

# Strategy Research Project

## Special Operations Liaison Officers: (SOLO) or Team Effort?

by

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United States Army War College  
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## **Abstract**

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USSOCOM has significantly increased its roles, responsibilities, and resources since the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism's counterterrorist operations in September 2001. This resultant growth has for the most part complimented, although occasionally competed with existing U.S. conventional military and other government agencies' security capabilities and has the potential to collide with long standing DoD foreign engagement presence in U.S. embassies, more so in an expected upcoming era of austerity. This paper will review existing DoD security cooperation positions within embassies, resourcing, and training; review the new/special requirements that resulted in the creation of SOLOs; and conclude with resultant policy recommendations.





## **Special Operations Liaison Officers: (SOLO) or Team Effort?**

Since the United States ascendancy to the world stage at the close of the nineteenth century, its foreign policy has remained relatively consistent, reflected in the contemporary Department of State's mission to "create a more secure, democratic, and prosperous world for the benefit of the American people and the international community."<sup>1</sup> As the lead executive agent for foreign relations excluding the conduct of war, the State Department has relied on diplomacy and foreign assistance to further U.S. interests abroad. With Congressional approval and funding, the State Department's Foreign Operations branch administers this and all other foreign assistance, including international security assistance. International security assistance is a term that broadly describes activities encompassing not only wider law enforcement, but also more traditionally military functions such as combating the spread of weapons of mass destruction, demining, peacekeeping operations, foreign military finance (FMF), and international military education and training (IMET).<sup>2</sup>

Overseas U.S. ambassadors lead a team of multiple interagency players to conduct the actual administration of "tactical" level foreign assistance. In this sense tactical pertains not only to "small-scale actions" serving a larger purpose,<sup>3</sup> but also includes the sense well known to security professionals, that of the actual means to implement operational ways dictated by strategic ends. To best achieve this nesting of the strategic through operational down to tactical level and accomplish its mission, the executive branch employs unity of effort, or more specifically the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) refers to unified action which "synchronizes, coordinates, and/or integrates"<sup>4</sup> its actions not only as a joint force, but in cooperation with intergovernmental, interagency, and international actors. Supporting the DoD's effort in

U.S. foreign military cooperation, the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has been developing Special Operations Liaison Officers (SOLO) for assignment with select partner nation Special Operations Forces (SOF) overseas.

USSOCOM has significantly increased its roles, responsibilities, and resources since the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism's counterterrorist operations in September 2001. This resultant growth has for the most part complimented, although occasionally competed with existing U.S. conventional military and other government agencies' security capabilities and has the potential to collide with long standing DoD foreign engagement presence in U.S. embassies, more so in an expected upcoming era of austerity. This paper will review existing DoD security cooperation positions within embassies, resourcing, and training; review the new/special requirements that resulted in the creation of SOLOs; and conclude with resultant policy recommendations.

Embassies are internationally recognized diplomatic missions that originated during the European renaissance with established traditions and methods of conducting business. In the United States' case, the embassy's ambassador, or Chief of Mission (COM), is the personal representative of the President. He and his staff of diplomats have special privileges and immunities to the host country's laws internationally respected and recognized as early as the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The U.S. ambassador leads his or her Country Team (CT) consisting primarily of State Department officers, but also officers from other executive branches with significant dealings within the country, most often including the military. In this regard, the President prescribes "appropriate procedures to assure coordination among

representatives of the USG (United States Government) in each country, under the leadership of the chief of the U.S. diplomatic mission.”<sup>5</sup>

It bears noting that an assignment to an embassy is a unique and challenging experience, especially for first time, non-State Department officers. Not only does the host country provide its often overwhelming challenges of foreign language and unfamiliar customs and practices to the assigned officer and his or her family, but so does the embassy itself. Embassy officers find themselves both in a perpetual, high-visibility “fish bowl” continually under observation not only from benign, but curious host nation locals, but from hostile foreign intelligence, as well as other foreign diplomats. Assignment far from a traditional military headquarters can either be a liberating or unsettling experience with plentiful opportunity for potential pitfalls or moral lapses. The embassy community itself, in work as well as in social settings, often confines itself to a limited number of assigned, fellow Americans, as well as a small pool of expatriates. For military service members and their families, absent are the amenities and benefits to which they may have become accustomed, such as a familiar military unit “family,” commissary, or post exchange. Additionally, the small mission offices and their assigned personnel often find themselves under-resourced and under-manned for the overwhelming requirements of professional duties, visiting delegations, and after-hours social representative events. The embassy environment and demands are so unique that DoD provides significant and specialized training to assist service members through such an atypical and exotic assignment.

In such a setting, the DoD’s senior representative and the ambassador’s primary military representative is the Senior Defense Official (SDO). Perhaps to ensure

executive branch unity and interagency cooperation overseas, a full quarter of the President's Unified Command Plan (UCP) guidance provides specific guidance to each of the Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) four-star commanders regarding DoD-DoS cooperation in the GCC countries' embassies. They are charged to "ensure unified action," "plan, conduct, assess security cooperation activities," "provide U.S. Military representation," "provide advice and assistance to chiefs of U.S. diplomatic missions," and in the event of emergency or war, "assume combatant command of security assistance organizations."<sup>6</sup> Additionally, DoD Directive 5010.75 charges the Secretary of Defense to appoint a SDO who is often the sole or "principal military advisor to the COM on defense issues" and the "principal diplomatically accredited DoD military officer assigned to a U.S. diplomatic mission."<sup>7</sup> The directive also assigns the SDO as "the single point of contact for all DoD matters involving the embassy or DoD elements assigned to, attached to, or operating from the embassy..."<sup>8</sup> In practice, the senior military attaché, usually called the Defense Attaché (DATT) is usually designated as the SDO.

As the senior military attaché and ambassador's primary advisor for defense intelligence issues, the DATT holds many responsibilities beyond those directly to the ambassador. To indicate the SDO/DATT's special status, the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) officially appoints the SDO with formal letters of introduction not only to the U.S. ambassador, but also to the host nation's minister of defense. Likewise, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) sends a similar appointment letter to his host nation counterpart.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the ambassador, SECDEF, and CJCS, the DATT's other prominent masters include at a minimum the combatant commander, the

DATT's respective service chief, and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) director. In turn, on periodic personnel evaluations the SDO/DATT is split-rated by the two organizations most interested in performance – the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and senior rated by the GCC commander. As we will see these occasionally competing and conflicting parties not only require the DATT's continuous attention, but also provide him a unique, holistic vantage point for defense equities. Beyond advising the advisor, representing the U.S. military to the host nation and other diplomatic missions in country, and leading the Defense Attaché Office (DAO), all these bosses understand the DATT's principal assignment. The DATT's primary duty is to "observe and report" activities and information concerning the assigned country to support U.S. defense interests, which naturally brings with it other classified responsibilities. Thus, the execution of such responsibilities provides the necessary information for best informing the ambassador and U.S. military leaders on not only the descriptive situation, but in identifying and recommending cooperative opportunities and avoiding pitfalls. In short, the SDO/DATT represents "all of DoD within the country team,"<sup>10</sup> to U.S. defense organizations, their visiting representatives, and the host nation. Thus, the SDO position provides its bearer with a unique, holistic vantage point for all defense equities not only concerning the assigned country, but also concerning the wider area of interest extending as far back as Washington.

In rare cases, another senior DoD officer assigned to most embassies, often referred to as the Security Assistance Officer (SAO) may be designated as the SDO. The author will refer to the SAO using the new doctrinal term, Security Cooperation Officer (SCO). Similar to the long historical tradition and practice of military attaches,

U.S. SCOs also earned a lineage of embassy representation and foreign relations, first administering Lend Lease in the Second World War, continuing to expand military cooperation throughout the Cold War, and further broadening their portfolios during the Global War on Terrorism.

Similar to the DATT, the SCO has a wide range of superiors and responsibilities. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) sources the SCO who represents the GCC J5<sup>11</sup> to the country team and to the host nation. The State Department's Foreign Operations branch administers all foreign assistance, including military security assistance, under Congressional oversight and funding. International security assistance is a broad description of activities encompassing not only wider law enforcement, but also more traditionally military functions such as combating the spread of weapons of mass destruction, demining, peacekeeping operations, foreign military finance (FMF), and international military education and training (IMET).<sup>12</sup> In another example of interagency cooperation both in Washington and in the CT, although DoS is responsible for security assistance, the Department relies on security cooperation management and administration to uniformed military experts, in practice, the SCO. The SCO is the lead agent "for the execution of most of DoD's Security Cooperation (SC) programs in the country assigned"<sup>13</sup> with legal functions assigned by Section 515(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act. These duties include: equipment and services case management, training management, program monitoring, evaluation, and planning of the host government's military capabilities and requirements, defense cooperation measures, and liaison functions exclusive of advisory and training assistance."<sup>14</sup> Although restricted by Congress from performing actual training and assistance due to

perceived military abuses of Congressional permissions during the Vietnam War<sup>15</sup>, the SCO exercises operational oversight for and provides administrative support to in-country Security Assistance Teams.<sup>16</sup> Such teams may include U.S. military service members or civilian contractors often having military experience. An example of a solely military cooperative event conducted by U.S. SOF is the Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) training. To aid these training teams, as well as accomplish other bilateral security assistance responsibilities, the SCO chief leads an organization known by various names depending on tradition or the respective combatant command such as Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC), U.S. Military Assistance Group (MAG), Military Training Mission, Military Liaison Office, or Office of Security Cooperation (OSC). In the majority of cases where the SDO is not the SCO, to ensure military unity of action within the embassy the SDO/DATT “performs, supervises, and manages security cooperation”<sup>17</sup> duties and responsibilities, including rating or endorsing the SCO on periodic personnel evaluation reports necessary for an officer’s promotion. The SCO is a valuable asset to the foreign nation, ambassador, GCC commander, and other military organizations as he promotes the U.S. defense industry, operational access, bilateral cooperation, as well as mutual interoperability and familiarity.

For such prominent, high-visibility, and responsible positions, DoD and the services have invested much thought towards their development, training, and employment. Both military attachés and SCO assignments are filled by competitively selected and trained, Joint, mid- to senior-career, regionally focused, expert officers colloquially known in the U.S. Army and Navy as Foreign Area Officers (FAO), however also called Regional Affairs Specialist (RAS) in the Air Forces and Regional Area

Officers (RAO) in the Marine Corps. The DoD FAO program enjoys senior and broad attention under the supervision of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness in coordination with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, Heads of the DoD Components, and Secretaries of the Military Departments.<sup>18</sup> In addition to the mentioned DAO and SCO positions in embassies, FAOs occupy a series of other Joint and service positions to “provide expertise in planning and executing operations, to provide liaison with foreign militaries operating in coalitions with U.S. forces, (and) to conduct political-military activities.”<sup>19</sup>

FAOs are subject to not only high-level supervision, but also rigorous training and standards. Although all the military departments select, train, and assign FAOs, the author will highlight the Army FAO often recognized as the most mature and resourced FAO program described as the “gold standard.”<sup>20</sup> Competitively selected after no less than six years’ cumulative military service as an O-3(captain), Army FAOs undergo 18-36 months of training. They possess the following long list of unique, minimum competencies and knowledge tailored for the Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational (JIIM) environment: minimum 2/2 language proficiency;<sup>21</sup> regional expertise at a professional level; ability to operate as advisors to senior military, civilian leaders in executing foreign policy and engaging foreign militaries in security assistance objectives; in-depth understanding of foreign cultures gained from a regionally focused graduate degree and experience living and working in a specific region; expert knowledge of regional military forces; well-versed in U.S. foreign policy and regional security cooperation initiatives, political-military, economic, and social issues relevant to



their regional Areas of Concentration(AOC); and sound understanding of interagency and nongovernmental (NGO) capabilities and unique professional cultures.<sup>22</sup> These competencies and experiences are further honed by appropriate and relevant post-graduate education, and repeated assignments of progressive responsibility focused on assigned, geographic areas of concentration on the Army Staff, Army Service Component Command, combatant commands, joint commands, defense agencies, national agencies, and the institutional army<sup>23</sup> with potential to promotion to brigadier general.

Now FAOs assigned to select embassies have a new DoD partner to assist with security cooperation. The newest contribution to U.S. military cooperation in select embassies is USSOCOM J55's SOLO. Joint SOF have also long been involved with foreign forces on the battlefield, first with the U.S. Army's Special Forces creation in 1952, then followed by the other services. Since the Special Forces, colloquially known as "green berets," first days, they have led the Joint fight to conduct foreign internal defense and unconventional warfare to counter communist wars of national liberation during the Cold War. Navy's Seals began their involvement with foreign forces during the Vietnam War, and later, Air Force and Marine special operations during the Global War on Terrorism. Over the last sixty years and especially most recently during the present Long War, all joint SOF have an established record of both operating alongside and training foreign general purpose and special operations forces on the battlefield. Established in June 2006, USSOCOM J55's International Engagement Division devised three ways to achieve USSOCOM SOF 2020 objectives – win the current fight, expand the global SOF network, preservation of the Force and Families, and Responsive

Resourcing.<sup>24</sup> To achieve these means, USSOCOM J55 stood up international outreach such as Partnership Development Teams (PDT) and Partner Outreach Development (POD), and most notably tailored the SOLO program to expand the global SOF network and responsive resourcing as a “small footprint w(ith) strategic effect.”<sup>25</sup>

According to their purpose, USASOC designed SOLOs as “specially selected and trained SOF officers assigned to either the partner nation SOF headquarters or to the US Embassy to advise and assist in the development of partner nation SOF capacity.”<sup>26</sup> SOLO assignment is only to “focus countries”, defined as “select countries that the Commander, USSOCOM has identified where an enduring, strategic USSOF relationship is mutually beneficial and aids the development of key partners with their SOF capacities, interoperability, and influence.”<sup>27</sup> USASOC assigned its first SOLO to temporary duty (TDY) in the United Kingdom in January 2007,<sup>28</sup> however by December 2012 SOLO embassy assignments had rapidly expanded to sixteen permanent positions with another seven planned.<sup>29</sup> The officers are senior field grade officers (eight O-6 colonel/captains and thirteen O-5 lieutenant colonel/ commanders) permanently assigned overseas for one to three years, in most cases accompanied by their families. SOLOs are to possess language proficiency, are assigned to partner nation (PN) SOF headquarters, and are charged to advise/assist in developing Partner Nation (PN) SOF plans and activities, improve PN synchronization with USSOF, serve as in-country SOF advisor to U.S. country team, and complement Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC)/GCC programs.<sup>30</sup> Of particular note, a SOLO operates “under the operational control (OPCON) of the respective TSOC commander.”<sup>31</sup>

Such a control relationship creates the potential for problems not only within the GCC, but more acutely and importantly, where relationships matter most - within the embassy country team. According to the UCP, the GCC has responsibility for the coordination and conduct of security cooperation within the countries in its area of responsibility. To that end, DoD, the CJCS, and GCC Combatant Commander (CCDR) have formally imbued the SDO with these responsibilities in country at the “tactical” level. Thus, SOLO subordination to the TSOC ignores the intended SDO role and responsibilities. Although the TSOC is subordinate to the CCDR, the TSOC is not only a subordinate commander, but also independent of the GCC J5 directorate, the COCOM’s organization responsible for foreign security cooperation. As the CCDR’s component commander, vice a staff section director, the TSOC thus wields autonomy, if not informal priority or attention over the J5. This established and accepted operational-level command and control relationship is viable at the headquarters, however senior-level collaborative relationships with their own independent, subordinate structures can quickly lead to unworkable or strained relationships at the day-to-day “tactical” level between peers, moreover when one has responsibility, yet no authority over the other.

As security cooperation assumes more importance in the anticipated future, the existing SDO and SOLO relationship can become further strained or dysfunctional. As mentioned above, the GCC presently exercises both combatant command (COCOM) and operational command (OPCON) of the TSOC while the functional combatant command USSOCOM exercises no authority over the TSOC. However, CDR USSOCOM is seeking new authorities under a revised UCP to gain COCOM of the TSOC, with OPCON retained by the GCCs as early as 2013,<sup>32</sup> further disjoining the

relationship not only with the GCC, but also potentially with the ambassador. The GCC commander is bound by form and function to be much more responsive to the ambassador than the more geographically distant functional combatant commander with worldwide versus regional responsibilities. Again, this new relational paradigm may manifest itself more keenly felt at the SDO and SOLO level. Without SDO overall supervision, both the SDO and SOLO organizations run the risk of pursuing their own interests, leading to disunity of voice, redundant messaging, and the possibility of working at cross-purposes.<sup>33</sup>

The creation of the SDO position actually resulted from such negative experiences within embassies between the DAO and SCO. The SDO was ostensibly created as a streamlining initiative to provide the embassy's chief of mission with a single DoD representative in country. In reality, however, DoD's Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) created the SDO position to quash several years of personality- and organizationally-driven clashes between the DAO and SCO abroad. Preceding SDO implementation, both the DATT and SCO, whether rank peers or not, were from separate and divergent DoD Joint organizations. These higher organizations' interests and missions resulted in not only petty questions of seniority, but also more understandable and substantial operational issues. The GCC's SCO rightfully did not want to be associated with the DAO's information gathering mission, while the DAO envied the SCO's freer access and cooperative venues, attempting to cajole, order, or demand internal, local cooperation. At present, the bad news is that such a situation is fertile for reoccurring between the SDO and SOLO, the good news is that DoD directives largely solve these questions.

Prior to SDO implementation, the DATT and SCO were organizationally separate peers. The combatant commander's SDO letter designated the SDO, whether DATT or SCO, as senior with resultant responsibilities, including for example, rating the other officer on annual evaluations. Similarly, by formalized agreement both organizations' equities such as distinct statutory authorities, funding streams, and duties were protected from employment by the other office, for example the DAO could not employ SCO-funded organizational assets such as vehicles or materially change the mission of the other.<sup>34</sup> Presently, as pointed out, the SOLO is not subordinated to the SDO, but to the GCC TSOC. As a result, the new, autonomous SOLO position runs the risk of repeating negative DoD organizational experience and again creating major problems within the embassy country team of coordination, supervision, and support.

Coordination requires overall unity of effort at all levels. All the armed services, whether via the Army's "sustained cooperation,"<sup>35</sup> the Navy's "persistence presence,"<sup>36</sup> the Marine Corps' "military engagement,"<sup>37</sup> or the Air Forces' "favorable shaping" of the strategic environment by "assessing, advising, training, and assisting host nation air forces,"<sup>38</sup> acknowledge the importance of security cooperation and prioritize it among their responsibilities to develop, resource, and deploy. Receiving the services' forces, the GCCs as members of the interagency process, control operations of military forces with and within the foreign countries of their geographic areas of responsibility. It would follow to reason that the services' subordinate SOF organizations not only share their parent organizations' responsibilities, but also execute security cooperation. Thus, if the SDO is responsible for ensuring unity of action and is best placed within the embassy to provide it, a SOLO should be formally subordinated to the SDO.

Only the SDO has the unique military position within the embassy country team to provide unity of effort. The embassy country team conducts its business in frequent meetings held at the embassy and chaired by the ambassador or his deputy chief of mission. Each country team meeting composition is different, but at a minimum among DoD officers, is attended by the SDO. This access gives the SDO unparalleled visibility and voice representing DoD equities within the embassy. Since the SOLO's contribution is a subset of wider military cooperation at which even the SCO may not have country team meeting representation, the SOLO's activity and business automatically assume importance to the SDO. Furthermore, the SDO has the widest aperture on the entire military relationship with the country. The SDO not only has greater interaction with fellow country team members, but is positioned to receive classified intelligence about the country and is charged with ensuring overall unity of effort in coordinating the SCO's, and presumably SOLO's, activities for not only better coordination, but mutually beneficial synergy with all DoD assets, activities, and cooperative activities.

Proper supervision is not unique to the military, but perhaps even more necessary for military postings to diplomatic embassy assignments. Not only are military service members placed in a completely new interagency operating environment in a foreign country, but also the typical, accustomed support structure is generally not present for the service member or his family. Due to absence of these familiarities, the service member and his family may be subject to additional stress or feelings of alienation. To the uninitiated or experienced, diplomatic postings can result in personal behavioral or moral failures resulting from the lack of this supportive social network or oversight. As envisioned, SOLO assignments are either in the embassy or in the host

nation's SOF headquarters, potentially distant from the capital. If disassociated from the SDO or SCO due to either organizational relationship and/or geographic placement, the SOLO has less supervision while at the same time is exposed to greater stresses and temptations.

Since SOF is accustomed to high-level oversight from bodies such as Congress and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the embassy would be an environment in which SOF should invite supervision and transparency. Due to either the ignorance or suspicion of other interagency country team members, US SOF and its activities often acts as a lightning rod. As a result, the SDO or SCO often acts as the default, if not logical interlocutor for information, de-confliction, and coordination within the embassy.

Thus, the SDO and SCO already support SOF with foreign partners and within the embassy country team. In the multiple embassies that have never had or will meet the threshold to receive a SOLO, the SDO or SCO have for years run an entire gambit of support for US SOF cooperative events such as Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) or civilian contractor training events from staffing, coordinating in country, hosting a pre-deployment site survey. Undoubtedly, the expanding quantity of SOF cooperation in select countries and its resultant support requirements probably encouraged the initial idea for dedicated SOLOs. Such a subject matter expert partner is of course welcome to increase cooperation and lighten the load, but in the majority of country teams without SOLOs, USSOCOM is apparently content with leveraging the existing SDO and SCO support structure with no provision to ever provide a SOLO. Perhaps Secretary Gates had these more resource austere situations in mind when he

said, “the standing up and mentoring of indigenous army and police – once the province of Special Forces – is now a key mission for the military as a whole.”<sup>39</sup>

### Recommendations

If the existing SDO construct is to avoid repeating past mistakes and remain viable as intended by DoD directives, the SOLO must be officially incorporated in the existing SDO structure. As already implemented between the SDO and his embassy counterpart, an obvious method to ensure the SDO’s relevance is to include the SOLO in the SDO or SCO’s rating chain for personnel evaluations either a rater or contributing rater. This proposal has precedence. For example, the U.S. National Guard contributes officers for long-term assignment to many embassies in eastern Europe, Africa, and South America to manage their respective states’ State Partnership Program (SPP), fostering both military and civilian relationships between U.S. states and foreign “sister” countries via U.S. citizen soldiers. These officers are most commonly called Bilateral Affairs Officers (BAO) and are both assigned to and rated by the SCO. Thus, the BAO’s situation greatly resembles the SOLO. Both officers are from external, donating organizations outside the direct purview of the GCC or DIA. Furthermore, both officers provide niche, sub-set security cooperation capabilities. However, the National Guard, has chosen to subordinate its officers to the SCO while the TSOC retains the independence of its SOLOs. SOF regularly provides its personnel for Title 50 operations, even outside DoD control, to the Central Intelligence Agency<sup>40</sup>, thus the TSOC’s retention of SOLO supervision vice the DoD-designated SDO is dubious. Furthermore, are service components’ select, multi-million-dollar, major military hardware sales of equipment requiring several years of decades of equipment and training no less important than the SOLO’s mission? If so, should each individual



armed service also provide liaison officers to select embassies for program implementation outside the realm of existing SCO structures?

Cooperation and collaboration among country team members is tantamount to survival in the embassy. As admirable as these traits are, there are also obvious reasons for the separation of missions. As the SDO-SCO relationship was formalized in resultant DoD directives, there is now little potential of improper utilization of roles or assets between the two organizations' equities. Prior to SDO implementation, a persistent fear among SCOs was their incorporation into the DAO's intelligence collection role in country or the appearance of such. A similar apprehension may exist for SOLOs, but the same protocols in use that have protected the SCO could apply to SOLOs. As mentioned earlier USSOCOM has leveraged DAO and SCO assistance in embassies without SOLOs, which will undoubtedly continue, even after the assignment of a SOLO to country.

If SDO incorporation is considered, USSOCOM should review its existing and future SOLO positions for rank compatibility. The good news is that according present plans, only four of the actual or planned 23 SOLO positions are of equal rank to the SDO. SOF organizations undoubtedly agree with the Joint Operating Environment 2010 that "the skills of a diplomat in working with other people and military organizations from different cultures must be in the tool kit"<sup>41</sup> of military organizations. In order to employ this experience longer in the force, more junior SOF officers than the presently envisioned senior field grades (O-5/O-6) could serve as SOLOs after an initial or second SOF assignment. Such an experience for senior O-3/O-4s fits into the Army's encouragement for "broadening assignments" and would permit not only the individual,

but also SOF forces greater returns during the remainder of the junior officers' subsequent service. The current practice assigns fairly senior officers at or beyond the twenty-year career mark, many of whom will retire. Another alternative is for junior or senior SOLOs to do shorter internships at embassies, working for SDO or SCOs. SOF operators could not only spend shorter time in a non-operations position, but a greater quantity of SOF officers could experience working overseas in an embassy country team.

In an anticipated era of austerity, the latest National Military Strategy seeks “comprehensive reform” to improve the effectiveness of our security assistance.<sup>42</sup> It envisions “a pooled-resources approach to facilitate more complementary efforts across departments and programs, integrating defense, diplomacy, development, law enforcement, and intelligence capacity-building activities.”<sup>43</sup> In a similar manner, US USSOCOM could review expanding or creating FAOs assignment to USSOCOM. The services could also permit more SOF to become FAOs, permitting permanent transfer or repeating and progressive assignments between the two communities. US USSOCOM could also investigate the benefits of partial or complete SOLO pre-assignment training at long established DoD schools such as DIA's Joint Military Attaché School (JMAS) or the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management (DISAM) vice the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU). Likewise, the DoD FAO program could take a lesson from US USSOCOM's SOLO program by targeting any SCO increases at only high priority countries, rather than wholesale increases to every country. In summary, there is much to be gained from not only a Department-wide

review of security cooperation efforts and position, but better integration between the SOF and FAO communities.

In conclusion, SOLOs impart a specialized, high-demand capability and create cooperative ties useful to not only our allies and partners, but which the United States can leverage in future conflicts. To maximize their utility, DoD, DoS, the GCCs, and USSOCOM must pay special attention to SOLOs' integration into existing, embassy security cooperation and military-diplomatic structures, training, and career-long utilization of embassy experience. Perhaps the creator of SOLO positions, USSOCOM Commander Admiral Olson, best characterized the current situation of SOLO/FAO affairs in embassies when he said, "General Purpose Forces are looking more like SOF and SOF are looking more like General Purpose Forces. Very soon there needs to be a conversation about what makes SOF SOF."<sup>44</sup> In light of increasing security cooperation demands overseas and decreasing domestic defense and foreign relations budgets, the sooner that conversation occurs, the better.

#### Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Department of State, *Executive Budget Summary Function 150 & Other International Programs* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tactical> (accessed February 6, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, Joint Publication 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, May 2, 2007 incorporating Change 1 March 20, 2009), xii.

<sup>5</sup> Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management, *The Management of Security Cooperation*, 31<sup>st</sup> ed. (Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio: February 2012), 2-14.

<sup>6</sup> Barack H. Obama, *Unified Command Plan* (Washington, C.C.: The White House, April 6, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *DoD Operations at U.S. Embassies*, Directive 5105.75 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, undated), 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management, *The Management of Security Cooperation*, 4-14.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-17.

<sup>11</sup> J5 is the GCC commander's staff section for plans and policy.

<sup>12</sup> Department of State, *Executive Budget Summary Function 150 & Other International Programs* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management, *The Management of Security Cooperation*, 4-1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-4.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (P.L. 87-195) §515(b): "Advisory and training assistance conducted by military personnel assigned under this section shall be kept to an absolute minimum. It is the sense of the Congress that advising and training assistance in countries to which military personnel are assigned under this section shall be provided primarily by other personnel who are not assigned under this section and who are detailed for limited periods to perform specific tasks."

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-19.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *DoD Operations at U.S. Embassies*, Directive 5105.75 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, undated), 11.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Military Department Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Programs*, Directive 1315.17 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, April 28, 2005), 3-5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Phillip A. Buswell, *Keeping Special Forces Special: Regional Proficiency in Special Forces*, Thesis (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, December, 2011), 43.

<sup>21</sup> 2/2 reflects a score of foreign language reading/listening proficiency on a 0 (rote, memorized proficiency) to 5 (professional proficiency) scale.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management*, Army Pamphlet 600-3 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, February 1, 2010), 257.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

- <sup>24</sup> U.S. Special Operations Command, unclassified information paper, 2 November 2012.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> U.S. Special Operations Command J-55, LTC Curtis, "The International Engagement Program," unclassified information paper, Tampa, FL, April 2010.
- <sup>27</sup> U.S. Special Operations Command, unclassified information paper, 2 November 2012.
- <sup>28</sup> U.S. Special Operations Command Center for Special Operations International Engagement Division (SCSO-J55), "Center for Special Operations International Engagement Division (SCSO-J55) History," unclassified information paper, Tampa, FL, Calendar Year 2007.
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- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>34</sup> DoDD 5105.75, p.3.
- <sup>35</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *The United States Army Operating Concept 2016-2028*, TRADOC Pam 525-3-1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, August 19, 2010), 29.
- <sup>36</sup> U.S. Department of the Navy, *Naval Operations Concept 2010* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Navy), 9.
- <sup>37</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Operating Concepts*, Third Edition, (June 2010), 9.
- <sup>38</sup> U.S. Department of the Air Force, *Air Force Basic Doctrine, Organization, and Command, Air Force Doctrine Document 1* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Air Force, October 14, 2011), 16.
- <sup>39</sup> Robert M. Gates, "Landon Lecture," speech, Manhattan, KS, Kansas State University Landon Lecture, November 26, 2007.
- <sup>40</sup> Joseph B. Burger III, "Covert Action: Title 10, Title 50, and the Chain of Command," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 67, (Fourth Quarter 2012): 32-39.
- <sup>41</sup> U.S. Joint Forces Command, *The Joint Operating Environment 2010*, (Suffolk, VA: Joint Forces Command, February 18, 2010), 18.

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2011*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 8, 2011), 15.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>44</sup> Phillip A. Buswell, *Keeping Special Forces Special: Regional Proficiency in Special Forces*, 3.