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A Theory of Special Operations: “These Ideas Are Dangerous”

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The critiques of special operations forces after the Second World War are applicable to the current quest to produce a theory of special operations today. A specific theory may be unwarranted as other, existing military theories may already prove necessary and sufficient for special operations. There are a number of individual and institutional impediments to overcome in the writing of special operations theory. Individual impediments include access to sufficient evidence, the credibility of the author and the type of theory they write, and sufficient time to produce theory. Institutional impediments are a reflection of large bureaucracies and the special operations community is not immune to their negative influence. Although special operations have a strategic value and can generate strategic effects, this does not necessarily translate into a need for theory. Institutional imperatives are likely to favor pragmatic over pure theory and co-opt such theory in the pursuit of bureaucratic agendas. In the worst possible case such coopted theory can become dogma, or a substitute for deep, critical thinking—the very *raison d’être* of theory.

Keywords: theory, pure theory, pragmatic theory, theorist, special operations, surgical strike, special warfare, dogma, orthodoxy

Writing more than a decade after the end of the Second World War, British Field Marshal William Slim assessed a number of aspects of the campaign in his command area of responsibility. Slim arrived in the China-Burma-India Theater at perhaps the worst possible time. A Japanese offensive in early 1942 threw British and Commonwealth forces from Burma in an attempt to cut off Allied supplies to beleaguered Chinese forces. Slim had the unenviable task of forging together an effective army out of defeated and demoralized British and Commonwealth troops who had managed to escape the Japanese, as well as untested replacements. Through a variety of innovative means, including reconceiving supply in a jungle environment through the use of airpower and the creation of combat “boxes” to serve as isolated fighting detachments, his efforts paid off handsomely in 1944 and 1945. A Japanese counteroffensive in 1944 failed to crack the boxes at Imphal, Kohima, and Sangshak, among others. More important, Japanese forces of the Twenty-Eighth Army were sufficiently weakened for Slim to go on the offensive again in 1945. During the course of the offensive, XIV Army not only managed to liberate Meiktila and Mandalay but also to cut off isolated Japanese forces from their supplies. During

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the course of the campaign in Burma, Slim rose from division through corps command and eventually was promoted as commander of the XIV Army (Allen, 1984, pp. 150–315).

In the course of his evaluation Slim turned, as one of his “Afterthoughts” to his memoir, to the role played by what he called “special forces” in his theater of operations. For Slim there were simply too many special forces trained to too high a level of specialization to be useful. In Slim’s estimation,

The rush to form special forces arose from confused thinking on what were, or were not, normal operations of war. In one sense, every operation of war is a special one, whether it is attack, defence, withdrawal, penetration, raids behind the enemy’s lines, destruction of his detachments, assault over a beach, river crossings, jungle or mountain warfare, or any of the rest; each has its peculiar requirements. Yet all are and have always been familiar operations of war; any standard unit should expect that, at some time or other, it may be called to engage in any of them. The level of initiative, individual training, and weapon skill required in, say, a commando, is admirable; what is not admirable is that it should be confined to a few small units. (Slim, 1956, p. 547)

In modern parlance, Slim was suggesting that any unit should be prepared to conduct any task in “the familiar operations of war;” no task or mission should be the exclusive preserve of any one unit no matter how specialized the task. Put another way, Slim argued that military forces can and should be maximized for a wide range of tasks, as opposed to optimized for highly specific military activities. At its logical extreme, Slim contended that optimization or specialization of forces could be taken to an absurd degree: “The cult of special forces is as sensible as to form a Royal Corps of Tree Climbers and say that no soldier, who does not wear its green hat with a bunch of oak leaves stuck in it, should be expected to climb a tree” (Slim, 1956, pp. 547–548).

For Slim, maximization of combat units under his command for a wide range of tasks done less than perfectly was a reflection of dire necessity as a commander. Slim was operating in “the forgotten theater” of the Second World War, akin to T. E. Lawrence’s (1920) self-deprecating characterization of his own irregular campaign during the Palestine Campaign of the First World War: “this sideshow of a sideshow” (p. 68). Optimizing forces such as Orde Wingate’s Chindits, parachute or mountain regiments, or the highly successful unconventional warfare force, Force 136 (part of the British Special Operations Executive that, in conjunction with local forces and Jedburghs, accounted for almost 17,000 Japanese killed and 1,000 wounded), drained resources, energy, and talent from XIV Army when the latter needed them the most (Cruickshank, 1983, p. 190). Such specialized forces sloughed off a number of the better officers and troops, all of which could have improved the overall quality of the conventional forces under Slim’s command.

Slim was not piqued primarily that specialized forces were developed or drew disproportionate resources. Indeed, he saw a role for special forces on future battlefields, small numbers of whom would conduct missions classified as sabotage and subversion lumped under the contemporary doctrinal terms “unconventional warfare” and “special activities” (Slim, 1956, p. 548). Rather, he concluded as an operational commander that the cardinal sin of the wide variety of specialized forces in his theater was they consumed far too many resources relative to their operational utility or effectiveness (p. 547). Specialized forces took a disproportionate share of resources dedicated to his theater, including the most advanced or latest equipment, and yet sat by idly during times of operational need precisely because of their acute specialization. After all, one would not expect a highly trained commando unit to fight as a line infantry unit when

needed, so the line of reasoning went, given its elite status and sunk costs in terms of resources (although commanders did occasionally commit specialized forces when absolutely necessary in the China-Burma-India theater). Even worse, the leaders of commando and other specialized units, such as Orde Wingate, lobbied political or military leaders to whom they owed their existence for roles in upcoming campaigns to showcase their military effectiveness, a practice that continues to this day.

Many of Slim’s critiques of special forces in his theater a more than a half-century ago can be applied in spirit to the need for theories of special operations today. Put simply, other theory may be necessary and sufficient for special operations. The contemporary popularity of special operations and the forces that conduct them has never been higher, leading to calls for a theory of special operations. A number of authors have responded to the challenge, in whole or in part (Celeski, Slempe, & Jogerst, 2012; Malvesti, 2010; Robinson, 2013; Spulak, 2007; Turnley, 2008; and Yarger, 2013). This article takes issue with the idea that a theory of special operations is desirable. Indeed, laboring on a theory of special operations, much less a theory of special operations forces (SOF), is not only irrelevant and unnecessary but also fraught with danger. The reason for this somewhat gloomy prognostication, as this article argues, lies in the relationship between the purpose of theory, and impediments to its creation, and the nature of special operations. This article first answers the question, “What is theory?” Next, it explores the impediments, individually and institutionally, to writing a theory of special operations. The article then examines special operations and concludes their nature is incompatible with theory. A theory of special operations is unnecessary given their enabling function, relative value, and strategic utility and effectiveness. The article closes by linking the previous elements together to suggest that a theory of special operations driven by institutional imperative will be not only unsatisfying but potentially dangerous.

Before proceeding further, it is useful to first define what I mean by theory. “Theory,” in a general sense, consists foremost of a supposition intended to explain actions or behavior based on systematic exploration of its nature through a series of codified, related propositions backed by sufficient analysis and evidence. There are two general types of theory: pure theory, based largely on logic and argumentation about the nature of a phenomenon, and pragmatic theory, which seeks to develop a set of principles based on the activity under investigation. Pure theory also seeks to abstract away contextual clutter to determine the essence of the subject of investigation. Military theory instructors within professional military education (PME) often refer to pure theory as “descriptive theory” and pragmatic theory as “prescriptive theory.” The reason why von Clausewitz’s *On War* (1984) continues to be taught within PME is that no other theorist has so comprehensively explored, and succinctly summarized, the nature of war as Carl von Clausewitz did in the descriptive theoretical sections of his incomplete work almost 200 years ago. Educators within professional military education continue to teach Baron Antoine de Henri Jomini’s (1971) *The Art of War* and J. F. C. Fuller’s (1926) *The Foundations of the Science of War* given their directive, prescriptive nature. The most informative theories combine prescriptive elements with descriptive ones, but their primary thrust—to identify a phenomenon’s timeless nature or timeless principles—determines the nature of the inquiry used. More recently, social scientists have sought to impose rigor on the nature of inquiry by seeking to identify core truths about war and conflict through a combination of scientific methods, including testable hypotheses and data gathering, although their efforts have had mixed effects.

THEORY, AUTHORSHIP, SPONSORSHIP, AND SOURCES

Not all theories are created equal, to paraphrase George Orwell, and this is especially true for military theory, including any theory of special operations. Harold Winton of the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies has provided the most useful and informative method for evaluating military theory. Winton (2011) suggests that military theory should be assessed according to its five functions: define, categorize, explain, connect, and anticipate. Defining clarifies the subject under investigation by outlining what is comprised within it and what is not, in a general sense. It establishes the boundaries for enquiry (pp. 855–857). For our field here, the question to be asked is, “What consists of special operations and what does not?” Categorizing “break[s] the field down into its constituent parts” (Winton, 2004, p. 2). An important and often neglected aspect of categorizing lies not just in identifying and separating out the constituent parts of special operations in isolation but rather clarifying how they relate together. Within military theory, this can be done in any number of ways, including across levels of war (strategic-operational-tactical), domains (land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace), or others. More often, in the realm of special operations, it is done according to roles and missions, such as counterinsurgency or counterterrorism, or operational approach, such as direct or indirect or “surgical strike” and “special warfare” (U.S. Army Special Operations Command [USASOC], 2013, pp. 10–16). Next, and perhaps most important, a military theory should explain the phenomenon under investigation through “repetitive observation and imaginative analysis” or Albert Einstein’s “intuition, supported by being sympathetically in touch with experience” (Winton, 2011, p. 855). For a theory of special operations to have explanatory power, it must explore both the scope and limitations of such operations relative to other methods or means. Winton concludes pithily that “theory without explanation is like salt without savor—it is worthy only of the dung heap” (p. 855). Military theory can and should connect to other fields of study as well. Ken Connor (1998) and Alastair MacKenzie (2011) have suggested or described the role that the Special Air Service has played as an instrument of British statecraft, but not in a systematic way. As Winton (2011) argues, von Clausewitz’s genius lay not in divining the character of battle or identifying timeless principles of war but rather connecting war to politics (p. 856). Last, theory can anticipate, and this can be especially valuable, as it can provide a clear direction for future military operations and guide the organizing, training, and equipping in times of great change and uncertainty.

Understanding the functions of theory and creating one are two very separate notions. Consider military theories about actions within specific operating environments or domains. Despite millennia of experience in land warfare, the number of useful theories about war on land can be confined to a single bookcase and, of those, few demand attention today. For sea warfare, the first theoretical work that connected naval engagement to military success and economic prosperity, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, was published only in 1890 despite a similar breadth of experience as war on land (Mahan, 1890). Theories of airpower crafted in the wake of the First World War, including Giulio Douhet’s (1983) *Command of the Air*, are often mocked or pilloried for some of their more outlandish claims or faulty assumptions. In the absence of experience (and often with individual or organizational agendas at play), however, all that these early airpower authors had to base their theories on was hypothesis based on intuition (Douhet, 1983; Mitchell, 1925). Many of the same hypothesis, based on intuition and some cases scaremongering, holds true for theory or conceptualization of the domains of space and

cyberspace today that rely heavily on analogy, such as “a cyber Pearl Harbor” (Bumiller & Shankar, 2012; see also Clarke & Knake, 2010, pp. 54–55; McCarthy, Burrow, Dion, & Pacheco, 2009, pp. 548–549), or metaphor/simile, as in Moltz (2008): “space is like the ocean and therefore must be treated as a global common for the good of all” (pp. 34–35). Winton (2011) suggests military theories are few and far between, and usually not comprehensive, for the following reasons: “The formulation of theory demands intense powers of observation, ruthless intellectual honesty, clear thinking, mental stamina of the highest order, gifted imagination, and other qualities that defy easy description” (p. 857).

In addition to the list of qualities and characteristics necessary for a theorist outlined by Winton (2011), he could have added three additional individual impediments to the crafting of theory. The first impediment is sufficient evidence with which to make a case. Depending on one’s time horizon, specified characteristics, and definition, special operations have either existed as long as warfare itself or are a relatively recent phenomenon. While sufficient evidence exists to plumb the subject of special operations since the beginning of time, providing useful anecdotes and illustrations, and perhaps illuminating recurring patterns, the opposite is true the closer one gets to the present day (see, for example, Arquilla, 1996, and Leebaert, 2006). Access to documentation, interviews, and other primary source material on which to begin critical enquiry for more recent special operations requires special access, a security clearance, or both. Such access, however, is no guarantee that such information can be subsequently written about, much less published. The majority of contemporary special operations are clandestine or covert in nature, given the range of counterterrorism activities, and national leaders prefer to keep the operations or the hand that guided them hidden from public view. National leaders have acknowledged some high-profile specific covert actions, such as the raid that killed Osama bin Laden in 2011 (The White House, 2011). Some commanders have allowed the details of other operations to be disclosed—for example, to ensure the public is aware of the courage, bravery, heroism, and sacrifice of special operators during Operation Gothic Serpent in Mogadishu on October 3 and 4, 1993 (covered by Bowden, 1999) or Operation Red Wing in Afghanistan in late June/early July 2005 (covered by Luttrell & Robinson, 2007). Most modern special operations, and the records associated with them to include overt actions, remain inaccessible to scholars to preserve operational security, protect sources of information, as well as current tactics, techniques, and procedures, or for other political or military sensitivities. At least one scholar and several other authors have argued for greater transparency or access to source material in support of their research (Finlan, 2007, pp. x–xi). For a theory to have any soundness it must be based on deep critical study and analysis of special operations in context, to assess the soundness of planning assumptions and command decisions, as well as to evaluate their operational or strategic effectiveness. Unfortunately such study and analysis often means looking at historical examples and campaigns from decades to a half-century or more in the past that appear to have little relevance or utility for the contemporary special operator.

The second additional individual impediment to a theory of special operations is related to the qualities and characteristics of the author. The sum of these qualities and characteristics affects the credibility of the author and, in turn, the reception of the ideas with the target audience. Few military communities are as driven by credibility and capability as the special operations community. Most special operations components have some sort of rigorous psychological and physical screening process, such as the Army Special Forces “Q” Course or the Navy SEALs Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) training, as a

means of gaining entry into their ranks. Once entry is gained, special operators are inculcated into the language, norms (results based, performance driven, problem solving under conditions of great stress), culture, values (e.g., NSDQ—"Night Stalkers Don't Quit," the motto of the Army 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment), and totems (unit symbols and specific badges, headgear, weapons, or platforms) of their particular community. While this phenomenon is not unique to special operations, it is much more acute given the barriers to entry and exclusive membership of the community. Individuals inculcated over time in the various components of the special operations community embrace an identity similar to that found in highly tribal or clannish societies. Membership is exclusive and limited, and those outside of their community are often treated with curiosity but more often suspicion or even disdain. Entry to a tribe often occurs, as in most tribes or clans, on the basis of personal connection, perceived value and utility for the collective good, or both. Perceived value and utility is a function of the ability to understand, solve problems, or advance the political agenda (and organizational influence) of the tribe.

The credibility of the author and the type of theory will influence its reception by the special operations community. Authors of theoretical works experienced in special operations are more credible in the eyes of their peers than those who do not. For example, Joe Celeski's work, *Operationalizing COIN* (2005), is useful on its own merits but is lent added credibility given his experience as a Special Forces Group and Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) commander in Afghanistan in 2002. In addition to previous demonstrations of personal competence, acceptance into the community, and a personal network within the community, those experienced in special operations crafting theory are better able to write it in language best understood by other special operators given unique connotations. Those outside the special operations community without the perceived requisite knowledge, skills, or ability, or ones with an identifiable potentially negative or personal agenda, are more likely to be treated with suspicion or ignored entirely by those within. Examples include journalists or scholars such as Jennifer Kibbe (2004), Sean Naylor (2005), and Jeremy Scahill (2013).

If accepted by the community, there is always the risk that such outsiders will become co-opted if they begin to identify with the language, culture, values, norms, and totems of the special operations community, potentially compromising their ability to look at the subject as objectively as possible. Authors of pure theory on the nature of special operations must be credible within the special operations community for their ideas to be even considered, as such ideas have no immediate, practical applicability. In addition, a theory based on critical study and analysis, particularly from an outsider, that challenges or overturns established tribal lore, beliefs, or myths, will in all likelihood lead to the idiomatic baby being thrown out with its bathwater. Pragmatic theory, particularly one useful in conceptualizing or helping solve the tactical, operational, or organizational problems of the tribe or subtribe, will be the most welcomed but will also likely have the shortest life span—as context changes and individual and collective interest in its subject subsides, as the frenzy and subsequent decline of interest in counterinsurgency throughout the wider Department of Defense suggests. There is a significant danger for the theorist in chasing intellectual fashion or fads.

The third individual impediment to theory is one common to all human endeavors: time. At the risk of overgeneralizing and oversimplifying, creating theory simply takes time. Time is necessary to read widely and deeply to better understand events and phenomena to place them in their appropriate context, as well as explore other related fields. The creation of models and

hypotheses requires inquiry, investigation, and some level of experimentation to get right. Data must be gathered, sorted, and analyzed, all of which takes time. Although it is seemingly an old saw, a theorist must spend time reflecting and ruminating in the attempt not merely to categorize various phenomena or elements but relate them together, explain those connections and their importance clearly and concisely through a set of logically consistent propositions, as well as connect them to other fields of study. Carl von Clausewitz’s *On War*, required reading in American and other staff and war colleges, was the product of 14 years of writing, reflection, and revision and was still incomplete at the time of the author’s death. Individuals often undertake pure theory largely for altruistic reasons, in the pursuit of greater knowledge or understanding or because they relish the intellectual challenge theory presents. Pragmatic theory seeks to find solutions often because the problem set is discrete, there is a requirement to find an answer, or for other more specific individual or institutional reasons.

Institutions almost never create theory, but they can establish internal or external requirements for theory. Internal institutional requirements for theory often result from recent operational failure or institutional uncertainties about the future. The first step is the capturing and digesting of lessons learned, followed by review of doctrine or the creation of new concepts of operations based on new techniques or emerging technology. When the technology is insufficiently mature or the future particularly uncertain, theory is created to fill the void and can influence doctrine. The particularly rich military theoretical debates in the Soviet Union in the wake of the unsuccessful Soviet-Polish War of 1920, but before the full potential of mechanizing armies was evident, are one example. The writings of Mikhail Tukhachevskii, G. Isserson, and V. I. Triandafillov influenced the writing of the highly influential Soviet doctrine for combined arms used prior to and during the Second World War, the Provisional Field Regulations for the Red Army 1936 (PU 36). The external institutional requirement for military theory is often tied to establishing or regaining lost political or organizational influence, armed service independence, or a greater share of the acquisitions budget. The primary audience Mahan’s (1890) *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* was not naval officers in pursuit of their education, even though Mahan based his writing on lectures for students. Rear Admiral Stephen Luce charged Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan with researching and writing on sea power throughout history and gave his subordinate 10 months to read widely on the subject prior to showing up to lecture (Seager, 1977, pp. 164–165, 174). The ultimate rationale for Mahan’s writing, however, was the creation of a comprehensive work that would convince the American public and members of U.S. Congress that a strong, modern navy was vital to the future growth and success of the nation (Crowl, 1986, pp. 462–468, 470–472).

Institutional impediments of theory are related to, but differ in degree and kind from, the individual ones discussed here. Large bureaucratic organizations based on hierarchy, such as the military, are conservative in outlook, as well as slow to change, and are much less receptive to new ideas. The innovation characteristic of special operations at the tactical and operational levels of war reflects the level of trust more senior leaders have in the skill and ability of the forces to conduct often risky missions with a high degree of success. With few exceptions, however, special operations organizations succumb to many of the same unflattering bureaucratic characteristics of their conventional counterparts at the acquisitions, force development and management, and senior command level (component and unified command level). Such characteristics include infighting, jockeying for influence with more senior leaders, protection of

budget and span of control at the expense of others, and in some cases, needless prevarication, to name a few.

Authors of theory, particularly those not from the special operations community, should be aware of the dangers involved before they navigate potentially treacherous institutional waters. The reception within the Royal Navy of Julian Corbett's (1988) theoretical work, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, is both useful and instructive. Corbett trained as a barrister but had little success as an author of historical biography until he turned his attention to naval biography. His earliest works, including a two-volume biography of Lord Horatio Nelson, brought him plaudits and the opportunity to teach naval officers first at Greenwich and later at Portsmouth. Corbett developed a reputation as a fine lecturer of considerable knowledge and intellect who at times went above the heads of his students. While developing his lectures Corbett was drawn to the writing and ideas of von Clausewitz. Corbett's training as a lawyer served him well as a theorist in his ability to construct a logically deep and well-reasoned argument for his case based on overwhelming evidence. Corbett (1988) turned a short instructional pamphlet into his theoretical masterwork, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, over the course of six years.

In *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* Corbett challenged the prevailing Mahanian notion of offensive naval action to the exclusion of all else. Corbett linked maritime commerce to the health and welfare of a maritime nation, and therefore the primary role of naval forces was to ensure sea lines of communication remained open. Naval forces could protect sea lines of communication in a variety of ways depending on the object of the war and the character of its opponent. Corbett (1988) reasoned that, in some cases, defensive action and dispersal of naval forces to protect commerce was preferable to concentration and offensive action against the enemy fleet (pp. 89–152). For a number of Royal Navy officers, raised in the tradition of Francis Drake and Horatio Nelson, many of the ideas in Corbett's theory were tantamount to heresy.

Corbett stayed true to his intellectual principles in the crafting of his theory but paid a heavy price personally for challenging the cherished canon of the Royal Navy. Those outside the Royal Navy, with some exceptions, praised Corbett's reasoning and the comprehensiveness of his theory. Reviewers from within the Royal Navy, however, were anything but kind. He was attacked personally in a number of reviews by authors, some of whom hid behind pseudonyms, who questioned the ideas of a civilian who had never served in uniform: "His audience [for lectures at the Royal Navy War College] has usually treated his amateur excursions into the subject good naturedly; nevertheless his presumption has been resented . . . [and] his opinion on strategy was of no concern to his listeners because as a civilian he was obviously incompetent to assess at their proper value the influences which purely naval considerations had on the problems that he was gratuitously attempting to solve" (Grove, 1988, p. xl). In subsequent years, the blame for the unsatisfactory outcome of the Battle of Jutland (1916) was placed squarely at Corbett's feet. Subsequent work as an official historian, first of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) and later of the Royal Navy, prevented Corbett from returning to and revising *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* when it was republished. Stung and haunted by the criticism, and constantly at work, Corbett died of a heart attack in 1922 (Shurman, 1965, p. 150).

SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS THEORY

The preceding section has looked at the various individual and institutional impediments to the writing and adoption of theory in a general sense. The article now turns more specifically to special operations and the challenges they pose to theory in the specific sense. Special operations, for the purposes of this article, are “unconventional actions against enemy vulnerabilities in a sustained campaign, undertaken by specially designated units [SOF], to enable [military or other governmental] operations and/or resolve economically politico-military problems at the operational or strategic level that are difficult or impossible to accomplish with [military or other government] forces alone” (Kiras, 2006, p. 5; the original parentheses contained the term *conventional* to describe forces, which limited the scope of my original enquiry). There are a number of key attributes about special operations that are implicit from this definition and other analysis:

- They are small-scale actions that can have disproportionate effects relative to their size and scale but lack sufficient mass to achieve decisive effects on their own.
- They are enablers for other actions operationally and strategically—conventional, other government department and agencies (individually or integrated), proxies, and/or host nation forces—often by setting the conditions for the success of future operations but cannot resolve problems at the level of strategy by themselves.
- They have a relationship, but not a unique one, to time against an adversary by speeding up or slowing down the tempo of conflict, often to buy strategic time and space but also to wrest the initiative from an adversary.
- They have strategic utility primarily by providing national security leaders and commanders with appealing economy of force options, because of their high degree of success, with immediate results, relative to other military options (Gray, 1996).
- Their use conforms to, and is shaped by, the orientation of strategy and policy and should be tailored to meet the unique policy demands of the era (Kiras, 2006, pp. 112–113; Gray, 1999, p. 3).

The sum of these qualities and characteristics is that special operations are a useful tool for political and military leaders because they appear to address immediate problems successfully and economically. In the current context, the value of special operations to U.S. policymakers lies in their ability to provide both immediate, high-profile success or sustained, sub rosa action to contain, harass, disrupt, and harry an adversarial or enemy state, but most often sub-state actors who present “a continuing or imminent threat to the American people” (Obama, 2013).

Strategic value or utility, however, does not translate to a need for theory. Indeed a theory of special operations is unnecessary for a number of reasons. First, special operations derive their value and utility only in comparison to other options available. In other words, special operations are useful relative to other options—they are smaller, more economical, and often have immediate or unobservable effects relative to law enforcement, intelligence, military, or development operations. Second, at the level of pure theory, special operations are therefore not so unique from their root phenomena—war, conflict, and espionage—as to warrant a theory of their own (for an opposing viewpoint, see Marsh, Kenny, and Joslyn’s contribution to the current volume). More pragmatic or practical military theories have been developed to identify the

unique attributes of military actions within different operating environments or domains, such as the sea or the air. Special operations, as a subset of war, conflict, and espionage, should work within all operating environments—and indeed they provide much of their operational value in performing in the spaces between such environments—but do not need a domain-specific, much less a cross-domain theory (Poole, 2011, p. 12). In sum, a special operations theory is unnecessary because existing theories on war, military operations, and conflict, including those in the wheelhouse of SOF, such as revolution, terrorism, insurgency, and coup d'état, are already sufficient to describe the role of special operations within them (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; della Porta, 2013; Horgan, 2014; Kalyvas, 2006; Simpson, 2012; Malkasian, 2013; Serena, 2014). Rather than enhancing our understanding of war, conflict, or military operations, a special operations theory is likely to subdivide the field of study so finely as to evaluate and explain the unique aspects of a tree with little regard for the metaphorical forest or ecosystem. If the library of current joint doctrine, some 47 separate volumes in all, offers any insights for specific theory, it is that enthusiasm to codify subfields often comes at the expense of the collective, root phenomena.¹

Most special operators are unlikely to be interested in or welcome a theory of what they do—special operations—particularly if such a theory asks uncomfortable questions. At the simplest level, theory should serve as an unconstrained and critical enquiry to divine the nature of a phenomenon under investigation. In addition, theory should educate and inform by providing answers to a phenomenon that largely begin with the question “why?”—a point for military professionals made forcefully by Fuller (1926, p. 40). A theory of special operations should seek answers to difficult questions by challenging core assumptions based on logical reasoning and investigating them through rigorous study and analysis in depth. Consider the following short list of potential questions:

- While desirable, can a theory of special operations bridge wartime and peacetime activities, and military and paramilitary activity? (Jogerst, 2012, p. 133)
- When have special operations campaigns been effective? When have they been ineffective or failed? What is the basis for measurement of the effectiveness of special operations campaigns and are sufficient data available to assess? Have special operations succeeded operationally but failed strategically, or vice versa? And if so, why?
- What core special operations roles and missions should be added, altered, or dropped for SOF to remain “special”? For example, is unconventional warfare useful or practical for Western democracies in the 21st century? Should it become virtual instead as technology and society change? If so, should the first SOF truth—“Humans are more important than hardware”—be rewritten?

Special operators, in contrast, are first and foremost uniformed pragmatists. The life of most special operators is in the pursuit of answers to questions that begins with “what” and “how” instead. What sets special operators apart from their conventional counterparts is not their tasks, which could be done by other forces, but rather performing them to a high standard in challenging conditions, which comes through selection, conditioning, rehearsal, and practical training (Kiras, 2011, p. 83). Much of what allows special operations to succeed involves doing what was once thought impractical or impossible through highly specific information, unorthodox solutions to problems, and a high degree of tactical autonomy and flexibility. For the special operator, theory should be pragmatic in nature and inform what to do to defeat current and future

threats, how to train and prepare, as well as provide examples and lessons from the experience of others to better inform their craft. Such theory, as mentioned previously, will have a limited shelf life indeed.

Those special operators who are interested in theory for institutional reasons are where the primary danger of a special operations theory lies. Pure theory will likely be co-opted to suit the needs of the institution in a way similar to how first the Prussian and later the Imperial German Army picked through von Clausewitz for quotes from his pragmatic theory about battle that supported contemporary thinking and reinforced collective biases and preferences without engaging meaningfully with his ideas. Even worse, practitioners might try to apply pure theory, as was the case with bargaining and coercion theory in Vietnam (Moyar, 2006, p. 306). For this reason, giving the special operations community an externally produced pure theory, based on critical enquiry and analysis, is akin to “allowing a child to play with a razor blade.” Pure theory on or related to special operations may not even be read much less favorably received, given the investment in time to draw from substantive scholastic wells.

Institutional imperatives within the special operations community, for reasons outlined here, will argue against both deep analysis and critical enquiry in favor of prevailing notions, established history and lore, and historical roles and missions. Such notions include the “SOF Truths” of the special operations community as a whole and the roles and missions central to the function and identity of a number of the service component commands, such as the Army Special Operations Command, Naval Special Warfare Command, Air Force Special Operations Command, and the Marine Special Operations Command. Many of these will form the departure point for and connective tissue of a theory that validates the special operations community in its quest to demonstrate its utility and value, and expand its budget, prestige, and influence. Institutional motivations associated with expansion will necessarily influence or even drive the logic and direction of a theory, to show special operations in the best light possible. An institutionally driven theory of special operations, especially one underpinned by a concept such as “SOF power,” will likely fall prey, by accident or design, to the central fallacy of Mahan’s work on sea power: “Mahan, it must be concluded, was consistently guilty of what David Hackett Fisher calls ‘the reductive fallacy [that] reduces complexity to simplicity, or diversity to uniformity’ by confusing *a* necessary cause with *the* sufficient cause” (Crowl, 1986, p. 454).

An emergent theory of special operations, or SOF power, particularly one sponsored by the special operations community, is an indicator of an expansion of bureaucratic confidence and political influence. SOF and special operations continue to captivate the public imagination and are the “force of choice” for policymakers against contemporary irregular threats, adding to this institutional sense of confidence. Special operations leaders have used this to good effect, to expand budget and manpower and strengthen connections with agencies, departments, and Congress (Pincus, 2013). With such confidence comes the temptation to increase bureaucratic power and authority and expand political influence. Representative theories written in support of service expansion or independence, such as those of A. T. Mahan, Giulio Douhet, and William Mitchell, served their institutional and political purposes admirably.

Such theories had negative consequences as well. At the institutional level, a theory that helps increase institutional prestige and influence is embraced wholeheartedly in the absence of further evidence for a variety of individual and organizational reasons. Propositions within a theory

become elevated to principles and a substitute for thought, rather than spurring it on, as first concepts of operations and later doctrine are built on unstable theoretical ground. Once embraced, a theory is often distilled down, and many of its central ideas can quickly become dogma or orthodoxy within the institution. This can lead to groupthink about special operations and can create the potential for future operational or strategic surprise or shock as reactions by competent opponents challenge initial theoretical assumptions. On an individual level, questioning the core assumptions of such a theory is tantamount to sacrilege and a sure way to have one's loyalty to the institution become suspect. The path to success within the institution lies in adherence to, and being a proponent of, the established institutional canon. There are few quicker paths to being marginalized, persecuted as Corbett was, or even excommunicated than by questioning the fiat of Rome.

CONCLUSION

Writing a decade before the creation of the U.S. Special Operations Command, Eliot Cohen (1978) offered a conclusion about the dangers elite military units, such as SOF, posed to democratic societies:

To sum up: elite units of the guerrilla, counterinsurgent, and commando type offer politicians in democracies both a tool of policy and a source of fantasy. When elite units are used for purposes that are not really defensible in military terms, a number of effects harmful to military efficiency occur. For the most part, however, we can rely on the natural proclivities of the regular military and defense bureaucracies to squelch overeager elite units. Even so, democratic politicians should resist the temptations offered by elite units. Without such restraint the defense of a modern democracy can only suffer. (pp. 101–102)

Although written in a much different context and time, Cohen's warning touches upon a number of the issues related to an institutionally driven theory for special operations. As with SOF, a theory of special operations is appealing for a variety of reasons, but left unchecked it can also propagate or create myths about special operations. More worrisome, a theory of special operations can very easily complement the ambitions of senior special operations leaders, or the institution as a whole, and take on a political life of its own. To paraphrase Viscount Slim, the rush to form special operations theory may arise from confused thinking on what are, or are not, normal operations of war, conflict, and espionage.

NOTE

1. I owe the insight on joint doctrine to discussions with Richard Basehart and Tom Miller.

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SO What? The Value of Scientific Inquiry and Theory Building in Special Operations Research

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The authors argue that the pursuit of theory is required for a scientifically-rigorous body of research on special operations. Following a review of the nature of theory and its role in the study of war and warfare, the authors argue against the development of a single, over-arching meta-theory of special operations. Instead, they propose that efforts at theory development should be aimed at a level below that of special operations, and suggest that focusing on the doctrinal division between surgical strike and special warfare offers great promise for developing theories of special warfare and surgical strike.

Keywords: special operations, social science research, social science methodology, theory

Any field of scientific inquiry must begin either with a theory or with the search for a theory. To do otherwise is simply to attempt to accumulate information about a given subject without any particular purpose or rationale. The idea that the scientist is a completely objective individual who gathers facts without preconceived ideas about them is a myth. Worse still, without theory it is impossible to conduct science; without theory, the researcher becomes a cataloger of “facts” and empirical data devoid of meaning, but even these facts are imbedded with subjective meaning. Early in the development of the philosophy of science, Poincaré (1952) pointed out that “it is often said that experiments should be made without preconceived ideas. This is impossible. Not only would it make every experiment fruitless, but even if we wished to do so, it could not be done” (p. 143).

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Without theory, it is difficult, if not impossible, to define the parameters of a particular subject of inquiry. Moreover, how does a researcher know what information is relevant and what irrelevant (or perhaps less relevant)? Research by its very nature is a reductionist enterprise. It is an exercise in the economical use of energy, in this case, mental energy. The purpose of theory is to know something about something about which very little is known. Categorizations about armed groups, for instance, help us understand something about them, from their formation and organization to ultimate objectives. Defining the typology of insurgencies (e.g., foco, protracted people's war) provides valuable insight and understanding of their methodology and construct. Thus labeling one group a guerrilla force and another an unarmed group (based upon, it is hoped, sound intelligence about the groups under investigation) can help us understand something about their relationship to state authorities (adversarial) and the means they are likely to employ to achieve their objectives (violence and coercion in the former, nonviolent means in the latter). Thus, simply labeling groups leads to significant (theoretical) assumptions about them and their behavior.

The project of special operations research, therefore, demands theoretical assumptions not only to have greater clarity of our operating environment and our partners and adversaries but also to guide research, whether or not we choose to recognize it. Sound theory provides an understanding of phenomena, the potential to predict outcomes (albeit more often in probabilistic than deterministic fashion), and thus a degree of control or the ability to influence outcomes (Reynolds, 1971). Hence, our pursuit of special operations relevant theory seeks to enhance our understanding of the operational environment (political and social theories) but also to inform hypotheses regarding what actions to take to achieve a desired effect. Thus, special operations forces (SOF) planners formulate a theory of action (e.g., if we do this, then it will have the following effect) and use theory to inform action (understanding the system to take the best action).

Our objective here is to argue persuasively and soundly that the study of special operations must attempt to generate scientific knowledge (vice other forms of knowledge, especially "everyday knowledge") and that such an enterprise is inextricably linked to theorizing and theory building. Our argument, while not in disagreement with the early formulations of Clausewitz or the advances offered by Kuhn in the field of philosophy of science, is more firmly grounded in the recent arguments of Hoyningen-Huene (2013) and his work into the systematicity of science. After making what we hope is a strong case for scientific rigor and theorizing in the study of special operations, we then argue against the development of a single, overarching metatheory of special operations, proposing instead that, since special operations are in fact related to different phenomena, multiple theories are necessary to explain the subphenomena of special operations activities.

In addition, we suggest that much of this theoretical body of work already exists. We propose, as an initial attempt at theorizing, dividing special operations into surgical strike and special warfare missions. By dividing the phenomena under investigation in this way, we can more easily examine existing theories that are related to the more specific phenomena of surgical strike and special warfare activities. We do this by examining theories related to each, including the theory of relative superiority and social movement theory, respectively. While far from a comprehensive inventory or treatment of theories applicable to special operations, we believe these examples illustrate well the value and necessity of scientific rigor and theorizing in the study of special operations.

ON THEORY

The term “theory” is derived from the late Latin *theōria*, which itself originates from the Greek θεωρία, meaning “a looking at, viewing, contemplation, speculation, theory, also a sight, a spectacle.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which chronicles semantic changes in the English language, the modern use of the term probably developed from the medieval Latin translation of the works of Aristotle. This is supported by the fact that the first attestations of the word in English with the meaning related to “a system of ideas or statements held as an explanation or account of a group of facts or phenomena” only occurs in the late 17th century (Simpson & Weiner, 1989).

The world is infinitely complex, and every human being is bombarded daily with millions of facts, far too many for the human mind to capture, not to mention categorize. Humans thus select certain facts as having meaning and discard most of the others. Facts that have meaning have such due to their effect on the observer, either immediately or in the longer term, and with either minor significance or great significance. What theory does, at its most basic level, is link facts to these outcomes. For example, storm clouds approaching suggest the likelihood of rain. One need not understand meteorology to identify the cause-and-effect relationship between the appearance of storm clouds and an ensuing storm. In its most rudimentary form, this would constitute a theory of storms.

Moving from the physical world to the social world, similar primitive theories can be developed. A man getting up abruptly and storming over to another man should suggest that the first man is considering a violent engagement with the second. The facial expression, pace of movement, and physical posturing (these would all be indicators, or variables, if you will) would all suggest that he is preparing to engage in a fight. These facts then become meaningful in a way that humans will recognize, most often without even knowing they are making such connections, and may cause a reaction in the observers.

Over time, therefore, fact accumulation leads to the development of a body of knowledge that assists us in understanding, explaining, and predicting phenomena in the world around us. But some among us are better qualified, whether by training, experience, or simply the possession of keen skills of observation, to make more reliable and accurate assessments about the world and the various observable phenomena in it. Put in more sophisticated terms, theories are knowledge constructions about which there is relative consensus (or at least some movement toward consensus) among those competent (and in the case of more arcane material, trusted) to interpret the substance of the construction (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113).

As Kuhn made us aware several decades ago, however, sometimes that consensus breaks down, whether due to the accumulation of facts (observed phenomena) that do not fit the existing paradigm (anomalies) or because a new explanation has been developed that gains adherents from both new members of the scientific profession as well as the established scientific community (Kuhn, 1962). These resulting scientific revolutions lead either to the emergence of a new paradigm or to a division between scholars who adhere to different paradigms, and then engage in research working under the theoretical assumptions of each in a sort of competition to determine which paradigm more closely approximates reality. Scientific revolutions, however, are about theory; the robustness of their

assumptions, their accordance with observable phenomena, and the logic of their explanations.

While Kuhn's (1962) model of scientific revolutions was a great contribution to the field, one of its weaknesses was in defining just what science is (pp. 2, 13). Many of his examples of scientific revolutions were in fact transitions from pre-science (such as alchemy) to science (in this instance, modern chemistry). A recent valuable contribution to the philosophy of science is Hoyningen-Huene's (2013) work on the nature of science. Hoyningen-Huene argues that systematicity—the degree to which an investigation is systematic—is at the core of all science, with his key thesis being that scientific knowledge is more systematic than everyday knowledge (of the primitive variety discussed previously). These differences are why scientific knowledge is more highly valued and what make it so instrumentally valuable. Systematicity is a complex notion, and Hoyningen-Huene uses the word as a technical term, examining nine qualities that constitute dimensions or aspects of systematicity.

Of Hoyningen-Huene's (2013) points, the most relevant to our concerns here is that scientists (and here we include scholars engaged in special operations research) are systematic in the way they collect data relevant to their inquiries (pp. 138–139). So even though someone outside of science may claim to be exerting serious effort in collecting data on a given research topic, scientists do this much more thoroughly and in a structured and systematic manner. In addition, scientists/scholars deserve to be recognized as authorities in their specialties, according to Hoyningen-Huene (2013), because their research is conducted systematically and they present their findings in a far more systematic way than do laypeople. This devotion to systematicity grounds their authority. Without a theory to guide the researcher, however, systematic collection of data and presentation of findings become near impossible.

While it is hoped that the discussion thus far has convinced the reader of the necessity of systematic scientific inquiry and the importance of theory, we are left with the task of more precisely defining theory. Many scholars have attempted to chart these murky waters, while others have ignored this challenge or offered very loose definitions (see King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994). Those who have made valuable attempts at it include Mouton (2001, p. 198) and Danermark, Ekstrom, Jakobsen, and Karlsson (2001, p. 115). The definition of theory that is most often cited, however, is that offered by Kerlinger (1973) and more recently Kerlinger and Lee (2000). They state: "A theory is a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena" (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000, p. 11). They further elaborate on this definition, providing greater detail about what each component means:

1. A theory is a set of propositions consisting of defined and interrelated constructs (concepts);
2. A theory sets out the interrelations among a set of variables (constructs), and in so doing, presents a systematic view of the phenomena described by the variables;
3. A theory explains phenomena; it does so by specifying which variables are related to which variables and how they are related, thus enabling the researcher to predict from certain variables to certain other variables. (p. 11)

In more simple terms, a good theory helps define concepts, explains how they are related to one another, and offers the ability to predict. This final point is where most social scientists get hung up, due to the difference between what is meant by prediction in the scientific world and in the everyday world. For the purposes of special operations, we suggest that, rather than prediction, actions informed by sound theory will have outcomes that are more predictable and controllable than those taken without a guiding theory. Theory aids our understanding of the operational environment but also helps us shape that same environment and move it toward a desired future environment.

A THEORY OF WAR AND THEORIES OF WARFARE

War is a social phenomenon. It has occurred since earliest recorded history, in one form or another. If war is understood as organized violence with a political aim, this can be traced back to our earliest ancestors. As a social phenomenon, it is amenable to analytical investigation and, if underlying patterns are observed, to theorizing. Such a theory would seek to describe the phenomenon, define its component parts, and explain its occurrence.

Perhaps the most significant work on war is, of course, Carl von Clausewitz's (1984) *On War*. There has been some debate on whether Clausewitz set out to develop a theory of war (Calhoun, 2011, p. 35). We take a strong stand on this point. Yes, he absolutely set out to write a theory of war as a phenomenon, as well as develop theoretical contributions to the engagement of warfare. This was certainly his intention, clearly stated in Chapter 2 of *On War*. But to examine Clausewitz as a theorist and his *On War* as offering a theory of war, one must understand two things related to the time he was writing and the paradigm under which he was working. The first is that "theory" (*die Theorie*) for Clausewitz meant something other than what we mean by the word *theory* here (as discussed previously). In the early 19th century, in German, *die Theorie* was defined as "view or understanding of general truths ... in contrast to practice" or "an association of general truths of a manner or type"; these are the definitions offered by Adelung (1811) in the authoritative German dictionary of Clausewitz's time, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart* (pp. 577–578). This meaning of the word *theory* predates the meaning we are using here (as an explanation for an observed phenomenon). Clausewitz's attack on theory, therefore, is an attack on theory qua "principles, rules, and even systems for the conduct of war" (Clausewitz, 1966, p. 179) of the sort proposed by Antoine-Henri Jomini, not on theory as an explanation of a phenomenon based upon analysis.¹

Second, Clausewitz's *weltanschauung* was powerfully affected by the work of Georg Hegel, a German philosopher of the late 18th and early 19th centuries who argued that the course of history was a back-and-forth between opposing structures, beginning with the thesis and then with the emergence of its antithesis, before the two meld into a synthesis (which will, in turn, become a new thesis). Without understanding this Hegelian dialectic and its centrality to Clausewitz's thinking, it's nearly impossible to understand what he is trying to express in Chapter 2 of *On War* regarding his critique of theory.

With these two points of clarification, we can see how Clausewitz was attempting to develop a theory of war and what that theory entailed. In his discussion on the "efforts to establish a positive doctrine" (*Lehre*; Howard and Paret [Clausewitz, 1984] confusingly translate this here

as “theory”), we see clearly what he was against developing: a doctrine that prescribed “principles, rules, and even systems for the conduct of war” (Clausewitz, 1966, p. 179). He sharply rejected this idea because, as he rightly recognized, war has no definite limits, while attempts to describe the phenomenon would be limited (he says “circumscribed”) by nature of a “synthesis,” here referring to his Hegelian method of reconciling theory and praxis. Here Clausewitz is far ahead of his time. Although held back by his embrace of Hegelianism, he is right to accept that such a definition of theory would be limited by the fact that theories of phenomena are developed based upon phenomena that have already been observed (in this case, past wars). But not every kind of war has been fought (and of course, never will), thus any positive theory would be useless, if not dangerous, for it would be prescribing methods for the conduct of war based solely on lessons drawn from observed past wars, which could be wholly inapplicable to a future war. Adhering to “principles, rules, and . . . systems of conduct” derived from previous wars and built into a doctrine to be employed in a new and different environment of warfare would be a folly and limit the commander by not allowing him to employ his “genius” in battle.

Clausewitz then summarizes many of the prescripts for the conduct of war that at the time were being understood as “theory,” including superior numbers, basing, and interior lines. He recognizes these as valuable observations (they are progress in their analytical part), but when it came to Hegelian synthesis, melding theory and praxis, such “precepts and rules” were “absolutely useless” (Clausewitz, 1984, p. 136).

After examining the chief components of war, Clausewitz concludes that such a “positive theory” (again, one of “principles, rules, and . . . systems for the conduct of war”) is impossible. He then argues that “theory must be of the nature of observation, not of doctrine.” Here he investigates what he calls a “second opening for the possibility of a theory” of war, with theory as a “point of view” that does not prescribe directions for action. Rather, he argues that theory as an analytical investigation of military history can be used to develop an objective form of knowledge, which can then be brought over into the subjective employment of skill in action (Clausewitz, 1984, p. 141).

The type of theory Clausewitz wants to develop is one that investigates the “subjects which constitute war,” breaks down the phenomenon into its component parts, and explains their properties and effects. If it can bring critical investigation to bear on the subject of war, then it has fulfilled its duties as a theory. It becomes, then, “a guide to anyone who wants to learn about war from books; it will light his way, ease his progress, train his judgment, and shield him from error” (Clausewitz, 1966, p. 188). It is difficult to refute that, while rejecting a positive theory of war, Clausewitz is offering his readers a theory of war in line with our contemporary understanding of the role of theory in the social sciences.

This leads us to perhaps a more contentious issue: defining Clausewitz’s theory of war. This actually is not entirely pertinent to our argument, and would take a lengthy discussion to engage with any degree of adequacy. Very simply, however, Clausewitz (1984) defined war “as an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will” (p. 75). War, moreover, is always an instrument of policy, and politics governs what is possible and desirable in war. Politics not only determines the aim, it also *limits* it. This limitation prevents war from reaching its theoretical (again, in a Hegelian sense) extremes (pp. 605–606). The crux of Clausewitz’s theory of war for the social scientist is his assertion that “wars vary based upon their motives and the situations that give rise to them” (p. 88). We thus have a phenomenon defined (war); its relationship to other variables

specified (war subordinate to politics); and an explanation for the variance in the occurrence of the phenomenon.

Viewed this way, Clausewitz offers a very parsimonious theory of war. Of course, Clausewitz also included many other factors (e.g., fog, friction, genius, enmity, passion) in his theory of war, but their role in his theory is beyond the scope of our discussion here. By pointing to war as an extension of politics, Clausewitz brilliantly captures the political and human dimensions of war, rather than the “scientific” and physical aspects that his contemporaries were focusing on.

By subsuming war beneath politics, moreover, Clausewitz further brought our attention to something that often confuses students of military theory: the fact that theories, as explanations of phenomena, are superordinate and subordinate to other theories that seek to explain phenomena at higher or lower levels of abstraction. Thus, while a theory of war may be subsumed by a theory of politics, theories of warfare, such as theories of air power, sea power, and special warfare, are subordinate to a more general theory of war. Theories of warfare, therefore, are subordinate to a theory of war and are *necessary* to explain types of warfare, a task not within the purview of a theory of war (though Clausewitz certainly tries to develop a few theories of warfare as well, including those related to tactics, the strength of the defense, and so on).

Of importance for the current argument here, however, is the assertion that theories of warfare are necessary to explain the phenomena upon which they focus, phenomena below the level of war in its entirety. No one would seriously argue that Mahan’s (1890) theory of the influence of sea power upon history, Douhet’s (1942) theory of air power, or Fuller’s (1945; Great Britain War Office, 1927) theory of the employment of armor were of no value to the understanding of these phenomena, or that they offered a theory of war in its totality. Likewise, there should be little question that theories of special operations are necessary and useful as well.

TOWARD A THEORY OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS

It is our hope that by this point we have convinced readers of the necessity of pursuing theory construction in regard to special operations. Unlike theorizing in regard to air power, sea power, or armor, however, the attempt to develop a theory of special operations is highly problematic because special operations include a very wide and varied combination of mission sets, ranging from direct action to humanitarian assistance. The category of special operations, therefore, from a social science perspective, is too broad perhaps to develop a single theory, certainly for the construction of a parsimonious theory. We believe this is where previous attempts at developing an overarching metatheory of special operations have gone off course. This is because special operations are quite distinct (though interrelated) *phenomena*, not a single phenomenon. So a theory of special operations should look more like Mahan’s theory of sea power and Douhet’s theory of air power than Clausewitz’s theory of war, because like sea power and air power, special operations are a subset of war, a subphenomenon of a larger phenomenon. In addition, even these theories of warfare were limited in scope and did not attempt to develop an overarching theory of the entire relevant domain. Mahan’s theory of sea power was focused on decisive battles at sea, while Douhet focused on strategic bombing. Similarly, we believe it would be useful to develop theories of special operations focused on specific mission sets rather than in its entirety.

We believe one method of addressing this situation that holds promise is the distinction within current U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) doctrine between special warfare activities and surgical strike activities. Indeed, the division of special operations into these subcategories was an attempt by USASOC to develop a usable construct for delineating between two rather distinct types of special operations. The construct makes sense for more than simply a planning model—it is useful from the theoretical perspective as well. The phenomena in which activities such as foreign internal defense (FID), stability operations, and unconventional warfare (UW) are associated share much in common with one another and less in common with surgical strike activities (though they may, of course, be used in combination). For our purposes here, therefore, which is to explore the value of theory for special operations, we look at these as being related to distinct phenomena and therefore apply theory that can help explain these respective phenomena.

Special Warfare and Social Movement Theory

Special warfare includes “activities that involve a combination of lethal and nonlethal actions taken by a specially trained and educated force that has a deep understanding of cultures and foreign language, proficiency in small-unit tactics, and the ability to build and fight alongside indigenous combat formations in a permissive, uncertain, or hostile environment” (ADRP 3-05). These activities include irregular warfare (IW), FID, counterinsurgency (COIN), stability operations, and UW. These are, of course, also discrete phenomena, but we believe they share a sufficient number of factors to make a theory of special warfare possible and valuable. There is also undeniable parsimony in this definition, as it firmly anchors the “specialness” of special warfare to the selected, trained, educated, and culturally and linguistically astute men and women that comprise SOF. Here, however, the formulation of theory hits a roadblock, at least with respect to deductive reasoning. Are the lethal and nonlethal actions referenced in this definition so general and the environments alluded to so diverse that a unitary theory of special warfare is simply undesirable or even impossible?

Fortunately, doctrine and history provide some additional insight into how U.S. military institutions have constructed the meaning of special warfare by subsuming specific phenomena under its purview. ADRP 3-05 clarifies that “special warfare is an umbrella term that represents special operations forces conducting combinations of unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, and/or counterinsurgency through and with indigenous forces or personnel in politically sensitive and/or hostile environments.” Such a definition is conceptually close to the definition formulated by former Secretary of the Army Elvis J. Stahr in 1962, when he framed special warfare as “all military and paramilitary measures and activities related to unconventional warfare, counterinsurgency, and psychological warfare” (qtd. in Paddock, 2002, p. 2). In terms of history, Paddock’s (2002) excellent history of U.S. Army Special Warfare outlines the psychological and guerilla warfare origins of special warfare. Arguably, U.S. Army Special Forces have conceived of special warfare as consisting of guerilla warfare, insurgency (or revolutionary war), and their antitheses (Joslyn, 2015, pp. 10–24). More recently, the role of special operations engagement in Phase Zero has been discussed and illuminated by Col. Brian S. Petit (2013). These arguments suggest that, as currently constructed by the U.S. military, special warfare involves the phenomena of guerilla warfare, psychological warfare, revolutionary war, civic action (or civil–military operations), and military engagement.

At the center of special warfare theory, therefore, is the role of social groups who organize to bring about a change in political power, usually through violent means. The social scientific literature on this topic is vast, and its classic works have been studied for decades and have formed much of the basis of U.S. Army special warfare doctrine, going back all the way to FM 31-21 and FM 31-22 and present in today's FM 3-24. In its early days, however, there was significant confusion over certain terms and concepts. Doctrine alternated between using the terms *guerilla warfare* and *insurgency* to explain such types of warfare, often confusing the two. But early on Huntington (1962) offered a very useful clarification of these phenomena, arguing that guerilla warfare was a form of warfare, while insurgency and revolutionary war were types of war. Specifically, Huntington defined guerilla warfare as “a form of warfare by which the strategically weak side assumes the tactical offensive in selected forms, times, and places,” while describing revolutionary war as “a struggle between a nongovernmental group and a government in which the latter attempts to destroy the former by some or all means at its command, and the nongovernmental group attempts by all the means at its command to replace the government in some or all of its territory” (1962, pp. xv–xxii). Huntington's definitions provide much-needed theoretical distinction on a subject that, at least in the English-speaking world, is fraught with terminology that often confuses methods and outcomes.

Rather than constructing a theory of special warfare on warfare itself, we believe a theory of special warfare should be based on the description and explanation of how SOF plan, construct, and utilize functional networks of human relationships to effect the mobilization and demobilization of collective actors operating within political opportunity structures and cultural contexts to achieve political objectives. The formulation of such a theory faces two equally daunting challenges: It must (a) account for how relatively limited means can be employed to achieve strategic ends and (b) unify diverse and often (purposefully) ambiguous SOF activities. We suggest here that the social science literature on contentious politics, a synthesis of revolutionary conflict and social movement theories, provides a rich point of departure for systematic and scientific discourse aimed at constructing a theory of engagement and special warfare. This argument is not tantamount to the exposition of a fully developed or formed theory of special warfare but is instead intended to elicit critical discourse and inspire research that is purposefully systematic and thus, at least in comparison to the compilation of everyday special warfare knowledge, scientific (Hoyningen-Huene, 2013, pp. 14–27). To that end, in this section we attempt to tie together the theoretical contributions of contentious politics with the activities of special warfare and outline how the theory of contentious politics might contribute to the development of special warfare theory.

Revolutionary Conflict and Social Movement Theory

From 1960 to the turn of the century, theories of revolutions and social movements were, with few exceptions, divided between scholars who alternately emphasized the explanatory primacy of structure, agency, and culture. The diffusion of social unrest that swept the world in the wake of World War II and reached its zenith in the turbulent 1960s led to the explosive development of cohesive sociological studies in revolutionary conflict theory (Gurr, 1980, p. 16). As social unrest diffused to the Global North in the form of student protests, labor strikes, civil rights, feminism, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) movements, scholars also developed a distinguishable body of social movement theory (SMT).

The structural schools of revolutionary conflict and social movements hold that the broad social, economic, and political constraints that contextualize actors are the key determinants of conflict and outcomes. The scholarly Marxist perspectives of revolutionary conflict offered by Barrington Moore Jr. and Eric Wolf and the political science perspective of Samuel Huntington are examples of early structuralist theories of contentious politics. The contributions of Theda Skocpol, Jack Goldstone, and Misagh Parsa are further examples of more recently developed structural theory. Structural approaches favor the use of comparative historical case studies and seek to distill general explanations from a small group of similar events. Many structural theorists have therefore sought to narrow their analyses by typifying contention as peasant revolution, social revolution, or great revolution. Criticisms of the structural school generally point out that these theories do not account for the strategic interaction of individual or collective agents. Furthermore, while they explain how revolutionary situations develop, they fail to account for revolutionary outcomes except in retrospect (Tilly, 1978, pp. 193–194).

The resource mobilization and rational choice approaches to revolutionary conflict and SMT have emphasized the agency of individuals or collectives in taking strategic action within contention. As such, resource mobilization and rational choice (RM/RC) scholars have highlighted the structuralist gap between revolutionary situations and revolutionary outcomes (Tilly, 1978, pp. 193–194). They have argued that while structure may indeed bound political opportunity, the motives and dynamics of agent behavior are the critical variables of contention (pp. 211–216). RM/RC theorists have often employed a mix of case studies, game theory models, and quantitative analysis to support their arguments. Ted Gurr, Charles Tilly, and Stathis Kalyvas have each proposed variants of RM/RC theory. Critics of RM/RC theory have often referenced the classic economic “free rider” problem of collective action, the problem of preference falsification, and the failure of RM/RC arguments to account for socially constructed identity in their particular logics (Olson, 1965, p. 2).

The third and most recently developed school of conflict and SMT is that of cultural framing. In contrast to scholarship that emphasizes macropatterns of structure or strategic behavior by collective or individual entities, the cultural framing perspective has sought to particularize conflict and protest by examining social construction processes at the microlevel (Noakes & Johnson, 2005, p. 1). Cultural framing scholars have pointed out that neither individual dissatisfaction nor the strategic mobilization of resources by groups provides a full picture of how conditions and potential yield either revolutionary or social movement outcomes. They have argued that revolutions and social movements require people to believe that collective action will deliver a desired goal commensurate with the risks that such activity entails. In essence, they have maintained that identity-based and rational decision making interact to mediate perceptions of opportunity and threat and inspire mobilization. This scholarship has suggested that analyzing cultural frames or framing processes yields insight into how constructed and communicated narratives resonate with particular audiences and inspire (or fail to inspire) collective action (p. 2). David A. Snow and William A. Gamson have provided complementary perspectives on different aspects of cultural framing. Criticisms of cultural framing have suggested that it is tantamount to ideology-based argumentation and thus difficult to empirically measure and troublesome to generalize into theory (Oliver & Johnson, 2005).

Contentious Politics

The scholarly field of contentious politics “brings together three familiar features of social life: contention, collective action, and politics” (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 7). This definition is ambitiously inclusive of nonlethal (strikes and social movements) and lethal (ethnic and religious conflict, civil war, and revolution) forms of nonroutine political action (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2009). At the center of contentious politics is political intercourse in which collective actors other than a government attempt to appropriate power and achieve specified claims.

As conceived of by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001), contentious politics is defined as consisting of public, collective claim making by collective actors on other collectives or on major political actors, when a government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a third party to claims (p. 5). The theory of contentious politics accepts the classic variables of structure, mobilization, and framing but seeks to examine the way these factors interact and to identify similar cause-effect relationships that occur across a broad spectrum of contention. Contentious politics perceives continuity between forms of violent and nonviolent contention as divergent as the French Revolution and the American civil rights movement (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2009; see also McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001, pp. 28–32).

To identify generalizable cause-effect relationships, contentious politics examines mechanisms or events that produce the same immediate effects over a broad range of circumstances (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 29). Combinations and sequences of mechanisms comprise processes that produce specified outcomes (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007, p. 29). Mechanisms and processes are located within episodes, bounded sequences of contentious interaction that can range from a series of protests or strikes to broad cycles of contention, such as the Arab Spring (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, pp. 36–38). McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow (2009, pp. 274–275) outline five (but do not constrain additional) mechanisms that illustrate reoccurring causal relationships:

- Brokerage—The production of a new connection between previously unconnected or weakly connected sites of contention
- Identity shift and boundary formation—The formation of collective identity by previously unconnected individuals with previously disparate social identities
- Co-optation—The incorporation of a previously excluded political actor into some center of political power
- Diffusion—The spread of a contentious performance, issue, or interpretive frame from one site to another
- Repression/facilitation—Action by an authority that increases or decreases the actual or potential cost of claim making

Contentious politics seeks to contextualize forms of contention within political opportunity structures or features of regimes (regular relations among governments, established political actors, outside political actors, and challengers) and institutions that facilitate or repress opportunities, repertoires, and performances of contention and affect their likely outcomes (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 45). The theory suggests that levels of political freedom and governing capacity within a regime broadly correlate to the likelihood and manifestations of contention (such as a social movement or an armed insurgency) (McAdam, Tilly, & Tarrow, 2001, pp. 72–88).

The theory also addresses contentious interaction principally through the mobilization and demobilization of collective actors and action. The process of mobilization is characterized by sequences of mechanisms such as identity shift, brokerage, the social appropriation of claim-making sites, and the diffusion of contentious repertoires that influence perceptions of opportunity for claim-making. Demobilization, on the other hand, is characterized by sequences that feature mechanisms of co-optation, defection, and increased repression.

If special warfare (and engagement, as warfare may not always be an appropriate or palatable term for SOF activities in Phase Zero) aims to catalyze, empower, or restrain indigenous actors to achieve shared strategic goals, then the social science perspective of contentious politics may have much to offer efforts to construct a theory of special warfare. Indeed, we believe that a great deal of hard-earned everyday knowledge regarding special warfare is highly supportive of this argument. SOF adages regarding the importance of humans over hardware, building rapport, winning hearts and minds, and identifying and gaining the cooperation of the “g-chief” (guerilla chief) all represent everyday special warfare knowledge aimed at building human networks to mobilize or demobilize collective actors in violent and nonviolent political contention. Perhaps SOF have actually evolved to address the key variables of contentious politics. SOF theater commands and organic intelligence capabilities observe and interpret diverse political opportunity structures. SOF units are capable of mobilizing or demobilizing collective actors as they build and fight alongside indigenous combat formations. SOF civil–military operations empower select collective actors and governments. SOF psychological operations interpret and amplify the resonance of cultural frames relative to collective action.

Surgical Strike, Relative Superiority, and Strategic Effect

While a theory of special warfare must explain how limited means can be employed to achieve shared strategic goals, a theory of relative superiority must describe the means by which SOF can apply numerically inferior forces to succeed in conducting surgical strike operations. As defined in ADRP 3-05, surgical strike is “the execution of activities in a precise manner that employ special operations in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover or damage designated targets, or influence adversaries and threats.” Missions such as counterterrorism, direct action, and special reconnaissance (including advanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance [ISR] capabilities developed to support SOF) are at the heart of surgical strike.

As Col (Ret.) David Maxwell (2013) has pointed out, the United States has “developed a surgical strike capability that is the envy of the world.” He continues that it “has a capability to find, fix, finish, exploit and analyze (F3EA) that has captured and killed numerous high value targets as well as disrupted and destroyed networks and cells conducting or threatening to conduct operations against U.S. interests.” This ability, we believe, significantly alters the nature of power in the international system, as other states seek to gain the status and capabilities that come from possession of such elite units and their ability to conduct missions such as surgical strike. This has led to a veritable proliferation of SOF across the globe over the past 20 years and is a trend that is likely to continue (Marsh and Kubiak, 2013).

Clearly there is a phenomenon of direct action missions of the type that Gray (1999) characterized as “handfuls of heroes on desperate ventures.” But is there a body of theoretical literature that deals with such phenomena? In fact, one of the earliest theories of special

operations, that of the theory of relative superiority, focuses almost explicitly on direct action missions that can be characterized as surgical strike operations. This theory, developed by then Lieutenant Commander William McRaven in his book *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*, posits that a numerically inferior number of special operators can achieve disproportionate results given that they accomplish relative superiority at a specific place and time by virtue of surprise, speed, and preparedness.

McRaven's work is the first durable theory of direct action and was based on careful research of case studies of several wartime raids by elite or specially selected troops. Through this research, he determined that if relative superiority is not achieved at the pivotal moment, or diminishes over time and is ultimately lost, the mission will likely fail. The "point of vulnerability" for any mission, he argued, is the point at which SOF meet enemy defenses or are detected in the approach to their objective. The "area of vulnerability" is a function of time spent in enemy territory beyond the point of vulnerability. The longer SOF spend on the objective, the more likely they are to become fixed and overwhelmed by enemy numerical superiority (McRaven, 1996).

McRaven's greatest contribution is perhaps the six principles of special operations through which planners and operators mitigate friction that would otherwise prevent mission success: simplicity, security, repetition, surprise, speed, and purpose (McRaven, 1996, p. 2). Applied properly, this theory should enable SOF to rapidly achieve a relative advantage against superior enemy positions by reducing the influence of friction for long enough to accomplish the mission.

At its core, McRaven's theory of relative superiority masterfully translates the Western tradition of maneuver warfare into a functional framework that SOF can use to apply inferior numbers but nonetheless mass combat power at a decisive point to overwhelm an enemy force. In essence, by employing cunning, achieving surprise, unifying forces in time, and concentrating forces in space, joint SOF can project temporary combined arms maneuver logic in places inaccessible to the massing of conventional combat power (Clausewitz, Book 3).

The long-term and big-picture utility of individual SOF surgical strikes aimed at sabotage, decapitation, or hostage rescue are often hotly debated. After all, in the context of a general war or even a global "long war" against violent extremists, can a single successful tactical mission really produce lasting strategic results? Operation Neptune Spear, the surgical strike operation that resulted in the death of Osama Bin Laden and dealt a serious blow to the Al Qaeda organization, can certainly be said to have had strategic consequences, but can an operation even of that significance have long-term strategic effects? How about others, not just those of USSOF employed beyond our borders but of foreign SOF attempting to achieve their own strategic objectives? Finally, are we on the verge of a phase transition in the world of warfare and international relations where such strikes may increase and become as commonplace as proxy wars were during the Cold War?

An alternative approach to surgical strike operations is that offered by James Kiras (2006), who sees the value in such operations not in any single successful mission, but in the ability of sustained, long-term special operations campaigns to erode the moral and material will of an adversary. In *Special Operations and Strategy*, Kiras (2006) asserts that special operations "consist of numerous small-scale activities that appear individually insignificant but improve strategic performance by eroding the material resources and moral resolve of an adversary cumulatively, in conjunction with or while supporting conventional forces." This erosion of will and material is what ultimately leads to the enemy's capitulation. Kiras is here clearly

focusing on surgical strike-type missions, not special warfare missions such as FID. This is clear by how he describes special operations as “unorthodox tactical actions for strategic effect” that exploit vulnerabilities to compensate for their numerical inferiority (Kiras, 2006). This success despite numerical inferiority is explained in the concept of relative superiority discussed previously: “The challenge in special operations is to do the impossible not once but repeatedly, to throw and keep an adversary off balance and continue to inflict moral and material damage out of proportion to the scale of their actions” (Kiras, 2006). This focus on moral and material attrition places little faith in achieving quick and decisive effects by attacking centers of gravity or critical vulnerabilities but instead advocates a steady erosion of the adversary’s will and capabilities. Unlike a strategy of annihilation, that of attrition is a “non-linear approach to achieving one’s political goals: it is characterized by shifts between battle and maneuver” and thus is a strategy of choice much like that of an insurgent (Kiras, 2006).

Yet another, though similar, approach is offered by Colin Gray (1996) in his *Explorations in Strategy*. Here Gray describes the contribution of special operations to campaign success in terms of two “master claims.” He asserts that the strategic utility of special operations lies in their ability to “achieve significant results with limited forces” and to “expand the options available to political and military leaders” (Gray, 1996, pp. 168, 174). These concepts can be described as *economy of force* and *expansion of choice*. Whether leveraging partners and proxies in a foreign internal defense or unconventional warfare campaign or conducting surgical strikes globally, special operations often achieve results that far exceed the resources committed. Similarly, by virtue of their small footprint and discreet, precise, and scalable nature, special operations provide decision makers with options they would not otherwise have, particularly in areas outside of declared theaters of armed combat. This could be conducting hostage rescue in a foreign country or setting conditions for the success of potential future operations. These claims are useful for understanding the value of special operations in achieving campaign objectives and for communicating to decision makers the strategic utility of special operations within the range of military options. While not only applicable to surgical strike operations, being equally applicable to special warfare, Gray’s theoretical insights certainly warrant inclusion in any theory of surgical strike.

CONCLUSION

Robert Spulak (2007), in his *A Theory of Special Operations*, posits that special operations are activities that achieve strategic effect but are so laden with Clausewitzian friction they are too risky for conventional forces to undertake. He further argues that their disproportionate number of high performers and unique characteristics is what allows SOF to contend with this friction. While we applaud such contributions to the development of a special operations theory, our purpose here was to attempt to contribute to theory development at a level below that of special operations in their entirety by focusing on the doctrinal division between surgical strike and special warfare. We believe this division is useful because special operations constitute a very broad and diverse range of activities, from kinetic action to humanitarian assistance—in other words, quite different phenomena. The search for an overarching theory of special operations, therefore, is highly problematic.

Putting aside the question of whether a theory of special operations is even necessary, our emphasis here has been on the argument that theories are required to explain phenomena and related concepts, so what we need are theories that explain more specific phenomena, such as surgical strike and special warfare operations. In addition, we tried to illustrate and survey some of the excellent research that is out there, either explicitly or as composite aspects of other theories (e.g., theories of unconventional warfare as correlates of social movement theory). Because special warfare both leverages insurgency to meet strategic objectives (e.g., UW) and assists allies in fighting insurgency (e.g., FID, COIN), it is useful to have a theoretical understanding of insurgency or social movements. Social movement theory offers a vast body of knowledge to the SOF planner to understand the operational environment, attempt to shape that environment, and to achieve a desired future environment. Likewise, the theory of relative superiority describes a means by which SOF can apply numerically inferior forces to succeed in conducting surgical strikes, again aiding the SOF planner in his efforts.

For a military planner (whether SOF or conventional force), a good theory provides an understanding of phenomena, the ability to predict outcomes, and a degree of control or perhaps influence. As quoted, Clausewitz (1966) saw great value in such theories, as they became “a guide to anyone who wants to learn about war from books; it will light his way, ease his progress, train his judgment, and shield him from error” (p. 188). In simple terms, he argued that “theory disciplines the mind of the commander” (p. 179). We believe, in today’s global operational and planning environment, theory aids not only the commander but his staff as well as they seek to translate the commander’s intent into plans and orders for the conduct of operations.

NOTE

1. The reader will notice that we switch between the authoritative German edition of Clausewitz, that of Werner Hahlweg (1966) and the popular English translation of Howard and Paret (1984). We use the latter in each case in which we feel that the translation is adequate; where we disagree we use our own translation based upon Hahlweg.

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Unique Capabilities of Women in Special Operations Forces

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Congress mandated that U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) adopt gender-neutral occupational performance standards by 2016, meaning that females will no longer be barred from applying to SOF's rigorous pipeline. In recent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, female enablers made significant, unique contributions to both conventional ground combat and SOF missions. Many of these unique contributions, such as the ability to interact with indigenous children and female adults forbidden by local customs or religious beliefs from interacting with male service members, were critical to mission success. In addition, women have been employed successively in SOF units worldwide. In other nations' militaries, the record has been more mixed—but mostly due to failures to effectively recruit and utilize women, not due to their inability to perform the required roles. Military leaders should therefore embrace lessons learned from these experiences and examine the unique capabilities female SOF enablers have demonstrated via their contributions to special operations core activities, thereby enabling the Armed Services and U.S. Special Operations Command to more effectively identify, efficiently train, and appropriately incorporate women into SOF.

Keywords: cultural support teams (CSTs), female engagement teams (FETs), SOF enablers, women in SOF

Passage of recent legislation ensures U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) will adopt gender-neutral occupational performance standards, meaning women will no longer be barred from applying to SOF's rigorous pipeline. Many acknowledge this is a righteous step toward gender equality in the military ranks. This new legislation paves the way for women to become full-fledged operators on equal footing with male counterparts.

The Armed Services were directed by U.S. Congress to address and provide answers to the inherent challenges in this task. However, a significant shortcoming of the gender-neutral performance standards approach is a failure to capitalize on the unique contributions that women bring to special operations. In recent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, female SOF

enablers made significant, unique contributions to both conventional ground combat and SOF missions. Many of these unique contributions, such as the ability to interact with indigenous children and female adults forbidden by local customs or religious beliefs from interacting with male service members, are overlooked in the gender-neutral approach. Military leaders should embrace lessons learned from recent wars and examine unique capabilities female SOF enablers have demonstrated via contributions to historical and current special operations core activities, thereby enabling the Armed Services and U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) to more effectively identify, efficiently train, and appropriately incorporate women into SOF.

In February 2012, the secretary of defense, with the joint chiefs of staff, modified the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule, opening up thousands of military positions previously closed to women via exceptions to policy. In January 2013, the secretary of defense rescinded the 1994 policy entirely, charging each Armed Service with implementing full integration by 2016, with the provision of any exceptions to be personally approved by the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff (CJCS) and secretary of defense (U.S. Secretary of Defense, 2013, p. 2). General Martin Dempsey, CJCS, outlined the following guiding principles for successful integration of women into SOF (Dempsey, 2013, p. 3):

- Preserve unit readiness, cohesion, and morale.
- Provide viable career paths for all Service men and women.
- Maintain the best quality and most qualified people.
- Validate and implement gender-neutral occupational performance standards.
- Ensure midgrade and senior women training cadre are assigned at point of introduction of women in previously closed units.

As the 2016 implementation deadline approaches, it is appropriate to examine the end state and potential shortfalls. The Armed Services will develop gender-neutral occupational performance standards as directed by both the CJCS and in accordance with Public Law 103-160, Section 542. However, how closely the gender-neutral standards represent current occupational performance standards and whether they facilitate or hinder gender integration remains to be seen. Much the same can be said for the guidance concerning the female training cadre, for although the Services will comply with CJCS guidance and form a female cadre to facilitate gender integration, the effectiveness of such a cadre cannot be assured due to the simple fact there currently are no women who have passed the performance standards to become operators who can serve in this cadre. By the 2016 deadline, the Department of Defense will have new gender-neutral occupational performance standards and a female cadre to facilitate evaluation of women in the training environment, but may be no further along toward true integration. What remains as a shortfall to the guidance is the difficult questions the Services must answer: Whom do we recruit? How do we train them? What unique capabilities do they bring? A review of historical examples and studies of the use of female enablers in ground combat arms units and special operations forces from around the world might help provide some answers to these questions.

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Initiatives to integrate women in ground combat arms and SOF have been implemented in many countries with varying results. In South Korea, a small number of women are operators in the 707th Special Missions Battalion (SMB), South Korea's elite counterterrorism unit. Their role

and function as operators is generally respected by the male members of the unit and is clearly defined based on the unique capabilities and access gained based on gender. The elite South Korean woman operators are fully integrated, from gender-neutral training and performance standards to inclusion in the full spectrum of operations of the 707th SMB mission set.

However, this appears to be an isolated case of successful gender integration, as South Korea continues to struggle with integrating women into other combat units. Despite similar training standards and promotion rates as men, women are prohibited from entering combat units other than the 707th Special Missions Battalion and are further prohibited by law from participating in combat directly. Full integration of all combat units will require a significant cultural shift of general attitudes toward military women to address the social stresses of increasing women's roles in combat units (Hong, 2002, p. 742).

Norway has employed women in combat roles since the 1990s, and their experience indicates that the inclusion of women has increased operational effectiveness with no negative impact on unit cohesion (Cawkill, Rogers, Knight, & Spear, 2009, p. 28). However, studies done by Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Israel, and other nations demonstrate that, while a small percentage of women are capable of meeting gender-neutral physical standards required for service in ground combat units, there are significant challenges to gender integration.

In 2011 Australia opened all combat units, even the elite 1st Commando Special Forces Regiment, to women and programmed a five-year implementation plan to support the initiative. However, no women have applied for the unit to date (Randazzo-Matsel, Schulte, & Yopp, 2012, p. 19). Denmark also opened special forces units to women, but none has passed the physical requirements for selection thus far.

A 2009 U.K. study proved inconclusive. The study revealed incidents of effectiveness of women in close-combat situations and mixed perceptions of unit cohesion between women and men in units involved in combat incidents (Randazzo-Matsel et al., 2012, p. 37). The U.K. minister of defense personnel, welfare, and veterans and the U.K. service chiefs judged overall that "the research's conclusions were mixed and did not provide the basis for a clear recommendation as to whether the policy excluding women from ground close-combat roles should be retained or rescinded" (p. 38). Further, the minister concluded, "The consequences of opening up these small tactical teams in close combat roles to women were unknown." In November 2010 the Minister decided to maintain the policy excluding women from ground close-combat roles (p. 38).

In the Canadian military, which allows women to serve in all military occupations and units, women make up only 2% of combat arms occupations, and no woman has served in the elite Joint Task Force 2 counterterrorism unit (Menke, 2013, p. 12). While Canadian women have successfully led units in combat in Afghanistan and continue to rise up the ranks, recruiting and attrition remain problematic in gender-integrated combat units and pose challenges to the Canadian Armed Forces (p. 18).

A 2003 study on gender integration in combat units in the French military revealed that women encounter rejection, isolation, and unhealthy attitudes held primarily but not exclusively by men (Sorin, 2004, p. 94). The study also found that women are obliged, far more often than men, to adjust, to make concessions, and to stifle personality traits to gain acceptance. It is therefore difficult for women to be integrated into a masculine environment, which was closed to them at the outset and often remains hostile (p. 94).

A quite different perspective is offered by the example of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). In a report on female combatants between 2002 and 2005, commanders found women often surpassed their male counterparts in discipline and motivation, maintaining alertness, shooting skills, managing tasks and organization, and in displaying knowledge and professionalism in weapon use (Menke, 2013, p. 18). In addition, as Randazzo-Matsel and colleagues (2012) have argued, the successful integration of women into combat units depends, in part, on the beliefs of the commanders. If the commanders believe women can be successful soldiers and are just as capable as men, the unit may be more accepting of female soldiers (Randazzo-Matsel et al., 2012, p. 63).

U.S. PERSPECTIVES

Throughout the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. forces found a unique capability of female SOF enablers in their ability to leverage gender in gaining trust and access to the indigenous female population, which oftentimes forms the hub of the support network for insurgency operations (Headquarters, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Afghanistan, 2011, p. 64). SOF teams find when they employ women in operations the neutral masses of women and children are far more likely to support and participate in the village stability operations (p. 64). The ability to sway the population, especially the undetermined or neutral portion of the population, provides a critical opportunity for SOF units. By leveraging the women of a village as well as the men, the counterinsurgency mission has the potential to disrupt insurgency operations and erode their support base at the same time.

The first use of female engagement teams (FETs) and cultural support teams (CSTs) in Afghanistan occurred in February of 2009 (Allen, Ladenheim, & Stout, 2011, p. 15). U.S. leadership in Afghanistan formed these teams to address the problems associated with conducting searches in culturally sensitive areas. The FETs and CSTs were designed to provide conventional forces and SOF, respectively, the ability to search and interact with the female half of the population. While this was their stated mission, many of these units faced direct confrontation with enemy forces while on patrol. At the time, lawmakers and military leaders back in the United States were debating the use of women in combat units. In July 2010, FETs and CSTs were called back to more secure bases until a decision could be reached (Erwin, 2012, p. 33). Upon completion of that debate, political and military leaders concluded that FETs and CSTs could operate on a limited basis at forward operating bases (FOBs) and on patrols. This nonspecific guidance was further clarified to state that female teams could operate up to 45 days outside the security of major deployed bases (p. 33). However, this guidance drove the teams to circumvent the system by spending 44 days in the field, one night at a major base, and then proceed back out into the field to repeat the process.

Women in SOF can also increase the collective intelligence of a team or group. Carnegie Mellon and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) research shows groups are collectively more intelligent than individuals on a range of simple to complex tasks (Woolley and Malone, 2011). In addition, the research finds a group's collective intelligence tends to increase as the percentage of women in the group increases. Researchers believe this may be due to a trait they call *social sensitivity*, which reflects how well a person can read the emotions of other people. The ability to perceive and sense emotional changes leads to more collaborative patterns of

group behavior, and women tend to score higher than men in this category (Haring, 2013, p. 28). Thus, male-only SOF teams are potentially less intelligent than they could be if they were optimized by including women in these collective groups (p. 28).

Along with increasing collective intelligence of SOF teams and operations, female inclusion into small SOF teams can increase task cohesion. Task cohesion is the shared commitment group members have toward accomplishing a goal (Haring, 2013, p. 30). This form of cohesion helps balance out the effects of excessive social cohesion, which is the extent to which group members relate to and like one another. Excessive social cohesion can lead to groupthink and polarized attitudes, which can then lead to bad decision making by the team (p. 30). In general, women in an all-volunteer force generally bring with them higher levels of education into an operational environment (Goldstein, 2001, p. 21).

Women are extensively used in Civil Affairs (CA) and Psychological Operations (PSYOP) in USSOCOM, which maximizes their unique skill sets in both peacetime and conflict environments. Both CA and PSYOP have established career tracks, and there is an extensive and established training pipeline in the preparation of CA/PSYOP professionals and in follow-on professional development. Both career fields provide women a wide range of experiences in which to utilize their unique skills beyond those traditionally required to do their job. CA/PSYOP elements are often positioned at remote FOBs and often have unique access to identify female-specific issues in an environment, providing an operational advantage by accessing the half of the population that men-only units cannot. The unique capabilities, which women use on CA/PSYOP missions, are documented extensively and are proven to be a successful force multiplier to both special operations and conventional forces. The most important aspect of women's contributions to CA/PSYOP is that both career fields produce professional SOF enablers from institutionalized training programs and have habitual training and operational relationships with supported SOF elements. For the most part, these forces are integrated into the planning cycles of supported SOF units. However, there is traditionally less emphasis on understanding and leveraging those unique capabilities that women SOF enablers bring to the mission. In these roles, women can also potentially enable the Public Affairs and Military Deception missions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Women SOF operators and enablers should be considered for inclusion in a wide range of current SOF missions. Women on CSTs should have a formalized training pipeline, which includes current task training and for the expanded tasks outlined here. This training should be codified and placed into doctrine. There are numerous sources of "lessons learned," which can help guide the development of a CST functional course similar to the CA and PSYOP career fields. This training should be developed with the long term in mind, and graduates should receive a skill identifier. Optimally, graduates should be assigned or habitually attached to SOF units for a tour to develop and integrate these skills with ongoing SOF missions.

Emphasis should be placed on maintenance and professional development training of the critical tasks of the CSTs. Also, nontraditional training, such as negotiation and strategic debriefing techniques, should be considered as follow-on developmental training as it fits the mission. Female SOF enablers should be trained in negotiations to facilitate relations and cultural interaction

with local populations. This is a critical skill that has been identified by numerous lessons-learned reports regarding dealings with local populations. This training should include recurring combatives training due to the restricted and remote environments where SOF forces often operate.

In addition, as the enemy and adversaries continue to practice more operational security (OPSEC) in their operations, human intelligence (HUMINT) continues to become an indispensable capability needed to support SOF. While other forms of intelligence collection become less successful, HUMINT often remains the sole provider of intelligence information for an operation. Female SOF operators and enablers may bring an element of disguise to operations because they may be more likely to go unnoticed during some operational conditions. This can be of great advantage in gaining access to locations and people in both conflict and steady-state operations. Rather than leaving this to chance, training for potential woman SOF enablers should include HUMINT collection and be incorporated into the planning effort for each operation.

CONCLUSION

The future of SOF recruiting and training will inevitably include women, as mandated by law. A successful approach for the military must be driven by a clearly articulated vision that not only acknowledges gender differences but also seeks to leverage them (Pinch, 2006, p. 191). For military leaders to capitalize on the unique capabilities and potential of women in SOF, they must embrace two avenues of approach. One avenue will be gender neutral, mandating that women meet the same standards as men to become SOF operators. This avenue of approach is currently being analyzed by the Armed Services and according to legislation will be completed by 2016. The second avenue will focus on building a force of female SOF enablers who are fully integrated with SOF operators and teams, in all levels of planning, training, and execution. Through the dedicated inclusion of women into planning and operations, SOF operators will capitalize on the unique capabilities women bring to the fight.

For the second avenue of approach to succeed, command emphasis should be placed on legitimizing and formalizing the process of creating and maintaining a force of female SOF enablers. Historical examples from around the world, and from within the U.S. military, demonstrate the significant benefits of including women in special operations. Through specific training in negotiations, strategic debriefing, and HUMINT, female SOF enablers will be positioned to provide unique capabilities where female-to-female interaction is needed or anticipated, which, after all, is a large portion of the globe. These female-unique capabilities must be recognized, developed and maintained as part of programmed training, and exercised along with all other individual, team, and unit training goals.

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What Is Old Is New Again: The Reemergence of Special Warfare

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The United States has participated in special warfare for decades, but the concept has only recently entered formal special operations forces (SOF) doctrine. Special warfare differs from traditional warfare principally in its involvement of the human domain and the importance of psychological operations. It occurs across the spectrum of conflict and in both irregular and conventional warfare. To be successful, special warfare efforts should cooperate with other military organizations, particularly those with intelligence and security assistance capacity, and must be adequately supported by the joint force. Special warfare efforts must also be synchronized with the efforts of interagency partners, quite often through the auspices of diplomatic missions because of the involvement of foreign populations. Special warfare has been a tool used by the United States in conflicts around the world for decades. Future SOF warriors will continue to engage in it. To be successful, it is critically important that these professionals understand this other type of war.

Keywords: SOF doctrine, Special Forces, special warfare, surgical strike

In August 2012, the U.S. Army published Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-05, *Special Operations*. A principal focus of this publication is the idea that Army special operations can be understood as involving the two mutually supporting critical capabilities: that of special warfare and surgical strike. This article focuses on special warfare, a somewhat paradoxical concept. It is paradoxical because despite the fact that the term has existed for decades in the jargon of special operations (e.g., both the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School and the U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command use the term in their names), prior to the publication of ADRP 3-05 it was largely absent from U.S. military doctrine. What are the origins of special warfare, and to what aspects of warfare has it referred in the past? Why is it reemerging now and being formally integrated into U.S. Army doctrine? Answering these questions will better link special warfare to the lexicon of terms and definitions that guide special operations and help lead to greater conceptual clarity both among scholars and practitioners. This article provides information that helps answer these questions and offers a synthesis of the concept of special warfare into the context of special operations and joint doctrine.

An excellent source on the history of special warfare is Paddock's (2002) *U.S. Army Special Warfare: Its Origins*. Alfred H. Paddock, Jr., served on active duty from 1957 to 1988, including

combat tours in Laos and Vietnam with U.S. Special Forces. His research into special warfare can be traced back to 1973, when he attended the U.S. Army War College. His vision of special warfare blends special forces capabilities with psychological warfare, civic action, and intelligence to provide a form of warfare closely linked to the concept of unconventional warfare that emerged in U.S. military doctrine in the early 1950s.

Special warfare made its original appearance in connection to special operations in 1956 when the U.S. Army Psychological Warfare Center was renamed the U.S. Army Center for Special Warfare. According to Paddock, the new center focused its efforts on psychological and unconventional warfare. Later this focus expanded to include counterinsurgency, thus including in special warfare the capability to both stabilize and destabilize political regimes. Special warfare was given coherence in 1962 when then Secretary of the Army Elvis J. Stahr, Jr., defined it as “a term used by the Army to embrace all military and paramilitary measures and activities related to unconventional warfare, counterinsurgency, and psychological warfare” (quoted in Paddock, 2002, p. 2).

Interest in special warfare reached the executive office of the president in the early 1960s. According to Francis Kelly (1963), President John F. Kennedy clearly understood the importance of special warfare. Gray (2007) goes further and says that special forces were the “flavor of the day” of his administration and that Kennedy “adopted” the green berets (p. 250). In delivering the commencement speech at the U.S. Military Academy in June 1962, Kennedy said: “This is another type of warfare—new in its intensity, ancient in its origin—war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins—war by ambush instead of by combat, by infiltration instead of aggression—seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him.” While not specifically mentioning special warfare, President Kennedy was clearly describing it.

Through National Security Action Memorandum 56, President Kennedy directed an evaluation of possible future “paramilitary and unconventional warfare requirements” (Bundy, 1961). This memorandum jump-started coordination between the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of State (DoS), and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to determine ways to meet these requirements.

Recognizing the importance of civil affairs in special warfare, the Alliance for Progress (essentially a Marshall Plan for Latin America) was created in 1961 and authorized \$20 billion in funding. According to the DoS, this was done to counter Soviet and Cuban influence in Latin America (Office of the Historian, n.d.). In addition, U.S. Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act in 1961, creating the U.S. Agency for International Development. This organization soon had more than 10,000 direct hires and played an important role in pacification programs in Vietnam (Andrade and Willbanks, 2006; see also Moyar, 1997).

The CIA also prepared to engage in special warfare through the development of its nascent paramilitary capability. A CIA-managed effort in Laos in the 1960s and 1970s was executed to interdict North Vietnamese resupply efforts. The CIA undertook this effort to avoid the onus of official U.S. military intervention in neutral Laos (Best and Feickert, 2009). Other CIA paramilitary activity is reported to have occurred during the Cold War in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Somalia. This capability again manifested in 2001 when CIA paramilitary operatives entered Afghanistan ahead of U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) to facilitate the link-up with northern Alliance forces, secure helicopter landing zones, and guide SOF teams (Stone, 2003).

The U.S. military also responded. On September 25, 1961, the green beret, which President Kennedy called “a symbol of excellence, a badge of courage, a mark of distinction in the fight for freedom” was designated as the exclusive headdress of the Army Special Forces, an organization directly linked to special warfare (Kennedy, 1962). The president’s personal involvement reflected his interest in special warfare. The Navy established Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) Teams ONE and TWO in January 1962. Finally, in April 1962, the Air Force established the Special Air Warfare Center at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida.

TOWARD DEFINING SPECIAL WARFARE

Unfortunately, this activity did not produce U.S. military doctrine specific to special warfare. But by 1962 enough had been written and said on the subject that a basic understanding of the concept could be gained: Special warfare included unconventional warfare, counterinsurgency, and psychological warfare. Civic action and intelligence played important roles as well. It also involved paramilitary forces and sought to psychologically exhaust the enemy rather than destroy him. The involvement of foreign civilian populations required efforts from diplomatic, informational, and economic agencies. Considering this, a possible definition for special warfare produced in 1962 might have been something like the following: military and paramilitary measures and activities related to unconventional warfare, counterinsurgency, and psychological warfare that focus on controlling and influencing civilian populations and in which political goals are achieved by employing all sources of power to defeat the enemy through psychological exhaustion.

Using this proposed definition, a comparison can be made with the definition presented in ADRP 3-05, which defines special warfare as “the execution of activities that involve a combination of lethal and nonlethal actions taken by a specially trained and educated force that has a deep understanding of cultures and foreign language, proficiency in small-unit tactics, and the ability to build and fight alongside indigenous combat formations in a permissive, uncertain, or hostile environment.” To begin, both definitions describe special warfare as including activity beyond direct combat. Both also include a psychological dimension and involve indigenous populations. Moreover, neither definition limits special warfare to a specific physical domain, such as air, land, or sea. There is one major difference: The 2012 definition emphasizes that special warfare is conducted by a “specially trained and educated force,” a constraint absent from the proposed earlier definition.

Intuitively, special warfare occurs within or in support of war. According to Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, war is “socially sanctioned violence to achieve a political purpose.” There are many ways to wage war. Currently, the *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (JP 1-02) defines 11 types of warfare including amphibious, directed-energy, chemical, electronic, irregular, mine, naval special warfare, navigation, nondestructive electronic, surface, unconventional, and undersea. In addition, 20 other types of warfare, including special warfare, are mentioned without definitions offered. This list of 31 types of warfare is not exhaustive. For example, in the 1950s, guerilla warfare was a common U.S. military doctrinal term. As late as 1991, it was included in FM 100-25, *Doctrine for Army Special Operations*, but it is no longer mentioned in the *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*.

On the surface, all types of warfare can be thought of as an activity (e.g., antisubmarine operations) that occurs somewhere (e.g., at sea). Where warfare occurs is often discussed in the context of operational domains. These generally include land, sea, air, space, cyber, and human (Odierno, Amos, & McRaven, 2013). Some have included the information domain (Kozloski, 2009). Some types of warfare occur exclusively or predominantly in a single domain. For example, undersea warfare occurs in the sea domain. Others types of warfare occur in several domains. Using this structure as a guide, an understanding of special warfare can be enhanced by determining the types of activity inherent to it and where it occurs.

Using the ADRP 3-05 definition, one can see that special warfare activities include lethal and nonlethal actions, small-unit tactics, and building and fighting alongside indigenous combat formations. By considering the proposed definition of special warfare offered here, this list of activities expands to include military and paramilitary measures and activities related to unconventional warfare, counterinsurgency, and psychological warfare. As for where special warfare occurs, the determining factor is its relationship to indigenous populations. While one could envision special warfare activities in all domains, the high importance of the human domain is emphasized through the need to understand and influence indigenous populations. To facilitate this, preparation for special warfare includes language training and cultural education.

ADRP 3-05 helps broaden the understanding of special warfare. It expands the list of special warfare activities from the three that Secretary of the Army Stahr mentioned in 1962—specifically, unconventional warfare, counterinsurgency, and psychological warfare—to include foreign internal defense, stability operations, special reconnaissance, and security force assistance. This implies the range of conflict in which special warfare is used has expanded. The reference also emphasizes the importance of the human domain when it states that special warfare is executed through collaborative efforts with indigenous populations and involves the ability to operate within the population, addressing sociocultural factors. This reference also emphasizes that special warfare builds and strengthens friendly networks in the execution of unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense.

The emphasis in special warfare on influencing populations links it very closely to the concept of irregular warfare, which is one of two basic forms of warfare, along with traditional warfare, recognized in JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, dated March 25, 2013. It is also one of the 11 types of warfare defined in the *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. Irregular warfare is defined therein as “[a] violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s).” *ARSOF 2022* (U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2013) recognizes the connection between special warfare and irregular warfare. To provide context, it identifies the Russian incursion in Ukraine, the activities of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), social unrest and civil war in parts of the African continent, and China’s use of coercive influence against its neighbors as current examples of irregular threats that Army SOF are uniquely positioned to counter through special warfare. But irregular warfare involves activity beyond special warfare and, although the linkage of special warfare is arguably strongest to irregular warfare, one could envision special warfare occurring within traditional warfare (e.g., Army SOF and CIA support to the Peshmerga in Iraq in 2003) and in operations other than war, such as peacekeeping operations or support for law enforcement confronting extremely violent criminal organizations.

THE REEMERGENCE OF SPECIAL WARFARE

Reflecting on the previous discussion in this article, it is clear why special warfare has reemerged and is now being formally integrated into U.S. Army doctrine. While special warfare is a type the United States has conducted regularly for some time, activity that falls under the current Army definition of special warfare has been particularly intense during the past couple of decades. In particular, special warfare has been conducted extensively in Afghanistan and Iraq. A broad array of tactics, techniques, and procedures has been developed that should be formally captured for future generations to master and rapidly reemploy. In preparation for this eventuality, special warfare is now being described in depth in U.S. Army doctrine.

Considering the history of special warfare, the term should by now be well integrated in U.S. military doctrine. But it is not. For example, while the *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* mentions special warfare, it does not define it. The term does not seem to be accepted by the joint force—or at least a joint definition has not emerged. What are some of the issues that might be complicating such integration?

One potential issue may be the disconnection between the Army definition for special warfare and the joint definition of naval special warfare. Naval special warfare is defined by the dictionary as “a naval warfare specialty that conducts special operations with an emphasis on maritime, coastal, and riverine environments using small, flexible, mobile units operating under, on, and from the sea.” This definition shares little with the Army definition of special warfare. For example, there is nothing in naval special warfare about building and fighting alongside indigenous combat formations. And while it may take a specially trained force to conduct naval special warfare, the need for a deep understanding of cultures and foreign language skills is not emphasized. There is nothing in the definition that predominantly places naval special warfare in either traditional or irregular warfare. Nothing in the definition describes the activities undertaken. Naval special warfare talks about a specialty, not a form of warfare. In short, the two definitions describe distinctly different concepts.

Another issue might be that current U.S. Army doctrine seems to limit special warfare to a select group of Army units (Department of the Army, 2012). Does this suggest that only the Army conducts special warfare? If so, the concept runs counter to almost 30 years of effort developing joint operations capabilities within the U.S. military. The overwhelming majority of service members are not provided the education necessary to obtain a deep understanding of cultures and foreign language, nor the ability to build and fight alongside indigenous combat formations. But they have skills essential to special warfare. Limiting special warfare to Army SOF runs counter to the newest SOF truth that most special operations require non-SOF assistance.

Finally, Army leadership is arguably moving in the direction of developing a special warfare–like capability. In the newest *U.S. Army Operating Concept* (TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1) Army Chief of Staff General Ray Odierno talks about the need for the Army to understand economic, cultural, and political environments. The concept of regionally aligned conventional forces is discussed. This blending of capabilities may blur the line between special warfare and other Army capabilities needed to confront modern complex and hybrid threats. It also risks absorbing special warfare into other programs that develop partner capability, such as theater security cooperation and security force assistance. Without staking out in doctrine where special warfare ends and other activities closely linked to it begins, the concept risks losing its

uniqueness. This is simultaneously occurring at a time when the U.S. military's interest in irregular warfare is waning. For example, while irregular warfare was mentioned 24 times in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, it was not mentioned at all in the 2010 and 2014 reports. This rapid disassociation is normal for the U.S. military after extended periods of irregular engagement. Prudence dictates that advocates strive to delineate the unique and ongoing role of special warfare or risk the concept going dormant until exigency once again calls for it.

What could be done to better integrate the Army concept of special warfare into joint doctrine? A first step might be to review the definition of naval special warfare. SEAL units have gained extensive experience in Afghanistan and Iraq building and fighting alongside indigenous combat formations. They participate in foreign internal defense missions around the world. Perhaps the definition of naval special warfare should be expanded to include this activity.

The view of Army participation in special warfare should also be expanded. ADRP 3-05 should clearly explain that special warfare is conducted by task forces composed of Army, joint, and often interagency elements. But the distinction between special warfare and security force assistance and theater security cooperation must be maintained. Thus, whether or not current Army security force assistance efforts are maintained, the essential and enduring role of SOF in such efforts can be protected. Current efforts by U.S. Army Special Operations Command leadership to delineate special warfare from other forms of warfare should be continued.

CONCLUSION

The United States has participated in special warfare for decades. The concept is closely linked to Army SOF, particularly Army Special Forces. Special warfare differs from traditional warfare principally in its involvement of the human domain and the importance of psychological operations. It occurs across the spectrum of conflict and in both irregular and conventional warfare. Organizations closely linked to special warfare, and specially trained and educated for it, include the U.S. Army Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and those capable of conducting psychological operations. To be successful, special warfare efforts should cooperate with other military organizations, particularly those with intelligence and security assistance capacity, and must be adequately supported by the joint force. Special warfare efforts must also be synchronized with the efforts of interagency partners, quite often through the auspices of diplomatic missions because of the involvement of foreign populations. Special warfare has been a tool used by the United States in conflicts around the world for decades. Future SOF warriors will continue to engage in it. To be successful, it is critically important that these professionals understand this other type of war.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Jacobsen, Annie. *Area 51: An Uncensored History of America's Top Secret Military Base*. New York, NY: Back Bay Books, 2012. 523 pp. \$16.00 (paperback). ISBN-13: 978-0-316-20230-5

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It has been described as the most secret military installation in the continental United States. It may in fact be one of the most secretive locations on Earth. Indeed, the mystery surrounding the clandestine research facility at Area 51, an enigmatic desert outpost situated on the Nevada Test and Training Range at the Nellis Air Force Base (AFB) Complex, and hidden from onlookers by a ring of mountains more than 100 miles outside of Las Vegas, has so thoroughly captured the imagination of the public that it has been ingrained in the American zeitgeist and pop culture. The installation is at the heart of a great many conspiracy theories, especially those touted by a number of pseudoscientists, including so-called ufologists, who believe the U.S. government is hiding evidence of extraterrestrial life behind the base's walls. It should therefore come as no surprise that this setting has, since the early 1990s, become a staple for a succession of equally imaginative science fiction films and television franchises, including *The X-Files*, *Stargate*, and the Hollywood blockbuster *Independence Day*.

To say nothing of the pedagogical need (Krishnan, 2013) to confront and correct the misinformation presented on conspiracy theory websites and elsewhere, the secrecy surrounding Area 51 and similar facilities, as with the phenomenon of black ops in general, presents a number of issues, particularly for international relations (IR) theorists. Mythology and pop culture notwithstanding, state-sponsored covert activities complicate scholars' abilities to understand the world in several ways. For example, researchers of the so-called democratic peace claim that democracies do not fight one another, yet paramilitary agents and military special operations forces frequently engage in espionage and covert actions against democratically elected governments, posing a serious challenge to the democratic peace research agenda (Downes and Lilley, 2010). Next, operating under the assumption that such objects are of a terrestrial origin, Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall (2008) view the phenomenon of the unidentified flying object (UFO) as a serious challenge to theories of national sovereignty, and with them, the very foundation of modern rule. The fact that most of the alleged UFO sightings from the mid-20th century can be attributed to classified technology, specifically the overflight espionage programs that gave birth to the U-2 and A-12 Oxcart, however, ameliorates such

theoretical concerns. Finally, experts on Islam and the Middle East (Khalidi, 1988, p. 778; Lewis, 1990) who perceive the relationship between the United States and Israel as the product of Judeo-Christian affinities, and as a sign of the “clash of civilizations,” might avoid the trap of Samuel Huntington’s (1993) fatalism if they understood that Israel was as vital a partner and strategic asset to the United States during the Cold War, as it still is. Covert actions taken by the Israeli Mossad led to the capture of a Soviet MiG-21 that not only helped Israel win the Six-Day War in 1967 but also helped American pilots turn the tide in the skies over Vietnam after Israeli intelligence officers delivered the MiG to Area 51 (Jacobsen, 2011, pp. 280–295; also see Davies, 2008).

In other words, the black-ops technological research and development (R&D) programs that took place at Area 51 throughout the Cold War likely played a vital role in the maintenance of American hegemony, as they presumably still do. Unfortunately, however, due to the classified nature of work at the installation, military historians, IR scholars, and other potentially interested parties have little reliable information available about the base’s operations or the more specific role it has played in U.S. foreign policy. This is exactly why Annie Jacobsen’s *Area 51: An Uncensored History of America’s Top Secret Military Base* is such a welcome contribution. In her book, Jacobsen attempts to cut through the myth and temper the hype that too frequently characterizes popular discourse on Area 51. Though her conclusion fails to achieve this goal, for the most part she succeeds in decoding what really goes on behind the scenes at Groom Lake and the related military installations that dot the Nevada desert. Intriguingly, as Jacobsen argues, it turns out that, despite the absence of extraterrestrials, Area 51 is a fascinating place at the forefront of cutting edge R&D, making the outpost a vitally important asset to the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and the American intelligence community.

Area 51 has its origins in a two-part story written for the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*. Jacobsen (2009a, 2009b), a contributing editor with the magazine, first started looking into the mysterious world of U.S. black-ops R&D in 2007, when Edward Lovick, a former radar expert at Lockheed Martin’s Skunk Works division, opened up to her about his work at Area 51 shortly after the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) declassified the Oxcart program. She learned that Oxcart was first conceived of and built at a Skunk Works laboratory in Burbank, California. The goal was to replace the U-2 with an “invisible” spy plane, which is how Lovick came to be known among colleagues as the “grandfather of stealth.” Lockheed canceled the Oxcart program after the death of a test pilot though, which nearly derailed the project. The CIA responded by relocating Oxcart to the same proving grounds in the Nevada desert where the U-2 had also been sent for flight testing. Thus, when Gary Powers’s U-2 was shot down over the Soviet Union in 1960, the CIA was already hard at work on the A-12 Oxcart at Area 51.

Jacobsen builds on these stories in her book, and reveals a fascinating history that links Area 51 R&D to American espionage as well as American air and space power. The unfocused reader may have trouble, as this entails multiple foci, but they are easily unified under the rubric of two common themes. That is, Jacobsen’s *Area 51* is essentially a story of innovation on one hand and rivalries on the other. It is, first and foremost, a history of R&D, but one set against the backdrop of the Cold War, that superpower conflict between the United States and Soviet Union that dominated international politics throughout much of the late 20th century. It is also a story of interagency rivalry, namely that of the feud between the CIA and U.S. Air Force (USAF), as they struggled for control of programs like the U-2 and Oxcart, as well as the Area 51 installation itself. This manifests specifically in a career-long rivalry between General Curtis

LeMay and Colonel Richard Leghorn, both of whom drew distinct conclusions about nuclear weapons from the Operation Crossroads nuclear tests at Bikini Atoll: where the incident gave LeMay confidence in American nuclear primacy, it instilled a passion for overflight espionage in Leghorn. But as Leghorn would tout his plan for a spy plane to the Joint Chiefs and people like General LeMay, he was frequently viewed as wasting time (Jacobsen, 2011, pp. 26–48)—that was, until the CIA got wind of Leghorn’s plan (pp. 48–49) and Project Aquatone was born.

According to most accounts, including the history of the U-2, declassified by the CIA in 2013 (Pedlow and Welzenbach, 1992), Area 51 was founded in 1955. Though Jacobsen contends that its name derives from its founding by the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) in 1951, Peter S. Merlin (2007), a NASA-affiliated aviation and aerospace historian, notes that a press release distributed to news outlets throughout the desert Southwest announcing the construction of Area 51 confirms that it was built in 1955. The area was used as a gunnery range during World War II, but when several high-level officials attached to Project Aquatone were looking for a place to build the U-2, the existence of the abandoned WWII-era airstrip at Groom Lake was the reason they selected it as the place to test their new spy plane. Though they believed the area to be under AEC jurisdiction at the time, the land actually had to be added to the test site after the fact (see also Yost, 2011; Nelson, 2014).

Though Area 51 was established and run by the CIA, the USAF remained an important partner on both Projects Aquatone and Oxcart, while a number of other parties were also involved as stakeholders there, including NASA, the U.S. Navy, the AEC, and a number of defense contractors like Raytheon, Lockheed, EG&G, and Kodak. Over time, these actors would build some of the most advanced reconnaissance aircraft in U.S. history. As the international climate changed, though, the nature of the base also evolved. When the Israeli Mossad delivered a Soviet MiG to Area 51 in 1968, the resulting program, Have Doughnut, reversed the kill ratio in Vietnam by giving pilots a chance to engage with the MiG in American airspace. When the Air Force took command of Area 51 in the late 1970s, it was to develop the F-117 Nighthawk. Other programs at Area 51 have contributed to American air primacy throughout the globe in similar ways, as much of the advanced technology responsible for undergirding U.S. military hegemony since the 1950s has been developed or tested at Area 51, including the B-2, and a number of drones, such as the RQ-170 Sentinel (“Beast of Kandahar”). Indeed, when 23 special operators from Navy SEAL Team 6 launched the raid on the compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, that resulted in Osama bin Laden’s death, they were transported aboard two MH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, which had been modified to mask heat and sound and to avoid radar detection. These stealth helicopters are believed to be the product of Test and Evaluation Project K, an Area 51 R&D program established in the early 1990s aimed at applying America’s radar-evasion technology to military helicopters (Rogers, 2011a, 2011b; also see Axe, 2011; Schmidle, 2011). However, Jacobsen’s book does not cover such recent events, as they obviously remain classified.

Yet her book does tackle other issues. In fact, the volume is most seriously flawed in Jacobsen’s attempt to understand the UFO conspiracies that have been so intimately tied to Area 51 in the popular imagination. Her concluding remarks in the book’s final chapter and epilogue rely exclusively on a single source, despite the fact that the rest of *Area 51* is based on meticulous open-source research and interviews with more than 70 men tied to the base. She contends that Operation Paperclip scientists brought to the United States from Nazi Germany were responsible for grotesque human rights violations at Area 51 in the early 1950s, and that the alleged crash of a UFO at Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947 was the work of similar Soviet

experiments on human children. Furthermore, she claims that Roswell resulted from a Soviet plot to incite mass panic in the United States concocted after Moscow heard reports of a similar episode resulting from Orson Welles's radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* dramatization in October 1938. However, some scholars question whether the mass panic allegedly provoked by the broadcast actually occurred (Pooley and Socolow, 2013). Even if the Soviet Union had reason to believe the veracity of news reports on the matter, however, Jacobsen's conclusions should be taken with the proverbial grain of salt, if they are read at all. T. D. Barnes, one of Jacobsen's other sources, and the president of Roadrunners International, an organization comprised of retired Area 51 employees, says many of his colleagues were upset by the inclusion of Jacobsen's conclusion in *Area 51*. He argues that her insinuations about the Nazis and Soviets should never have been included and that the conclusion "destroys what would've been a good book." Though Barnes and others still support Jacobsen's book, they suggest readers ignore the final chapters (Speigel, 2011). In fact, this may be good advice. In an interview with Jacobsen on ABC's *Nightline*, Bill Weir (2011) takes Jacobsen and her anonymous source to task, implying that the audacious conclusion to an otherwise superb book was written only to increase sales.

This aside, *Area 51* is still worthy of a read, though it may appear daunting to some readers; the book weighs in at a total of 584 pages, including front matter, 85 pages of meticulous notes, a bibliography, photos, a thorough index, and an interview with Jacobsen appended to the paperback edition but excluded from the hardback. For such a hefty volume, some of her critics will no doubt lament the lack of novel content in her book. CIA watchers, aerospace historians, and Area 51 investigators have frequently culled the same open-source content and interviewed the same sources as Jacobsen, so many of her claims and inferences can be found on the Internet and in other popular works. Yet as a Princeton-trained investigative journalist, Jacobsen clearly has the ability to synthesize and distill disparate information into a consistent, highly accessible narrative, so having all of this information in one volume is of real value. In other words, a trained military historian would likely produce a number of books of equal or greater length to address each of Jacobsen's individual thrusts, ideas, and arguments, but most readers can instead approach Jacobsen's as a good introduction to Cold War espionage, as well as, among other things, the military history of Area 51 and the wider Nevada Test and Training Range.

Given this, some may also critique her for what might seem like a lack of focus. Because the book stands out for its contributions on various subjects, including black-ops projects, the Manhattan Project, and other aspects of the American nuclear program, of which her accounts of Operation Crossroads at Bikini Atoll and Operation Plumbbob at the Nevada Test Site are particularly noteworthy, this is understandable; but Jacobsen's training as a journalist has gifted her with a riveting ability to weave these episodes together with the history of Area 51 in a convincing and consistent manner. Said simply, there is a lot of information in *Area 51*. Though the ardent conspiracy theorist will likely walk away from the text disappointed, this suggests most scholars and students, including military historians, experts on intelligence studies, and IR specialists, as well as aviation buffs, and general readers alike, can probably find something of value in *Area 51*, especially since Jacobsen generally steers the reader away from fringe narratives—her final chapter, notwithstanding.

Finally, it's worth mentioning that Jacobsen's book is a few years old now; the first edition was published in 2011, with the paperback published the following year. Nevertheless, it remains the only relatively down-to-earth, book-length contribution on the

subject matter that covers such a vast expanse of time, so it should continue to be read—though admittedly, with caution—by levelheaded scholars, students, and general audiences. Indeed, though the book is not without its flaws, it stands out as a welcome counterweight to the kind of conspiracy-riddled ideas one can easily find on the Internet, as well as in books that too often pass for “nonfiction” and in the distorted “documentaries” that similarly pass for “truth” on some of the biggest educational television networks these days. Her book remains especially relevant since the CIA officially acknowledged the existence of the research facility at Groom Lake in 2013 (Pedlow and Welzenbach, 1992), but readers must remember that Jacobsen’s is only one take, especially since, as noted, she is not entirely successful in her effort to cut through the myth and hype of Area 51. That her final chapter and epilogue trade one conspiracy theory for what sounds a lot like another should be enough to warrant this concern. Thus, *Area 51* should be read with other works, like Steve Davies’ (2008) *Red Eagles*. Critical theorists might prefer Trevor Paglen’s (2007) “Groom Lake and the Imperial Production of Nowhere.” Interested readers will also find the various works of Peter Merlin (e.g., 2007) a helpful counterweight to Jacobsen’s more hyperbolic assertions. The National Geographic Channel has likewise produced two documentaries (Yost, 2011; and Nelson, 2014) that cover some of the same content as Jacobsen’s book without pandering to a conspiracy-peddling fringe.

Still, further research is necessary. Though it will likely take some time for many of the pertinent records regarding Area 51 and similar research facilities to come to light, the fact that the CIA declassified the history of the U-2 and simultaneously acknowledged the existence of Area 51 in 2013 could indicate that military historians and other interested researchers may find records opening to them sooner rather than later, so they should seize on the opportunities presented by the release of such documents. Though, when approached from the perspective of a conspiracy theorist, topics like Area 51 might ordinarily be viewed as somewhat taboo in academic and professional circles, scholars should not hesitate to fill the lacuna on black-ops or governments’ clandestine activities when opportunities to obtain reliable information do present themselves.

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McGlinchy, Stephen. *US Arms Policies Towards the Shah's Iran*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2014. 194 pp. \$140.00 (hardback). ISBN: 978-0-415-73921-4

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Iran, like all former great empires, still has a psychological chip on its shoulder. It yearns for the glory days of 2,000 years ago when Persia was *the* global center of civilization. Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, better known as the shah of Iran, was deeply schooled in Iran's own rich sense of tradition and wanted more than anything else to reestablish what he saw as its former position in the world. Keenly aware of the intense nationalism and sense of history which still grips the country, the same factors seem to underlie Iran's quest for nuclear weapons today, among both reformers and hard-liners alike. Like Britain, left with a similar sense of being a world power thanks to its own possession of empire, Iran appears to want the power, prestige, and a “seat at the top table” that nuclear weapons seem to bring. Considerations of realpolitik have perhaps trumped even the force of radical Khomeinism, as Khomeini himself is said to have regarded nuclear weapons as “un-Islamic.”

Stephen McGlinchy's *US Arms Policies Towards the Shah's Iran* focuses more on conventional than nuclear weapons, but it reminds us just how long Iran's search to become a genuine

regional power has been going on (the shah also had a nuclear weapons program of his own, which was derailed by the revolution of 1979). Those who yearn for a test of overarching international relations (IR) theories or a psychoanalysis of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi's motivations or a detailed account of Iranian aspirations to recapture a glorious past will be disappointed, for this is an overwhelmingly empirical book on arms sales to Iran during the days of the shah, based on the actual documentary record in Britain and the United States, and drawing on a very large variety of sources. But existing works already talk about IR theories, the shah's megalomania/insecurity, and Iran's sense of destiny. There has also been a deluge of attention paid to arms sales to Iran *after* the shah, when America traded for hostages and influence—very much against its own Constitution—using off-the-books missiles that Congress knew nothing about. That story has been told already. But we still, oddly enough, lack a detailed and concerted account of the defense relationship between the United States and the shah during the Cold War.

McGlinchy fills a major hole in the literature by providing just such an account. Within a neat structure, he examines the arms relationships that the shah carried on with a series of U.S. presidents from Harry Truman to Jimmy Carter, focusing most heavily on the American executive branch and on what we actually know rather than informed speculation (the focus on the U.S. presidency is justified by the fact that Congress played an active role in shaping the relationship only after Watergate, during the “postimperial” presidencies of Ford and Carter). Although containment in the region was, of course, the overarching theme, and many accounts treat the relationship as if it were entirely consistent throughout, McGlinchy shows that the U.S.–Iranian relationship actually passed through at least four more or less distinct stages overall (pp. 166–170, *passim*). In the first stage, military aid to bolster a regime thought vulnerable to Soviet expansionism ruled the day. Under Dwight Eisenhower and especially after the 1953 coup, Iran increasingly became a “client state,” so the simple survival of a pro-U.S. regime was the primary goal of U.S. foreign policy. Then, from 1964 to 1971, there was a second move toward “credit partnership” under Johnson and the early part of the Nixon administration, which culminated in the third phase: the “blank cheque partnership” of 1972 to 1976. This reflected the fact that the shah's leverage over the United States had increased greatly—as the British left the Middle East and as Vietnam left America predisposed against direct intervention. Unlimited conventional arms sales were now the order of the day, a pattern which (perhaps unexpectedly) remained tempered only slightly under Carter from 1977 through 1979. Iran was now so important that it would be treated as a “special case” in the president's inconsistent war against human rights abusers.

It would have been nice if the cover had featured one of those iconic images of a series of U.S. presidents meeting with the shah over the years. Unfortunately, Routledge/Taylor & Francis uses a standard single cover for all the contributions to its Studies in US Foreign Policy series. While “big” theoreticians and those who want to focus on the shah himself, as already noted, will not be entirely satisfied, *US Arms Policies Towards the Shah's Iran* is not entirely devoid of theory. In fact, the conclusion pulls all the strings together rather nicely, arguing that a combination of external shocks plus domestic developments in the United States played a particular role in shaping the arms relationship. Overall, this book provides a clearly written, understandable, and comprehensive introduction to the oeuvre that will rightly take its place on essential reading lists, alongside other works in this area like the more time-limited *Carter and Arms Sales* by Joanna Spear. Indeed, it should be of major interest not just to students of U.S.–Iranian relations but also to those who study U.S. defense policy and arms sales in general.

Chamayou, Grégoire. *A Theory of the Drone* (Janet Lloyd, Trans.). New York, NY: The New Press, 2015. 304 pp. \$26.95 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-1-59558-975-0

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On February 13, 2001, George W. Bush, recently sworn in as president of the United States, presented his vision for the future of the American military's air strike capabilities: "In the air, we will be able to strike across the world with pinpoint accuracy, using both aircraft and unmanned systems." The Global War on Terror (GWOT) has seen this vision come to fruition as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) have become an integral part of American military and intelligence operations throughout the world. Grégoire Chamayou (2015), in his book *A Theory of the Drone*, critiques what he calls drone warfare's "discourse of legitimation" (p. 17) and seeks to "subject the drone to a philosophical investigation" (p. 14) and to "provide discursive weapons for the use of those men and women who wish to oppose the policy served by drones" (p. 16). Chamayou's work is successful in its quest and provides an ethically and philosophically challenging dissection of the ethical, ideological, and policy underpinnings of drone warfare.

The book is divided into five major sections—Techniques and Tactics, Ethos and Psyche, Necroethics, The Principles of the Philosophy of the Right to Kill, and Political Bodies—that build upon one another to create a robust critique of drone warfare. A generally readable text, each chapter is no more than 10 pages of complex but digestible analysis. Chamayou assumes a basic background in continental philosophy (i.e., Kant, Hegel, Adorno) and basic political theory (i.e., Plato, Hobbes, Rousseau). His analysis, however, rapidly shifts between philosophic thought and current event application, making several of his chapters read like a game of analytic table tennis. While initially distracting, this strategy succeeds in efficiently explaining theoretic suppositions and quickly showing how they are relevant to the drone debate and to the historic or contemporary context from which the reader may approach the book.

Carefully building his critique, Chamayou begins by explaining that the GWOT propelled the U.S. military into a policing role, hunting for individual nonstate actors, rather than traditional, state-affiliated armies. The assumptions of network-centric warfare suggest that "by successfully targeting its key nodes, an enemy network can be disorganized to the point of being practically wiped out" (Chamayou, 2015, p. 34). Thus, according to conventional beliefs, weaponized drones provide the surveillance and attack capabilities necessary to precisely eliminate terrorists while posing minimal risk to American soldiers. Quietly surveying from the clouds, drones provide information that "spot the emergence of suspect elements based on [the] unusual behavior" of targeted individuals and populations (p. 42). This information becomes the data for "pattern-of-life analysis," forming the basis for the Obama administration's doctrine of "signature strikes," which "target individuals whose identity remains unknown but whose behavior suggests, signals, or signs membership in a 'terrorist organization'" (p. 47).

The balance of Chamayou's book examines the ethical implications of conducting warfare in this fashion. In this pursuit, Chamayou is ruthless. He suggests that a manhunt-oriented warfare combined with a surveillance-and-attack-weapon that can be deployed worldwide reduces the "kill box" to the individual and renders the battlefield geographically unbounded. Consequently,

this redefines the confines of war, as “combat” can occur essentially anytime, in any place, with anyone as the target. Complicating this, the stealth and distance of drones makes “combat impossible” for the target and transforms “armed combat into execution” with the intention of “[annihilating] the very will-power of those opposing them” (Chamayou, 2015, p. 62). If combat is essentially impossible, the result of unmanned drones, according to Chamayou, is the emasculation of the operator, transforming the warrior ethic “from an ethic of self-sacrifice and courage to one of self-preservation and more or less assumed cowardice” (p. 101). Adding to this analysis, Chamayou eviscerates rhetoric that celebrates drone tactics as precise and casualty reducing: “The targets are presumed guilty until they are proved innocent—which, however, can only be done posthumously” (p. 146). In defiance of traditionally held obligations of discrimination in just war theory, the drone is “related to a nondiscriminatory weapon of a new kind: by ruling out the possibility of combat, the drone destroys the very possibility of any clear differentiation between combatants and noncombatants” (p. 147).

Chamayou’s monograph advances a generally coherent and helpful critique of the American drone program. He is, however, guilty of overreach in two key parts of his analysis, which weakens the analytic punch of which these sections might otherwise be capable. First, in Chapter 12, “Psychopathologies of the Drone,” Chamayou discusses what he argues is the impossibility of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among drone operators due to the inability of drone operators’ combat experiences to fit under the auspices of the American Psychiatric Association’s definition of PTSD. Chamayou’s assertion borders on the offensive; without the benefit of psychiatric training, it seems inadvisable for anyone to flippantly dismiss the seriousness of this reported condition among drone operators. In fact, a 2013 study conducted by the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center and reported on by *The New York Times* found that “pilots of drone aircraft experience mental health problems like depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress at the same rate as pilots of manned aircraft who are deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan” (Dao, 2013).

Second, while it is the objective of critical philosophic texts to deconstruct dominantly held beliefs, it is generally unhelpful to deconstruct without clarity and without meaningful concept construction. Chamayou is guilty of both in Section 4, The Principles of the Philosophy of the Right to Kill. Alleging engagement with “legal discourse,” he does little to situate drone warfare within the context of the Law of Armed Conflict, the prevailing international doctrine for legal warfare. Instead, he focuses his analysis on Michael Walzer’s 1977 classic, *Just and Unjust Wars*, and a blog contribution by legal scholar Kenneth Anderson. While suggesting that wartime drone use balances on the precipice of “legal fragility,” Chamayou comes just short of asserting the illegality of the use of drones by the United States with the ominous, vague, and rather melodramatic concluding statement: “You have been warned” (Chamayou, 2015, p. 173). For an author who pulls no punches throughout the rest of his book, the tentative nature of his legal section is as unhelpful as it is anticlimactic and serves as a distraction from the otherwise provocative contributions of this text.

A Theory of the Drone is an insightful and challenging evaluation of the tacit acceptance of drone warfare as an extension of a cultural preference for casualty aversion. Making a significant philosophic contribution to military ethics, this monograph should be given careful consideration by both practitioners and academics. While its sometimes complex prose and hyperbole may be challenging, graduate students of philosophy, political science, international studies, and military history would also greatly benefit by grappling with the implications of this text for the continued use of drones in military contexts and in civilian society.

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Wilson, Andrew. *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014. 207 pp. plus notes and index. \$17.00 (paperback). ISBN: 978-0-300-21159-7

Reviewed by **Christopher Marsh***

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It might at first seem strange to see a review of a book on the Ukraine crisis in a journal that focuses on special operations. But as those familiar with the crisis know, both Ukrainian and Russian special operations forces have played key—and often leading—roles in the events there. Anyone interested in learning more about these units and the role they played—indeed, continue to play—will be served very well by turning to Wilson’s latest book.

Andrew Wilson is one of the West’s leading experts on Ukraine, and his recent book *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, Third Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) is the place to begin research into the crisis if one wishes to understand the operating environment. A reader in Ukrainian studies at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, Wilson has followed Ukrainian affairs throughout his career and has published widely on the subject, unlike many others who have begun to write on the subject with minimal scholarly qualifications.

While these facts certainly give the author the bona fides to write a book on the Ukrainian crisis, it by no means guarantees that he can deal with the complexities of social revolutions, warfare, and military operations. But Wilson does so quite adeptly, even beginning his work with the recognition that Russia claims it is engaged in a counter-unconventional warfare campaign (implying that the West is the one conducting unconventional warfare). Readers familiar with special operations will be able to draw from Wilson’s work all they need to understand the actors involved, their intentions, and how power competition has thwarted the empire-building agendas of local warlords. Such readers will also clearly see Russia’s use of unconventional warfare tactics, including psychological operations, information warfare, and the training and equipping of proxy forces.

In painting such a complete picture of the situation, Wilson captures a lot of the special warfare activity going on. Readers familiar with such operations will see their mark even when Wilson does not highlight it. And although he does not highlight these operations the way someone trained in special warfare would, Wilson does an excellent job and clearly understands the dynamics at work in a hybrid war such as this.

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One of the most useful aspects of Wilson's book is the fact that he explains the roles of the irregular forces that never make the news in the West, including the *titushki*. These are street thugs—recruited most often from weightlifting gyms and boxing clubs—who are hired, trained to be militant hooligans, and set off to beat up journalists, disrupt rallies, and generally act as agents provocateurs. These groups are certainly nothing new in Ukraine, or Eastern Europe for that matter, but they have played critical roles in the events in Ukraine—from Euromaidan to the present—and receive practically no coverage in the Western media.

Wilson also covers the Ukrainian units involved: not just the armed forces but also those of the Ministry of Interior (similar to Department of Homeland Security in the United States). Of particular importance here is his excellent coverage of *Berkut* (“Golden Eagle”), a unit which was deemed responsible for the majority of the nearly 100 civilian deaths during the Maidan Revolution and which was disbanded immediately thereafter. This unit, which is still active in Russian-controlled territory (and now under Russia's Ministry of Interior) is seldom discussed in Western media, and Wilson covers it superbly.

The events in Ukraine are clearly of interest to those concerned with special operations, whether as an academic interest or as operators. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of quality analytical reports on the subject (with U.S. Army Special Operation Command's “Countering-Unconventional Warfare” white paper as a clear exception: Fort Bragg, September 26, 2014). The crisis in Ukraine, however, is extremely complex, with a long history and numerous actors, each of which has its own agenda. To understand this operating environment, the best place to begin is with Wilson's book.