

Where Are Special Operations Forces?

By JOHN M. COLLINS

The capabilities of Special Operations Forces (SOF) had declined severely for more than a decade before 1986 when legislation created both the position of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict—the ASD (SO/LIC)—and the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and also directed the Secretary of Defense to devise a major force program (namely, MFP-11), especially for SOF. Progress was slow at first but soon gained momentum.

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Summary

Special Operations Forces (SOF) were fragmented and inadequately funded when Congress passed legislation in 1987 that put in place a senior-level Pentagon official, unified command, and defense program to both consolidate and advance the interests of the special operations community. While initial progress was slow, the pace soon quickened and recently SOF have scored a number of notable accomplishments. But there are shortcomings that hamper SOF from achieving their full potential. Command relationships, humanitarian assistance, search and rescue missions, theater staffs, career incentives, Special Mission Unit priorities, and research, development, and acquisition are all areas that require further attention. While institutional changes are essentially complete, military culture is evolving gradually when it comes to accepting SOF. Overall, however, the prospects for special operations are brighter today than they have been for decades.

This article is extracted and adapted from a report by John M. Collins entitled *Special Operations Forces: An Assessment, 1986–1993* issued by the Congressional Research Service on July 30, 1993 and is available from the U.S. Government Printing Office.

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 1993		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-1993 to 00-00-1993	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Where Are Special Operations Forces?				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 10	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			



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Subsequent accomplishments have been impressive. Institutionally, the office of the ASD (SO/LIC) as well as SOCOM headquarters and its Army, Navy, and Air Force component commands, theater Special Operations Commands (SOCs), and Army Special Operations Support Commands have been activated and staffed. SOCOM

has codified relationships with regionally-oriented unified commands and the services. It also has created a planning, programming, and budgeting system and a research, development, and acquisition system as well as intelligence architectures for special operations. A new series of doctrinal publications guides their employment in peacetime, crises, and war. Teamwork between SOF and conventional forces is much improved. Approximately 2,500 SOF personnel serve in roughly forty countries on a constant basis (see chart on page 11), and they have played an important part in all major contingencies since Operation Desert Storm.

Some residual problems nevertheless prevent SOF from contributing effectively to overall military capabilities. Statutory relationships between the ASD (SO/LIC) and SOCOM headquarters and the former's responsibility for low-intensity conflict as well as special operations seem to merit review. So do SOF obligations with regard to both humanitarian assistance and theater search and rescue which tend to overload active Civil Affairs units and SOF helicopter crews, respectively. The sparsely staffed SOCs rely heavily on Reserve component augmentation which is not always sufficiently responsive or well qualified. Career progression by SOF officers is severely limited, because conventional officers occupy many SOF posts and promotion ladders within the special operations community stop at two stars, except for one Army billet. The high priorities assigned to Special Mission Units cause

morale problems among other SOF. Also, research, development, and acquisition cycles for SOF-peculiar items are sluggish.

On balance, however, all concerned reach one conclusion: SOF today are far stronger than in 1986. Institutional changes are essentially complete, and despite the fact that military culture is changing more slowly with regard to special operations, most prognoses are optimistic.

The Essence of SOF

Congress designated the following activities in the order listed as the focus of SOF *insofar as they relate to special operations*: direct action, strategic reconnaissance, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, Civil Affairs (CA), Psychological Operations (PSYOP), counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance, theater search and rescue (TSAR), and such other activities as specified by the President or the Secretary of Defense.

The Secretary of Defense and the Commander in Chief, U.S. Special Operations Command (CINCSOC), consider the first six activities listed above as primary responsibilities. Humanitarian assistance and TSAR occupy a separate category known as *collateral special operations activities*, together with such disparate duties as antiterrorism (the defensive counterpart of counterterrorism), counterdrug operations, and security assistance.

Unconventional warfare and counterterrorism are strictly special operations. SOF share the other seven specific responsibilities with conventional forces, but low-visibility, low-cost special operations techniques are distinctively different, and thereby expand the range of options open to national security decisionmakers.

SOF often are employable where high-profile conventional forces are politically, militarily, and/or economically inappropriate. Small, self-reliant, readily deployable units that capitalize on speed, surprise, audacity, and deception sometimes accomplish missions in ways that minimize risks of escalation and concurrently maximize returns compared with the orthodox applications of military power which normally emphasize mass. Aircraft, artillery, or combat engineers might demolish a critical bridge at a particular time, for example, but SOF could magnify the physical and psychological effects considerably if they blew that bridge while a



U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC)—includes 30,000 active and Reserve component members of Special Forces, Special Operations Aviation, Ranger, Psychological Operations, and Civil Affairs units.

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trainload of enemy dignitaries or ammunition was halfway across. Conventional land, sea, and air forces normally patrol specified sectors intermittently, whereas special reconnaissance troops may remain in hostile territory for weeks or months at a time collecting information that otherwise would be unobtainable. Severe misfortunes, however, may accompany failure. Large enemy conventional forces can easily overwhelm small SOF units they manage to corner during clandestine operations, and may be tempted to treat survivors harshly. Adverse political repercussions can be far-reaching.

Nontraditional responsibilities, such as humanitarian assistance, are traditional roles for Army Special Forces (SF) as well as PSYOP and CA units. Their readiness, in fact, *improves* while they perform foreign internal defense missions, whereas that of conventional forces normally *declines*, because such duties divert time and attention away from primary responsibilities. Area orientation and language skills attune SF (and some members of Sea-Air-Land Teams or SEALs) to cultural nuances that usually temper humanitarian assistance techniques. Self-reliance allows them to function effectively under austere conditions without the infrastructure that conventional forces often need.

ASD (SO/LIC) Accomplishments

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict has accomplished quite a lot with a relatively small staff since Congress confirmed the first occupant of that office in August 1988. A principal deputy is the second in charge, with a deputy assistant secretary for policy and missions and another for forces and resources. The strength of the office is currently 42 military and 35 civilian personnel including administrative support. The civilians are preponderant in supervisory positions, but several have accrued twenty or more years of experience in SOF while on active duty. The action officers with extensive military service (not necessarily in SOF) outnumber career civil servants by about five to one. Proven interdepartmental and interagency performers who know how to work within the system are among them.

Few ASD (SO/LIC) achievements have been publicized. Most occurred quietly and incrementally behind the scenes. Their cumulative influence on institutional relations, policies, and plans nevertheless is considerable. A few illustrations include:

- ▼ Strengthened and clarified organizational relationships between ASD (SO/LIC) and SOCOM by developing ten mutually agreeable principles to improve coordination and oversight and by resolving legal disagreements over defining elements of ASD (SO/LIC) oversight and supervision of SOCOM activities.

- ▼ Successfully represented continuing needs for the Sensitive Special Operations Program on matters dealing with operational and policy decisions during the DOD intelligence reorganization. The ASD (SO/LIC) relationship with the intelligence community has proven to be a key ingredient in negotiating sensitive intelligence support for the special operations community.

- ▼ Obtained the Secretary of Defense's approval in March 1993 to designate PSYOP and CA as SOF which helped eliminate fragmentation of CA responsibilities among other OSD offices.

- ▼ Obtained Secretary of Defense approval in 1988 to designate ASD (SO/LIC) as the single point of contact for DOD antiterrorism matters, thereby linking efforts of the Joint Staff, unified and specified commands, defense agencies, and the interagency antiterrorism community.

- ▼ Developed and promulgated policy directives regarding the planning, programming, budgeting, execution, and acquisition authority granted to SOCOM.

- ▼ Developed extensive input for the bottom-up review, a zero-based examination of roles for the Armed Forces in the emerging security environment. The project, aimed at improving SOF effectiveness in accomplishing traditional and new missions, included policy proposals for strategic forward basing of SOF; afloat bases for SOF in regions where land-based presence is not feasible; research, development, and acquisition initiatives to improve SOF contributions to counterproliferation; a range of activities to improve national assistance capabilities; and recommendations concerning such missions as peacekeeping, peace-making, promoting democracy, and nonproliferation.

- ▼ Buttressed the national campaign to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction by ensuring that current SOF capabilities are being integrated into key strategy documents and policy decisions and by sponsoring multi-year, multi-agency research studies that explore emerging and potential counterproliferation roles for SOF.

(continued on page 12)



SEALs exiting an underwater delivery unit.



Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM)—comprised of 5,500 active and Reserve component operational and support personnel, including Sea-Air-Land (SEAL) Teams, SEAL Delivery Vehicle Teams, and Special Boat Squadrons and Units.

Theater-Level Special Operations Commands

U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) organizes, equips, trains, and provides Special Operations Forces (SOF) for commanders in chief (CINCs) of regionally-oriented unified commands (European, Atlantic, Southern, Pacific, and Central)—in addition to the Commander in Chief, U.S. Forces, Korea—each of whom, in turn, delegates operational control of the forces to their theater-level Special Operations Commands (SOCs). The six SOCs are the focal point for in-theater SOF, form nuclei for Joint Special Operations Task Forces, and furnish expertise needed to effectively employ SOF independently or in concert with conventional forces.

The regionally-oriented unified commands and SOCs rely upon the same basic sources of doctrine and policy for special operations. Annex E to the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan outlines missions, apports assets to theater CINCs, and provides basic policy guidance.

The 3-05 series of joint publications is being developed to dispense fundamental doctrine for special operations. Documents prepared

by SOCOM and its component commands elaborate upon other issues while CINCs promulgate policies for their areas of responsibility (AORs). Small special operations staff sections help CINCs plan and supervise all in-theater SOF activities, serve as conduits to and from SOCs, sometimes manage sensitive compartmented *black* programs, and also assist as required. The regionally-oriented SOCs exhibit unique characteristics such as

perceived threats, geographic circumstances, types of contingencies, the intensity of crises, and other factors.

Special Operations Command, Atlantic (SOCLANT)

U.S. Atlantic Command (LANTCOM) has an immense AOR mainly covered by water. Of the 39 islands that comprise the land in the area, Greenland is by far the largest with a population half the size of Peoria. The most densely settled islands are in the Caribbean and all—except for Cuba, Hispaniola, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico—are small. Located in Norfolk, SOCLANT is the smallest of the SOCs designated as subordinate unified commands. No SOF units are permanently assigned and none is forward based, save for one Naval Special Warfare Unit. The LANTCOM staff has responsibility for counterterrorism, counternarcotics, Psychological Operations (PSYOP), Civil Affairs (CA), and black programs.

Special Operations Command, Central (SOCCENT)

U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) is responsible for an area made up of 18 countries in Northeast Africa and Southwest Asia, plus Afghanistan and Pakistan. CENTCOM headquarters, collocated with SOCOM at MacDill Air Force Base, is removed by no fewer than seven time zones from its AOR, and no SOF are permanently stationed in the region. SOCOM and its component commands provide assets from a pool containing Special Forces, Rangers, Naval Special Warfare Units, fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, and PSYOP and CA units. An amphibious Ready Group that includes a Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable), SEALs, and aviation assets is normally in the AOR. That mix is adequate according to SOCCENT, though both PSYOP and CA support depends heavily on the selected call-up of Reservists.

Special Operations Command, Europe (SOCEUR)

U.S. European Command (EUCOM) is a well-developed theater that enjoyed a top priority during the Cold War. Its AOR, stretching from Norway's North Cape to the

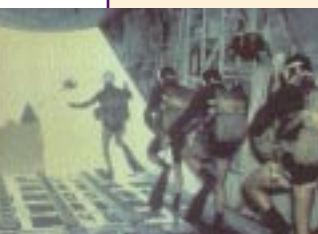
Cape of Good Hope, contains several trouble spots and potential flash points of which Bosnia-Herzegovina, Libya, Liberia, Israel, and South Africa are the most prominent. Refugees from the Balkans, right-wing nationalists in Germany, unrest in Russia and neighboring states, and transnational terrorism are among Europe's security concerns. SOCEUR is located in Vaihingen, Germany. Forward-based SOF units controlled by SOCEUR include a Special Forces battalion in Germany, a Naval Special Warfare Unit in Scotland, and an Air Force Special Operations Group in England that consists of three squadrons of MC-130 Combat Talons, MH-53J Pave Low helicopters, and HC-130 Combat Shadows. Active and Reserve PSYOP units also provide support and a Reserve CA command periodically augments the CINC's staff.

Special Operations Command, South (SOCSOUTH)

U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) has an AOR which includes 20 countries across Central and South America, from the Mexican border with Guatemala and Belize to Cape Horn. Each nation of the region has distinctive characteristics, but the huge area is fairly homogeneous despite great geographic differences (flatlands and mountain chains, jungles, swamps, and arable plains). SOCSOUTH, with headquarters at Albrook Air Force Station, Panama, controls a Special Forces company and an Army special operations aviation detachment equipped with MH-60 Black Hawks as well as a Special Operations Support Command. U.S. Atlantic Fleet Detachment South has both a Naval Special Warfare Unit and a Special Boat Unit at Rodman, Panama, which support SOCSOUTH as directed by CINCSOUTH.

Special Operations Command, Pacific (SOCPAC)

U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) is a watery domain which is three times larger than that of LANTCOM. Its AOR embraces India and the In-

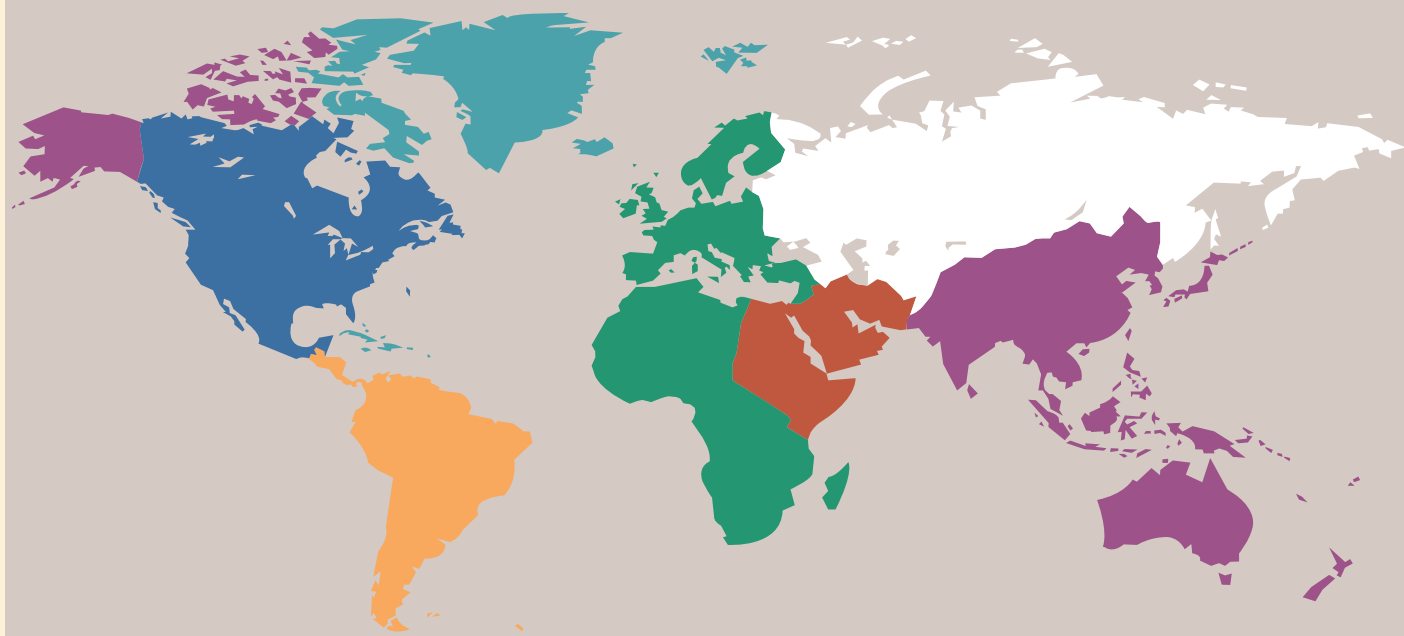


SEALs jumping from an Air Force AC-130.

SOF Deployments: A Snapshot of a Typical Week

Period of 30 Jan-6 Feb 1993

	Missions	Personnel	Countries	States
■ CONUS	36	844	1	20
■ PACOM AOR	25	568	9	2
■ EUCOM AOR	24	381	8	
■ CENTCOM AOR	9	423	5	
■ LANTCOM AOR	8	80	3	
■ SOUTHCOM AOR	49	221	14	
TOTAL	151	2517	40	22



dian Ocean, northeast and southeast Asia, and the South Pacific and Oceania. Strict priorities based on the best possible requirement forecasts are consequently essential, because SOCOM cannot provide enough culturally-attuned, language-qualified SOF personnel for every corner of this extensive region. Special Operations Command, Pacific (SOCPAC), at Camp H.M. Smith, Hawaii, is as distant from South and Southeast Asia as SOC-CENT is from the Middle East. SOF assigned to this populous and complex area include a Special Forces battalion on Okinawa, a SEAL platoon collocated with a Naval Special Warfare Unit on Guam, and an Air Force Special Operations Group consisting of three squadrons of MC-130 Combat Talons and HC-130 Combat Shadows at Kadena Air Base, and MH-53J Pave

Low helicopters at Osan, Korea. A Special Operations Support Command completes the in-theater assets. In addition, a CA brigade from the Army Reserve is earmarked to assist if required.

Special Operations Command, Korea (SOC-K)

Korea is the only theater in which American and allied SOF are institutionally integrated. Located in Seoul, SOC-K is a standing joint task force controlled by the Commander, U.S. Forces Korea. It serves the Republic of Korea (ROK)/U.S. Combined Forces Command, is a component of the Combined Unconventional Warfare Task Force, and works closely with the Korean Army Special Warfare Command. Since the

Koreans furnish most in-theater SOF, the fact that SOC-K has control over only one Special Forces detachment is not significant. In the event of hostilities SOC-K combines with the ROK Special Warfare Command to form the Combined Unconventional Warfare Task Force. JFQ

DOD



AC-130 Spectre illuminating the night sky.

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▼ Initiated and secured agreement from the National Defense University (NDU) and SOCOM on creating, funding, and filling a SOF faculty chair beginning in academic year 1993-94. Follow-on activities include establishing both a SOF archive in the NDU Library and a post-senior service college fellowship within the Institute for National Strategic Studies at NDU.

SOCOM has made great strides since 1986. Procedures and force postures within that headquarters and all component commands are much improved.

SOCOM Accomplishments

Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS). SOCOM created a PPBS from scratch which interlocks with the system in the Pentagon, but SOCOM procedures, unlike those of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force, are joint in every respect.

Inadequate intelligence was an initial impediment: input was quantitatively and qualitatively poor. Automated data processing and dedicated communications were nearly nonexistent and outmoded maps contained large blank sections or depicted conditions decades ago. Meteorological and oceanographic intelligence were insufficiently specific for detailed SOF planning.

Prognoses now seem bright in most respects, according to the SOCOM J-2.

Interagency cooperation concerning human intelligence (HUMINT) is much better since Operation Just Cause (Panama 1989-90). SOCOM is collaborating with all the services in efforts to prototype and test new, lighter, smaller, interoperable intelligence systems needed for the type conflicts anticipated. The most important initiatives may reach fruition because SOF intelligence programs for FY93 through FY99 are reportedly well supported in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill.

SOCOM planners, using scenarios and computer models, seek to answer four fundamental questions: how many SOF and supporting airlift/sealift platforms of what sort are needed to accomplish anticipated missions in specific theaters, subregions, countries, and other areas? What forces will



U.S. Navy (Patrick E. Winter)

SEAL using a Mark 10 ordnance locator to find a submerged mine.

be available to satisfy inferred requirements at particular times in the future? What risks result when projected SOF capabilities appear insufficient? What courses of action might reduce those risks, including actions to employ programmed assets more effectively?

The resultant objective force seems at first glance to be inconsistent with ongoing efforts to reduce force structures and the defense budget. Active SOF personnel strengths continue to climb. So do the inventories of costly weapon systems, most notably HC-130 Combat Shadows, MC-130 Combat Talons, MH-53 Pave Low helicopters, and Cyclone class coastal patrol ships. Conventional forces conversely have been declining since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Two conditions explain that anomaly, according to SOCOM spokesmen: first, most conventional forces deployed primarily to deal with Soviet threats during the Cold War while most multipurpose SOF served diversified purposes and, second, SOF are still recovering from the period of neglect that led to the enactment of remedial legislation. Programs and budget requests reflect those realities.

Force Posture Improvements. Better weapons, equipment, personnel, and integrating structures are evident in SOCOM and among SOF in unified commands. Concentrated education and training help commanders make the most of available assets. Revitalization continues at modest cost compared with funding for conventional forces. FY94 budget requests for procurement, personnel, operations, maintenance, research, development, test, evaluation, and military construction comprise little more than one penny out of every DOD dollar.

promotion and advancement vary for SOF from better than average to poor, depending on rank, service, and specialties

All Army and Navy SOF are volunteers. Most demonstrate superior performance during tours with conventional forces before they volunteer. Recruiting practices vary with each service (Navy SEALs, for example, take some volunteers straight from basic training, but Army SF do not), although standards are uniformly high. Strict professionalism thereafter prevails. CINCSOC and component commanders work hard to eradicate misperceptions that Rambo-style snake eaters and reckless, out-of-control individuals typify SOF personnel because discipline and maturity help make SOF unique.

Defense publications in the mid-1980s deplored special operations hardware deficiencies. DOD and Congress validated needs, but few funds were forthcoming. "We've got bands that are in a higher state of readiness than some of our special operations assets," is the way one Pentagon official put it. Such deficiencies have largely been corrected.

Combat readiness is the number one priority. Highly-motivated professionals, well armed, equipped, and supplied, are essential, but proficient units are even more important than skilled individuals. Superior

education and training at all levels are key requirements.

SOCOM operates its own school system. The John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg develops doctrine and conducts courses for all Army SOF and Foreign Area Officers (FAO). The Naval Special Warfare Center at the Amphibious Base Coronado and the Air Force Special Operations School at Hurlburt Field do likewise within their respective spheres. All instruct foreign students as well as personnel from other departments and agencies. Intensive, extensive, and diversified courses of instruction cover a wide

range of subjects and scenarios. Members of small, self-contained teams concentrate on cross-training (demolition experts may not become fully proficient as radio operators or medics, but must be qualified to perform such duties in an emergency). SOCOM also cultivates linguistic and cross-cultural skills, which many SOF need to accomplish regional security missions in an ever more complex world. Conventional units do not match their competence.

The Army, Navy, and Air Force furnished all logistic support for SOF before Congress created SOCOM. They still provide common weapons, equipment, supplies, and services, while the Special Operations Forces Support Activity (SOFSA) has handled low-density, SOF-peculiar needs for the Army since 1988. The Joint Operational Stocks (JOS) Program is a centrally managed repository of some SOF-specific hardware. Its inventory features civilian products that have military applications and demand minimum familiarization before use. Off-the-shelf purchases reduce needs for research, development, test, or evaluation funds.

Residual Problems

The office of the ASD (SO/LIC) and SOCOM still face problems including the following:

SOCOM Battle Staffs. Each SOC currently relies extensively on Reserve component augmentation packets for major exercises and emergencies. All eagerly await the formation of SOCOM Battle Staffs.

Two battle rosters list primary and alternate active duty personnel who are assigned to SOCOM headquarters. Members of the first roster must be ready to deploy within 24 hours after notification. They possess operations, intelligence, communications, logistics, and other skills that theater SOCs are known to need most. The maximum number ready to surge is 29. Alternate and selected personnel from SOCOM's component commands constitute the second roster, whose members could fill additional requests for not more than 29 commissioned and noncommissioned officers. They prepare to follow within one week. Anticipated capabilities, however, will not be available until SOCOM acquires sufficient weapons and makes them immediately available for use by personnel on the two battle rosters.

ACRONYMS

AFSOC	Air Force Special Operations Command
ASD (SO/LIC)	Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict
CA	Civil Affairs
CINCSOC	Commander in Chief, U.S. Special Operations Command
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Command
NAVSPECWARCOM	Naval Special Warfare Command
PSYOP	Psychological Operations
SEAL	Sea-Air-Land
SF	Special Forces
SOC	Special Operations Command
SOCCENT	Special Operations Command, Central
SOCCEUR	Special Operations Command, Europe
SOC-K	Special Operations Command, Korea
SOCCLANT	Special Operations Command, Atlantic
SOCOM	[U.S.] Special Operations Command
SOC PAC	Special Operations Command, Pacific
SOC SOUTH	Special Operations Command, South
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOFSA	Special Operations Forces Support Activity
SO/LIC	Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict
USASOC	U.S. Army Special Operations Command



Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC)—includes one active Special Operations Wing and two Special Operations Groups, one Reserve Special Operations Wing, and one Air National Guard Special Operations Group.

Career Opportunities. Promotion and advancement vary for SOF personnel from better than average to poor, depending on present rank, service idiosyncrasies, and specialties. Rear admirals, Air Force major generals, Air Force helicopter pilots, and Army SF officers encounter “glass promotion ceilings.” SEALs and Reserve component CA and PSYOP officers, who are few in number and in constant demand, find little time to attend military schools and colleges. SOF in several categories find assignment potential quite limited. Title 10, *U.S. Code*, tells CINCSOC to monitor such matters, which are parent service responsibilities, but he has little ability to reverse adverse trends.

SOF-qualified flag officers from a multi-service pool of candidates should ideally compete for every senior command and staff position within SOCOM headquarters, component commands, and theater SOCs. A relatively small reservoir now exists, however, partly because SOF generals and admirals find it difficult to progress within the special operations community after they pin on the first star, partly because non-SOF officers fill many key slots.

Language Training. Many members of the Armed Forces are fluent in common foreign languages such as French, German, and Spanish. Sufficient numbers are also well qualified SOF. Those who are conversant in local dialects like Creole, which is common in Haiti, range from few to none. Such problems are hard to correct. The relevance of programs conducted by the Defense Language Center at Monterey and the Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg, for example, depend heavily on requirements that cannot always be predicted by the intelligence community. Egyptian and Syrian emerged as the most important Arabic dialects after the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. As a result only 16 of the Arabic linguists on active duty (less than one percent) had studied Iraqi before Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. No one predicted large-scale SOF employment in Kurdistan or Somalia, where Operations Provide Comfort and Restore Hope took place. Maintaining language skills is just

as essential as initial learning, but for most linguists peak proficiency occurs the day they receive their diploma. Unrelated military duties thereafter inhibit further progress.

Civil Affairs. CINCSOC, SOCOM component commanders, regionally-oriented CINCs, theater SOCs, and their respective staffs believe that an undesirable balance exists between active and Reserve component CA forces, which receive important missions in almost every contingency plan and are in daily demand. Some 97 percent are Army Reserve. The one active battalion is chronically under its authorized personnel strength level of 212 but bears most of the operational load. Theater CINCs repeatedly request Reserves because the 96th CA Battalion cannot be everywhere at once and the Reserve component contains many CA skills that it cannot replicate. It is impractical to call entire Reserve units when requestors need only a fraction of their capabilities. Volunteers, who are not universally well qualified, consequently fill most gaps. Recurrent active duty periods of long duration, however, cause domestic difficulties and jeopardize civilian jobs.

Hardware. The Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact no longer threaten the United States or its allies, but the SOF community must continually improve (in some cases replace) present hardware if it is to retain a sharp edge against lesser, unpredictable opponents who are increasingly able to wage high-tech wars. Critics, however, claim that SOCOM has embraced research, development, and acquisition (RDA) procedures much like the services. Guidelines specifically designed to fill small inventories expeditiously are insufficient. Links between RDA specialists and SOF users in the field allegedly are loose. Few program managers reportedly possess adequate RDA experience; the reverse seems equally true. The relationships among the staff elements of SOCOM responsible for requirements, resources, and program execution may also need tightening. Programs overlook some important requirements and program cycles are overly long (10–15 years for some aircraft).

Peacetime and Wartime Performance

SOF have performed admirably during recent years, despite residual problems like those just discussed. Peacetime engagement is



Liaising with coalition forces during Operation Desert Storm.

SOF are still recovering from the neglect that led to remedial legislation



Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC)—serves as a standing Joint Special Operations Task Force responsible for special missions planning, training, tactics, and equipment development.

DOD



Air Force AC-130 Spectre.

SOF often are employable where high-profile conventional forces are politically, militarily, and/or economically inappropriate



AC-130 Spectre crew loading a 40mm Bofors cannon.

DOD

SOF deter aggression primarily through good deeds, whereas conventional forces promise military retaliation

a prescription for applying political, military, economic, and other instruments of national power to promote regional stability, diminish threats, facilitate combat operations if deterrence fails, foster post-crisis recovery, and otherwise enhance U.S. security. Peacetime engagement concepts employ military forces, but not military force. SOF are especially well suited, because they deter aggression primarily through good deeds, whereas conventional forces promise military retaliation. Low-key SOF maximize U.S. influence in selected countries through military-to-military contacts, information programs, and civic actions; minimize prospects of unpleasant surprise by conducting special reconnaissance missions; and garner good will in the aftermath of natural catastrophes and conflicts by taking care of afflicted peoples. The following are some recent employments:

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▼ a Special Mission Unit provided counterterrorism training, equipment, and weapons to security forces in the Republic of Georgia

▼ SOF succored thousands of Kurdish refugees along the Iraqi-Turkish border where all but

3 of 250 children declared hopeless by local doctors were saved by SOF medics

▼ CA specialists entered Kuwait City on liberation day with local counterparts and directed deliveries of food, water, and medical supplies, then restored health and other public services

▼ SOF medical personnel inoculated 60,000 people in Cameroon over a 10-day period during a meningitis epidemic at a minuscule cost by using donated American vaccines

▼ SOF in East Africa teach game wardens how to stop poaching to enhance the political, economic, and social stability of local people who depend upon tourism for hard currency

▼ Russian speaking SOF facilitated safe passage for U.S. military cargo aircraft flying through restricted air corridors during Operation Provide Hope to deliver food and medicine within the Commonwealth of Independent States

▼ SOF assisted relief efforts in Bangladesh after Cyclone Marian, and performed similar duty in Dade County, Florida, following Hurricane Andrew.

SOF combat operations in Grenada (1983), Panama (1989–90), and Kuwait/Iraq (1990–91) displayed other capabilities; forces committed to Desert Storm performed all ten statutory missions with positive results.



Door gunner keeping watch from a MH-60L helicopter.

As a consequence SOF are in demand in peace as well as war, and the potential for overcommitment is constant. Since the root cause is too few forces for too many tasks, senior officials would be well advised to exercise restraint in employing SOF.

Future Effectiveness

SOF could contribute even more effectively to U.S. military capabilities if decision-makers along the chain of command corrected shortcomings within their respective spheres of influence. The suggested actions listed below address serious deficiencies.

The President might:

- ▼ establish a board on the National Security Council to guide, integrate, and otherwise focus all SO/LIC efforts within the U.S. Government.

Congress might:

- ▼ establish special operations panels or subcommittees on the Senate and the House Armed Services Committees to facilitate oversight

- ▼ authorize a three-star deputy CINCSOC and also allocate one star to each theater SOC; a larger pool of well qualified candidates thereafter could compete for senior command and staff assignments within SOCOM

- ▼ authorize additional active duty CA units

- ▼ relax some existing research, development, and acquisition regulations to make SOF-peculiar systems more responsive.

The Secretary of Defense might:

- ▼ nominate a special operations practitioner as the ASD (SO/LIC) and a SOF-qualified individual as principal deputy

- ▼ direct the Secretary of the Air Force and the Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force, to furnish SOCOM with seasoned SOF.

The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, might:

- ▼ act as a proponent for SOF

- ▼ direct service schools and colleges to strengthen curricula so that future commanders and their staffs more accurately appreciate the capabilities and limitations of SOF.

Theater commanders in chief, who employ most SOF that SOCOM organizes, equips, trains, and provides, might:

- ▼ use shorthanded SOF less liberally if they interpreted requirements as Title 10 intended; humanitarian and search and rescue missions then would call for SOF only *insofar as they relate to special operations*.

Prognosis

The Honorable John O. Marsh, Jr., when he was Secretary of the Army and soon to serve simultaneously as acting ASD (SO/LIC), opined that "failure in the past to link special operations with national strategy through the *Defense Guidance*—and thereby to develop doctrine—has prevented special operations . . . from gaining permanence and acceptability within the ranks of the military." That deficiency has been corrected. Institutional changes are essentially complete, but military culture is changing more slowly. Mutual distrust and misunderstandings still separate conventional forces from SOF. Not many of the former fully understand SOF capabilities and limitations. Too few special operations specialists have enough Pentagon experience to make the system work for them instead of against them. SOF constituencies on Capitol Hill, in the services, and across the industrial sector remain scant and tenuous. Appropriate acceptance of SOF consequently will come only after all parties concerned complete a learning process and put doctrine into practice. **JFQ**