

Joint Special Operations



Patrol coastal class ship *USS Cyclone* with Dominican craft.

in Peace and War

By WAYNE A. DOWNING

U.S. Air Force (Eugene L. LaDoucer)

Summary

The experience of U.S. Special Operations Command over its eight-year history has surfaced five factors integral to the success of special operations: regional orientation; readiness; programming and budget; research, development, and acquisition; and command and control. In adjusting to the new security environment and changing threats, the special operations community is building on lessons from Panama, the Persian Gulf, and Haiti. For example, theater special operations commands provide regional CINCs with headquarters for planning. Mission criteria originally developed for Desert Storm are being institutionalized in doctrine to validate proposed operations: Is it appropriate? Does it support the campaign plan? Is it feasible? Are resources available? Will the outcome justify the risk? Such initiatives will ensure that special operations personnel effectively meet the challenge posed by two kinds of threats: nation-states with conventional forces and groups without a viable military or a clear national center of gravity.

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post-Cold War strategy requires a force that operates in a variety of environments

Since it was founded in April 1987, the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) has provided the Nation with special operations forces (SOF) that are arguably the most capable in the world. SOCOM trains, equips, and provides joint special operations capabilities to each regional CINC, American ambassadors and country teams, and governmental agencies. SOCOM ensures the combat readiness of forces assigned and monitors the preparedness of SOF assigned to other commands. Unique among the unified commands, SOCOM manages its own program and budget and also conducts research, development, and acquisition (RD&A) of SOF-peculiar items. Lastly, the command maintains a proficient Reserve component which is fully integrated into the total SOF concept.

The command sets SOF priorities to meet the requirements of regional CINCs. It ensures that those priorities are supported by joint doctrine, planning, and training and that interoperability across the SOF community and compatibility with the equipment of all the services are maintained. To some, it may appear that SOCOM looks and acts like a fifth service. But it is not, and could not be, since its mission can only be accomplished with solid service support. Among other things, the services provide quality personnel, common equipment, base operating support, a good deal of the logistical sustainment, and critical core service skills training. This support allows SOCOM to focus on SOF-specific training and equipment as well as joint integration.

SOF provide an unprecedented range of capabilities including regionally oriented assets for operations other than war (OOTW), specially tailored JTFs for unique missions in peace and war, short-notice strategic strike forces for global deployment, and psychological operations (PSYOP) and civil affairs (CA) capabilities for the entire range of military operations.

The SOCOM Experience

After eight years of carrying out our mission, we have derived a series of lessons, namely, regional orientation, readiness, programming and budget, RD&A, and command and control.

Regional Orientation. A post-Cold War security strategy that focuses on regional affairs, in war and OOTW, requires a force that operates effectively in a variety of environments. SOF has enhanced regional orientation and language proficiency in many units and reinforced the capability of others. Special Forces (SF) have always been language-qualified as well as regionally focused, and the regional orientation of PSYOP and CA units has been expanded. Selected members of the Navy's Sea, Air, Land teams (SEALs) receive language training for foreign internal defense (FID) missions, and Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) has formed a special operations squadron with appropriate language and regional training for FID missions. Because of the ability of SOF to work overseas, employment rates have steadily increased. In FY94 alone SOF operated in 139 nations, providing ambassadors and geographic CINCs with regionally-oriented support for country and regional development plans. In an average week some two to three thousand SOF operators are deployed on 150 missions in 60 to 70 countries.

Readiness. Another lesson is the importance of maintaining a consistent and high state of readiness. This is a function of concentrating on core missions, quality people, and a continuous, regionally-oriented, joint training program. It is a focused program that allows Army, Navy, and Air Force special operators to be ready to work together as a joint team, performing those tasks that they know and understand, as soon as they arrive in an objective area in peace, conflict, or war.

Programming and Budgeting. It is essential in fielding a preeminent force to have authority over programming and budget formulation and execution. The congressional mandate to manage a separate major force program (MFP 11) ensures visibility for SOF program requirements in DOD as well as Congress. Because of the growing utility of SOF in a world characterized by multiple regional challenges, SOF funding (about 1.2 percent of the defense budget) has remained

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relatively stable which has allowed us to retain adequate forces. In fact, we have added two SF battalions oriented on the Caribbean and Africa to the active force since the end of the Cold War while, at the same time, eliminating two Reserve groups focused on Central Europe.

Research, Development, and Acquisition. The fourth lesson is that RD&A authorities are essential to having the best equipped force in the world. MFP 11 facilitates the fielding of major systems that will take SOF into the 21st century with the most capable equipment available. Every C-130 platform has gotten an SOF-improved capability—that is, enhanced navigation, self defense, and communications. We are fielding the MC-130H Combat Talon II for long-range penetration which has increased cargo capacity and enhanced avionics. AC-130U Spectre gunships will offer SOF and conventional commanders a capability that can be strategically deployed to immediately attack more targets under more severe conditions than its predecessor. SF aviation is fielding the MH-60K and MH-47E, air-refuelable transport helicopters that provide superb short- and medium-range insertion capabilities under all weather conditions.

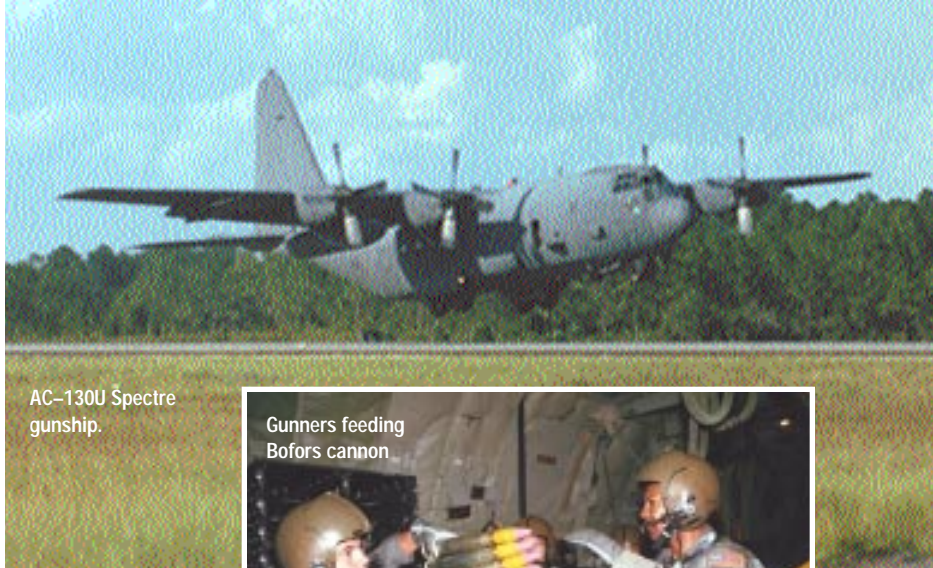
The Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM) is replacing its Vietnam-era fleet of special boats. Modernization programs include a 10-meter rigid-hull inflatable boat and the Mark V special operations craft, a high-speed boat which can carry a platoon of (16) SEALs with an operational range of 500 nautical miles and a top speed in excess of 50 knots. Transportable in C-5 aircraft, the boats will dramatically enhance SEAL support. NAVSPECWARCOM has taken delivery of nine of thirteen planned naval ships that are particularly effective for coastal patrol and interdiction missions and transporting SEALs. The last major program under development is an advanced SEAL delivery system—a dry, submersible (or mini-) submarine—that will significantly increase the speed and range of clandestine insertion and extraction in hostile or denied waters.

Finally, SOCOM is implementing a command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C⁴I) master plan for restructuring architecture and the way in

which hardware will be procured and utilized to support the C⁴I system. In sum, we have revamped modernization based on a hard look at available funding and future needs which resulted in canceling 42 projects and reducing 24 others in scope. The approximately 200 programs that remain are affordable and will provide equipment essential to succeed in a dynamic, unpredictable environment. Just as important as major systems acquisitions is quick reaction procurement which gives us the ability to equip the force with commercially available, nondevelopmental items in a matter of weeks or days.

Command and Control. SOCOM has made notable advancements in command and control since 1987 that have focused on improving the integration of SOF and conventional forces. The history of special operations has repeatedly shown that SOF make their greatest contribution when they are fully integrated into the overall theater campaign plan, working in close cooperation with other joint forces. The most important improvement is the increased capabilities of theater Special Operations Commands (SOCs). These sub-unified commands provide regional CINCs with the headquarters to plan and control the employment of joint SOF in war and OOTW. Theater SOCs have formed joint special operations task forces several times, including for Promote Liberty in Panama, Desert Shield/Desert Storm in Southwest Asia, Provide Comfort in Northern Iraq, the humanitarian relief efforts in Rwanda, and, lately, multinational force training for Haiti. To support this growing role, SOCOM has manned theater SOCs at 100 percent of peacetime authorization and provided interim quick reaction communications. In addition, all theater SOC commanders are now flag officers.

A major step in integrating SOF effectively is the increased use of special operations coordination elements, special operations command and control elements within Army corps and conventional headquarters, special operations liaison elements with joint force air component commander headquarters, and naval special warfare task units with amphibious ready groups and,



AC-130U Spectre gunship.



Gunners feeding Bofors cannon

U.S. Air Force (Vic Owens)

U.S. Air Force (Charles Gohl)

New World Order

Probably the most profound challenge that we confront is dealing with two competing and different kinds of threat. One is a well-equipped nation-state, like Iraq, which requires high-tech capabilities that can quickly and precisely attack high-value targets and integrate coalition forces of diverse backgrounds, tasks which SOF accomplish extremely well.

But we also face threats which have no viable conventional military or clear national centers of gravity, as illustrated by Somalia, Rwanda, and Haiti. Here threats are subnational groups, disintegrating social structures, disease, and environmental degradation. Some classify them as fourth generation warfare. The forces that are needed to fight a nation-state are usually not appropriate to address these latter threats.

The task is to field sufficiently flexible, adaptable forces that can operate effectively against both kinds of threat. This is a substantial task and requires regionally oriented, culturally attuned, and highly ready forces with extensive experience. SOF provides outstanding capabilities to assist conventional commanders in meeting a challenge from another state or fourth generation warfare.

SOF can provide direct action, special reconnaissance, unconventional warfare, PSYOP, and CA capabilities against other states to support a joint conventional campaign plan. Effectively integrated into that plan, special operations can act as a force multiplier for conventional forces by synchronizing coalition operations or providing coalition support teams to allied contingents. SOF language capabilities help communicate with other contingents, and their organic communications systems make SOF ideal links between multinational participants and coalition headquarters. SOF can also be used in an economy-of-force role by helping nations on the theater periphery to bolster their defenses, thus freeing U.S. conventional forces for the main effort.

more recently, carrier battle groups. All of these organizations have been used by conventional commands in several recent contingency operations to fully integrate SOF into operations.

Another step in integrating SOF into conventional operations is developing mission criteria. During the Gulf War, to provide guidance on planning and executing operations, Special Operations Command, Central (SOCCENT), developed mission criteria for proposed operations:

- ▼ Is this an appropriate SOF mission?
- ▼ Does it support the CINC's campaign plan?
- ▼ Is it operationally feasible?
- ▼ Are required resources available to execute?
- ▼ Does the expected outcome justify the risk?

These criteria were invaluable in mission planning and execution for the remainder of the war and are being incorporated into doctrine for SOF and conventional planners. In

addition, they provide a test for determining the feasibility of operations, ensure SOF are properly employed in theater or JTF campaign plans in peace and war, help to objectively evaluate missions, improve Joint Target

Coordination Board actions, and educate others to ensure realistic perceptions of SOF capabilities.

SOF provides outstanding capabilities in a challenge from another state or fourth generation warfare

The Tools

SOF is particularly useful in OOTW. FID, PSYOP, and CA can be critical components of a regional or country plan (crafted by the geographic CINC or ambassador for a specific country) designed to alleviate the problems that cause instability. Working with foreign governments, foreign militaries, and various civilian organizations, SOF can assist the host nation in creating programs that will prevent conflict. And if conflict does arise, SOF's knowledge of the area, its people, and its institutions, gained through frequent deployments to the locale, can provide valuable information to the geographic CINC as he devises his campaign plan.

Psychological Operations. New and dramatic challenges highlight the importance of one of our least known and least understood yet powerful assets—PSYOP. While it has been an element of military operations since World War II, PSYOP played a key role as a combat multiplier during Just Cause, and also gained prominence during Desert Storm. In the Gulf, PSYOP contributed to theater strategy by communicating the power of the U.S.-led coalition, strengthening economic and diplomatic sanctions, emphasizing Iraq's isolation, and conveying the destructive consequences of Saddam's refusal to comply with U.N. Security Council resolutions. Some 29 million

leaflets, radio broadcasts over 40 days, and 66 loudspeaker teams reinforced the effects of coalition combat power and helped

to encourage 70–80 thousand enemy soldiers to desert, defect, and surrender, thereby saving countless lives on both sides.

PSYOP has continued to be an important part of all major deployments. It paved the way for humanitarian assistance food drops in Bosnia and was a key contributor to the success of U.S.-led multinational efforts in Somalia. Leaflets and loudspeaker messages introduced U.S. forces to the country. Complemented by newspapers and radio these tools provided needed information and instruction, allayed fears, and underscored the humanitarian intent of the operation. But PSYOP staffs must be included in initial planning to tailor products to the goals of the joint commander and the target audience. PSYOP personnel must know the campaign

plan as well as the languages and cultures of each audience. Joint operations can be greatly enhanced when supported by carefully planned and executed PSYOP campaigns, a potential of the information age that is only beginning to be appreciated. PSYOP is a vital national asset that will only reach maturity when we channel its efforts through a national-level, interagency body to coordinate disparate elements of information warfare. A coherent theater information strategy and coordination mechanisms are needed as well.

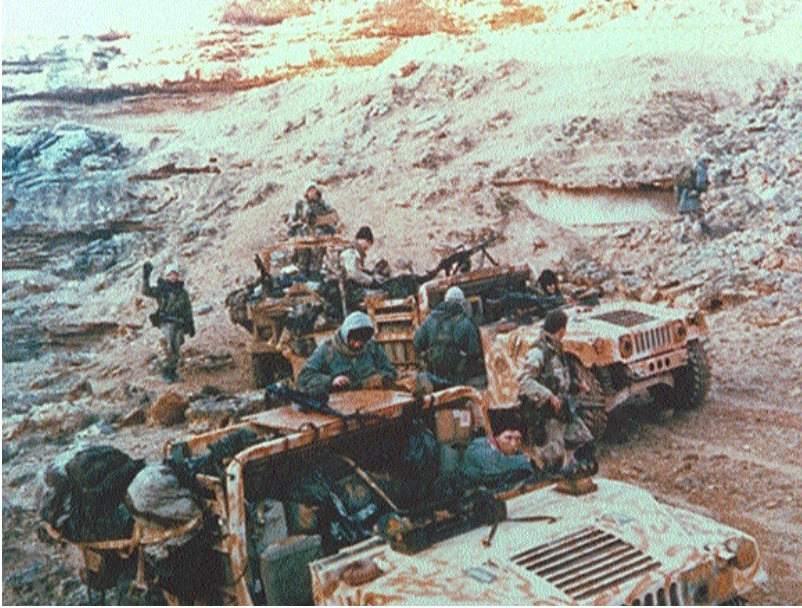
Civil Affairs. Another facet of SOF that is gaining prominence is CA. A commander has a moral and legal obligation to protect civilians caught in a conflict. Often a root cause of conflict, especially in OOTW, is a failure of civil infrastructure to meet the needs of the population. In war, CA units can look after displaced persons and help to get the local infrastructure functioning again. In OOTW, they can help create a capable infrastructure or assist in times of natural disaster where the infrastructure has been overwhelmed. Some 97 percent of CA capabilities reside in the Reserve components. The skills needed to manage a country's infrastructure—sanitation, public transport, legal systems, and other public services—can only be maintained by people with similar civilian backgrounds. Highly skilled personnel from the Reserves have performed such jobs in Panama, the Persian Gulf, and Haiti.

Restore Democracy

The utility of SOF was evident in Haiti where they were integral to restoring democracy even before forces were committed. Four months earlier, extremely versatile new SOF patrol craft joined the fleet to enforce trade sanctions, capitalizing on their capabilities to operate near-shore and embark SEALs and rigid hull inflatable boat detachments. In five months of continuous operations the craft conducted 153 interdictions, 24 boardings, and multiple Dominican Republic patrols.

For two weeks before the introduction of troops, Air National Guard EC-130E Commando Solo PSYOP aircraft broadcast four-hour programs daily to reduce the volume of refugees leaving the country and create support for the return of President Aristide.

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SOF long-range reconnaissance patrol inside Iraq.

Some 900 hours of broadcasts were continued until ground broadcasts started. In the weeks prior to intervention, AFSOC aircraft delivered 8.4 million leaflets paving the way for the multinational forces and the return of Aristide.

The U.S. Atlantic Command SOC set up a training camp in Puerto Rico and coordinated support of international police monitors and multinational force contingents. Moreover, SOF had the lead in invasion planning. A number of units were involved, operating from the United States, a forward staging base, an aircraft carrier, and other facilities. They would have conducted forced entry operations to facilitate the follow-on introduction of conventional forces.

Once the island's occupation began, SF teams—fluent in French/Creole—were dispatched to restore civilian rule. Small teams operated in over 500 towns and villages, helping people set up police forces, courts, and government services to provide law and order and bolster democratic rule. Moreover, they resolved disputes, repaired utilities, prevented violence, offered medical aid, and conducted information campaigns. Other SF teams provided coalition support teams to foreign contingents in the multinational force and international police monitor force.

In addition, SOF personnel were instrumental in rebuilding the civil infrastructure. As was the case in the Persian Gulf, Reservists were called to active duty to offer expertise that exists only in Reserve CA units. To back up these lightly armed forces, other SOF assets, including AC-130 Spectre gunships, provided a rapid reaction force to persuade Haitian thugs not to run afoul of the peacekeepers. In total, nearly 400 mission hours were flown to support multinational forces;

many AC-130 crews and planes were from the Air Force Reserve. SOF had a significant quick reaction and show-of-force capability with ground-deployed Rangers, Air Force special operations aircraft, and a command and control headquarters. From the outset, SOF have been an integral part of our effort to restore democracy in Haiti, providing capabilities available nowhere else in the military.

As SOCOM moves into the 21st century, we will keep pace of the security environment. But in every phase of that evolution the focus will be on people. The most important ingredients of success are the personnel who we commit to diverse missions. We continually seek innovative ways to select the right people, train them, and develop them throughout their professional careers. The best piece of equipment will not accomplish the mission without the right person operating it, and the right person will find a way to succeed using almost anything at hand. All our programs assume that we will have the right people in the right place with the right training.

The range of capabilities, size, and strategic reach of SOF today are unmatched anywhere in the world and offer the Nation unparalleled capabilities to influence the international security environment. SOCOM is evolving in this environment. Instead of sticking to comfortable defense paradigms of the past, we are vigorously pursuing innovative ways to promote national security. We are developing equipment that will enable our most important asset, the operator, to perform in difficult exigencies. SOCOM has moved beyond the Cold War into a new environment in which we may not have all the answers but in which we possess unique and valuable capabilities. **JQ**