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**FROM BOSNIA TO BAGHDAD: THE EVOLUTION OF US  
ARMY SPECIAL FORCES FROM 1995-2004**

by

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September 2004

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FORCES FROM 1995 TO 2004**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis presents a historical analysis of the evolution of US Army Special Forces operations from 1995 to 2004, focusing specifically on operations conducted in the Balkans (Bosnia and Kosovo), Afghanistan and Iraq, answering the research question: How have the operations conducted by US Army Special Forces evolved from the Balkans in 1995 through Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)?

The thesis examines the progression of Special Forces operations during each of the aforementioned campaigns, analyzing their evolution in the areas of intelligence operations, unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense, close air support, integration with conventional forces and the institutionalization of lessons learned. The thesis concludes by examining future roles of US Army Special Forces with respect to employment.

Tracing the progression of Special Forces employment from the Balkans to OIF is critical to understanding the factors contributing to the success of Special Forces operations in both the decisive operations and stability and support (SASO) phases of OEF and OIF.

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## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

This thesis often references the loosely-knit terrorist group known as “al-Qaeda,” meaning “the base” in Arabic. Recognizing the grammatical error of using the English indefinite article ‘the’ before the Arabic indefinite article ‘al’, this study will nevertheless refer to the terrorist group as ‘al-Qaeda’ for the sake of simplicity and reader familiarity with the name.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Immediately following the terrorist strikes of September 11, 2001, US policymakers and senior Department of Defense (DoD) leadership launched Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) to destroy the worldwide al-Qaeda terrorist network and topple the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Roughly 17 months later, the same US officials ordered the execution of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. US Army Special Forces infiltrated both Afghanistan and Iraq and in doing so provided the first US military boots on the ground in both conflicts. The reliance of senior policymakers and DoD leadership upon Special Forces was unprecedented in its scope, ushering in a new era in Special Forces employment and operations.

How did Special Forces successfully conduct operations against the Taliban, al-Qaeda and the Saddam Hussein regime? Following Operation Desert Storm in 1991, US Army Special Forces underwent a subtle, yet critical change. The wartime missions of special reconnaissance (SR), direct action (DA) and coalition support, transitioned to the post-conflict mission of foreign internal defense (FID) during Operation Provide Comfort<sup>1</sup>.

Although always maintaining the capability to execute the five doctrinal missions of SR, DA, FID, unconventional warfare (UW) and combating terrorism (CBT), a great deal of Special Forces employment throughout the mid-1990s generally consisted of humanitarian-related missions supporting international organizations to ease human suffering and FID operations to aid friendly foreign governments. Despite the maintenance of these “warrior skills” through constant training at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) and National Training Center (NTC), policymakers chose to employ Special Forces units in non-offensive roles.

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<sup>1</sup> Following Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm in 1991, the US military conducted Operation Provide Comfort, providing humanitarian assistance to Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq. Special Forces conducted the initial assessments of the situation in northern Iraq, establishing credibility with the ethnic Kurds that would influence the Kurdish decision to support the coalition effort in the north during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The shift away from the post-Desert Storm non-lethal employment of Special Forces began with the decision to commit US military forces to Bosnia in late 1995. Over the next seven years, in both Bosnia and Kosovo, the US Special Forces would conduct a variety of missions, effectively changing the perception of policymakers and military commanders, ultimately influencing their future employment.

The US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) operations in the Balkans between 1995 and 2001 provided the first long-term integration between Special Forces and conventional forces in US military history, allowing Special Forces and conventional forces to work together, in both a joint and coalition environment, and learn each other's capabilities. Special Forces initially served as liaisons with non-NATO troop contributing nations (TCN) in Bosnia, providing command, control and communications support in the complex operating environment. Special Forces also commenced intelligence operations, working and living among the citizens of the various ethnic groups, providing NATO commanders with accurate assessments of the situation on the ground and rapid communications with influential political, social, religious and military leaders among the former warfighting factions (FWF). During Operation Allied Force, Special Forces conducted SR in Bosnia and FID, providing intelligence and communications support for the Kosovo Liberation Army, operating from Albania against the Serb military. As conventional commanders during the Kosovo Force (KFOR) mission in Kosovo grew more comfortable with their Special Forces, they slowly allowed the Special Forces soldiers to conduct higher-risk missions and intelligence operations.

Unleashed by policymakers as the first US combat force on the ground in the opening days of OEF, Special Forces conducted aggressive UW and DA missions, leveraging indigenous forces and technology against al-Qaeda terrorists and the Taliban. Working with tribal warlords and their militias, several hundred Special Forces soldiers contributed to the overthrow of the Taliban regime in less than two months and the loss of Afghanistan as a sanctuary to al-

Qaeda. In support of the new Afghan government, Special Forces commenced an aggressive FID effort focused on counterinsurgency (COIN) to capture or kill former members of the Taliban and al-Qaeda terrorists.

In Iraq, Special Forces elements manned two Combined/Joint Special Operations Task Forces (C/JSOTFs), conducting UW, DA and SR against the Iraqi military. Unable to deploy conventional coalition units into northern Iraq, US Central Command (CENTCOM) infiltrated C/JSOTF-North into the Kurdish Autonomous Zone to conduct UW operations with the ethnic Kurds. Leading Kurdish fighters and backed by formidable coalition air support, the Special Forces soldiers attacked and destroyed a terrorist enclave in northeastern Iraq suspected of manufacturing chemical weapons. Following the destruction of the terrorist group, the Special Forces soldiers and their ethnic Kurd allies faced off against 13 conventional divisions, an estimated sixty-percent of the Iraqi military, along the forward edge of the battle area, known as the Green Line. The US mission was to prevent the units from reinforcing Baghdad against the coalition main effort from the south. Attacking to disrupt conventional Iraqi forces, Special Forces and the Kurds ultimately seized the key cities of Kirkuk and Mosul, forcing the surrender of the Iraqi V Corps. Following the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, Special Forces conducted COIN, utilizing techniques developed through their experience in the Balkans and Afghanistan to combat the growing Iraqi insurgency and lend stability to the fragile provisional government.

#### **A. STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION AND PURPOSE**

How have the operations conducted by US Army Special Forces evolved from the Balkans in 1995 through Operation Enduring Freedom to Operation Iraqi Freedom? This thesis presents a historical analysis of the evolution of Special Forces operations from 1995 to 2004, focusing specifically on operations conducted in the Balkans (Bosnia and Kosovo), Afghanistan and Iraq. This study demonstrates a causal relationship between the employment of Special Forces in the Balkans and subsequent operations during Operation Enduring Freedom. The thesis then builds upon the experience of Special Forces during OEF to explain the success of Special Forces operations in OIF. The evolution of

Special Forces operations in the Balkans and lessons learned from those operations proved critical to the success of Special Forces in OEF and OIF. Tracing the evolution of Special Forces employment is critical to understanding the factors contributing to the success of Special Forces operations in both the combat and stability and support operations (SASO) phases of OEF and OIF as well as how Special Forces may be employed in future operations.

## **B. METHODOLOGY**

This thesis presents a historical analysis of the evolution of SF operations through present day, beginning in the Balkans, in order to understand the impact of this evolution upon the success of operations in OEF and OIF. Sources consist of open-source publications, unclassified material internal to DoD and interviews with both Special Forces and conventional soldiers that participated in operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq.

## **C. ORGANIZATION**

This thesis investigates how the evolution of Special Forces operations during the 1990s led to their success in OEF and OIF. To analyze the evolution of Special Forces from the Balkans to Iraq, this thesis is structured into four parts. The first section provides an overview and analysis of Special Forces operations in the Balkans from 1995 to 2001. The second section examines lessons learned by Special Forces from their Balkans experience. The third section reviews Special Forces operations conducted during Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. The final section analyzes the overall evolution of Special Forces operations from the Balkans to Iraq, specifically examining why policymakers chose Special Forces for OEF and OIF, intelligence operations, the impact of UW and FID operations, the role of close air support, integration with conventional forces and the institutionalization of lessons learned by the Special Forces community. The thesis concludes with an analysis of the future of Special Forces operations based upon lessons learned from OEF and OIF.



## II. INTO THE BALKANS

This thesis chapter surveys US Army Special Forces missions conducted in the Balkans between 1995 and 2001, answering the research question: What types of operations did Special Forces conduct in the Balkans (Bosnia, Albania, and Kosovo) from 1995-2001? This chapter provides an overview of Special Forces operations in the Balkans and their task organization as it changed over the years.

### A. SETTING THE STAGE

US Army Special Forces arrived in Bosnia as part of the Implementation Force (IFOR) led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on 20 December 1995. The 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), headquartered at Fort Carson, Colorado and regionally oriented to Europe, provided a preliminary force package of 240 personnel in support of Operation Joint Endeavor.<sup>2</sup> During Operation Joint Endeavor, US Army Special Forces provided Liaison Coordination Elements (LCE) to non-NATO troop contributing nations (TCN).

As IFOR transitioned to the Stabilization Force (SFOR) and Joint Endeavor became Operation Joint Guard on 20 December 1996, only two of the original LCE missions continued and US Army Special Forces assumed the Joint Commission Observer (JCO) operations from the British. Special Forces may have additionally played a role in the apprehension of Persons Indicted For War Crimes (PIFWCs) in Bosnia, but due to the sensitivity of the topic, this paper will not address PIFWC operations in detail. On 20 June 1998, as Operation Joint Guard became Operation Joint Forge, Special Forces continued their LCE and JCO missions until Operation Allied Force in 1999.

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<sup>2</sup> *Operation Joint Guard PowerPoint Briefing*, Headquarters, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Overview, December 1995-November 1996, date unknown, provided by Command Historian's Office (Archives), US Army Special Operations Command (Airborne), Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, 26 February 2004. NATO named the IFOR mission in Bosnia "Operation Joint Endeavor," which lasted from 20 December 1995-20 December 1996.

NATO commanders employed Special Forces in several missions during Allied Force, including special reconnaissance (SR) and limited support to the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in Albania. Following the cessation of hostilities, Special Forces operated extensively in Kosovo conducting LCE and Liaison Team (LT) missions in support of Operation Joint Guardian. A comparison of Special Forces operations in Bosnia prior to Operation Allied Force with those in Kosovo following the conflict demonstrates a marked increase in the amount of risk which leaders allowed the Special Forces soldiers to take while conducting operations. This trend will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Organized into 12-man operational detachments and cross-trained in critical skills, the Special Forces team split into two or three independent elements as dictated by mission requirements. This flexibility for task organization provides Special Forces a unique capability as combat multipliers, unavailable to conventional units. Special Forces may conduct five “doctrinal” missions.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Five Doctrinal Special Forces Missions as defined in the *SOF Posture Statement, 2003-2004*, United States Special Operations Command, p. 36:

(1) Counterterrorism (CT): The primary Special Operations Forces (SOF) mission in the Global War On Terror (GWOT). CT “involves offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, preempt and respond to terrorism.”

(2) Special Reconnaissance (SR): “Reconnaissance and surveillance missions conducted as special operations in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance, employing military capabilities not normally found in conventional forces.”

(3) Direct Action (DA): “The conduct of short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied or politically sensitive environments to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover or damage targets of strategic or operational significance, employing special military capabilities.”

(4) Unconventional Warfare (UW): “A broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration. UW is predominantly conducted by, with or through indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source. UW includes guerrilla warfare and other direct offensive, low-visibility, covert or clandestine operations, as well as the indirect activities of subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and unconventional assisted recovery.”

(5) Foreign Internal Defense (FID): “Participation by civilian or military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free their society from subversion, lawlessness and insurgency.”

## **B. US SPECIAL FORCES TASK ORGANIZATION-IFOR**

As US Army Special Forces personnel entered Bosnia with the IFOR on 20 December 1995, IFOR activated its own Special Operations Command (SOCIFOR) and incorporated the existing non-US NATO Special Forces units previously supporting the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) into a multinational Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF).<sup>4</sup>

IFOR exercised command of special operations through a Special Operations Command-IFOR (SOCIFOR) commanded by the Commander of Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR), US BG Canavan. SOCIFOR established a Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) subordinate to the ARRC (Allied Rapid Reaction Corps) for the conduct of special operations in Bosnia. This CJSOTF was initially commanded by British Brigadier General Cedric Delves.<sup>5</sup>

SOCIFOR functioned as the US theater-level special operations command while the CJSOTF directly supported the Multinational Division (MND) commanders in IFOR through command and control of the British JCO teams as well as the US Army Special Forces Liaison Control Elements (LCE) deployed to support non-NATO Troop Contributing Nations (TCN).<sup>6</sup>

## **C. US SPECIAL FORCES TASK ORGANIZATION-SFOR**

As the NATO Stabilization Force (SFOR) replaced IFOR on 20 January 1996, the special operations task organization in Bosnia changed as well. SOCIFOR was “disestablished” and an American Special Forces officer took command of the CJSOTF as the US Land Forces Central (LANDCENT) assumed command from the ARRC.<sup>7</sup> The CJSOTF functioned under the operational control (OPCON) of SFOR and assumed control of all special operations in Bosnia. Subordinate to the CJSOTF was a US Army Special

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<sup>4</sup> Charles T. Cleveland, *Command and Control of the Joint Commission Observer Program-US Army Special Forces in Bosnia*, Strategy Research Project, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, USAWC Class of 2001, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Michael L. Findlay, *Special Forces Integration with Multinational Division-North in Bosnia Herzegovina, A Monograph*, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 21 May 1998, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Findlay, *Special Forces Integration*. pp. 16-17.

<sup>7</sup> Cleveland, *Command and Control*. p. 6.

Forces Battalion headquarters, which in turn controlled a Special Forces company-level Special Operations Command and Control Element (SOCCE)<sup>8</sup>. With the assumption of CJSOTF command by the United States, the JCO mission shifted from the British, who had pioneered the concept in 1994, to US Army Special Forces personnel. The SOCCEs, under the Tactical Control (TACON) of MND commanders, directly controlled all US Special Forces personnel conducting the new JCO and few remaining LCE missions.

#### **D. US SPECIAL FORCES TASK ORGANIZATION-OPERATION ALLIED FORCE AND KOSOVO**

During Operation Allied Force, US Army Special Forces formed part of a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) OPCON to United States Commander-In-Chief Europe (USCINCEUR) General Wesley Clark. In addition to OPCON responsibilities, the JSOTF was under the tactical control (TACON) of Commander, Joint Task Force (COMJTF) Noble Anvil, Admiral Ellis.<sup>9</sup> Once the situation stabilized in Kosovo, 3rd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) sent a SOCCE into Kosovo as part of the US Multinational Brigade-East (MNB-E), also known as Task Force Falcon (TF Falcon). The SOCCE was OPCON to SOCEUR and TACON to MNB-E, controlling all US Special Forces personnel in Kosovo.<sup>10</sup>

#### **E. LIAISON COORDINATION ELEMENT (LCE) OPERATIONS (OPERATION JOINT ENDEAVOR)**

In 1995, while developing the initial NATO IFOR concept, planners recognized the need to “develop a liaison/advisory assistance capability for the non-NATO forces deploying with IFOR.”<sup>11</sup> Several of the non-NATO countries

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<sup>8</sup> Findlay, *Special Forces Integration*. p. 15. The SOCCE, a Special Forces company headquarters, provides command, control, communications and intelligence (C3I) to its subordinate Special Forces Operational Detachment Alphas (SFODA).

<sup>9</sup> *Kosovo/Operation Allied Force After-Action Review, Report to Congress*, 31 January 2000, CALL Database, Special Products, p. 20, Figure 3, Command Structure, January-July 1999 (U).

<sup>10</sup> Telephone interview with MAJ Michael Csicsila, Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), Pentagon, 4 March 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Findlay, *Special Forces Integration*. pp. 22-23.

still had forces on the ground in Bosnia that had previously participated in the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) and would stay to join the NATO-led IFOR.

IFOR recognized the need to ensure that an adequate chain of communications and coordination existed between the elements. Special Forces responded with the establishment of LCE operations. Special Forces had integrated with foreign military forces under the coalition umbrella in the past. During Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, US Army Special Forces deployed Coalition Support Elements (CSE) to various foreign units, providing liaisons with critical communications packages, the glue which kept the coalition together in the desert.

In Bosnia, the LCE enhanced NATO coordination with foreign military units and enabled communication and connectivity in the decision-making process. The language ability, regional orientation and relative maturity, in age, rank, and experience, of the Special Forces soldiers led IFOR to select them as the ideal vehicle to successfully conduct the LCE mission.

The 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) received the mission to field the first LCEs. After linking-up with their non-NATO military units, the LCEs fulfilled five key tasks for IFOR:

1. Provide communications connectivity.
2. Provide liaison with C2 (command and control) Architecture.
3. Provide liaison with Intell Architecture.
4. Provide CAS/TGO (Close-Air Support/Terminal Guidance Operations) capability.
5. Provide Tactical Air Control Capability.<sup>12</sup>

The 10th SFG (A) provided an initial force package of 240 personnel in December 1995 with three Special Operations Command and Control Elements

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<sup>12</sup> *Operation Joint Guard PowerPoint Briefing*. December 1995-November 1996.

(SOCCEs) to direct the efforts of 10 LCEs in theater.<sup>13</sup> Each LCE consisted of six US Army Special Forces personnel and one US Air Force Special Operations Tactical Air Control operator.<sup>14</sup>

FM 3-5.20 defines the SOCCE as “A C2 element based on a Special Forces company headquarters element augmented with a communications package, equipment and selected personnel as required by the mission.”<sup>15</sup> During the initial deployment of SF personnel by the 10th SFG (A), each SOCCE controlled three LCEs or approximately 18 personnel in three locations.

The 10th SFG (A) provided LCEs with the appropriate language capability to [a] Hungarian Engineer Battalion, [a] Romanian Engineer Battalion (both IFOR assets), [a] Russian Airborne Brigade, [a] Turkish Brigade, [a] Polish Airborne Battalion, all assets of the Multinational Division-North. The 10th SFG (A) also provided an LCE to the Czech Battle Group of Multinational Division-Southwest (MND-SW). The 1st SFG (A) provided an LCE to the Malaysian Battle Group of MND-SW and the 5th SFG (A) provided an LCE to the Egyptian Battalion of Multinational Division-Southeast (MND-SE).<sup>16</sup>

Although the LCE missions proved successful in Bosnia, the troop contributing nations (TCN) to which the LCEs were assigned quickly adapted to the operational situation, acquiring the necessary communications and language ability, allowing them functional independence within the NATO command structure. “By November 1996, only the Hungarian Engineer Battalion and the Russian Airborne Brigade still had LCEs.”<sup>17</sup>

The LCE mission proved itself critical during the first 11 months of Operation Joint Endeavor by enabling open communications and minimizing

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan D. White, *Doctrine for Special Forces in Stability and Support Operations*, School of Advanced Military Studies, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Second Term, Academic Year 1999-2000, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> FM 3-5.20, *Doctrine for Special Operations Forces Operations*. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2001c, pp. 4-6.

<sup>16</sup> White, *Doctrine for Special Forces*. p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> Chad Storlie, “The Liaison Coordination Element: Force Multiplier for Coalition Operations,” *Special Warfare Magazine*, Spring 1999, p. 40. From White. *Doctrine for Special Forces*. p. 20.

ambiguity between IFOR NATO and non-NATO TCNs. Although this mission proved low-risk for the Special Forces soldiers involved, the overall semi-permissive environment in Bosnia at the time, still reeling from the ethnic violence, paramilitary activities and displaced civilians, remained higher risk. LCEs contributed to IFOR success by training their respective TCN in MEDEVAC procedures, call for fire procedures and communications.

#### **F. JOINT COMMISSION OBSERVER (JCO) OPERATIONS (OPERATION JOINT GUARD)**

The British launched the JCO mission during the later phases of UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) operations in Bosnia from 1994-1995. The UNPROFOR Commander at the time, British General Sir Michael Rose, selected a group of soldiers to act as his “directed telescopes”, with the mission of providing him with a frank, true assessment of the situation on the ground as well as serving as forward air controllers to direct air strikes as necessary.<sup>18</sup> When IFOR moved into Bosnia on 20 December 1995, this JCO system operated throughout the country.

Upon accepting the hand-off of the JCO mission from the British as IFOR transitioned to SFOR, approximately 18 US Special Forces teams assumed the JCO mission in all three MND sectors, commanded and controlled by Special Operations Command and Control Elements (SOCCE) co-located with each MND headquarters.<sup>19</sup> The mission of the SOCCE was to command, control, and communicate with all JCO teams within the given MND sector, support the teams as an intelligence conduit, and advise each MND commander on the appropriate employment of the SOF assets within his sector.<sup>20</sup>

In 1998 the French and British replaced the US Special Forces JCO teams in their sectors with their own JCOs. US JCO operations shifted exclusively to the US-run MND-N sector.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Findlay, *Special Forces Integration*. pp. 21-22.

<sup>19</sup> Cleveland, *Command and Control*. p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Findlay, *Special Forces Integration*. p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> Cleveland, *Command and Control*. p. 7.

The JCO teams dressed in the standard battle dress uniform (BDU) with no unit patches, special skill badges or rank. Only their nametape and US Army tape identified them as US soldiers. Unlike other SFOR soldiers, the JCOs wore patrol caps rather than Kevlar helmets, conducted business without body armor and carried no rifles. JCO team members carried only concealed M9 pistols beneath their BDUs, hoping to present a less threatening image to the people in their sectors and demonstrate a level of confidence by traveling lightly armed. The JCOs drove rented civilian sports utility vehicles (SUVs) and rented houses to live in on the economy amongst the population while the conventional SFOR units lived in heavily fortified cantonment areas.

The JCO mission continued, as it had under the British, with the key tasks of “direct liaison, communications, and information exchange with the FWF (former warfighting forces) forces.”<sup>22</sup> The Special Forces teams initially identified, contacted and maintained open dialogue with key players and power brokers in the communities in which they lived and operated. The JCOs provided both the MND and SFOR commanders with several unique capabilities which conventional units were not organized or trained to provide.

First, they offered the conventional force commanders accurate assessments of the sentiments of the population through their personal interaction with the people within their sector on a daily basis. Second, the JCOs provided a conduit through which the conventional commander could immediately gain access to key local personnel in the event of an emergency or crisis and speak with them through the secure communications of the JCOs. Third, the JCOs served as the commander’s eyes and ears within the sector, providing ground truth and accurate reporting on critical events.<sup>23</sup> Overall, the JCO was about relationship building.

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<sup>22</sup> Findlay, *Special Forces Integration*. p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> Telephone Interview with MAJ Jonathan Cash, US Army Student Detachment, 5 March 2004.



## **G. JCO BIJELJINA (OPERATION JOINT FORGE)**

Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha (SFODA) 086, commanded by Special Forces CPT Jonathan Cash in the city of Bijeljina within the MND-N sector, divided the detachment into four elements to accomplish its mission, each focusing upon a “functional area.”

- Political Team-Maintaining communications with the Mayor, members of parliament, political party leaders and international or regional organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.
- Military Team-Building rapport and getting to know the military leaders within the sector, the locations of all units and checkpoints and their strengths, weaknesses and concerns.
- Judicial and Police Team-Working with the local and national police, members of the judicial system and courts within the sector.
- Floating Team-Available to reinforce any other team requiring assistance or to deal with particular areas of concern.<sup>24</sup>

By assigning two detachment members to each functional area, the detachment effectively built rapport and enabled communication with most key leaders among various walks of life throughout their sector. The teams fostered these habitual working relationships not only with the key leaders but with members of the population at large. This allowed the detachments to accurately read the sentiment of the population and notify their higher headquarters of impending problems or unrest before they occurred.

Although the detachments received intelligence and taskings from their SOCCE co-located with MND-N, the JCOs carefully avoided being perceived as acting as intelligence gatherers among the local people with whom they interacted. In order to gain the trust of the people within their sectors, the JCOs relied upon their credibility, which included, to a large degree, trust. Another potential pitfall for JCOs was favoritism of one FWF over another. JCO teams policed themselves to ensure that team members did not become overly sympathetic to one ethnic group over another. Some JCO teams divided their

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 5 March 2004.

detachments into “Serb teams” which would only work with and report on Serbian villages and “Bosniak teams” exclusively focusing their efforts upon Bosnian Muslim villages.<sup>25</sup>

#### **H. FROM JCO TO SR (OPERATION ALLIED FORCE)**

The training and flexibility of Special Forces teams operating in JCO roles allowed them to quickly shift their mission if necessary. CPT Cash’s ODA 086 demonstrated this flexibility while serving as a JCO in Bijeljina during Operation Allied Force. During the first week of April 1999, MND-N received word that the Russian military unit, the 13th Tactical Group, working within the MND-N sector had begun moving vehicles and personnel out of their base camp in Uglevik, Republika Srpska (RS), to staging areas in Bijeljina. Fearing that the Russians were pre-positioning vehicles and personnel to move into Kosovo, NATO required information on the 13th Tactical Group. The MND-N CDR turned to the SOCCE commander to fulfill this intelligence requirement. The SOCCE ordered SFODA 786 to conduct special reconnaissance (SR) to report on the activities of the 13th Tactical Group.

CPT Cash’s 10-man detachment, augmented by four Navy SEALs from the CJSOTF in Sarajevo, task organized into several reconnaissance elements to conduct SR on the staging area in Bijeljina and the nearest crossing point from Bosnia into Serbia along the Drina River. Using video imagery, SFODA 086 recorded the Russians repainting their vehicles from the distinctive IFOR letters to KFOR in Bijeljina. On 11 June 1999, the Russians departed their staging area and crossed the Drina River into Serbia with a convoy of less than 200 personnel. The movement, captured on video, was sent by the SFODA via satellite communications to higher headquarters, providing proof to the MND-N CDR, COMSFOR, SACEUR and the Pentagon that the Russians were on the move.<sup>26</sup>

This SFODA provided key information to NATO and US military and political decision-makers, confirming suspicions of a unilateral Russian entry into

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<sup>25</sup> Csicsila phone interview, 04 March 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Cash phone interview, 5 March 2004.

Kosovo to seize the Pristina Airfield. The intelligence gathered and the rapid flexibility demonstrated by the Special Forces soldiers, transitioning from JCO to SR in support of the MND commander's requirements, undoubtedly contributed to the conventional commander's willingness to employ US Special Forces in higher risk missions as the mission shifted to Kosovo.

#### **I. SPECIAL FORCES IN ALBANIA (OPERATION ALLIED FORCE)**

MAJ Roger Carstens, commander of Company A, 1st Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), received the mission to deploy a small Special Forces element to Albania in support of the US Task Force Hawk, commanded by LTG Jay Hendrix. LTG Hendrix informed Carstens that he did not yet have a mission for the Special Forces soldiers, but former MND-N Commander GEN Montgomery Meigs had advised him, "I take Special Forces wherever I go. Even if I don't have a mission for them, they'll find a mission and they always add great value."<sup>27</sup> Once in Albania, LTG Hendrix tasked Carstens to report on the size, disposition and location of Serb military forces in Kosovo without allowing the deployment of US Special Forces personnel over the Albanian border into Kosovo. Carstens deployed four Special Forces elements forward to within five miles of the northern Albanian border where the US personnel contacted the KLA, referred to in Albanian as the UCK (Ushtria Clirimtare Kosova).<sup>28</sup>

After offering support to the UCK, the Special Forces personnel, using US college students studying abroad in Albania as interpreters, conducted daily visits to the guerrilla basecamps within Albania where they co-located with the UCK communications sections. As the UCK guerrillas fighting in Kosovo acquired targets, such as Serb tanks, armored vehicles or large troop formations, they radioed the target locations back to the basecamps where the UCK command quickly passed the information to US Special Forces personnel. The US soldiers transmitted the targeting information to the Special Forces command element, co-located with TF Hawk, which passed the information to the Combined Air

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<sup>27</sup> Telephone Interview with MAJ Roger Carstens, Commander, CO F, 1st Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne), Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 25 February 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 25 February 2004.

Operations Center (CAOC) in Italy. The CAOC then tasked close-air support missions to NATO aircraft, which attacked the targets accordingly.

Following the engagements, the UCK guerillas on the ground observing the effects of the close air support reported the battle damage assessment, which the Special Forces soldiers relayed back to TF Hawk. Carstens estimated that the combined US/UCK targeting effort engaged over 1,000 targets during Operation Allied Force, including the destruction of 75 armored vehicles and the annihilation of a Serb infantry battalion on Mount Pastrick in Kosovo with a B-52 strike.<sup>29</sup>

Although the Special Forces soldiers were prohibited from entering Kosovo with the UCK guerrillas to engage in ground combat and therefore did not conduct unconventional warfare (UW) in the classic sense, the mission demonstrated a willingness of conventional commanders to assume greater risks with Special Forces personnel than they had previously in Bosnia. Maximizing their effectiveness as force multipliers, the 20-plus Special Forces soldiers increased the effectiveness of NATO airpower through the use of surrogate forces on the ground in an area restricted to US forces. The UCK also learned to trust the Special Forces soldiers who delivered what they had promised in the form of air support to ground operations. Although LTG Hendrix did not have a specific mission for Special Forces, he wanted them as part of his arsenal in Albania, solely based upon counsel from a former MND-N commander. True to Gen Meig's advice, the Special Force soldiers found a mission and made a great contribution to TF Hawk. The end of Operation Allied Force opened a new chapter in the Special Forces Balkans saga: operations in Kosovo.

#### **J. OPERATION JOINT GUARDIAN-SPECIAL FORCES IN KOSOVO**

US Special Forces LCEs operated in Kosovo following Operation Allied Force, providing liaisons to a United Arab Emirates Special Forces unit, a Greek mechanized battalion, a Polish Air Assault battalion and the Russian 13th Task

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Group.<sup>30</sup> The LCEs maintained the same mission profile in Kosovo as they had in Bosnia but provided a broader capability, to include unilateral and combined missions at both the tactical and operational levels.<sup>31</sup> The JCO mission changed names in Kosovo and became known as the Liaison Team (LT) mission. With or without name changes, the Special Forces missions had evolved since the LCE and JCO missions of Operations Joint Endeavor and Joint Guard.

The following discussion considers the operations conducted by two Special Forces teams, one operating as an LCE and the other as an LT. An analysis of these missions demonstrates the increased level of risk that commanders accepted in employment of Special Forces assets in Kosovo as compared to operations in Bosnia, due to the increased confidence in their SOF since December 1995.

#### **K. SPECIAL FORCES LCE WITH RUSSIAN 13TH TASK GROUP (OPERATION JOINT GUARDIAN)**

Following the movement of the Russian 13th Task Group (13th TG) from Bijeljina, RS, the Russians eventually moved a force of 3600 soldiers into Kosovo. The 13th TG received a Special Forces LCE at their headquarters in Kamenica, approximately 100km southwest of Pristina on the Serbian border. The 13th Task Group operated within the US Multinational Brigade-East (MNB-E) Sector commanded by BG Ricardo Sanchez.<sup>32</sup> Following the Russian movement to the Pristina Airfield in Kosovo, tensions had increased between the Russians and NATO, particularly the United States. Commanding the two-plus battalions of Russian soldiers was a 29-year old Russian Colonel who had led the unit during the second battle of Grozny in Chechnya.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Bruce R. Swatek, *Role of Special Forces Liaison Elements in Future Multinational Operations*, US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2002, p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>32</sup> LTG Sanchez currently serves as the Commanding General of V Corps United States Army Europe and Seventh Army with duty as Commanding General Joint Task Force-7, Iraq.

<sup>33</sup> Csicsila phone interview, 4 March 2004.

The 13th TG had very few supplies and suffered logistically. The LCE built rapport with the 13th TG, assisting in the construction of their base camps, checkpoints, and barricades and improving their force protection posture with building projects. The LCE also provided the 13th TG with necessities unavailable through the Russian supply system such as oil, transmission fluid, fuel and fruit. CPT Michael Csicsila, commander of SFODA 095 and LCE Team Leader, served as the direct US counterpart of the Russian COL commanding the 13th TG, interacting with him on a daily basis. Simultaneously, the Special Forces NCOs on the LCE functioned as the direct counterparts of the Russian company commanders.

BG Sanchez utilized his Russian LCE in a more aggressive role than the LCEs in Bosnia, telling the SFODA what he wanted the Russians to do rather than commanding the Russians to execute tasks within the sector. The LCE would then persuade the Russians to accomplish the objectives of the MNB-E commander, reducing the possibility of ill-will between the two countries.

On 16 December 1999, two members of the Special Forces LCE traveling in a vehicle struck a landmine in the vicinity of Kamenica. Upon notification that LCE members were injured, the commander of Task Group 13 immediately dispatched Russian troops and trucks to the crisis site. Russian soldiers probed their way through a minefield, marking a dozen mines prior to reaching the overturned vehicle and the injured soldier inside. Unfortunately, the US soldier died.<sup>34</sup>

On 30 December 1999, two Russian soldiers were injured by a landmine planted at a platoon checkpoint outside of Kamenica. Determined to find the parties responsible for the mining, the US LCE redoubled its efforts with the Albanian Kosovars in the area to identify the suspects while the Russians worked with the Serb villages. Responding to sniper fire against Russian checkpoints manned by TG 13 personnel, the LCE requested and received a battery of US

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 4 March 2004. The second soldier had crawled out of the vehicle and made his way to a Russian checkpoint, commandeering an Albanian vehicle and returning to the Russian compound for help.

155mm artillery in direct support of their operations. After a Russian checkpoint took sniper fire on 4 January 2000, the LCE called for illumination rounds to assist in flushing out the sniper.<sup>35</sup> This was the first time since World War II that US artillery had fired in support of Russian troops. Based upon intelligence gathered on suspected minelayers, the LCE and Task Group 13 accompanied two US infantry battalions in a raid on the town of Koprivica, arresting five men and confiscating many weapons. This also was the first time a combined US-Russian raid had occurred since World War II.<sup>36</sup>

The experience of SFODA 095 in their LCE role with the Russian 13th TG demonstrates the evolution of Special Forces operations from Bosnia to Kosovo. The LCE with the Russian Airborne Brigade in Uglevik, RS, never conducted combined operations with their counterparts as part of IFOR or SFOR. The MNB-E commander, BG Sanchez, used the LCE more aggressively than the LCEs in Bosnia, to communicate his intent to the Russian 13th TG in his sector and allowed the SFODA the flexibility to support the Russians with artillery and conventional forces to conduct a raid.

#### **L. SPECIAL FORCES LIAISON TEAM (LT) OPERATIONS AND GUERRILLA DEMOBILIZATION (OPERATION JOINT GUARDIAN)**

One of the most interesting operations conducted by a Special Forces Liaison Team (LT) in Kosovo was undertaken by SFODA 086, commanded by CPT Jonathan Cash. SFODA 086 worked the Gnjilane area of operations (AO) in the MNB-E sector, close to the Serbian and Macedonian borders from March to August 2001. The SFODA split into four teams with two team members living in each LT house in different towns throughout the several hundred square mile sized AO along the tri-border area. Three of the teams focused on Albanian Kosovars (Albanian Tms) while the remaining team focused on Serbs (Serb Tm).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Kosovo Force (KFOR) Homepage, "Illumination Rounds Light Up the Eastern Boundary Sky" (4 January 2000). Available [Online] <[http://www.nato.int/kfor/chronicle/2000/nu\\_000104.htm](http://www.nato.int/kfor/chronicle/2000/nu_000104.htm)> [4 March 2004].

<sup>36</sup> Csicsila phone interview, 4 March 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Cash phone interview, 5 March 2004.

The Ground Safety Zone (GSZ) existed between the border of Kosovo and Serbia. A 5-10 km wide buffer starting at the Serbian-Kosovo border and extending into Serbia, the GSZ was off-limits to Serb military, but patrolled by Serbian police. Many ethnic Albanian villages existed within the GSZ and paramilitary activity increased during the summer of 2001.

UNSCR 1244 specified the key task of demobilizing the KLA (Ushtria Clirimtare Kosova or UCK in Albanian) following Operation Allied Force.<sup>38</sup> Upon their demobilization, some former UCK members went to the GSZ to support their ethnic Albanian kin and founded the UCPMB (Ushtria Clirimtare Presheve Medveja e Bujanovec) or Liberation Army of Presheva, Medvegja and Bujanoc. Presheva, Medvegja and Bujanoc were three ethnic Albanian towns within the GSZ in Serbia. The UCPMB was organized into factions, which might consist of 100 or so fighters.

Following several incidents during which the UCPMB shot Serbs in the GSZ, the Serbian military pushed to enter the zone and engage the guerrillas. In an effort to defuse an escalating situation, SFODA 086 received the mission to solve the problem. The LT conducted detailed intelligence preparation of the battlefield to determine how the UCPMB received weapons, supplies and recruits in their sector.

In June, representatives from the Serb government, US Department of State and MNB-E developed a plan to compress the GSZ back towards Kosovo, forming a single Kosovo-Serbia border. The UCPMB activity complicated the process and tensions escalated.

Reacting to increased pressure by the Serbs, KFOR and the Macedonians, the commander of the Sefer faction of the UCPMB initiated contact through intermediaries with the Special Forces LT due to their credibility with the local ethnic Albanian communities. CPT Cash met with the commander

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<sup>38</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Kosovo Force (KFOR) Homepage, "Resolution 1244 (1999), Adopted by the Security Council at its 4011th meeting, on 10 June 1999" (Date Unavailable). Available [Online] <<http://www.nato.int/kfor/kfor/documents/unscr1244.htm>> [4 March 2004].



and deputy commanders of the Sefer faction one evening in an Albanian Kosovar farmhouse near the GSZ. CPT Cash and several of his NCOs negotiated the surrender and demobilization of the Sefer faction for the next day, guaranteeing the safety and respectful treatment of the guerrillas on the condition that they surrender all of their weapons and ammunition.<sup>39</sup>

Cash coordinated with conventional units for vehicle support, security and the establishment of a processing station. Ramadani, the Sefer faction leader, arrived the next day at the demobilization point with approximately 40 faction members, including one female, and wheelbarrows full of weapons and ammunition. The LCE searched, disarmed, and re-searched the faction members for paraphernalia before boarding them on trucks bound for a makeshift processing station manned by US military intelligence personnel at a nearby 82d Airborne Division basecamp. The former Sefer faction members were photographed, interviewed for basic information, and required to give an address of their next destination. That evening, all the faction members were released to go home.<sup>40</sup>

The Special Forces LT smoothly transitioned from liaison duties one day to the demobilization of a guerrilla force the next. Demonstrating their value as force multipliers, three LT soldiers relied upon their interpersonal skills and credibility within the local community, rather than deterrence and firepower, to ensure the safety of the Sefer faction members and convince them to demobilize without incident. The MNB-E commander allowed an Army CPT and his NCOs to orchestrate the demobilization based upon their Special Forces training in UW.<sup>41</sup> The evolution of US Army Special Forces in the Balkans had come full circle.

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<sup>39</sup> Cash phone interview, 5 March 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 5 March 2004.

<sup>41</sup> A US-sponsored insurgency consists of seven doctrinal phases, of which the final phase is demobilization of the guerrilla force. US Army Special Forces is the only unit in the US military trained specifically in guerrilla force demobilization.

## **M. CONCLUSION**

From their initial entry into Bosnia conducting LCE missions with TCN to guerrilla demobilization as liaison teams in Kosovo, US Army Special Forces came of age in the Balkans from 1995 to 2001. Special Forces overcame the initial suspicion with which they were viewed by conventional commanders, discussed at greater length in the following chapter, delivering results and gaining the confidence of US leaders. In turn, the conventional decision-makers assumed greater risks in the employment of their Special Forces assets over the years in the Balkans, granting them greater flexibility and responsibility. The Balkans experience ultimately prepared Special Forces for their successes in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom during the Global War on Terror.

### **III. BALKANS LESSONS LEARNED**

This chapter considers the lessons learned by Special Forces in the Balkans from 1995-2001. This first section analyzes the lessons learned beginning with the IFOR entry in Bosnia from 1995 to 1996 in Operation Joint Endeavor and the initial Special Forces mission. The second section discusses the challenges faced by Special Forces after the transition from Implementation Force (IFOR) to Stabilization Force (SFOR) in December 1996 in Operation Joint Guard and into the 1998 transition to Operation Joint Forge. Finally, this study analyzes lessons learned during Operation Allied Force in the spring of 1999 in Albania and the subsequent Operation Joint Guardian in Kosovo. The conclusion of this chapter suggests that as Special Forces and conventional commanders worked together over the years, these commanders gradually felt more comfortable with their US Army Special Operations Forces (SOF) and assumed greater risks in their employment.

SOF may provide support to conventional commanders. NATO operations in the Balkans forced SOF and conventional forces to work together for a longer period of time and to a greater degree than ever before. In time, both SOF and the conventional forces overcame their traditional distrust for one another, borne partly of unfamiliarity, to achieve the goal of mission success. Despite the numerous volumes available discussing NATO operations in the Balkans, little open-source material on the role of US Army Special Forces during this period exists. Theses and personal interviews provide the majority of research information for the discussion that follows.

The identification of lessons learned by the Special Forces soldiers during operations in the Balkans proves critical to the later analysis of institutionalization of the lessons learned into Special Forces training and their ultimate application in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

## A. OPERATION JOINT ENDEAVOR LESSONS LEARNED

What were the lessons learned by Special Forces during Operation Joint Endeavor? The first lesson was that leaders failed to utilize Special Forces to their full capabilities in the uncertain environment of Bosnia for the first year following the arrival of IFOR. By limiting Special Forces to solely conducting Liaison Coordination Element (LCE) operations, US commanders missed the opportunity to employ a tremendous intelligence-gathering asset that may have aided in clearing the murky intelligence picture. Although Special Forces operated in all Multinational Division (MND) sectors as LCEs during Joint Endeavor, MND commanders chose not to use them for any other purpose. "US Special Forces support of US commanders in this first year-the critical year-was limited unfortunately to that of providing liaison teams (the LCEs), a function rapidly taken over by the MND's organic liaison teams."<sup>42</sup>

The second lesson learned was that Special Forces and conventional forces needed to work better together. Although US Special Forces trained in supporting conventional units at the National Training Center (NTC) and Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), the two elements worked together only briefly, normally for a week or two, with a liaison team called a Special Operations Command and Control Element (SOCCE) as the focal point for coordination.<sup>43</sup> As a result, mutual distrust existed between the Special Forces personnel and the conventional units. This distrust lessened the emphasis that conventional commanders placed upon the use of their Special Forces assets and subsequently, on the attitudes of subordinate conventional commanders operating within the MND sector. LTC Michael Findlay sums up this situation:

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<sup>42</sup> Michael L. Findlay, *Special Forces Integration with Multinational Division-North in Bosnia Herzegovina, A Monograph*, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 21 May 1998, p. 37.

<sup>43</sup> A SOCCE, normally a 12-man Special Forces company headquarters, deploys to the supported conventional unit headquarters where it provides C3I for its deployed Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alphas (SFODAs), coordinates and deconflicts issues with the supported conventional force and advises the conventional commander on the proper employment of his Special Forces assets.

Many US conventional commanders and staff lacked trust in USSF [Special Forces] because they felt the Special Forces were not focused on ensuring MND-N success. They believed USSF [Special Forces] were not part of the 'team' because of the weak command relationships with MND-N addressed earlier, their not being 'productive' members of the TF Eagle team, and the belief that they were avoiding hardships facing conventional troops. This lack of trust reduced open communications and resulted in both elements not receiving the benefits of each other's thoughts when making decisions.<sup>44</sup>

MND commanders proved reluctant in employing Special Forces and risk-averse when they chose to utilize them. Special Forces C2 elements, such as the SOCCE, failed to integrate themselves into the conventional command structure for planning purposes where they could influence the conventional decision cycle. To their credit, Special Forces soon identified these deficiencies and addressed them during Operations Joint Guard and Joint Forge.

#### **B. OPERATIONS JOINT GUARD AND JOINT FORGE LESSONS LEARNED**

As discussed in the previous chapter, when IFOR transitioned to SFOR on 20 December 1996 and Operation Joint Endeavor became Operation Joint Guard, the special operations command relationship changed significantly in Bosnia, with the United States assuming command of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) from the British.<sup>45</sup> With the assumption of the mission by SFOR, US Special Forces maintained only three LCEs, working with the Russians, Hungarians and Romanians.<sup>46</sup>

Along with the transition of command, the United States assumed the Joint Commission Observer (JCO) program from the British as well. The JCO program consisted of Special Forces soldiers living among and interacting with the local communities within each MND sector in order to provide the

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<sup>44</sup> Findlay, *Special Forces Integration*. p. 49.

<sup>45</sup> Charles T. Cleveland, *Command and Control of the Joint Commission Observer Program-US Army Special Forces in Bosnia*, Strategy Research Project, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, USAWC Class of 2001, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> *Operation Joint Guard PowerPoint Briefing*, Headquarters, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Concept of Operations: Operation Joint Guard, date unknown, provided by Command Historian's Office (Archives), US Army Special Operations Command (Airborne), Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, 26 February 2004.

conventional commanders with ground truth information and a clear reading of public sentiment.<sup>47</sup> The JCOs also maintained contact with the influential members of the Former Warfighting Factions (FWF) and key local leaders, providing rapid access and communications to these individuals for IFOR commanders in order to defuse potentially dangerous situations.

The first lesson learned during Operation Joint Guard became evident following the assumption of the JCO mission by the United States from the British. The US soldiers received no training and minimal handover from their UK colleagues. As a result, the effectiveness of the JCO mission suffered during the first year of Operation Joint Guard as the JCOs learned by trial and error while seasoning themselves in the role.

The lack of a cohesive program at the time of the transfer of the mission [from the British to the US] and the lack of documentation of British JCO staff procedures meant the US would have to develop its own processes. For nearly a year the program relied heavily on the energy and abilities of the individual [US Special Forces] teams to accomplish the mission, while the headquarters wrestled with the challenges of this long term special operation.<sup>48</sup>

LTC Charlie Cleveland, battalion commander of 3rd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), identified this and several other weaknesses in the JCO program. Along with the poor handover and lack of training, Cleveland noted a lack of direction for the JCOs by their higher headquarters and perceived a disconnect between JCO mission planning and effective support of the conventional commander's intelligence requirements. Cleveland developed and fielded a new "JCO methodology," standardizing JCO tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP). Cleveland additionally implemented a JCO targeting process to identify power players within local, regional and national formal and informal hierarchies and incorporated the SFOR and MND commander's intelligence requirements into the JCO collection plan.<sup>49</sup> The effectiveness of the US JCOs increased during Operation Joint Forge in 1998, following the implementation of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Cleveland, *Command and Control*. p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-15.

Cleveland's methodology. Special Forces successfully integrated itself more into the conventional planning process and JCOs focused upon answering the SFOR and MND commander's intelligence requirements, proving themselves a valuable resource. Within a year, the Special Forces role in the Balkans would widen as NATO fought to end Serb aggression in Kosovo during Operation Allied Force.

### **C. OPERATION ALLIED FORCE LESSONS LEARNED**

Although the Special Forces soldiers proved themselves as effective force multipliers during operations in Kosovo, through the effective support they provided to the UCK guerrillas, several major lessons learned subsequently emerged from the Special Forces experience during Operation Allied Force. First, although US military aircraft regularly attacked Serb targets within Kosovo, the decision forbidding the Special Forces soldiers from accompanying the UCK guerrillas into Kosovo to conduct combat operations very likely limited the effectiveness of their resistance operations against the Serb military. Secondly, the circuitous close-air support (CAS) procedures required for political reasons, degraded the effectiveness of NATO airstrikes in the targeting process against the Serbs.

Special Forces personnel might have increased the effectiveness of the UCK, had the Americans accompanied them on combat operations. Specifically trained to organize, train, advise and assist guerrilla forces fighting against technologically and numerically superior forces, the integration of Special Forces personnel into the UCK hierarchy as advisors could have likely improved the offensive and intelligence gathering roles of the guerrillas.

NATO coalition intelligence might have benefitted from the presence of US Special Forces personnel on the ground. Key leaders and planners from the SACEUR level down could have received additional intelligence from US personnel on the ground, expediting the targeting process. NATO priority intelligence requirements (PIR) and information requirements (IR) could have been tasked down to the soldiers operating with the guerrillas in order to fill this critical human intelligence (HUMINT) capability gap. Special Forces personnel on the ground may have provided an additional measure of safety for civilians on

the battlefield as well. As part of the agreement with the UCK to provide CAS, no civilians were to be located within two kilometers of targets radioed back to the Special Forces personnel at the UCK basecamps. Special Forces troops on the ground could have verified this safety measure, possibly decreasing the number of civilian casualties due to NATO airstrikes

The second lesson learned is that the Special Forces soldiers should have been allowed to communicate directly with the close air support platforms engaging targets during operations in Kosovo. Again, the decision prohibiting the direct communication between the Special Forces personnel and the aircraft was a conscious political decision designed to distance the direct participation of US personnel in the targeting process based upon UCK intelligence in Kosovo. The lengthy targeting process which required the UCK to radio targets to their basecamp where the Special Forces soldiers would then relay the information back to Task Force Hawk, to the CAOC in Italy and finally to the aircraft took between 2 to 4 hours. Although this would not affect stationary targets, mobile targets, such as Serb artillery proved difficult to engage successfully. UCK elements engaged in direct combat with Serb units could have received emergency close-air support, reducing their casualties through rapid engagement of Serb forces. Critical UCK supply routes between Albania and guerrilla units engaged in combat could have been better protected from ground interdiction through immediate close air support as well.

#### **D. OPERATION JOINT GUARDIAN LESSONS LEARNED**

Special Forces learned an important lesson during LCE operations in Bosnia that it applied in Kosovo. The LCE could function as more than just a mouthpiece for conventional commanders. When provided with a clear understanding of the commander's guidance and intent, the LCEs could effectively influence the decision-making process of the TCN unit commanders. This was dependent upon aggressive use of the LCEs by the conventional commander.

The second lesson learned was that conventional commanders increased the amount of risk they would allow their Special Forces personnel to take within



their sectors. BG Sanchez allowed Special Forces to call for fire in support of the Russian 13th TG and participate in a combined raid. MND commanders in Bosnia would not have assumed this level of risk in the use of Special Forces. This increase in the acceptability of risk is attributable to several factors. Conventional commanders had developed a measure of trust in their Special Forces after five years of operations in the Balkans. These commanders better understood the capabilities and weaknesses of their assets and felt more comfortable in their employment. Special Forces had also effectively integrated themselves into the conventional forces command structure and fully participated as members of staffs.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The Special Forces experience in the Balkans from 1995 to 2001 produced several lessons learned. The majority of these lessons revealed weaknesses in Special Forces doctrine, specifically with respect to its integration and support for conventional forces. However, Special Forces had matured from Bosnia to Kosovo. Having demonstrated their utility during operations with the UCK during Operation Allied Force in Albania, Special Forces took a step forward in demonstrating their utility to conventional commanders. In Kosovo, as opposed to Bosnia, conventional commanders wanted Special Forces personnel working in their areas due to the intelligence these soldiers provided and the access they maintained with the indigenous population.

Some constraints placed upon Special Forces during Operation Allied Force, such as the inability of US personnel to accompany UCK guerrillas on operations into Kosovo and the unwieldy CAS request system quickly re-emerged as important considerations following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 as the United States launched Special Forces into Afghanistan during the opening days of Operation Enduring Freedom. The following chapter will describe Special Forces operations in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom and in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

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## **IV. OPERATIONS ENDURING FREEDOM AND IRAQI FREEDOM**

Within about two months of the start of combat operations, several hundred CIA operatives and Special Forces soldiers, backed by the striking power of US aircraft and a much larger infrastructure of intelligence and support efforts had combined with Afghan militias and a small number of other coalition soldiers to destroy the Taliban regime and disrupt al-Qaeda. They had killed or captured about a quarter of the enemy's known leaders.<sup>50</sup>

This chapter examines the role of Special Forces in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), answering the research question: What types of operations did Special Forces conduct in OEF and OIF. Investigation of Special Forces employment in OEF and OIF will assist the overall analysis of the chronological evolution of Special Forces operations from the mid-1990s to present day.

### **A. OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM**

#### **1. Setting the Stage**

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, as the US Central Command (CENTCOM) staff analyzed the feasibility of attacking Afghanistan, they recognized two critical shortcomings. No plan existed to fight a conventional war in Afghanistan, nor did the US maintain basing arrangements with any neighboring countries from which ground forces could rapidly enter Afghanistan.<sup>51</sup> Faced with the mission of annihilating the al-Qaeda terrorist group and removing the ruling Taliban regime from power, Afghanistan posed unique challenges to military planners. Geographically constrained by the land-locked, mountainous topography, US forces would either have to fly or move overland into Afghanistan. Complicating matters further, no modern infrastructure existed within the country, conditions being primitive. Roads,

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<sup>50</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, W.W. Norton and Company (New York: 2004), p. 337.

<sup>51</sup> Tommy R. Franks, *American Soldier*, Regan Books (New York: 2004), p. 251.

airfields and scarce public services were still largely in a state of disrepair from the Soviet occupation of the 1980s, presenting a logistical nightmare to planners considering large scale conventional troop movements.

CENTCOM knew that the Taliban, the Islamic fundamentalist group controlling 70 to 80 percent of Afghanistan, supported al-Qaeda operations and provided a safe haven to their leaders, including Osama bin-Laden. The loosely organized Taliban militia, comprised primarily of ethnic Pashtuns, largely ad-hoc and unorganized in terms of a modern-day military, would very likely move to the mountains once challenged, resulting in an anticipated light infantry fight.

The US had maintained some contact with the group of predominantly ethnic Tajik tribal warlords opposing the rule of the Taliban from the northern section of Afghanistan, known as the Northern Alliance. Al-Qaeda assassinated the de-facto leader of the Northern Alliance, General Ahmad Shah Massoud, on 10 September 2001, in an attempt to destabilize the Northern Alliance in preparation for an anticipated military response from the US following the attacks of September 11.<sup>52</sup> Without Massoud, al-Qaeda believed the warlords of the Northern Alliance would each attempt to gain power, negating their ability to work together against the Taliban or in concert with US forces in the event of an American invasion of Afghanistan.

After considering the available options General Franks and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld chose to forego a large, conventional deployment to Afghanistan:

Secretary Rumsfeld and I agreed that the US force should remain small. We wanted to avoid cumbersome Soviet-style occupation by armored divisions. It hadn't worked for the Soviets and it wouldn't work for us. Flexibility and rapid reaction-airborne and helicopter-borne night assault by small, lethal, and unpredictable units coupled with unprecedented precision-would be the hallmarks of America's first war in the twenty-first century.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

With these considerations in mind, CENTCOM chose to employ US Army Special Forces as the initial ground combat force in Afghanistan. Personnel from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) established initial contact with various Northern Alliance warlords, offering money and support, laying the groundwork for cooperation with US Special Forces soldiers.<sup>54</sup> The coalition air campaign would target the Taliban command and control infrastructure and leadership to blind the regime, while Special Forces infiltrated Afghanistan and linked-up with the Northern Alliance warlords. The Special Forces personnel would organize and assist the Northern Alliance to destroy al-Qaeda and unseat the Taliban, at which point conventional forces would arrive in Afghanistan to mop up the remains.<sup>55</sup>

General Franks estimated the overthrow of the Taliban and the destruction of al-Qaeda could be achieved by 200 Special Forces soldiers working with the Northern Alliance and supported by coalition close air support (CAS).<sup>56</sup> Special Forces commenced combat operations in Afghanistan on 15 October 2001.<sup>57</sup>

## **2. Command and Control**

CENTCOM established three Combined/Joint Special Operations Task Forces (C/JSOTFs) to conduct operations in Afghanistan, two of which included US Army Special Forces personnel. C/JSOTF-North, codenamed Task Force Dagger formed around the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) to conduct initial operations against al-Qaeda and the Taliban.<sup>58</sup> Combined/Joint Special Operations Task Force-South (C/JSOTF-South), codenamed Task Force K-Bar, originally consisted of a US Navy SEAL element and the special operations

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<sup>54</sup> A US-sponsored insurgency consists of seven doctrinal phases. The second phase typically involves agencies other than DoD making contact with potential resistance organizations to prepare them for the arrival of Special Forces soldiers. These soldiers then organize, train, advise and assist the resistance organization as necessary to overthrow the existing government.

<sup>55</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, p. 271.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>57</sup> Gregory Fontenot, E. J. Degen and David Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, Operation Iraqi Freedom Study Group, Office of the Chief of Staff US Army, Combat Studies Institute Press (Fort Leavenworth, 2004), p. 24.

<sup>58</sup> "PBS Frontline: Campaign Against Terror: Interview: Colonel John Mulholland", PBS, p. 1. Available [Online]: <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/campaign/interviews/mulholland.html>> [28 July 2004].

forces (SOF) of other coalition nations, arriving in Afghanistan in late November 2001 and augmented in December by one company from the 1st Battalion, 5th SFG (A).<sup>59</sup> The final C/JSOTF, codenamed Task Force Sword, conducted operations beyond the scope of this unclassified thesis. This study will primarily analyze the operations conducted by Task Force Dagger.

Commanded by COL John Mulholland, commander of the 5th SFG (A), Task Force Dagger directed the efforts of Army, Navy and Air Force special operations forces to conduct unconventional warfare operations. Task Force Dagger initially based out of Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Airfield in Uzbekistan, located 90 miles from the Afghan border before relocating to Afghanistan. Deviating from SOF doctrine, Mulholland initially reported directly to CENTCOM Commander General Franks rather than through Special Operations Command-Central (SOCCENT).<sup>60</sup> This command relationship aligned itself with doctrine in December when SOCCENT established C/JSOTF-Afghanistan (C/JSOTF-AF), the Coalition Joint Forces Special Operations Component Command (CJFSOCC).<sup>61</sup> Beginning in December 2001, Task Force Dagger reported through C/JSOTF-AF to the CENTCOM commander. This command relationship remained in place until COL Mulholland disestablished Task Force Dagger on 15 March 2002 as the active duty 3rd Special Forces Group and Army Reserve 19th Special Forces Group assumed the Afghanistan mission.<sup>62</sup>

### **3. Scheme of Maneuver**

Task Force Dagger initiated operations on the evening of 19-20 October 2001, infiltrating two SFODAs to conduct unconventional warfare in support of the Northern Alliance. Coalition planners hoped to gain a foothold in northern Afghanistan with the Northern Alliance, seizing Mazar-e-Sharif and attacking and occupying the major cities throughout Afghanistan. After the initial effort in the

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<sup>59</sup> Robin Moore, *The Hunt for Bin Laden: Task Force Dagger-On the Ground with Special Forces in Afghanistan*, Random House (New York: 2003), p. 267.

<sup>60</sup> Denis P. Doty, "Command and Control of Special Operations Forces for 21st Century Contingency Operations," US Naval War College Department of Joint Military Operations, p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> Moore, *The Hunt for Bin Laden*, p. 296.

north, Special Forces would work with indigenous fighters in western Afghanistan to seize Kabul. After the fall of Kabul, the focus of operations would shift to the Oruzgan province in the south with the Pashtuns, driving to Kandahar and in western Afghanistan to gain control of the city of Herat. Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha 595 (SFODA 595) linked-up with General Rashid Dostum in the vicinity of Mazar-e-Sharif. SFODA 555 met General Fahim Khan near the Bagram Airfield.<sup>63</sup>

#### **4. SFODA 595-In the North with General Dostum**

SFODA 595 received the mission to link-up with Northern Alliance General Abdul Rashid Dostum and conduct unconventional warfare in his support.<sup>64</sup> Planners deemed the capture of Mazar-e-Sharif critical as it controlled the land route south from Uzbekistan into northern Afghanistan and access to several airfields. Upon meeting General Dostum, the SFODA set out to assist the fighters in capturing the Taliban stronghold of Mazar-e-Sharif and its adjacent airfield, splitting the 12-man Special Forces detachment into four three-man teams to accompany Dostum's force, sometimes up to 18 hours away from each other by horse.<sup>65</sup>

When notified by satellite communications that coalition leaders and US policymakers were growing impatient for results from the SFODA, the detachment commander drafted a message responding:

I am advising a man on how to best employ light infantry and horse cavalry in the attack against Taliban Russian T-55 tanks, Russian armored personnel carriers, BTRs, mortars, artillery, ZSU anti-aircraft guns and machine guns. I can't recall the US fighting like this since the Gatling gun destroyed Pancho Villa's charges in the Mexican Civil War in the early 19th Century.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> "PBS Frontline: Campaign Against Terror: Chronology," PBS, p. 4. Available [Online]: <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/campaign/etc/cron.html>> [28 July 2004].

<sup>64</sup> "PBS Frontline: Campaign Against Terror: On the Ground: Working with the Warlords," PBS, p. 2. Available: [Online]: <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/campaign/ground/warlord.html>> [28 July 2004].

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>66</sup> Moore, *The Hunt for Bin-Laden*, p. 71.

SFODA 595 blended technology with techniques of cavalry warfare, calling air strikes on the enemy while the Northern Alliance fighters charged the Taliban lines on horseback. Fighting daily engagements as they approached Marzar-e-Sharif in early November 2001, SFODA 595 realized that Dostum's force lacked the number of men necessary to seize the town. The Special Forces soldiers convinced several warlords to work together, most notably General Mohammed Atta, accompanied by SFODA 534, massing a sizeable force to attack Mazar-e-Sharif.

We used the common bond of uniting their forces together from three ethnic factions-Hazaras, Tajiks and Uzbeks-who have all fought against each other, to unite against the Taliban. And the Special Forces soldiers became the glue that are holding these ethnic factions together.<sup>67</sup>

On 9 November 2001, Mazar-E-Sharif fell to the Northern Alliance, aided by their US Special Force counterparts, opening the land route from Uzbekistan into northern Afghanistan. Days later, the Northern Alliance forces under General Mohammed Fahim Khan attacking south from Bagram, seized Kabul accompanied by SFODA 555. The Special Forces soldiers then moved eastward to the city of Kunduz, the last major enemy-held urban area in Afghanistan. After a pitched-battle with Taliban and al-Qaeda forces at Kunduz thousands of the enemy surrendered, giving control of northern Afghanistan to the Northern Alliance and the US-led coalition.

#### **5. SFODA 574-Unconventional Warfare with Hamid Karzai**

CPT Jason Amerine, detachment commander of SFODA 574 of A Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) received the mission to conduct unconventional warfare against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in southern Afghanistan.

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<sup>67</sup> "Frontline: Campaign Against Terror: Transcripts: PBS," PBS, p. 34. Available [Online]: <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/campaign/etc/script.html>> [28 July 2004].



Our mission was to infiltrate the Oruzgan province, link up with Hamid Karzai and his Pashtun fighters, and advise and assist his forces in order to destabilize and eliminate the Taliban regime there. More importantly, we were there to ensure that Al-Qaeda couldn't operate in Afghanistan anymore. We were going to make sure that Afghanistan was no longer a safe haven for terrorism.<sup>68</sup>

SFODA 574 linked-up with Karzai in mid-November 2001, accompanying him throughout the Oruzgan province to help unify the ethnic Pashtun tribes of the region against the Taliban.

As Karzai's military advisors, the SFODA provided military legitimacy to the future Afghan leader as he sought to recruit ethnic Pashtuns to his cause. After arriving in the town of Tarin Kowt, recently abandoned by the Taliban, Karzai and the Special Forces soldiers received word that a large force of Taliban fighters were rapidly approaching the town. Facing an estimated 500 Taliban fighters in 100 vehicles moving north to Tarin Kowt from Kandahar, SFODA 574 used coalition close air support (CAS) to defeat the numerically superior enemy and avoid the loss of Hamid Karzai and the ethnic Pashtun village. The victory over the Taliban immediately endeared the SFODA to the local Pashtun mullahs and their followers, while delivering a crushing psychological blow to the Taliban.<sup>69</sup> The successful employment of CAS provided instant credibility for the SFODA with the anti-Taliban fighters, boosting their morale and confidence in the leadership of Hamid Karzai.

On 29 November 2001, a larger command and control element, led by Special Forces battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel David Fox arrived to assist Hamid Karzai in the push to seize Kandahar. Moving south from Tarin Kowt, the Special Forces element and the ethnic Pashtun force encountered resistance while occupying the village of Showali Kowt, just north of Kandahar. Calling coalition air to provide fires against a Taliban attack of approximately 100 fighters on 5 December 2001, the Special Forces element misread the

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<sup>68</sup> "PBS Frontline: Campaign Against Terror: Interview: US Army Captain Jason Amerine," PBS, p. 2. Available [Online]: <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/campaign/interviews/amerine.html>> [28 July 2004].

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

coordinates of the enemy position to the pilot. The aircraft dropped a 2000 pound Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) on the Special Forces observation post, killing three US soldiers and 27 Pashtun fighters. While the ordnance narrowly missed killing Karzai, all SFODA members were wounded and medically evacuated from the battlefield. Kandahar surrendered three days later.

## **6. SFODA 572: Combat at Tora Bora**

As the Northern Alliance backed by US Special Forces and CAS steadily defeated the Taliban and al-Qaeda throughout Afghanistan, the remnants of the enemy forces retreated to the Tora Bora region, adjacent to the Pakistani border. Intelligence sources believed that Osama bin-Laden, mastermind of the 9/11 attacks upon the United States, was located in the mountains of Tora Bora with a sizeable al-Qaeda force. Anticipating that al-Qaeda would occupy and fight from suspected cave and tunnel complexes much as the *mujahadeen* had against the Soviet Army in the 1980s, coalition planners launched an operation to sweep the mountains to find and kill al-Qaeda forces.

Multiple SOF elements from various services and nations converged on the foothills of Tora Bora to participate in the operation. One SOF team, SFODA 572 infiltrated into the Tora Bora region of Afghanistan, linking-up with Northern Alliance General Hazrat Ali, whose forces were already in contact with the Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters as they retreated into the Tora Bora mountains.<sup>70</sup> COL John Mulholland described the operation:

Our function was to work with the [anti-Taliban Afghan] forces and increase their capability as much as possible to move into the mountains, and then re-apply air power up there to destroy these caves and to kill as many Al-Qaeda as possible. [Al-Qaeda] wasn't interested in surrendering, by and large.<sup>71</sup>

The SFODA assessed the situation and coordinated CAS to cover the advance of the Northern Alliance fighters into the Tora Bora mountains as they

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<sup>70</sup> "PBS Frontline: Campaign Against Terror: Interviews: US Special Forces ODA 572," PBS, pp. 1-3. Available [Online]: <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/campaign/interviews/572.html>> [28 July 2004].

<sup>71</sup> "PBS Frontline: Campaign Against Terror: On the Ground: Assault On Tora Bora," PBS, p. 1. Available [Online]: <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/campaign/ground/torabora.html>> [28 July 2004].

fought the enemy. Other SOF elements also directed CAS from observation posts and covered likely escape routes out of the mountains. With al-Qaeda and the Taliban on the run throughout the country, the Northern Alliance fighters failed to attack the enemy aggressively at Tora Bora, content to allow them to retreat. Subsequently, an unknown number of al-Qaeda and Taliban combatants escaped through the Tora Bora range. Although some question the success of the Tora Bora operation for the failure to seal off escape routes into Pakistan, the lack of aggressiveness by the Northern Alliance and the inability to net Osama bin-Laden, US Special Forces troops accomplished their mission of aiding General Ali and his fighting force to clear the cave complex.<sup>72</sup>

The escape of an unknown number of al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters to Pakistan from the Tora Bora region led the coalition to question the effectiveness of the Northern Alliance fighters and would ultimately change the US strategy in Afghanistan. When faced with a similar situation in Operation Anaconda, CENTCOM would send US conventional forces into the fight rather than indigenous troops.

## **7. Operation Anaconda**

Following the Tora Bora operation, a group of Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters massed in the Shah-i-Kot Valley, located in the Paktia Province south of Kabul along the Pakistani border. Coalition planners, estimating that the enemy in the Shah-i-Kot presented too difficult a target for the Northern Alliance fighters alone, decided to commit elements of the US 10th Mountain Division, a light infantry force and the 101st Airborne Division as the assault force, supported by other coalition ground units, aviation, and Special Forces. Commanders dubbed the plan, to surround the Shah-i-Kot Valley and squeeze the enemy from all sides, Operation Anaconda.<sup>73</sup> This marked the first large-scale use of coalition conventional forces since the beginning of the Afghanistan campaign in the fall of 2001.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 7

<sup>73</sup> Moore, *The Hunt for Bin Laden*, p. 273.

US Army Special Forces soldiers supported Operation Anaconda with eight SFODAs as part of the overall SOF package. Several SFODAs led an Afghan Militia Force (AMF) of Pashtun fighters during Operation Anaconda to augment the conventional coalition forces and ensure host nation participation in the operation.<sup>74</sup> Other SFODAs manned observation posts in the mountains ringing the valley, directing CAS onto pockets of enemy fighters and cave entrances as the conventional forces swept forward. The bloody fight in the Shah-i-Kot began on 1 March 2002 and lasted a week with coalition forces meeting tenacious resistance from the well-entrenched enemy. The coalition later estimated between 800 to 1000 al-Qaeda fighters participated in the battle that cost the coalition the highest number of dead and wounded of any fight in Afghanistan. Operation Anaconda marked the significant integration of conventional and special operations forces during the war in Afghanistan as well as the point at which operations in Afghanistan shifted in focus from a special operations-centric campaign to a conventional coalition fight.

## **8. Stability and Support Operations**

On March 15, 2002, following the completion of Operation Anaconda, Task Force Dagger redeployed to Fort Campbell, KY and the 3rd and 19th Special Forces Groups assumed the responsibility for Special Forces operations in Afghanistan. SFODAs spread out throughout the country, under the command and control of company-level Special Operations Command and Control Elements (SOCCEs), gathering intelligence to aid in the pursuit of al-Qaeda fighters and members of the Taliban.

As the priority of effort in Afghanistan shifted from SOF to conventional operations, Special Forces detachments and conventional coalition units began working together on a daily basis. SFODAs spread out throughout the country,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., An Afghan Militia Force (AMF) consisted of the Northern Alliance fighters of any warlord in any region throughout Afghanistan. Special Forces soldiers operating in a particular region paid the AMA of the influential warlord and used the fighters as a de-facto fighting force to accomplish US objectives.

reinforcing their living areas to create “firebases” from which they operated. Conventional US Army soldiers, operating in either platoon or squad strength, provided the security for the Special Forces soldiers at their firebases.<sup>75</sup>

As the focus of special operations planners shifted from Afghanistan to Iraq in 2002, C/JSOTF-AF, the CJFSOCC fell under the control of Combined/Joint Task Force-180 (C/JTF-180), the conventional headquarters subordinate to CENTCOM, in May 2002. Under this new command relationship, the majority of Special Forces missions required approval from both C/JSOTF-AF and C/JTF-180 prior to execution. Many Special Forces soldiers speculate that the new mission approval process often constrained the ability of Special Forces units to react to time-sensitive intelligence and possibly contributed to the escape of high value targets that the coalition might otherwise have captured. The freedom of Special Forces to operate throughout their assigned sectors also decreased with the “conventionalization” of the fight in Afghanistan. Most SFODAs were required to operate within a 10 kilometer radius of their firebase, requiring permission from higher headquarters to travel further than that distance.<sup>76</sup>

As each Special Forces team occupied its area of responsibility throughout Afghanistan, their mission required them to make contact with and develop a working relationship with the local populace. Once the Special Forces soldiers gained the trust of the local people within a province, the people provided the Americans with information on the locations of suspected al-Qaeda or Taliban fighters as well as weapons caches. Armed with this information, Special Forces personnel planned special reconnaissance missions to confirm or deny the validity of the information. If deemed valid and verified by multiple independent sources, Special Forces could conduct a direct action (DA) mission

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<sup>75</sup> Author interview with US Army MAJ Pete Canonico, Naval Postgraduate School, 18 August 2004.

<sup>76</sup> Author telephone interview with US Army Special Forces Sergeant First Class wishing to remain anonymous, 18 August 2004. This Special Forces soldier served two tours in Afghanistan.

to capture or kill enemy personnel and seize weapons caches. Intelligence operations, followed by DA missions continue to this day as the primary Special Forces missions in Afghanistan.

Special Forces also played a role in the training of the Afghan National Army (ANA). When policymakers decided to organize and train the ANA, CJTF-180 developed a plan to train an initial cadre of Afghan soldiers that would, in turn, train other ANA units. The responsibility for training the ANA fell to various coalition nations participating in Operation Enduring Freedom, with US Army Special Forces conducted the initial training for the ANA provided by the United States. This task, however, was later delegated to civilian contractors. The implications of this decision will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **B. OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM**

### **1. Setting the Stage**

The employment of SOF in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) was revolutionary, marking the first time that planners, unable to bring conventional forces to bear against an armored and mechanized enemy threat, used large-scale SOF forces in their place. Turkey's initial refusal to allow US forces to move through and fly through Turkish airspace constrained the ability of US planners to project conventional coalition forces into northern Iraq prior to the start of the war. With northward movement towards Baghdad from Kuwait as the sole overland axis of advance available to conventional coalition forces, planners developed a plan to infiltrate Special Forces into northern and western Iraq in their place. The coalition determined that two Combined/Joint Special Operations Task Forces (C/JSOTFs) conducting special operations in northern and western Iraq could sufficiently shape the battlefield in support of the conventional coalition attack from Kuwait.

Operating in northern Iraq, C/JSOTF-North would link-up with Kurdish forces in the Kurdish Autonomous Zone and raid the Ansar al-Islam terrorist safe haven along the Iranian border in northeastern Iraq. Following the assault against the terrorist group, C/JSOTF-North and their Kurdish counterparts would

turn south to fix and disrupt conventional Iraqi military forces arrayed along the forward edge of the battle area, called the Green Line, establishing the conditions for the seizure of the cities of Kirkuk and Mosul.

C/JSOTF-West would infiltrate western Iraq from Jordan and conduct an area denial mission, seizing key airfields in the desert, securing infrastructure and sealing off the lines of communications leading to the Jordanian and Syrian borders to prevent the escape of fleeing Ba'athists. C/JSOTF-West would also conduct an exhaustive hunt for Iraqi theater ballistic missiles (TBM) to prevent launches against Israel and Jordan. With the attack by conventional coalition forces from the south and the employment of C/JSOTFs in the north and west, coalition commanders hoped to isolate Baghdad, slowly tightening the noose around the capital.

Special Forces would also provide one battalion of the 5th SFG (A) to support the conventional attack north out of Kuwait. Tasked with supporting the Shia minority in southern Iraq to conduct unconventional warfare, the battalion played a small role in the overall campaign.

## **2. Command and Control**

The overall responsibility for special operations in OIF belonged to the Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command (CFSOCC). Formed from the headquarters of Special Operations Command-Central (SOCCENT), the CFSOCC provided command and control for both C/JSOTF-North and C/JSOTF-West. Following the transition from Decisive Operations to Stability and Support Operations, the CFSOCC disestablished C/JSOTF-North and redesignated C/JSOTF-West as C/JSOTF-Arabian Peninsula (C/JSOTF-AP), moving the headquarters to Baghdad.

## **3. C/JSOTF North**

C/JSOTF-North, codenamed Task Force (TF) Viking, initially moved from the US in February 2003, establishing a forward operating location in Constanta,

Romania, located on the Black Sea coast.<sup>77</sup> Turkey's refusal to authorize US overflights into Iraq led to a complicated infiltration, requiring a flight from Constanta to Jordan. C/JSOTF-North aircraft encroached upon heavily defended Iraqi airspace from Jordan enroute to northern Iraq. Despite taking considerable anti-aircraft fire, five of the six aircraft reached airfields in northern Iraq on the night of 22 to 23 March 2003.<sup>78</sup> Under intense pressure from the US State Department, Turkey relented, allowing overflights into northern Iraq beginning on 23 March.

A brigade-sized special operations task force, C/JSOTF-North consisted of a mix of special operations and conventional combat and support units, numbering approximately 5,200 personnel.<sup>79</sup> Three Special Forces battalions (2-10 SFG, 3-10 SFG and 3-3 SFG) provided nine Special Forces companies, totaling 45 SFODAs. An element of the 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry of the Fort Drum based 10th Mountain Division initially rounded out the task force. The 173d Airborne Brigade, based in Vicenza, Italy later arrived to reinforce C/JSOTF-North with two additional light infantry battalions, as well as an armored and mechanized force.

C/JSOTF-North's mission:

On order, JSOTF-North conducts Unconventional Warfare and other Special Operations in JSOA (Joint Special Operations Area) North to disrupt Iraqi combat power, IOT (In order to) prevent effective military operations against CFLCC [Combined Forces Land Component Command] forces.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> "United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) National Defense Industrial Association (NDIA) Symposium Briefing, 5 February 2003," Slide 6. 15th Annual NDIA SO/LIC (Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict Symposium and Exhibition, Washington, D.C., February 2004. Available [Online]: <<http://www.dtic.mil/ndia/2004soloc/cleveland.pdf>> [7 August 2004].

<sup>78</sup> Mark Grdovic, "Task Force 103 During Operation Iraqi Freedom," a synopsis of training and operations conducted by 3rd Battalion, 10th SFG (A) in OIF, p. 10. Provided to the author by MAJ Grdovic on 31 August 2004. The sixth plane, substantially damaged by anti-aircraft fire, made an emergency landing in Turkey.

<sup>79</sup> USASOC NDIA Briefing, Slide 6.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., Slide 3.



Facing 13 Iraqi divisions, JSOTF-N sought to “disrupt Iraqi operational mobility and exploit operational success” through a combination of air interdiction, ground operations and information operations in support of the CFLCC push to isolate Baghdad.<sup>81</sup>

Based upon their experiences employing US Army Special Forces in Operation Enduring Freedom, coalition planners ensured that Special Forces would play a key role in Operation Iraqi Freedom. In order to shape the battlefield for coalition success, Special Forces would first link-up with ethnic Kurdish groups in northern Iraq opposed to the Saddam Hussein regime, recruiting an indigenous force with which they would conduct unconventional warfare. Special Forces would then conduct a combined raid with the Kurds to destroy the Ansar al-Islam (AI) terrorist group, based along the Iranian border in northern Iraq. Having eliminated the Islamists, C/JSOTF-North would then turn south to face the Iraqi divisions located along the Green Line to operationally disrupt the forces while the CFLCC moved north on Baghdad. Working with conventional units as well as Kurdish allies, the ultimate objective of C/JSOTF-North was the disruption of the Iraqi forces along the Green line as well as the seizure of the cities of Kirkuk and Mosul.

C/JSOTF-N, commanded by the headquarters element of the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), from Fort Carson, Colorado commanded and controlled three Special Forces battalion-level Forward Operating Bases (FOBs), co-located with the major ethnic Kurdish groups in northern Iraq. C/JSOTF-North conducted a delicate “balancing act”, leveraging Special Forces as the fulcrum point with which to manage three potentially volatile elements in northern Iraq: the enemy Iraqi forces, two rival factions of ethnic Kurds, and the Turkish military.<sup>82</sup>

#### **4. C/JSOTF West**

Special Forces and other SOF elements conducted a complex area denial operation in western Iraq, commanded and controlled by C/JSOTF-W, led by the command element of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) from Fort

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., Slide 7.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., Slide 5.

Campbell, Kentucky. As in the first Gulf War, coalition planners deemed it essential to find and eliminate Saddam's remaining SCUD missiles to prevent Israel from entering the war against Iraq.

Infiltrating Iraq from Saudi Arabia and Jordan, elements of C/JSOTF-West systematically seized airfields in western Iraq to be used as staging areas for further operations. Upon establishing a foothold in the west, elements of the 5th SFG (A) and other joint SOF units initiated an exhaustive SCUD hunt across the Iraqi western desert. C/JSOTF-W forces additionally strove to cut-off land lines of communications to prevent the entry or exit of enemy forces from western Iraq, anticipating a flow of fleeing Ba'athists from the country. Finally, C/JSOTF-W orchestrated various intelligence operations with the goal of capturing or killing Iraqis deemed high value targets.

The employment of SOF to accomplish a screening mission normally assigned to a conventional division was a military first. Upon the occupation of Baghdad by conventional forces, JSOTF-W relocated from the western desert to the Iraqi capital.

## **5. UW with the Kurds**

A largely overlooked aspect of OIF is the Special Forces involvement with the Kurds in northern Iraq. Occupying both sides of the border between Iraq and Turkey, the ethnic Kurds had long faced persecution from both the Turkish and Iraqi governments. Prior to the invasion of Iraq the United States initiated diplomatic contact with the two major Kurdish elements in northern Iraq with three primary objectives in mind. First, the US planned to conduct combined counterterrorism operations in northern Iraq to strike the Al-Qaeda-linked radical Islamic group Ansar al-Islam (AI), operating in a remote pocket of eastern Iraq, known as the Halabjah salient, along the Iranian border.<sup>83</sup> Next, US planners hoped to open a northern front with Special Forces operating in concert with Kurdish forces to strike Iraqi units, estimated at *sixty-percent of the combat force*

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<sup>83</sup> Grdovic, "Task Force 103," p. 6. Grdovic adds, "Halabjah was the main village in the region. It was the site of the [Saddam] regime's chemical attacks in 1988 that left 5000 Kurds dead. The area is also sometimes referred to as the Khurma or Sargat area named after the smaller villages in the vicinity of suspected WMD sites."

*of the Iraqi military*, postured along the Green Line with enough combat power to keep them occupied in northern Iraq rather than reinforcing Baghdad against the coalition conventional ground assault from the south. Finally, success along the Green Line would lead to the defeat of Iraqi forces and the occupation of the key cities of Mosul and Kirkuk and their adjacent oilfields. Prevention of the Iraqi units manning the Green Line from reinforcing Baghdad was critical to ensuring the success of the coalition main effort from the south.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), occupying the Iraqi provinces of Dohuk and Arbil, consisted of approximately 62,000 Kurd soldiers under the command of Masoud Barzani.<sup>84</sup> The western portion of northern Iraq controlled by Barzani's KDP was critical due to the city of Mosul, Iraq's third largest city. Located south of the Green Line, occupied by Iraqi forces, Mosul provided access to numerous oil fields that coalition planners hoped to secure against destruction by retreating Iraqi forces.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) consisted of an estimated 40,000 soldiers, controlling the province of Sulamaniyah.<sup>85</sup> Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani served as the Secretary-General of the PUK. OIF planners deemed the eastern portion of the northern Iraq critical due to the access to oil fields estimated as supplying one-third of Iraq's oil and the predominantly Kurd city of Kirkuk.<sup>86</sup>

Reluctant to allow the opportunity for US support to slip away, Barzani and Talabani agreed to merge the KDP and PUK to form Joint Higher Leadership (JHL), unifying both parties in their struggle against the Iraqis.<sup>87</sup> The JHL, co-chaired by Barzani and Talabani allowed the US to deal with one consolidated

<sup>84</sup> Patrick Cockburn, "US Special Forces Prepare Way for Invasion in Northern Iraq," EUP20030307000177 London, The Independent (Internet Version-WWW) (07 March 03). Accessed through the Foreign Broadcast Information System (FBIS) portal, [15 August 2004].

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> "US Forces Repair Runways for Northern Front: Kurdish General," AFP, Kurdistan Observer, (12 March 2003). Available [Online]: <<http://home.cogeco.ca/~dbonni1/13-3-03-us-repair-runways-kurdistan.html>> [02 August 2004].

<sup>87</sup> "Statement on the Formation of a Joint Higher Leadership in Iraqi Kurdistan," Kurdistan Observer, (4 March 2003). Available [Online]: <<http://home.cogeco.ca/~observer/4-3-03-statement-joint-leadership.html>> [02 August 2004].

Kurd body, simplifying the military planning process to map out the seizure of Mosul, Kirkuk and the surrounding oil fields. The JHL would provide approximately 60,000 Kurdish fighters, collectively known as *peshmerga*, or “those who face death”, to aid the US in the fight against Saddam Hussein.<sup>88</sup> The *peshmerga* would provide the indigenous force with which US Special Forces would conduct unconventional warfare.

The first reports of US Special Forces on the ground in northern Iraq began in mid-February 2003, confirming the arrival of US commandos to link-up with *peshmerga*, laying the groundwork for the arrival of larger numbers of US forces.<sup>89</sup> Following the first Gulf War, US Special Forces worked closely with the Kurds, providing much-needed humanitarian relief during Operation Provide Comfort (OPC). The strong relationship built between Special Forces and the Kurds during OPC assisted the US personnel in rapidly rekindling the rapport and gaining the trust of the *peshmerga*.

The purpose of the Special Forces, recently infiltrated into the three northern provinces of Iraq under the control of the Kurds, is to prepare the ground, by scouting and gathering intelligence, for a full scale-invasion. The Kurds have always had up-to-the-minute information about the disposition, equipment and morale of the 1st and 5th Iraqi Army Corps that defend the strategically important cities of Mosul and Kirkuk.<sup>90</sup>

The Turkish government, wishing to avoid a situation similar to the one that arose during the first Gulf War when an estimated 750,000 displaced Iraqi Kurds fled across the border to Turkey, threatened to deploy additional troops across its southern border into Iraq. Fearing that Kurd autonomy in the wake of a US invasion might lead to an ethnic nationalist uprising by Kurds and instability within its own borders, Turkey threatened to occupy the city of Kirkuk with its own

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<sup>88</sup> “US in Final Military Discussion with Iraqi Kurds,” AFP, 9 March 2003, Kurdistan Observer (9 March 2003). Available [Online]: <<http://cogeco.ca/~dbonni1/10-3-03-kurds-us-final-talks.html>> [02 August 2004].

<sup>89</sup> “Secret Plan: Militant Islamic Group Plans to Attack US Special Forces in Northern Iraq,” ABC News (21 February 2003). Available [Online]: <[http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections/world/2020/iraq030221\\_ansar.html](http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections/world/2020/iraq030221_ansar.html)> [04 August 04].

<sup>90</sup> Cockburn, “US Special Forces Prepare Way.”

military forces rather than allow its control by Kurdish forces.<sup>91</sup> The Turks may also have desired access to the oil fields adjacent to Kirkuk as well. After failing to secure Turkish permission to move US ground forces into Iraq through Turkey, US diplomats worked feverishly to convince Turkish officials that the US would not allow Kurdish forces to unilaterally occupy the cities of Mosul and Kirkuk. The US feared the possibility of friendly fire incidents with the Turks as well as the diversion of Kurd forces from fighting the Iraqis to fighting the Turks.

Realizing that US Special Forces lacked the conventional force structure to deter a cross border incursion by the Turks, US planners considered other available options. On 27 March 2003, the 1000 man-strong 173rd Airborne Brigade conducted a tactical night combat parachute assault into Bashur Airfield in northern Iraq to add a conventional punch to US forces in the north and send a message to Turkey. The 173rd Airborne Brigade, based in Vicenza, Italy, faced no resistance on the ground during its consolidation and would later be assigned as a subordinate unit to C/JSOTF-North.

#### **6. Operation Viking Hammer- Counterterrorism Against Ansar al-Islam (AI)-(28-30 March 2003)**

Allegedly relocating to northern Iraq from Afghanistan following the US invasion in 2001, AI conducted numerous terrorist operations against the PUK from its complex of 16 villages in the Halabjah salient along the Iraq-Iran border.<sup>92</sup> Hoping to keep the Kurds off-balance in the north, Saddam Hussein allegedly supported AI with funding and weapons, enabling the organization to continue terrorizing the Kurds in their rear area thus relieving pressure against Iraqi forces on the Green Line. Considering AI a significant threat, the PUK maintained 10,000 *peshmerga* fighters near the Halabjah salient, diverting a significant amount of potential combat power from the conventional Iraqi divisions

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<sup>91</sup> Daniel Williams, "US Troops Working With Kurdish Fighters: Groups May Help Special Forces Plan Airstrikes for Advance Into Northern Iraq," Washington Post, Kurdistan Observer (17 March 2003). Available [Online]: <<http://home.cogeco.ca/~dbonni1/18-3-03-us-to-coordinates-with-kurds.html>> [02 August 2004].

<sup>92</sup> "US Condemns Murder of PUK Commander, Vows to Fight Group Held Responsible," AFP, Kurdistan Observer, (10 February 2003). Available [Online]: <<http://home.cogeco.ca/~observer/10-2-03-us-condemns-murder-of-puk-leader.html>> [02 August 04].

along the Green Line.<sup>93</sup> The PUK would not commit the fighters arrayed against AI to the effort along the Green Line until the terrorist threat to their rear was eliminated.<sup>94</sup> In his address to the United Nations in early February 2003, US Secretary of State Colin Powell stated that the US suspected AI of manufacturing chemical weapons in its isolated stronghold and expressed concern over the link between AI and Al-Qaeda operative Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.<sup>95</sup> AI's estimated strength at that time stood at between 800-1000 fighters.<sup>96</sup> AI's suspected involvement in production of chemical weapons and terrorist operations resulted in the diversion of peshmerga forces from the Green Line made AI the first ground target for C/JSOTF-North.

In one of the most dramatic yet least known operations of OIF, the coalition opened a division-sized ground attack against AI consisting of Kurdish *peshmerga* led by US Army Special Forces on 28 March 2003, following a preliminary attack with 64 Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles (TLAMs) and air strikes against suspected terrorist locations.<sup>97</sup>

Six columns of 1000 peshmerga each, advanced along six separate axes of attack. Each column had Special Forces soldiers along the column commander and spread through his subordinate units. Four thousand additional peshmerga secured the flanks or waited in reserve.<sup>98</sup>

The columns advanced rapidly, forcing the AI fighters to retreat by aggressive ground maneuver and close air support. Unable to fight an effective delaying action against the coalition force, AI found itself in an all-out retreat to

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<sup>93</sup> Grdovic, "Task Force 103," p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> FOB 103 Operations Order 02-003, 132000ZJAN03, Declassified 15 May 2003, p. 1. Provided to the author by MAJ Mark Grdovic, 30 August 2004.

<sup>95</sup> Colin L. Powell, "Remarks to the United Nations Security Council," (February 5, 2003). Available [Online]: <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2003/17300.htm>> [04 August 04].

<sup>96</sup> Michael Ware, "Battling Terrorists in the Hills: In Northern Iraq Special Forces coupled with Kurdish allies battle Ansar al-Islam," Time.com, (30 March 2003). Available [Online]: <<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,438869,00.html>> [04 August 2004].

<sup>97</sup> Author interview with US Army Captain Dave Downing, Naval Postgraduate School, 12 August 2004.

<sup>98</sup> Grdovic, "Task Force 103," p. 12.

survive. The second day of the operation witnessed the defeat of AI and the escape of its leaders into Iran as coalition forces moved forward, attacking Iranian border guards assisting the fleeing terrorists.<sup>99</sup>

The success of Operation Viking Hammer yielded several positive effects for the coalition. First, the operation defeated one of the largest terrorist groups in the world. Second, the operation increased the credibility of the Special Forces soldiers with the *peshmerga* after the Kurds witnessed US firepower in action in the form of cruise missiles and close air support platforms. Next, the raid upon the terrorist complex provided the *peshmerga* with confidence in their fighting ability, adding immeasurably to their morale.<sup>100</sup> Finally, the operation against AI freed up an estimated 10,000 *peshmerga*, who now eagerly joined the Special Forces soldiers moving south to the Green Line for disruption operations against Iraqi forces postured on the Green Line.

## **7. On the Green Line**

Facing 13 Iraqi divisions, a full sixty-percent of the Iraqi military, arrayed along the Green Line, C/JSOTF-North developed a plan to disrupt the enemy's operational center of gravity by targeting the three units deemed the greatest threat: the Adnan Republican Guard Division, the Nebbuchadnezzar Division and the 3rd Armor Division.<sup>101</sup> C/JSOTF-North employed the SFODAs of three Special Forces battalions along with their *peshmerga* counterparts to accomplish the mission. C/JSOTF-North and the ethnic Kurds attacked up and down the length of the Green Line, conducting ground maneuver supported by terminal guidance operations (TGO) to strike Iraqi positions and vehicles with precision guided munitions (PGMs). Further complicating the fight in the north, the C/JSOTF needed to ensure that the engaged Iraqi units would not move south to reinforce Baghdad against the coalition main effort advancing from the south. Seizing town after town as they pushed the Green Line steadily south, C/JSOTF-North and the Kurds engaged in some of the fiercest fighting of the war, even

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>100</sup> USASOC NDIA Brief, Slide 13.

<sup>101</sup> USASOC NDIA Brief, Slide 7.

enveloping the Iraqi forces through maneuver south of Kirkuk, cutting off the lines of communications to Baghdad and forcing the enemy to flee west towards Tikrit.<sup>102</sup>

With the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kirkuk the inevitable looting began. Coalition commanders, hoping to avoid a Turkish military operation to prevent the *peshmerga* from occupying Kirkuk, yet determined to prevent looting and the subsequent loss of public services, attempted to move coalition units north to Kirkuk from Baghdad but found the task impossible due to enemy resistance. C/JSOTF-North and Kurd units entered the town of Kirkuk on 10 April 2003, despite Turkish protests and threats. The Turks responded by massing forces along the Iraqi border and the Kurds began redeploying forces to the north to face the emerging Turkish threat. C/JSOTF-North now found itself embroiled in an almost unimaginable situation, “the likelihood of an outbreak of fighting between a US-equipped guerrilla force who was a key ally during the war and a NATO ally.”<sup>103</sup>

Working rapidly to secure the oilfields surrounding Kirkuk as well as the city itself, C/JSOTF-North flooded the area with as many US soldiers as possible to demonstrate coalition control over the city and dispel Turkish-generated rumors of ethnic violence and massacres directed towards Turkmen residing in Kirkuk. The increased US presence helped calm the volatile ethnic situation in Kirkuk. Two days later, the 173d Airborne Brigade arrived to occupy Kirkuk with its attached armor and mechanized forces.

Occupying the city of Mosul, the Iraqi V Corps withdrew from its positions as C/JSOTF-North and the *peshmerga* of the KDP fought their way towards the third-largest city in Iraq. With the surrender of the V Corps, Special Forces and their Kurd allies entered Mosul on 11 April 2004, in an effort to stop looting and

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<sup>102</sup> Grdovic, “Task Force 103,” p. 15.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.



bring order to the city. After several days C/JSOTF-North handed the city over to the 101st Airborne Division and elements of the 26th Marine Corps Expeditionary Unit.

## **8. Stability and Support Operations**

Following the defeat of the Iraqi Army, the US military transitioned to stability and support operations (SASO) throughout the country. As the insurgency gained momentum, coalition leaders focused their Special Forces assets on a counterinsurgency (COIN) mission.<sup>104</sup> As the situation in the north with the Kurds stabilized and more conventional coalition forces moved into the area, the Special Forces battalions continued supporting their *peshmerga* allies with liaison teams and conducted intelligence operations to find fugitive members of the outlawed Ba'ath Party. Although units from C/JSOTF-North remained in place in northern Iraq, C/JSOTF-North was disestablished as a headquarters as C/JSOTF-West moved to Baghdad and became C/JSOTF-Arabian Peninsula (CJSOTF-AP), assuming command and control of special operations in Iraq.<sup>105</sup>

The hunt for former members of the Saddam Hussein regime, known as high-value targets (HVTs), became the centerpiece of the COIN mission. Special Forces companies set up company-level headquarters, known as Advanced Operational Bases (AOBs), providing command and control to the SFODAs subordinate to them.<sup>106</sup> Responsible for a particular geographic area, the AOBs and SFODAs now assumed the COIN mission to find, capture or kill HVTs within their area of operations.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Joint Pub 3-07.1, *Joint Tactics Techniques and Procedures for Foreign Internal Defense*, defines counterinsurgency as “Those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency. Also called COIN.” COIN exists a subtask of Foreign Internal Defense (FID).

<sup>105</sup> Patrick Flood, “Special Ops Signal Battalion Provides Special Support for Operation Iraqi Freedom,” *Army Communicator*, p. 4. Available [Online]: <[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0PAA/is\\_3\\_28/ai\\_111464903/print](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PAA/is_3_28/ai_111464903/print)> [18 August 2004].

<sup>106</sup> The Special Forces company headquarters staffing the AOB is the same as the Special Operations Command and Control Element (SOCCE) described in earlier chapters. When the company headquarters operates subordinate to the battalion headquarters, known as a Forward Operating Base (FOB), the company headquarters is referred to as an AOB. When deployed to command and control subordinate detachments in support of a conventional headquarters, the company headquarters becomes a SOCCE.

Using the Joint Combined Observer (JCO) targeting methodology originally devised by COL Charlie Cleveland in Bosnia, the AOBs began creating their own databases of influential and suspicious personnel throughout their area of operation. The AOBs conducted COIN-specific intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) by analyzing types of insurgent incidents with the location and timing of the incidents to establish an operational pattern for insurgent targets. Likewise, the Special Forces soldiers analyzed associations between suspected insurgents and known insurgents and their supporters to establish formal and informal links between individuals within their area of responsibility.<sup>108</sup> The use of these analytical techniques, along with the ability of the Special Forces personnel to get out into the communities and meet with the local citizens, helped demonstrate insurgent organizational relationships and focused the Special Forces targeting process. This analysis occurred at both the AOB and SFODA levels.

Due to the multiple special operations underway to locate, capture or kill HVTs, the AOBs and SFODAs found it necessary to create their own intelligence picture of their area of responsibility using the techniques described above. The Special Forces soldiers could then conduct DA operations based upon the intelligence they had developed within their own sector. It was reported that ninety-nine percent of the DA missions conducted by Special Forces in Iraq were based upon intelligence developed at the company level or below.<sup>109</sup> The intelligence was bottom-driven rather than coming down from higher headquarters.

The Special Forces integration with conventional units also progressed during the SASO phase of OIF. AOBs, now operating within the sectors assigned to conventional units, conducted daily coordination with division-level operations cells and exchanged information with the division intelligence

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<sup>107</sup> Author telephone interview with a US Army Special Force Major wishing to remain anonymous, 22 August 2004. This officer commanded a Special Forces AOB in Iraq from 2003 to 2004.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

elements. Conventional units provided cordon forces and security for Special Forces elements conducting DA missions, leveraging maneuver and firepower in the form of infantry platoons, tanks, and attack helicopters to support the Special Forces operations. Special Forces soldiers living on the economy in hardened “safehouses” often received an infantry squad to provide additional protection and reinforce the SFODA.<sup>110</sup> COIN operations remain the primary mission of Special Forces personnel in Iraq with greater emphasis upon intelligence collection and exploitation.

Building upon the lessons learned during their experience in the Balkans, Special Forces employment and operations evolved during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The primary instrument of DoD in ground operations in Afghanistan, several hundred Special Forces soldiers working with indigenous groups and augmented by close air support overthrew the Taliban government in less than two months. Transitioning to counterinsurgency operations in December 2001, Special Forces led the hunt for fleeing members of al-Qaeda and the Taliban regime. Largely based upon their successful employment in Afghanistan, Special Forces opened the campaign in northern Iraq during OIF, destroying one of the largest terrorist groups in the world and disrupting sixty-percent of the Iraqi military along the Green Line, again with native guerrilla fighters and close air support. The following chapter will analyze the evolution of Special Forces from the Balkans to Iraq, focusing upon the decision of policymakers to employ Special Forces and the specific areas of Special Forces intelligence operations, the roles of foreign internal defense and unconventional Warfare, close air support, integration with conventional units and the institutionalization of lessons learned.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

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## **V. ANALYSIS**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter analyzes the evolution of Special Forces operations from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Implementation Force (IFOR) mission in the Balkans through Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). The section begins by examining the reasons Special Forces were chosen by policymakers as the force of choice for OEF and OIF, followed by analysis of the evolution of Special Forces intelligence operations, unconventional warfare (UW) and Foreign Internal Defense (FID), employment of close air support (CAS) and Special Forces integration with conventional forces. This chapter concludes with an analysis of the institutionalization of experience and lessons learned and its impact upon future Special Forces operations.

The evolution of Special Forces began in the Balkans where they performed a minimal, supporting role, slowly coming to the notice of conventional commanders through the success of their missions and the quality of the intelligence they produced. Their integration with and value to conventional commanders increased through operations in Kosovo. In Afghanistan, Special Forces became one of the primary workhorses in the Special Operations Forces (SOF)-centric initial combat phase, working with Northern Alliance warlords and contributing to the overthrow of the Taliban regime. In Iraq, Special Forces once again shared the stage with conventional forces, but received the mission to control the northern and western portions of the country, shaping the battlespace for conventional coalition success in the south.

### **B. WHY PLANNERS CHOSE TO EMPLOY SPECIAL FORCES IN OEF AND OIF**

CENTCOM planners chose to employ Special Forces in Afghanistan for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, the change of attitudes towards the military that occurred between the Clinton to the Bush administration, specifically that of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, may very likely have contributed

to the decision to employ Special Forces in Afghanistan. Secondly, no campaign plan existed for a conventional military operation in Afghanistan and the US could not respond with the speed desired by the President with a phased-deployment of large conventional units into theater. This, coupled with the geographic constraints of Afghanistan, the initial lack of basing in neighboring countries, the loosely-organized Taliban and terrorist group al-Qaeda all contributed to making Special Forces the force of choice for the opening phases of OEF.

When asked how military operations in the 1990s, specifically Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo influenced his decision on how to employ forces in Afghanistan, CENTCOM commander General Tommy Franks replied that while he had considered these operations, the history of Afghanistan, more than any other factor, influenced his decision to not immediately commit large numbers of conventional troops to the battlefield.<sup>111</sup> Franks looked at the hard lessons learned by the Soviets during their operations in Afghanistan and sought to avoid the same pitfalls.

It's always been somewhat interesting to me to see the views of some of the pundits who have suggested the introduction of large conventional forces in Afghanistan. I think a great many people are aware, and I know you're aware of the fact that for some 10 or 11 years of Soviet experience in Afghanistan, they introduced 625,000 people on the ground, and had 15,000 of them killed and 55,000 of them wounded. So we took that as instructive--as the way not to do it.<sup>112</sup>

Elaborating on his rationale, Gen Franks commented on the decision to employ unconventional forces in Afghanistan:

I think all of us recognized that there are a variety of ways to either apply force or threaten the application of force. One is cruise missiles. Another is the introduction of large conventional forces. The Soviets tried it, and didn't like it. Another approach is the

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<sup>111</sup> "PBS Frontline: Campaign Against Terror: Interviews: US Army General Tommy Franks," PBS, p. 2. Available: [Online]: <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/campaign/interviews/franks.html>> [28 July 2004].

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

unconventional approach, which seeks to leverage operational forces, air-to-ground forces, air support, that sort of kinetic activity by putting people on the ground close enough to observe the

targets one would like them to destroy. That approach is certainly unconventional at the level at which the operation in Afghanistan moved forward.<sup>113</sup>

The decision by planners to open OEF with air and SOF sets the campaign apart from all others conducted by the US, by designating SOF as the main effort on the ground. The decision to exclude conventional ground forces from the fight provided Special Forces the flexibility and freedom of maneuver required on a non-contiguous battlefield to rapidly react and defeat the enemy in less than two months. Unlike any other conflict, SOF entered the war in Afghanistan as the supported force, rather than its traditional employment as a supporting force to conventional operations.

One potential weakness of the employment of SOF with no conventional ground forces is that numerous Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders likely escaped. Lacking vehicles for ground mobility and adequate number of soldiers to seal off the porous borders, the sole use of SOF in the campaign may have contributed to the escape of numerous high value targets. Following Operation Anaconda, SOF once again reverted to a supporting force rather than the supported force.

Lacking the ability to project a significant conventional force into northern Iraq without the use of Turkey as an overland route prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom, CENTCOM chose to insert Combined/Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (C/JSOTF-North) into the area along the Turkish border to conduct UW with the ethnic Kurds. Unable to infiltrate a conventional force into the western desert to conduct an area denial mission, CENTCOM tasked C/JSOTF-West to locate and prevent SCUD missile launches and cut-off lines of communications from central Iraq to Syria for fleeing members of the Saddam Hussein regime.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

The significance of assigning responsibility to two C/JSOTFs for the control western and northern Iraq in place of conventional forces cannot be overstated. In northern Iraq, C/JSOTF-North led a division-level assault by Kurdish fighters with US air and ground support to destroy a terrorist complex and received a conventional brigade as support. Special Forces provided a level of agility and adaptability not found in conventional force. Paired with interpersonal skills, cultural awareness and the ability to operate in uncertain conditions, these all combined to make SF the force of choice in OEF and OIF. One factor contributing to the success of Special Forces operations in the Balkans as well as during the stability and support (SASO) phase of OEF and OIF was the evolution of Special Forces intelligence operations.

### **C. INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS**

Intelligence operations pioneered during Special Forces operations in Bosnia and Kosovo continued their evolution during OEF and OIF. Analysis of the operations conducted by Special Forces from the Balkans to OEF and OIF demonstrate a distinct trend away from the traditional “top-driven” intelligence, gathered and evaluated at higher command levels and disseminated to lower units, to a “bottom-driven” intelligence system based upon collection and exploitation of information at the user level.

Rather than relying upon higher headquarters for information, Special Forces operators cultivated and developed their own intelligence sources, planning and executing company and detachment-level missions based upon self-generated information. An analysis of operations from Bosnia to Iraq clearly demonstrates a trend indicating that as the operational environment became less permissive, Special Forces were allowed to conduct more of their own operations based upon intelligence generated at the unit level. Conventional commanders and headquarters seemed more likely to allow Special Forces more flexibility and decentralized control over their own operations in more dangerous circumstances.



Intelligence operations conducted by Special Forces in the Balkans were generally urban and conducted in a permissive environment. Conventional commanders employed Joint Commission Observer (JCO) teams in Bosnia and later, Liaison Teams (LT) in Kosovo, tasking Special Forces soldiers to monitor the mood of local communities and identify influential people from local government, military, religious, and ethnic groups. By living among the various communities and interacting on a daily basis with the local ethnic groups, the Special Forces personnel maintained an open line of communication between North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) commanders and prominent individuals, enabling the conventional commanders to defuse potentially explosive situations before they occurred.

NATO Implementation Force (IFOR), Stabilization Force (SFOR) and Kosovo Force (KFOR) commanders used the information generated by the Special Forces teams to maintain stability within their sectors. In Kosovo, conventional commanders for the first time allowed SFODAs to plan and execute time-sensitive operations based upon intelligence gathered in their areas, such as the joint raid conducted by SFODA 095 with the Russian 13th Task Group and the demobilization of the Sefer Faction of the Liberation Army of Presheva, Medvegja and Bujanoc (UCPMB) by SFODA 086.

Following Operation Anaconda, in the spring of 2002, SFODAs deployed throughout Afghanistan, continuing the hunt for al-Qaeda terrorists and members of the Taliban regime. Special Forces began conducting intelligence operations in a primitive, largely rural setting, in a semi-permissive environment. Arriving in their operational areas, the Special Forces soldiers developed relationships with local tribal warlords and the citizens of the area, largely mirroring the JCO and LT model from the Balkans. Conducting a counterinsurgency (COIN) mission, Special Forces generated information from interaction with the population, at the company and detachment levels, to identify fugitive al-Qaeda fighters or former

members of the Taliban regime within their particular area of operation.<sup>114</sup> If verified through multiple sources and approved by conventional commanders, Special Forces soldiers were allowed to conduct direct action (DA) missions based upon the intelligence collected.

In Iraq, Special Forces teams conducted similar intelligence operations, again based upon the JCO model, developing their own intelligence at the company or detachment levels. Intelligence gathered in raids conducted during the initial combat phase in Iraq often led to immediate follow-on missions based upon the target identified by the information. As the mission shifted to COIN during the stability and support phase of OIF, Special Forces soldiers typically operated in a non-permissive, urban setting. Using COIN-focused intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB), and greater reliance upon pattern analysis to identify key figures within the insurgency, Special Forces personnel rapidly reacted to information, conducting DA missions to capture or kill high-value targets (HVTs) based upon self-generated information.

Recent operations have shown the value of SF in supporting intelligence collection efforts. The ability to build rapport and operate amongst the indigenous population has enabled SF to provide important human intelligence to support force protection, SOF intelligence requirements, and joint force intelligence requirements. Language skills and regional expertise continue to be critical skills for SF soldiers to conduct these missions.<sup>115</sup>

This same type of COIN-focused IPB contributed to the capture of Saddam Hussein in Operation Red Dawn in December 2003.<sup>116</sup> The success of Special Forces intelligence operations during the SASO phases of OEF and OIF all build upon lessons learned in the Balkans.

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<sup>114</sup> Joint Publication 3-07.1, *Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Foreign Internal Defense*, defines counterinsurgency as “those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency. Also called COIN.”

<sup>115</sup> Paul A. Ott, *Unconventional Warfare in the Contemporary Operating Environment: Transforming Special Forces*, A Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, AY 01-02, p. 37.

<sup>116</sup> Robin Moore, *Hunting Down Saddam: The Inside Story of the Search and Capture*, St Martins Press, (New York: 2004), p. 241.

#### D. FOREIGN INTERNAL DEFENSE (FID) AND UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE (UW)

The conduct of FID and UW operations by Special Forces has evolved from operations in the Balkans through Afghanistan to Iraq. Joint Publication 3-07.1, *Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Foreign Internal Defense*, defines FID as:

participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness and insurgency. Also called FID.<sup>117</sup>

FID includes the application of diplomatic, informational, military and economic measures by both civilian and military forces in support of a friendly government. Three military FID programs exist: indirect support, direct support (not including combat operations), and combat operations.<sup>118</sup> COIN operations exist as a subset of FID, directly meeting the definition through US support to a friendly government to overcome an insurgency and may be conducted in any of the three military FID programs. Although many Special Forces FID operations may incorporate unconventional tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP), they are not, by definition, nor should they be confused with, unconventional warfare operations.

Joint Publication 3-05.5, *Joint Special Operations Targeting and Mission Planning Procedures*, defines UW as:

A broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration, predominantly conducted through, with, or by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source. It includes guerrilla warfare and other direct

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<sup>117</sup> Joint Publication 3-07.1, *Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Foreign Internal Defense*, (30 April 2004), p. GL-7. Available [Online]: <[http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new\\_pubs/jp3\\_07\\_1.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp3_07_1.pdf)> [19 August 2004].

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. I-4. “**Indirect Support** focuses on building strong national infrastructures through economic and military capabilities that contribute to self-sufficiency.” (p. I-5). **Direct Support (Not Involving Combat Operations)**: “these operations involve the use of US forces providing direct assistance to the HN (host nation) civilian populace or military.” (p. I-11). **US Combat Operations**: “The introduction of US combat forces into FID operations requires a Presidential decision and serves only as a temporary solution until HN forces are able to stabilize the situation and provide security for the populace.” (p. I-13-I-14).

offensive, low visibility, covert, or clandestine operations, as well as the indirect activities of subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and evasion and escape. Also called UW.<sup>119</sup>

UW generally provides US support to indigenous resistance forces in order to overthrow a hostile foreign government or regime. Once the hostile government has been overthrown and a new government has assumed power, US support to that government, by definition, becomes FID. One of the most common FID missions in support of a new government upon assumption of power has traditionally been COIN. While conventional units may conduct FID, US Army Special Forces exists as the only force in the US military organized, trained, equipped and chartered to conduct UW and FID since its establishment in the 1950s.

While Special Forces provided intelligence and communications support to the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) from Albania during Operation Allied Force, by definition they performed the FID mission of Direct Support (Not Involving Combat Operations), rather than UW. The demobilization of the UCPMB's Sefer Faction by SFODA 086 in Kosovo in support of KFOR also meets the criteria for FID, rather than UW. Despite the employment of unconventional TTP by Special Forces, support to the KLA and the demobilization of the Sefer Faction were FID missions.

Combat operations by Special Forces soldiers with the Northern Alliance during the initial phase of OEF meet the criteria for UW. Some may argue that the operations conducted with the Northern Alliance were FID due to numerous, large force-on force, direct-fire engagements. However, as Special Forces sought the overthrow of the existing government within the country with, by, or through indigenous forces, the operations meet the definition of UW. Following the overthrow of the Taliban and the establishment of a new Afghan government

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<sup>119</sup> Joint Publication 3-05.2, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Special Operations Targeting and Mission Planning*, (21 May 2003), p. GL-16. Available [Online]: <[http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new\\_pubs/jp3\\_05\\_2.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp3_05_2.pdf)> [19 August 2004].

in December 2001, coalition operations supported the new government against an insurgency, thus the mission shifted from UW to FID, specifically COIN in December 2001.<sup>120</sup>

On the opposite end of the spectrum from successful UW operations with the Northern Alliance, the US learned a hard lesson on the employment of the indigenous fighters at Tora Bora. Conducting a FID mission at Tora Bora, the Special Forces soldiers could not motivate the indigenous troops to attack the well-entrenched and well-armed al-Qaeda fighters. A likely factor behind their lack of motivation is that the campaign had shifted heavily in favor of the US and the Northern Alliance by the time of the action. Subsequently, the Northern Alliance fighters could not link the destruction of al-Qaeda to their survival as they had at the outset of OEF. The use of indigenous troops, lacking the motivation that US soldiers may have possessed in the same operation, likely led to the escape of numerous al-Qaeda personnel.

The training of the Afghan National Army (ANA) also qualifies as FID as it involves organizing, training, advising, and equipping the fighting force. Contractors have now assumed the training of the ANA, a mistake, in the estimation of one Special Forces officer,

I think we [US Army Special Forces] should be taking the ANA from 'cradle to grave'. We should be building their Army, then, with those we have conducted training with, execute combat operations. As you know, there are contractors and others that do this mission right now, and this takes away from one of our core missions.<sup>121</sup>

The obvious advantage of the 'cradle to grave' training concept is that it builds a strong relationship between the Afghan soldiers and the Special Forces trainers, in essence, providing an indigenous fighting force capable of conducting COIN, advised by US Special Forces soldiers.

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<sup>120</sup> Author email correspondence with a US Army Special Forces Major, wishing to remain anonymous, 19 August 2004. This officer currently commands a Special Forces AOB in Afghanistan.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 19 August 2004.

Initial Special Forces operations in Iraq conducted with the Kurdish *peshmerga* fighters to overthrow the existing government meets the definition of UW. Used first as the primary ground force for the destruction of the Ansar al-Islam terrorist group followed by operations against conventional Iraqi military forces, the Special Forces experience of UW with the Kurds succeeded due to detailed planning beginning in August 2002 and the use of pilot teams to assess the capabilities, limitations and needs of the *peshmerga* prior to the arrival of the main body of C/JSOTF-North in Iraq.<sup>122</sup> Upon the seizure of Kirkuk and Mosul in the north, coupled with the defeat of the Iraqi military and the fall of the Iraqi government, the Special Forces mission changed from UW to FID with an emphasis on COIN to help stabilize the country and support the US-sponsored provisional government. SOF also became the supporting force in northern Iraq as opposed to the supported force they had been during initial combat operations.

Prior to OEF and OIF, the US military had not conducted extensive UW and COIN missions since the conflict in Vietnam. Special Forces provided the only capability within the military capable of conducting effective UW in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Special Forces, although capable, depended heavily upon close air support to maximize their effectiveness as a combat multiplier and defeat numerically superior forces.

#### **E. CLOSE AIR SUPPORT (CAS)**

CAS has played a pivotal role in the evolution of Special Forces from the Balkans to Iraq. Four overarching results of the Special Forces employment of CAS are common to Special Forces operations with the KLA during Operation Allied Force, with the Northern Alliance in OEF and with the ethnic Kurdish *peshmerga* fighters in OIF.

First, CAS improved the ability of Special Forces to function as combat multipliers, exponentially increasing the lethality of a small group of soldiers with

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<sup>122</sup> Special Forces UW doctrine calls for advanced elements of Special Forces soldiers to infiltrate denied areas and assess the capabilities of a potential resistance organization. These UW assessments are conducted by pilot teams.

radios to bring devastating effects to bear upon a numerically superior enemy force. Second, the ability of Special Forces soldiers and their attached USAF Tactical Air Control (TAC) personnel to accurately observe and report targets and conduct battle damage assessment to gauge the effects of CAS maximized the lethality of airborne platforms as opposed to unobserved or uncontrolled bombing. Third, the employment of CAS provided the Special Forces soldiers with instant credibility with indigenous ground forces, enabling them to rapidly build rapport, gaining the trust and confidence of their allies in order to maximize their effectiveness as a fighting force. Lastly, CAS bolstered the confidence and the morale of indigenous ground forces, rallying more fighters to support combat operations, generating more combat power against the enemy.

As the US military undertook Operation Allied Force in 1999, policymakers debated the level of support the US should provide the KLA. Aided by US intelligence, communications support and NATO aircraft, the KLA conducted successful combat operations in Kosovo against the Serbs during Operation Allied Force in the spring of 1999. The combination of pressure on the ground, coupled with the NATO air campaign contributed to the capitulation of Serb combat forces and their ultimate withdrawal from Kosovo. Although US Special Forces operating on the Albanian border provided support to the KLA by relaying targets from the guerrillas in Kosovo to the Task Force Hawk headquarters in Tirana, the Special Forces soldiers never communicated directly with NATO aircraft. By not allowing the Special Forces personnel to target Serb forces directly through communications with the aircraft, decision-makers likely believed they were removing US forces from direct responsibility of the outcome of the missions. The US air support also had a psychological impact upon the KLA, improving their morale and emboldening their efforts against the Serbs, while demonstrating NATO resolve to ethnic Albanian Kosovars.

Fighting on a non-contiguous, rather than a linear battlefield, Special Forces initially lacked priority of support for CAS early in the Afghanistan

campaign.<sup>123</sup> Once coalition planners saw the success of Special Forces UW operations with the Northern Alliance, they diverted CAS to support Special Forces elements in contact with the enemy, calling the support Ground-Directed Interdiction (GDI), rather than allocate pre-planned CAS to support the ground operations.<sup>124</sup> The availability of aircraft for GDI contributed to the ultimate downfall of the Taliban, but its initial employment by Special Forces was not without its challenges.

Task Force Dagger's first few teams deployed without terminal attack controllers-Air Force troops trained and certified to control CAS. During the first few days of combat, unsuccessful CAS revealed how important it is to have experts on the ground immediately. Task Force Dagger's commander quickly deployed trained ground controllers who had an immediate, positive effect on the campaign. Within days, every Special Forces team had a qualified terminal attack controller [TAC]...<sup>125</sup>

CAS allowed the Special Forces soldiers to establish immediate credibility with the Northern Alliance warlords and their fighters during the initial phase of combat operations in Afghanistan, bolstering the confidence of the indigenous resistance movement and adding momentum to the fight against the Taliban.

The rapid advance of the Northern Alliance against the Taliban shows the tremendous asymmetry created by a small element capable of synergistically linking low-tech opposition ground forces with overwhelming US air power technology (i.e. precision guided munitions).<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Mike Findlay, Robert Green and Eric Braganca, "SOF on the Contemporary Battlefield," *Military Review*, May-June 2003, p. 8-11. Available [Online]: <<http://www.leavenworth.army.mil/milrev/download/english/MayJun03/findlay.pdf>> [12 August 2004].

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9 and 11. Findlay, Green and Braganca define GDI as a situation in which "the ground force identifies targets and directs interdiction fire."

<sup>125</sup> Eric P. Braganca, "Joint Fires Evolution," *Military Review*, January/February, 2004, p. 51. Available [Online]: <<http://www.leavenworth.army.mil/milrev/download/english/JanFeb04/braganca.pdf>> [12 August 2004].

<sup>126</sup> Ott, *Unconventional Warfare*, p. 36.



Unfortunately, several fratricide incidents still occurred. Following the special operations-centric phase of OEF, planners realized the shortcomings of SOF integration with joint fires and took numerous measures to correct shortcomings identified during OEF.<sup>127</sup>

Building upon lessons learned in OEF, SOF effectively integrated with joint fires in OIF. SFODAs infiltrating into Iraq deployed with TACs to ensure efficient GDI. In northern Iraq, Special Forces teams conducting unconventional warfare with the Kurds maximized the use of GDI in the destruction of Ansar al-Islam (AI), employing precision guided munitions and B-52 strikes during the day and A/C-130U fires at night. The use of the A/C-130U at night proved critical to the effort against Ansar al-Islam (AI), keeping the terrorists fighting all night while the Special Forces soldiers and Kurds rested, arriving fresh to fight the following day while the enemy had not slept.<sup>128</sup> The use of GDI also increased the credibility of the Special Forces personnel with the Kurdish fighters. Confidence in coalition air support very likely rallied more *peshmerga* to the cause, swelling their ranks prior to the fight along the Green Line. Effective GDI, coupled with Combined/Joint Special Operations Command-North (C/JSOTF-N) operations along the Green line led to the defeat of thirteen Iraqi divisions and prevented the Iraqi V Corps from reinforcing Baghdad, likely preventing many potential coalition casualties in the process.

From the Balkans to Iraq, planners found a winning combination in the integration of Special Forces and CAS, maximizing the effectiveness of both the Special Forces on the ground and the CAS platforms in the air. Doctrine for better employment of CAS evolved between Afghanistan and Iraq, providing devastatingly effective results along the Green line. Special Forces integration with conventional ground forces also traces its roots back to the IFOR mission in the Balkans.

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<sup>127</sup> Findlay, Green, Braganca, "SOF on the Contemporary Battlefield," pp. 12-14.

<sup>128</sup> Author telephone interview with MAJ Mark Grdovic, Directorate of Training and Doctrine, US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS) 30 August 2004.

## **F. SPECIAL FORCES INTEGRATION WITH CONVENTIONAL FORCES**

The first prolonged interaction of Army Special Forces and conventional units occurred in the Balkans. A rocky relationship from the start, both forces worked to understand one another and gradually became comfortable working together. In Afghanistan, SOF fought as the main effort and supported force during the initial combat operations, not integrating with conventional ground units until Operation Anaconda in the spring of 2002. In Iraq, C/JSOTF-North received the attachment of a conventional parachute infantry brigade, while other Special Forces elements worked with conventional units in the south. Although Special Forces integration with conventional forces has evolved a great deal in nine years, it still has a long way to go.

When US Special Forces arrived in the Balkans conventional commanders met them with little enthusiasm. Conventional forces considered the Special Forces soldiers mavericks, resistant to the concepts of discipline and teamwork within the Army. Likewise, some Special Forces soldiers avoided interacting with conventional forces, preferring not to mix with soldiers in normal units. Special Forces and conventional units rarely trained together and understood little of each other's capabilities and limitations. Moreover, many conventional commanders, unfamiliar with Special Forces missions and capabilities, distrusted the Special Forces personnel. William Carty lists some of the challenges commonly facing Special Forces integration with conventional forces:

Issues of organizational culture, lack of understanding of roles and capabilities, doctrinal shortcomings, and training deficiencies have created friction between SOF and conventional forces resulting in failures to exploit potential, missed opportunities, and in some cases, fatal errors.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> William J. Carty, "An Unconventional Look at Training and Education to Improve Conventional and SOF Integration," A paper submitted to the National Defense Industrial Association-Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict Division and Joint Special Operations University for competition in the 2004 SO/LIC Essay Contest, (15 January 2004), p. 5. Available [Online]: <<http://www.dtic.army.mil/ndia/2004solic/cart.pdf>> [10 August 2004].

Initially utilizing Special Forces as Liaison Coordination Elements (LCEs), to assist in the command, control and communications connectivity of Troop Contributing Nations (TCNs) to the NATO effort, these conventional commanders failed to use their Special Forces personnel to the utmost of their potential.

As NATO operations in Bosnia transitioned from IFOR to SFOR and Special Forces assumed the Joint Commission Observer (JCO) mission from the British, conventional commanders witnessed the capabilities and unique intelligence perspective provided by the JCO teams as they operated in and around the local communities. Special Forces personnel matured, recognizing the need for effective integration within the conventional command structure, co-locating their SOCCEs with the supported commander and availing themselves to the conventional collection plan.

As JTF-Hawk deployed to Albania, LTG Hendrix, following the advice of Gen Meigs, deployed with Special Forces despite not having a mission for them. True to form, the Special Forces soldiers found a mission, providing intelligence and communications support to the KLA from Albania. During the KFOR mission in Kosovo, the Multinational Brigade-East (MNB-E) commander relied heavily upon his Special Forces Liaison Teams (LTs) for intelligence information gained while interacting with the local communities. Finally, the MNB-E commander allowed his Special Forces personnel to conduct high-risk operations, such as the combined raid with the Russians, a testament to his trust in the SFODAs.

OEF, initially fought as a special operations ground war, relied heavily upon US Army Special Forces at the outset of the campaign, as demonstrated by the non-doctrinal, direct reporting chain from Task Force Dagger to the Combatant Commander, General Franks. The spotty performance of the Northern Alliance fighters at Tora Bora resulting in the presumed escape of many al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters led to the decision to employ conventional coalition forces in the spring of 2002 against al-Qaeda in the Shah-i-Kot Valley during in Operation Anaconda. After Anaconda, the war in Afghanistan took on a conventional flavor, with Special Forces moving from the supported force to the

supporting force. The establishment of Combined/Joint Task Force-Afghanistan (C/JSOTF-AF) and Joint Task Force 180 (JTF-180) marked the shift at which point Special Forces came fully under the command and control of conventional commanders in Afghanistan. As COIN became the mission priority for Special Forces, the restrictions placed upon their operations and freedom of movement by conventional commanders limited their effectiveness. One Special Forces officer currently serving in Afghanistan commented,

The environment we are operating [in] today is extremely limited by conventional commanders that do not understand [Special Forces]-unique capabilities and how to employ them.<sup>130</sup>

The current constraints placed upon Special Forces in Afghanistan and the complex approval system mandated by conventional commanders for mission approval seemingly fails to maximize the use of Special Forces to their fullest potential.

C/JSOTF-North shared a rocky relationship with the 173d ABN BDE right from the start. Attending a planning conference in Italy in January 2003, C/JSOTF-North commanders and staff officers met resistance from the officers of the 173d ABN BDE over their incorporation into a C/JSOTF.<sup>131</sup> Bristling at the recommendation from C/JSOTF-North staff officers that they should plan for stability and support operations (SASO), the 173d refused, claiming that SASO wasn't a mission for paratroopers. Although the 173d ABN BDE was OPCON to C/JSOTF-North in Iraq, the BDE commander showed little interest in supporting C/JSOTF operations. During OIF the relationship between C/JSOTF-North and the 173d ABN BDE showed no improvement despite the dire situation with the 173d doing little to support C/JSOTF-North. The 173d ABN BDE ultimately

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<sup>130</sup> Author email correspondence with a Special Forces Major, wishing to remain anonymous, 19 August 2004. This officer currently commands a Special Forces AOB in Afghanistan.

<sup>131</sup> Author telephone interview with US Army Major Mark Grdovic, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 30 August 2004. MAJ Grdovic, a member of C/JSOTF-North, attended the planning conference in Italy and later conducted operations in northern Iraq during OIF. Both C/JSOTF-North and the 173d ABN BDE were commanded by Army O-6's. Complicating matters further was the fact that OIF marked the first time that a conventional BDE had been assigned subordinate to a BDE-sized C/JSOTF.

arrived to secure the city of Kirkuk, commencing its SASO mission 36 hours after the occupation of the city by Special Forces and *peshmerga* fighters. All interviews conducted reference the friction between C/JSOTF-North and the 173d ABN BDE indicate the breakdown in integration hinged upon personality differences at the command levels.

As Special Forces and *peshmerga* fighters occupied the city of Mosul, two days after the liberation of Kirkuk, the 101st Airborne Division and the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) moved into the city as the first conventional units on the scene. Having previously worked with the 5th SFG (A), the 101st ABN worked well with C/JSOTF-North elements in Mosul.

The trend seems to demonstrate that in the initial phase of combat, with the exception of the experience of C/JSOTF-North with the 173d ABN BDE, excellent integration and cooperation existed between Special Forces and conventional units. Crisis forges a team spirit and all forces strive to accomplish their missions rapidly and efficiently. This initial period of combat is also the time during which Special Force operate most effectively-in ambiguous situations, conducting decentralized operations.

Why do Special Forces operate more effectively when conducting decentralized operations? The ability to operate in a decentralized manner eliminates the necessity to request permission through multiple levels of command and maximizes the ability of units to respond rapidly to new or perishable information. Decentralized operations typically allow Special Forces to quickly traverse the Observe, Orient, Decide and Act (OODA) loop, disrupting the enemy's decision cycle.<sup>132</sup>

A battle against small, independent and mobile formations may change too rapidly to allow centralized control in detail. The lesson from Afghanistan is that, with clear mission orders and appropriate technology, each tactical element can become a command, control,

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<sup>132</sup> The OODA Loop, developed by John Boyd, models reaction and response to an event. A soldier on the ground witnesses an event (Observe); processes what he has just seen (Orient); chooses a course of action or response (Decide); and responds (Acts). If a friendly force can complete the OODA Loop more rapidly than the enemy force, their ability to react first will force the enemy to change his behavior or course of action.

and execution node, greatly shortening the OODA loop while still allowing the passing of information on tactical actions and results to higher levels for operational and strategic analysis.<sup>133</sup>

For example, the ability to immediately mount a follow-on mission based on intelligence recovered at an objective allows Special Forces to get ahead of the enemy's decision cycle, keeping the enemy off balance and unable to react before the situation changes again. Shortening the OODA loop increases the odds of defeating the enemy.

As the situation stabilizes and the combat phase ends, conventional commanders seem to feel more at ease with the situation and place greater restrictions upon the Special Forces personnel, imposing a more centralized command approach and lengthening the OODA loop. These restrictions and the centralization of command limit the effectiveness of Special Forces through failure to employ them at their optimal level, possibly due to a lack of understanding of Special Forces doctrine and capabilities. The employment of Special Forces in the SASO phases of OEF and OIF clearly illustrate this point.

Evidence also indicates that the relationship between Special Forces and conventional units normally improves in direct proportion to the level of the echelon at which the relationship occurs. Analysis of Special Forces operations in the Balkans, OEF and OIF demonstrate that Special Forces detachments and companies generally maintain positive relations with conventional squads, platoons, companies and battalions. The dynamics of the relationship seem to change with an increase in the echelons requiring cooperation.

These trends in mind, personalities ultimately drive the relationship between Special Forces and conventional forces. The perception of conventional commanders towards Special Forces and vice-versa, as well as the past experiences of commanders in dealing with Special Forces is the overriding factor that will determine the relationship.

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<sup>133</sup> John Jogerst, "What's So Special About Special Operations? Lessons from the War in Afghanistan," *Aerospace Power Journal*, Summer 2002, pp. 2-3. Available [Online]: <<http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj02/sum02/jogerst.html>> [18 August 2004].

Conventional commanders require more education as to the capabilities and limitations of Special Forces and Special Forces soldiers likewise require more familiarity with conventional organization, doctrine and operations. Although the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) regularly integrates Special Forces and conventional units in training, the scenarios may provide an unreal expectation of Special Forces capabilities to conventional commanders due to the habitual employment of SFODAs as reconnaissance elements supporting maneuver brigade headquarters.<sup>134</sup> Greater understanding of the roles and missions of Special Forces by conventional commanders will foster more trust between the two forces, contributing to better integration and maximization of capabilities.

The military requires doctrine to address the integration of Special Force and conventional forces.

The most significant problem with current doctrine and recommended employment methods, at the joint and service levels, both from the SOF and conventional forces perspectives, is that the majority of doctrine and traditional planning has primarily focused on coordination and deconfliction of SOF and conventional forces assets. No official reference, traditional training, or formal planning framework exist that address true SOF and conventional force integration within the theater in any significant detail.<sup>135</sup>

Although the relationship has progressed from the Balkans to Afghanistan to Iraq, a doctrinal “gap” still exists in the integration of Special Forces and conventional units. Unless identified and addressed by DoD, perception and personalities will continue defining the relationship between Special Forces and conventional forces in the years to come.

## **G. INSTITUTIONALIZATION**

This section analyzes the institutionalization of lessons learned. Institutionalization of lessons learned may occur at one of two levels: either in the internal training conducted by units, known as the unit level, or at the proponent

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<sup>134</sup> Author telephone interview with US Army Major Mark Grdovic, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 30 August 2004.

<sup>135</sup> Carty, “An Unconventional Look,” pp. 3-4.

school, known as the institutional level. Upon assuming the JCO mission from British SOF following the Implementation Force (IFOR) rotation in Bosnia, the 10th Special Forces Group realized that no doctrine existed for such operations and no good handover occurred to familiarize the US soldiers undertaking the mission from the British. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, this caused the US Special Forces JCO effort to flounder for the first year after its establishment. Only after LTC Charlie Cleveland developed a JCO targeting methodology was an informal, on the ground doctrine established, resulting in improved operational results. The 10th Special Forces Group incorporated the JCO targeting methodology into unit training to better prepare detachments to assume the JCO mission in Bosnia.

Following the initial combat phase of Operation Enduring Freedom, Special Forces units preparing to deploy to Afghanistan to relieve those due to rotate out familiarized themselves with the operations of the outgoing units by sending Pre-Deployment Site Surveys (PDSS) to gather information and analyze all aspects of the situation. Preparing to deploy to OEF, 2nd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group invited guest speakers with experience in Afghanistan, both military and non-military, to share their experiences and lessons learned with the entire battalion.<sup>136</sup> When preparing to assume the mission of the outgoing Special Force elements, the incoming units reviewed after-action reviews and lessons learned of the units on the ground in order to focus their training and develop tactics, techniques and procedures unique to operational environment of Afghanistan.

Prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom, both the 10th SFG (A) and the 5th SFG (A) conducted extensive training in preparation for their missions in Iraq. The Special Forces Groups based a significant amount of this training upon lessons learned in Operation Enduring Freedom. The 3rd Battalion, 10th SFG (A) began training in August 2002, conducting detailed mission planning exercises, followed by mission rehearsal exercises and UW training consisting of interaction with

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<sup>136</sup> Author email correspondence with US Army Major Pete Canonico, dated 01 September 2004.



role-players posing as guerrillas and detailed guerrilla warfare planning exercises.<sup>137</sup> The 10th SFG (A) based many of the scenarios upon the experiences of Special Forces soldiers conducting UW with Northern Alliance fighters in OEF as well as the Special Forces experience working with the ethnic Kurds in Operation Provide Comfort. The five active and two reserve Special Forces Groups constantly conduct internal after-action reviews at all levels to improve performance, modify tactics, techniques and procedures and implement lessons learned at the unit level.

The US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS) is the institutional level for Special Forces. Headquartered at Fort Bragg, NC, USAJFKSWCS is the proponent for Special Forces training, conducting the Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC). The SFQC provides entry-level common-core training for perspective Special Forces soldiers and specialty training for the officer and each of the Special Forces non-commissioned officer (NCO) military occupational specialties (MOS).<sup>138</sup>

During OEF and OIF Fort Leavenworth, US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and US Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) deployed teams of historians to interview Special Forces soldiers, recording the facts and circumstances surrounding the operations. Returning with the historians to their respective commands, these historical records, lessons learned, or after-action reviews were never disseminated to the USAJFKSWCS. When asked how Special Forces lessons learned arrive at the Directorate of Training and Doctrine at USAJFKSWCS and what doctrinal changes may stem from the experiences of OEF and OIF, one officer replied:

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<sup>137</sup> Mark Grdovic, "Task Force 103 During Operation IRAQI FREEDOM," a synopsis of training and operations conducted by 3rd Battalion, 10th SFG (A) prior to and during OIF. Provided to the author by MAJ Grdovic on 31 August 2004.

<sup>138</sup> The SFQC produces trained Special Forces in 5 MOS's: the 18A officer MOS; the 18B Weapons Sergeant MOS; the 18C Communications Sergeant MOS; 18D Medical Sergeant MOS; and 18E Engineer Sergeant MOS. The SFQC varies in length depending on the particular MOS.

The mechanism to collect and disseminate info is non-existent...not a single AAR from OIF or OEF has touched the schoolhouse. Very little changes have been implemented.<sup>139</sup>

Although few formal lessons learned reach USAJFKSWCS, informal lessons learned abound. The rotation of OEF and OIF veterans as cadre at the SFQC allows the officers and NCOs to share their experiences and lessons learned in combat directly with students in the various courses. Combat veteran experience has most likely had the greatest impact on adding realism to the two-week UW scenario students undergo in later phases of training. Originally conceived in the 1950s and built around a rural World War II French Resistance model, the UW exercise, codenamed "Robin Sage" places students in a notional hostile country to conduct a US-sponsored insurgency to aid guerrillas in overthrowing an existing government. Striving to make the training as realistic as possible, the SFQC sought out Special Forces OEF and OIF veterans with real-world UW experience to serve as role players and evaluators for students in the Robin Sage exercise and adding urban operations to the UW scenario based upon the operational environments in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>140</sup> Further modification to the SFQC POI may occur in the near future.

Institutionalization of experiences and lessons learned occurs more frequently at the unit level rather than at the proponent school level. Units can more rapidly change or modify training to meet mission-specific requirements, where the USAJFKSWCS must change doctrine and develop formal programs of instruction (POI) to add new material to the courses being taught, facing the additional challenge of providing the broad instruction to soldiers destined for all of the Special Forces Groups, rather than just one. The institutionalization of experiences and lessons learned will most likely occur at the school but it will take time.

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<sup>139</sup> Author email correspondence with a US Army Special Forces officer wishing to remain anonymous, dated 1 September 2004. This officer is assigned to the USAJFKSWCS.

<sup>140</sup> Author telephone interview with US Army Major Patrick Marques, 23 March 2004. MAJ Marques commanded Company F, 1st Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne) from 2001 to 2002. Company F conducts training for the SFQC, including the Robin Sage UW scenario.

Special Forces evolved significantly from their initial employment in the Balkans to SASO operations in Iraq. Demonstrating their value in Bosnia and Kosovo, Special Forces slowly gained the trust of conventional commanders, providing liaisons with troop contributing nations and intelligence. In Kosovo, Special Forces conducted higher risk missions including support to the KLA and demobilization of former guerrilla forces. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 Special Forces provided the first boots on the ground in Afghanistan for DoD, leading an indigenous force to topple the existing regime, followed by COIN operations in support of the new government. Finally in Iraq, Special Forces conducted UW to destroy a terrorist safehaven and disrupt and defeat 13 conventional Iraqi divisions along the Green Line in northern Iraq, while conducting successful area denial in the west. Throughout all of these operations the intelligence operations, UW and FID operations, employment of CAS, integration with conventional units and institutionalization of lessons learned all played a critical role in the evolution of Special Forces.

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## VI. CONCLUSION

### A. EVOLUTION AND THE FUTURE OF SPECIAL FORCES

Operations in the Balkans, beginning in 1995, marked the most significant change in Special Forces employment since Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. The interaction of Special Forces with conventional forces demonstrated their capabilities and value to commanders, ultimately changing the mindset of the latter and laying the foundation for greater integration. Special Forces also matured internally, growing more comfortable working with conventional forces and integrating into the command structure through proactive liaison and command and control elements. Building upon lessons learned in the Balkans in the areas of intelligence operations, foreign internal defense (FID), employment of close air support, coupled with the most extensive incorporation into the conventional force planning structure ever, Special Forces conducted successful combat operations followed by stability and support operations (SASO) in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan in 2001. Commencing planning for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in the summer of 2002, Special Forces applied the lessons learned from Afghanistan to combat operations and SASO in Iraq.

How will the future operating environment dictate the employment of Special Forces? Special Forces will very likely continue at the forefront of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) for several reasons. As few countries in the world pose a substantial conventional threat to the US, future conflicts will likely be small in scope, characterized by guerrilla or other asymmetric warfare which large mechanized or armored conventional US units will be unlikely suited to fight.<sup>141</sup> Special Forces provide policymakers with a flexible response option capable of conducting unconventional warfare (UW) or counterinsurgency (COIN) for prolonged periods in austere environments with little support. Next, to effectively respond to the asymmetric threat posed by terrorism, the US must

<sup>141</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, "Shift from Traditional War Seen at Pentagon," Washington Post, (3 September 2004), p. 1. Available [Online]: <<http://ebird.afis.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20040903327365.html>> [3 September 2004].

maintain the capability to respond rapidly to actionable intelligence with an agile, lethal special operations forces (SOF), including Special Forces. The consistent emphasis on the integration of technology into Special Forces operations will also continue improving the effectiveness of Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alphas (SFODAs) on the battlefield. Finally, the ability of Special Forces elements to leverage technology to conduct decentralized operations, rapidly reacting to targets of opportunity based upon intelligence, will continue making them a force of choice in the future.<sup>142</sup>

Are we currently employing Special Forces in roles that maximize their effectiveness? Based upon the evolution from the Balkans to Iraq, current Special Forces missions in support of the GWOT emphasize unilateral operations such as direct action (DA) or COIN, rather than operations with the indigenous forces. According to several Special Forces officers, conventional commanders insist upon employing Special Forces exclusively in DA or COIN missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, rather than focusing their efforts on operations with the host nation forces.<sup>143</sup>

[The new Iraqi military forces are] trained by unskilled trainers (PFCs in some cases) and no advisors to hold it all together...but we [Special Forces] have never been given (or asked) for the mission to establish new [Iraqi] forces and advise them. Some in the community are enamored with our new unilateral capability. We have become locked on Kill or Capture as a mission statement. That's not what we are doing and not what is needed no matter how offensive it sounds. The Kill or Capture charter has led to chasing bad guys (and subsequently making more).<sup>144</sup>

The employment of Special Forces to conduct unilateral missions by conventional commanders as well as Special Forces commanders may ultimately work to the detriment of the force. In order for COIN to be as effective as

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<sup>142</sup> John Jogerst, "What's So Special About Special Operations? Lessons from the War in Afghanistan," *Aerospace Power Journal*, Summer 2002, pp. 3-4. Available [Online]: <<http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj02/sumo2/jogerst.html>> [18 August 2004].

<sup>143</sup> Author email correspondence with a US Army Special Forces Major wishing to remain anonymous, 19 August 2004. This officer currently commands an AOB in Afghanistan.

<sup>144</sup> Author email correspondence with a US Army Special Forces Major wishing to remain anonymous, 1 September 2004. This officer served in Iraq during OEF.

possible it must be conducted by, with or through indigenous forces in order to foster a sense of responsibility in the host nation government and ultimately make the military self-sufficient in executing the mission.<sup>145</sup> The reliance upon contractors in Afghanistan and conventional Army units in Iraq to conduct the training for the new military forces in each country, as well as the insistence of conventional and Special Forces commanders for the conduct of unilateral missions squanders an opportunity for Special Forces soldiers to maintain a long-lasting advisory relationship with these forces and mold them effectively.

As the GWOT develops in the future, the US will likely pursue foreign policy options focused upon the prevention of conditions that might potentially foster the creation of or support terrorist groups. Recognizing that these efforts will require the application of the diplomatic, informational, military and economic resources of the US, the military effort will very likely include the employment of Special Forces in key regions to train US allies in the GWOT.<sup>146</sup> Anticipating this requirement in the future, commanders at all levels, in both the conventional and special operations communities, must avoid the temptation of unilateral Special Forces employment and continue building upon the core FID tasks of providing organization, training, advice and assistance to host nation forces. In order to maximize their effectiveness, Special Forces must maintain proficiency in all five doctrinal missions to continue providing a flexible response option anywhere along the operational continuum in any part of the world.

Although future battlefields may not be similar to the SOF-centric fight in Afghanistan or witness the employment of Special Forces on the scale of C/JSOTF-North in OEF, future Special Forces operations will very likely trace their lessons learned and validations to OEF and OIF. Unlike any other conflict

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<sup>145</sup> Joint Publication 3-07.1, *Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Foreign Internal Defense (FID)*, (30 April 2004), p. I-14. Available [Online]: <[http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new\\_pubs/jp3\\_07\\_1.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp3_07_1.pdf)> [19 August 2004].

<sup>146</sup> "Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) at War," United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) National Defense Industrial Association (NDIA) Symposium Briefing, (5 February 2003), Slide 5. 15th Annual NDIA SO/LIC (Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict Symposium and Exhibition, Washington, D.C., February 2004. Available [Online]: <<http://www.dtic.mil/ndia/2004solic/usasoc2.pdf>> [7 August 2004].

since Vietnam, the GWOT has involved Special Forces soldiers from each of the five active duty Groups and two National Guard Groups. Lessons learned and new doctrine developed based upon experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq will likely have a substantial impact on future Special Forces operations. Ongoing operations and the employment of all Groups in the GWOT also allow experiences gained in the operations to trickle down to a wider audience than any operation prior to OEF.

Institutionalization of lessons learned, however effective at the unit level, must be incorporated into the Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC), ensuring that current doctrine changes to incorporate the lessons learned from Afghanistan and Iraq and that soldiers receive the best possible preparation prior to operational assignments to the Special Forces Groups. One possible area of improvement based upon current SASO missions in Iraq and Afghanistan could be greater emphasis upon COIN planning considerations and execution in permissive and semi-permissive environments.

In conclusion, although policymakers and military commanders have made great progress in improving the employment of Special Forces since the early days of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia, through OEF in Afghanistan and OIF in Iraq, they must learn from the past in order to utilize Special Forces more responsibly in the future.



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