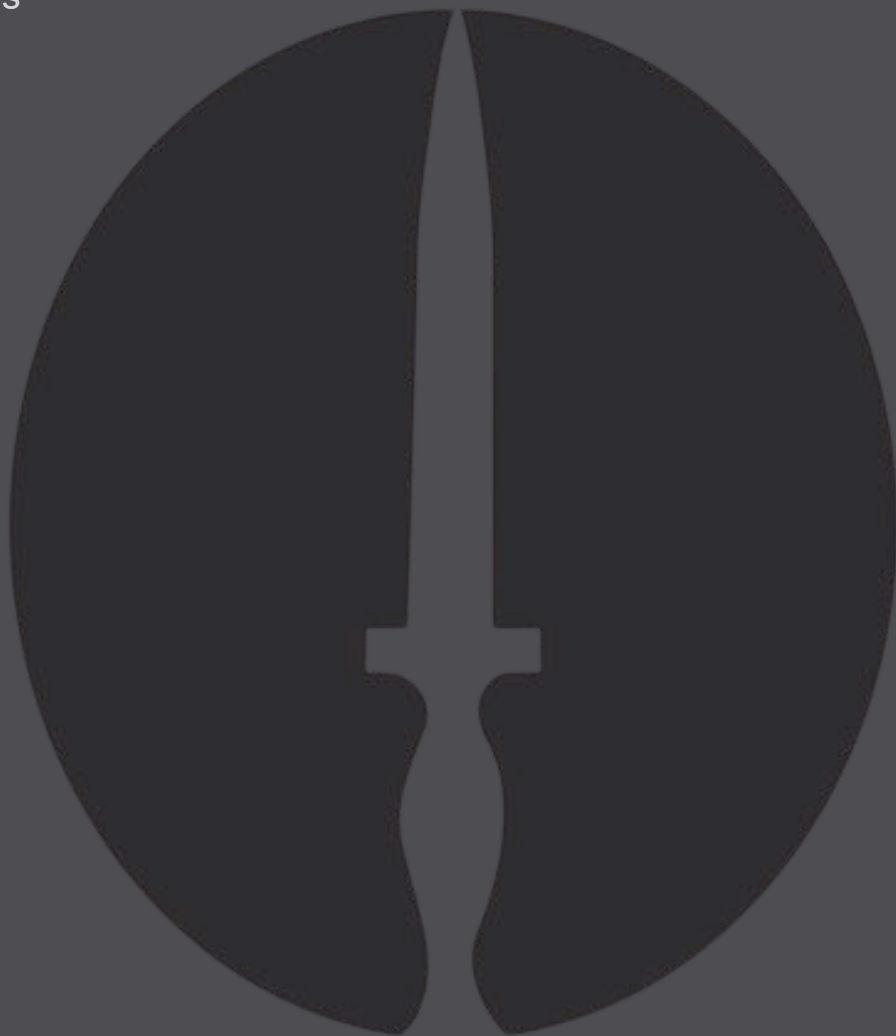


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# Special Operations Forces in the Gray Zone: An Operational Framework for Using Special Operations Forces in the Space Between War and Peace

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In September of 2015, the United States Special Operations Command published a report on the challenges presented by hostile adversarial actions that exist outside of the “traditional peace/war duality.” Yet neither that paper nor subsequent treatments of the subject address the central question of when and how to employ the most innovative, subtle, and adaptable instruments of national power—special operations forces—in these ambiguous threat environments. This article provides an initial inquiry into this question. After discussing the inadequacy of current operational models to address “gray zone” challenges (however loosely defined), the article introduces and uses an alternative model to illuminate the utility of special operations forces power at various points on the escalatory spectrum. The paper closes with additional questions to spur further research and a synopsis that addresses the implications of the model to the United States’ overall approach to gray zone competition.

**Keywords:** special operations forces, gray zone, hybrid warfare, deterrence, strategic culture, operational frameworks

## THE GRAY ZONE CHALLENGE

What do we mean by *gray zone*? To some, it is the zone between the identification of an imminent threat and the enemy’s attack (Fish, McCraw, & Reddish, 2004), whereas others remove the requirement for an imminent threat and treat the term more broadly as the area “existing short of a formal state of war” (Kapusta, 2015, p. 1). Still others question the value of the term and argue that so-called gray zone activities are identical to what we once called “international competition,” a timeless paradigm for understanding the nature of international relations (Elkus, 2015). Recent attempts to define *gray zone* have lacked precision, which has hindered the U.S. government’s attempts to develop appropriate responses. Problematic though the term may be, rejecting it entirely belies the changing nature and rapidity of international competition and undermines current momentum to address the United States’ strategic incoherence outside of the orthodox peace/war duality. The real terminological

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problem may in fact be the quest for a prescriptive definition of *gray zone* rather than a descriptive one, as gray zone challenges differ from actor to actor and from theater to theater (Freier et al., 2016). Seeking a taxonomy that could be applied to something that, by definition, defies categorization reflects our instinct to define a static end goal more than it does the opaque nature of the problem.

Special operations forces (SOF), along with elements of the intelligence community, are uniquely adapted to operating in this ambiguous zone. Tradecraft and operational approaches tied to irregular warfare, unconventional warfare, information warfare, and building partner capacity are both indigenous to SOF and important tools to addressing gray zone challenges, and should certainly be enhanced.

Enhancing capabilities alone, however, will not be sufficient to address gray zone challenges. The United States' enemies already know that they cannot compete with America in terms of conventional military power, and must observe and react to their stronger adversary; they have no other choice. Rather than trying to level the conventional playing field, a winning strategy for them is one where they fundamentally alter the playing field to play to their strengths or minimize the relevance of the United States' superior military. The outdated, rigid frameworks that form the basis of the U.S. military's approach to conflict, and friction points within the military itself, are two areas that, if not addressed, will reduce the relevance of the United States' overwhelming might.

The special operations community is not invulnerable to these weaknesses. The frameworks that drive SOF operations often account for ambiguity, but they are inevitably embedded within a larger formulaic approach to conflict that can undermine SOF effectiveness. Friction points outside of the SOF community similarly affect it, as do friction points between SOF and their partners. Furthermore, as the SOF community is asked to take on an increasing share of the nation's security responsibilities, its ability to operate in innovative ways and with agility, precision, subtlety and speed—the very qualities needed to address gray zone challenges—may diminish if it is not used carefully and adroitly.

## THE PROBLEM WITH APPLYING EXISTING FRAMEWORKS TO GRAY ZONE CHALLENGES

However long the SOF community has discussed gray zone issues, they still present novel challenges to the larger military's thinking about warfare; the operational approaches associated with addressing the gray zone (preconflict, or "phase zero," shaping operations) did not become an officially recognized military concept of operations until 2006 (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2006, pp. III–39). Despite the new terminology, however, gray zone challenges are nothing new (Kapusta, 2015); indeed, the Cold War could arguably be viewed as a protracted gray zone challenge (U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2015, pp. 2–3). So why, then, does the U.S. military have such a difficult time wrapping its mind around the space between war and peace?

Russell Weigley shed light on why gray zone challenges have only recently garnered the U.S. military's attention in his 1973 classic, *The American Way of War*, in which he asserted that the United States' strategic culture fundamentally rests upon a "strategy of annihilation" (Weigley, 1973, p. xiv). Rather than organizing its military based on the actions of a militarily superior foe, the United States focuses on maximizing efficiency and optimizing its military to

win against any enemy through attrition, and, more recently and importantly, on substituting firepower for manpower (Cauchon, 2003; Rothstein, 2006, p. 95).

Thus, efforts to shape the strategic environment are often viewed as a mere step on the escalation ladder rather than as an end unto themselves. It makes little sense, after all, to put in the effort to shape an environment when one is confident of victory in any direct confrontation.

The United States' ascent to sole superpower status, the associated shift within the military from a mindset of "engagement" to one of "containment" (Braun III & Allen, 2014, p. 53), and the related tendency to approach conflict in a reactive and piecemeal manner have only exacerbated this trend and further clouded the fact that total war is merely the final stage of competition between nations rather than its principal form. The operational frameworks used by the larger military with respect to the gray zone reflect this misunderstanding of the problem. The 2008 version of *Joint Publication 3-0*, the U.S. military's guide for conducting joint operations, defines phase zero as the stage of conflict between the design and the execution of a larger operational plan. Despite highly detailed guidance for the other phases of conflict—that is, the ones that involve kinetic action—this guidance for the preconflict phase receives scant attention, and is heavily skewed toward battlefield preparation rather than toward shaping the environment in a manner that would reduce the occurrence of kinetic conflict or constrain enemy choices should such conflict eventually occur. Moreover, because phase zero operations are nested within a larger military campaign, the concept may not adequately address the true nature of gray zone challenges (Groh & Bailey, 2015), which often take place before overt hostilities are acknowledged in the space that might be termed *left of the bang* (Flynn, Sisco, & Ellis, 2012), or, in the context of this discussion, left of zero.

Failing to address left of zero challenges provides fertile ground for adversaries whose approach is more fluid. The Chinese military, for example, building off of the intellectual legacy of Sun Tzu, has long valued intervening in subtle ways to shape the environment long before a conflict has arisen (McDonald, Jones, & Frazee, 2012). Long before the invasion of Crimea and the subsequent war in the Donbas, Russia developed a deep support network of military and civil society relationships that could be leveraged in a time of need (Greene, 2012). Iran uses not only the Revolutionary Guards but also its navy to mold the security dynamics in its surroundings to its advantage (Gouré & Grant, 2009; Pletka & Kagan, 2014). Key to the success of these actors is their patient, long-term investment in resources and networks that can provide critical leverage if and when their regional interests are threatened; the United States, including the SOF community, has long struggled to cultivate and maintain these networks over the long-term (Malvesti, 2010).

The U.S. military cannot be expected to bear total responsibility for shaping activities, as other organs of the U.S. government, such as the intelligence community, the Department of State, and the Department of the Treasury, to name a few, also have an important role to play in shaping the strategic environment in which the military operates. Nesting the U.S. military's gray zone activities within a whole-of-government approach will be an important goal moving forward, but there is plenty of work to be done within the Department of Defense and the SOF community in the mean time. The adversarial approaches highlighted above challenge our understanding of what defines war, a question that is squarely within the military's jurisdiction to address. If activities that we have typically viewed as a prelude to conflict are in fact an

### The Inadequacy of an Attrition-based OPLAN

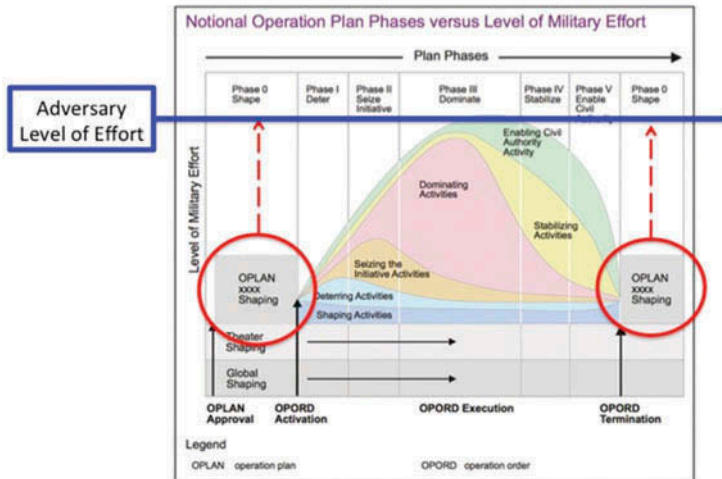


FIGURE 1 The inadequacy of an attrition-based operation plan.

adversary's center of gravity, the role of the military, and of SOF in particular, in mitigating gray zone activities deserves further attention.

Current frameworks that drive operational planning, and to which the application of SOF power is subordinated, provide little space to address such questions. The "Notional Operation Plan: Phases versus Level of Military Effort," (Figure 1) a foundational campaign planning tool, communicates clearly that the level of effort dedicated to shaping should only be a fraction of the efforts that take place in the phases that follow the activation of an operational order, particularly when compared with phase 3 (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011, p. V-6). This precludes from consideration the fact that, because of U.S. military superiority, the shaping phase will necessarily be a much more consequential phase to potential adversaries. The plan also implies that the phases, and the level of effort associated with them, will always progress in an orderly and predictable fashion. This, however, does not mesh with the opportunism that potential adversaries must rely upon when encountering an enemy such as the United States; activities associated with the operation order execution phase may need to take place during what are now labeled as shaping phases—operations in cyber space and the information realm are a case in point.

Legal considerations may limit the ability of the military to employ such plans outside of wartime, but that does not mean that such plans should not be considered. Gray zone challenges confound our current models, which is precisely why they are so difficult to address. The danger is that, as gray zone challenges become considered more closely, the military's response will be to create a new line of operation with a formulaic response, which would simply create another doctrine to which the enemy could easily adapt. Rather than another operational planning framework that considers the end goal as static, operational planners should build adaptability into their models, reject the implied temporal progression from one phase to the next, and recognize that the level of effort dedicated to a particular phase may need to change at a

moment's notice. Although such adaptations frequently happen in the field when current models are deemed ineffective, baking flexibility into the planning process would allow for a more optimal allocation of human and material resources, increasing the likelihood of success from the very beginning of a campaign.

This kind of thinking is endemic to the special operations community (Petit, 2013, pp. 53-72). However, as SOF develop additional gray zone capabilities, the capacity to use them will continue to be stymied by the larger operational culture of the U.S. military, which is not yet adept at understanding or supporting efforts that deter enemies at the low, though crucial, end of the escalatory spectrum, nor those (outside of strategic forces) that can make a decisive difference in the highest ends of the spectrum. Special operators may be familiar with systemic operational design, which takes into account the need to adapt throughout the mission (de Czege, 2009). This manner of thinking works well for small, highly agile units, but an effective solution that could be used in a broader, campaign-wide basis has yet to be devised. SOF should also not be thought of as the only tool available for shaping activities; a more effective approach would involve many aspects of national and military power.

### FRICION POINTS AROUND AND WITHIN SOF

In observing America, many have correctly identified that the seams, or friction points, within our society and between levers of power are a fruitful place to exploit.<sup>1</sup> In devising a response to gray zone challenges, SOF will need to contend with friction points above them stemming from the failure of the U.S. government to properly contend with the convergence of military and intelligence functions; lateral ones that relate to their relationship with the conventional force and Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental and Multilateral partners; and internal ones stemming from the underdevelopment of disciplines related to the indirect approach. Capabilities pertinent to gray zone challenges should certainly be enhanced, but doing so alone would be beside the point: indeed, without addressing the points of friction between them, bolstering capabilities may, in fact, make preexisting seams even more attractive to enemy exploitation.

At a level above SOF, friction points in the civilian oversight and bureaucratic environment threaten to stymie effective operations before they begin. Fortunately, the legal question marks regarding Title 10 versus Title 50 authorities are, if not solved, at least largely avoidable. Because their coordination tends to be informal and in the "pursuit of mutual objectives," cooperation between the parts of the Defense enterprise governed under Title 10 of U.S. Code, including SOF, and Title 50 of the U.S. Code, such as the Central Intelligence Agency, is on legally sound ground (Wall, 2011). The blossoming of military and intelligence cooperation post-9/11 indicates a certain ability to sort out which organization should lead, and which should support, based on mission requirements and within legal strictures. In a legal sense, much of the Title 10 versus Title 50 debate may be much ado about nothing—legal structures, throughout history, frequently change based on the strategic needs of the state (Bobbitt, 2003, p. Part I).<sup>2</sup>

The oversight and bureaucratic functions that oversee such cooperation, however, are still playing catch up to this convergence between military and intelligence roles. Thus, despite the robust cooperation at the tactical and operational levels between SOF and the intelligence

community, internal executive branch decision making, relations between Congress and the President, and the reliance on ad hoc authorities and arrangements (Chesney, 2012, p. 583), may impede coordinated efforts to tackle gray zone issues. Response times may lag, and the most capable and appropriate tool within the government's arsenal may not be mapped to a particular problem because of these issues. New concepts of operation and capabilities established to conduct cyber, information, or political warfare threaten to further challenge traditional decision-making silos, or worse, they will not, and will further contribute to the inflexibility of current operational plans addressed earlier.

As an aside, it is also worth mentioning the political and social constraints on the use of SOF, and especially other instruments of military power, to address gray zone challenges. The extent to which public opinion influences Presidential and Congressional foreign policy decisions is highly varied, but history suggests that when elected officials take negative public attitudes into consideration, their reliance on SOF increases, regardless of whether SOF are the right tool for the challenge or not (Tucker & Lamb, 2007, pp. 164–174).

At the lateral level, SOF and conventional forces have made great strides to better integrate their efforts. Joint Chiefs of Staff Concept for Integrated Campaigning initiative and research projects from within the Chief of Staff of the Army's Strategic Studies Group and the U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute (Freier et al., 2016; Mazarr, 2015), as well as the numerous recent white papers published on topics related to the future application of SOF and conventional power, all reflect a trend toward further integration.<sup>3</sup>

To reiterate, however, SOF-conventional integration should not be thought of in formulaic terms. The balance between the forces must be recalibrated depending on the specific circumstances of each competition and conflict, and effectively balancing each force has historically eluded commanders in many conflicts. The use of Civilian Irregular Defense Groups in the later years of the Vietnam War and the lack of an adequately sized force during Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan provide two compelling examples of how the misapplication of different types of forces leads to operational failures (Adams, 2001, pp. 116–120; U.S. Special Operations Command History and Research Office, 2007, p. 94).

For the center of the escalatory spectrum, that is, once adversarial conditions have been acknowledged and before kinetic conflict begins, the positioning and use of conventional forces may be more effective at shaping the strategic environment than the use of highly capable but smaller SOF teams; Operation Iraqi Freedom presents an example of this contingency. In the lower and higher ends of the escalatory spectrum, however, as will be discussed in the next section, the marginal utility of SOF employment increases substantially. Finding the appropriate balance to suit the task at hand is a function of the commander's judgment, and is much easier to define retrospectively than in the heat of the battle. Fortunately, the protracted nature of gray zone challenges allows ample opportunities for tinkering.

The real danger with respect to the SOF-conventional balance and the gray zone is, in fact, a lack of such tinkering, or rather, the exclusive reliance on SOF to conduct the U.S. military's gray zone activities. As I have detailed elsewhere, the limited resources of the U.S. Special Operations Command as related to those of the larger U.S. military require a careful examination of the role that the conventional force can play in gray zone challenges (Lohaus, 2014, pp. 55–56). Capabilities such as information operations, cyber operations, and efforts to build partner capacity should be initiated and developed by SOF but, once best practices are established, should be quickly migrated toward the larger force (Barno & Bensahel, 2015). Doing so

will allow for a more effective use of available resources and make the task of identifying U.S. centers of gravity more difficult for its enemies.

Close coordination with intergovernmental and multilateral partners also has the potential to obscure centers of gravity and allows for each government to focus on areas of comparative advantage. Through such specialization, a small country such as Estonia, for example, contributes to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s collective security in the cyber realm even though its military may not, in terms of size or capabilities, add much to NATO's force presence, and the Taiwanese and Japanese, by virtue of their location, provide intelligence insights to U.S. partners that would otherwise be difficult to obtain.

Cooperation with allies is rightfully thought of as a force-multiplier for SOF tackling gray zone challenges. Allied coordination, however, is often complicated by sluggish intelligence sharing procedures, interoperability issues, and the draconian procedural environment that too often characterizes multinational cooperation. Such challenges are less acute when U.S. SOF work with their counterparts from the United States' closest allies, especially those within the "five eyes" paradigm. Yet, in terms of comparative advantage, many of the least reproducible skill sets and knowledge bases lie outside of the commonwealth. Enhanced SOF coordination within NATO, as exemplified by the establishment of NATO SOF Headquarters, is a step in the right direction. But SOF cannot change the nature of NATO itself, which has limited utility in the "gray zone": the very conduct of phase zero operations by NATO would be tantamount to admitting the existence of an ongoing conflict, a political nonstarter for many NATO member states. NATO SOF are further stymied by a similar problem that plagues the independent efforts of their U.S. counterparts: the lack of a coherent strategy (Oliker, McNearney, & Davis, 2015). This has not gone unnoticed by the Russians, who have become quite adept at exploiting the friction points that the lack of a unified NATO vision creates (Eckstein, 2015).<sup>4</sup>

It's clear that the existence of NATO is a "shaping tool" in its own right: the commitment of its member states to stand with each other against external threats sends a powerful message to would-be adversaries. Comparable multilateral structures do not exist for tackling China or Iran's gray zone activities, and the absence of such structures reduces the number of solutions available for the United States and its allies to shape regional security dynamics. There is an argument to be made that working on a bilateral basis may be a more effective way to leverage comparative advantages, but doing so in a European context could risk undermining the considerable deterrent factor that NATO represents. A mix of both approaches is the likely solution, but finding the appropriate balance will again need to be a function of circumstance, not just preexisting and partially outmoded multilateral structures.

Within SOF, direct action missions continue to receive more attention not only from politicians and the press, but also with respect to funding and training. Though their use in addressing gray zone challenges is clear, the strategic patience required to successfully conduct military information support operations, civil affairs, and foreign internal defense is often in short supply, especially when it is particularly difficult to define and measure the "success" of such missions (Robinson, 2012, p. 113). The budgetary situation for indirect tools of SOF power has recently improved (per the U.S. Special Operations Command's FY2015 budget request; see U.S. Special Operations Command, 2014, pp. 825–827), but questions remain about how, when, where, and to what ends the indirect approach will be employed.

Meanwhile, U.S. adversaries are not waiting: China continues to pursue its "three warfares" or "unrestricted warfare" strategy (Halper, 2012, pp. 11-27; Van Messel, 2004) which relies

heavily on indirect means of projecting influence, and Russia has stepped up its information warfare capabilities and its efforts to leverage relationships with key economic, political, and journalistic players to its advantage (Aro, 2015; Chen, 2015; Lohaus & Jermilavicius, 2015). The underdevelopment of disciplines related to the indirect approach, not just in terms of budget but also in terms of training and readiness, will continue to impede the speed and effectiveness of SOF responses to enemy efforts in this sphere (Haddick, 2014, p. 66).

Even once indirect capabilities are bolstered, the friction points outlined throughout this section may still impede on SOF's abilities to effectively deploy them. Addressing these friction points will be necessary to enhance the effectiveness of all SOF gray zone activities. If friction points are left unaddressed, deploying capabilities at the appropriate level of speed, agility, and subtlety will not be systematically possible.

## A FRAMEWORK FOR THE USE OF SOF IN THE GRAY ZONE

This article has thus far outlined the context and constraints that will affect SOF efforts to address gray zone challenges. But what would an optimal use of SOF in the gray zone look like? Qualities intrinsic to SOF, including agility, precision, subtlety, and speed, are of clear utility at the lower end of the escalatory spectrum, where shifts in enemy approaches take place largely outside the public domain and at a rapid pace as one actor tests and prods the other's weaknesses. Once formal hostilities begin, then the mass brought by the conventional force often becomes necessary to create the conditions where total victory is achieved, regardless of whether they are the primary agent in achieving it. At the highest end of the escalatory spectrum, however, the survivability, agility, precision, and speed of SOF again outpace the utility of conventional forces.

The sections that follow propose and discuss a model for thinking about SOF in the gray zone that is informed by the critique of current operational models and the analysis of friction points relevant to SOF mentioned in the previous sections (Figure 2). It also takes the different perceptions between actors into account. What may be viewed as a shaping activity by the United States may be the main line of effort to its enemies (Kapusta, 2015, p. 4), and might thus lead to different definitions of where the gray zone of competition ends and the "black zone," where war begins. The model is meant to be a tool for parsing the use of different levers of U.S. military power across the escalatory spectrum, and should be thought of as an initial inquiry rather than a comprehensively researched and tested formula.

The model segments the escalatory spectrum into four different phases: peace, shaping, war, and survival. These phases are based off of a modification of the operational plan phases, with the addition of a peace phase— in which the role of the military in shaping is primarily to deter further escalation and to build partner capacity— and a survival phase beyond war in which the survival of the nation hangs in the balance. Each of the phases is then further broken down into subphases that are meant convey particular steps on the escalation ladder. These lines, which represent the borders between the steps, are dashed, indicating the opaque transition between them. Though it will be clarified later, it is also worth noting here that the phases correspond to intensity of effort, not necessarily a linear progression.

Likewise with the transition points, which are meant to represent macro-level shifts in the nature of interaction with an adversary. The first transition, from "peace" to "shaping," might be thought of as the transition from a neutral or friendly actor to one whose loyalties are less

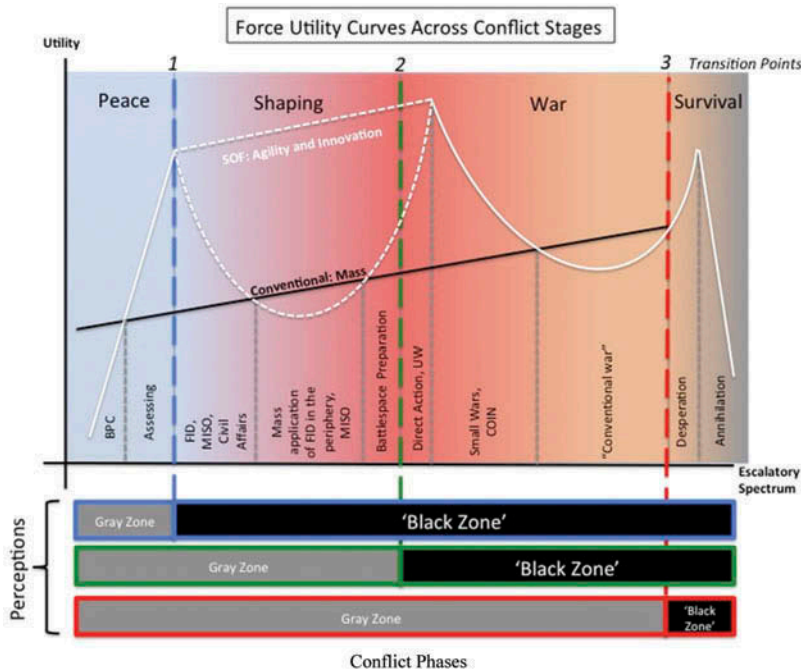


FIGURE 2 Force utility curves across conflict stages.

certain, or who may present a threat in the future. The second transition point, from “shaping” to “war,” reflects the point at which shaping behavior has ceased to result in favorable outcomes and kinetic conflict is deemed inevitable. Transition point three should be thought of as the moment at which the conventional force has become exhausted and overwhelmed, or as the final stages of total war. Beyond this point lie final attempts at survival, in which SOF, if they are available, and ultimately strategic forces, play a decisive role.

### Force Curves

The interaction between the two force curves illustrates the changing value of conventional and special operations forces at different conflict stages. Throughout the escalatory spectrum, there are important roles for each group; the interaction of the curves is meant to illustrate the force whose use will have the most consequential impact at a given point on the escalatory spectrum. In the peace stage, for example, the model should not be construed as implying that SOF have no role to play with allies (relationships with whom are represented by the “building partner capacity” section). Rather, it is meant to illustrate that it is the conventional forces that should lead these efforts, and also that it is the mass that they present that undergirds the peaceful status quo. From a U.S. perspective, the United Kingdom might fit into this part of the spectrum.

That begins to change as one moves to the right in the peace zone, which is to say, in the approach to transition point one. This area reflects interactions with actors whose intentions are

unknown or whose loyalties are unclear. The use of subtlety in these situations is paramount, but so are SOF functions like foreign internal defense and civil affairs, which may bleed across transition point one into the realm of shaping. From a U.S. perspective, the Colombian government in the late 1980s and early 1990s may have fit into this category.

Transition point one should be thought of as the delineator between building friendly relations and addressing potential adversaries. Here, core SOF competencies are particularly relevant, especially in the early stages of the transition. SOF will establish the key relationships that may later be of use to intelligence organizations, will conduct initial information operations, and potentially perform foreign internal defense or train-and-equip missions. For U.S. policy, Pakistan might fit into this category.

As the stakes increase, and as evidence mounts that the other actor has ill intentions (however ill-defined those intentions may be), the path chosen will depend on the internal perception of the threat level. The dashed line represents a contingency in which information operations, foreign internal defense in states on the periphery of the actor of interest, and military information support operations are conducted with the full weight of the military, which is to say, the conventional forces begin taking a more active role in shaping efforts. The United States' efforts in the Sahel against al-Qaeda would be a good example of this type of contingency. Alternatively, the priority to conduct shaping operations is de-emphasized, or SOF remain the principal instruments of military power in this realm, represented by the dotted line. An example of that contingency would be U.S. attempts to train anti-Assad forces in Jordan in 2015. Regardless of the path chosen, SOF retain their leading role in initial phases of shaping and in the final one, battle space preparation.

Transition point two marks the beginning of war. Again, the transition is deliberately portrayed as vague, because there may not be a formal declaration. Rather, this point is marked by the actor's perception of when overt hostilities have begun. The primary U.S. activity turns from preparation to direct action and unconventional warfare, both squarely within SOF's wheelhouse. One could point to the United States' fight against ISIS in Syria or Russia's postinvasion activities in Ukraine for an example of this stage.

As the missions become more complex, the speed and agility of SOF become less relevant to newfound priorities, such as holding ground that has been gained, or building relationships with local stakeholders on a massive and granular scale. SOF still have an important role to play, but their utility relative to conventional forces begins to decrease. The later years of Operation Iraqi Freedom during and after the surge provide an example of this stage.

As intensity increases, forces enter a stage that we would now loosely characterize as "conventional war." The utility of SOF decreases as the importance of presence—that is, mass—increases, and the conventional force becomes the decisive factor in the conflict (SOF, of course, are still used, but their marginal impact to strategic objectives falls below that of the conventional force). The First Gulf War provides a good example of this stage.

As we approach transition point three, however, the utility of SOF gradually increases as the stakes of a conflict increase to the point where survival may be at stake. In this zone, mass becomes less relevant and the consequences to society of individual missions increases. As the most keenly trained soldiers available to the U.S. military—and also those with the most well developed ties to the intelligence community—it follows naturally that SOF would be relied upon more heavily in this zone. Transition point three might thus be thought of as the stage

where total war has nearly destroyed another society. Germany in the final days of World War II would be an example of a society approaching transition point three.

Beyond the final acts that leadership will rely upon in a desperate attempt to avoid their fate, a country's resources are exhausted and all that remains between them and destruction are their strategic forces (if any are available). Perhaps the most appropriate example of this, absent strategic forces, would be the annihilation of the Aztecs in 1521.

It is important at this stage to note that the force curves present an idealized and simplified way to think about the appropriate use of different mixes of forces—not a historical account of how they actually have been used. At any stage, SOF may be employed in a manner consistent with their inherent comparative advantages—subtlety, innovation, flexibility, and speed. That said, decision-makers should weigh such decisions carefully in order to avoid a misuse of SOF in circumstances that would be better addressed through conventional means, such as when the quality of special operators is seen as a replacement for mass, or as a Hail Mary pass to stave off strategic desperation.

## Perceptions

As Kapusta (2015) rightly pointed out in his piece on gray zone challenges, the way that an actor perceives his interactions with another is subjective and independent of the adversary's perspective (p. 4). If an adversary knows that it cannot compete with America in the realm of conventional military power, then it makes sense that they would dedicate more effort to the shaping phase of the interaction. This then begs the question: If the enemy views the conflict as solidly within the realm of war, why would we not want to approach it with the same level of effort and dedication of resources?

The model thus illustrates three hypothetical actors, all with differing perceptions of what constitutes a “gray zone,” or preconflict, activity and what constitutes a conflict that is already underway. The first actor (denoted in blue) views shaping activities as part of its war footing, which is to say that it would require admitting and in some cases legislating the fact that conflict is inevitable before shaping activities occur. Many European actors would fall into this category; as mentioned previously, NATO as a whole cannot conduct “phase zero” operations by law.

For the second actor (denoted in green), shaping activities take place up to the beginning of the kinetic phases of conflict, thus allowing for, at least in theory, more resources and effort to be dedicated to shaping than would be possible for an actor operating under the first perspective. The main question here then becomes how much effort should be dedicated to shaping, rather than whether shaping can take place at all. The United States arguably operates with this perspective. Under its current approach, shaping activities are largely relegated to SOF and the intelligence community; the top dashed line in the model would thus reflect the current U.S. approach.

The third actor (denoted in red), on the other hand, views activities that the other actors view as shaping as the war itself. Because they cannot compete effectively in the areas of conflict in which capable conventional forces increasingly dominate, more resources are dedicated to earlier conflict phases, and just as in a kinetic conflict, the utility of SOF diminishes as conventional forces are increasingly enlisted to support the effort. Russia's behavior pre-Crimea (and its current efforts in the information, cyber, and political warfare realms in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states), may fit into this category, as might China's “unrestricted warfare.”

Because perceptions of the nature of a particular conflict will be different depending on where one sits, assessing the level of effort that a particular adversary is displaying toward certain ends will be a more useful method of determining how to interact with them than are strict comparisons of hard and soft power. Net assessments usefully factor considerations such as will, culture, and capacity into power comparisons, but still rely upon traditional conceptions of war. As this model shows, if what von Clausewitz (1989) called “the culminating point of attack” (p. 528) happens as a result of activities that are traditionally thought of as preludes to the main battle, such as cyber warfare, information warfare, and political warfare, we risk overlooking the enemy’s center of gravity and cede advantages to them that will be useful should kinetic war ever take place.

### Practical Implications

The intent of the model outlined in this article is to provide operational planners with a lens through which to think about how and when to utilize SOF power at all stages of the escalatory spectrum. Models are frequently the domain of theoreticians instead of practitioners. Yet once models do gain traction with practitioners, there is a danger that they will be thought of as formulaic and prescriptive, as evidenced by the discussion of the current operational planning model outlined earlier in this article. If thought of as a framing tool rather than as the basis for standard operating procedures, however, the model discussed herein intentionally allows for ambiguity and for a continuous discussion of how the perceptions of U.S. forces and their adversaries may differ—and thus has several practical implications that warrant additional discussion.

First, because the force utility model calls for an analysis of enemy perceptions and levels of effort as a starting point, it provides an alternative to current operational planning models that largely treat such elements as either exogenous (e.g., the *Joint Operations* model) or as a consideration that is relevant only after a campaign has begun (e.g., systemic operational design). Intelligence has an obvious role to play here, but only if the right questions are asked; questions about intent, capabilities, and plans are important, but so too are metrics that indicate the level of effort that an enemy is placing on particular operations, as well as their perceptions of the United States’ priorities. Offices such as the Office of Net Assessment and the Joint Chiefs of Staff J3 conduct such assessments, but these efforts should mesh with similar analyses conducted from an operational point of view at the combatant commands as well. The method by which this analysis is conducted is not as important as the fact that it occurs in the first place, because without an understanding of enemy perceptions and priorities, the risk of strategic and operational miscalculation increases.

Second, the model provides a useful way to think about the respective roles of conventional and special operations forces. It suggests a key role for conventional forces in the conduct of shaping activities, particularly when the adversary is similarly using mass as a counterweight to the superiority of U.S. capabilities. This does not mean that SOF do not have a role to play against such enemies, but that they will be most useful in areas suited to their comparative advantages in adaptability, flexibility, subtlety, and speed. Once an effective way of countering the shaping operations of a powerful adversary is developed, it follows from the model that the mass application of such techniques should then become the responsibility of the conventional force.

Nonstate actors such as the Islamic State are not included in this model, as fully discussing the challenges they pose would fall outside the scope of this paper. The model does suggest, however, that SOF would be the most useful tools to counter the shaping activities of such groups in most situations. If one thinks of groups such as the Islamic State as existing in a perpetual state of violent jihad against their enemies (Bunzel, 2015, pp. 7–11; Landau-Tasserion, 2016, p. 6; Wood, 2015), then their perception of international competition is always in the “war” if not “desperation” stages of conflict. The model shows that SOF would be the most useful tools in countering such an enemy, outside of a transition from “hybrid” to fully conventional war. This makes sense: insurgencies are highly adaptable and fluid, and require a similarly flexible and creative response—one that is solidly within SOF’s realm to provide.

The model also suggests another area where the employment of SOF would make more sense than using their conventional counterparts: the transition stages between peace, shaping, war, and survival stages of conflict. These points in the escalatory spectrum are characterized by uncertainty, and SOF’s ability to drive innovative approaches to the changing nature of the enemy’s responses supersedes the need for a mass application of established procedures. As the nature of each conflict moves away from the transition points, likewise, it would make sense for SOF to transition some of their approaches to the conventional force, which would then apply them en masse.

Last, the model serves as a tool for thinking about conflict as a point on a spectrum, and therefore allows operational planners to think of conflict in a more nuanced manner than current operational planning models allow. Rather than thinking of each conflict as inexorably marching to phase 3, because of the stress on analyzing perceptions, the model may be used as a way to show how shaping efforts can prevent conflict from escalating into later stages. If shaping activities, including those endemic to SOF, are prioritized and adequately resourced, the model shows that successfully countering an enemy’s advances is entirely achievable without total domination.

### Additional Considerations and Areas for Further Research

The force utility model discussed in this article should be thought of as a starting point for discussions about how to optimize the use of SOF at various conflict stages. The model raises questions that bear upon operational, strategic, and political considerations, including the following:

- If other actors perceive gray zone challenges as the main event, should we respond only with SOF, or would it be more effective to mimic their level of effort and relegate more responsibility to conventional forces?
- Where and when should shaping efforts begin? How should we describe transition point two and where does shaping end and war begin?
- How should strategic forces factor into this model? Are SOF adequately prepared to shape the weapons of mass destruction environment across the escalatory spectrum?
- Are the three “perception” blocks sufficient to explain the spectrum of gray zone perspectives? How could their meaning be clarified?

- Do the challenges of gray zone conflicts demand organizational responses, e.g. elevating SOCOM to a service? Should this conversation be part of the current debate underway regarding the reform of the Goldwater-Nichols Act?
- Do cyber operations, which rarely cause damage in a kinetic manner and occur in a fundamentally different domain, demand an entirely separate escalatory curve?
- Civil-military relations within the societies and governments of adversaries operating in the “red perception zone” of the graphic often differ markedly from those in the United States. How should nonmilitary contributions be represented in the model? What are the implications for tackling gray zone issues for broader questions of the respective roles of civilian and military levers of power?

## SYNOPSIS

The attention that the gray zone currently receives suggests an understanding within the military that current operational approaches are not sufficient to address challenges to U.S. interests outside of traditional campaigns. It is worth stepping back for a moment, however, and asking, again, whether gray zone challenges are really anything new. In essence, they are not. But the rapidity of enemy adaptations and the increased number of mediums in which they act are, in fact, unprecedented. Moreover, because of its unquestioned strength in conventional terms, and the related assumption that this status will allow it to always set the terms of international competition, the U.S. military’s ability to adapt to new challenges has decreased. Gray zone challenges do not so much demand additional resources as they require a reconsideration of the U.S. military’s approach to its putative and declared adversaries. The only reason that these competitors are gaining advantage is because of the United States’ unwillingness or inability to deter and address gray behavior.

One thing is clear: the gray zone challenge will require the efforts of much more than just SOF. One advantage that many of our enemies have is that they either (a) enjoy a command and control environment that is less prone to friction or (b) enjoy a political environment in which constraints on the application of shaping tools has been minimized, or both. To compete effectively with such actors, it behooves us not only to understand their perspective but also to dedicate far more resources to shaping activities than those that exist within the SOF community. Rather than retaining primary responsibility for SOF activities, they would be better used as example setters, as innovators, and as tools for the most sensitive missions, i.e., those that take place near the transition points outlined in the force utility model.

America has operated effectively in the gray zone before, as the various operations outside of warfare during the Cold War demonstrate. Perhaps, then, the luxury of enjoying sole superpower status has weakened its ability to identify and act upon opportunities that would have seemed obvious in generations past. Rather than completely change the suite of tools available to today’s decision makers, what is needed is a comfort with ambiguity and a willingness to dedicate resources to a problem long before it becomes what we would consider a crisis.

In providing a way of thinking about conflict that is less linear, less determinative, and more accurately reflective of the ongoing and nuanced nature of international competition, the model presented in this paper attempts to address this need. It highlights key roles for SOF but, critically, also demonstrates the need for expanded presence and capacities for the conventional

force as well. Although the expansion of military activity suggested in this article may be controversial, mitigating challenges at lower ends of the escalatory spectrum often precludes the need to engage at higher levels. Injecting a more comprehensive understanding of international competition into U.S. military doctrine will allow the United States to better address a variety of threats and identify additional opportunities at every stage of interaction with international actors.

## NOTES

1. Friction points within society are highly relevant to a discussion of gray zone challenges, but an adequate discussion of them deserves separate treatment.
2. The more interesting question of the relation between Title 10, Title 50, and Title 22 authorities, however, warrants further research.
3. An expanding appreciation for maneuver warfare within the conventional force, its use in wide area security operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere over the past decade, and its increased use in foreign internal defense missions, for example, mark the development of SOF-like tactics, techniques, and procedures outside of the SOF community.
4. This does not, however, preclude nations from conducting shaping operations under bilateral arrangements, which draws into question the utility of NATO in addressing the unconventional aspects of gray zone challenges (Domröse, 2015)

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# The Human Domain and Influence Operations in the 21st Century

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Recent military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, the proliferation of violent nonstate actors, and the rise of ISIS have sparked a debate on the need to create a sixth domain of warfighting, the human domain. This article builds off of military doctrine and scholarly articles and books to offer (a) a definition of the human domain and (b) its military objective—building influence to affect behavior of a target population better than the adversary.

Keywords: human domain, influence operations, irregular warfare, population-centric warfare

In 2006, retired General Rupert Smith opened his book *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* by proclaiming that “war no longer exists,” surmising that state-on-state war is a thing of the past and present and future wars will be fought largely between nonstate actors (p. 3). In a similar vein, Mary Kaldor’s book *New Wars* (2007) argues that the post-Cold War security environment is defined by “wars among the people,” or wars where states will fight nonstate actors or nonstate actors will fight each other; these wars, while perhaps not new, will be the dominant form of warfare and eclipse military engagements between states. Military historian Martin Van Creveld (1991) makes a similar prediction, attributing the danger of nuclear war to the decline in war between states and the rise of nonstate actor conflicts. All three scholars purport that conventional warfare is a thing of the past and military engagements will be punctuated by irregular threats, such as terrorists, insurgents and violent transnational groups. These scholars agree that these ‘new wars’ require changes in how and why states engage in military action.

Recent military operations appear to affirm these new dynamics in warfare. The Global War on Terror, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the rise of ISIS have all involved armed conflict between state and nonstate actors. These violent engagements have compelled intervening forces to change not only tactics, techniques and procedures, but also to develop new strategies and objectives in warfare more broadly. In particular, U.S. and European countries have begun to debate the need to create a sixth domain of warfighting, the human domain, to be analytically distinct from the existing domains of warfare (land, sea, air, space, and cyber). In the United States, for example, a 2012 U.S. Army white paper argues, “the success of future strategic initiatives and the ability of the U.S. to shape a peaceful and prosperous global environment will rest more and more on our ability to understand, influence, or exercise control within the ‘human

domain” (TRADOC 525-3-0, p. 15). However, the call for a sixth domain of warfare has sparked considerable debate over its definition, purpose, connection to other domains, and training requirements for military forces.

This article builds off of doctrine, scholarly articles, books, and media reports, to offer a definition of the human domain and a defense for creating the human domain as the sixth realm of warfighting in an era dominated by population centric warfare. The article proposes a military objective in the human domain, which is influencing an individual or group to affect behavior better than the adversary. With this objective in mind, the article argues that four broad core competencies are necessary to understand and influence the human domain within the armed forces: language and cultural analytics, which is the ability of intervening forces to analyze culture within their area of operation; communications skills; intelligence capabilities; and skills that prepare the military for interagency, whole of government, and a “whole of nation” approach.

## DEFINING THE HUMAN DOMAIN

One of the challenges of establishing a human domain of warfighting is defining the term and its scope. Several publications offer definitions of the human domain, with little agreement on what it is, what it contains, and how it is distinct from the other domains. For example, a 2013 USSOCOM White Paper defines the human domain as follows: “the totality of the physical, cognitive, cultural, and social environments that influence human behavior” (pp. 4–5). This definition, while offering a broad foundation upon which to investigate the human domain, poses a challenge, namely that it conflates what affects humans with the domain itself. The human domain first should be defined independent of the factors that shape it; then a discussion on what affects or influences it should be investigated. The 2015 USSOCOM report “Operating in the Human Domain” offers a more basic definition: “The Human Domain consists of the people (individuals, groups, and populations) in the environment, including their perceptions, decision-making, and behavior” (p. 4). This definition, while straightforward, confines the human domain only to what people think and do, which leaves out other important aspects of the human domain, such as the material objects and social groups that humans produce.

The 2010 British Joint Doctrine “Understanding” offers a more complex definition of the human domain, breaking it down into what it is, the environments that affect and are affected by it, and different types of actors. The doctrine defines the human domain as: “the interaction between human actors, their activity and their broader environment. It is defined as *the totality of the human sphere of activity or knowledge*” (pp. 3-5, emphasis theirs). “Understanding” further delineates the environments that affect and are affected by the human domain, breaking these down into cultural (ideological, psychological); institutions (political, military, economic, legal); technological (technology, cyberspace); and the physical environment, meaning terrain and weather (pp. 3-5 to 3-7). “Understanding” provides categories of actors, dividing the human domain into state (individual and group actors aligned with the state); nonstate (individuals and groups independent of the state); global (actors that have influence at the global level, including organizations such as the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and superpowered individuals); and local actors—those who have influence at the local level (pp. 3–8). The doctrine is quick to point out that these categories are not mutually exclusive; individuals and groups could belong to multiple categories, and affiliations and priorities can change over time.

A June 2013 *Small Wars Journal* article “Joint Force 2020 and the Human Domain” asserts that “human factors are the basis for all action within, and interaction between, the various actors in the physical domain of the battlespace” (Hoffman & Davies, p. 2). The article builds off of the concept of maneuver in warfighting to propose that humans are their own space of military maneuver. The goal of intervening militaries and governments is to influence and shape human behavior in targeted areas: “Our interest in this environment, which cuts across and drives our operational effectiveness in all other domains, is predicated upon the need to shape the attitudes and behaviors of decision-makers, individuals, and relevant populations to our desired political outcomes” (p. 4). The article asserts that the human domain is the foundation of all other domains:

Literally no action can take place in the other physical domains without this vital human element. It is humans who fly aircraft and apply precision power in the air domain. It is trained professionals who operate sophisticated surface and subsurface platforms in the sea domain. Cyber professionals operate and defend our computers, and seek to outwit hackers and intruders in the cyber domain (p. 5).

Building off of these debates, this article proposes the following definition of *human domain*:

The human domain is comprised of humans—including humans as physical beings, human thought, emotions, and human action—and what they create, such as groups, infrastructure, art and so on. In other words, the human domain is what humans are, what they think, how they act, and what they create.

This definition draws from descriptions of the traditional domains of warfighting—land, sea, air, and space—which include not only the terrain of each domain, but all that is in that terrain as well. Similarly, the human domain consists of more than just humans as physical beings, but also their thoughts and perceptions, and the things they make, such as groups, infrastructure, information, and so on. Furthermore, as will be described, this definition of the human domain allows for a separate discussion on the military objective of this realm, which is to influence the target audience to affect behavior better than the adversary.

Each subdivision of the human domain—the physical being, thought, action, and what humans create—can become a focus of warfare. For example, humans as physical beings have become the target of extermination campaigns, or genocide, as a wider military strategy. Examples of this strategy include Armenians during World War I; Jews, Slavs, Roma, homosexuals, and the mentally and physically challenged in Hitler’s Germany and its allies during World War II; and the Hutu’s slaughter of the Tutsis in the Rwandan civil war in 1994. In these cases the elimination of these groups of people—as opposed to targeting them for just psychological effect—was the goal. Rape as a weapon of war is another strategy that targets humans as physical beings, and aims to wipe out ethnic groups and destroy communities through mass rape and the offspring they produce (Diken & Lausten, 2005). On a tactical level, the use of people as a “human shield” to prevent adversaries from attack is another form of using humans as physical beings in war.

Human thought is also a critical target of warfare. Affecting leaders and their decision making processes has always been a goal of warfare. In conventional war, state leaders make the decision to go to war and to capitulate; therefore, ultimately war begins and ends in the minds of leaders. In more modern times, particularly after the creation of nation-states, populations and their thoughts have also played a critical role in warfare. The creation of the *levee en mass*, and the state’s need for its population’s willingness to participate in warfare to field sufficient troops, has become a critical calculation in warfare. With the advent of democracy, the ability of citizens to oust leaders through elections has also created new calculations for going to war and for the

duration of armed conflict. The greater inclusion of the press in warfare has informed populations' perceptions through what is commonly known as the "CNN effect," which has shaped popular support for going to war and ongoing military engagements. More recently, social media has become a powerful tool for mobilizing mass protest, as was evident in the 2010 and 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. All of these factors make shaping human thoughts, perceptions and emotions, a critical aspect of warfighting today.

Last, what humans make is an important part of the human domain. Humans are creative beings and constantly developing ways to be more efficient and organized. Humans create collectives—social, political, ethnic, religious, and occupational based groups—which, in turn, affect how humans think and behave. Human creations also include tangible objects such as roads, buildings and other infrastructure. Humans also develop stories, myths, symbols, art, and other systems of belief that help to explain and make sense of the world. All of these creations can be powerful tools of warfighting and peace building.

Because the human domain (similar to the other domains of warfare) is extremely broad, it is useful to break it down into analytical subcategories. Despite the rise of "war among the people," states are still the principal unit of political organization in international affairs and the polity most immediately responsible for working toward internal and transnational war termination; therefore, subcategories of the human domain should begin with, and relate to, the state. Here states are defined as physical territory, its government, and the population within it. States, however, are no longer (or perhaps never were) unitary actors; therefore it is essential to include the substate level, which contains everything within a state, such as tribes, ethnic groups, civic associations, religious groups, gangs, and so on. It is also necessary to consider trans-state actors, good and bad, such as international charities and nongovernmental organizations as well as criminal and terrorist networks that cross borders. Ethnic and religious groups can also cross state borders and form their own groups with interests and resources.

A second important consideration within the human domain is leaders and followers and the dynamic between them. Leaders are powerbrokers; they hold sway over others and therefore are extremely important to manage in times of potential or actual conflict as well as in efforts to maintain peace. However, those that follow are also an important consideration and require separate attention to manage and influence. For example, one of the effects of globalization is that it has dispersed information to all levels of society around the world, changing power dynamics (Fukuyama, 1999; Zakaria, 2003). Studying the effects of globalization on the dynamic between leaders and followers is an important consideration for influence in the human domain.

Building off of the discussion from the British "Understanding" and the USSOCOM White Paper on the human domain, it is important to further consider what affects the human domain. Several publications aid this discussion. First, *Operational Culture for the Warfighter* (Salmoni & Holms-Eber, 2008) points out that humans affect and are affected by their environment; therefore humans' relationship to their surroundings is dynamic. *Operational Culture* proposes a three part dynamic model for understanding humans and their environment: an "ecological model," which considers humans' relationship to the physical environment; a "social structure model," which investigates the social and political systems that humans create and how they affect humans in turn; and a "symbolic model," which examines "the beliefs, symbols, and rituals of a group" (Salmoni & Holms-Eber, 2008, pp. 22–24). The authors further relate this three-part dynamic model to war, noting that the ecological model predicts conflicts over natural resources, such as water, land, and byways; the social structure includes wars over power in unequal societies; and the symbolic model includes

conflicts over “identity and ideology between competing social systems” (Salmoni & Holms-Eber, 2008, p. 24).

Two additional dynamic variables help round out what affects the human domain. First, the authors of *Operational Culture* include technology under the ecological model, but it is useful to consider it as its own variable. Technology has changed the way humans engage in warfare and opened up new domains of warfighting, most recently the space and cyber domains. Moreover, globalization, brought on by advances in information technologies, has connected people in new ways, including for conflict. The cyber domain, in particular, has become a new realm of warfighting that would not exist without innovations in information technologies. Therefore, technology and its relationship to people is an important consideration in the human domain.

Second, humans’ relationship to information is another important consideration for its dynamic impact on the human domain. Information, a product of humans, is particularly important for its ability to shape perceptions. Nineteenth-century scholar of democracy Alex de Tocqueville (1990) notes that “nothing but a newspaper can drop the same thought into a thousand minds at the same moment” (p. 111). While clearly technology has allowed for other means of communications to speak to the masses, the essence of de Tocqueville’s comment remains unchanged. Information is a valuable tool for shaping beliefs and behavior. More recent innovations in social media are a continuation of the influencing effects that information technology has on human thought and behavior. In addition to the spread of information created by advances in Information Technologies, it is also important to note that “low tech” means of spreading information is still important today. Rumors, “whisper campaigns,” gossip and word-of-mouth communications may be particularly important in villages and areas with limited technology, but is still a facet of modern societies as well (see Table 1).

Last, in this wider discussion of the human domain is the U.S. military’s 2007 creation of the Human Terrain System, which aimed to provide military commanders in Afghanistan and Iraq with a better understanding of the populations they were engaging. Defined as “the human population in the operational environment ... as defined and characterized by sociocultural, anthropologic and ethnographic data and other non-geographical information,” the U.S. military focused heavily on “mapping” and understanding the human terrain in critical areas of operation (Kipp, Grau, Prinslow, & Smith, 2006, p. 15).

Although the concept of the Human Terrain System makes sense in conflicts that are population centric, mapping the human terrain introduces some important problems. First, not everything in the human terrain can be mapped. Gender and age demographics can be mapped, but important considerations, such as worldviews, cannot. Thus the danger of mapping the human terrain is that it will include items that are easy to identify and map, and omit ones that are not, effectively giving greater importance to these easily measured or visualized factors. Second, humans are ever-adapting; they change and are changed by their environments. Mapping the human terrain runs the risk of creating static information that is collected at one point in time and not rechecked for changes. Even seemingly static factors, such as group identity or religious affiliation, could change with time.

Rather than map the human terrain, it is better to focus on the military objective in the human terrain—influence—which will be explored further in the following section.

TABLE 1  
The Human Domain

<i>Definition</i>	<i>Groups</i>	<i>Leaders/followers</i>	<i>Dynamic models</i>
Humans, including humans as physical beings, human thought, human action, and what they create.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substate (e.g., tribes, associations)</li> <li>• State (the territory, population, and the government)</li> <li>• Trans-state (international organizations and networks, certain ethnic, racial, tribal and religious groups)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substate (tribal leaders, warlords, governors, etc.)</li> <li>• State (heads of government, key state leaders)</li> <li>• Trans-state (super-powered individuals, leaders of international organizations)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecological (humans' relationship to terrain, weather)</li> <li>• Social systems (humans' relationship to social and political organizations)</li> <li>• Symbolic (humans' relationship to beliefs, rituals, symbols)</li> <li>• Technology (humans' relationship with technology)</li> <li>• Information (humans' relationships to ideas and information)</li> </ul>

### THE MILITARY OBJECTIVE OF THE HUMAN DOMAIN—INFLUENCE

The U.S. military defines the objective of the four physical domains of warfighting (land, sea, air and space) as “dominating” these realms. Dominating the traditional domains of warfare involves controlling physical space: securing and holding specific territory; controlling sea lanes of communication; and denying airspace. However, with the creation of the fifth domain of warfighting in U.S. doctrine, the cyber domain, dominance is no longer defined by controlling physical space. Unlike land, sea, air, and space, the cyber domain is not physical; despite having roots in the world, its battlespace is largely virtual and therefore cannot be bounded and controlled like sea lanes, air space, or specific terrain. Similar to the cyber domain, the human domain contains challenges for identifying and measuring military objectives.

The military objective in the human domain should be influence, and dominating the human domain is the ability to influence targeted individuals and groups better than the adversary. A useful definition of operationalized influence comes from a RAND report on strategic influence in the Global War on Terror. It builds off of the U.S. Psychological Operations (PSYOP) Field Manual to operationalize influence operations as:

...planned operations—convert and/or overt—to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences. Such campaigns attempt to influence perceptions, cognitions, and behaviors of foreign governments, organizations, groups and individuals (Cragin & Gerweher, 2005, p. 14).

Influence is critical in the human domain because it holds the potential to shape human thoughts, actions, and what humans create. If done properly, targeted individuals and groups will align their attitudes and behavior with U.S. interests. The critical question becomes: how do intervening militaries (and government more broadly) effectively build influence with target audiences?

Several scholars offer useful insights into creating influence with a targeted audience. Cialdini (2006) outlines six principles for building influence: reciprocity (treat others as you wish to be treated); commitment and consistency (get people involved early on and be persistent); social proof (create an atmosphere where others are doing same thing and there is safety in numbers); likability (which builds trust); authority (which also builds trust); and scarcity (things are more desirable when they are few in number).

The Yale attitudinal change model offers another useful tool for how to build influence in a target audience. The steps include the following: exposure (the message reaches the audience); attention (the message can be heard above competing messages and “static”); comprehension (the message is clear and makes sense culturally); acceptance (the audience understands *and* accepts the model); retention (the message is durable); and translation (the message changes thinking, which leads to changes in behavior). The model’s creators are quick to note that these steps are sequential and therefore must be performed in this order to successfully build influence (Cragin & Gerweher, 2005, pp. 22–24; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953).

Also useful for a discussion on influence in the human domain, the RAND study on strategic influence presents a spectrum of influence that ranges from compliance to conversion. Compliance is summarized as “believe what you want but do as we say” (Cragin & Gerweher, 2005, p. 15). For compliance to occur, the instructions need to “(1) have sufficient inducement; (2) few or no obstacles to obedience; and (3) a simple set of instructions to follow” (Cragin & Gerweher, 2005, p. 16). The report further notes that compliance campaigns are usually immediate in effect but they rarely result in changes in belief; therefore the effect requires constant reinforcement or is short lived. The threat or use of force is a useful tool in compliance campaigns (Cragin & Gerweher, 2005, p. 16).

In the middle of the spectrum is conformity, which can be summarized as peer pressure, or individuals measuring their behavior and beliefs to others around them and conforming to the group. Conformity campaigns can be built around normative influence, or building uniformity in peer beliefs and behavior. Another means of building a conformity campaign is through information, which can shape behavior and beliefs (Cragin & Gerweher, 2005, p. 17).

On the right end of the spectrum is conversion, which is “the complete restructuring of the audiences’ relevant beliefs, attitudes, emotions and opinions” (Cragin & Gerweher, 2005, p. 19). The goal in conversion is still to alter behavior, but to do so by changing the underlying beliefs that guide actions. Conversion campaigns require a strong degree of control over the environment, sufficient knowledge of the target audience, and time. The influencer is also trusted (Cragin & Gerweher, 2005, p. 19–20).

Cialdini’s six principles, the Yale Six Step sequence, and the RAND spectrum of compliance, conformity and conversion suggest a few important considerations for building influence in the human domain. First, it is important to know what desired effect the intervening power would like from its targeted individual or population. This is perhaps the most critical piece of information for influence in the human domain. If the intervening authority wants specific actions and is limited by time, then coercion to achieve compliance may be the best course of action. However, if the intervening power wants to create lasting influence with a group, state, region, or their leaders, the literature suggests that this will take time and building relationships and trust are paramount. The use of force under these circumstances, if not balanced within the wider objective of building lasting influence, may be counterproductive.

Second, these models suggest that the goal of influence is to change behavior, but the means through which to do that differ. Compliance campaigns change behaviors without changing beliefs, conformity changes behaviors subconsciously through environmental cues, and conversion changes behavior through changing beliefs. With conformity and especially conversion, changes in behavior should be long-lasting (if not permanent) because the social cues and beliefs that govern behavior have been changed; therefore change may take longer, but it lasts longer as well.

Third, changing behavior alone in the human domain is an attainable goal for an intervening military, especially through the threat or use of force. However, transforming underlying beliefs with the goal of lasting change in behavior will most likely require a whole of government approach. Incentives or “inducements” could come in the form of aid, trade agreements, military advising, or other forms of influence, which require different agencies in the government—not just the military—all working together toward the same goal. A “whole of nation” approach, which includes not just the instruments of government power but also a nation’s population, its private sector, and its independent associations, could also provide useful resources for long term efforts aimed at building relationships and credibility between states. For example, during the Cold War, the United States used academic exchanges, music tours, art, and literature to help promote U.S. and democratic values around the world and blunt communist ideology (Gregg, 2010). The wide array of government and national resources offer a much broader spectrum of resources for shaping beliefs and influencing the behavior of targeted audiences in the human domain.

Fourth, in most cases, influence campaigns aimed at doing more than temporary change take time and consistent effort. It is unrealistic for the intervening force to expect to build a credible and trusting relationship—requirements for lasting influence—without the investment of time and consistent interaction with the targeted individual or group. Furthermore, the use of force for near term influence may be counterproductive to a long term relationship of trust and influence. Therefore, the intervening government and military may need to make tradeoff calculations in short versus long term desires for changing behavior in the human domain (see Figure 1).

## MILITARY RESOURCES FOR BUILDING INFLUENCE

If building influence to change behavior is the objective in the human domain, what resources do intervening militaries have to create this change? Perhaps the principal role of any military in the modern era is to act as a deterrent against aggression toward its homeland and its interests. Deterrence is *prima facie* a form of influence; its goal is to shape adversarial behavior. A country’s deterrent capability is largely a tool of compliance; it creates a credible threat of the use of force for adversaries with the aim of changing behavior. As the RAND model suggests, compliance is usually quick, but constant pressure is needed to keep the adversary behaving in a specific way. However, as also noted by the RAND report, compliance could be counterproductive if a more lasting and trusting relationship is desired.

Militaries also have useful resources for a conformity campaign, although this form of influence requires a better understanding of the target audience and a subtler hand than with compliance. Perhaps one of the most useful tools of a country’s military is resources aimed at shaping and spreading information. Information Operations and PSYOP, if properly employed, could help create instructions that shape behavior. As previously noted, conformity campaigns require several ingredients. As with all influence campaigns, intervening forces need to know the

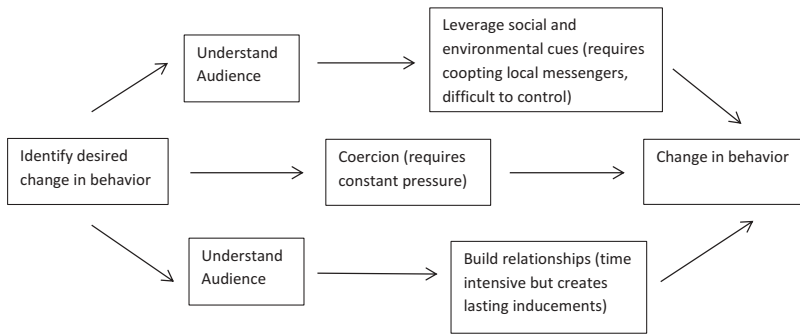


FIGURE 1 Three paths of influence to change behavior.

type of behavior it wants from its target audience to create an effective program. Second, all forms of messaging from various agencies in the government need to be sending the same message to prevent confusion and reduce “static.” The message must also make sense culturally. Furthermore, the messenger needs to be trusted. In countries where intervening powers are not trusted, it may be preferable and even necessary to work through messengers on the ground to shape behavior. The threat of force may play a role in conformity campaigns, but its role would be significantly subtler than with compliance campaigns.

Conversion campaigns require the most work and time, but also promise to have the most lasting effect; as with conformity campaigns, a whole of government and maybe even a whole of nation approach is needed to sustain a consistent message and offer a range of inducements to build relationships and trust between states. Furthermore, conversion campaigns are more likely to be effective if begun before a crisis emerges as part of “shaping operations”, or what is also called “Phase Zero,” “Left of Phase Zero,” or “Grey Zone” operations. Influence campaigns that are begun before crises allow for influence and trust to build without the added urgency of immediate military action.

Perhaps one of the most useful resources in a conversion campaign available to the military is military-to-military engagements with target countries. Joint military exercises communicate an ongoing relationship and commitment with the target country on several levels: it trains the target nation’s military in tactics and other useful military skills; it provides personal contact between the partnering power and target nation troops; it builds persistent relationships between both nations’ senior officers, who jointly conduct planning and execution of the exercise; and, from a messaging standpoint, coverage of the exercise informs the target nation’s population of the partnering nation’s commitment to those countries.

Another resource for building lasting influence is military training and advising; both conventional and Special Operations Forces have an important role to play in developing influence and shaping behavior through this form of military contact. Training and advising provide the opportunity to build relationships through sharing information, tactics and experience. The ultimate goal with military advising, however, should be to build trust between participating forces and to work toward partnership. Drawing from Cialdini, the Yale Six Step Model and the RAND spectrum of influence, in order for this form of influence to be effective, the interaction

should be consistent and long lasting—preferably the same troops returning to the same areas—which shows commitment and helps build trust. If the target audience trusts the messenger, then the message is more likely to be embraced and the desired behavior adopted.

In addition to training and advising, Special Operations Forces have other valuable resources for influencing the human domain. In the U.S. military, for example, Army Civil Affairs could shape operations and provide influence within local governments and society through projects aimed at addressing these groups' needs and vulnerabilities. Similarly, U.S. PSYOP is a potentially valuable source of influence through messaging to target audiences. Taken together, U.S. Civil Affairs, with its focus on local governments and civil society, and U.S. PSYOP with its messaging resources should work in concert with other Special Operations Forces to provide a holistic approach to influencing a target group and its leaders.

Other sources of influence include exchanges to military schools, as well as officer exchanges with partner nations' schools. Academic exchanges allow for prolonged, concentrated time of interaction between officers. These exchanges also allow for officers to experience their host nation's culture over the period of a year or more.

## CORE CAPABILITIES FOR INFLUENCING THE HUMAN DOMAIN

The article concludes by proposing four core capabilities militaries need to better understand and influence the human domain and shape conventional and irregular threats: language and cultural skills, communications capabilities, intelligence that focuses both on populations and the adversary, and preparing the military for a whole of government and nation approach.

### Language and Cultural Skills

Considerable attention has been paid to the need for language and cultural skills in order to influence target groups, leaders, and regions. In 2005, the Department of Defense released the "Defense Language Transformation Roadmap," which aims to identify language and cultural skills necessary for addressing threats in the post-September 11 security environment. The report identifies four goals for language and cultural training:

Create foundational language and cultural expertise in the officer, civilian, and enlisted ranks for both Active and Reserve Components; Create the capacity to surge language and cultural resources beyond these foundational and in-house capabilities; Establish a cadre of language specialists possessing a level 3/3/3 ability (reading/listening/speaking ability); Establish a process to track the accession, separation and promotion rates of language professionals and Foreign Area Officers (FAOs) (U.S. Department of Defense, 2005, p. 1).

These goals clearly prioritize language training as necessary for influencing and shaping behavior in the human domain. The report further names a desired outcome "the total force understands and values the tactical, operational, and strategic asset inherent in regional expertise and language" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2005, p. 4).

Cultural and regional competency appears to be less emphasized than language skills. There is reason to suggest that basic skills in analyzing culture and society, what could be called "cultural analytics", may be more attainable and also highly useful for influencing and shaping

behavior than language proficiency. Cultural analytics differs from teaching troops about a specific group's culture, such as its history, religion, famous leaders and so on, which is often dated, static and relies more on what others say about a group's culture than what it says about itself. Instead, cultural analytics teaches skills that allow troops to analyze for themselves their target audience's social, political, economic, and belief systems, and how these aspects of culture could be leveraged for influence operations. Moreover, this approach also equips troops to analyze changes in beliefs and behavior introduced by their operations and whether or not they are having the desired effect.

The concept of cultural analytics is echoed in both the Cialdini principles and the Yale Six Step model, which stress the importance of understanding one's target audience in order to effectively influence it. *Operational Culture for the Warfighter* also emphasizes this approach, particularly the importance of being able to analyze culture as a social phenomenon, and the dynamics between people and their environment, their social groups, and their symbols in order to effectively engage and influence people in an area of operation (Salmoni & Holmes-Eber, 2008, pp. 15–27). Cultural analytics, in other words, gives troops skills that allow them to assess their surroundings and better understand the values, beliefs, needs and vulnerabilities of the groups that they are engaging. This point is further elucidated in the 2013 U.S. report "Operational Relevance of Behavioral and Social Sciences to DoD Missions," in which the authors consider the wide range of military operations and missions, spanning from deterrence to stability operations, that require knowledge in social and behavioral sciences, and the need to train troops in the ability to assess culture and a dynamic and changing factor (Flynn et al., 2013).

Another core competency required for influencing the human domain is developing tools that engage all aspects of society, including men, women, and even children. The U.S. Army, Marine Corps, and Special Operations Forces have experimented with creating teams of female troops aimed at engaging women in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom across a range of missions. One key finding from the deployment of these teams is that female troops were often regarded as "a third gender" that could engage both local men and women in Afghanistan (U.S. Marine Corps I Marine Expeditionary Force, 2010, p. 8). Ultimately, influencing the human domain will be a difficult endeavor if only half the population is accessible to intervening forces.

## Communications Skills

A separate, but perhaps equally important, core competency for forces attempting to exercise influence the human domain is communications skills. Whereas cultural competency and analytics include knowledge and tools for assessing groups—including their values, social organization, needs, and vulnerabilities—communications skills involve applying cultural knowledge to effectively interact with target populations. Two broad communications core competencies are highlighted here: listening and negotiating.

Listening is a critical capability for influence operations. Cultural awareness and analytics are of little value if intervening forces cannot receive the messages that target groups are sending. In other words, intervening forces need adequate listening skills to comprehend the people they are attempting to influence. Listening skills go beyond hearing what people are saying to include nonverbal cues and other signals.

One approach to teaching listening skills to intervening forces is Brownell's H.U.R.I.E.R. model: Hearing, focusing on and attending to the message; Understanding, obtaining the literal message's meaning; Remembering, recalling the message for future action; Interpreting, expressing sensitivity to contextual and nonverbal message aspects; Evaluating, logic applied to the assessment of the message value; Responding, choosing an appropriate response to what is heard (Brownell, 2005). Regardless of the model employed, listening skills are a necessary competency for intervening troops to understand their operating environment in the human domain.

Another useful capability for influence operations in the human domain is negotiation skills. Negotiation skills combine listening, comprehension, communication, patience, and iterative interaction aimed at conflict resolution, knowledge transfer and compromise. Numerous models exist for different types of negotiation for different purposes, derived largely from business management and law (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1992; Nadler, Thompson, & Van Boven, 2003). Negotiation skills would be particularly useful for engaging leadership in the human domain, both friendly and adversarial.

## Intelligence

A third major core competency for influencing the human domain is intelligence. The 2006 U.S. Counterinsurgency Manual FM 3-24 devotes an entire chapter to intelligence gathering in counterinsurgency; it begins by stating: "Counterinsurgency (COIN) is an intelligence-driven endeavor." The chapter goes on to assert that "the function of intelligence in COIN is to facilitate understanding of the operational environment, with emphasis on the populous, host nation, and insurgents" (p. 3-1). The importance of intelligence is reiterated in the 2014 updated manual (FM 3-24, MCWP 3-33.5, 2014, p. 8-1).

Military intelligence collection from the United States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the International Security Assistance Force underwent considerable scrutiny during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, the controversial 2010 U.S. report "Fixing Intel," which focused specifically on intelligence gathering in Afghanistan, argues the following:

... because the United States has focused the overwhelming majority of collection efforts and analytical brainpower on insurgent groups, our intelligence apparatus still finds itself unable to answer fundamental questions about the environment in which we operate and the people we are trying to protect and persuade (Flynn, Pottinger, & Batchelor, 2010, p. 4).

"Fixing Intel" offers a comprehensive approach to gathering intelligence for influence operations in the human domain. However, this approach to intelligence collection, data management, and analysis is significantly different from the way intelligence has historically been structured and its purpose in traditional warfare, including a stronger focus on the population (as opposed to enemy forces), the relation between nonstate actors and the population, and possible points of influence with the population, as opposed to a country's enemy forces. In other words, this approach to intelligence gathering would require significant changes in selecting, training, structuring, managing and reporting of intelligence. It is unclear whether this new approach to gathering and analyzing intelligence would work for traditional state-on-state warfare as well.

Although "Fixing Intel" stresses the importance of better understanding the populous in Irregular Warfare, comprehending the adversary is still a critical function of intelligence.

Leadership targeting, in particular, is important in the human domain. The U.S. Government and military have made kinetic leadership targeting one of its priorities in the Global War on Terror and, more recently, in the fight against ISIS. Intelligence gathering and analysis should also focus on nonkinetic means of influencing leadership, both with friendly and adversarial leaders. Leadership profiling was done during the Cold War and remains invaluable for understanding specific leaders and how to influence them (Mitrovich, 2000). Intelligence topics for nonkinetic leadership targeting could include which leaders to include in negotiations and which to isolate and why.

### Preparing the Military for a Whole of Government and Nation Approach

The human domain of warfighting requires a whole of government and even a whole of nation approach. As the 2010 U.S. *Joint Operating Concept: Irregular Warfare* points out, to maximize the likelihood of success, joint forces must adopt collaborative frameworks and work closely with government, international, host nation governments, and indigenous organizations to understand and account for the population and operating environment. This understanding requires better knowledge of, and collaboration with, various stake holders within a country, and between countries' agencies more broadly. Moreover, greater emphasis should be placed on better understanding and coordination with international organizations, such as the United Nations, and regional organizations such as North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Domestic and international nongovernmental organizations are also key stakeholders in population centric conflict and warfare, and can no longer be dismissed as insignificant or subordinate. This myriad of actors undoubtedly complicates operations and coordination; however, they are part of the landscape of "new wars"; therefore efforts to better coordinate with these various actors to influence targeted individuals, groups and society with the human domain is time well spent for any country and its military forces.

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# Clarifying the Antisystemic Elements of Special Operations: A Conceptual Inquiry

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Strategic theories and definitions on the phenomena of special operations are still at an under-developed stage. Without proper definition, special operations are misunderstood and likely to be poorly implemented. This article aims to address that issue and to contribute with an expanded vocabulary and understanding of the capabilities and limitations of the phenomena special operations on a conceptual level. The authors complete this task by studying some of the more vaguely described elements, and thereby solidifying the terminology on what constitute special operations.

Keywords: special operations, theory, conceptual research, antisystemic

In a majority of Western countries, there has not been a single case of significant budget cuts to special operation capacities over the past decade (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2014). A number of national special operations capabilities, in contrast, have seen an increase in units, funds, and political emphasis. For example, Croatia, Denmark, Norway, and Spain have recently created Special Operation Commands as unique departments on par with the traditional branches: the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force (Høll, 2015; Holte, 2014; Ministarstvo obrane Republike Hrvatske, 2014, pp. 49–52; Tourne, 2016). Such growth stands in stark contrast to most regular Western militaries that have experienced considerable budget cuts and downsizing, especially after the financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2014).

The tendency to prioritize Special Operation Forces (SOF) has not gone unnoticed and many academics have tried to explain this development (Gray, 1999; King, 2011, pp. 168–172; Niva, 2013). Some authors argue SOF's capabilities match apparent security threats (Liat, 2013; Lujan, 2013), while others emphasize SOF institutional political ability to maneuver within bureaucratic systems (De la Billiere, 1995, pp. 314–350; Pedahzur, 2016, pp. 16–18). Furthermore, some academics conclude SOF are being prioritized as a result of decision makers desire to create military elites and so-called “silver bullet solutions” (Cohen, 1978, p. 44), while others argue that SOF serve as a sound alternate to deploying vast numbers of regular troops, which Western public opinion is primarily against (King, 2011, pp. 178–179; Norheim-Martinsen & Nyhamar, 2015; Turse, 2015). Last, a handful of academics suggest that SOF satisfies a societal need for heroic figures. The mere

social symbolic effect, evident in popular literature, movies and video games they argue, has had a significant effect on the rise of SOF (Mitchell, 2014, p. 5; Toomse, 2015, p. 49).

Despite the popularity of SOF, several academics conclude that special operations, as a way of dealing with foreign policy issues, is something vaguely elaborated on in terms of theory. In short, there is little in the way of sufficient strategic theories that can be properly operationalized and used for analysis in this area of study (Gray, 1996; Kiras, 2006; Marsh, Kiras, & Blocksome, 2015; Wey, 2014). Without clearly defined variables or a typology describing what a special operation is, it is unfeasible to conduct rigorous analysis on any level in this area. A lack of such analysis can lead to the troubling picture where strategists and decision makers might be investing in special operations on the basis of guesses rather than adequate and well-documented knowledge about their strategic capabilities and limitations (Bucci, 2015, p. 47). The suggestion that special operations have primarily been driven by gut feelings and hunches, rather than by in-depth knowledge, has been a remarkable historically feature of the growth and declines of special operations forces since World War II (Johnson, 2006, p. 273).

With the lack of a comprehensive theoretical and conceptual framework to guide a sound understanding and use of special operations, the concern of the authors is that if no one understands what this highly prioritized instrument is, then how can we properly assess whether it is an appropriate way of dealing with certain types of emerging threats? With this puzzle in mind, we ask ourselves the following: “Which particular defining elements can be used to determine contextual capabilities and limitations of special operations on a strategic level?”

Through a survey of the relevant literature, the authors were able to conclude that some defining elements of special operations have already been well-described, well-operationalized, and implemented in practice. We have chosen to classify these existing defining elements under the category of *tactical superiority*. During the process of our research, we discovered several defining attributes of special operations that have only been vaguely described, which we have chosen to classify under the category *antisystemic*. Antisystemic attributes exploit the unknowns in war and conflict situations and are steered by unruly, creative, and unexpected thinking and actions in addition to operating cross-institutionally. These findings are the result of an extensive investigation into the field of special operations and will be further explained and elaborated on throughout the article, with the purpose of presenting operational variables categorized as the antisystemic elements of special operations.

## THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

We do not aspire to establish a grand meta-theory on special operations in this article. Rather, our aim is to contribute to the theoretical discussions in academia concerning special operations by presenting an in-depth conceptual inquiry. The article does not address ethical questions or those regarding the efficiency of special operations. We do, however, differentiate between strategic quality and strategic effect by suggesting that the former is descriptive and the latter contextual. Accordingly, we identify a need to identify strategic quality with the goal of ensuring correct contextual application, to achieve the highest strategic effect. The purpose of this article, therefore, is not to analyze the strategic effect of special operations and present policy recommendations, but rather clarify some of the strategic qualities descriptively.

Several academics have argued that it is difficult to construct theory on special operations for different reasons (Marsh, Kenny, & Joslyn, 2015, pp. 95–96). Some emphasize that the main difficulty lays in the sensitive and classified nature of the field (Finlan, 2008, p. 3). Other academics, such as Maurice Tugwell and David Charters, have stated that “some concepts defy precise definitions, and it must be admitted that ‘special operations’ may be just such a concept” (Barnett, 1984, p. 29). Tugwell and Charters’ assessment reflects the belief that the nature of special operations is something continually changing and therefore is difficult, if not impossible, to fully capture. Kiras (2015) highlighted the importance of not advancing a theory on the basis of institutional reasons alone, because doing so will only result in insufficient and biased theory (p. 75). We consider these insightful caveats not as dead ends or an insurmountable gap, but rather as a guide to avoiding potential pitfalls.

The authors encountered significant methodological challenges during the course of our conceptual inquiry. Similar to efforts of theory testing or theory building, conceptual research most logically stems from either concise theory, a reliable and valid empirical dataset, or both. Unfortunately, we concluded that it is not possible to conduct traditional theory testing or theory building where systematically selected cases are subjected for testing a given theory, or for building one (de Vaus, 2001, pp. 5–7).<sup>1</sup>

An example to clarify this methodological problem associated with finding suitable subjects illustrates our point. If we want to test a general theory on breaking horses, our subject for testing would identify efforts to allow horses to be ridden. For horse breaking, two criteria need to be met: a horse must be difficult to ride and something or someone must attempt to allow the horse to be ridden. Then, a range of different horses, on the basis of a variety such as race, age, health, among others, as well as different breaking methods, should be defined and compared with make the theory as representative and general as possible.

Locating subjects for testing a theory on special operation, however, is completely different from breaking horses and requires another approach, as a result of a lack of existing definitional limits. The lack of definitional limits, in turn, is what makes it difficult to establish suitable criteria for what constitutes a special operation. For example, are special operations strictly within the domain of military activities? According to Tugwell and Charters, they are not (Barnett et al., 1984, pp. 29–41), but William McRaven suggested that they are (McRaven, 1996, pp. 381–391). Are special operations defined by what special operation forces do? Horn (2004) thought that they should be (pp. 3–24), while Gray (1996) suggested that they should not (pp. 149–153). If special operations are not defined by what SOF are doing, and is not necessarily a military activity, does this then imply that units, perhaps civilian ones other than SOF, are able to conduct special operations? These are some of the questions that scholars seem to disagree on and we therefore leave without definitive answers. To set up a range of criteria for subjects to be studied becomes an arbitrary exercise as a result of deficient empirical limits and could become either too inclusive or too exclusive with no reason other than personal preference or project scope. Accordingly, Pedahzur (2016) also found that “many authors have relied on their intuition and applied the ‘elephant test’: ‘I know an SOF/[special operation] when I see one’” (p. 14).

The methodological challenges in creating theory on special operations have influenced our conceptual inquiry, which means that we cannot pinpoint valid concepts from either a fixed sets of theories or from a concise empirical dataset. Instead, our search for definitional elements takes a holistic approach that is based on an existing yet fragmented body of knowledge on special operations, as this provides us with guidance and clues to which elements require further

investigation and clarification. Besides enabling us to move on without a rigid theoretical framework, this approach also frees us from relying on any specific national special operation capability or unit, such as U.S. Army Green Berets (labeled *SF*), the Polish GROM (labeled *SOF*), the French GIGN (labeled *elite forces*), the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (which labels its foreign missions *special operations*) or certain private security companies, such as Academi (formerly Blackwater or Xe), also known for conducting special operation.

By approaching a body of knowledge as a whole, in a phenomenological sense, we are able to synthesize certain patterns and meanings that frame concepts associated with the phenomena of special operations. Accordingly, we conducted our study in three steps. First, we addressed the state of the art theoretically. Second, we interviewed special operation practitioners.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, interviewees requested anonymity for themselves as well as the details of their work based on the sensitivity of their activities and therefore it has not been possible to present or apply this data properly. Nevertheless, the interviews have provided useful insights in shaping our understanding of special operations and the elements vaguely described in most literature. Third, we outlined a range of cases which are dependent on, and compliment, the first two steps. This third step entailed a search for patterns and meanings, identified in a range of cases that are used to illuminate certain conceptual ambiguities. In the first section of the article we present these three steps and identify recurring patterns and meanings, which can be used to provide a conciseness and precision of the defining elements. Next, we connect these findings to a strategic context rather than a tactical or operational one and end up with a discussion of the issues raised to shed further light upon the meanings associated with the *antisystemic* principles presented in this article, by addressing how to operationalize them.

## THE QUANTITATIVELY AND QUALITATIVELY DIFFERENT

Adam Leong Kok Wey sets up two different approaches of defining special operations. The first approach is based on the idea “that special operations are what a special operation unit does, and the second on a broader definition of what a special operation is and a *suggestion* of who should conduct it” (2014, p. 132). The first approach, used by scholars such as McRaven (1996), Kiras (2006), Spulak (2009) and Yarger (2013), emphasize the point that the tactical superiority of the forces is what constitutes a special operation. Each departs from this common point to arrive at different conclusions. William McRaven and James Kiras develop theories on different ends of the theoretical continuum. McRaven emphasizes special operations within the realm of maneuver warfare while Kiras meticulously argues they almost inevitably fall within the scope of attrition warfare (Kiras, 2006, pp. 58–82).

The frameworks of these scholars share a common frame of reference. They all define special operations in military terms, and contain essential elements easily identified within conventional military operations. Special operations, therefore, are conventional operations conducted in superior ways. In essence, these frameworks describe special operations as *more of the same*, instead of defining special operations by “operations that are outside the realm and tactics of the conventional battlefield” (Marquis, 1997, p. 46). Following this trail of thought, special operations can be described as “elite” or “hyper conventional operations” (Cohen, 1978; Rothstein, 2006), which implies they are different, yet consist of the same basic elements as in regular military operations but differ quantitatively in a number of ways, such as higher speed, smaller

size, stronger intelligence, and more repetitions (Driver & DeFeyter, 2008, pp. 5–12; McRaven, 1996, p. 11).

Theories supporting the quantitatively different principles help provide a clear framework by presenting operational variables that can be used in contextual analysis. Ecklund's analysis of Operation Gothic Serpent in Mogadishu and Lillbacka's analysis of the Finnish long range reconnaissance operations during World War II (Ecklund, 2004; Lillbacka, 2014) are examples of successful use of this type of analytical framework and proof that useful theory can be derived from studies of specific types of special operations.

The second approach, on the basis of definitions by Luttwak (1982), Tugwell and Charters (in Barnett et al., 1984), Gray (1996), and Finlan (2008), differ from the first approach by using concepts to steer the means and not the other way around. In both approaches, we found significant departures in defining special operations in a negative way: in other words, by defining what conventional operations are not. Examples of such negative definitions are expressed in different ways, such as "special operations are operations that regular forces cannot perform" (Gray, 1996, p. 156), "a theory of special operations must therefore start with an understanding of what conventional forces cannot do" (Spulak, 2009, p. 3), or the description of being "non-conventional" (AJP 3.5-A, 2013, p. IV-4).

A negative definition does not provide insight into what special operations are and does not provide any operationalizable variables on their strategic qualities of what special operations are. Paradoxically, despite framing special operations as a negation of conventional operations, these frameworks highlight aspects that consist of conventional military elements and with those basic military elements develop a set of operationalizable variables. Accordingly, both approaches also tend to understand the phenomena *special operations* primarily in military terms. However, both approaches have some similarities in their basic definitions, the first approach limits nonmilitary or paramilitary elements from the phenomena special operation. The second approach, in contrast, is not as limited in its definition and lends itself to the possibility of including components within special operations that may not necessarily be military elements.

Terms such as "SOF mindset" (AJP 3.5-A, 2013, II-1), "unorthodox" (Gray, 1999, p. 146), and "out-of-the-box solutions" (Horn & Balasevicius, 2007, p. 88) are used to depict the differences from conventional operations, which are not merely quantitatively different. Despite the fact that such terms are vague and abstract and do not provide any operationalizable variables, they capture the idea that something is qualitatively different about special operations. Qualitatively different elements suggest definitional components outside the domain of conventional military operations and highlight the inadequacy of describing special operations as simply more of the same.

## UNDERSTANDING THE QUALITATIVELY DIFFERENT

Having addressed the first part of our research question, we are able to conclude that some clear applicable variables have already been established. We also suggest that there are aspects of special operations that are in need of further clarification and definition. Therefore, in the following section, we seek to clarify the connotations and meanings of the qualitatively different elements.

The phrase *SOF mindset* has become a catch-all within the SOF-community<sup>3</sup> and beyond. Some scholars and politicians use the phrase enthusiastically and argue that having a SOF

mindset is the key to operational success. One such scholar wrote that “the heart of special forces pertains to their intellectual and philosophical capability, their distinct way of thinking: quite simply, a belief that no mission is too great, no task is too daunting, and failure is not an option” (Horn, 2004, p. 10). Others have found this form of cheerleading<sup>4</sup> to be excessive and unrealistic, poking fun of such panacea descriptions. For example, Halberstam wrote:

...they are all uncommon men, extraordinary physical specimens and intellectual Ph.D’s swinging from trees, speaking Russian and Chinese, eating snake meat and other fauna at night, springing counter-ambushes on unwary Asian ambushers [...] It was all going to be very exciting, and even better, great gains would be made at little cost (quoted in Cohen, 1978, p. 87).

There is some merit in arguing that the SOF mindset cannot involve superhuman capabilities and that these men (and women) are ordinary human beings. In contrast, the concept of a SOF mindset suggests certain distinct characteristics that assist in defining capabilities and limitations of special operations.

One study that looks at the SOF mindset in depth was conducted by Tone Danielsen. Danielsen specifically looked at the Norwegian SOF from an anthropological perspective and presented an in-depth explanation of what constitutes the “SOFish mindset” (Danielsen, 2015, p. 247). In trying to shed further light on components of the concept special operations that are outside the ordinary military domain, it might seem paradoxical to find explanatory value in an anthropological study of specific human capabilities and dynamics within a military organization. However, Danielsen’s study provides insight into certain dynamics of special operations that not only support our interview data, but also lead to a more precise vocabulary in terms of the qualitatively different elements. Finding explanatory depth about special operations within a study on certain human traits support the so-called “SO(F)-truth” that “humans are more important than hardware” (Bucci, 2015, pp. 51–52). We suggest that just as ships are at the center of conventional maritime operations, aircraft are at the center of air operations, and armored vehicles are at the center of land operations, the center of a special operation is the human operator.

Danielsen (2015) identified a number of distinct elements. In particular, she uses terms such as “initiative,” “creativity,” and “unconventional thinking” to describe the “SOF mindset” (pp. 247–293). In Danielsen’s description of the relationship between a legal framework and the part of the SOFish mindset that are unruly, she depicts the Norwegian SOF as completely able to always maneuver within these legal frameworks (Danielsen, 2015, pp. 281–286). However, in the same paragraph she lists multiple examples of incidents where special operations in some way or another collide with a certain set of rules and are able to stretch and bend them, due to their unconventional mindset (Danielsen, 2015, pp. 281–286). Instead of using the more imprecise term “unconventional mindset,” we rely instead on the term “unruly,” in combination with “initiative” and “creative,” as it gives a more precise and particular understanding of these “unconventional” dimensions. “Unruly,” should be understood as something difficult to control or manage as well as something that is actively, and in some cases automatically, opposed to standard procedures, which Tucker and Lamb, de la Billière and Cohen also highlight as significant traits of special operations (de la Billière, 1995; Cohen, 1978, pp. 53–81, Tucker et al, 2007, pp. 48–50). We interpret “initiative” as having three meanings in the context of special operations: to come up with an alternative solution to a given problem; to act on your own without waiting for orders; and, to act before others do. We also suggest that “creativity” relates to presenting new elements in the avant-garde sense, meaning something previously unseen or

unthought-of in a given time and space. In addition, “creativity” includes the ability to think and act in new ways.

The meaning we associate with the terms *creativity* and *initiative* are comparable to terms used in McRaven’s framework, which we previously categorized as the *quantitatively different*. It can easily be argued that initiative is an element that is also significant for conventional troops. Elements of initiative are therefore also left out in the category of the *qualitatively different*. Creativity, however, as something avant-garde, will remain. When McRaven elaborates on the importance of innovation, there are certain similarities with our definition of *creativity*. However, these two differ significantly in one aspect, as *innovation* refers to using existing mechanisms in new ways, within that given apparatus’ physical, political, legal and military known boundaries. *Creativity*, on the other hand, is the ability to think outside the existing boundaries and coming up with something original and avant-garde, meaning thinking and doing the “unthinkable.” *Creativity* will therefore also remain an element of the *qualitatively different*, as regular military operations should not stand significantly aside doctrinal standards and rules of engagements. The abstract descriptions such as *unorthodox* and *out of the box solutions*, also gain substance from these terms, in the sense that *unorthodox* can obtain meaning and definition from *creativity* and *unruliness* (similar to unconventional thinking), and *out of the box solutions* from *initiative* and *creativity*.

Other elements described in the literature, which fall under the *qualitatively different* category, are characteristics of the *parapolitical* and *paramilitary*. These two traits are part of the defining elements that constitute special operations, previously described by Marquis as “operations that are outside the realm and tactics of the conventional battlefield” (Marquis, 1997, p. 46). Tugwell and Charters explained that the *parapolitical* ability reflect “the intermediate objectives and the chosen instruments range from the political into military and paramilitary fields” (Barnett et al., 1984, p. 34). From these two elements, we join the argument that special operations are *not* strictly military instruments, but rather instruments that go beyond the classic Weberian model by transcending the fixated division between civil and military institutions.

Kapusta (2015) stated that the U.S. response to foreign conflicts, that are difficult to define as neither peace or war, are either “overly militarized or overly constrained” (pp. 18–25). He pointed to the problem that the military institutions, as the absolutely primary instrument of violence dealing with foreign policy issues, are often too one-sided and militarized to be useful in the “gray zones” between war and peace (Kapusta, 2015). Kapusta’s notions on dealing with the gray zones of violence in foreign conflicts provide insight to foreign policy instruments that are *parapolitical* and *paramilitary*. Special operations in the context of gray zones are able to function as an instrument serving the state monopoly on violence, yet do not fit the regular military model as something only dealing with armed conflicts in militarized ways (Kapusta, 2015). In addition, such foreign policy instruments are able to engage in issues addressing more direct political problems, with perhaps diplomatic or economic drivers providing the main leverage, yet still within the domain of dealing with violent issues. These notions are in line with Tugwell and Charters finding of the *parapolitical* constituting elements of special operations as something that is able to function as a given states instrument of violence in a *cross-institutional* way (Barnett et al., 1984, p. 34). Special operations, therefore, transcend the legal framework, rules of engagement, and behavioral codex of military institutions into the realm of others such as police or intelligence agencies. Such transcendence leads to the question of whether special operations capacities require their own unique legal frameworks, rules of engagement, and behavioral codex. If so, it would imply developing a new distinct profession that exists outside the military profession. We will leave this question unanswered for

now and move on to categorizing the identified constituting elements of special operations. Tugwell and Charters' findings of the parapolitical traits within special operations combined with Kapusta's notions on capacities dealing with the gray zones between war and peace in nonmilitarized ways gives us further explanatory value when defining these cross institutional aspects of special operations.

Understanding the qualitatively different leaves us with the following constituting elements for further investigation: creativity, unruliness, and cross-institutional methods and characteristics. These elements represent antisystemic dynamics, which we argue is part of the defining principles that constitutes the phenomena *special operations*. Antisystemic in the sense that special operations counter existing established systems, internal and external, by being creative, unruly and cross-institutional. Because we deem the principles describing tactical superiority sufficient, we focus on investigating the antisystemic principles of special operations to better understand these defining features.

### GENEALOGICAL VIEW OF THE ANTISYSTEMIC PRINCIPLES

According to the logic behind genealogical studies, a concept is influenced by its surroundings and its meaning changes over time and through space, as a result of a changing environmental context (Foucault, 1980, pp. 139–164). Following this trail of rationality, the meaning associated with the concept special operations therefore must inevitably have evolved. This evolution implies that studying special operations through the antisystemic perspective from a genealogical point of view can provide a deeper understanding of the specific features that constitutes special operations, as it gives insight to where it comes from, where it might have changed in meaning and application, and which traits have proven consistent.

The following section is not meant as an exhaustive genealogical study or historical survey of the antisystemic concepts of a special operation, as it would insist on a much greater study of the environmental contexts than the cases presented below. However, by looking at a range of special operations cases from the 1940s,<sup>5</sup> we arrived at the following two conclusions: (a) We can confirm that the characteristics of the antisystemic elements can be traced in a genealogical sense; and more important, (b) it provides us with a more extensive vocabulary for special operations, when attempting to explain these antisystemic features as constituting elements.

Wylie (2006) argued that British “special operations [during WWII] were at heart a form of political warfare” consisting of “irregular warriors and irregular diplomats” (p. 111). Wylie (2006) depicted how the special operations changed focus and emphasis from sabotaging military activities to engaging in political aspects such as empowering certain anti-Nazi movements throughout Europe. They used methods such as “industrial and military sabotage, labour agitation and strikes, continuous propaganda, terrorist acts against traitors and German leaders, boycotts and riots” (Wylie, 2006, p. 110), as well as using economic and financial dynamics, for example, by manipulating certain commodity flows and currency exchanges (Messenger, 2005; Murphy, 2005). Special Operation Executive, a British special operations organization created in and disbanded after WWII, was characterized by autonomous management (Wylie, 2006, p. 4). The country sections heads within Special Operation Executive applied methods that they found most useful, disregarding advice and regulations from London headquarters (Messenger, 2005; Murphy, 2010).

Since WWII, it was possible to identify similar types of political warfare in the late 1950s and early 1960s, during which time Belgium, France, and England used these forms of special operations in their colonial empires: Belgium in Congo (van Reybrouck, 2014, pp. 181–330), France in Algeria (Cohen, 1978, pp. 70–75), and England in Kenya (Anderson, 2005). Authors exploring these operations often refer to them in a significantly different, less-flattering tone from that used to describe special operations during WWII. However, despite the difference in tone of reference, these Belgian, French, and English special operations used very similar methods as those of the Special Operation Executive, such as industrial and military sabotage, labor agitation and strikes, continuous propaganda, terrorist acts, boycotts, and riots.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, hostage rescue operations became the increasing focus of special operations. This did not imply that political warfare, as depicted earlier, did not occur at this time, as the United States, for example, increased these types of special operations in wars by proxy against the Soviet Union through operations led by the Central Intelligence Agency in South America (Johnson, 2006, p. 280). Some of the best described recollections of hostage rescue operations, from this period of time, are the Israeli operation in Entebbe in 1976 (McRaven, 1996, pp. 333–378), the German GSG9 operation in Mogadishu in 1977 (Horn, 2004, pp. 107–118), and, the failed American mission codenamed Operation Eagle Claw in Iran in 1980 (Radvanyi, 2002). All of these operations were authorized by the highest decision-making level and therefore neither existed nor operated within a strictly military framework. These cross-institutional aspects also created bureaucratic difficulties, as untried and unorthodox procedures were implemented.

Throughout the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, civil wars were the norm in third-world countries. However, it was the Gulf War and the unrest in the former Yugoslavia that most directly involved Western states in operations approaching war. During the Gulf War, General Norman Schwarzkopf, Jr.<sup>6</sup> was hostile to the antisystemic virtues of special operations (Marquis, 1997, p. 230), yet some special operations forces were deployed and used, for example, during the so-called “Scud Missile Hunt” (Rosenau, 2001, pp. 29–44).

While special operations were used more extensively during and after the civil wars in the former Yugoslavia, most often to capture persons indicted for war crimes, we highlight a different example. A Danish special operation unit deployed to the Balkans disregarded orders from higher headquarters and instead used a nonlethal method to have a strategic effect. This method, which has since been referred to as the “camera kill,” entailed taking photos that identified hostile snipers. These photos were then delivered to Bosnian backers by other channels, with a message the individuals could be indicted for war crimes if they did not put an immediate stop to their actions (Odgaard, 2015, pp. 62–63). The camera-kill example of a special operation not following the regular military chain of command, but instead used creative thinking to solve the problem with nontraditional methods. This example illustrates a mission accomplished through nonmilitary means by using international institutions to provide pressure and leverage.

More recently, there have been other examples of the antisystemic properties of special operations. In 2003, an American Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha was stationed in Kunar province, close to the Pakistani border (Gant, 2009). In their efforts to secure the area and fight Taliban insurgents, Operational Detachment Alpha made a close alliance with a nearby tribe. Major Jim Gant, the Operational Detachment Alpha commander, was recognized for his successes and used as an exemplar for the Village Stability Operations program (Shreckengast, 2012, p. 5). However, Major Gant was later charged with violating a number of military regulations by becoming too

personally involved in the daily life of the tribe, which entailed socializing with local Afghans, drinking alcohol and doing drugs, and bringing his future wife to the combat zone (Thyson, 2014). The Major Gant case has been discussed in negative terms as a special operator gone rogue along the lines of the fictional Colonel Kurtz, or more positively as having gone native along the lines of T. E. Lawrence, the famed “Lawrence of Arabia” (Thyson, 2014). Regardless of the discussion, Gant’s actions entailed elements of the antisystemic, by being unruly and unexpected as well as high levels of risk-taking behavior by operating outside of the rules of engagement.

All of the cases mentioned evolved out of completely different environments, contexts, and geographical locations, conducted by Britain, Belgium, France, Germany, Denmark, and the United States. These concepts span the Total War era of WWII, the era of colonial rule and its end, through ideological proxy conflict in the Cold War era, the 1990s unrest, and lastly the World on Terror paradigm after 2001. Despite these different contexts, it has nevertheless been possible to identify repeated patterns and meanings genealogically, which consist of antisystemic elements. By addressing elements of operations as we have, it is clear there is a level of unexpectedness traceable throughout. Unexpectedness, in the context of special operations, refers to both internal and external unknowns. Whereas *internal unknowns* involve going beyond acknowledged military procedures (i.e., Major Gant in Afghanistan; the camera kill in Sarajevo), external unknowns exploit the adversary’s lack of imagination to handle the unknown (i.e., the German GSG9 operation in Mogadishu). Addressing such external unknowns, however, is similar to the element of surprise, which we earlier categorized as an element associated with tactical superiority. However, we categorize unexpectedness as an antisystemic element because it differs from regular military surprise elements in the sense that it also entails the aspect of going against one’s own established procedures, which is not part of regular military operations.

## EXPLOITING THE UNKNOWN—USING THE ANTISYSTEMIC STRATEGICALLY

One of the main purposes of systems in societies such as the Weberian model of bureaucracy is to ensure predictability and transparency, which are also connected to accountability (Swedberg, 2005, pp. 18–21). It is, however, improbable to reach complete transparency. The elements entailed in the Clausewitzian “frictions of war” term consist of the unavoidable basic conditions unpredictability and opacity (Kiesling, 2001). Allison argues that bureaucratic and organizational models are unable to provide sufficient known procedures when dealing with unthought-of situations in international relations (Allison, 1999, pp. 143–153). In addition, in his description of Hybrid Warfare, Kilcullen (2009) portrayed temporary conflict dynamics as unrestricted warfare, which are omnidirectional and impossible to comprehend with static models on the perspectives of armed conflicts (pp. 1–7). Nordstrom has another way of dealing with the ungraspable complexity in her description of Global Fractures, where she depicts the interdependence in all our layers of society when dealing with crises and armed conflicts (Nordstrom, 2009). All of these attributes reflect the basic conditions of unknowns that systems of bureaucracy and procedural planning are unable to make predictable and controllable. Contrary to regular military operations, special operations do not necessarily strive to eliminate the unclarity of the unknowns, but rather seek to explore and exploit these unknowns. Unruliness, creativity, interagency, and unexpectedness, therefore, all embody qualities associated with operating

outside the known. The antisystemic elements entail the ability to thrive within, and take advantage of, the unknowns in internal and external contexts.

Our characterization of special operations so far might be viewed as an anarchical or unethical ends-justifies-the-means instrumentation, with imagination as its only boundary. Following this idea, Niva described a special operation capacity that navigates away from sufficient governmental oversight (Niva, 2013), which relates to the exploitation of the internal unknowns. The disappearing violence that Niva described has an unethical sound to it. The antisystemic attribute of special operations are not necessarily inherently unethical, although it can be. The designed systems we build around our societies are of course closely related to our less tangible politicoethical structures, but it is still possible to separate such systems of legal frameworks, military procedures and bureaucracy from the politicoethical foundations (Murphy & Coleman, 1989). The antisystemic can and of course should be within politicoethical boundaries, and at the same time be a rule breaker within the known systems. The example previously described as the camera kill, suggests that the antisystemic elements can take place within politicoethical boundaries and at the same time defy known systems. With the important notion that antisystemic exploitation of internal unknowns not automatically entails unethical outcomes, findings such as those depicted by Niva should stand as clear reminders of the potential in special operations conducting unethical actions when dealing with the probability of applying extralegal methods.

Exploiting the external unknowns are a more common phenomenon and not as controversial as the dynamics of exploiting the internal unknowns. Employing this aspect of the unknowns, the antisystemic elements of special operations create an asymmetric environment, in terms of dealing with an adversary by playing by a different set of rules. Such qualities are described in many different forms and are known and well-studied phenomena.<sup>7</sup> For example, in studies about the strategic qualities or capabilities and limitations of terror acts, D. R. Morris described such acts exploit and cultivate strikes “in unexpected ways and from unexpected directions” (Morris, 2009, p. 18). Wirtz wrote something very similar about what he saw as the qualities of special operation and argued that for SOF to reach their goals, they need to be specialists in “unconventional modes of transportation and operations” (Wirtz, as cited in Gill et al., 2008, p. 76), which makes them capable of appearing and vanishing in “unexpected ways and at unanticipated ways and at unanticipated times and places.”

Exploiting the internal unknowns to create unexpected solutions provides special operations with advantageous asymmetry, by playing by a different set of rules than the adversary. To deliver unexpected operations, it is necessary to go beyond known procedures and domains, as it is not just a matter of operating concealed, but rather a matter of exploring and exploiting the unknown domains.

Both the internal and external exploitation of the unknowns leads to a range of specific capabilities and limitations that require contextual analysis, which would differ from case to case, as depicted in the previous examples presented in this article, ranging from the 1940s to the 2000s.

## INTERDEPENDENCE OF TACTICAL SUPERIORITY AND THE ANTISYSTEMIC

Before concluding our initial inquiry into the antisystemic elements of special operations, we need to study them in relation to the elements of tactical superiority. We do this because both constitute components of special operations. What might appear as two opposites (one emphasizing repetition and security to acquire utmost control, the other emphasizing unruliness and creativity to acquire

untried and high risk situations), we find that the tactical superiority is a much-needed prerequisite for success when using the antisystemic.

Contrary to the wording *special*, military special operations capacities do not consist of specialized soldiers per se, but rather generalists. These generalists, compared to ordinary soldiers, go through multiple different courses and training to hone the craftsmanship of soldiering (i.e., demolition skills, vehicle control skills, radio-transmitting skills, weapon-handling skills, paramedic skills).<sup>8</sup> Some soldiers develop a higher level of expertise towards certain skills than others do, but most, if not all aspects of the craftsmanship, needs to be at highly developed skill level to reach the standard of tactical superiority. Such a skill level implies that tactical superiority also encompasses refined craftsmanship beyond ordinary soldiering.

According to certain phenomenological studies of embodied cognition, extra-skilled generalists have a better requisite to successfully handle unknown situations in that given profession (Zahavi, 2009). For example, an extra-skilled cabinet maker who wants to make a cabinet model that he or she has never seen or heard of before would have to transcend known procedures about cabinet making that he or she normally practices. However, he or she would still use the experience and skill set on the basis of his or her profession as a cabinet maker to come up with the design and execution of the unknown cabinet design. The same logic applies to the exceeded craftsmanship of the tactical superior who suggest, plan, manage, and execute special operations.

Our point here is that embodied cognition, on the basis of certain well-developed skill sets, provides special operators with an advantage when dealing with changing and unknown environments. This advantage is expressed in the use of prereflective self-consciousness,<sup>9</sup> often in intersubjective (social) contexts, rather than by using reflective, planned, and consciously controlled methods (Zahavi, 2009, pp. 177–185).

Without the antisystemic principles, the skillsets required to obtain tactical superiority will not be materialized in a deliberate exploitation of internal and external unknowns. We conclude this because, in our assessment, tactical superiority only represents known domains in the military profession. Not applying unruliness, avant-garde thinking and cross-institutionality would limit special operations as anticipated or templated hyperconventional operations.

In the context of exploiting the unknowns through special operations, the antisystemic elements and tactical superiority becomes interdependent as illustrated in Figure 1. The embodied skill set developed within the tactical superiority provides favorable requisites for experimental operations, where the antisystemic provides motivation to deliberately strive towards exploiting the unknowns of a given conflict.

## SPECIAL OPERATION CAPACITIES MAINTAINING ANTISYSTEMIC PRINCIPLES

If the antisystemic elements are to be valued at par with the tactical superiority elements, certain premises need to be fulfilled so that tactical superiority does not gain complete hegemony within the discourse of what a special operation should encompass.

First, it would mean that a special operation capacity should not be strictly bound within military departments. Second, it would mean an entity that is based on an organization that nourishes creativity. Third, it would mean an entity that are regulated more by political and ethical concerns than rules, laws, doctrines, conventions etc., implying that it would have to be

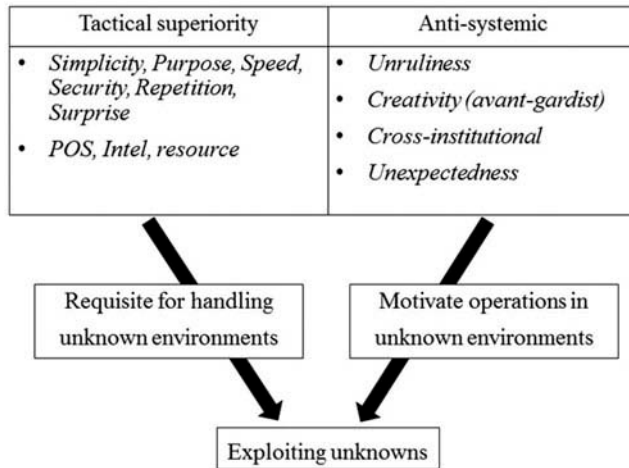


FIGURE 1 Special Operations exploiting unknowns.

placed closely to the top decision-making level. Last, it would mean an entity consisting of capacities other than a bunch of hyper conventional, and hyper-masculine elite soldiers.

Fulfilling promises that nourish the antisystemic can only be meaningfully discussed through contextual analysis. Such pedantic contextual variables could be that establishing a special operations capacity would depend on how much emphasis is put on the ability to operate besides existing systems (i.e., legal frameworks, military procedures, formal organizational structures), and whether certain systems are more easily disregarded than others. Additionally, it depends on the strategic culture of the given country, which determines the formation of a special operation capacity (Gray, 1996, p. 150), and it also depends on which types of threat this instrument should counter.

Whether special operations should be placed within or outside a given military institution will depend on the freedom of movement the forces conducting them are given. Such freedom includes the ability to act outside of a certain chain of command, as well as the ability to transcend institutions, governmental and nongovernmental, if needed. Such freedom lends itself to questions about what type of organizations such entities should be structured around. Without entering into a discussion on different organizational models, it is fair to say that the standard Western, hierarchical, military organizations most likely would not nourish creativity and unruliness (Vego, 2013). Therefore, other organizational models should be considered or even prioritized.

A significant issue in regards to establishing a special operations capacity in a more antisystemic way consists of addressing the nexus between politicoethical and legal boundaries. Addressing this plays a key part in whether a special operation becomes a pathological case as depicted by Cohen, or a glorious one as depicted by McRaven (Cohen, 1978, pp. 65–70; McRaven, 1996, pp. 287–330). Such cases are linked to a necessary discussion on the level and degree of oversight special operations should have. Furthermore, it leads to questions of whether special operations are the instrument best suited in a state of exception, as that would more easily allow the possibility of acting outside the traditional judicial limits (Agamben, 2005). It is possible to argue that the WWII establishment of the Special Operation Executive

and Office of Strategic Services and the amplified prioritizing of contemporary SOF after 9/11<sup>10</sup> might explain the causality between *states of exceptions* and the use of special operations. In this regard, one could refer to SOF as “*forces of exception*.”<sup>11</sup>

A broader definition of special operations, one constituted by the defining elements presented in this article, create a theoretical opening that challenges the hyper-masculine virtues often connected with contemporary special operations forces. If features such as creativity and unruliness should determine a special operator, it lends itself to questioning the narrow hetero-masculine definition of a special operations forces soldier, as Simons portrays him (2004, pp. 79–91). In line with the discussion of the profile and characteristics of the special operator, it is also interesting, but beyond the scope of this article, to address the point about a distinct profession formed for special operations. We raised the question previously as to whether special operations consists of a military profession or something else, as virtues other than militaristic ones are emphasized as essential within the antisystemic. At the same time, it also seems contradictory to attempt to establish a distinct and rigorously described special operation profession, because this in itself goes against being *antisystemic*.

In our discussion of special operation capacities, we have raised several questions and concerns that are ultimately unanswered. The purpose of this article is to provide clarification about the *defining elements* that constitute a special operation, and not to come up with definitions of what a given special operations capacity should look like or what it should consist of. Such analysis would require a much deeper contextual investigation. However, the issues we raised help shed further light upon the meanings associated with the antisystemic principles presented in this article by addressing relevant matters in terms of operationalizing these principles.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the methodological challenges we encountered, we feel strengthened in our understanding of what constitute a special operation on a strategic level. Investigating the state of the art, we were able to conclude that some defining elements had already been sufficiently described (i.e., McRaven’s six principles) and could be categorized under the umbrella term *tactical superiority*. However, we also uncovered central aspects of special operations that had not been sufficiently described and needed further analysis and inquiry. We categorized these missing defining elements under the umbrella term *antisystemic* and elaborated on meanings associated with the principles: *creativity*, *unruliness*, *cross-institutional*, and *unexpectedness*.

It is important to emphasize that this article does not depict contemporary Western SOF operations. Many contemporary operations labeled as *special operations* are conducted within a military framework and therefore also primarily characterized within the principles of tactical superiority, which implies more of the same and not what is characterized as antisystemic. Retired Lieutenant General Cleveland addresses a similar tendency and argues that the U.S. SOF needs to focus more on “physical, cognitive, social, cultural, and information elements” (Gresham, 2014) to influence human behavior. Others have stated that United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is not able to conduct “real” unconventional special operations, but only hyperconventional ones (Rothstein, 2006, pp. 164–182; Webb, 2013). Perhaps special operations which place greater emphasis on the antisystemic virtues are no longer placed within special operation capacities such as military special operations commands but should be

found elsewhere in paramilitary entities such as the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and Central Intelligence Agency and the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR). With a hopefully better awareness of what constitutes the phenomena special operations, we hope that it should be easier to apply this instrument of national policy with greater insight.

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## NOTES

1. de Vaus provides an generalization about theory building within social science, but for a more precise reference to the difficulties associated with building theory on special operations, see Marsh, Kenny, and Joslyn (2015).
2. Primarily officers who were part of their respective SOF communities at the time the interviews were conducted. All of the interviewees had substantial insight into the development of their respective countries SOF entities during the past decade or more; however, none of them spoke as official representatives for their units and all spoke as anonymous respondents. The interviewees consisted of 14 nationalities: French, Croatian, Danish, English, German, Dutch, American, Estonian, Norwegian, Spanish, Swedish, Polish, Finnish, and Italian.
3. The informal term *SOF community* describe a sense of transnational fellow-feeling and joint enterprise—a band of brothers—among those who has passed the special operation forces selection programs in their respective countries. The term *SOF community* sometimes also merely refers to the people who work with special operations regardless of whether they have passed the selection program.
4. At a seminar in Copenhagen on small-state SOF in 2014, Dr. Christopher Ankersen argued that a large degree of research conducted on SOF comes of as uncritical cheerleading (Johnsen, 2014, pp. 5).
5. We begin this study at WWII, despite the idea that such a study could potentially have a much earlier starting point. Wey, for example, connects his study of special operations to ancient war theories of Sun Tzu and Sextus Iulius Frontinus (Wey, 2014).
6. Commander of United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) during the Gulf War.
7. In “Theory of Surprise” by James J. Wirtz, one will find a substantial study on the state of art of surprise in the context of armed conflicts (as cited in Gill et al., 2008, pp. 73–86).
8. Besides these ordinary soldier skills, the special operators also go through training which emphasize psychological resilience and creativity under pressure. Despite encompassing these extraordinary skills, it does not change the fact that military special operations capacities are often generalists rather than specialists.
9. Zahavi defined the prereflective self-consciousness as “the ongoing first-personal manifestation of experimental life” (2009, p. 175), which can be simplistically explained as the ability to act on the basis of relevant experience without processing it through cognitive thinking and planning.
10. The state of exception in England during the start 1940’s is evidently whereas it is more discussed when it comes to the proclaimed state of exception followed by the War on Terror discourse, but Giorgio Agamben make a strong argument of the implementation of a permanent state of exception after 9/11 (2005, p. 87).
11. *Forces of exception* is a term coined by postgraduate student Loke Bisbjerg Nielsen.

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# To See and Not to Be Seen: Emerging Principles and Theory of Special Reconnaissance and Surveillance Missions for Special Operations Forces

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This article suggests there is a distinction between theories that support special operations in achieving the aim, and theories explaining what special operations the unique utility of special operations. That is theories for special operations and theories of special operations. Also, the debate and paradigm of special operations and theory have neglected the core activity and mission of special reconnaissance and surveillance. The debate and study of special operations, as a result, have partly become skewed. A special reconnaissance and surveillance theory and principles is a theory for special operation forces to guide practitioners. This certain knowledge and understanding are required to plan, prepare and execute successfully special reconnaissance and surveillance operations. The article asserts that other principles are more important than the known direct action or principles or principles of war. The purpose of the article is to contribute to “the [special operation forces] body of knowledge” and to spark the debate on special operation forces’ core activities, especially special reconnaissance and surveillance.

Keywords: special operation forces, special reconnaissance and surveillance, theory, principles

## INTRODUCTION

Recently, the importance of reliable and actionable intelligence has increased and may constitute a “paradigm shift.” Today, conflicts can be difficult to define. The enemy is adaptable, and sometimes not state-oriented and can be difficult to find, but easier to destroy when fixed. Special operations forces (SOF) have become the preferred force of the 21st century. The expected increased use of special operations calls for political leaders, decision makers, and staff officers to gain deeper understanding and knowledge of SOF’s possibilities, potential, and limitations. One assertion is that SOF uniqueness provides a specific human aspect to the battlefield (McRaven, 2004; Simons, 2005). Another is ingrained in one of the “SOF truths” that humans are more important than hardware. This aphorism holds true when countries and forces do not have advanced technological

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Color versions of one or more of the figures in the article can be found online at [www.tandfonline.com/uops](http://www.tandfonline.com/uops).

intelligence collection means, or when there is a lack of certain collecting platforms in the theater of operations. Therefore, special reconnaissance and surveillance (SR) will most likely continue to be an important part of the future SOF mission set.

Quantitative evidence suggests SR may be a lost art and science of SOF. A compilation of approximately 717 articles from *Special Warfare* magazine shows that in 103 available issues from 1990 to 2012, there were 16 articles about Direct Action, 103 articles on Unconventional Warfare and Foreign Internal Defence and 100 articles on Civil Affairs, PSYOPS. In contrast, of all these articles, a mere 16, or a little more than 2%, were on the subject of SR and this total includes the subject of intelligence analysis.

There are explanations for this dearth articles on SR. First is a limited amount of open and public research available on SR. The reasons for this include that many of the operations, actions, and methods are still classified. Those with first-hand knowledge of the subject are bound by certain security procedures and largely forbidden from discussing it publically. Within SR, the use of remotely piloted Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) platforms and other technology are the focus of the collection debate. The focus on ISR platforms has had two effects: not only do such platforms dominate discussion of the subject but dependence of technology has overwhelmed consideration of “traditional” SR. Outside of SR, within SOF the dominant model in terms of roles and missions remains direct action or, within the U.S. Army Special Forces, Foreign Internal Defense, and Unconventional Warfare. Therefore, the debate and study of special operations remains skewed towards its most dramatic and well-known missions.

Traditional approaches to battle, including direct action, remain the focus of most research even in an era of hybrid war and grey zone threats. Moreover, a unified theory of special operations, the subject of articles in a previous issue of this journal, remains elusive. McRaven’s accepted principles and much-quoted theory of special operations remains a theory of direct action mission success (McRaven, 1996). For a unified theory of special operations, for example, what are the principles of SR, foreign internal defense, unconventional warfare and other core missions? This article seeks to move the discussion into one of these less-considered realms and offers insights into a theory and principles of SR.

## EMERGING SR THEORY AND PRINCIPLES

Normally, an SR mission would fall within the operational realm of human intelligence. However, it would not be suitable to exclude other and more advanced methods or technology (for example, the use of small airborne ISR assets). A SOF operator may well enable the technical employment of a certain collection method.

The problems with SR begin with its output. This output, the “intelligence report,” is abstract in the sense that its immediate “effect” can be hard to assess or understand. Special operations and intelligence are two areas of study whose impact or outcome can elusive for an external observer. The problem of abstractness is complicated not only by debate of its tangible effectiveness but also by the current organizational paradigm. The SR mission has become trapped between the responsibility of several services, organizations, or commands, some of which are intelligence-focused, whereas others are paramilitary or military in orientation. This article asserts that SR can be the bridge trying to bring the two areas of special operations and intelligence closer.

On military theories and future wars, several scholars assert that uncertainty has played, plays now and will continue to be important in future warfare (Hall & Citrenbaum, 2012; Smith, 2006; Spulak, 2007; Tucker, 2014). The essence of this article, SR theory, seeks to increase certainty with the use of time and intelligence resources. Depending on the collection mission’s purpose, this knowledge is more often than not actionable intelligence. Several historical cases and articles of SOF employment are the foundations of the argument here (Westberg, 2016). The author conducted a survey of open sources on SOF (or SOF-like units) to include: the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and British Special Operations Executive (SOE); British Long Range Desert Group; the German Brandenburgers; American Alamo Scouts; and, intelligence operations before the Inchon Landing in 1950. As part of his effort, the author also reviewed sources from the British experiences in Northern Ireland (from 1972 onwards), the Falklands War (1982), the use of Israeli surveillance units in the West Bank, the Gulf War (1990), and Afghanistan (2002). Last, my master’s thesis from the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), which is the foundation for this article, extensively assessed the contents of public Field Manuals and Joint Publications on intelligence and special operations.

The result of this study was that SR theory and principles contribute to existing processes or phases. The theory is a function of certainty or knowledge and time, and a particular condition, which I term *relative certainty*. The condition of *relative certainty* can be compared to McRaven’s theory of relative superiority for direct action missions (see Figure 1). The condition of relative certainty is the threshold where there is sufficient actionable intelligence on the opponent or target. A decision maker needs relative certainty to decide to continue or not with a course of action with an operation depending on the information they receive. On the y axis, the

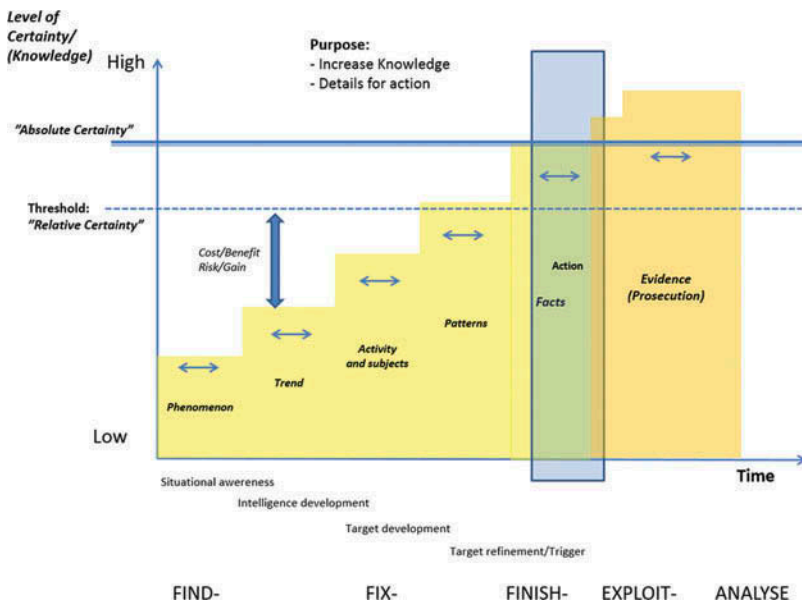


FIGURE 1 A suggested theory of special reconnaissance and surveillance (Westberg, 2016).

level of certainty, low to high, is depicted (see [Figure 1](#)). This axis seeks to depict the level of information the organization has after the mission including a certain event, object, targets, or a specific situation. The  $x$  axis depicts the time the mission takes. Time refers to minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, or years. Also, time can be phased. For example, on today's battlefield, the find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze, and disseminate is used (Faint & Harris, 2012).

Actionable intelligence, for the purpose of this article, is intelligence with a high level of detail on the adversary and target. The dependent variable in the examination of cases of the study is the decision made to act or not. The mission and its related intelligence requirements are the independent variables. Normally, it is rare to gain absolute certainty, much less confirmation, until long after a decision is made.

The condition of relative certainty can and should be accompanied by a cost-benefit or risk-gain analysis and decision. The threshold for these assessments and decisions can present a decision maker with a dilemma, in the sense that there may not be enough intelligence, but time or other considerations do not allow further collection or analytical efforts. However, if a unit or organization achieves relative certainty and decides to carry out a direct action, does not automatically infer a successful strike operation. Direct action missions are another special operation, and rely on McRaven's theory and other principles of direct action. Nevertheless, detailed intelligence supports McRaven's principle of simplicity and targeting. Despite this, he argues in his theory of direct action that several aspects can go wrong in a raid can cause relative superiority to be lost. The same holds true for SR missions in the sense that relative certainty can be lost as well. The collection units can fail to report in time or lose contact with the target.

If intelligence is still missing, the staff and the decision maker can and should perform a cost/benefit or risk/gain assessment. This assessment supports the understanding if an SR mission can help achieve or narrow the unknowns closer to an acceptable level to relative certainty. In short, an SR mission should contribute to answering as many of the outstanding intelligence requirements as possible to achieve relative certainty.

SR is usually part of the intelligence cycle's collection phase. The purpose is either to satisfy higher commands intelligence requirements or one's own organization's requirements. Depending on the purpose of the mission, either the find-fix-finish-analyze and exploit can be used or phases to develop a situational awareness leading to further intelligence development (see [Figure 1](#)). Normally, SR is best used in the fix and exploit phase to confirm or deny a target, but that again depends on the purpose of the mission. Usually, a specific type of phenomenon attracts the interest of an organization to begin collection, particularly if an organization does not know enough about a target or target set (see [Figure 1](#)). A phenomenon can include an event, a name, a place, or a certain threat that serve as a starting point for collections. A defined starting point is important for SR. From this starting point, the next phases would consist of developing the information into intelligence and, if time and situation allow, confirming facts and evidence. The organization directs more intelligence resources, including analysis, toward better understanding the phenomenon. Over time, trends and patterns will emerge as more information is collected and processed. Eventually, details of the targets, objects, and activities can be distinguished, and relative certainty achieved. In other words, the more dedicated intelligence resources and time are used on a target the more will the organization know.

However, for SR units to access a target and collect the information, and achieve relative certainty certain principles are needed.

## SR PRINCIPLES

This article identifies some SR-related principles required to achieve relative certainty during the phases of planning, preparation, and execution. For SR missions, the planning, and the preparation phases are more iterative than linear. The result of the preparation supports the final planning product. The SR theory follows the direct action principles of simplicity, security, repetition, and purpose. However, the SR theory also proposes several unique principles (Westberg, 2014, 2016). Readers interested in the direct action principles can review them in McRaven; this article focuses primarily on the SR-unique principles but will make reference to McRaven's where appropriate. The SR principles discussed in detail below are *coordination*, *review*, *cover*, *reporting*, and *exploit*.

In general, the principles of coordination and review are more inward-focused and relate to the internal processes of the collection element in SR. The principles of cover and reporting, however, are more externally focused. They are intimately connected to the direct or indirect contact with a target or an enemy. The exploit, unlike the other principles, is both internally and externally focused. This last principle is connected to the effects or follow-on actions from the SR mission, such as targeting and control of air strikes. Also, the SR unit can act as a guiding or pathfinder force for follow-on forces. Looking internally, exploit can support the collection approach to develop new starting points and other initiatives, such as a change of collection method. The use of exploit can support a renewal or reevaluation of a risk assessment on the basis of the outcome of a completed SR mission.

### Preparation Phase

During the preparation phase, but also related to the planning phase, coordination and review of SR missions are important. History is full of examples where a "routine mission" has been unsuccessful, with fatal or near-fatal casualties as a result. For example, SR operations in the Gulf War in 1990 (McNab, 1994; Waller, 1994); the Falklands War in 1982 (Southby-Tailour, 2014) and Afghanistan in 2002 and 2005 (Luttrell, 2007; Naylor, 2005; Williams, 2010). In these cases, at least some SR principles such as coordination and review are assessed to be not thoroughly considered.

SOF's ability to create access to a target is unique (Spulak, 2007). It could well be the details provided by such access can make the difference if the SR mission will be successful or not. The tendency to treat missions as routine is can be risky. Today, for an SR unit the details have changed from counting tanks and fortifications from a distance to be so close to including a collection of biometrics, individual persons' physical description as well as computer data. Therefore, a more reflective and thorough consideration and estimate are important not to endanger the operator, source, or compromise the mission.

### Coordination

The general division with planning staff between the operations department and the intelligence department can obstruct missions. The respective importance of their differing role can create bias. For example, officer belonging to the operations section can assert their task is more important to overall success and vice versa. What is important for SR mission success is to work in a fused and meshed environment and recognize all the different roles and functions.

A modern solution to overcome this division and obstacle can be to set up a fusion cell or center. From the operations department, the collection unit for the SR mission needs clarifications including boundaries, objectives, contingency plans, medical and casualty evacuation procedures, and command, control, communications procedures before a mission starts. Also, coordination with the intelligence section, intelligence officer or analyzing or research cell is of importance. For example, it is necessary to understand to include the purpose of the mission, the role of the intelligence requirements, what report format is required, and the latest time of value of the information. Also, the SR unit needs regularly updated intelligence on the area of interest to make thorough plans and risk assessments. The current intelligence department approach, based on intelligence fusion cells and centers, ensure the effective use and coordination of the information collected from an SR mission. But only on an ad-hoc basis. Doctrine suggests that fusion cells and centre are more ad hoc in nature (Army Doctrine Reference Publication 2-0, pp. 2-11). Fusion should, however, be the norm and standard for an SR unit and organizations that support SOF.

A historical and tactical example of coordination was setting up the Tasking and Coordination Groups (TCGs) by Great Britain during the Northern Ireland conflict (Arascain, 2014). The TCGs are the forerunner of today's fusion center. TCGs dramatically improved the overall effort of the multi-agency approach by the British authorities. Mark Urban asserts "the setting up of the TCG was probably the most important of all the steps were taken during the late 1970s towards enhanced information-gathering" (Urban, 1993, p. 94). The first TCG stood up to coordinate the multi-agencies working in first Belfast and later in the rest of the region in the late 1970s. In all, three TCGs were established. Their purpose was to coordinate and direct the multisourced intelligence collection. This coordination included source and agent handling, covert static and mobile surveillance and signals intelligence conducted by the special police, security services, the local special police as well as SOF units from the British Army. Besides, strike units from the police or the military could conduct a raid, such as a search or an arrest, when there was actionable intelligence (Arascain, 2014).

## Review

The principle of review allows the collector and to recheck and reevaluate the missions and the approach to the collection. For the use of SOF in small numbers, the commander, staff (on all levels) and the collectors need to continuous review and consider emerging alternatives to weigh different options and approaches for collection. During the review, one should take the opportunity to see if the plan will work, for example, by wargaming it. An important part of the review is risk assessment and identifying the actions to reduce the risk to the mission, risk to force, and risk to a third party, which normally consist of civilians or a certain source or another collection method. Normally, SOF assumes the highest risk as part of normal practice for SR missions. However, the situation might have changed since the mission was received and the planning started. Therefore, SOF units and the higher headquarters need to review constantly the latest intelligence about the target or target set and threat assessments. For example, the weather and terrain and the effects on the area or target can be subject to a refined assessment.

Another area that falls under this principle is standard operating procedures, or SOPs. Such SOPs are derived from integrating lessons identified from prior experiences, whether from one's own unit or another's. Also, contingency plans should be developed during this phase and are especially important for SR units. Specific details within a contingency plan should include a cover and compromise plan, a "no communications" plan, as well as an escape and evasion (E&E) plan.

One example of the use of the principle of review is the conducted by a specialized SOF organization that Sean Naylor identified as Advanced Force Operation (AFO). AFO was active during Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan 2002 and had collected on the target area for weeks. They conducted a preliminary study of the situation in the Shah-i-kot Valley, and identified the starting points a deep reconnaissance mission that would follow in support of the air assault by the conventional troops (Naylor, 2005). Regularly, AFO reassessed the information and intelligence requirements, the targets, courses of action, risks involved, approaches and methods to find the best way to access the target area of interest. SR teams probed the infiltration and exfiltration routes before the conduct of the full-scale SR mission in support of Operation Anaconda. Therefore, the AFO team members developed an understanding of the enemy, terrain, and the weather. Their particular approach and preparation determined the final plan. AFO was able, therefore, to make the thorough assessment of the possibility and suitability to access the target areas successfully (Naylor, 2005).

## EXECUTION PHASE

The execution phase would perhaps be the phase that differs the most from McRaven's model. Speed, as in McRaven's theory, is not necessary, but time and timing is. Unlike a direct action mission, which can be over in minutes, a unit could perform an SR collection mission using a static observation post for weeks. Also, for a successful SR mission, there is no need for surprise as described by McRaven (1996: "Surprise is the ability to "*strike* [author emphasis] the enemy at a time and place, or in a manner for which he is unprepared," p. 16). The SOF unit presence can be clandestine, discreet, and even overt. An SR collection unit may be able to come back repeatedly to an area, depending on the environment, to collect the information. Therefore, the collection unit may not need to push the collection and chosen approach beyond the abilities or take unnecessary risks to succeed in its mission. However, there may be some mission for which there is minimal time to prepare, and if a target presents itself, the unit might only have one attempt to collect information on it. Therefore, purpose is necessary for the collector, but it differs compared with McRaven's assertion. The purpose of an SR mission would involve the intelligence requirements, desired end state, and the time available to carry out the mission. During the execution phase, the SR principles of cover, exploit, and reporting can and should be considered in advance and during the conduct of the mission.

### Cover

The proper use of the SR principle cover allows SOF to mitigate risks and access a target area to collect the information. The Army Doctrine Reference Publication for special operations mentions the core principles of SOF, one of which is "discreet" (Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-05, pp.1-6). The SR principle of cover supports and reaffirms this overall SOF principle.

However, in the SR theory, cover has multiple layers. There are two subsets of the cover principle. The first subset includes the use of terrain, weather, disguise, cover stories, and camouflage. This particular part of cover employs tactics and procedures as well as material and technology or a combination. "Cover for action" is another term applied, since it relates to

the collection unit's true mission and whether this mission would be detected or compromised. A SR mission can be overt, but still have a concealed purpose. Conducting a mission overtly may be vital to mission success, and therefore it is important for the collecting unit to blend in with the local population and use cross-cultural communication skills to remain unnoticed or undetected.

The other subset of cover is the use of various direct or indirect support measures such as: the use of SR reserves; backup or quick reaction forces, which allow SOF to assume the risk to mission; and, access to the target area and collect the information. This subset of *cover* is the direct support in completing the mission including protection of the collection. Part of this subset is also *situational awareness* in or around the infiltration or exfiltration route or target area and actions on the target.

As an example, a German SOF unit known as "the Brandenburgers" employed the principle of cover repeatedly during World War II. In one mission "the Brandenburgers" undertook a long-range reconnaissance mission to confirm British forces' line of communications between West Africa and Egypt (Lucas, 2003). James Lucas states the Germans used "British uniforms and would travel in captured British Army vehicles. These would form a road convoy with all the appearance of Long Range Desert Group patrol [the British LRDG, a SOF unit]" (Lucas, 2003, p. 84). During this mission, a group of "Brandenburgers" made unexpected contact with French troops along their route towards the objective. The group was not compromised because of the disguise (Kurowski, 2005, p. 179). Eventually, the intelligence reports from Brandenburg units informed German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel that at least three mechanized divisions were necessary to penetrate the area and disrupt or destroy the British lines of communications. However, since Rommel could not divert such forces from the front lines in North Africa, the whole campaign was abandoned (Kurowski, 2005, p. 180). Lucas mentions to support the Brandenburg's cover, a captured British Spitfire "[carried] out long-range reconnaissance ahead of the group" (Lucas, 2003, p. 85). The Spitfire, still with British markings, was piloted by a pilot from the Brandenburgers and it conducted several successful reconnaissance flights in support of the Brandenburgers' mission and avenue of approach (Kurowski, 2005, pp. 177–179).

In sum, cover is essential for SR collectors to blend in with their surroundings. How those collectors blend in depends on the nature of the mission as well as where and when it is executed. Cover can also include certain manned or unmanned and human-enabled technologies, as well as the use of surrogates and even proxies to achieve the ability to see, collect, and, report the findings.

## Reporting

Reporting lies at the heart of SR execution. It is essential to report the findings of the SR mission and SOF will do so in a detailed, timely, reliable and accurate manner. Also, reporting translates into collectors developing situational awareness on the battlefield and report their status to other collectors as well as the the command element. This form of reporting is necessary for the use of backup teams or quick reaction forces as well the SR unit's headquarters. For the reasons mentioned on the principle of cover, the force elements in direct support need to be aware as much as possible of the whereabouts and intentions of the SR unit. This understanding is crucial if the collectors are in peril and need extraction.

Usually, communication is a success criterion and can sometimes also be an abort criteria once an operation is underway. Therefore, reliable and robust ways of communication or contact with the “customer” and with the receiving department of the reports are critical. Reporting is also part of the after action debrief or summary after a mission is complete and the SR unit is back to a safe area. As examples of the importance of communications, David Lloyd Owen, one of the founders of the British Long Range Desert Group during World War II, mentions four fundamentals for small unit actions behind enemy lines; “the most careful and detailed planning, first class equipment, *a sound and simple communication system* [author’s emphasis] and a human element of rare quality” (Lloyd Owen, 2001, p. 5). Furthermore, the Alamo scouts, the US 6<sup>th</sup> Army reconnaissance unit in the Pacific theater during World War II, trained every member of the patrols in radio and communications skills. Every soldier carried at least one personal small range radio and the patrol had, at least, one patrol radio to communicate with the unit’s headquarter and support elements (Alexander, 2010, pp. 60–61, 80–82).

## Exploit

Regularly, there is a need for intelligence, and it can be important to create new access to information, or to exploit the situation. The principle of exploit supports the execution of an SR mission. The principle serves the purpose to increase certainty (i.e., relative certainty) and confirm the intelligence with follow-up activities. If the SR unit has infiltrated and started to report on the target, it would be prudent to take advantage of different, depending on the purpose, opportunities. This principle rests with the SOF characteristics of “creating access.” (Spulak, 2007). Exploit serves to create a new starting point for another collection method if the SR unit has not achieved relative certainty.

Moreover, the rapid and fluid situations in today’s and tomorrow’s conflicts will call for forces’ and commands’ ability to switch focus from SR to direct action and vice versa. Examples can be, site exploitations or to call in of air strike to destroy targets. Exploit can be to take unilateral offensive action or support an external finishing force with surveillance, whenever a target is fixed (Naylor, 2005). Another example of exploit is the use of the SR team as a guiding force. The Alamo Scouts, supported by local guerillas, had the task not only to collect intelligence on a Japanese prison camp but also to act as a guiding force for a larger Ranger rescue force on the Cabanatuan Raid, thus reducing the uncertainty for the rescue force (Alexander, 2010, pp. 233–256).

## CONCLUSIONS

There is no unified theory of special operations, and most of the existing theories focus heavily on direct action or draw from counterinsurgency theory or doctrine. The purpose of this article is to contribute to theory related to special operations as well to prompt debate on the SOF core activities.

Because of an overreliance on technological collection means, with all of their benefits and drawbacks, SOF expertise in the art and science of traditional, “manned” SR may be at risk. If the adversary chooses simple, low-technology approaches to avoid detection or if air superiority has not been established against a higher-technology opponent, such risks may prove

unacceptable. For these reasons it may be time to reassess and reconsider our approach to SOF core missions such as SR. In addition, advances in human intelligence collection methods pale in comparison to the development and application of advanced technology collection capabilities. There is a tendency for all military services and branches strive to attack targets from longer range. Therefore, there may be a void on the battlefield. Who than will access a target at close range in the future? Certainly, this void provides a highly suitable mission for SOF. SOF can fill this informational gap regardless of the larger core activity or mission, such as direct action or unconventional warfare. SOF intelligence should also always strive to be actionable. Normally, SOF intelligence collection serves two main purposes: to develop actionable intelligence for follow-on actions such as raids, sabotage, or hostage rescues; or, to collect information on the situation to improve the intelligence picture in a specific target or area.

To conclude, this article suggests that decision makers, planners, and SOF units should consider SOF principles related to specific core missions. The principles of one mission set most likely are not transferable to another. Attention to such unique principles for SR missions is necessary for SOF to assume the risks and successfully access, collect (sometimes, simultaneously, with the use of several methods), and answer intelligence requirements—in other words, to achieve relative certainty. Detailed and accurate intelligence are a hard currency. Therefore, the future of SR and SOF intelligence looks bright. Nonetheless, SR should not be taken for granted. Inefficiency or lack of knowledge and understanding of SR principles can lead to the incorrect employment of SOF at best, and the comprise, capture, or death of SR personnel at worst.

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# The U.S. Strategic Paradox, Third-Party Proxies, and Special Operations Forces

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The author argues that the United States faces a strategic paradox where values conflict with the ability to develop and implement coherent strategies in the complex and dynamic world of today and the future. Special Operations Forces' ability to be effective in the contexts of foreign environments may mean future reliance on proxy forces that offer plausible deniability for U.S. policy makers. However, such opportunities come with a potential of heightened strategic risk that must be carefully managed and judged. The author provides examples of historical cases of effective use of third-party proxies, which may become a template for partner nations and Special Operations Forces to effectively meet future challenges while coping with the strategic paradox that currently limits capabilities.

Keywords: strategy, special operations, proxy, special operations forces, paradox

*“War is cruelty and you cannot refine it ... and those who brought war into our country deserve all the curses and maledictions a people can pour out”* (Hansen, 1961, p. 441).

—William Tecumseh Sherman

## THE PARADOX

While ostensibly the topic is concerned with the utility of third-party proxies and the use of Special Operations Forces (SOF), it is in fact much about the conduct of future warfare. War, much like strategy, may be conducted differently, but the nature of both is unchanging and ubiquitous (Gray, 1999, p. 354). Unfortunately, the unchanging nature of war provides only general terms of reference, usually historical and with misleading clarity and can often be confused with the changing nature of warfare, the conduct of war. Pondering warfare is adequate for providing fleeting glimpses of the current juxtaposition to history and quite often profoundly inaccurate predictions of an unknowable future. Yet, there are trends, macro in scope, lacking in fidelity and subject to change that may help guide our understanding of future challenges in the conduct of war—history is that guide, but only in the most general terms (Gray, 2014, p. 107).

Future uncertainty is compounded by the tendency of military professionals, civil servants, and the outlying academics interested in martial subjects to focus upon challenges with

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### The Five Levels of War and U.S. Strategic Context

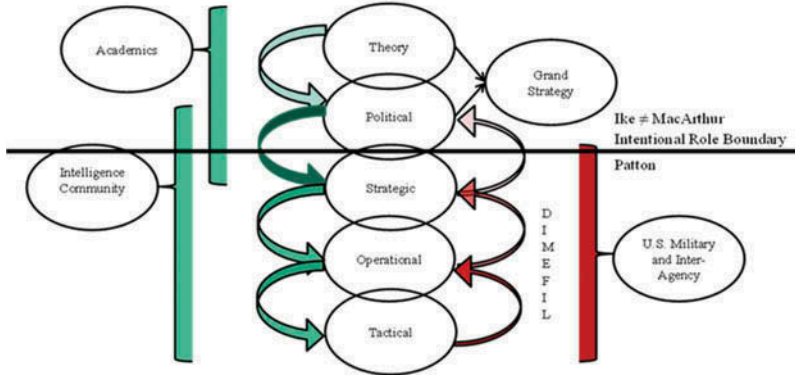


FIGURE 1 The five levels of war and U.S. strategic context.  
Source: Rubright (2014).

relevance that are immediately apparent. Emerging technologies, new and improved weapon systems and all manner of rediscovery of subjects previously and thoroughly examined (with exciting new names) provide a bevy of subject matter for debate and publishing opportunities. The process of Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Analyze, and Disseminate (3FEAD) would be new and exciting if it were not conducted by the French in the Battle of Algiers half a century ago (von Tunzelmann, 2009). The discovery of the “human domain” could be revolutionary, unless of course you buy into Aristotle’s foundational idea that humans are political animals (Aristotle, 1995, p. xi) and von Clausewitz’s argument that war is politics by other means (2000, p. 271); humans have always been the most relevant aspect of war. The point here is not to lessen the value of thinking about the subject of warfare (or the profession of the author and readers), but to illustrate that transitory rediscovery of known subjects are often distracting from the strategic problems of greater temporal significance. This is to say that current challenges are important, but in a strategic vacuum, or at least a strategic paradox, they are of lesser consequence.

The United States faces a fundamental strategic paradox which has additively increased its restraining effect upon our strategic flexibility. The paradox has been slowly evolving; the roots are centuries in the making as the Western conception of liberalism has perpetuated the myth of the possibility of perpetual peace (Figure 1). In the simplest terms, the paradox resides in the inability of U.S. strategic culture to permit the achievement of desired political outcomes because warfare has become ritualized through constraints (Barnett, 2003, pp. 130–131). The optimistic angle is that nothing in the future is assured and the United States has a history of adaptation when confronted by challenges. The paradox can be broken, but the paradox is also likely to be the single greatest challenge the U.S. military, and United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) in particular, will face in the conduct of war in the coming century.

## AN IRREGULAR FUTURE

The technologic advantage of the U.S. military will likely remain until China reaches parity within a few decades at most (Gray, 2005, p. 172). While the technical advantages of the U.S. military are profound, they also represent a second order effect of self-neutralization. China specifically recognized the extreme lethality of the technically oriented conventional forces which the United States developed in the later stages of the Cold War (Federation of American Scientists, 1996). After Vietnam and the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, the U.S. Army may have relegated irregular warfare to a second-class military standing, other countries realized that an asymmetrical conflict had become the only viable counter to U.S. military might. In many ways the investment of conventional capability has reached a culminating strategic point in which further investment will not provide the same return relative to other means. The author does not imply that the culminating point has taken on terminal context. Rather, for a time, U.S. conventional forces are unlikely to meet opponents within a conventional force on force context. In the meantime, the future is far more likely to see irregular threats to U.S. national interests rather than state-backed conventional threats (Kiras, 2008, p. 227). SOF will bear the brunt of future commitments, given the public's war fatigue, while working by, with, and through proxy and indigenous forces.

Fundamentally, irregular or otherwise, war is about achieving political objectives through the imposition of will, as Clausewitz elegantly and perhaps obtusely (in his writing) observed. This means the use of violence and fear, as politically incorrect as many may find such a definition. The other timeless strategic thinker Sun Tzu would agree in principle if not within the method. It is important to note that war is not about winning. The idea of winning wars is a truly unfortunate semantic designation. To win falls somewhere between horse racing and a lucky scratch-off without any meaning in modern or irregular conflict. With "Win the Current Fight" as a line of effort at USSOCOM, one must ask what that actually entails (United States Special Operations Command Public Affairs, 2013). What does a "win" actually entail as a strategic end? Does "win" have any relevance within a strategic framework, or does it simply supply a slogan, culturally comfortable as a neat constructs with a hyperreal sense of finality?

The United States is not going to "win" against ISIS because it is as much an ideology as it is an entity. The United States may be successful in achieving certain political objectives—perhaps degrading the organization—but the underlying ideology is not something the United States can "win" against. The fate of the ideology is in the hands of Muslims in the Middle East. Politicians demonstrate strategic ignorance when making claims or promises to "destroy" ISIS. Such a course of action would require the destruction of the people who support the ideology, which is not something Western democratic leaders will support (Berger and Wintour, 2014).

The fact that our near-term future conflicts will be irregular in nature against violent extremist organizations means that we will be combatting an underlying ideology that is supported by a segment of a given population. This population is sometimes recognized as up to 10–15% (FM 3-24, 2006). In the past, such populations and the insurgents they support have been underestimated. ISIS was classified as a "JV squad" in comparison to Al-Qaida, (Contorno, 2014) and Iraqi insurgents were referred to as dead-enders by individuals who preferred, to down play the significance of either emerging threats (Chandrasekaran, 2006, pp. 96–89). Whether an insurgency starts as a terrorist organization or not, to exist insurgencies must have political support of some percentage of a population.

The past 15 years of conflict have provided ample lessons in the importance of the human terrain and other human-to-human connections within the strategic contexts of the conflicts. As each context is unique, so too must each effort. COIN in Afghanistan is not COIN in Iraq, just as COIN in Anbar Province, Iraq is not COIN in Diyala Province, Iraq. The USSOCOM's recognition of the value and importance of the interagency community to obtain success in these varied conflicts speaks volumes about the adaptability of the military as a learning institution and the ability to develop a theory of victory defined by kinetic operations alone (FM 3-24, 2006). In essence, the U.S. military has come to understand that all war is conducted in a strategic context in which people matter. People will have a vote on whether our political objective may be achieved. This may seem a banal observation of evidence, but it is in fact not a historical norm and is partially one of the foundational issues of the U.S. strategic paradox.

Populations have been, are and will continue to be targets in war. The examples are legion from the historical record of Mongols, Romans and a myriad of other cultures and peoples. More modern examples can be found in the Russian efforts in Chechnya and Sri Lankan campaign to bring finality to the Tamil Tigers (United Nations, 2011). Western democratic nations practiced similar warfare during the colonial period with U.S. treatment of American Indian and Filipino insurgents standing as pertinent examples of U.S. military participation in efforts that would be now be classified as war crimes (Jones, 2012, pp. 352–358). This is not an attempt to engage in revisionist judgment of past military practice. The historical period treated these activities and those who participated as normative. Such conduct of warfare will remain an option for the future but will be judged harshly by contemporary standards, while ignoring the historical efficacy of such methods. The Western world is now different through self-imposed constraints and restraints, but only when viewed through the context of time and our ideological paradigms of the present.

At the tactical level the U.S. military performs brilliantly, is particularly proficient at the operational level, and mostly just contemplates the strategic level. In reality, there are five levels of war that all fall under the auspices of the umbrella of this author's preferred "theory" of war. Theory drives politics and policy, which, in turn, drives strategy, operations and tactics in descending order. The theory is universally applicable as the originating theory/ideology that drives the political level may be liberalism, fascism, communism, wahhabism, and so forth. By design the U.S. military remains below the political level in the formulation of ends, an inherently political realm. Some generals operate well at the political level, such as Eisenhower's ability to help reorganize the Department of Defense because he understood his role was to execute policy rather than attempt to make policy (Allard, 1990, p. 118). Others such as Douglas MacArthur (and his father Arthur MacArthur) fell to ignominy because they strayed into the political level and attempted to make policy (Halberstam, 2007, pp. 592–594).

Over time, our conception of appropriate use of force has evolved, or devolved depending on perspective, because our overarching theory of Liberalism has impacted the political level within the figure. Once normative behaviors such as attacking American Indian villages and killing Filipinos older than 10 years of age capable of bearing arms as a definition of enemy combatants have become much more constrained (Jones, 2012, p. 312). This is of course a natural process of our political system to reflect the ever evolving nature of the normative views of the population, or at least a percentage of them. To be sure this is not meant to be a critique of liberalism (the political theory) and its impact on American society, an issue far beyond the scope of this work. The point is to recognize the historical trend of Liberalism acting as a constraint on U.S. strategic flexibility (Barnett, 2003, pp. 130–131).

The U.S. strategic paradox then is that through our ritualization of war, based on a theory of liberalism, combined with our technical superiority driving adversaries to irregular means leaves the U.S. military unable to impose its will on the population-centric enemy. Put another way, we cannot force an adversary (population) to stop supporting organizations beyond any normative bounds such as ISIS. Such a paradigm creates a strategic paradox, again, when at the political-level policy statements about destroying an organization such as ISIS is then to guide strategy. With strategy as a bridge between means and ends, it becomes the proverbial bridge to nowhere when the ends are unattainable because the ritualization of war has become anathema to the nature of war.

The U.S. military is attempting to address the paradox—not out of awareness, but rather out of a lack of alternatives. Contrary to popular opinion and public statements made by defense experts of all stripes, there is in fact a military solution to irregular enemies—just ask the Tamils. There is always a military solution, just not one the United States is willing to pay the political price for enacting. Given our theoretical basis within our context it is an issue of lack of will and a moral/legal self-restraint not a lack of means. To address the paradox the whole-of-government or all-of-nation approach is seen as the model with which to move forward. It is ironic that this is just a rediscovery of Grand Strategy, but catchy new names always sound better than do hard-to-grasp, ill-defined, and academically dusty terms (Hart, 1967, p. 322). In theory, through the whole-of-government approach all facets of national power are deployed to achieve our political objective. The means of strategy becomes more diverse and the ways more complex and the meaning of strategy in its pure form evolves yet strategic theory remains intact. The interagency approach should address the shortfalls of purely military efforts in a modern irregular context with the attendant constraints on military strategic utility. The problem, as Peter Drucker is credited for recognizing: culture eats strategy for breakfast (Strategy, 2015). The whole-of-government approach does not guarantee success because the enemy actually gets a vote.

## IMPLICATIONS

When the United States engages an adversary at the tactical level, it should support the operational objective and strategic objective to effect a political change in the adversary's context. Too often the military thinks in terms of tactical action for strategic effect as a “win”; think killing Bin Laden and then ask what has been won? How have we affected the theoretical and political levels of Salafist Jihadism? Can we change an adversary's theoretical underpinnings or foundations upon which its entire political paradigm rests? The answer is both yes and no; we have in the past, but the paradox will not allow us to in the future.

## “SO WHAT” FOR SOF?

SOF will not, nor should it attempt, to make policy or affect political theory within the domestic realm. The separation of our military and policy making is deeply ingrained and is meant to be so, even though it is incumbent upon the military to offer advice for the benefit of civilian leaders. Even a cursory reading of the National Security Strategy will reveal deep connections to liberalism as our foundational theoretical basis with the accompanying constraints. However, SOF does not operate within the same contextual milieu as the United States. Typically, there are SOF in 75–100 countries on any given day. USSOCOM through its size limitations must work

by, with and through host nation cooperation to achieve U.S. policy goals with all of the Laws of Armed Conflict (LOAC) and Leahy Law restrictions so implied. It is important to note that we tend to see conflicts from our own lens. There is a tendency to assume that a host nation must have the same goals as the United States. Therefore, as SOF work with other nations, there is an expectation of normative behavior by the host nation or indigenous groups that comport to our Western liberal democratic theory. The truth is every context is different, every state and group will not have like goals, and there is certainly no guarantee of liberalism becoming the norm worldwide and existential threats to states have a tendency lessen the regard for rules of war with an attendant move to Clausewitz's extreme (Rubright, 2014, p. 87).

In the context of a given conflict a myriad of pressures and perceptions will influence actors. The factors will be unique, but the means of addressing them will and do have a degree of consistence. Organizations will form to pursue a given political agenda. It is the natural evolution of any conflict. In such contexts groups with differing agendas, political goals, will emerge and fight to obtain those objectives. Even a cursory survey of recent conflicts clearly shows the formation of nonstate armed groups pursuing specific goals. Iraq saw the formation of Shi'a militias with the prominence of the Badr Brigades and the Jaesh Al Mehdi (JAM) with JAM spawning separate spin offs of their JAM Special Groups. The Peshmerga refused to lay down its weapons and there continued to be splits within the Kurdish population. At the same time there was Al Qaeda in Iraq, Sunni tribal militias other violent Sunni groups such as Ansar Al Islam. This convoluted milieu of groups in Iraq is certainly not unique. Similar diversity has been the norm in places such as Afghanistan and Columbia in the 1980s. In effect, the emergence of armed groups in chaotic situations is a normal evolution of people, power and politics within a political vacuum that can legitimately claim sovereignty and a monopoly on the use of force. Such group offer the opportunity for partnerships to further strategic goals, but they also represent risks.

A proxy actor of the United States is answerable to some degree to the United States for its behavior in a conflict. If the proxy actor chooses not behave in such a way that normative, their strategic utility may become a liability and support could evaporate. Yet, our proxies find themselves in a conflict zone in which there are technically no "good guys." They also have to deal with the realities of the milieu, which may include the cooperation with other groups fighting for particular goals within the same conflict. In this case, with two examples to be subsequently examined, there becomes the possibility of the United States being quasi aligned with a third-party proxy. That is to say a proxy actor of proxy supported by the United States. The author uses the term *third-party proxy* opposed to *surrogate* and *proxy* to emphasize the one degree of separation between the United States and an ally/surrogates proxy force. This third-party proxy represents differing levels of strategic utility but much reduced levels of risk if there is no direct connection between the United States and the third-party proxy. In the examples below the use of third-party proxies are examined and from the two a single factor can be determined as to whether third-party proxies are worth the risk they represent.

A modern example to the inherent tension between strategic utility and risk can be seen in the manhunt to capture or kill former Columbian drug lord Pablo Escobar. Following the death of University of Maryland basketball star Len Bias from a cocaine overdose there was a new emphasis on combating drugs and cocaine in particular (Evans, 2008). The ensuing manhunt would take years and see involvement of SOF. While the hunt would be successful in its finality with Escobar being killed in Medellin, Columbia, to a large degree it would be accomplished

through studiously ignoring the actions of the paramilitary/vigilante organization Los Pepes (The National Security Archive, 2008).

In the hunt for Pablo Escobar, it became clear that the much of the police were corrupt, politicians had been bought off, the judiciary paid for or thoroughly intimidated to the point that the rule of law had broken down and the likelihood of ever catching, trying, and incarcerating Escobar, in a real jail, was almost zero. The United States was deeply committed to catching or killing Escobar for his role in cocaine trafficking, but in particular, after he orchestrated the bombing of an Avianca Flight 203 which resulted in the deaths of 107 people including two U.S. citizens in November 1989 (McFadden, 1994). In essence, the issue moved from one of criminality and law enforcement to being an issue of national security in which the application of military power was justified (Bowden, 2001, p. 81). At this point the strategic utility of Colombian law enforcement became proxy actor in support of U.S. policy goals. This is not to imply that U.S. entities such as the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Central Intelligence Agency had not previously worked with or partnered with Colombian law enforcement, but rather, Colombian law enforcement was now strategically linked to U.S. political objectives and the U.S. military was authorized to help obtain those objectives.

The U.S. military in general does not make for good law enforcement and is specifically prohibited from operating in such capacity inside the United States under normal conditions (Posse Comitatus Act). There was likely no widespread appreciable understanding of the political risks associated with the hunt for Pablo Escobar. In a simple calculation, the United States would use its power to help Columbia hunt down and kill or capture Pablo Escobar, and the issue would be settled. This potentially shortsighted strategic understanding of the cocaine trade made the effort a fool's errand if the strategic calculus was to stop the flow of drugs. Yet, it can also be classified as a shrewd strategic move if the goal was to put drug kingpins on notice that taking control of sovereign states, blowing up airliners and killing U.S. citizens would not be tolerated. In short, Pablo Escobar's ambition and mania could be turned to a deterrent effect. It will never be known for sure which strategic calculus was in play, but the stage was set for a third-party proxy to become a liability and therefore present a degree of risk while simultaneously offering strategic utility.

As the hunt progressed it became clear that Pablo Escobar would not be easy to capture and was running an intolerable campaign of terror which included the killing of police, judges, politicians, and criminal rivals. It became clear to some in Columbia that the rule of law and the niceties by which western democratic nations operate was not going to get the job accomplished. From this morass sprung the shadowy vigilante group Los Pepes, which in turn used the same brutal tactics of torture, extrajudicial killings, and threats to Pablo Escobar's associates and family to systematically tear down the Medellin Cartel and eventually wear down Escobar (Bowden, 2001, p. 263). Los Pepes was studiously being ignored by U.S. officials who understood the risk which the organization posed to the U.S. effort if an explicit connection were ever made. While a direct link between Los Pepes and U.S. military and agencies is extremely doubtful, there is evidence that U.S. support was used by Colombian partners to help Los Pepes further the effectiveness of their extralegal operations (Bowden, 2001, p. 268).

In this case, the third-party proxy was an effective means to achieve the strategic ends. An important distinction is that the strategic ends of the United States and the Colombian government were aligned to a tolerable degree. In essence, the U.S. proxy actor was not pursuing ends that contradicted the ends sought by the United States. The fact that third-party proxies were

used from a U.S. relative perspective, while not politically correct, was an inevitable result of the conditions in Medellin. This should not be surprising and would likely be mirrored even in the United States if a criminal organization behaved as egregiously as the Medellin cartel did in Columbia. The next example is a very different vignette from which the strategic ends differed greatly.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 resulted in an unexpected long-term counter-insurgency struggle, which ended in failure for the Soviets (Monks, 1981, pp. 15–17). The common perception of this conflict, especially within the Arab world, is that the holy warriors, or Mujahedeen, with the help of Allah managed through valor to throw back the atheistic Soviet war machine, resulting in the Soviet Union's dissolution (Galeotti, 1995, p. 2). Naturally, the Mujahedeen who fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan picture themselves, along with their faith, as being the principal reason for the defeat of the Soviet military. And while it is true that the Soviets would not have been defeated without the Mujahedeen being willing to sacrifice their lives, personal valor is simply not the whole story. The common belief that technology is not a decisive implement in counterinsurgency strategy was to prove false in Afghanistan as it did become the deciding factor in the outcome of the conflict (Rubin, 1995, p. 80). It should be noted that the Soviet use of extreme oppression and unrestricted operations against those willing to support the Mujahedeen was a successful tactic until technology changed the conflict (Rubright, 2015; Yousaf & Adkin, 1992, p. 177).

Initially, the Soviet Union had considerable trouble dealing with the Mujahedeen who would prey upon the logistics lines while using guerrilla tactics to inflict casualties. (Newell & Newell, 1981, p. 134) The primary mode of operation for the Soviet military was to use motorized rifle units moving with substantial artillery support and attempt to close with and kill or capture insurgent fighters (Girardet, 1985, p. 33). It quickly became apparent that such doctrine left the Soviet military extremely vulnerable and quite often unable to take effective control of substantial areas of territory. The Soviets, however, had considerable technical superiority over the insurgent forces, especially the ability to use close air support in both tactical situations and for punitive measures against population centers which supported the insurgents/Mujahedeen. It became clear that reliance upon ground forces alone, moving through constricted valleys and passes, was simply not an effective method of fighting in the mountainous country of Afghanistan. The Soviet Union developed new doctrine which employed air mobility to quickly move forces in theatre (Rais, 1994, p. 112). This doctrine evolved into hammer and anvil operations in which an airmobile force would be moved into a valley while a ground force would move to squeeze civilians and Mujahedeen between the two forces. It became clear to the Soviets that doctrinal change to incorporate air mobility would serve them better in mountainous terrain than the use of Motorized Rifle Divisions (Yousaf & Adkin, 1992, pp. 59–61).

While the common perception is that the Soviet Union entered into a quagmire in Afghanistan, it is not widely understood that the Soviet Union was, in fact, very much in control and was expected by both their own military and by the Reagan administration to be successful in Afghanistan (C. Gray, personal communication, 2010). By 1984, the head of the Inter-Service Intelligence of Pakistan had similar misgivings about the likelihood of success in effectively defeating the Soviet military (Yousaf & Adkin, 1992, p. 182). In fact, by 1984, Mohammad Yousaf, the head of the Inter-Service Intelligence effort to arm and equip the Mujahedeen of Afghanistan, was convinced that the effort was doomed to failure unless more modern weaponry was made available to the Mujahedeen to counter the technical dominance of the Soviet Union. By

late 1984, the Soviet military, using ruthlessly repressive measures, had driven much of the insurgents' civilian support structure back across the Pakistani border, (Rais, 1994, p. 102) with 3.5 million refugees seeking shelter in Pakistan and 1.5 million refugees seeking shelter in Iran (Urban, 1988, p. 157). The people of Afghanistan were either being repressed to the point of compliance or were being driven out of the country. This period in the Soviet Afghan conflict is often ignored as it does not reflect the ideal prowess of the Arab or Muslim Mujahedeen, nor does it portray particularly favorably the half-hearted US support to the Mujahedeen.

It became quite clear by 1984 that the Mujahedeen, to have any chance of success, required an ability to negate the threat of Soviet close air support and the threat of Soviet helicopter gunships, such as the HIND, which were making punitive raids on Afghan villages without repercussions (Yousaf & Adkin, 1992, p. 180). The Mujahedeen, up until that point, had been supplied with SA-7 and Blowpipe shoulder launched surface-to-air missiles in an attempt to counter the Soviet air threats (Carew, 2000, p. 270). Both of these weapons proved to be completely inadequate for the job. Specifically, while the SA-7 was available in fairly large numbers, it had the limitation of needing to be generally above and always behind the target to be effective: such opportunities are exceedingly rare (C. Gray, personal communication, 2011).

The Stinger missile removed the viability of close air support as a tactical advantage for Soviet military forces in Afghanistan and this changed the military strategic context in which the conflict was being fought. The first result was an inability of Soviet aircraft to effectively carry out punitive raids against Afghan population centers which were known, or suspected, to support insurgents because they could not operate at low altitudes (Kearney, 2006). Therefore, the Mujahedeen's supply bases, which in reality consisted of villages in remote areas of Afghanistan, became sanctuaries which could only be threatened by the use of ground forces with the attendant risks of ambush and vulnerability of logistics trains. The second result, and more important for the overall strategic context of the conflict, was that this ensured that combat between Soviet military forces and the Mujahedeen took place as direct fire ground engagements or indirect fire to harass Soviet base areas. In such a context the Mujahedeen were still at a tactical disadvantage to superior Soviet military firepower, but, as was the case for the U.S. military in Vietnam, the overall effect was to transform the conflict into an attrition style of warfare. The Mujahedeen, given an almost endless supply of volunteer insurgent fighters, albeit still at a severe technical and tactical disadvantage, were capable of inflicting a constant stream of Soviet casualties.

The Soviet Union may have been able to foresee the introduction of technical tools that would challenge the Soviet mastery on the battlefield at the military strategic level, and they may have simply assumed that the United States would be unwilling to give such advanced technical capabilities to the Mujahedeen. This highlights the dangers of conducting counterinsurgency operations through brutal repression, with the resultant increased likelihood of resistance from the population, if the campaign cannot be effectively continued through to its full conclusion. In the case of Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, the Pakistani safe areas, combined with the technical capabilities of the Stinger missile, guaranteed a defeat of the Soviet intervention in the long term. However, without the introduction of the Stinger missile into Afghanistan, it is quite unlikely that the Mujahedeen would have been successful in resisting the Soviet occupation and the Soviet counterinsurgency strategy of brutal repression would very likely have succeeded until the breakup of the Soviet Union itself.

The important difference between the uses of third-party proxies in this case is that the support to the proxy was unconditional and the Inter-Service Intelligence as an agent of Pakistani interests were not aligned with U.S. strategic interests. Pakistan saw a weak and divided Afghanistan as a strategic rear area in case of conflict with India. The United States saw the Soviet expansion into Afghanistan as an opportunity to bleed the Soviet Union (maybe a bit of payback for Vietnam) and the continuation of the containment of Communism. While these two strategic interests were not at odds with each other, the fact is they were not aligned as was the case in Colombia. Furthermore, while the emergence of third-party proxies is inevitable result of the environment, the third-party proxies strategic aims were also not in harmony with the United States' policy ends or strategic goals.

## CONCLUSION

The world is becoming more complex, but not to the point it is unrecognizable. The United States faces a strategic paradox in which our strategic culture is at odds with the timeless nature of war causing our conduct of warfare to be disconnected from reality. To overcome this paradox the United States, mostly by accident and war fatigue of the American electorate, will seek to work by with and through, host nation and proxy forces. This SOF focused future will be combined with adversaries whom recognize the military prowess of the United States at the tactical and operational level cause an asymmetrical or irregular context for future conflicts.

In these future conflicts the emergence of third-party actors will be, and is, a naturally occurring phenomena; Syria is a typical case in point. Third-party actors have the potential to be third-party proxies which can provide SOF with more localized tools to achieve U.S. strategic goals. The question becomes one of risk vs utility. That calculus should not be made upon the assumption of the old proverb "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" as Afghanistan clearly showed. The calculus for SOF use of third-party proxies needs to be one of whether a proxy actor and the third-party proxy has the same strategic ends. The reasons for those ends will differ, but the overall ends should be in harmony as the case of Colombia shows. The fact that third-party proxies provide plausible deniability for U.S. forces when it comes to dirty but potentially necessary work, an ability to circumvent Leahy vetting or LOAC is simply an ancillary benefit, and one that must be carefully monitored to prevent risk out weighing utility. The final arbiter of SOF's use of and the utility of third-party proxies should be based on common strategic goals.

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# Formative Years: Military Adaptation of Dutch Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan

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Between 2005 and 2010, Dutch Special Operations Forces (SOF) carried out three missions in Afghanistan. This article analyses how they, a joint effort of the *Korps Commandotroepen* and the Maritime Special Operations Forces adapted to operational challenges and examines the factors driving and shaping this process. The development of Dutch Special Operations Forces is analyzed through Theo Farrell's analytical framework of military adaptation, particularly focusing on influences from politico-strategic imperatives, operational challenges, organizational culture, and new technology. Dutch Special Operations Forces successfully improved its performance by adapting to the requirements of the political and military strategic leadership, the directives of the International Security Assistance Force command, the allocation of sophisticated assets and the occurrences on the battlefield. The experience of Dutch Special Operations Forces demonstrates that highly specialized, cohesive, and relatively autonomous units can behave rather unbureaucratically, produce tactical flexibility, and adapt swiftly to operational and tactical challenges when visionary leadership and a learning culture is present.

Keywords: military adaptation, special operations forces, Afghanistan, Uruzgan, counterinsurgency, NATO, ISAF

## INTRODUCTION

In August 2003, Dutch soldiers in the Dutch Korps Commandotroepen (KCT; the Dutch Army Special Operations Forces [SOF]) left Afghanistan at the end of a mission in the country's capital city Kabul. As members of the Dutch SOF, they had made a substantial contribution to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) there, although the mission had not been too demanding. For the next 2 years, there was no Dutch SOF presence in Afghanistan (during

which time they were deployed in Iraq), but they then returned for three subsequent missions in Afghanistan's southern provinces.

This time, the Dutch SOF (the KCT and Maritime SOF [MARSOF]) were to face greater challenges. The first mission was the deployment of the Special Forces Task Group Afghanistan (SFTG-A) in Kandahar province from April 2005 until April 2006, a contribution to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Next, the Dutch military deployed to Uruzgan province in support of ISAF in April 2006, where Dutch SOF would contribute with the Special Forces Task Group Viper until December 2007. Last, after an intermission of more than a year, Dutch SOF returned to southern Afghanistan in April as Task Force (TF) 55 where they remained until the end of the Dutch mission in August 2010.

This article explores how Dutch SOF adapted during these missions and to what extent the units' tactics, procedures, and organizational structures evolved during the missions. Never before in contemporary history had Dutch SOF been deployed in such a challenging environment or with such a robust mandate. At the same time, the unit encountered several politicostrategic and operational challenges, such as national restrictions, complex command and control relationships, and ISAF directives on the execution of operations. The level of cooperation with other SOF and the access to sophisticated technology, such as SOF helicopters, wideband satellite communication and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) assets, was unprecedented. How did Dutch SOF adapt to these challenges and opportunities? And what were the dominant drivers and shapers of this adaptation?

The three SOF missions, jointly executed by the KCT and MARSOF, in Afghanistan between 2005 and 2010 are the main focus of this article. In the first section we introduce our theoretical framework of military adaptation and present some relevant epistemological background of SOF and special operations. We start with Theo Farrell's (2010) definition of military adaptation—"change to tactics, techniques, or existing technologies to improve operational performance"—and his hypothesis that military organizations adapt by either exploiting core competencies or exploring new capacities and that the adaptive process is driven and shaped by operational challenges, technology, domestic and alliance politics, culture and civil-military relations. The article focuses on the operational and tactical elements of the mission, particularly exploring changes because of politics, operational challenges, organizational culture and leadership, and technology. The article follows Farrell's analytical framework, but more important, it aims to tell the story of how Dutch SOF adapted in this specific case.

We analyze the driving and shaping factors during three missions the Dutch SOF conducted in Afghanistan from 2005 until 2010 and describe how Dutch SOF consequently adapted. The case demonstrates that the Dutch SOF were able to adapt by exploiting their core competences, exploring new ideas, developing cooperation with sophisticated enablers, and examining new procedures. Conceptual thinking within the Dutch SOF community on tactics, organization, and support has been shaped and developed. The experience of the Dutch SOF furthermore demonstrates that highly specialized, cohesive, and relatively autonomous units can behave rather unbureaucratically, produce tactical flexibility, and adapt swiftly to operational and tactical challenges when visionary leadership and a learning culture is present.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Adaptation on the battlefield is as old as war itself. The body of literature on military change is, however, underdeveloped, and although it has evolved considerably since Barry Posen's (1984)

*The Sources of Military Doctrine*, a strong empirical and conceptual basis for adaptation and innovation is lacking. One of the main disputed issues is the question of what constitutes military change (Farrell & Terriff, 2001, p. 4). Authors have suggested military changes comprise alteration in formal doctrine, the structure of the military organization, goals, or strategies. Often military change is differentiated between *innovation*—major change and adoption of new means and methods—and *adaptation*—adjusting existing military means and methods (Farrell & Terriff, 2001, pp. 4–6; Stenhouse, 2015). Others saw adaptation and innovation as overlapping concepts (Beyerchen, 1998, pp. 266–269; Huges, 1976, pp. 423–431). Last, others also include emulation, the importing of new tools and ways of copying other militaries (Stenhouse, 2015).

Because this case focuses on a relatively small unit, examines tactics and operations, and evaluates battlefield performance, this article naturally fits in Theo Farrell's (2013) framework of military adaptation, which he defined as a change to tactics, techniques, or existing technologies to improve operational performance. According to Farrell (2013), the most important driver of military adaptation in war are operational challenges: new enemy tactics, mounting casualties, and a demanding physical environment (pp. 8–9). Another important driver is the development of new technology, including both new technologies promoted by scientists as well as militaries seeking for new technologies to undertake change (Farrell & Terriff, 2001, p. 14). Besides these main drivers, Farrell noted that military adaptation is additionally shaped by domestic politics, alliance politics, strategic culture, and civil-military relations.

Military organizations, as other large bureaucracies, are commonly viewed as traditional, preferring continuity and being reluctant to major change (Echevarria II, 1998, p. 85). Military organizations, similar to other bureaucracies, are more susceptible to change that promise to confer prestige, increase resources, secure autonomy and increases the organization's chances of survival (Allison, 1971; Terriff & Farrell, 2001, p. 271). According to Murray (2011), there is an inherent tension between the nature of disciplined, obedient military organizations and organizations that are responsive and adaptive to a world of constant change. Contrary to peacetime, there is little time to adapt in war. Setbacks and growing casualties may put enormous pressure on the military organization, often not the condition in which its leaders are prone to experiment, take risks or adopt new ideas (Murray, 2011, pp. 2–3). It appears that the biggest obstacle to military change is the military organizational culture itself.

The organizational culture of SOF, however, operating in small cohesive units and relatively autonomously, is inherently less bureaucratic and hierarchical than conventional units. The SOF culture, which has been characterized as being more flexible, creative, and informal than are conventional units, is the opposite of the bureaucratic model (Turnley, 2011, 57, pp. 65–67). This starts with selection and training processes which are particularly designed to produce SOF operators who are adaptable, creative and innovative (U.S. Department of the Army, 2006, pp. 1–11). SOF units rely on these attributes of their personnel and incorporate them in order to be successful, while conventional units value predictability of performance and meeting standards (Yarger, 2013, p. 61). A recent survey among Dutch MARSOF personnel showed that they regard adaptability as the strongest trait of their unit, while the lack of a comprehensive vision regarding the purpose of the unit is largely considered as a negative attribute (Kraag, 2012, p. 135). According to Spulak (2007, p. 14), "the major differences between SOF and other narrowly defined military organizations are that SOF are elite warriors, creative, and flexible." Spulak argued that SOF can be flexible because they have a broader range of capabilities as a result of more capable personnel, better equipment and often a more agile organizational

structure. In other words, SOF have more means and possibilities to overcome challenges or to find creative solutions in combat than conventional units (Spulak, 2007, pp. 17–19). Because of these organizational characteristics, SOF are inherently more adaptable, creative and flexible than conventional units. Examining the adaptive performances of SOF units may consequently provide different conclusions than popular beliefs on military adaptation suggest.

In addition, most work on military innovation and adaptation focuses on large units and major breakthroughs (Grissom, 2006, p. 920). Scholarly work is dominated by case studies of top-down innovation or adaption of large units or even the military as a whole. Consequently, there is a lack of empirical cases and understanding on bottom-up adaptation on a smaller scale.<sup>1</sup> This is understandable as documentation of battlefield performances of small units is scarce, often classified and difficult to interpret for non-specialists. Moreover, Grissom (2006) argued that “bottom-up causality is more complex than top-down causality, involving more actors possessing less formal authority and tacit or complex causal chains” (p. 925).

It would, however, be a mistake to characterize military adaptation as strictly either bottom-up or top-down, because it is rather dialectical in nature, drawing upon a series of forces from both within and outside the unit (Russell, 2011, pp. 12–13). Small unit adaptation may therefore offer valuable insights as to where major innovation starts. As Russell’s (2011, p. 8) account on the development of the U.S. strategy in Iraq 2005–2007 demonstrated, tactical adaptation may be one of the driving forces for major change and comprehensive innovation. Russell’s study, as well as the case of the Dutch SOF later described, demonstrated that small, cohesive, rather autonomous units with visionary leadership and an effective learning culture may behave less bureaucratically and hierarchical as is often suggested and be more prone to change. As such, examining small unit, bottom-up adaptation can contribute to the understanding and the conceptual body of military change studies.

Before we turn to the case studies and tell the story of how the Dutch SOF adapted during their missions in Afghanistan, let us turn first to some epistemological background on SOF and special operations.

## SOF AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS

The study on SOF and special operations is characterized by a lack of rigorous methods and a scarce amount of available empirical data (Braily, 2005, p. 4). Although most readers will have an idea of what special operations are, there is no clear definition on the subject. A workable definition in the literature speaks of “[s]mall scale, clandestine, covert or overt operations of an unorthodox and frequently high-risk nature, undertaken to achieve significant political or military objectives in support of foreign policy,” characterized by, “either simplicity or complexity, by subtlety and imagination, by the discriminate use of violence, and by oversight of the highest level” (Tugwell & Charters, 1984, p. 35). The strategist Colin Gray (1998) defined *special operations* as “political-military activities tailored to achieve specific, focused objectives [...] and conducted by units which adapt with great flexibility to the demands of each challenge” (p. 141). Military doctrines use similar definitions. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (2009) described *special operations* as follows:

Military activities conducted by specially designated, organized, trained, and equipped forces using operational techniques and modes of employment not standard to conventional forces. These activities are conducted across the full range of military operations independently or in coordination

with operations of conventional forces to achieve political, military, psychological and economic objectives. Politico-military considerations may require covert or discreet techniques and the acceptance of a degree of physical and political risk not associated with conventional operations. (p. 15)

According to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the principal tasks of the SOF are as follows: special reconnaissance, direct action, and military assistance.

Although these definitions of special operations differ, they all agree, for example, on their relation to the political- and military-strategic objectives. With this in mind, Kiras (2006, p. 113) distinguished between the nature of the activities and their effects. He considered special operations as tactical actions with a strategic purpose. Another recurrent feature of these definitions is flexibility, as previously highlighted, especially during complex and difficult operations. Last, a distinctive feature of special operations is that they are “executed with speed, surprise, and purpose.” These are the elements that McRaven (1996, p. 2) used in his defining work on special operations in which he argued that the success of special operations depends on gaining “relative superiority.”

Although these characteristics are typical for SOF units, they are not exclusive; conventional units also use concepts such as speed, surprise, and flexibility and their operations may occasionally have operational or strategic effects. The principal SOF tasks of special reconnaissance and military assistance do not easily fit into McRaven’s framework. There is consequently no academic consensus or a commonly agreed-upon practitioner’s view about what constitutes *special* and where *conventional* begins. Missions that are considered special in one country may be considered not so in another. Operations are mostly deemed special when they are executed by designated special operations forces, although this conception falls short when historical cases (pre–World War II) are examined, when this term was not generally used and acknowledged yet. Similarly, the difference between special and conventional forces is not clearly defined. In general, SOF units have higher physical and mental standards, are better equipped, and are better trained than are conventional units. In addition, they are trained for different tasks, such as hostage release operations, irregular warfare, and counterterrorism. However, these general observations do not solve the problem of the lack of special operations theory.

Although some valuable studies have been published, the debate is far from over (Marsh, Kiras, & Blocksome, 2015, p. 4). Several, mainly U.S., academics have urged for the development of a theoretical body of special operations. Robert Spulak (2007, p. 3) stated, for example, that a special operations theory is needed to guide the strategic application of SOF. Linda Robinson (2013, pp. 20–21) contended that a special operations theory is necessary to gauge the strategic effect of SOF. In contrast, James Kiras argued that no specific special operations theory is needed because it could constrain research in this relatively new field (Marsh et al., 2015, p. 4).

The absence of an agreed-upon definition and clear demarcation between SOF and conventional forces, and special and conventional operations, has not hampered the development of special operations forces. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there has been an increasing demand for SOF (Finlan, 2003, pp. 94–95). According to Tucker and Lamb (2007, p. 237), SOF are an apt instrument to use against terrorists or other irregular threats, preferably incorporated at a national level. Besides counterterrorism, military assistance (the training of and cooperation with indigenous paramilitary and security forces) has become more important for SOF. The successes during the initial stages of OEF in particular, where American SOF in collaboration with the

Northern Alliance managed to overthrow the Taliban regime in a matter of weeks, commanded significant attention for military assistance.

The successful use of SOF has had a profound effect on political and military policymakers. Since 2001, budgets have increased, SOF have been expanded, and deployment has more than doubled (Brown, 2006). Although this trend is most notably seen in the United States, research has shown that the importance of SOF has also increased in other Western Armed Forces (Gratrud, 2009, pp. 6–15; Sjoberg, 2004, pp. 47–52). The successful deployment of SOF has led some to argue that SOF-dominated campaigns might be the future of warfare. According to Sepp (2010): “Special Forces are in the best political and military position to provide a sufficient answer, the better option, and the weapon of choice to respond to the conflicts of the new century” (p. 138). The increased importance of SOF cannot be solely credited to their own merit, however. With growing public aversion to, and decreasing political willingness for long, large-scale military commitments, in some countries SOF are seen as a cost-effective alternative to large conventional forces.

As a result, over the past decade, there have been significant developments in the international discussion of the use of SOF and the execution of special operations, also in the Netherlands. With the establishment of a ministerial core group for special operations in 2000, the employment of SOF has gained a special position within the Dutch political decision-making process for military commitments. This group has the authority to order a special operation without informing parliament before that operation (The Netherlands Parliament, 2000). Although the Dutch SOF has no separate special operations command structure, the operational planning and execution of SOF operations is directed and guided by the Joint Special Operations Branch of the Directorate of Operations of the Department of Defence (Ten Cate & Van Der Vorm, 2016, p. 36).

The increased importance assigned to the Dutch SOF can be seen in their relative growth, despite severe cuts in the overall defense budget over the past two decades. The Dutch SOF have also been deployed continuously since the conflict in the Balkans in the 1990s in various conflict areas. In particular, the missions in Afghanistan in 2005–2010 have been challenging and demanded the utmost of the soldiers and their materiel. Dutch SOF had not been involved in such heavy combat since the Indonesian War of decolonization (1945–1949). When the Dutch SOF entered Afghanistan, they had broad experience with stability operations, such as SFIR in Iraq in 2004–2005, but this mission theater presented a whole spectrum of new challenges. How did the Dutch SOF adapt to this tough environment, a fierce opponent and the operational challenges? And which were the dominant drivers and shapers of Dutch SOF adaptation?

### THE SPECIAL FORCES TASK GROUP AFGHANISTAN, 2005–2006

In 2005, the process of state-building in Afghanistan was left largely to the allies of the ISAF (Jones, 2009). In the meantime, the US-led OEF was continuing to hunt down remaining Taliban and Al Qaeda forces in the southern and eastern provinces of the country. The SOF units of OEF were commanded by the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force, located at the Bagram airbase, near Kabul (Burke, 2011, pp. 303–306).

Before the deployment of Special Forces Task Group Afghanistan (SFTG-A) in 2005, the United States had asked the Netherlands to support the fight against international terrorism in

Afghanistan by sending Special Forces (The Netherlands Parliament, 2004b). Because of other commitments (ISAF and the mission in Iraq), the Dutch SOF were not available for OEF until 2005. By that time, however, the Dutch Minister of Defence, Henk Kamp, had reviewed this request, because he considered the SOF, with their special training and skills, to be ideally suited for such a mission under OEF. This resulted in the deployment of the SFTG-A to Kandahar in southern Afghanistan. To prevent any ambiguity on the nature of the mission and to give service personnel a clear judicial framework, the department issued an unprecedented statement that the operation would be regarded as “a time of war” (The Netherlands Parliament, 2005c, p. 1).

The decision to deploy Commandos and Marines to Kandahar gave cause for debate in Parliament, with several Members of Parliament (MPs) criticizing the government for not following the normal procedure for deploying armed forces in the event of an international mission, but for resorting to the clause for special operations instead. In addition, there was criticism of the reference to article 51 of the United Nations charter, 3 years after the fall of the Taliban regime. Article 51 had been invoked at the time when the government of Afghanistan could be considered hostile. According to the Social Democrats, the installation of the government of President Hamid Karzai had since rendered the use of article 51 obsolete. In a letter to parliament, Foreign Minister Ben Bot stated that the Taliban and Al Qaeda still posed a threat and therefore the Dutch government retained the right of self-defense (The Netherlands Parliament, 2005a).

Second, the objective of the mission itself was also debated in parliament. The Liberal Democrats saw the mission as a part of the fight against international terrorism. According to them, this fight should be waged in Afghanistan, lest terrorism would threaten the Netherlands. The Christian Democrats concurred, stating that: “terrorists could hijack trains and destroy buildings here [in the Netherlands] as well” (The Netherlands Parliament, 2004a). During the final debate on the mission, the Social Democrats stated that the nature and the effectiveness of the mission were still unclear. Although the Ministers for Defence and Foreign Affairs Henk Kamp and Ben Bot stipulated that the SFTG-A would gather intelligence, conduct reconnaissance operations, and possibly engage in combat, this description of the overall objective of the mission was still too vague for the Social Democrats, and thus, they withheld their support for the mission. Other left-wing parties also objected to the mission. However, the Dutch government secured a majority in parliament in support of the mission of SFTG-A (The Netherlands Parliament, 2005b). The political decision, despite the absence of broad political support, provided SOF with a robust mandate and hardly any limitations or caveats. The allocated means, the flexible mission design, and the robust mandate presented by the politicians offered the SFTG maneuver space and flexibility to adapt to the operational challenges and increase operational experience with supporting assets such as helicopters.

The SFTG-A deployed in April 2005 to the southern province of Kandahar. The airfield outside Kandahar City was to be the Forward Operating Base for the first Dutch Special Operations Task Group (SOTG). The Dutch government had chosen to let the SFTG-A operate in the southernmost districts of Registan and Shorabak, along the Pakistan border. This area of responsibility, known by the quintessentially Dutch name “Windmill,” presented some challenges in terms of distances and accessibility. It consisted mostly of arid desert and was sparsely populated. Furthermore, the available intelligence on the area of operations was very limited (The Netherlands Parliament, 2007a).

The combination of geographical challenges and the availability of enabling forces and a full staff opened possibilities for the development of new tactics. Compared with previous Dutch missions, the organizational structure of the SFTG-A was quite robust. The unit consisted of eight SOF-teams with enabling forces, such as a detachment of four CH-47D helicopters (Chinook), a reconnaissance platoon for guard duties and explosive ordnance disposal specialists and a staff with the relevant sections, including a large intelligence element. The distance between the area of operations and the Dutch forward operating base *Achnacarry*, some 200 to 300 kilometers, affected the way SFTG-A could operate. First, the distance limited the options available to SFTG-A in the area of operations. Transport to and from Windmill was limited to either helicopters or wheeled vehicles, but the size of the helicopter detachment meant that only two SOF teams and two vehicles could be moved on each flight. A second consequence of the large distance was the limited availability of support in the event of engagements with the enemy, or other calamities (Van Wiggen, 2007).

As a result, the commander and the staff of the Task Group decided to experiment with larger force elements. A combination of at least two teams was deemed necessary to operate independently and with sufficient firepower. The experience of deploying clustered elements contributed considerably to the development of the concept of 'clustered team operations' that would be developed more in depth afterwards and stimulated thinking on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's SOTG concept in the Netherlands. In addition, the intelligence capacity and the helicopter detachment provided a first incentive to intelligence-driven operations (Van Wiggen, 2007).

With this force composition the SFTG-A began with covert reconnaissance operations along the Pakistani border in the summer of 2005. The main objective was to locate infiltration routes used by insurgents and eventually interdict them. Despite extensive surveillance and patrolling no significant movements by insurgents were established (The Netherlands Parliament, 2007a). Although the frequency of combat and terrorism in Afghanistan increased from 2003, it appeared that this trend had not affected Shorabak and Registan at that time. As a result the first missions reaped little information on the whereabouts of the insurgents and the SFTG staff felt the need to change to enhance its effectiveness. The SFTG-A adopted a different approach by focusing less on patrolling and surveillance, but more on engaging the local population for intelligence gathering. The teams conducted patrols in which they visited villages and offered medical support. They learned that the main problems faced by villagers in the area were intimidation, drug trafficking, and tribal conflicts. The change of tactics was fruitful, the new approach resulted in a better awareness of the situation by SFTG-A (The Netherlands Parliament, 2007a).

At the end 2005, The SFTG-A started to concentrate more on the border with the adjacent province of Helmand, an inhospitable, if not hostile, terrain which the insurgents used to enter Afghanistan en route to Helmand and Kandahar City. The new focus yielded results. In the first months of 2006, the teams intercepted several groups of insurgents, on two occasions leading to a fire fight. The close cooperation with the Chinook detachment enabled the teams to evacuate wounded and detained insurgents. Moreover, the helicopters were instrumental in supplying the teams in the field, thereby allowing them to mount longer patrols and leverage the renowned operational flexibility (The Netherlands Parliament, 2007a).

The operational flexibility of SFTG-A could to a significant extent be attributed to the international chain of command. For the first time, a Dutch SOTG was embedded in an

international Special Operations Task Force. This command structure allowed for adjustments in the operational plans to the local circumstances. However, national considerations prevailed over attempts of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force to deploy the Dutch task group in other parts of Afghanistan. In the fall of 2005, the staff at Bagram was of the opinion that the objectives in the Dutch area of operations had been met and that the SFTG-A could be better used elsewhere. Although the SFTG-A conducted several operations in Helmand province, the Dutch government did not give its consent to change the area of operations (The Netherlands Parliament, 2007a).

To conclude, how did the SFTG adapt to the operational and tactical challenges during the mission and how did it institutionalize new technology? The mission contributed to the development and adaption of the Dutch SOF in several ways. First, the domestic political decision-making process for special operations enabled the government to deploy SOF relatively easily in an international mission with a robust mandate, allowing flexibility to change tactics and adjusting the mission to certain extent; however, the use of this clause and the high level of secrecy can have negative consequences for the political support for such a mission. Second, the Dutch SOF community itself concluded that the SFTG-A was a first step for further SOF deployments. The new methods and tactics thought out and tested in the Southern part of Afghanistan were a welcome addition to the already existing SOF repertoire (Tuinman, Dimitriu, and Van Der Vorm, 2014, 27). The SFTG-A contributed to a more professional Dutch military along the lines of developments within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Third, the first Dutch SOTG was equipped with highly sophisticated technological assets and supporting elements—intelligence, helicopters, and explosive ordnance disposal teams. These enablers and an increased staff capacity made it possible for the SFTG-A to plan and execute its operations in an autonomous fashion. During the mission, the SFTG-A staff was able to plan its own mission in a proactive way, rather than await tasking from the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force. The proactive SOF culture of gaining the initiative resulted in a bottom-up approach that allowed the SFTG-A to plan other, less kinetic operations when the initial perceived threat did not materialize. Fourth, the SFTG-A was a part of an international SOF chain of command. Before this mission, the Dutch SOF had almost always been part of a conventional force. In this setting, the SFTG-A could learn from its international partners and operational tasking and command and control went smoothly. For example, before their deployment in southern Afghanistan, the Dutch SOF had limited operational experience in command and control of SOF operations above company level and the use of fire support and air support. The international command structure—particularly the use of forward air controllers at team level—now enabled the Dutch SOF to gain this operational experience.

Last, the Dutch SOF learned from the challenges presented by operating in the unforgiving desert of southern Afghanistan: For example, the open terrain made it hard to gather intelligence in a covert manner. New procedures were tested and applied, such as conducting operations with force elements of multiple teams, implementing COIN tactics and methods and shaping the battle space to increase situational awareness. The SFTG demonstrated its ability to adapt to the operational challenges, the tactical situation and the new means available. Moreover, the robust mandate, the level of autonomy and the force composition of SFTG-A was seen as a blueprint for future special operations (The Netherlands Parliament, 2006a). The political mandate, the allocation of means, the operational structure, and the challenging environment were the main drivers and factors of the Dutch SOFs adaptation. Even nowadays, SFTG-A is still regarded as a

template in the contemporary discussion of special operations (Jellema, 2011). But to what extent would this be institutionalized? This brings us to the next SOF operation in Afghanistan: Task Group Viper.

### SPECIAL FORCES TASK GROUP VIPER, 2006–2007

With the decision in February 2006 to deploy Dutch troops to Uruzgan province, a Dutch SOF company was also sent to the volatile area. According to Minister of Defence Henk Kamp, the Dutch SOF would have a completely different task than during SFTG-A and would be commanded by the Dutch commander of the conventional Task Force (Task Force Uruzgan, TFU) in the province: “There is no Special Forces operation planned in [Uruzgan]; there is just an ISAF-operation. The Commandos are part of the military taskforce. They have specific Commando tasks, like long range reconnaissance patrols in harsh environments,” as a letter from Kamp explained to parliament (The Netherlands Parliament, 2006c). During the mission in Uruzgan the Dutch SOF would be an integral part of the TFU and would not conduct special operations. This would significantly influence the level of autonomy, the effect and the tactical flexibility of the Dutch Special Forces unit. Nevertheless, Minister Kamp saw a crucial role for SOF in creating the necessary conditions for the TFU (The Netherlands Parliament, 2007b).

In the spring of 2006, along with the Deployment Task Force of TFU the Dutch Special Forces Task Group Viper was sent to Kamp Holland in Tarin Kowt, the provincial capital of Uruzgan. SFTG Viper had to conduct the mission with a significantly different organization and particularly less supporting assets, as compared with SFTG-A. The core of SFTG Viper consisted of four Special Forces (10-person) teams with an enhanced company staff, without enabling forces, such as helicopters, intelligence staff or explosive ordinance disposal (Jellema, 2011). All the enabling capabilities had to be provided by the TFU or the allies and were not trained or equipped to support special operations. Also, the mission of SFTG Viper differed substantially from the mission of SFTG-A. The task was different, as previously outlined, SFTG Viper would not conduct autonomous special operations. Another difference was that SFTG Viper was embedded in a national, conventional task force and not in an international SOF headquarters. As a result of these circumstances, the Dutch SOF had to adapt their planning process and the execution of operations, while at the same time dealing with a much more challenging threat. Compared with the border region of Kandahar, Uruzgan province was largely dominated by insurgents, who soon demonstrated to be able and willing to take on the fight. The volatile environment and fierce insurgency proved to be a dominant factor in the development of tactics, procedures and organizational structure.

One of the main limiting factors was the lack of dedicated assets and the organizational embedding outside the SOF chain of command. During the first two rotations, the task group still had a large amount of leeway. Because the TFU was still in the process of deploying, SFTG Viper had to initiate and plan its own missions. SFTG Viper had to rely heavily, however, on the international partners in this period, which reduced its flexibility and autonomy. One reason was that the Dutch vehicles were not yet fitted with electronic jammers against improvised explosive devices (IEDs). As a result, the Dutch SOF had to move within the slipstream of the other allies to give a measure of protection, significantly reducing its autonomy (Commander SFTG Viper 1, 2007). This international cooperation had also benefits; for example, the Dutch SOF could tap

into the local knowledge of the allies and their experience in the use of ISR assets and air support. The American and Australian SOF allies had more extensive experience in combating the insurgency in Uruzgan. As a result, the international support was crucial during the early stages of the mission of SFTG Viper in order to swiftly adapt to the operational challenges (Commander SFTG Viper 1, 2007).

Once the TFU became operational in August 2006, the national command structure came into play and affected the operations of SFTG Viper. As a consequence of not being part of a SOF command structure, lacking organic enabling capacity, and having limited access to ISR assets, the task group was restricted in its ability to operate in an autonomous and flexible fashion on the serious challenges the insurgency in Uruzgan confronted the Dutch SOF with. Most important, the initial leeway to plan and initiate operations was constrained. Viper was increasingly tasked to carry out conventional type missions that the thinly stretched Dutch battle group could not perform. During the subsequent rotations, SFTG Viper devolved into a quick reaction force that was used to deal with flashpoints in the area of operations of the TFU (Van Dijk, 2007). A second effect of the national command structure was that the task group now had to rely on the TFU for enabling capacity such as intelligence specialists, engineers and explosive ordnance disposal personnel. These resources were, however, scarce and had to be shared with the conventional infantry units of the battle group (Commander SFTG Viper 1, 2007). This had an adverse effect on the autonomy and flexibility of SFTG Viper. Last, being embedded outside the SOF chain of command restricted the access to resources at higher levels (e.g., ISR assets). This problem could only partly be circumvented by cooperating with international SOF units. The relationships with other SOF partners, however, abated as the mission progressed and Dutch SOF started teaming up with the Dutch Provincial Reconstruction Team or with the reconnaissance platoons to gain intelligence on the area of operations.

The operational environment and the insurgency posed significant challenges and drove the adaptation process. Although the Dutch SOF had been deployed to Uruzgan as an ISAF unit, as opposed to OEF, the new mission area proved far more violent and the unit got involved in some fierce engagements and heavy combat. One of the most important learning aspects was that the Dutch task group came to understand the difficulties of fighting an insurgency (Ten Cate & Van Der Vorm, 2016, pp. 236–238). The insurgents themselves were not conspicuous, most of the times blending into the local population, which made it hard to engage them. Moreover, they proved to be highly adaptive. The commander of SFTG Viper rotation 4 (2008, p. 5), for example, noted that the opposing forces had adapted during the missions to the point that “fighting against ISAF troops with small arms was to no avail. Instead of engaging directly [the insurgents] shifted their tactics increasingly to using [IEDs].”

The populated and cultivated areas—called green zones—were not always suited for the use of vehicles. The task group therefore needed to adapt its tactics and experimented with other means of insertion. For example, a small unit would infiltrate a village during the night, after which the mounted units would link up at dawn. Another example was to deploy covert observation posts and subsequently infiltrate the green zone with a seemingly small unit in order to draw fire, after which the insurgents could be engaged. At other times, the troops of Viper operated in the complex environment of the green zone in teams of four to twelve men, with cover from higher grounds. As one of the commanders of Task Force Viper would conclude, the Dutch SOF adapted to the geographical circumstances and the insurgent tactics by means of surprise, creativity and flexibility (Commander SFTG Viper 4, 2007).

A second consequence of the challenging operational environment and the organizational structure was the continuation of the use of larger force elements, as during the previous deployment to Kandahar. Initially, the first rotation used two clusters of two teams each. Later task groups were mostly deployed as a whole. To a considerable extent, the use of larger force elements was a response to the intensity of the insurgency in Uruzgan. Another reason was the limited availability of enablers such as combat engineers. Because of the threat posed by IEDs, it was hard to deploy multiple elements of Viper (Commander SFTG Viper 5, 2008). The clustered approach to operations, which was experimented with during the previous mission, slowly became the standard way of executing operations. As the mission progressed, the use of fire support and air support proved to be decisive. This was also a development that had its origin in the mission of SFTG-A, for in several instances, the mounted weapons proved insufficient to deter and defeat the insurgents. Many engagements were decided by the coordinated use of air support and ground-based fire support. As a result, these assets were increasingly given prominence at the planning and preparation stages of operations (Jellema, 2011).

The importance of junior leadership became more evident, strengthening the culture of allocating trust and responsibility to the lowest levels and the notion within Dutch SOF that the training and cultivation of leadership is paramount. Captain Marco Kroon was awarded the Militaire Willemsorde (the highest military honor) in 2009 for acts of bravery, skill, and loyalty during operations. The Viper mission was characterized by intensive engagements in a diffuse and complex operational environment in which young officers and NCO's had to assume large responsibilities. Several other junior leaders of Viper were also awarded decorations. The motivations for these accolades support the view that leadership was in many occasions a decisive factor during the operations of task group Viper (Netherlands Ministry of Defence, 2009, p. 29).

To conclude, SFTG Viper had to adapt to the political and operational challenges, and the organizational restrictions. Why did the developments to autonomous operations, flexible mission designs and incorporation into a SOF command and control structure not continue, despite the broad appreciation, both within and outside SOF, of the experiences during the SFTG-A mission in Kandahar? And how did Task Force Viper adapt to these challenges? Recent reports on the institutionalization of the lessons learned process in the Netherlands Armed Forces suggest structural weaknesses in the Armed Forces' ability to learn from operational experiences and lack of a structured lessons learned process (Netherlands Ministry of Defence, 2010). As Martijn Kitzen, Sebastiaan Rietjens and Frans Osinga (2013, p. 160) observe, although the Dutch forces gained a lot of operational experience during the 1990s and early 2000s, lessons were not systematically documented, incorporated, and institutionalized. However, other factors also played a role. The Dutch mission focused on security, stability and reconstruction and the presence of a SOF unit operating as the SFTG-A did, would not match with the overall mission profile and would neither naturally fit within the overall communication messages (Dimitriu & De Graaf, 2014). A more self-evident argument is that the Netherlands simply did not have the means available to support two independently operating forces, the TFU and a Special Operations Task Group, with a sufficient number of scarce enablers such as helicopters, explosive ordnance disposal specialists, and intelligence personnel. The Dutch mission in Uruzgan moreover directly followed on the mission of SFTG-A, which implied there was simply not enough time to institutionalize the lessons learned in Kandahar province.

The political and military strategic decision-making was an important shaping factor to Viper's adaptation. This time, however, the unit did not need to adapt to a broader mandate, new technologies and more allocated assets, but to the lack of enablers and not being integrated in an overall SOF command and control structure. With the notable exception of the first rotation, SFTG Viper suffered from a severely restricted autonomy, misuse of its abilities and from the lack of organic enabling assets. As a result of this growing dependence on the Dutch national TFU, international SOF partners became more wary of cooperating with SFTG Viper. This limited the access to intelligence and ISR-capacity. The mission framework led to discontent among some Dutch SOF operators, as was displayed in the documentary *09:11 Zulu*, produced by the Dutch reporter Vic Franke in November 2006 (The Netherlands Parliament, 2006b). Some critical remarks were made by Dutch commandos, who were frustrated about the mandate and the lack of available assets and who argued that the current mission of Viper was not the proper way to use a SOF unit. This even led to parliamentary questions (The Netherlands Parliament, 2007b).

The complex operational environment and the many intensive engagements demanded tactical adaptation and flexibility of the Dutch SOF. As opposed to the operational lessons, the lessons learned on the tactical level during SFTG-A were implemented, cultivated and expanded, such as operating with clusters of multiple teams and the use of air support and fire support. This was primarily because many of the staff, leaders and operators of TF Viper had been in Afghanistan during the previous mission. This supported a solid start of the mission and as soon as the first rotations returned, they passed on their experiences to their successors. The sharing of experiences and knowledge was facilitated by a culture within the Dutch SOF that values organizational learning (Kraag, 2012, p. 151). The Interservice Special Operations Center of Excellence, for example, translated these experiences into new Standard Operating Procedures, which later would contribute to the development of a Dutch special operations doctrine (Van De As, 2013). The position of a cluster commander, which was crucial for the success of the clustered team operations, was institutionalized within the peacetime organizational structure of Dutch SOF companies (Van De As, 2014). Furthermore, lessons and adaption strategies were implemented in selection and training processes. An important catalyst for adaption and change was the learning philosophy that experienced SOF operators from SFTG Orange and Viper should instruct the candidates in SOF selection and training and advise the next rotations in their Force Integration Training before deploying.

#### SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK GROUP, TF55, 2009–2010

On March 13, 2009, after a period of absence of more than a year, the Minister of Defence, Eimert van Middelkoop, announced in a letter to parliament a new deployment of Dutch SOF. According to the Minister, there was a pressing need for the deployment of SOF to support the Dutch military efforts in Uruzgan. The objectives of the deployment would be to perform reconnaissance missions, acquire intelligence, and arrest leaders of the insurgency and IED facilitators. The main idea of the mission was that the SOF would operate outside the TFU development zones to decrease the pressure on the activities of the TFU and PRT (The Netherlands Parliament, 2009).

This time more attention was paid to the lessons learned of the previous SOF missions. The Dutch SOF's preference for being embedded in an international SOF command was granted. The deployment, under the name of Task Force 55, would be placed directly under the ISAF SOF command, a subcommand of ISAF. Another improvement for the Dutch SOF was the mandate of their mission. Whereas SFTG Viper had been mainly a reconnaissance force, subsidiary to the TFU, TF55 was to be a proper special operations task force, with special tasks (The Netherlands Parliament, 2012). TF55's mission was to target the insurgents' networks and seize the initiative rather than react to the insurgents. The mission was, however, complicated by the fact that TF55 was not provided with its own supporting enablers as a result of the scarce availability in the Dutch armed forces. Thus, although TF55 was not part of the TFU, it was still dependent on the TFU for its enabling units such as intelligence assets, explosive ordnance disposal specialists, combat engineers and mortars (The Netherlands Parliament, 2012). Other assets such as helicopters and ISR were to be requested at Regional Command South. The dependency on inorganic enablers would have an effect on the operational flexibility and tempo of TF55 (Commander TF55 3, 2010).

TF55 was to operate in and around Uruzgan province. The complete task force consisted of 76 people; its nucleus was formed by four Special Forces teams (The Netherlands Parliament, 2009). The staff element was a hybrid form of the last two missions in Southern Afghanistan. Just as during the SFTG-A mission, TF55 was part of an international SOF command. The commander of TF55 and his staff were located at Kandahar Airfield. Despite the integration in the SOF command chain, the staff of TF55 initiated the operations mainly by itself. Operational plans had to be approved by the ISAF chain of command, as well by the Dutch Defence staff. The trend of low-level planning established during SFTG-A continued during TF55 (The Netherlands Parliament, 2012). Key personnel of the first rotation, such as the commander, his deputy, and most of the subunit commanders, had been deployed with Task Force Viper and were familiar with the command and control processes within the TFU and Regional Command South. Because of the experience gained in the previous missions, TF55 was able to plan and conduct special operations quickly and effectively upon arrival.

The deployment of TF55 in the spring of 2009 coincided with the strategic review of the international campaign in Afghanistan. It was in that period that the new commander of ISAF, General Stanley McChrystal concluded that the campaign suffered from a lack of resources, a lack of political will and, above all, the lack of a comprehensive strategy. According to McChrystal, ISAF should follow a counterinsurgency strategy in which the protection of the civilian population would be paramount (McChrystal, 2009). While his strategy was not new, he raised counterinsurgency to an entirely different level and issued several directives and guidance to his troops (Dimitriu, 2012). For example, night raids were strictly curtailed and troops were restrained in the use of force ("McChrystal bans night raids without Afghan troops," 2010). This limited the possibilities for gaining the advantage of surprise during operations under the cover of darkness. The most important directive during the mission was the obligation to partner with an Afghan unit. TF55 had to cooperate with a unit of the Afghan National Police, the Special Response Team Uruzgan.

One of the main ideas behind the concept of partnering was to increase the capabilities of the Afghan security forces so that in time they could take over the responsibilities of the international forces. The other reason for partnering was that the use of Afghan forces might help to gain more support of the local population for the Afghan government. For TF55, this partnering

effort was operationally challenging as it had not planned for this task, did not have dedicated training and partnering personnel, did not have the financial resources to equip the partner force sufficiently and the Special Response Team Uruzgan had to be built up from the ground. However, after intensive training, equipping, and advising for several months, the Special Response Team Uruzgan proved to be a valuable unit during operations (Ten Cate & Van Der Vorm, 2016, pp. 277–278). This also reacquainted the Dutch SOF with one of its primary tasks: military assistance. In later missions in Mali and particularly in Iraq, where Dutch SOF trained Iraqi SOF teams in preparation for their fight against ISIS, these would prove invaluable lessons (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014, 2015).

Another operational challenge that affected TF55 operations was the decision in 2009 that Kandahar City and central Helmand province were to be the main effort of ISAF. As a consequence of this decision, Regional Command South concentrated scarce resources such as helicopters and ISR-assets in these areas. To track down insurgents and fight them effectively, TF55 was to a large extent dependent on these resources, but the shifting focus to Kandahar and Helmand limited the access of TF55 to these assets. By initiating more operations in these provinces, which also had an effect in Uruzgan province, TF55 was able to get support from RC South while contributing to efforts of the TFU (U.S. Department of Defense, 2010, pp. 12–20).

The experience gained with the use of sophisticated technological assets, such as helicopters, ISR and fire support and close air support during previous deployments, expanded during the mission of TF55. At the same time, new equipment bred new options. Because of the availability of parachutes in theater and the allocation of tactical air transport (C-130), TF55 was able to insert a small parachute unit into an area dominated by insurgents in 2009 (Van Westerhoven, 2011). To add to this inventory during the mission, the Dutch SOF also used Mine Resistant Ambush Protected wheeled vehicles, boats, and quad bikes. The large diversity of equipment and specialties in the teams and enablers of TF55 taxed the commanders to a great extent.

Despite the technological advances, the TF55 proved again the importance of the human factor, a culture of developing and adjusting existing tactics, and leadership. This also applied to the staff elements. The international hierarchy, the complex environment and the high pace of operations demanded the utmost from staff and other support personnel. The Dutch SOF was repeatedly confronted with complex operations and dealing with integration of the SOF with different enabling and supporting units, while also taking into account the partners of the Special Response Team Uruzgan, the directives and guidance from ISAF and the grievances of the local population. Moreover, the majority of the operations were conducted in desolate areas, controlled by the insurgents and fierce fire fights occurred frequently. TF55 sustained losses on these operations. During an operation on September 6, 2009, Corporal Kevin van de Rijdt suffered a fatal injury during a fire fight. On February 15, 2010, an officer of the Special Response Team Uruzgan, Zaman Ali, was killed in an IED explosion (Ten Cate & Van Der Vorm, 2016, pp. 278–280).

Another significant factor that required the SOF unit to adapt were the insurgents' changes in their way of fighting. During the direct engagement in 2006 and 2007, the insurgents had sustained heavy losses and by the beginning of 2008 the TFU had established a fragile dominance over the population centres. This affected the tactics of the insurgents. They now started to avoid direct confrontations with the coalition troops in the TFU development zones' and resorted mainly to the use of IEDs. As a result, the freedom of movement of ISAF troops was hampered. Speed and surprise were hard to achieve by ground moves. Outside these

development zones the insurgents themselves enjoyed far more freedom of movement. They used inhospitable and mostly impassable terrain as sanctuaries to plan attacks and to recuperate (Ten Cate & Van Der Vorm, 2016, pp. 244–247). The SOF units of ISAF were tasked with finding and neutralize these sanctuaries. TF55, by definition, had to operate outside the development zones (The Netherlands Parliament, 2009).

One of the methods the commanders and staff of TF55 developed was to engage the insurgents in their sanctuaries in order to deny them freedom of movement and to disrupt their activities. These kinds of operations took the fight to the insurgency and released the pressure on the TFU development zones. Another type of mission was a short but intensive operation, mostly by helicopter, to complete a certain objective, for instance detaining an insurgent commander or destroying a storage of weaponry and IED material. The aforementioned types of operations are described in a very generic fashion. Several hybrid courses of action were available to TF55 as well (Ten Cate & Van Der Vorm, 2016, pp. 251–266). The tactics that TF55 used was an adaption to the fundamental shift of *modus operandi* of the insurgents' use of IEDs and the lack of possibility to gain surprise when moving with vehicles.

In sum, TF55's mission offered again some conditions in terms of politicostrategic boundaries, operational challenges, and new technology which compelled the unit to adapt. The mission in itself provided a sound and proven framework to conduct full-spectrum special operations. Furthermore the advice to embed the task force in an international special operations command was heeded. This increased the effectiveness of the operations, because TF55 had more access to scarce assets of Regional Command South, had a more dominant place in the ISAF hierarchy and could more easily cooperate with international partners. Despite the mission configuration, TF55 again did not have its own enablers at its disposal. The scarce availability of rotary-wing, EW, and combat support made the planning of every operation a considerable exercise in creativity and flexibility.

In particular, the guidance by general McChrystal through his directives posed a considerable operational challenge and had a significant effect on the operations of the Dutch SOF. Because of the more population-centric approach, the use of force was curtailed and the role of the Afghan National Security Forces increased. Conducting operations in circumstances such as these is quintessentially a task for SOF, although the Dutch SOF was not specifically prepared for this. This example demonstrates that contrary to some popular beliefs, units not always behave bureaucratic and slow and in some occasions are quite capable to adapt to different types of mission profiles during an operation. By anticipating on the many directives by ISAF command, while at the same time maintaining an effective operational pace to disrupt the Taliban insurgency, the Dutch SOF showed that they are flexible and capable of working within these boundaries.

In relation to the two previous missions, TF55 proved to be another valuable experience for the Dutch SOF in which it further developed its tactical ideas about the conduct of special operations. All primary SOF tasks, special reconnaissance, direct action, and military assistance, were performed during the mission. The trend toward team operations, complemented by enablers, continued. It increasingly has become apparent that SOF have to cooperate neatly with enabling assets that are preferably included in the task organization in order to conduct operations successfully. Capacities such as helicopters, engineers, explosive ordnance disposal specialists, fire support and staff- and intelligence capacity are mission essential. This awareness is one of the most significant observations of this mission and has been institutionalized in

national manuals (Van De As, 2014). The lessons learned also stimulated thinking on new technology, such as the implementation of a new tactical vehicle, particularly designed and tailored to special operations (Van Der Wal, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

Since 2001, the international SOF have experienced a profound professionalization. In several western countries SOF budgets have been increased, units expanded and deployed more often. From what we have seen from the Dutch SOF deployments in Southern Afghanistan between 2005 and 2010, we conclude that the Dutch SOF have gone through a significant development as well. Driven and shaped by politicostrategic imperatives, operational challenges, organizational culture and the adoption of new assets, the Dutch SOF has noticeably demonstrated its adaptive nature during the three missions it executed in Afghanistan. The deployment of SFTG-A provided a rich learning environment for the Dutch SOF. For the first time, a Dutch SOTG was deployed within an international SOF organization. The operational environment posed significant challenges, which the SFTG was able to overcome because of its autonomy and the organizational structure. During Task Force Viper, the adaptation on the operational level appeared to be limited because the Dutch forces were not properly used as a SOF unit and lacked the mandate, the organizational structure and supporting assets to conduct special operations. This mission, however, marked a period of tactical developments as a result of the fierce insurgency resistance and geographical challenges. During TF55 in 2009–2010, the important organizational and operational lessons learned from SFTG-A came together with the tactical adaptation of TF Viper. The Dutch SOF learning experience in Afghanistan culminated with the execution of some complex operations with a broad spectrum of sophisticated enabling assets and the application of battlefield-proven tactics.

Our analysis demonstrates that the Dutch SOF were able to maintain their flexibility and innovative posture, flexibly anticipating national and ISAF instructions. The small and rather autonomously operating unit behaved rather unbureaucratic and flexible, responding adequately and swiftly to operational and tactical challenges. The experiences of the missions demonstrate that the Dutch SOF are able to maintain their flexibility when national imperatives or international directives require this. The directive to partner intensively with an Afghan partner even led to the renewed attention to military assistance, which proves its relevance to date.

Other aspects have contributed to the adaptive nature of the Dutch SOF as well. One of the most important lessons was that it is preferable to be embedded in an international SOF hierarchy, as opposed to being part of a national conventional unit such as the TFU. This places the SOF-unit closer to the politicostrategic level, gives it greater access to scarce and essential assets and allows closer cooperation between international partners. The international cooperation paid its dividends for the Dutch SOF by providing new experiences and insights in the planning of special operations and the use of ISR, fire support and close air support. The combination of geographical factors, the complex demographics and a highly adaptive insurgency have affected the thinking on the deployment of SOF as well. One of the first lessons learned during SFTG-A was to operate in clustered teams. This evolved eventually in the concept of *clustered team operations*. Alongside this development, the Dutch SOF gained experience with a range of tactical concepts. Moreover, situations such as this validated the

high standards in selection and training for the individual operator and the value of good leadership. One of the most important lessons is that enablers are crucial in contemporary special operations. The main lesson learned from the three missions is the primacy of one of the classic maxims of special operations: “Most SOF operations require non-SOF assistance.” Supporting elements such as staff, rotary wing, fire support, intelligence specialists, engineers, explosive ordnance disposal specialists, logistics, and other enablers have proved to be invaluable in the Dutch SOF missions.

The Dutch learning process during the mission in Afghanistan was rather informal, which naturally suits the adaptation process of the Dutch SOF. These units are relatively small, the continuity of personnel is high, and the contribution of previous rotations’ key players during mission preparation is deemed vital. The question remains, how will these lessons be institutionalized in the Dutch military? The Dutch SOF community proved its adaptive character during the missions, but how will this continue afterwards? While this requires further study, it seems that the Dutch government has developed confidence in the capabilities of the Dutch SOF. The ambitious objectives of the SFTG-A and TF55 missions demonstrate the increased reliance on special forces. Moreover, the trend of increased budget for SOF despite the cuts for defense in general, shows that the politicians regard SOF as a force for the future. On the other hand, the Dutch SOF do not have a special place in the political and public national security thinking, as they do in the United States or the United Kingdom, and is underrepresented in national strategic policy documents (The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2015, p. 79). Similar to those of other European countries, the Dutch armed forces do not commonly face large-scale conventional conflicts. With SOF, strategic objectives can be achieved without leaving a large footprint or high costs. The strategic utility of SOF forces could perhaps be more widely investigated and more clearly publicized.

The Dutch experiences in Afghanistan has initiated further thinking on the use and utility of special operations. In 2015, a report was published on the direction and oversight of SOF and the evaluations of recent SOF missions have further developed thinking on the concept of the SOTG (Jellema, 2011; The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2015). Contrary to many other Western countries, the size of the SOF directional staff at the strategic level is rather limited and not autonomously organized, but embedded in the conventional operations directorate of the defense staff. Recent studies have recognized this lacuna (De Weger, 2011; Kraag, 2012; The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2015). The SOTG concept on the other hand, is steadily maturing. The concept stands for comprehensive planning and execution of special operations, wherein the enabling elements are an integral part of the SOTG. Although this concept is not new and several North Atlantic Treaty Organization members practice it, it has gained momentum in the Netherlands as a result of the missions in Afghanistan. The concept has evolved in studies and doctrine and has stimulated thinking on creating additional SOF capability such as ranger and the incorporation of enabling assets into the SOF community. The SOTG concept is a central part of the development of SOF in the Netherlands, which was once again demonstrated with the Dutch contribution to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization mission (MINUSMA) in Mali in which the relevant lessons from Afghanistan were used during the planning phase and early stages of the execution (Tuinman, Dimitriu, & Van Der Vorm, 2014).

## NOTE

1. A notable exception on the bottom-up development is the account on German storm-troop tactics in the First World War as described by Timothy T. Lupfer (1981).

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# The Albanian Insurgency in the Balkans

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The latest case of an insurgency in the Balkans is the Albanian insurgency that waged guerrilla warfare in Kosovo from 1997 to 1999, in South Serbia in 2000, and in Macedonia in 2001. It is a typical example of how one insurgency makes the right moves in certain historical contexts; adapts to changes in the operational environment and regional and global policies; and links ends, ways, and means to achieve victory. The Albanian insurgency was successful because its leadership managed to properly translate its strategic goals into tactical actions. They chose the right timing to rebel, secured logistics and financial support from the Diaspora, and obtained approval from the international community. They were smart, thorough, and disciplined; established a real, concrete strategy with clearly defined goals without ambiguous policies; and avoided splitting into fractions typical for many failed insurgencies. It is worth examining the Albanian insurgency to better understand how an insurgency should work to be successful in a contemporary environment.

Keywords: insurgency, Albania, Balkans, Serbia, Kosovo, counterinsurgency

Since the process of creating nation-states started after the French Revolution, the Balkans has been a highly unstable region in Europe. The history of warfare in the Balkans includes primordial violence rooted in religion, nationality, and ethnicity that became particularly obvious after the end of Ottoman rule in 1912. In general, the Ottoman Empire held the region together relatively peacefully, but as soon as the Balkan nations gained their independence, they turned against each other for dominance on the peninsula. Even today, not a single nation in the Balkans is satisfied with the borders they live in. The contemporary state borders do not match with the desired, “ancient and rightful” borders of the Balkan nations. For anyone who tries to understand the Balkan quagmire, it is very important to understand that the Balkan nations have an Eastern, traditional mindset when they perceive history. For them, it is not a linear time-line but circular, which means something that happened years ago is often viewed as if it happened yesterday.

The Balkan region is a battlefield of complex cultural, demographic, and social relations, entangled with ethnoreligious differences and opposed national interests. Although the intention of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) integration of the Balkan region is to help Balkan nations to settle down, the conflicts are so often that it is difficult for nations to overcome distrust. The quest to establish strong nation-states is and will be the dominant policy concern for all Balkan states in the future. Because Western Europeans have recognized this as a valid security threat in the region, they are pushing the policy of multicultural Europe and open

borders as a method to secure stability. However, the last Balkan wars after the end of the Cold War showed that the ambitions of the Balkan people to rearrange their state borders can easily inflame war, with the possibility of conducting ethnic cleansing and genocide as a method to remove people from the projected demographic map. Despite the European unification, the contemporary Balkan operational environment and security policies of its countries will continue to be shaped and influenced in the context of nationality, religion, and ethnicity.

Historically, the Balkan nations have always favored guerrilla warfare because the powerful Ottoman Empire as a great power occupied the peninsula for centuries, which forced its people to seek unconventional ways to fight for freedom. All Balkan nations have waged many independent rebellions and insurrections that have taught them to fight a stronger force using the mountainous terrain and four weather seasons as an advantage. The latest case of an insurgency in the Balkans is the Albanian insurgency in Serbia and Macedonia. It is an example of a successfully waged insurgency that fulfilled its end state; thus, it is worth examining if one is interested in understanding modern insurgencies.

The Albanian insurgency in the Balkans was successful because its leadership managed to properly translate its strategic goals into tactical actions. The insurgency was not created overnight. The movement of the Albanian minority in the former Yugoslavia and later in Serbia and Macedonia had its ideas slowly projected into the social construct of ethnic Albanians, which were their center of gravity in such type of warfare. The Albanian question became familiar to the international community and recognized as a potential source of instability in the region. Approval from the international community is another often unrecognized center of gravity insurgents can influence in modern warfare.

The success of any insurgency depends on how much its political leaders, fighters, auxiliaries, and sympathizers agree on the ways and means to achieve the desired end state. In that sense, the Albanians established a realistic, concrete strategy with clearly defined and understood goals. The Albanian insurgency was smart, thorough, disciplined and united in their cause, without ambiguous policies and fractions typical for many insurgent movements. On the ground, the insurgents in Serbia and Macedonia demonstrated typical guerrilla warfare with all necessary elements and methods of popular movement.

The Albanian insurgency leadership had a clear vision translated as national strategy that was passed through time and has its historical perspectives. The main root for the creation of the insurgency movement was the "Albanian question" in the Balkans. The Albanians, similar to other Balkan nations, live outside the borders of their national state. Multiethnicity of the Balkan countries has been a core reason for conflicts since the end of the Ottoman rule. To establish their own nation-state, the Albanians, as have everybody else, tried to dominate the Balkans and put its people in one country. The Albanian question has existed since the establishment of Albania at the beginning of the 20th century, and its end state to create Great Albania was pursued through the Second World War until today. It is simply establishing a nation-state that will include all territories where Albanians live. This was achieved temporally during the Second World War, when the fascist supported Albanian protectorate occupied parts of Yugoslavia. During this period, the ethnic relations between the Albanians on one side and the Serbs and Macedonians on the other became very violent. Since then, the Albanians in Yugoslavia in the collective memory of Serbs and Macedonians were remembered as fascists. Today's revisionist policy of the Albanian establishment tries to portray that struggle as an anticommunist movement, ideological rather than ethnic conflict, which is a paradox, because Yugoslavia was a kingdom and communists responded with their own guerrilla warfare after Yugoslavia was divided

among the Axis powers. The Italian occupation on Albania's behalf was intended to create Great Albania. After the Second World War, the annexed territories were given back to Yugoslavia. The Albanians outside Albania became a minority ethnic group in three Yugoslav republics: Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia. Some Albanian profascists did not disarm after the end of the war and proceeded with their struggle until they were defeated in the late 1940s.

Despite the ethnoreligious motivated animosities during the war, Yugoslavian leader Josip Broz Tito managed to establish a new Yugoslavia under the slogan "brotherhood and unity." In the period between 1945 and 1990, known as an era of Second Yugoslavia, the Albanians in Yugoslavia enjoyed significantly more freedom than did the Albanians in Albania. While Yugoslavia developed liberal form of socialism unique compared with the countries behind the Iron Curtain, Albania was under hardcore communist rule in which its people were oppressed by their communist government. During this time, Yugoslavia opened its borders to fleeing refugees from the communist regime in Albania. This was a game changer because it significantly changed demographics, especially in Kosovo, where within a few decades the Albanian population eventually overwhelmed the Serbian governmental structure there.

During the Yugoslavian era, the Albanians started to pursue the idea that Kosovo should have a status of the seventh republic in Yugoslavia. This was considered as a fundamental danger for the federation, because the Albanians are not Slavs. Yugoslavia, which means "south-Slavia," was constituted primarily as a federation of the south Slavic people. If Albanians obtained their own republic, the country would not have the exclusive Slavic character. Although the Albanian population in Yugoslavia was in greater numbers than that of Macedonians and Montenegrins altogether, they had the status of a minority group, instead of a constitutional nation.

The Albanian dissatisfaction with Yugoslavian laws on minority issues started in the 1960s and became more radical in the 1980s. The first ethnic unrest of Albanians in Yugoslavia started in 1968 with demonstrations in Kosovo and Macedonia (Meier, 1999, p. 27). Some believe that the Albanian nationalism encouraged the Croatian spring a few years later, which led to constitutional changes in 1974 with bigger the decentralization of the republics. According to Yugoslavia's most recent constitutional changes in 1974, the six federal republics (Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina) had the right to secede, but the two autonomous provinces (Vojvodina and Kosovo) did not, because that would encourage irredentism of the minorities if they had their own ethnic countries in the neighborhood (Hungary and Albania). However, with the constitutional changes in 1974, Vojvodina and Kosovo gained a better position with broad autonomy.

Not to show weakness, after the constitutional changes in 1974 by which the Albanians in Kosovo were given self-rule, the Yugoslavian government at the same time pushed many measures to counter the Albanian separatism and irredentism. Although many Albanian nationalists were arrested in the 1970s, the idea to establish Kosovo as a seventh republic persisted. At the same time, the Albanian Diaspora started to lobby and support this cause, making the Albanian dissatisfaction obviously a clear case of separatism and irredentism. Years later, the Albanian immigrants in the Diaspora will become the core of the future Albanian insurgency as its political leadership.

The ethnic confrontation increased in Kosovo as soon as the president of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito died in 1980. In the following year, the Albanians in Kosovo engaged in mass protests and unrest, openly demanding Kosovo to become Yugoslavia's seventh republic (Phillips, 2004, p. 80), which, under the 1974 constitution, would give them right to pursue independence from the federation. With the response to mass demonstration and civil disobedience in the province,

Yugoslavian government deployed strong police forces from all republics. Shortly after, the Yugoslav army was also deployed on Kosovo to pacify the province with a demonstration of force. Many were arrested under accusation for separatism and irredentism. The Yugoslav government's counterargument was clear: Albanians already had broad autonomy in Kosovo, the Albanian language was the official language in the province, education was up to the university level, and they had their media (TV, news, radio); thus, the only reason for establishing a fully equal republic was secessionism and irredentism toward the neighboring Republic of Albania.

During the 1980s, the Albanians developed an illegal network in Kosovo and Macedonia. This means that not only was there was continuity in pursuing the idea but also a connection between Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia. The Albanians in Macedonia looked upon their kin in Kosovo as a cultural center, especially because the only university taught in Albanian was in Pristine, the capital of Kosovo (Grillot, Paes, Risser, & Stoneman, 2004, p. 5). The Albanians also attempted to use their religion to acquire the sentiments of Turk and Muslim minorities. The movement for status of a seventh republic was perceived as irredentist, thus unconstitutional. The fear from the Albanian nationalism spurred nationalism in others, pushing them to protect themselves through laws that restricted the demands of the minorities. To counteract this, the republics (Serbia and Macedonia) acted with constitutional changes to decrease the position of Albanians as a minority group. The Albanians in Macedonia, for example, had a more favorable status as a minority group in Macedonia in the period between 1974 and 1989 than after the constitutional changes in republics in 1989 and post-Yugoslav independence of Macedonia (Abrahams, 1996, p. 28).

Because of the Albanian demonstrations in the 60s and 80s, the Yugoslav government marked the Albanian minority as a potential threat for destabilization of the federation from the inside. From that point, the term *Albanian* often suggested "separatism" and "irredentism" in the mindset of the Yugoslavs. A whole generation was raised in this image—that Albanians are a threat for existence of south Slavic federation. But the idea of uniting all Albanian-claimed territories through secession and irredentism from the other Balkan countries was not a spontaneous act. It represented Albanian national strategy, obviously translated into policies because the Albanian separatists in Kosovo and Macedonia during the communist era were coordinating all the time. The Albanians in Macedonia even insisted that territories in Northwest Macedonia should be united with Kosovo (Rossos, 2008, p. 259). The establishing of the seventh republic of Kosovo was a priority and the way to secede from Yugoslavia.

From a modern perspective, the Albanian movement found fertile ground in Yugoslavia because of Tito's politics. Yugoslavia, although under communist rule, became a leader of the idea of egalitarianism, and opened its borders to everyone. Often Westerners confuse Yugoslavia as being part of the Iron Curtain, but the country was much more independent, and waves of Albanian refugees from the communist regime in Albania in the 1950s and 1960s were accommodated in Yugoslavia. That was either the deliberate policy of Tito to weaken the Serbs as a majority nation in Yugoslavia or simply lowering the guard in the name of fraternity and unity for all nations in the Balkans despite ethnicity and religion. After the Second World War, there was the idea of a Balkan federation led by Yugoslavia, which is probably why Stalin isolated Yugoslavia from the rest of the communist countries in Eastern Europe.

The fact is that the Albanians in Yugoslavia never accepted the Yugoslavian state as their own, because they were not Slavic. Behind the agenda for the equality and request for a seventh republic, it was always the idea of Great Albania that inspired the movement, unification of all territories where

Albanians live. Although the creators of the Albanian movement for independence from Yugoslavia at first were communists, after the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the movement became purely nationalistic. The Albanian insurgency was created by the Albanian immigrants in Switzerland and Germany, which were former communists (Phillips, 2004, p. 7).

The collapse of the Yugoslavian federation spurred increased nationalism among all ethnic groups. During the era of Second Yugoslavia, there was no border between Kosovo and Macedonia. However, with the creation of different countries, the Albanians in Macedonia stayed out of the cultural center of the Albanians, which meant that the collapse of Yugoslavia also caused a cultural split among Albanians in the region. The division had a negative effect on the Albanian unity in former Yugoslavia and temporally shattered their cohesion. The Albanians in Macedonia, for example, lost their full access to the university in Pristina. Education in the Albanian language was always the most important symbol of Albanian minority rights (Pritchard, 2000).

In Kosovo, the Albanian leadership pushed independence because the percentage of the Albanian population was greater than 90%, whereas in Macedonia, the Albanian political parties were (and still are) asking for binational model of state, claiming 35–40% from the total population. The estimated number of Albanians in Macedonia today is around 25%. However, they are concentrated territorially along the border with Albania and Kosovo, which makes a more case-sensitive model of a multicultural society as it facilitates the secessionist movement. The main request on the Albanian agenda in Macedonia during the 1990s was that the Macedonian constitution at a time defined Macedonia primarily as the nation-state of Macedonians. Later, when Albanian insurgents raised a rebellion against the Macedonian government, the first demand was constitutional recognition of Albanians as a constituted or an equal nation in Macedonia.

Albanian nationalism grew rapidly after 1989 when both Serbia and Macedonia changed their constitutions making the Albanian minority position less favorable (Phillips, 2004, p. 64). The political rhetoric always gravitated around the use of the Albanian language in state institutions. Minority groups across the world always tend to push their cultural package primarily by requesting language equalities. The Albanian leadership perceived that language inequality is the first issue of discrimination against the Albanians. For Macedonians, this felt akin to a threat to the sovereignty and independence of the Macedonian state, which was exaggerated because in many cities and villages in Macedonia, the Albanians already functioned without speaking the Macedonian language.

In the 1990s, the Albanians in Macedonia continued to demand stronger political autonomy. Although there was never a public and open call for Great Albania, to avoid discrediting and undermining the strategy and process that already developed in Kosovo, it was always clear to Macedonians that that was exactly the policy of the Albanian leadership. The independence of Kosovo from Yugoslavia and splitting Macedonia across ethnic lines would be just the first phase toward the desired end state.

After the collapse of Yugoslavia, the Albanians in Kosovo did not immediately pursue their goal. At the time when Serbs, Croats, and Muslims were at war, such attempt would be disastrous for the Albanians on Kosovo. Instead, they organized politically, establishing a strong base for the future insurgency. While the Serbs were preoccupied with the Muslims and Croats, the Albanians in Kosovo were building a strong base for an efficient insurgency movement, supported from inside and outside. They boycotted Serbian governing in Kosovo, they prepared the mindset of the people, developed a future auxiliary which is an important part of any

movement, but also their logistics and financial support from the Diaspora. Any insurgency needs outside help. Bank accounts and money flow were an important part for the successful movement. They addressed the importance of necessary infrastructure, logistics, communications, and—most important—support from the international community.

One might debate whether this was planned, but waiting for the Bosnian War to end was a positive thing for the Albanians for one big reason: The Serbs totally lost any sympathy from the international community. Perpetrating atrocities in the region, attacking United Nations soldiers in Bosnia, shooting down NATO planes, and the genocide in Srebrenica stripped Serbia of any compassion and sympathy from the international community. Serbs were marked as perpetrators and a main cause of the Balkan War. Because of the damaged reputation, they lost all credibility to fight for their own land—Kosovo. To gain more territory, pursuing their own Greater Serbia (a dream for Balkan nations), they compromised themselves and were positioned to lose Kosovo.

The Albanian leadership in Kosovo made the decision to start a rebellion for independence from Serbia in early 1990. However, they did not have any means available to wage armed rebellion. The decision was made to delay the action and wait for the right moment. In 1991, the shadow government of Kosovo pushed a resolution for independent and sovereign republic of Kosovo, and unilaterally proclaimed Kosovo as a republic with its own constitution (Malcolm, 1999, p. 346). This was an official declaration and message to the world about the end state for Albanians on Kosovo.

However, not having the means for armed struggle was not the only reason for delaying the inevitable secession of Kosovo from Serbia. The international community was entangled in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the policymakers knew that if Albanians in Kosovo opened another front in the region, it could undermine the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina and possibly destabilize Macedonia, which had a significant Albanian minority and other unresolved issues with the neighbors. It is most likely that Albanians in Kosovo were advised not to start their own independence war until Bosnia is resolved (Clark, 2000, p. 160).

After the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the Dayton agreement, the Albanian leadership knew that the Serbs will start to focus on the internal security, which will make their struggle even more difficult. The Albanian leadership was often criticized from their political opponents, but there was a lack of means for war. Kosovo is a landlocked territory without necessary logistics routes to import weapons in large amounts from outside nations such as in Croatia and Bosnia. New ways had to be found to bring weapons to the insurgents from the outside nations.

The Albanian academy of science made an important input to the cause when in 1998 they declared a platform that directly supported the Albanian effort to secede from the neighboring countries. It encouraged the irredentist movement and called for unification of all Albanians in the Balkans into one Great Albania. The academy proclaimed that Kosovo and western Macedonia's territory were illegitimately annexed by Yugoslavia after the First World War, and thus suggesting that the Albanians who live there have a lawful right to secede and unite with the motherland. The platform openly called for Kosovo's independence, thus attacking the sovereignty of the neighboring country and openly supporting the armed rebellion.

Overall, during the 1990s, the Albanian leaders in Kosovo and Macedonia did not rush, pursuing a political agenda that calmly leaned toward their goals. Either they were familiar with Sun Tzu's dictum regarding "when not to fight" or they simply obeyed the outside advisers step by step. The build-up phase was well organized and planned, following two simple rules of guerrilla warfare: (a) gaining hearts and minds at home and abroad and (b) making the opponent

look really bad. In this context, the Serbs helped them significantly by completely losing international credibility. When the insurgents declared war, the Serbian attempt to portray them as terrorists was ignored in the West. Two years later, the Macedonian government made the same mistake, following the Serbs method that turned out to be a blunder. Macedonia became collateral damage on the image of Serbs as internationally recognized oppressors and the Albanians portraying them as internationally recognized victims of oppression.

The Albanian insurgency leadership showed exemplary understanding of the operational environment. They adapted their tune during the Yugoslav era (when they stayed moderate), and during the collapse of Yugoslavia and the wars in Croatia and Bosnia (when they stayed cautious). However, the unrest in Albania in 1997 was a game changer, when huge amounts of Albanian army armament were stolen from the country and smuggled into Kosovo and Macedonia. The leadership managed to adapt to this new situation and used it for their benefit, building their insurgent force overnight. The large amount of weapons smuggled into Kosovo and Macedonia was also used for criminal activities, smuggling, drugs and human trafficking, which became a lucrative business to also build up finance for the incoming insurgency. Because these trades were alongside the border of the territory with a majority of ethnic Albanians, the governments of Serbia and Macedonia never managed to effectively stop it, particularly in Macedonia, fearing that it could incite ethnic tensions. Conspiracy theorists say that the unrest in Albania was a deliberately orchestrated event for that sole purpose—to arm the Albanians across the border. Even if that theory is true, it is nothing but an outstanding example of linking ends, ways, and means that supports the case why the Albanian insurgency was successful. After arming themselves, the Albanian insurgents waged typical guerrilla warfare first in Kosovo in 1997–1999, in South Serbia in 2000, and then in Macedonia in 2001.

Choosing guerrilla warfare to pursue Albanian national objectives to achieve secession from Yugoslavia and make a stronghold in Macedonia, instead of open conventional warfare such as those in Bosnia and Croatia was the most feasible, suitable, and acceptable course of action for the Albanian leadership. Linking ends and means by using guerrilla tactics as ways was the crucial key for success of the Albanian movement toward achieving its national goal. In the past three decades the Albanians created nice political elite in the diaspora, which helped the insurgency with finance and logistics (Phillips, 2004, p. 65). They were properly trained and educated in guerrilla warfare: they established camps and operational bases, secured their logistics through their population, used them as auxiliaries, controlled villages around key terrain thus securing their lines of operations, they would hold terrain but were flexible if pressed by the security forces. They used hit and run tactics, dominated on the rigid terrain, making lines of communications not safe for the security forces. One of the most effective means was their ability to wage information warfare: they had excellent public relations, promoted themselves through the international media, and easily managed to build legitimacy on the negotiation table.

During the build-up phase, they established all necessary elements in the movement, trained and prepared in camps in Kosovo (allegedly also in Albania and Macedonia), and secured the maximum support from the Albanian population. Understanding the popularity of the Serbs in the international arena, they used hit-and-run tactics to provoke a disproportional Serb response until NATO responded to stop one more humanitarian crisis in the Balkans. In the grand strategy of NATO, even before the Albanians started with the rebellion in Kosovo, the regime of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia was a designated target. The West supported the Albanian insurgency in Kosovo and recognized it as its own ways to achieve their end state. In the classic insurgent war, NATO came to help in the final phase of the conflict to occupy Kosovo and make

Serb forces retreat. The key for intervention was to trigger humanitarian crisis, which the insurgents played well and Serbs failed to avoid it. The trigger for NATO intervention was the alleged Racak massacre in January 1999. After the ultimatum to disengage from Kosovo, NATO bombed Yugoslavia.

This operation caused a mass refugee crisis enough to justify the NATO intervention. A wave of refugees fled in Macedonia and Albania. The refugee crisis from Kosovo could easily destabilize the whole region. Besides the humanitarian crisis, there was a threat for regional instability and spreading the war in Macedonia. At the same time, NATO used this to get back to the Serbs for the fiasco in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to end the Milosevic regime. The causal effect of the intervention was useful for both, Albanians and NATO policymakers.

As mentioned above, the tensions in Macedonia were always influenced from the tensions in Kosovo. When the war in Kosovo started, it was clear that the next conflict will be in Macedonia. The international community saw the Macedonian conflict as a spillover from Kosovo. But the end state of the Albanian insurgency was so obvious that the decision to proceed with the wave of violence from Kosovo to Macedonia could not be spontaneous. After all, the position of Albanian insurgents in the world politics was favorable so the chances were slim that the international community will react in Macedonian defense. Although Albanians claim that these groups are separate entities, the insurgents gravitated under the same idea of uniting Albanian territories. NATO already intervened on their side, and certainly it would not deny assisting or at least not interfering during the spillover of the insurgency from Kosovo to Macedonia. Huge amounts of armament from Albanian military storages, stocked during the Cold War, were still in the hands of Albanians. After the war in Kosovo and the NATO bombing campaign, the Kosovo Force did not proceed with disarming the insurgents, which became the major factor that allowed them to continue the fight in Macedonia.

The movement of the Albanian nationalists in the Balkans to establish Great Albania is still relevant. Pending threats of opportunists could still cause destabilization in Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, even Greece. The insurgency is still alive on the web, often publishing their memos to promote their cause. This analysis aimed not to critique the international community and NATO forces that supported the side of one secessionist movement or their support in reshaping the state borders in the Balkans, but to applaud one smart, efficient, and successful insurgency that played well by understanding the situation, environment, and timing to use the international community to achieve its goals. Many insurgencies are doomed to fail either because they split into fractions, because they do not have international support, or because they attempt to wage conventional war against stronger opponent. Albanian insurgency in the Balkans should be taught as a typical example of how one insurgency makes the right moves in certain historical context, adapts to changes in the operational environment, regional, and global policies and links ends, ways, and means to achieve victory.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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Straus, Scott. *Making and Unmaking Nations: War, Leadership, and Genocide in Modern Africa*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015. 386 pp., \$26.95 (paperback). ISBN: 978-0-801-47968-7

Reviewed by **Dan G. Cox**, Ph.D.  
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Scott Straus' *Making and Unmaking Nations* is a very good book. Straus explores the phenomenon of genocide from a very interesting perspective. Instead of solely exploring cases of genocide, Straus examines both cases of genocide and near genocide, cases where the environment was ripe for genocide but none occurred (p. 7). Straus also uniquely approaches genocide from a pseudo-complexity lens. The reason his approach only somewhat embraces complexity theory is that while he clearly and correctly indicates that genocide is a complex political phenomenon (pp. 6–7), he never references or uses any of the rich literature on complexity theory. This is a minor shortcoming in such a novel work on genocide and state formation that is only mentioned for reference for future research.

Some might take umbrage with the small number of cases Straus examines but that would be a mistake. Strauss intentionally focuses on African cases of genocide and near genocide. The reasoning behind this decision is solid. Strauss wanted to compare most similar cases. So not only were the cases from Africa but from a similar time period, which means they arose in a comparable strategic context. Taking these factors into account, Straus chose the Ivory Coast from 2002 to 2011, Mali from 1990 to 1995 and 2011 to 2012, and Senegal from the late 1980s to 2011 as his negative cases of where genocide was likely but did not occur. Straus used Sudan from 2000 to the present and Rwanda in 1994 as his positive cases of genocide (p. 9). The level of care and theoretical justification for case selection is rare in the case study literature. It is clear that Straus is interested in honestly exploring why genocides occur and do not occur rather than selecting favorable cases to promote a preconceived policy or theoretical agenda.

We will not delve into all the cases here but we will briefly explore two of the five cases to give the reader an idea of the insights Straus gleans from his study. It is interesting to note that Mali and Rwanda have become similar cases even though no genocide occurred in Mali and one of the worst genocides in history occurred in Rwanda. In Mali, all of the same precursors and interethnic/interreligious animosities were present as they were in Rwanda. However, because Malians shared a common nationalist history that all the tribes embraced; developed a culture

that embraced “specific values of humility, tolerance, patience, justice sharing and solidarity” (p. 200); and developed “griots” or “people of words” “who promote dialogue and mediate disputes (p. 201), genocide never occurred in Mali. Furthermore, the political elites in Mali were more prone to a dialogue of unity and shared cultural history despite animosity that existed between different tribal and religious groups.

In contrast, Straus notes in Rwanda that the predominant narrative about Rwandan state formation was laid on a foundation of animosity. Hutu political elites were particularly vitriolic in their narrative that the Tutsi minority had mistreated the Hutus during colonization. While parallel governmental institutions arose in Mali, the elites there aimed to constrain their influence. In Rwanda, political elites supported some of these very same parallel governmental institutions, especially local militias (pp. 274–274). The more radical genocide proponents were given a great boon to exploit when President Habyarimana was assassinated. The fear this assassination generated amongst Hutus allowed the more radical politicians to argue more forcefully for genocide. For Straus, it is not only political elite ideology but also the important link between political elites and locals that allows for genocide to occur.

The analysis of these cases leads Straus to conclude that “the strongest commonality among violence in cases, and the factor that the negative cases lack, is the ideological dominance among the political and military elite of a hierarchical, nationalist founding narrative” (p. 275). Given Straus’ earlier assertion that genocide carries heavy political and economic costs, by dragging large numbers of people out of production, narrative and ideology must be very strong indeed to motivate a group of people to perpetuate genocide against others.

However, if Straus is correct, then the implications for the Mass Atrocity Prevention Operations/Responsibility to Protect camp are staggering. It is hard to imagine military operations either to prevent or respond to genocides and other mass atrocities. How is it even the domain of military operators to affect elite ideology formation and dissemination? Straus himself notes that one of the best preventative measures to genocide is to craft a narrative of inclusion in African states (p. 323). He also notes that economic diversity and development and avoiding armed conflict are good preventative measures as well (p. 325).

Unfortunately, none of this falls under the purview of an operational artist. However, you could argue that the Regionally Aligned Forces program might serve in part toward this end in that professionalizing African militaries might reduce the likelihood of these same militaries resorting to genocide. In terms of responding to genocide, Straus notes that military interveners have successfully established demilitarized zones and helped end genocidal conflict (pp. 12–13) but unless foreign interlocutors are willing to make these Demilitarized Zone borders permanent, there is no evidence this is a long-term solution to mass atrocity.

Straus’ work fits nicely into a larger literature on state formation in Africa as well. One is reminded of Jeffrey Herbst’s book *States and Power in Africa*. In this work, Herbst argues that African states never went through a European-style state formation through interstate war. Herbst argues this created weak centralized governments that were unable to push their influence to the hinterlands producing incomplete state formations. Straus’ observation that political leaders craft “unmaking” (p. 3) narratives before genocide occurring nests nicely with Herbst’s research. Weakly formed states would be particularly prone to elite unmaking narratives.

In the final analysis, this is a solid book that should be read by anyone interested in genocide, state formation in Africa, the power of elite narrative, and policy responses to genocide.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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Fitzsimmons, Scott. *Mercenaries in Asymmetric Conflicts*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2012., 340 pp., \$113.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-1-107-02691-9

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At a time when aging White South African mercenaries are reported to be operating against Boko Haram in Nigeria, the academic debate surrounding the effectiveness of nonstate military forces is as relevant as ever. Scott Fitzsimmons' timely *Mercenaries in Asymmetric Conflicts* aims to address why numerically and materially inferior mercenary units often triumph over considerably larger and better equipped adversaries. To do so, he pits two rival theories against each other, both purporting to explain military performance and conflict outcome. The neorealist argument stresses that greater numbers of men and materials should ultimately determine which side wins the conflict. Alternatively, the constructivist normative theory of military performance suggests that the unit with the superior military culture—namely that which demonstrates decentralized decision making, innovative thinking, transmission of accurate military intelligence, group cohesion, technical expertise, and personal initiative—should triumph over the numerically superior opponent that fails to show equally high standards of military culture. Fitzsimmons' ultimate conclusion is that the latter normative argument much better explains the military successes and failings of mercenary units since the mid-20th century.

Fitzsimmons' study is neatly divided into six core chapters. He begins by extensively outlining the theory behind both neorealist and normative arguments and it is Fitzsimmons' ability to deconstruct and explain to lay readers these theoretical foundations that is perhaps his greatest strength. With this ideological basis covered, he then applies these concepts to four mercenary interventions in postcolonial Africa: 5 Commando in the Congo (1964–1965); Colonel "Callan" in Angola (1976); Executive Outcomes in Angola (1993–1995), and the White Legion in Zaire (1997). This structure successfully provides Fitzsimmons with a diverse range of mercenary performances through which to apply his theory. However, his theoretical focus is at once both his greatest strength and a potential structural weakness. The methodical way in which he applies his theory to each case study arguably weakens the pacing of the text, making analysis appear rather repetitive and less engaging for lay readers. Although theoretical focus is evidently crucial to the study, this aspect could arguably be sufficiently dealt with in the initial theory chapter and kept to a minimum thereafter.

In terms of the evidence Fitzsimmons mobilizes to prove his arguments, these also provoke a mixed response. On the one hand, he makes excellent use of secondary material on military theory and mercenarism. Furthermore, he skillfully integrates diaries and other accounts from key figures such as Colonel “Mad” Mike Hoare, Ernesto “Che” Guevara, and Eeben Barlow into his analysis, combined with various first-hand interviews with other participants. Nevertheless, Fitzsimmons’ study could have potentially benefited from using the wealth of archival sources now available at the U.K. National Archives and elsewhere, which include 1960s and 1970s diplomatic files on mercenaries from Western embassies in war-torn African states.

Despite these issues, however, *Mercenaries in Asymmetric Conflicts* makes vital contributions to various fields of ongoing research. It is the first study to comprehensively analyze mercenary military culture at the level of the tactical unit across various comparative conflicts. Despite innumerable accounts devoted to the campaign histories of nonstate forces since the 1960s, few have looked in any great detail at the nature of training and morale in both these units, and perhaps most intriguing is that in the units of their often underanalyzed opponents. This book, therefore, adds considerably to our understanding of mercenary culture and its effect on the battlefield. Furthermore, *Mercenaries in Asymmetric Conflicts* contributes to a key debate within international relations: that between the neorealist and normative approaches. It is the first study to incorporate nonstate actors into this expanding literature. It is clear from Fitzsimmons’ conclusions, which heavily favor the normative approach over the neorealist one, that his book does much to disprove those commentators who continue to hold faith in the theory that numerical and material superiority will usually determine the outcome in any asymmetric conflict. Military culture is often more decisive. Ultimately, therefore, his conclusions are very compelling.

The utility and reception of *Mercenaries in Asymmetric Conflicts* depends very much on the needs of the individual reader. As a basis for understanding the background to mercenary involvement in postcolonial Africa and as a standard narrative of these campaigns, this book may leave the reader wanting. However, for readers who seek an impressive theoretical explanation for the often extraordinary success of mercenary forces in triumphing against the odds or for those wishing to better understand the nature of mercenary culture, this book is of vital importance. It is certain that with the continually emerging evidence of mercenary involvement in contemporary warfare, this book will be consulted and respected for many years.