mission analysis and the threat estimate grew, COL Mulholland quickly “recognized that a deliberate attack against a well-entrenched enemy force exceeded the capabilities of his task force to plan and execute.”<sup>87</sup> This capability limitation is reinforced by SOF’s small organizational

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<sup>86</sup> Bentley, “Afghanistan: Joint and Coalition Fire Support in Operation Anaconda,” 12.

<sup>87</sup> Briscoe et. al., *Weapons of Choice*, 280.

structure and limited number of assigned personnel. Accordingly, COL Mulholland turned to CF for support, who were subsequently placed in overall command of the operation. As discussed previously in the DOTMLPF comparison of the two forces, the large organizational structure of the conventional force allows them to operate over a large geographical area, as well as facilitate large-scale operations that require extensive planning, coordination, synchronization, and command and control prior to and during execution. The large amount of enemy forces believed to be in the area, the extremely mountainous terrain with numerous possible escape routes, and the large geographical distance of the objective area created the need for this capability. Placing CF in charge of Operation ANACONDA allowed them to compliment SOF's capability limitation because CF had a greater capacity to plan, coordinate, synchronize, and command and control this type of operation.

On the first day of Operation ANACONDA, there was a missed opportunity for SOF to fully leverage CF's ability to provide firepower support. On D-day, the plan called for a massive bombardment of the objective area to include the Whale. However, only five bombs were dropped on the target area. Additionally, TF Hammer, came under heavy indirect fire as they approached the Whale, but the decision was still made to divert the priority for close air support from TF Hammer to TF Rakassan as the CF moved to their blocking positions. This occurred even though TF Hammer was the main effort and by doctrine should have received priority of effort. Internally, TF Hammer did not have enough firepower to cover their movement around the Whale and with the priority for close air support being diverted to support TF Rakassan's movement, the SOF-advised force lost all momentum and the main effort stalled. This missed opportunity resulted in the withdrawal of TF Hammer by the end of the first day and directly contributed to the plan falling apart, enabling the enemy to concentrate its efforts on TF Mountain's blocking positions.

## **Conclusion**

Although there were missed opportunities, it appears overall that both forces tried to employ their units using each other's strengths to compensate for their own internal capability limitations. However, it does not appear that SOF and CF operated in the most efficient and effective manner possible, which can

be partially attributed to a lack of integration, coordination, synchronization, and overall situational awareness by both forces. This is best demonstrated by the shift of close air support priority from TF Hammer to TF Rakassan which contributed to the eventual decision of the Afghan force to withdrawal from the battlefield, as well as the cancellation of over half of CF preplanned air sorties because of SOF's presence near the target areas.

## **Case Study #2: CJTF-76 & CJSOTF-A (Afghanistan, 2004)**

This second case study analyzes how U.S. SOF and CF conducted joint operations in Afghanistan during 2004. This case study differs from the first case study of Operation ANACONDA as it covers operations over a longer period of time (2004) rather than a single battle. In 2004, both forces were relatively successfully in keeping the number of insurgent attacks down and enabling the presidential election process. However, in the long-run it appears that the manner in which they operated was not sufficient to prevent the reemergence of the Taliban. At the operational and tactical levels, both forces leveraged each other's capability strengths to compensate for their own internal capability limitations, but only to a limited extent. This prohibited the two forces from operating in the most efficient and effective manner possible. One way that both forces would have been more efficient and effective at the operational and tactical levels was if more troops were made available, which could have been accomplished through employing more CF or using SOF to act as a force multiplier. At the tactical level, efficiency could have been increased if SOF and CF's plans and operations were more integrated. In doing so, the two forces could have fully exploited each other's capabilities.

The case study begins with a brief background on the events leading up to the operations conducted in Afghanistan during 2004. Next, the two CF and SOF operational headquarters are described, followed by an overview of their operational objectives, the overall situation, and the manner in which both organizations employed their forces. After the overview, the operations conducted by both forces and the overall results from those operations are briefly described and then analyzed. The analysis demonstrates areas where SOF and CF were able to successfully leverage each other's capability

strengths to substitute for their own internal capability limitations, as well as areas where there were missed opportunities to do so. Finally, conclusions are presented based on the preceding discussion and analysis.

## **Background**

After the Taliban was removed from power in December of 2001, they moved into a strategic defensive posture and remained there until the end of 2003. “In May 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld declared that major combat operation in Afghanistan had ended and that American forces would begin rebuilding Afghanistan while maintaining peace and order.”<sup>88</sup> During this period, the Taliban “built up their bases, recruited and trained new members, and continued attempts to implement a shadow government. Once the Taliban was prepared to resume operations, they remained fixated on the focus-military strategy because they perceived popular support as insufficient or nonexistent. Therefore, they did not see the need to involve political development of the populace.”<sup>89</sup> As the Taliban built up their support base, they increased their level of attacks from 65 in 2002 to 148 in 2003, which resulted in 79 and 133 deaths respectively.<sup>90</sup> In an effort to stabilize Afghanistan, the U.S. increased their troop numbers from 5,200 in 2002 to 10,400 in 2003.<sup>91</sup> However, in comparison to the conflict in Iraq, where troop numbers in 2003 were estimated to be around 146,000, Afghanistan was an economy of force operation.

## **Afghanistan 2004**

In 2004, the SOF and CF operational headquarters were Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A) for SOF and Combined Joint Task Force-76 (CJTF-76) for CF. As summarized by Adrian Bogart in *One Valley at a Time*:

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<sup>88</sup> Christopher N Koontz, ed., *Enduring Voices: Oral Histories of the U.S. Army Experience in Afghanistan 2003-2005*. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2008), 3.

<sup>89</sup> Joseph D. Celeski, *Operationalizing COIN*, JSOU Report 05-2 (Hurlburt, FL, JSOU Press, 2005), 66.

<sup>90</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2008), 48.

<sup>91</sup> National Priorities Project, “Fact Sheet: Quick Facts about U.s. Military Operations in Afghanistan,” <http://www.nationalpriorities.org/newsletter/2009/12/01/Afghanistan-fact-sheet-numbers-behind-troop-increase> (accessed January 18, 2010).

The span of control of CJSOTF-A in 2004 was over a 4,000 man force consisting of SF battalion task forces with subordinate SF company teams, a U.S. naval special warfare task unit, tactical SF company teams, tactical psychological teams, a civil affairs company team, joint tactical air control parties, and irregular forces consisting of Afghan Security Forces [ASF].<sup>92</sup>

CJTF-76's span of control consisted of an Infantry Brigade Combat Team, eight U.S. infantry battalions, a field artillery battalion, 12 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT), approximately seven Afghan infantry Battalions (kandaks), as well as numerous other assets.<sup>93</sup>



Figure#3. Map of Afghanistan

Source: Christopher N Koontz, ed., *Enduring Voices: Oral Histories of the U.S. Army Experience in Afghanistan 2003-2005*. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2008), 7. Copyright reprint permission for this figure was granted on February 18, 2010 by Command and General Staff College copyrights coordinator.

CJSOTF-A was subordinate to CJTF-76, however the units can still be viewed as the operational equivalent of each other because both forces were responsible for commanding and controlling their organizations across the same geographical areas. Their shared area of responsibility consisted of the

<sup>92</sup> Adrian T Bogart III, *One Valley at a Time*, JSOU Report 06-06 (Hurlburt, FL: JSOU Press, 2007), 39.

<sup>93</sup> Koontz, *Enduring Voices*, 7-8.



entire country except for the northern region, which was commanded by NATO (See above “Figure#3: Map of Afghanistan” for a depiction of the Coalition boundaries within Afghanistan).<sup>94</sup> At the strategic level, one of the U.S. policy objectives was to ensure the legitimization and successful transition of the new Afghan government. This translated into several operational objectives such as addressing the causes of instability and enabling several key Afghan political events that were to transpire in 2004.

Due to the fact that this monograph is only written from open source material, it is difficult to ascertain what the exact operational objectives for both organizations were. However, Major General Olson, the commander of CJTF-76 in 2004, stated that the purpose of their mission “was to establish a stable security environment.” He believed that a major component of this was the reconstruction effort.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, Brigadier General Bernard S. Champoux, Deputy Commanding General of CJTF-76 in 2004, stated that one of the main issues his command dealt with was separating the insurgent from the populace and that voter registration and the presidential elections became an impromptu campaign objective for CJTF-76. According to Bogart, CJSOTF-A’s 2004 campaign focused on what they called three strategic goals:

- 1) Voter registration and elections security – prevent the disruptions to the electoral process
- 2) Reconstruction – build Afghan institutions in order to remove the causes of instability
- 3) COIN [Counterinsurgency] Operations – conduct UW [Unconventional Warfare] and foreign internal defense to separate the guerrilla from the populace<sup>96</sup>

These goals seem congruent with both Major General Olson and Brigadier General Champoux’s views on the major components of CJTF-76’s operations in 2004. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the CJSOTF-A “strategic goals” were in fact the operational objectives that both forces used to guide their tactical operations. As such, the case study will focus on how both forces leveraged each other’s capabilities while trying to achieve these operational objectives.

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<sup>94</sup> Koontz, *Enduring Voices*, 249.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 247, 256.

<sup>96</sup> Bogart, *One Valley at a Time*, 56.

In 2004, both organizations had to address numerous causes of instability that directly threatened the legitimacy of the new Afghan government. The causes of instability were primarily fueled by the inability of the interim Afghan government and coalition forces to secure large sections of the country, which left a significant power vacuum. This resulted in numerous conflicts between the central government of Afghanistan and other competing warlords who attempted to fill the void. Additionally, the lack of governance resulted in numerous inter-ethnic conflicts, the reemergence of the Taliban, and allowed al-Qaeda / Hezb-i-Islami (HiG)<sup>97</sup> elements to operate within the borders of Afghanistan.<sup>98</sup> In general, coalition forces believe the al Qaeda was operating in the east, the Taliban in the south, and HiG in the northeast.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, coalition forces also assessed that al Qaeda was the external source supporting the indigenous Taliban and HiG insurgent groups<sup>100</sup>. These threats used the poor structural conditions found throughout Afghanistan to promote their cause by demonstrating the inability of the Afghan government to provide basic services. In addition to addressing these threats, both CJSOTF-A and CJTF-76 had to address a series of major political events that were to transpire throughout the year, which the insurgent groups sought to undermine at every available opportunity. These events consisted of interim Afghan government delegates meeting to ratify the new national constitution in January, voter registration in the spring, and presidential elections in the fall.

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<sup>97</sup> The front commander of the HiG was Gulbuddin Hekmatyar who was a former Mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s. In the early 1990s he became part of the new Mujahideen government. In 1994 he became dissatisfied with the regime and attempted unsuccessfully to overthrow it. In 1996 he once again became part of the Afghan government as the Prime Minister but was forced from power by the Taliban. When the Taliban fell from power in 2001, he became a part of the resistance movement allying his organization with the remnants of the Taliban and Al Qaeda operatives. Bogart, *One Valley at a Time*, 17.

<sup>98</sup> Globalsecurity.org, "Military: Afghanistan," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/afghanistan/intro.htm> (accessed November 2009).

<sup>99</sup> The Northern Resistance Front generally ran from "Kabul to the Panshir Valley, westward along the Kabul River and northeast along the Afghan/Pakistan border." The Central Resistance Front spanned "south of the Tora Bora mountains along the Afghan/Pakistan border and south to Spin Boldak. It spread west to the Ring Road and the cities of Ghazni and Gardez." The Southern Resistance Front "included Kandahar north to Qalat, west to the Oruzgan province, and south to the Helmand providence." Bogart, *One Valley at a Time*, 16-18.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 16.

Generally speaking, both CJSOTF-A and CJTF-76 had their forces spread throughout the country. The CF were mainly located around the major population centers on the interior and peripheral parts of the country. They were also tasked with commanding and controlling all activities that happened within their assigned area of responsibility, which encompassed a large portion of the country. CJSOTF-A was assigned the mission of protecting the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, as such many SOF units (i.e. Special Forces) were located along this border in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan.<sup>101</sup> Additionally, in major population centers near the border such as Kandahar and Khowst, SOF was collocated with CF. In these areas, both units had shared areas of responsibility, but CF usually had the overall responsibility for command and control of the battlespace. However, even with this established relationship, there was little integration between both forces. An infantry commander, who was collocated with two SFODAs at Khowst, stated that the primary interaction between the two forces was to coordinate de-confliction measures. He further stated that his company had little knowledge as to what type of operations the SFODAs were conducting in the area.<sup>102</sup> In addition to the two forces being collocated, CJSOTF-A positioned their Special Forces units out on the peripheral parts of the country, in areas that extended beyond the reach of CF. Often these areas were extremely non-permissive and required the use of local indigenous forces to secure the Special Forces' firebases. In some of these remote areas, CSJOTF-A units were assigned a joint special operations area, making them responsible for commanding and controlling all activities within their assigned battlespace.<sup>103</sup>

With the forces position as just discussed, both forces attempted to achieve their operational objectives. Voter registration and presidential election was a key component in ensuring the legitimization

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<sup>101</sup> Koontz, *Enduring Voices*, 297; Bogart, *One Valley at a Time*, 39.

<sup>102</sup> MAJ Jason Condrey, interviewed by author, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, December 11, 2009.

<sup>103</sup> As defined by JP 1-02, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, a JSOA is "an area of land, sea, and airspace assigned by a joint force commander to the commander of a joint special operations force to conduct special operations activities. It may be limited in size to accommodate a discrete direct action mission or may be extensive enough to allow a continuing broad range of unconventional warfare options." JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 298.

of the Afghan government. One of the biggest threats to the election process was the threat of Anti-Coalition Militias (ACM) (i.e. various insurgent groups and malign indigenous actors).<sup>104</sup> Special operation forces and conventional forces addressed this threat prior to and during the election process through an increase in offensive operations. The intent behind these operations was to prevent ACM forces from planning, organizing, and executing any activity which could possibly disrupt the election process. To assist in providing security for the election process, both forces increased their number of troops in Afghanistan from 10,400 to approximately 17,900 troops.<sup>105</sup>

CJTF-76 and CJSOTF-A focused their reconstruction efforts on civil-military projects that were designed to expand the basic infrastructure within Afghanistan and remove the causes of instability.<sup>106</sup> Civil Affairs personnel and units were at the core of both organizations' civil-military efforts. Both SOF and CF worked on projects such as building roads, schools, wells, and others projects that the local villagers needed to improve their standard of living. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) were assigned to CF and were focused specifically on this task. In each PRT, Civil Affairs personnel did the majority of the work in terms of project assessment, planning, and supervision. Additionally, each PRT also had a CF assigned to provide security. The SOF headquarters, CJSTOTF-A, had one Civil Affairs company assigned to them that consisted of a company headquarters section, called a Civil Affairs Team-Bravo, and five Civil Affairs maneuver units, called Civil Affairs Team-Alphas. Both SOF and CF took the same approach in using their Civil Affairs assets, but with two distinct differences. In addition to focusing projects aimed at removing the causes of instability, CJSOTF-A also used Civil Affairs to

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<sup>104</sup> Anti-coalition militias (ACM) was a term used in 2004 to describe the various resistant groups in Afghanistan. Anti-coalition militias was a broad term that covered groups such as the Taliban, al Qaeda, Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HiG), and resistant tribal warlords/militias.

<sup>105</sup> Lisa Burgess, "U.S. Troops presence in Afghanistan at 17,900 and expected to hold steady," *Stars and Stripes*, July 09, 2004, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2004/040709-afghan-presence.htm> (accessed January 17, 2010).

<sup>106</sup> The expansion of the Afghan national army was another significant project that was occurring during 2004. However, neither CJSOTF-A nor CJTF-76 were responsible for this task. This responsibility fell under control of Combined Security Transition Command - Afghanistan and Task Force Phoenix.

“develop protection plans for the local population (curfews, local security force support, neighborhood watch, protected zoned) and organized strategies to turn hostile locals friendly (black to white), neutral populations to supportive (gray to white), and retain positive support (conditional CMO).”<sup>107</sup> The second difference is that the PRTs tended to focus on larger scale projects, such as improving Highway 1, the major roadway that wrapped around Afghanistan, while CJSOTF-A tended to focus on smaller projects such as building schools and wells. In addition to the use of PRT and Civil Affairs, both SOF and CF had access to Commander’s Emergence Relief Program funds. These funds allowed commanders at all levels to nominate projects for funding that could enable the reconstruction effort based on the needs of the local populace. Once the project was approved, funds would be provided and the unit that nominated the project would be responsible for its supervision and execution.<sup>108</sup> Accordingly, both forces conducted assessments within their areas of operations, nominated projects, and supervised their construction. However, there are many examples of where both the PRTs and SOF units were working in the same areas but did not coordinate their projects with each other. For example, the PRT’s Civil Affairs team leader in Kandahar stated that the majority of the interaction the PRT had with the Special Forces team operating in the same area was to de-conflict where the two units were operating. The team leader further stated that both the PRT and the Special Forces team had little knowledge as to the different projects both units were planning and conducting, much less their other operational activities. The team leader did say that some operations and projects were coordinated, but only to a limited extent.<sup>109</sup>

For both SOF and CF, separating the insurgents from the populace was a two-fold process. The first part of the process was to remove the causes of instability through reconstruction projects. The second part was through a series of offensive actions designed to disrupt insurgent activities, remove their safe havens, and kill or capture key anti-coalition militias leaders. To achieve this end state, both forces

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<sup>107</sup> Bogart, *One Valley at a Time*, 73.

<sup>108</sup> The level of approval dependent upon the amount requested. The higher cost projects required approval by a higher level headquarters such as CJTF-76 and CJSOTF-A.

<sup>109</sup> MAJ Michael Hammerstrom, interviewed by author, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, January 20, 2010.

planned and conducted numerous large and small-scale offensive operations.<sup>110</sup> Most of these operations served two purposes: 1) To separate the insurgent from the populace; and 2) To provide security for the election process.

The overall operational strategy for both forces is best summarized by Bogart in *One Valley at a Time*: “The winning formula involved strike operations to kill or capture the insurgent and civic actions to remove the causes of instability that fostered the insurgency. The exit strategy was centered on Afghans defending Afghanistan.”<sup>111</sup> This operational strategy proved to be extremely successful in 2004 resulting in the ratification of the Afghan national constitution and successful election of President Hamid Karzai. As summarized by a Department of State Report: “Over 10 million Afghans registered to vote and over 8 million cast ballots on election day; more than 40 percent of whom were women. The success of the election was a blow to the Taliban insurgency, which proved unable to significantly disrupt the process or intimidate voters from participating.”<sup>112</sup> Another indicator of the success of the operational strategy was how both forces were able to stop the upward trend in attacks during 2004.<sup>113</sup> However, as we will discuss in the next section, even though this strategy was successful in 2004 it may have proved to be insufficient to facilitate the overall exit strategy of “Afghans defending Afghanistan.” This is demonstrated by the inability of the current Afghan government to provide effective governance and the growth of the Taliban insurgency.

### **Strengthening CF Capability limitations with SOF Capability Strengths**

The CF headquarters, CJTF-76, did not have enough CF assigned to them to secure the major population centers, the remote parts of country, and protect the borders. This situation represents a

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<sup>110</sup> For CF, the large offensive operations included Operation Lighting Freedom and Thunder Freedom. For SOF, the large offensive operations included Operation Princess, Independence, Ticonderoga, Trenton, and Saratoga. Koontz, *Enduring Voices*, 260; Bogart, *One Valley at a Time*, 58.

<sup>111</sup> Bogart, *One Valley at a Time*, 55.

<sup>112</sup> U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, April 2005, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2004*, 70, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/45313.pdf> (accessed January 18, 2010).

<sup>113</sup> . The number of insurgent attacks decreased slightly from 148 in 2003 to 146 in 2004. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 48

significant capability limitation. Securing the population in the remote parts of the country was an extremely important task because loss of this territory to Anti-Coalition Militia (ACM) forces would allow them to build up their support base, expand their spheres of influence, and potentially project forward into the major population centers; thus further destabilizing the situation. Protecting the Afghanistan/Pakistan border was also an extremely important task because ACM forces used Pakistan as their safe heaven to rest, refit, resupply, and plan their future operations. In sealing off the border, this would have denied ACM forces of this opportunity. Therefore, SOF or CF had to be placed in these areas. The majority of the CF were protecting the major population centers and only a limited number of CF could have been spared. If CF would have been tasked with this responsibility it would have required them to operate in smaller size units to secure the remote areas that were spread throughout the country. Operating in this capacity is a capability limitation for CF because they are organized, trained, and equipped to operate as a part of a larger force and not to conduct independent small unit operations. Employing CF in this manner would have created a significant risk not only to the mission, but to the force as well. However, this task fell within SOF's inherent capability strengths because they are organized, trained, and equipped to operate in small units, far forward of friendly lines, in high risk situations, and in an operational environment that is extremely complex and ambiguous. Additionally, securing these areas, would require working by, with, and through the Afghan militia forces and Afghan national army, which directly fell in line with the inherent capability strengths of SOF, particularly Special Forces. Therefore, the placement of Special Forces along the border region and in the peripheral parts of the country made operational and tactical sense. In doing so, the CF was able to successfully leverage SOF's ability to act as a force multiplier and extend the reach of Afghan government.

In 2004, Civil Affairs was only a SOF asset and CF did not have trained units to conduct civil-military operations, representing a significant capability limitation.<sup>114</sup> As such, the employment of a Civil

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<sup>114</sup> In 2006, U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne) was transferred to U.S. Army Reserve Command. Under Department of the Army General Order No. 12., reserve component Civil

Affairs team with each PRT made up for this capability deficiency. The addition of the Civil Affairs into this organization gave the PRT the capability to interface with the local populace, understand social networks in the area, determine the key leaders, and develop area assessments. In doing so, the PRTs were able to determine the needs of the local populace and prioritize their reconstruction projects accordingly. The Civil Affairs units also served as one of the primary means for project coordination and supervision. In addition to these activities, the Civil Affairs units were also the PRT's primary interface with any U.S. governmental agencies, Afghan governmental agency, nongovernmental organizations and private volunteer organizations. This capability allowed the PRTs to coordinate their actions with numerous organizations that were operating within their area, as well as the ability to leverage them for additional support if needed. LTC Augustine, the Lashkar Gah PRT commander, stated that his greatest success as a PRT commander was providing the ability, through his Civil Affairs unit, for the local village leaders, Afghan governmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and the various other organizations to coordinate their activities, as well as act as a conduit for information.<sup>115</sup> Another PRT commander stated that Civil Affairs was vital in providing "good situational awareness and understanding of what was going on."<sup>116</sup> Through the use of Civil Affairs in the PRTs, SOF was able to provide a capability that CF did not previously possess, and the PRTs were able to be more effective while serving as one of the key components of the CF's reconstruction effort.

As we have discussed, using SOF along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border was an example of how SOF's ability to act as a force multiplier was successfully leveraged; however, this example also shows a

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Affairs and Psychological operation units were tasked to primarily support CF and active component Civil Affairs and Psychological operation units remained tasked to primarily support SOF. Department of the Army, General Order No. 12, *Reassignment of United States Reserve Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Organizations from the United States Army Special Operations Command to the United States Army Reserve Command* (Washington, DC: GPO, 25 October 2006), <http://www.army.mil/usapa/epubs/pdf/go0612.pdf> (accessed February 16, 2010).

<sup>115</sup> Koontz, *Enduring Voices*, 451.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 493. Interview with the Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Anthony J. Hunter, the Gardiz PRT commander.



missed opportunity because the Special Forces units were not leveraged to their fullest potential. As noted in the RAND study, “Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan,” “There were too few U.S. and Afghan government forces to stabilize the country. Afghan militia forces had to fill the security vacuum.”<sup>117</sup> This is true especially considering that CF only had 17,900 troops in Afghanistan at its highest point in 2004 and the Afghan national army numbered slightly over 11,000. The Afghan militia forces presented potentially more combat power, but due to U.S. legal restrictions, SOF was only allowed to use the Afghan militia forces to conduct activities associated with firebase security. The Special Forces units were not allowed to organize, train, equip, or advise the Afghan militia forces to protect the local villages that were under constant threat from insurgent forces. Since SOF could not use the Afghan militia forces in this capacity, they had to focus on conducting offensive operations with the Afghan national army and CF as a means to protect the local populace. As Tucker and Lamb would argue, this is not maximizing the inherent capability strength of Special Forces, because Special Forces’ greatest utility is their ability to counter unconventional threats through indirect means.<sup>118</sup> Special Forces’ ability to act as a force multiplier could have been further leveraged if they had been allowed to employ Afghan militia forces to secure the local villages. This would have been a better utilization of SOF’s capability strengths especially considering there were an estimated 60,000 to 100,000 soldiers in private militias throughout Afghanistan during 2004.<sup>119</sup> However, this option was not thoroughly explored because it was thought that in the long-run, using the Afghan militia forces in this capacity would only undermine the power of the central government.<sup>120</sup> This contention does not take into consideration that the Afghan militia forces could be formed as a village defense force that fell under the direct control and supervision of either the Afghan national police or the Afghan national army. It should be noted that this concept was initiated in

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<sup>117</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 90.

<sup>118</sup> Tucker and Lamb, *United States Special Operation Forces*, 176-178.

<sup>119</sup> Afghanistan Watch, “Fact Sheet: Security Sector Capacity Building,” Century Foundation, <http://www.afghanistanwatch.org/> (accessed January 18, 2010).

<sup>120</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 90.

the fall of 2009, through what is being called the Community Defense Initiative, currently the program is ongoing with varying degrees of success.<sup>121</sup>

### **Strengthening SOF Capability Limitations with CF Capability Strengths**

As stated in FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, a key component to counterinsurgency is protecting the populace and the infrastructure from insurgent attacks.<sup>122</sup> In order to secure a major population center such as Kandahar, Khowst, and Kabul a large number of forces would be needed. However, this task exceeded the capabilities of CJSOTF-A, representing a significant capability limitation. In the beginning of 2004, the Afghan national army was just being developed and only numbered around 6,000 troops, which was not enough to secure these areas. However, this requirement fell in line with CF's inherent capability strengths, which was derived from their large organizational structure. In using the CF in this capacity, both SOF and the Afghan national army's capability limitations were negated and provided time for the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan to expand the Afghan national army, which equated to roughly 17,000 by the end of 2004.<sup>123</sup>

In the remote areas of the country, where SOF predominately operated, SOF had a limited capacity to provide indirect fire support, secure their firebase, protect the populace, and conduct offensive operations. This capability limitation was mainly a product of SOF's small organizational structure and limited internal fire support assets. CJTF-76 was able to make up for SOF's capability limitations in a number of ways. First, the CF augmented the SOF's indirect fire support assets with 105mm or 155mm howitzers. COL Neason, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery commander, noted the importance of augmenting SOF with howitzers when he stated:

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<sup>121</sup> Jon Boone, "US pours millions into anti-Taliban militias in Afghanistan: Special Forces funding fighters in Afghanistan," *guardian.co.uk*, November 22, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/nov/22/us-anti-taliban-militias-afghanistan> (accessed February 11, 2010).

<sup>122</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* (Washington D.C.: GPO, April 2009), 3-6.

<sup>123</sup> Institute for the Study of War, "Afghanistan National Army (ANA)," <http://www.understandingwar.org/themenode/afghanistan-national-army-ana> (accessed January 18, 2010).

Most of them were in support of SOF, to enhance their reach because we had a lot of no-man's land. The SOF guys would go out on these long missions, but they didn't have any organic and direct support to take and assist them with either enabling them as they had contact and/or breaking or disengaging contact. Those fires were able to provide some destruction to these sites where people were launching mortars into their compounds. It created standoff, and once we got the guns out there, it was immediately known and had an immediate impact upon the operations in terms of assisting and safeguarding their base of operations, as well as supporting them when they were on operations external to their remote locations.<sup>124</sup>

Through employing the howitzers in this fashion CF were able to significantly make up for SOF's limited indirect fire capability, as well as increase SOF's overall effectiveness.

In terms of base security, protecting the populace, and conducting offensive operations, SOF was able to partially make up this capability limitation internally by recruiting and training Afghan militia forces to secure their bases. However, due to legal restrictions, SOF could not use this force to conduct offensive operations. In numerous circumstances, CJTF-76 made up for this capability limitation by deploying U.S. infantry units, Afghan national army units, or both to augment SOF units at their remote locations.<sup>125</sup> For example, three weeks prior to the October presidential elections an infantry company from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division augmented SFODA 341. Their purpose was to help SOF prevent insurgent attacks from disrupting the election process. SFODA 341's commander, CPT Stuart Farris, noted the effectiveness of being augmented by an infantry unit when he said:

We [SFODA 341] did a great combined operation with them [Bravo Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 505<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment] where we gutted the entire ACM network with the valley. We captured seven of nine people we were looking for on the combined operation, and we would not have been able to do that without the 82<sup>nd</sup> because we just didn't have the manpower.<sup>126</sup>

The addition of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne company made up for the capability limitation of the Special Forces unit. In doing so, the joint unit was able to enhance the security situation in that area; thus facilitating the election process and contributing to its overall success. This is just one example of many, where CF

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<sup>124</sup> Koontz, *Enduring Voices*, 355.

<sup>125</sup> The size of the force deployed was often dependent upon the security situation in that area.

<sup>126</sup> MAJ Stuart Farris, interviewed by Laurence Lessard, December 06, 2007, Operational Leadership Experiences Project, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 12.

augment SOF to enable them to conduct large-scale offensive operations, provide base security, or protect the local populace.

In a testimony to the House Armed Service Committee, Lt. Gen. Norton A. Schwartz, Director of Operations for the Joint Staff, said that U.S. Military had 17,900 troops in Afghanistan and that number was adequate for the mission.<sup>127</sup> However, this assessment was partly based on CJTF-76 and CJSTOF-A's operational campaign objectives that primarily focused on conducting offensive operations and stability operations (i.e. reconstruction). In a counterinsurgency campaign, as stated in FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, a combination of offensive, defensive, and stability operations must be conducted. FM 3-24.2 further states that the combination of these operations will vary according to the situation, mission, and desired end-state.<sup>128</sup> In other words, all three operations will take place simultaneously, but to varying degrees. The key missing component in Afghanistan at that time was defensive operations (i.e. protecting the populace and infrastructure from insurgent attacks). Conventional forces were conducting some defensive operations in large urban areas such as Kandahar, Khowst, and Kabul, but more forces were needed to secure the rest of the country until the Afghan national army could assume those responsibilities. Special operation forces was able to make up for this capability limitation in working by, with, and through indigenous forces, but their small organizational structure prohibited them from securing the major population centers and operating in the remote parts of the country at the same time. Simply stated, more forces were needed. The lack of additional forces in 2004 represents a missed opportunity to leverage CF's ability to provide a large amount of resources (i.e. manpower).

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<sup>127</sup> Lisa Burgess, "U.S. Troops presence in Afghanistan at 17,900 and expected to hold steady," *Stars and Stripes*, July 09, 2004, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2004/040709-afghan-presence.htm> (accessed January 17, 2010).

<sup>128</sup> FM 3-24.2 states, "Counterinsurgent offensive operations focus on eliminating the insurgents. Counterinsurgent defensive operations focus on protecting the populace and infrastructure from insurgent attacks. Stability operations focus on addressing the root causes that allowed to insurgency to come into existence." FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, 3-6.

The small CF footprint seems to have directly contributed to growth of the Taliban insurgency and the continued destabilization of Afghanistan.<sup>129</sup> Due to the limited number of forces both SOF and CF had, offensive operations had to be the primary means to protect the populace, deny enemy sanctuary, and disrupt enemy activities. The main problem with this approach is that many of these offensive operations were unsuccessful in completely dismantling the insurgent networks because of the insurgent's extensive early warning systems. As the large CF approached, the insurgents simply blended in with the local populace or fled prior to the CF's arrival.<sup>130</sup> Once the CF would leave, the insurgent then would reemerge back amongst the populace. In order to truly secure the populace, the counterinsurgent must be living amongst them, something the current strategy by General McChrystal takes into consideration. In 2004, there were simply not enough forces to execute this strategy. This allowed the Taliban to buy enough time to build up their support bases, recruit and train new members, and expand their implementation of a shadow government. As a result, the Taliban was able to expand their operations and power base. This is evident by the significant increase in insurgent attacks, which grew from 146 in 2004 to 207 and 353 in 2005 and 2006, respectively.<sup>131</sup>

## **Conclusion**

At the operational and tactical levels, both SOF and CF leveraged each other's capability strengths to compensate for their own internal capability limitations, but only to a limited extent which prohibited both forces from operating in the most efficient and effective manner possible. The manner in which both forces operated in 2004 allowed them to successfully enable voter registration and the presidential elections, as well as to reduce the number of insurgent attacks. However, in the long-run it appears that the manner in which they operated was not sufficient to prevent the reemergence of the

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<sup>129</sup> It should also be noted that the demobilization of the militias from 2005 to 2006 seemed to also contribute to the rise of the insurgency because the poor economic conditions throughout the country offered few alternatives for employment.

<sup>130</sup> Bogart, *One Valley at a Time*, 60.

<sup>131</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 48.

Taliban, who continues to delegitimize the Afghan government. Both forces could have been more effective if the decision was made to employ more forces. This could have been done through leveraging CF's ability to provide a large amount of manpower, using SOF's ability to act as a force multiplier, or both. At the tactical level, both forces could have been more efficient if they took a more integrated approach, ensuring their plans, operations, and activities were nested.

As noted by a SFODA commander, "The CJSOTF was waiting for the joint task force to issue their campaign plan. Everyone was waiting for everyone else to kick out this grand plan, so our mission statement at that time was in support of a plan that didn't even exist."<sup>132</sup> Whether or not a campaign plan was published is difficult to determine, what is known is that in early 2004 there were several planning conferences held between CJTF-76 and CJSOTF-A to discuss the new operational approach for Afghanistan. However, it appears the results of those conferences never made their way down to the tactical units. The lack of knowledge of the overall operational plan at the tactical level seems to have directly affected the degree in which both forces integrated their operations with each other. Even though, both forces had a tremendous amount of success in enabling the political process, it seems the manner in which they operated was not sufficient to prevent the reemergence of the Taliban.

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<sup>132</sup> MAJ Stuart Farris, interviewed by Laurence Lessard, December 06, 2007, Operational Leadership Experiences Project, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 5.

## **Conclusions and Applicability to Operation Enduring Freedom**

If U.S. Special Operation Forces (SOF) and Conventional Forces (CF) are going to be successful in Afghanistan, as well as in any future conflicts where both forces are operating jointly, then both forces must learn to leverage each other's capabilities. This will require SOF and CF to leverage each other's capability strengths to compensate for each other's own internal capability limitations by taking an integrated approach when conducting joint operations. In doing so, both forces will be operating in the most efficient and effective manner possible. As demonstrated in both case studies, neither force operated in this manner because they were not well integrated. The two forces primarily operated along parallel lines of operations, with limited knowledge of each other's plans, operations, and activities. While these case studies took place over six years ago, the DOTMLPF comparison in this monograph is current as of 2010 and demonstrates that the same problems highlighted in the case studies still exists today. As reflected in the cases studies and DOTMLPF comparison, progress has been made but the lessons learned have not been institutionalized. Therefore, if SOF and CF are going to successfully leverage each other's capabilities and prevent repeat mistakes when the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan end, the following changes must occur and be institutionalized: 1) SOF and CF must take an integrated approach to joint operations; 2) Doctrine must be updated on SOF and CF joint operations; 3)SOF and CF must be better educated and trained on each force's capabilities and the best methods for their employment; and 4) Leaders in both organizations must take an active role in overcoming personal and organizational agendas, integrate both forces' plans and operations, and seek to leverage each other's capability strengths to sublimit for their capability limitations.

Proper integration is the first step towards both forces leveraging each other's capability strengths because their plans, operations, and activities will be synchronized and coordinated, thus enabling both forces to operate along the same, or complementary, lines of operations. Additionally, through operating in this capacity, both forces will be able to identify the areas where either force could provide additional capabilities. In terms of DOTMLPF, joint doctrine must be updated to reflect that proper integration is only done when both forces' plans, operations, activities, and/or actions are coordinated, synchronized,

and properly nested so that both forces are striving towards the same operational and strategic end state. In doing so, SOF and CF will be forced to work along the same lines of operation. Joint doctrine must also be updated to show the link between integration, capability leverage, and efficiency/effectiveness. As demonstrated by the case studies, when the two forces were properly integrated they leveraged each other's capabilities and avoided duplications in effort. Through integration, both organizations were maximized to their fullest potential and operated in the most efficient and effective manner possible. Accordingly, joint doctrine needs to be updated to reflect this linkage. Lastly, joint doctrine needs to be updated to reflect that both SOF and CF can support each other's operations. As demonstrated in the case studies, both forces leveraged each other's capabilities and had a tremendous amount of success when they did so; therefore, doctrine needs to be updated to reflect this reality.

Special operation forces and conventional forces must also be better educated and trained on each other's capabilities and limitations, as well as the optimal ways that both forces should be employed. Major Roger Crombie, a CF company commander during Operation ANACONDA, talked about the difficulties of integrating a SOF radio intercept unit into his organization without previously working with the unit. Specifically he stated, "when you get matched up like that and you're not familiar with each other's capabilities – that instant intel [intelligence received from the SOF radio intercept unit about the enemy's disposition and intentions], being able to turn it right back around on the enemy – we didn't make the maximum use of it as we could have."<sup>133</sup> If SOF and CF are not educated or trained to operate jointly prior to operational deployments, then it is unlikely that both forces will be able to maximize each other's fullest potential overseas. The age-old adage, "Train as you fight," directly applies here.

Lastly, leaders must highlight the necessity for both forces to leverage each other's capabilities and be directly involved in the integration process because none of the other changes will be effective unless leaders at all levels are willing to address these issues. As the Afghanistan 2004 case study

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<sup>133</sup> MAJ Roger Crombie, interviewed by John McCool, March 30, 2006, Operational Leadership Experiences Project, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 11.



demonstrated, integration and capability leverage will take place only in limited form unless leaders at all levels ensure that both SOF and CF's plans are properly nested, coordinated, and synchronized. It is each leader's responsibility, regardless of the force, to seek to leverage each other's capabilities and break through the personal and organizational agendas that prohibits both forces from fully integrating their plans and operations. As one Special Forces soldier put it: "The Army should promote everybody with the last name Smith to Colonel and everybody with the last name Johnson to Sergeant Major. Everybody else should remain at their current position. That way everybody who is not getting promoted can start worrying about how to get the mission accomplished and less about who gets credit for the operation." While this response is obviously facetious, it does highlight the organizational culture that needs to be broken through by all leaders in order to ensure proper integration between SOF and CF.

Through making these fundamental changes, both forces will be in a better position to leverage each other's capabilities, which may prove critical in implementing General McChrystal's 2009 strategy for Afghanistan. The new strategy shifts the focus from defeating Taliban insurgents to winning the will of the populace. As summarized in General McChrystal's initial security assessment dated 30 August 2009, the new strategy is built on the following four pillars:

1. Improve effectiveness through greater partnering with ANSF [Afghan National Security Force]. We will increase the size and accelerate the growth of the ANSF, with a radically improved partnership at every level, to improve effectiveness and prepare them to take the lead in security operations.
2. Prioritize responsive and accountable governance. We must assist in improving governance at all levels through both formal and traditional mechanisms.
3. Gain the Initiative. Our first imperative, in a series of operational stages, is to gain the initiative and reverse the insurgency's momentum.
4. Focus Resources. We will prioritize available resources to those critical areas where vulnerable populations are most threatened.<sup>134</sup>

In the assessment, it further states that when implementing this strategy:

We must also balance force level to enable effective ANSF partnering and provide population security, while avoiding perceptions of coalition dominance. Ideally, the ANSF must lead this fight, but they will not have enough capability in the near-term given the insurgency's growth. In

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<sup>134</sup> McChrystal, *COMISAF'S Initial Assessment*, 1-3.

the interim, coalition forces must provide a bridge capability to protect critical segments of the population. The status quo will lead to failure if we wait for the ANSF to grow.<sup>135</sup>

In order for this strategy to succeed then the two forces need to become more integrated than they were in 2004, as well as learn from the missed opportunities that were brought forward in the case studies. As noted in the assessment, just as in 2004, there are not enough Afghan National Security Forces to “secure the critical segments of the population.” However, what is different in 2010 from 2004 is 90,000 U.S. troops are projected to be in Afghanistan to implement this new strategy, not to mention the numerous other coalition forces already located in the country. Even with the increase in troops there are still not enough forces to “secure the critical segments of the population” which are located in the remote parts of the country. In order to accomplish this, the Civil Defense Initiative started in 2009 must be maintained. This initiative requires local Afghan forces to be organized, trained, equipped, and advised by coalition forces. The intent behind the Civil Defense Initiative is to use the local Afghan forces to secure their villages until the Afghan National Security Force have enough combat forces to assume this responsibility. As noted in the Afghanistan 2004 case study, this task falls within SOF’s capability strengths and CF’s limitations. Therefore, SOF would be best employed in this capacity and have been performing this mission since 2009.<sup>136</sup> In addition to protecting the populace in the remote areas, the major urban and rural population centers throughout Afghanistan also need to be protected. This task falls within SOF’s capability limitation because securing these areas would require a force that is too large for SOF to organize, train, equip, and advise. Especially considering that SOF is also tasked with securing the border and to operate in the remote parts of the country. However, as noted in the case study, this task falls within CF’s capability strengths. Therefore, CF would be best employed in this capacity until enough Afghan National Security Forces can be trained to relieve them of this responsibility.

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<sup>135</sup> McChrystal, *COMISAF’S Initial Assessment*, 1-4.

<sup>136</sup> Jon Boone, “US pours millions into anti-Taliban militias in Afghanistan: Special Forces funding fighters in Afghanistan,” *guardian.co.uk*, November 22, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/nov/22/us-anti-taliban-militias-afghanistan> (accessed February 11, 2010).

Lastly, the task of training the Afghan National Security Force falls within both SOF and CF capability strengths and limitations. Special Forces are primarily trained, equipped, and organized to perform such a task, representing a capability strength for SOF. However, the task to train and advise the entire Afghan National Security Force gives rise to two main problems for Special Forces. First, just as in 2004, the situation in Afghanistan requires the employment of Special Forces in the remote areas of the country. Second, the task to train and advise the entire Afghan National Security Force exceeds the organizational capacity of Special Forces. However, CF does have the organizational structure and capacity to perform this mission but lack the necessary institutional training and education to perform the task. Although, CF have been performing this task over the past several years, they still do not possess the same skill set or level of expertise as SOF does. Therefore, the optimal answer would be for both forces to develop an integrated approach to training the Afghan National Security Force. Conventional forces should focus on the large scale institutional training (i.e. Infantry training skills) and Special Forces should provide the specialized training which are beyond the capability for CF to provide (i.e. SOF specific task skill sets).<sup>137</sup> In doing so, both forces would be leveraging each other's strengths to substitute for their own internal capability limitations, thus ensuring both forces are operating in the most efficient and effective manner possible. These examples are just a few ways in which both forces can leverage each other's capability strengths. However, what matters more is that both forces take an integrated approach to their operations throughout all levels of command (strategic, operational, and tactical), as well as seek to leverage each other's capabilities at every available opportunity. If this does not happen, then it would be difficult for General McChrystal's new strategy to succeed.

In sum, if the United States is going to succeed in Afghanistan and future conflicts where SOF and CF are operating jointly, then both forces must take a more integrated approach to their operations. In doing so, the two forces will no longer be operating along parallel lines of operations and have more

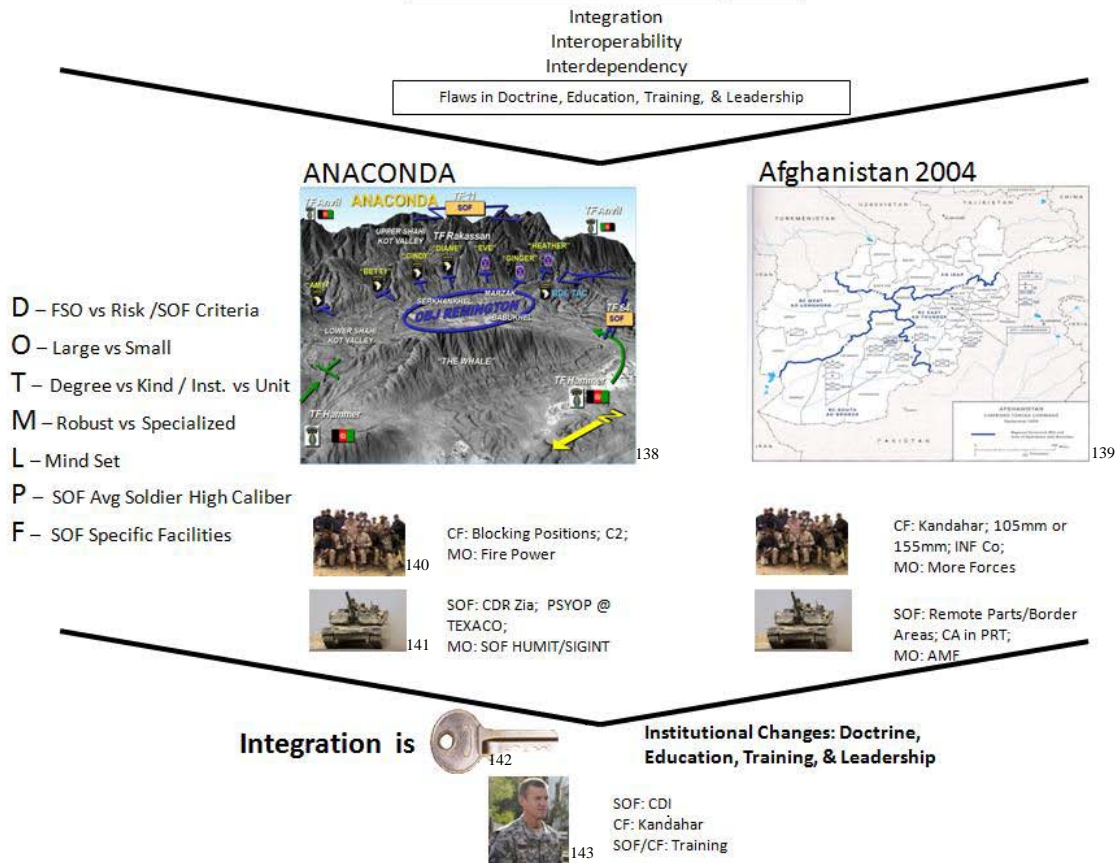
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<sup>137</sup> This approach is currently being taken and should be maintained. Since 2006, Special Forces have been training the Afghan Commandos, a SOF equivalent force within the Afghan national security force, and CF have been training the Afghan infantry units.

insight as to where they can seek to leverage each other's capabilities. This situation will create numerous opportunities for SOF and CF to leverage each other's capability strengths for their internal capability limitations, thus allowing both forces to achieve optimal efficiency and effectiveness. However, before this can occur, doctrine must be updated to reflect what true integration means and the necessary changes must occur in education, training, and most importantly leadership. Lastly, this monograph primarily focused on the necessary institutional changes required to facilitate these areas, making the issue of command and control relationships beyond the scope of this research project. Further research should be conducted in order to determine how command and control relationships influence both forces ability to integrate their operations and leverage each other's capabilities. Through researching the operational concept of command and control relationships between both forces, better insight can be gleaned on how SOF and CF should integrate their operations and leverage each other's capabilities.

## APPENDIX: Rich Picture of Major Findings

**Thesis: Integrated approach to joint operations = Capability leverage (Strengths to Limitations) = Operating in the most efficient and effective manner possible.**



<sup>138</sup> Command and General Staff School Brief, W343: *SOF Enablers to the BCT or SOF/BCT Integration*, undated, slide 71.

<sup>139</sup> Christopher N Koontz, ed., *Enduring Voices: Oral Histories of the U.S. Army Experience in Afghanistan 2003-2005*. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2008), 7.

<sup>140</sup> Richard W. Stewart, *Operation Enduring Freedom: October 2001-March 2002* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 2004), 22.

<sup>141</sup> Image was derived from <http://www.armytankphotos.com/photos/US%20Army%20M1A1%20Army%20Tank%20Photo%20-%202001.jpg> (accessed March 2, 2010).

<sup>142</sup> Image was derived from <http://www.buzzle.com/picture-photo.asp?pic=key&image=57> (accessed March 2, 2010)

<sup>143</sup> Image was derived from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley\\_A.\\_McChrystal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley_A._McChrystal) (accessed March 2, 2010)

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