

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

PROPER EMPLOYMENT OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES:

GEOGRAPHIC COMBATANT COMMAND PLANNER CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPECIAL
OPERATIONS FORCES EMPLOYMENT

by

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Chapter 1

Introduction

- ‡ *Humans are more important than hardware.*
- ‡ *Special Operations Forces(SOF) cannot be mass-produced.*
- ‡ *Quality is better than quantity.*
- ‡ *Competent SOF cannot be created after emergencies occur.*
- ‡ *Most special operations require non-SOF support.*

—SOF Truths

The lessons learned from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) shape United States Special Operation Command's (USSOCOM's) doctrine today. To employ special operations forces (SOF) properly, geographic combatant command planners must understand the SOF employment lessons learned about command relationships, planner interaction between staffs, assigning proper missions, and joint special operation area (JSOA) considerations from OEF and OIF, which currently are codified in SOF doctrine.

It is fair to say that the attention given to special operations from conventional military leaders was much less prior to 9/11 and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Though America's wars since WWII have been limited and have dealt with irregular forces to a significant extent, a conventional mindset, plagued by the fear of war with Russia, kept SOF out of the spotlight in military thinking. Now that SOF has played critical roles in both OEF and OIF, geographic combatant command (GCC) planners must examine and understand the lessons learned from these operations concerning SOF employment in order to integrate SOF into the overall campaign plan properly. Four focus areas concerning lessons learned from these operations are command relationships, liaison elements, proper mission assignments, and

considerations for establishing JSOAs and therefore, are the four areas this paper explores.

These four areas are by no means exhaustive, but serve well in highlighting significant factors in SOF employment over the last nine years.

In looking at the first area, C2, it is important to note that the unique characteristics of SOF offers similarly unique command and control (C2) issues of these forces. GCC planners have the responsibility to influence SOF command relationships by working through SOF C2 issues with their commander and by considering SOF relationship efficiency during the wargaming of a plan. Key supporting entities of effective C2 as well as lower-level planning are SOF liaison officers (LNOs). SOF LNOs are the second area to highlight as they provide links between the SOF commander they represent and the commanders and staffs to which they are assigned to ensure SOF are given proper mission assignments. For the third area it is important to highlight that the assignments given to SOF may occur in both peacetime and wartime and, due to the specialized nature of SOF, must focus on achieving the operational- and strategic-level goals of the campaign. Lastly, GCC planners must ensure that SOF and conventional missions within a given battlespace of an operation integrate in order to accomplish the overall military objectives of a given campaign. JSOAs have the ability to either assist or hinder this integration effort. A well thought out plan for the creation and termination of JSOAs accompanied by a continuous examination of the validity of each JSOA during the execution will ensure that they assist rather than hinder the campaign objectives.

One example where each of these four areas suffered to some degree was Operation Anaconda, which occurred February 2002 during OEF. SOF units comprising Task Force (TF) Dagger and TF 11 in Afghanistan had enjoyed a special command relationship reporting directly to General Tommy Franks, the CENTCOM commander, for the beginning of OEF, but by the

time Operation Anaconda kicked off, TF Dagger was reporting to the conventional 10th Mountain Division Commander, MG Franklin L. “Buster” Hagenbeck.¹ Unity of command suffered by not having one commander over the entire operation and the mix of conventional forces, fresh into this fight, with SOF, who had months of experience in country, added a high amount of friction initially.² Proper liaisons were lacking and SOF air was left out of the joint fires planning resulting in very poor air-ground coordination both in mission tempo and in location of friendlies.³ While Operation Anaconda resulted in hundreds of enemy fighters killed or captured, it also resulted in several needlessly lost SOF lives due to poor SOF employment and communication with conventional forces.

As stated in the second SOF truth above, SOF cannot be mass-produced. As such, one cannot over emphasize the need to employ SOF properly. Their improper employment can deplete SOF quickly along with the ability to accomplish the many unique missions SOF conduct that are needed to reach the campaign objectives of the joint force commander (JFC). Planners must also consider conventional support of SOF, as the fifth SOF truth above reveals. GCC planners are the starting point for the proper support of SOF by ensuring that proper C2, liaison elements, mission assignments, and JSOAs are in place that facilitates proper SOF employment.

¹ Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*, 83.

² Ibid, 87-89.

³ Homan, 23 November 2009.

Chapter 2

Command Relationships

SOF are most effective when fully integrated and synchronized into the overall plan. Given the ability of SOF to operate unilaterally, independently as part of the overall plan, or in support of a conventional commander, effective coordination and integration of the SOF effort is dependent on a robust C2 structure. Successful execution of SO requires centralized, responsive, and unambiguous C2. The time-sensitive nature normally associated with the majority of SOF missions as well as the sensitive nature of many of these missions requires a C2 structure that is, above all, responsive to the needs of the operational unit and provides the most flexibility and agility in the application of SOF. SOF C2 is tailored for each specific mission or operation.

—JP 3-05.1, III-2

C2 of SOF offers unique challenges planners must be aware of for effective SOF employment. As with any force component, command relationships are important to understand and special consideration must be given on how best to exercise C2 over SOF due to their ability to operate both conventionally and unconventionally. The intent of this chapter is to break down the command relationships that planners must consider, and outline best practices based on recent operational lessons learned.

Combatant Command (COCOM) Authority

It is important to note that all SOF are under the COCOM of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), which has both functional responsibilities and service-like responsibilities. The commander of USSOCOM (CDR USSOCOM) may either assign or attach forces to a GCC. When *assigned*, the geographic combatant commander will exercise COCOM over these forces. SOF are normally *assigned* on a permanent basis. SOF are normally *attached*

on a temporary basis, in which case the geographic combatant commander will exercise operational control (OPCON) while the CDRUSSOCOM maintains COCOM. In unique situations the CDRUSSOCOM, as the supported commander, will plan and conduct special operations (SO) missions with OPCON given directly to the President or Secretary of Defense.¹ Understanding COCOM of SOF is straightforward, but the GCC planners need to consider this command relationship since it will drive employment authority.

Operational Control (OPCON)

Like each of the service components, SOF has an inherent theater-level C2 structure that the GCC has COCOM over. For SOF, this is called a theater special operations command (TSOC), and is built into every GCC except for NORTHCOM. The TSOC commander acts as a SO advisor to other commanders in the theater and is normally given OPCON over both assigned and attached SOF in theater giving him or her dual-hatted responsibilities as both advisor and commander of SOF. The TSOC commander may exercise OPCON as the joint force special operations component commander (JFSOCC) directly under a GCC or within an established joint task force (JTF) under the JTF commander. This is the case if the scope of the operation dictates it or if multiple joint special operations task forces (JSOTFs) are stood up under a JTF.² Otherwise, the single JSOTF commander is normally made the JFSOCC and given OPCON of forces under him or her.

OPCON of SOF may also be given to conventional force commanders. Therefore, understanding OPCON relationships for SOF is a concept that is important to GCC planners who will advise the JFCs on the OPCON relationships that best support the campaign plan. Getting OPCON relationships established early in a plan helps during the wargaming of a plan by helping GCC planners anticipate needed changes to OPCON relationships based on possible

mission or campaign changes. This will allow the JFC to focus more on the changing issues at hand than on working through proper OPCON relationships from a dead stop.³ This will also ensure that a conventional force commander who receives OPCON of SOF receives the proper SOF expertise as well. SOF expertise not only provides employment enhancement, but sustainment enhancement since there is a varying degree in education of the conventional force commander that needs to take place in order to provide the proper care and feeding of the SOF forces attached to him or her.⁴

Tactical Control (TACON)

TACON is the command relationship that offers commanders the ability to direct the movement and maneuver of a particular force within the operational area necessary in order to accomplish a specific mission or task.⁵ The commander possessing OPCON may assign or attach TACON of SOF to SOF commanders as well as conventional force commanders as he or she sees fit. For example, the TSOC commander may assign TACON to the JSOTF commanders, as is the case in Iraq and Afghanistan, or the TSOC may provide TACON of certain air assets to a supported commander such as the joint forces air component commander (JFACC). The arrangement of TACON is flexible in duration. It may be established for a short duration, such as for a specific task, or may be established for a long duration, such as what is currently given to the JSOTFs in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁶

Because the arrangement of TACON is flexible in duration, GCC planners must be familiar with best practices and ensure proper TACON assignments are issued in initiating directives such as warning and execution orders. JP 3-05.1 stresses the fact that C2 of SOF must be considered during all phases: planning, deployment, employment, termination, transition, and redeployment.⁷ Giving insightful tips on best practices of TACON, General (Ret) Gary Luck

and Colonel (Ret) Mike Findlay offer the following from a United States Joint Forces Command Focus Paper, October 2008, in Figure 2-1 below.

- | TACON Best Practices | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1) | For the respective commanders to jointly determine the required tasks and organize the provided or attached TACON force for those identified tasks. This is a continuing dialogue as the situation and requirements change. Major changes of mission focus normally require organizational changes, are not within the parameters of “TACON” and require coordination with the parent organization. |
| 2) | Provide the gaining commander of the TACON force the requisite expertise to effectively plan and exercise TACON of the force. We sometimes find conventional forces requesting TACON or even OPCON of SOF without also asking for the requisite command and staff expertise in employment. |
| 3) | Minimize direction or control of the TACON force by the losing commander to strengthen the JTF’s unity of command and responsibility for employment of the TACON force. |

Figure 2-1

These are just three of their suggestions, but three that need elaborating. The first suggestion is applicable when the TACON of SOF is given to an organization other than the parent organization. As changes occur, a plan may change requiring a shift in end state, objectives, and centers of gravity. This may cause major changes of mission focus, which may or may not be suited to the unique capabilities of a SOF unit or may require a change in unit structure. The parent organization is the proper authority to make these changes since this authority is not inherent in TACON. While the commander possessing TACON and the parent organization commander are responsible for working out the details, GCC planners must possess awareness of this fact when constructing or reconstructing a plan. The second suggestion, to “provide the requisite SOF command and staff expertise to the gaining conventional commander receiving OPCON/TACON of SOF,” will assist with the first suggestion as well as ensure SOF are employed in the most efficient way and not in a way that may be detrimental to personnel or the mission. The third suggestion is vital to fostering a sound chain of command. While

command and staff expertise is essential, the commander exercising TACON of SOF must have total control without the parent organization acting as a competing boss.

OEF provides an excellent example of a failure to provide the requisite SOF expertise needed when assigning TACON of SOF to a conventional force. As stated in Chapter 1, at the beginning of OEF, SOF enjoyed a unique and effective relationship with the GCC General Tommy Franks. SOF were responsible for connecting anti-Taliban ground ops with the air campaign in a highly conventional war of attrition. During this time, GEN Franks video teleconferenced daily with SOF.⁸ Though SOF was performing a conventional role, the operational-level employment of that role, and the lack of a conventional command and control element in country made their unconventional direct command relationship with the GCC one that was both efficient and effective. However, in November 2001, the 10th Mountain Division HQ stood up in Bagram under the CFLCC in Uzbekistan and SOF, except for TF 11, was placed under 10th Mountain Division HQ control.⁹ The problem with this was that the war became more and more unconventional and SOF had to work through two geographically separated conventional headquarters to get approval for their now unconventional operations. This created a large and complex mission approval process that did not adequately meet the unconventional decision loop necessary to execute SOF's unconventional missions.¹⁰ One way to combat this mismatch of command relationships is for planners to remember the iterative nature of the joint operation planning process (JOPP), which means planners, working with the JFC, must reanalyze the mission and restructure the campaign command relationships in a manner commensurate with current mission realities.

Summary

GCC planners must be familiar with the SOF command structure doctrine and best practices for proper SOF employment. The best resource available for input into SOF planning is the TSOC commander who has an advisory role inherent in each GCC, save NORTHCOM, and who will normally exercise OPCON over SOF. C2 of SOF must be planned for early in the planning cycle and considered throughout each phase of an OPLAN because command relationships may be assigned to conventional force commanders in which case proper command and staff expertise must be provided to bolster successful employment. SOF LNOs do a great deal to alleviate friction points in the C2 of SOF as the next chapter shows.

¹ JP 3-05 (17 Dec 03), III-2.

² JP 3-05 (17 Dec 03), III-5.

³ Perry, 10 February 2010.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ JP 1-02, 544.

⁶ Luck and Findlay, 6.

⁷ JP 3-05.1 (26 Apr 07), III-2 –III-3.

⁸ Rothstein, 13.

⁹ Rothstein, 13.

¹⁰ Rothstein, 14.

Chapter 3

Planner Interaction

SOF LNOs ensure the timely exchange of necessary operational and support information to aid mission execution and preclude fratricide, duplication of effort, disruption of ongoing operations, or loss of intelligence sources. SOF LNOs may assist in the coordination of fire support, overflight, aerial refueling, targeting, deception, PSYOP, CAO, and other operational issues based on ongoing and projected SO missions. These efforts are crucial to maintaining the JFC's unity of effort, tempo, and coordination of limited resources and assets.

—JP 3-05, III-11

The use of SOF LNOs facilitates effective planner interaction amongst the various planning cells under the JFC. SOF LNOs are the conduit by which the JFSOCC integrates and synchronizes his or her planning with the other component commanders in order to provide unity of effort and thus a cohesive overall campaign plan. Therefore, SOF LNOs must be able to articulate the intent of the JFSOCC to the planning component or JPG they are assigned to in order to enhance SOF employment. Likewise, SOF LNOs must be able to comprehend and articulate the ideas, concepts, and plans of the planning component or JPG they are assigned to back to the JFSOCC and his or her planning cell. This means that SOF LNOs must be capable individuals with the authorization to correspond directly with the JFSOCC.

Liaison Roles

SOF liaisons play a crucial role at all levels of planning and command, informing both SOF and conventional forces of movements and operations in order to provide deconfliction of duplication, prevention of fratricide, and advocate and inform conventional commanders on the

proper employment of SOF. There is another important, though less tangible, aspect of liaisons however. SOF liaisons need to foster an “us/we” relationship that results in a “one team, one fight” mindset, and not simply function as an element who keeps SOF and conventional forces in separate lanes.

GEN (Ret) Luck and COL (Ret) Findlay offer two key insights on this dynamic of teamwork. The first is to, “Recognize the perishable nature of trust in combat and guard it...It takes a long time to rebuild trust once it is lost.”¹ The second is to, “Aggressively demand subordinates to work with each other and seamlessly share information...through resourcing of liaison elements.”² GCC planners can influence this dynamic by working closely with their SOF liaisons at the JPG to build personal as well as professional relationships, realizing that as trust grows, information for planning will follow suit. There is no denying that some information SOF deals with will not be shared because of its sensitivity. However, teamwork and trust need not be hampered by compartmented sensitive information that cannot be shared. Instead, trust is effectively promoted by the information that can be shared to gain unity of effort toward attaining the desired endstate.

Special Operations Liaison Element (SOLE)

GCC planners must be aware of the doctrinally established SOF liaison elements since planning continues throughout the execution of the plan, and knowing the functions of these SOF liaison elements can influence decisions made on SOF employment. For instance, if GCC planners intend to employ SOF near or in conjunction with conventional air forces, it is important to know that the SOF liaison unit that interfaces with “Big Blue Air” or the JFACC’s staff is the SOLE. According to AFDD 2-7 “Special Operations,”

The SOLE is a team that represents the JFSOCC to the JFACC (if designated) or appropriate Service component air C2 organization, to coordinate, deconflict, and

integrate special operations air, space, surface, and subsurface operations with conventional air, space, and information operations.³

The SOLE is present in the joint air operations center and thus provides instant accessibility to conventional air planners on pertinent information regarding SOF operations in order to deconflict conventional operations being performed by the JFACC's assets. The deconfliction of operations includes air, space, and information deconfliction as well as fire support coordination to reduce the risk of fratricide. They also coordinate and monitor SOF support to conventional forces. The best example of this from OIF and OEF is AC-130 support of conventional units.

Special Operations Command and Control Element (SOCCE)

Just as the SOLE synchronizes SOF operations with the JFACC's operations, a SOCCE synchronizes SOF operations with conventional land force operations by co-locating with the divisional land force command post it will support.⁴ SOCCE provides key synchronization information by receiving SOF operational, intelligence, and target acquisition reports directly from deployed SOF elements and then providing that information to the supported command post.⁵ A SOCCE is therefore a vital link allowing SOF operations to support conventional operations efficiently and provide unity of effort.

A further layer of fidelity in ensuring land forces and SOF integrate properly is a special operations coordination element (SOCOORD). A SOCOORD, while not part of the SOF organization like a SOCCE, offers the SOF expertise needed by the land force commander to employ SOF in support of his or her operations effectively. A SOCCE and SOCOORD together will harmonize SOF and conventional force operations and therefore, should be considered by the land force commander as vital members of his or her team for planning and conducting operations.

Parallel planning

An important aspect of planning that all planners need to remember, whether they are GCC planners at the JPG, component planners, or even tactical planners, is that while many plans may exist, there is just one campaign plan. It is vital that all plans integrate and support the campaign plan in order to accomplish the campaign objectives. Figure 3-1 below (taken from JP 3-30) shows how each component planning process flows from the JPG Mission Analysis phase of the JOPP into the COA development phase of the JOPP in a parallel planning construct.

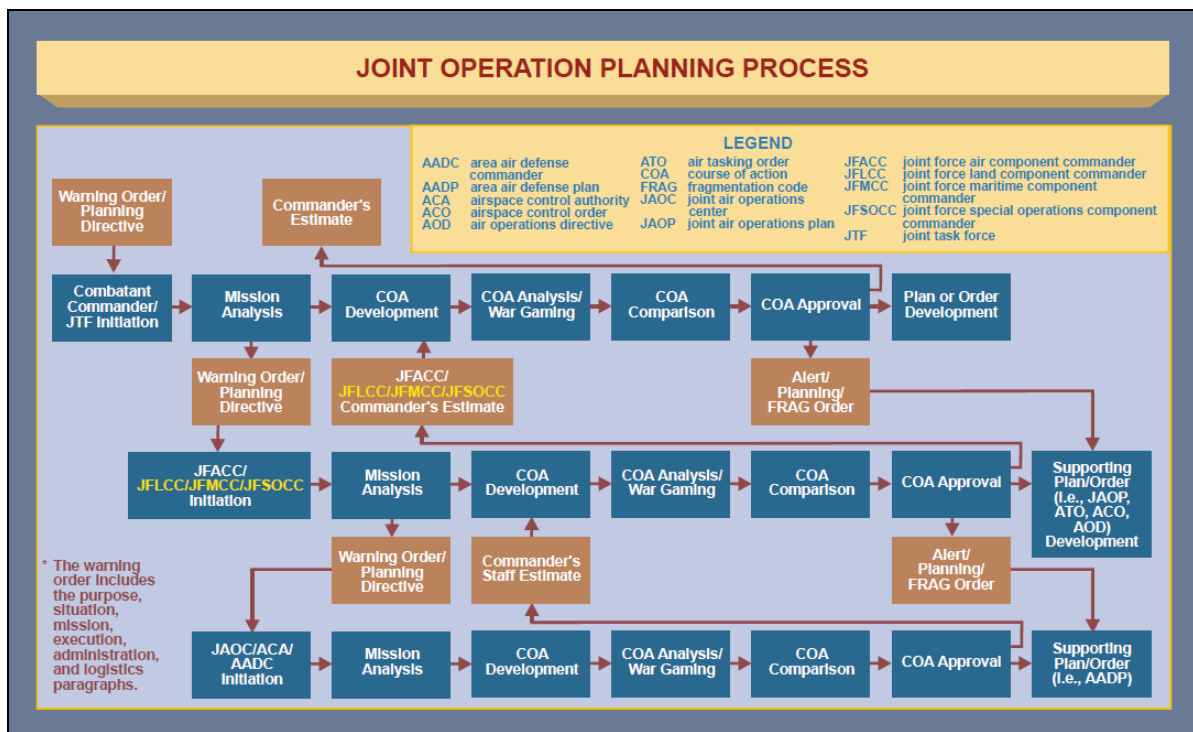


Figure 3-1

The key ingredient to integrate and synchronize SOF planning with the other components is SOF LNO coordination, not only at the JPG, but also at each of the component planning cells. The reason for this is that it is much easier to influence planning early rather than later when the plan begins to solidify. As you can see from Figure 3-1, by the JPG COA Development step, component planning is very mature, so relying on JPG-level SOF LNOs to influence the proper employment of SOF, while needed and valuable, is inadequate alone.

Summary

SOF LNOs are the glue that integrates SOF and conventional operations from JPG planning, to component planning, to tactical planning, and mission execution. As such, SOF LNOs need to be individuals who have expert knowledge and the proper authority to foster trust between conventional and SOF planners, staffs, and commanders. These individuals must not be the weak links sent by SOF commanders merely to fill a perceived perfunctory role, nor denied authority to speak on behalf of their SOF commander and thereby relegated to nothing more than “message boys.” Planning that produces proper timing, tempo, deconfliction, synchronization, unity of effort, et cetera, depends heavily on quality SOF LNOs. Therefore, GCC planners as well as staffs and commanders at every level of a campaign must consider SOF LNOs essential assets.

¹ Luck and Findlay, 5.

² Ibid.

³ AFDD 2-7, 20.

⁴ JP 3-05, III-10.

⁵ JP 3-31, IV-15.

Chapter 4

Assigning Proper Missions

What makes SOF so special?...[they are] carefully selected, highly trained personnel that can conduct challenging missions — including in hostile, denied or politically sensitive environments — that often exceed the capabilities of general purpose forces...SOF units are smaller and comprise more senior personnel than their conventional counterparts. Because of their advanced training, they can also use specialized equipment and employ tactics, techniques and procedures that are unavailable to general-purpose forces. SOF units typically carry out missions with much smaller numbers of personnel than conventional units, making it possible to operate clandestinely in semi-permissive or denied areas. Their higher level of training (particularly linguistic and cultural expertise), combined with their relatively higher maturity and experience, also make them the preferred force for training and advising foreign militaries, especially in politically sensitive areas.¹

—Robert Martinage, 2008

In the epigraph above, Robert Martinage, who is a Senior Fellow, consultant to the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, and expert on defense strategy, military modernization, special operations, military revolutions, and advanced technology and future warfare, highlights the most important aspect of what separates SOF from conventional forces. This difference is encapsulated in the word *specialized*. To analogize this difference, compare and contrast an M-60 machine gun with a long-range sniper rifle. Both of these weapons kill opposing forces, but both are not appropriate in every situation. The M-60 is a formidable weapon allowing its operator to kill or deter multiple front-line hostiles simultaneously. It takes a moderate amount of training for its operator to employ it effectively, leaves no doubt that its operator is in the area, and it is not easily overrun. The long-range sniper rifle also kills hostiles, but is best used against a single hostile, preferably a high value target such as another sniper or

heavily guarded leader or commander. It takes a high level of training to operate efficiently and it allows its operator a ghost-like presence in the area. However, if detected it requires defensive support as it is highly vulnerable to being overrun. GCC planners must consider the proper application of this analogy when assigning objectives to SOF.

Capabilities and Limitations

With the previous analogy in mind, consider these doctrinal statements on the capabilities and limitations of SOF from JP 3-5 in Figure 3-1 below.

<p style="text-align: center;">Capabilities of SOF</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Be task-organized quickly and deployed rapidly to provide tailored responses to many different situations.2) Gain access to hostile or denied areas.3) Provide limited medical support for themselves and those they support.4) Communicate worldwide with organic equipment.5) Conduct operations in austere, harsh environments without extensive support.6) Survey and assess local situations and report these assessments rapidly.7) Work closely with regional military and civilian authorities and populations.8) Organize people into working teams to help solve local problems.9) Deploy with a generally lower profile and less intrusive presence than larger conventional forces.10) Provide unconventional options for addressing ambiguous situations. <p style="text-align: center;">Limitations of SOF</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Improper employment of SOF could result in the depletion of forces.2) SOF should normally be employed against targets with strategic or operational relevance.3) SOF are not a substitute for conventional forces.4) SOF logistic support is austere.

Figure 4-1

Determining SOF objectives requires a careful balancing of risk versus gain and a clear understanding of both the capabilities and limitations of SOF. It is crucial for planners to understand the capabilities and limitations in Figure 4-1 as they relate to specific Service component SOF elements. This understanding is crucial to the proper employment of a given Service component SOF element in order to accomplish the operational and strategic objectives

desired in a campaign. For a full breakdown of each of the Service component's SOF missions and associated equipment available, a great quick reference source is the USSOCOM public affairs produced pamphlet called the USSOCOM FACT BOOK.

Of all the capabilities and limitations mentioned above, the two that GCC planners should take particular note of are, capability 5 and limitation 4 dealing with supply.

Admiral Eric T. Olson, the commander of USSOCOM, recently resurrected the fifth SOF truth (Most special operations require non-SOF support), which lay quiescent in SOF truth promotion for the past 20 years.² Current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have reminded SOF of the importance of this truth. In a 3 August 2009 Congressional Research Service Report for Congress on SOF Issues, Andrew Feickert reports,

One concern [for Iraq] is that when conventional forces do begin their anticipated large-scale departure this year, that remote SOF units that rely on nearby conventional force support, may have to pull out of their operational areas and consolidate near remaining logistical support units which could adversely impact SOF missions.³

In Afghanistan, the concern is just the opposite. With the anticipated increase in conventional forces, SOF anticipates a strain on logistics due to competing needs of both SOF and conventional forces.⁴ ADM Olson expressed these logistics concerns regarding OIF and OEF in an interview with Joint Forces Quarterly in January 2010 where he stated, "the ability of the Services to meet SOF needs is stretched thin...The main issue is related to the "enabling" forces that are in short supply. SOF truly depend on them and cannot perform their missions without them."⁵ GCC planners will do well to consider the logistical and non-SOF support required by SOF especially in any employment with a foreseen sustained requirement.

The Right Kind of Missions

Based on SOF capabilities and limitations, what are the right kind of objectives for SOF?

JP 3-05 lists five questions, listed in Figure 3-2, which must be answered when considering missions for SOF:

SOF Employment Considerations
1) Is this an appropriate SOF mission?
2) Does the mission support the JFC's campaign plan?
3) Is the mission operationally feasible?
4) Are required resources available to execute the mission?
5) Does the expected outcome of the mission justify the risk?

Figure 4-2

These five questions rightly could be asked of any Service unit employment and not just SOF. A more focused question GCC planners should ask in addition to these five broad questions is: “Does the mission require the light, lean, and specialized capabilities of SOF in order to achieve the operational and/or strategic objectives of the JFC?” This applies to SOF missions across the full spectrum of military operations.

Peacetime Mission Example

A recent example of a proper non-kinetic employment of SOF occurred January 2010 in the devastated region of Haiti. To provide humanitarian relief, a critical decisive point was the control and operation of the airfield at Port au Prince. This mission was given to Colonel Buck Elton, the Joint Special Operations Air Component Commander –Haiti and a force of merely 220 Airmen who lived in tents, subsisted on MREs, and achieved results of strategic-level importance. This small group of SOF professionals executed tasks such as air traffic control, airfield security, rescue, critical care evacuation, surgery, aerial port duties, humanitarian airdrop surveys, drop zone control, rotary-wing C2, communications, and logistics to name a

few.⁶ For the first week of their operations, Col Elton and his SOF team were the only ones with food, shelter, and security. According to Col Elton:

We became the focal point for the evacuation of over 12,000 American citizens, the primary casualty evacuation center coordinating hundreds of evac flights, our surgeons performed 14 major operations in their field hospital, mostly amputations of crushed limbs, our security held back rioting crowds and fence jumpers for the first several days, our pararescue jumpers saved 13 lives conducting confined space rescue missions with Fairfax Country Urban Rescue, the best in the world. Our security teams flew aid in to crowded landing zones and secured the LZ to distribute aid. Our Special Tactics Combat Controllers controlled an international airport 24/7 from a card table in the grass next to the runway for 12 days without a single incident, controlled almost 1,700 fixed wing flights and 800 rotary wing flights from the infield with tactical radios until we handed the job back to Air Force air traffic controllers in their portable FAA tower (with air conditioning) on 25 Jan. We coordinated and planned three airdrop missions from C-17 aircraft. Our joint special operations forces distributed 43,800 hand-cranked radios to allow disaster survivors to receive news and information regarding international relief efforts and public safety messages. And, we provided internet and phone service to virtually every arriving unit and aid organization that showed up here without a plan.⁷

In addition to these accomplishments, Col Elton became a focal point of information, briefing hundreds of reporters as well as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, former POTUS Bill Clinton and a host of three- and four-star generals.⁸ The strategic effects of this operation are highlighted by that fact that Col Elton not only provided economy of force at Port au Prince, but also affected both national and high-level military decision makers and helped shape world opinion.

Wartime Mission Example

The war in Afghanistan offers several examples of strategic employment of SOF in a wartime situation. One of the best examples was the unconventional warfare (UW) mission in Northern Afghanistan against Mazar-i-Sharif. Under the Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (JSOTF-N), known as Task Force (TF) Dagger, air and ground SOF teams linked up with Northern Alliance (NA) forces to bring kinetic airpower strikes against Taliban and AQ forces.

These forces were truly unconventional as they set up observation posts and utilized horses as transportation to support NA fighters through calling in close air support (CAS).

SOF provided the vital linkage between NA forces and American airpower, which, according to USSOCOM, had huge negative psychological effects on the Taliban and bolstered the resolve of the NA.⁹ The resultant effect of UW operations in Northern Afghanistan was the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif, and gave the U.S. a strategic and operational foothold in Afghanistan by building a relationship with an indigenous coalition partner and by acquiring an airfield to base future operations.¹⁰

Summary

From the capabilities, limitations, and missions mentioned above, one thing becomes apparent; SOF are specialized forces who, when properly supported, produce synergistic effects that lead to the accomplishment of the JFC's operational and strategic objectives. While the peacetime example above may suggest that SOF can be decisive apart from conventional support, this is not sustainable for long durations. SOF are high-demand/low-density assets who conduct operations worldwide and therefore, sustained operations limit their ability to respond to future conflicts around the world. GCC planners must decide where SOF can make the best impact to the operational and strategic objectives of the JFC, such as in the examples given in this chapter, and then support and integrate them with conventional forces to bring about synergistic effects.

¹ Martinage, 1.

² Naylor, "Adm Olsen adds "lost" 5th SOF Truth to doctrine." 1.

³ Feickert, 6. The information for Feickert's report was garnered from testimony before the House of Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Terrorism and Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, "Special Operations Forces: Challenges and Opportunities," Roger D. Carstens, Center for a New American Security, March 3, 2009; Lolita C. Baldor, "Iraqi Pullout Raises Concerns for Elite Forces," Army Times, March 7, 2009; Sean D. Naylor, "A Duel for the Enablers of U.S. Wars," and Defense News, March 16, 2009, p. 33.

⁴ Feickert, 6.

⁵ JFQ, 62. Support from conventional units are who are referred to as “enablers”—such as engineers, military police, intelligence, signal, and medical units.

⁶ Elton, 42.

⁷ Elton, 43.

⁸ Elton, 44.

⁹ USSOCOM, 88.

¹⁰ USSOCOM, 89.

Chapter 5

Joint Special Operations Area (JSOA) Considerations

While establishment of a designated JSOA for SOF to conduct independent operations assists in the ease of control of SO and the prevention of fratricide, the JFC should always evaluate the value of isolating SOF against the greater benefit of integrating SOF into the overall campaign plan.

—JP 3-05, III-13

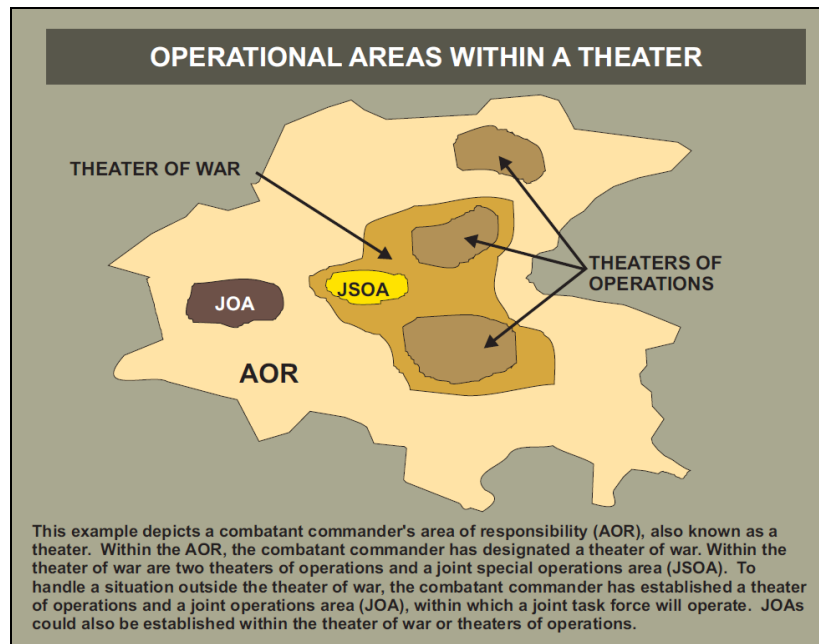


Figure 5-1¹

A JSOA is an area (land, sea, or air) in which operations are restricted to those of special operations forces alone. This area may be established for a single mission, or for extended operations, where the JSOTF commander is the supported commander. As the epigraph above states from joint doctrine, the JSOA provides “ease of control of SO and the prevention of fratricide.” It goes on to warn that one must evaluate when there is value in doing so and when it is better to integrate SOF into the campaign plan. What joint doctrine, such as JP 3-05 *Doctrine*

for Special Operations and JP 3-05.1 *Joint Special Operations Task Force Operations*, does not provide is any prescription or examples of when establishment of a JSOA is better and when integration is better.

At the beginning of OEF, SOF were the main ground effort with two distinct missions, one north and one south of the Hindu Kush mountain range. In the North, JSOTF-N conducted primarily UW missions, as described in Chapter 4, along with foreign internal defense (FID). In the South, JSOTF-S conducted primarily direct action (DA) missions. Each JSOTF had their own joint special operations air component (JSOAC) to provide the requisite SOF air support needed as well, so the establishment of a JSOA north of the Hindu Kush to support JSOTF-N UW and FID operations and a JSOA south of the Hindu Kush to support JSOTF-S DA operations made a great deal of sense. As the war progressed however, the UW mission spread beyond the confines of the JSOTF-N's JSOA and deconfliction became an issue. One big issue, according to Colonel Michael Homan, Battlestaff Commander for JSOAC-S, was the ability of the two JSOACs and JSOTFs to communicate securely due to incompatibility between the types of secure communications each had in place.² Along with the expansion of JSOTF-N mission throughout Afghanistan came the beginning of conventional force operations, making coordination even more difficult.

During the planning of conventional operations, SOF were left out of the joint fires planning. In fact, SOF and conventional force planners never talked to one another to coordinate fire control measures.³ Mini JSOAs or restricted operating zones (ROZs) began to pop up throughout Afghanistan as a way to deconflict fires and air operations. These ROZs did not help promote a unified effort between SOF and conventional forces since the overall campaign plan failed to be the main consideration.

SOF got so comfortable setting up these mini JSOAs that Afghanistan began to look like it had measles, which made it cumbersome for air support forces to transit and communicate. What should have happened, according to Col (Ret) Rich “Kemo” Perry, an air planner during OEF and OIF, was what happened in the western desert of Iraq during OIF where JSOAs were planned out by standing them up then standing them down once the major muscle movements were completed.⁴ Another thing that should have happened was, once conventional ground forces began operations, there should have been a transition plan developed that would better structure the battlespace in order to provide better unity of effort and fire support control measures.⁵ The lessons learned by the problems in control, communication, frequency management, and fire support in Afghanistan helped make the success achieved in OIF possible, and need to continue to influence future operations.

JSOAs must be planned out and continually revisited by planners for validity. Types of questions that must be asked are:

- What is the objective to achieve within the JSOA?
- What effects will the establishment of a JSOA have on the campaign plan?
- What are the termination factors that will allow the JSOA to be stood down?
- What coordination measures with forces operating outside the JSOA need to be in place to keep operations from conflicting?

Asking these types of questions before establishing JSOAs will keep the focus of operations on the overall campaign plan and defend against vestigial areas that serve only to disjoint operational efforts.

¹ JP 3-5.1, III-9.

² Homan, 23 November 2009.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Perry, 10 February 2010.

⁵ Perry, 10 February 2010.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

In 2005, USSOCOM was directed by the Unified Command Plan to plan, synchronize and, as directed, conduct global operations against terrorist networks in coordination with other combatant commanders. While this was widely perceived as granting USSOCOM the authority to direct a wide range of operational activities in areas already assigned to the Geographic Combatant Commanders, we have realized in execution that our greatest value is in synchronizing GWOT campaign plans and planning. The operations themselves are in almost every case conducted by the Geographic Combatant Commander responsible for that region, with USSOCOM support. Every day at Headquarters USSOCOM, and at numerous outstations and agencies around the world, USSOCOM personnel are collaborating, coordinating, and planning with other agencies to achieve desired global effects.¹

—Admiral Eric T. Olsen, CDRUSSOCOM

For USSOCOM to synchronize its missions with the missions of the GCCs, it is fundamentally important that planners understand how to employ SOF effectively and efficiently. Ignoring the essential elements of SOF employment discussed in this paper and those found in the lessons learned over the last nine years is detrimental to campaign planning and execution. As ADM Olsen said in the epigraph above, “our greatest value is in synchronizing GWOT campaign plans and planning,” which means GCC planners carry with them the mantle of responsibility to ensure this synchronization occurs.² They must understand the importance of command relationships, liaisons, proper mission assignments, and the advantages and disadvantages of JSOAs.

In looking at command relationships, it is clear that SOF must be planned for early in the planning cycle and considered throughout each phase of the plan, because command

relationships may be assigned to conventional force commanders in which case proper command and staff expertise must be provided to bolster successful employment. Along with staff expertise, liaison elements are essential in providing effective communication between supported and supporting commanders of SOF and conventional forces in order to conduct planning that produces proper timing, tempo, deconfliction, synchronization, unity of effort, et cetera. Therefore, GCC planners as well as staffs and commanders at every level of a campaign must consider SOF LNO's essential assets. The proper mission assignments come about from understanding the capabilities and limitations affecting SOF. Therefore, GCC planners must consider these capabilities and limitations when deciding where SOF can make the best impact to the operational and strategic objectives of the JFC. Finally, understanding the planning factors involved in establishing JSOAs are crucial to the overall campaign focus. Planners must ask the right questions in order to integrate SOF and conventional operations into accomplishing the strategic and operational military objectives and not just those of the tactical units involved.

It is only when plans, forces, and efforts are synchronized that the desired global effects are realized. Without synchronization, opposing forces gain a foothold that the free world cannot tolerate. If those opposing forces are terrorists, we risk another 9/11 or worse. If those forces are disasters such as Hurricane Katrina (2005) or the earthquake in Haiti (2010) we risk the lives of those in desperate need of humanitarian aid.

¹ US Senate, 9-10. Statement of Admiral Eric T. Olsen Commander, United Special Operations Command before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the posture of Special Operations 4 March 2008.

² Ibid.

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