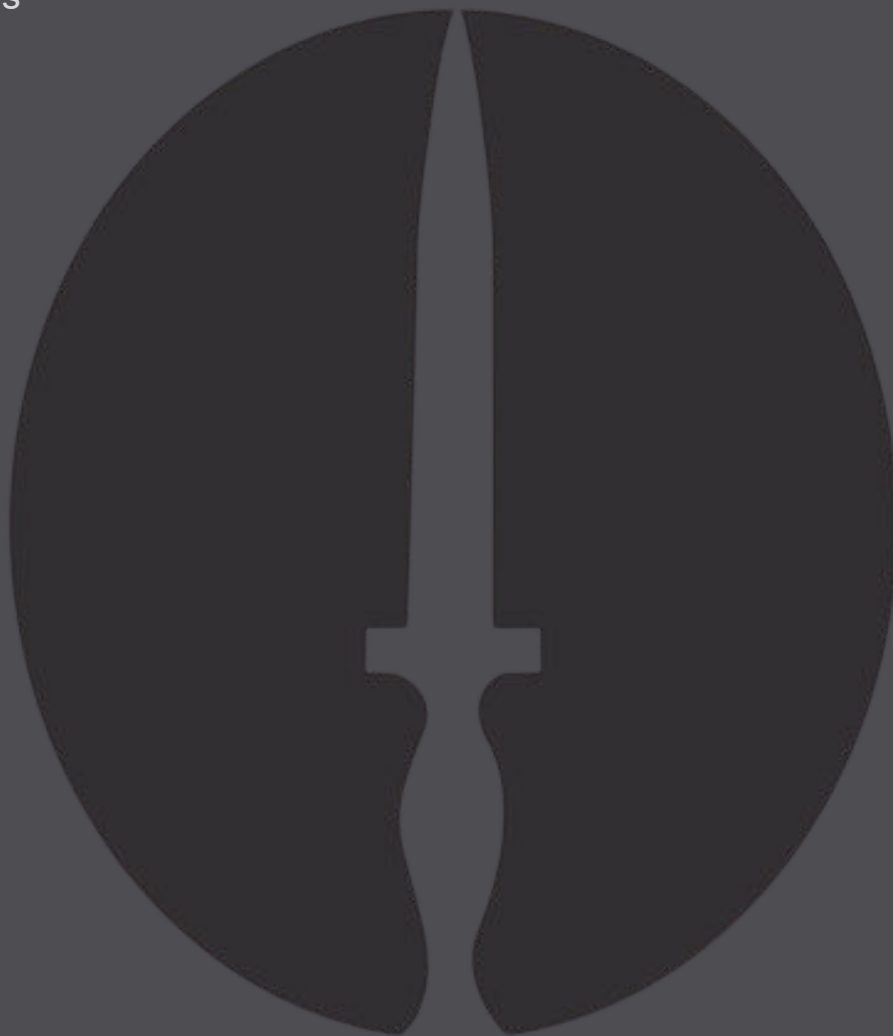


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INTRODUCTION

Introduction: Recruiting and Organizing to Meet Future SOF Challenges

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Special Operations Forces (SOF) units have been in high demand over the past decades, and nothing indicates this will change in the near future. An oft-voiced concern within the SOF community is that the standards and requirements for joining an SOF unit are being lowered in order to fill expanding force structures. Physical strength, stamina, excellent marksmanship, and unorthodox problem solving remain at the core of SOF's self-image and identity. But is it self-evident that these traits will remain essential? Looking ahead at a landscape of multiple, diverse, complex, and seemingly unpredictable threats, the contributions in this issue of the *Special Operations Journal*, surveyed below, suggest why and how SOF needs to diversify in terms of skills and talents in order to meet future challenges.

Keywords: SOF, identity, diversity, gender, talent, recruitment, future trends

The past decades have seen an increased reliance on and investment in SOF. The missions of such forces have spanned a considerable range, from counterterrorism raids and foreign internal defense to humanitarian assistance. The increase in missions has led to a growing SOF presence in international mission under UN, NATO, or alliance command. Looking ahead at a landscape of diverse and partly unpredictable threats, SOF is likely to remain a force of choice for national and alliance decision-makers due to their flexibility, light footprint, and high level of readiness.

While special operators, as a rule, cherish the opportunity to prove their worth, constant demand comes at a price. A growing number of journalists, authors, pundits, and policymakers have expressed concern about the long-term effects of sustaining a high SOF operations tempo and the expansion of roles. In particular, they suggest that such an operational pace could lead to overstretch and personnel attrition. In addition, the prospect of more lucrative compensation packages has lured scarce talent away from military SOF units and towards the corporate world and private sector security companies. Further adding to concern are indicators such as declining birth rates and increasing ambivalence within the citizenry about serving within the military. Such negative demographic trends in many western countries may further complicate efforts to fill expanding SOF force structures.

The stresses associated with demand have led to a degree of unease within the SOF community. A primary concern SOF operators voice is that “the bar is being lowered,” in terms of selection standards and criteria, in order to expand or simply maintain the current size of national SOF organizations. This concern seems to rest on the explicit or implicit assumption that physical strength, stamina, and excellent marksmanship will remain the key qualification for the operators of the future.

Looking ahead at a landscape of multiple, complex, and hard-to-predict threats and challenges, is it really self-evident that current tasks, force structures, and personnel profiles should remain as they are today? Or is it more likely that SOF will need to expand and diversify in terms of the kind of human talent it recruits? If so, how can SOF preserve unit cohesion and mutual trust in light of more diversity? Specifically, should SOF do more to recruit female talent and exploit an almost untapped talent pool? These were some questions raised and discussed at a workshop in Copenhagen in November 2016, which brought together practitioners from Denmark’s SOF community with a group of international scholars.

This first issue of the fifth edition of the *Special Operations Journal* is based on the presentations and discussions of the workshop. It features five articles by Scandinavian and U.S. scholars as well as a first for the *Journal*. Included in this edition is a primary source that SOF scholars may find useful. While the *Journal’s* editors have long sought practitioner’s perspectives, this issue features a somewhat unique one. The Commander and Deputy-Commander of the Danish Special Operations Command, Major General Peter Boysen and Colonel Michael Hyldgaard, consented to be interviewed.

The contributors to the workshop were asked to provide different points of view and approach the question of future SOF force structures and talent from different perspectives. Despite their novel approaches, however, almost all contributors indicate that SOF self-image centered narrowly on the combat team and the skill set of the current combat team member represents an obstacle on the road towards an adaptable and ultimately effective SOF in the future. The combat team can, in the words of one contributor, “mow the lawn,” but it takes a different type of organization or approach to get at the root causes of problems like international terrorism or local insurgencies. Technological development, according to another contributor, will permit many current SOF tasks to be performed with less application of physical strength. Unpredictable and diverse threats and challenges will, according to several of the authors in this issue, require a broader range of talent, which SOF will need to integrate in ways that do not undermine unit cohesion. The contributors do not provide any fixed or ultimate answers as to how this might be done. Political, cultural, organizational, and maybe biological factors stand in the way. A few of the articles, however, indicate that if diversity

demonstrably adds to SOF's operational performance and if newcomers – whatever their field, background, or gender – show a strong commitment to excellence and missions achievement, more diverse teams might eventually cohere.

In the first article, “Future Tasks: Threats and Missions for SOF,” Professor James Kiras looks at future trends in terms of SOF missions and the kind of talent they will require. He points to three trends that arguably pose particularly poignant questions to the SOF community: First, new technologies are set to eclipse human SOF skills in areas such as reconnaissance and close quarter combat. In this case, are humans still more important than hardware as one of the five so-called SOF truths have it? Second, whereas direct action and the operator are often at the center of SOF identity and the question of what makes SOF special, the future may render direct action less valuable as compared to their role as “global scouts.” Such a mission shift would invert current relations between SOF and intelligence analysts – SOF might have to adjust to being in the supporting, not the supported, role with all of the implications that have for organizations and budgets. Third, technological developments in the area of human enhancement and human–machine interfaces will raise fundamental questions about which skill sets and physical attributes SOF should recruit for. Kiras suggests that SOF would do well to contemplate the potentially uncomfortable implications of these trends and seize the initiative in developing new roles, missions, and approaches, rather than waiting for adversaries to do so first.

In “Diversity and SOF: Boon or Bane?,” Professor Anna Simons argues that force diversification is a necessity seen from a national security point of view. Today’s security challenges imply the need to work inclusively with other branches of government, civil society actors, and private sector actors – that is, with organizations and individuals that represent different skill sets and possibly different worldviews. Attempts to build diversity into SOF combat teams, she argues, risk undermining SOF’s combat effectiveness. On the one hand, Simons notes, SOF are pragmatic and task-oriented. Operators will welcome any diversity perceived to add to their operational effectiveness. The combat team, she argues, cannot become more inclusive as diversity, including gender diversity, poses a threat to the reflexive, mutual trust between members. Team members must be able to count on each other as interchangeable combatants, and any doubts about standards, allegiance, and ultimate loyalties of teammates would be destructive. As opposed to the combat team, however, the larger “SOF enterprise” can and should become more diverse. Simons suggests the need to re-frame SOF around the adversary and not, as they are currently, around the combat team. Such reframing should make the need for a diversity of skills self-evident. SOF can, as she puts it, continue to “serially react” to mitigate the threat from terrorism by arresting or killing terrorist leaders, ideologues, and operatives. But if the problem is reformulated in broader terms, for example to root out the ability to groups such as al-Qaida or ISIS to recruit and operate within a given territory, SOF need a much broader approach and many more skills.

In “Female Specialists as Operational Enabler for Special Operations Forces? An Explorative Pilot Study among Danish Military Linguists,” lecturer Rikke Haugegaard argues that female military linguists attached to SOF teams, due to a combination of their skills *and* their gender, create positive operational effects, such as improving intelligence collection and interaction with local populations. Her study, which is explorative in nature and based on interviews, compares the deployment experiences of male and female military linguists attached to Danish SOF teams. Haugegaard concedes to Simon’s point about the challenge

women can pose to unit cohesion. Nevertheless, she argues, the operational advantages to including women (as linguists or in other roles) outweigh the downsides. Her initial results indicate that even if women do report instances of perceived gender-based discrimination, they also emphasize that SOF teams are welcoming to those who work hard and display dedication and a high level of skill in their field of specialization. The research, in line with points made by Turnley in her contribution, indicates that the reflexive trust emphasized by Simons between members of an all-male combat team who have passed the same physical tests may not be the only way to ensure team cohesion.

In “Funhouse Mirrors: Reflections of Females in Special Operations Forces,” Dr. Jessica Glickman Turnley applies identity theory to illustrate the opportunities and challenges entailed with seeking to include women in SOF. She outlines some of the many different perceptions of what women in SOF might mean: a liability, a resource, an enabler, a third gender, and a threat to cohesion. Turnley recognizes SOF operators’ concern with physical capability and physical standards as legitimate. Still, she shows how cultural forces and factors conspire to create an SOF self-image that is heavily rooted in gender and thus inherently exclusive to women – women challenge the identity and self-image of (U.S.) SOF regardless of how they might perform. Studies of how mixed gender teams that perform physically demanding and risky tasks in austere environments, e.g., high-altitude mountaineering, wildfire firefighters, and police special weapons and tactics (SWAT) teams, actually show that mixed teams might approach tasks differently, but they perform no worse than all-male teams. Ultimately, Turnley concludes, it is up to the organizational leadership to recognize the many different images of self and other – for example women – and work constructively with those perceptions that enhances SOF’s ability to solve assigned tasks and missions and challenge those that hold SOF back.

One such attempt is explored in the next contribution, “Why make a special platoon for women? An assessment of the *Jegertruppen* at the Norwegian Special Operations Commando (NORSOC)” by Frank Brundtland Steder and Nina Rones of the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment. In 2014, NORSOC established a separate platoon for women, and the article explores the reasons for and results of this innovation. The segregated approach is generally deemed a success in terms of attracting and selecting highly capable and dedicated female talent. Interestingly, the education is based on the same physical and operational requirements as the “male twin” of the *Jegertruppen* – the *Fallskermjegertruppen*. That is, by creating a separate arena where women compete against women in the selection course, not by lowering the physical or operational requirements for selection, the Norwegian armed forces has been able to tap a female talent pool hitherto inaccessible. Interestingly, however, even if the original argument for launching the *Jegertruppen* was a need to diversify SOF capabilities, NORSOC has not yet provided a further career ladder to the graduates from the *Jegertruppen*. While the authors do not venture an opinion on whether this should happen, they do point out the Norwegian armed forces may find it difficult to retain this group of highly skilled, ambitious, and task-oriented women unless such options are eventually provided.

The closing piece of this issue is the interview with the current Commander and Deputy-Commander of the Danish Special Operations Command. Their practitioners’ perspective covers a range of current issues seen from the point of view of the leadership of a small state’s SOF organization. In line with the scholarly contributions, however, Major General Boysen and Colonel Hyldgaard also highlight the importance of SOF’s self-image, identity, and inclusivity/exclusivity in the interview. The interviewees emphasize the need for a small state’s SOF

organization to display a very high degree of flexibility – tasks may range from direct action to humanitarian assistance and also comprise counterterrorism assistance to the Danish national police. In order for SOF to span this range of tasks, they point out, many specialties and skills are needed. Echoing themes from Simon’s and Turnley’s articles, Boysen and Hyldgaard speak of the need to “tailor to mission” and of breaking down the exclusivity that goes back to whether a person is “badged” or not. In Major General Boysen’s words, what matters is “what you bring to the table.”

One of the traits most outsiders admire about SOF is their continuing ability to adapt rapidly to circumstances. As the different contributions of this special issue make clear from their analytical, empirical, and practical perspectives, adaption may not be enough. Future threats and challenges may drive SOF to consider “out of the box” options to recruit and retain the right talent in the face of uncertainty and competition. In the process, SOF may have to reassess long-held beliefs, traditions, and organizing principles in order to answer the question of “what will continue to make SOF ‘special?’” One attribute is that SOF consider themselves to be the masters of the so-called “human domain.” That domain is replete with competing agendas and aspirations. If SOF aspire to meet the challenges of future operating environments, their toughest mission collectively will require assessing the direction and degree of change they need to make. The authors of this edition have certainly offered scholars and the SOF community much food for thought and have pointed out directions for future operational and policy consideration as well as scholastic research.

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Future Tasks: Threats and Missions for SOF

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Forecasting is an inexact art at best. This article outlines a framework for forecasting SOF futures based on one originally used in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review to map capabilities against threats. It also employs intersecting lines of inquiry, beginning with the American SOF “corporate view” of the future. The forecast distills a number of public and private sector futures assessments into three “mega-trends,” derived from analysis of over a dozen public and private sector futures assessments, and then produces a SOF “market forecast” based on the implications of current and emerging technologies. The market forecast suggests decision makers may be forced into reconsidering the nature of SOF organizations as well as the SOF Truths in order for SOF to retain a unique or “special” value in the future. This forecast concludes by outlining four future possible vectors, or alternative futures scenarios, in which emerging technologies might impact future missions to inform and spur additional thought and discussion among SOF force developers and employers.

Keywords: forecasting, mega-trends, recruitment, retention, SOF truths, SOF missions, SOF expansion

INTRODUCTION

Looking into the future for the purposes of prediction can be an unnerving prospect for those tasked with developing future military force structure and capabilities, regardless of the size of the state. If nothing else, the penalties for getting those capabilities bets wrong can be extreme particularly for small states, given their limited capabilities and budgets. The record of successful prediction on military matters is ripe with seemingly sage insights and equally glorious epic failures. For example, advocates for the value of aircraft can point to H.G. Wells’ insights in 1908 on air power rendering null and void sea power as the instrument to defend against catastrophic attack and invasion (Wells, 1930). Given technologies currently available or in development in the public and private sector, the research question driving this paper is: to what extent should special operations forces (SOF) evolve or transform to remain special in future operating environments involving great power competition?

Three major factors complicate efforts at defense forecasting. The first is the inherently conservative nature of military organizations and, by extension, the thinking of many within it.

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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.

These barriers to innovative thinking and organizational change are often shaped by tradition, a track record of perhaps illusory past success, as well as anxieties about the future and the need for change. Collectively, organizational culture can significantly affect the boundaries of and reception to forecasting and calls for change to meet the challenges of the future, particularly in peacetime (Rosen, 1991, pp. 57–75). A range of other internal and external pressures and tensions also play a role in influencing the receptivity to calls for change (Pierce, 2004, p. 2–50).

The second factor, an external one, is the nature of the competitors as evolving security threats. The threat such competitors pose, and the actions they take, further complicate forecasting efforts. Significant shifts in adversary capabilities can lead to worst-case assumptions and potential arms spirals or future conflict. Worse, the rise of such actors can quickly invalidate budgeting and programming assumptions as occurred in Britain in the decades after the First World War (Ferris, 1989). Forecasting based on enemy threats is further complicated when the acquisition of capabilities is accompanied by misleading reasons, or none at all, to preserve their operational security. All of these factors contribute to a human tendency in threat and national security assessment to misperceive various intentional and unintentional attempts at signaling (Jervis, 1976).

The third factor is the nature of prophecy and those who conduct it. The forecaster who is a prophet often detects the confluence of various factors but most importantly divines their implications and significance. Such divination leads to the perception of a future new reality that can invalidate the past. Frustrated in their attempts to convert others to their newly discovered truth or create change sufficiently quickly, and in a competing marketplace of other future realities, prophets can take extreme acts or adopt extreme arguments. Giulio Douhet and William Mitchell peered in the future of warfare and concluded air power would change how nations and armies fought. Douhet was one voice among many in Italy espousing the value of strategic bombing after the First World War, but his ideas became increasingly radical and myopic (Hippler, 2013). Mitchell alienated a substantial swath of Army and Navy senior leadership through a combination of sharp criticism, unsanctioned political lobbying, and uncompromising views (Cooke, 2002, pp. 114–119). When it came time to test Mitchell's ideas, several leaders denounced Mitchell's ideas as "nonsensical" and upheld the superiority of the horse and battleship to the airplane (Beason & Lewis, 2005, p. 77).

The net effect of these three factors is that forecasting is fraught with various perils for internal and external reasons. In addition, predictions from experts are more often incorrect than accurate. Experts in their field are too often wedded to current realities including constrained processes, as well as cherished beliefs, traditions, and ideas. In addition, forecasts eventually validated often come from unlikely sources: science fiction authors who see possibilities and explore them in writing (Clarke, 1992); and, predictions from outsiders in popular fora. An example of the latter appeared in the most unlikely of sources in 1900: the *Ladies Home Journal*. Among the forecasts by experts polled by John Watkins, Jr. were:

- "Automobiles will be cheaper than horses are today";
- "Wireless telephone and telegraph circuits will span the world"; and
- "Huge forts on wheels will dash across open spaces at the speed of express trains of today. They will make what is now known as cavalry charges" (Watkins, 1900).

More often than not, amateurs or outsiders can be less constrained and free ranging in their ideas.

The original charter for this article was to explore the future threat horizon for SOF in the next five to ten years. Small state SOF organizations looking to conduct their own forecasting should be aware that “futures” from an American perspective look farther out. American military strategic visioning and futures, including SOF, looks out 15–20 years instead. The reason for this time horizon is process-driven. The Department of Defense Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS) cycle occurs in five-year increments. Such increments mean that the next five years are already programmed and budgeted and the current cycle extends to the subsequent five years. The implication of American SOF forecasting is that to change major programs, or start new capabilities, often requires at least 10 or more years lead-time.

Unconstrained future forecasting should not be confused with the anarchic. In order to impose some discipline and rigor in this forecast for future task for SOF, this assessment begins with the past, and more specifically, a heuristic framework to assess future threats and missions. This framework has utility in identifying common areas of convergence and divergence in terms of the current and future operating environment and threats within them. From this framework, this forecast then surveys the different SOF tasks or missions as defined in American doctrine. It highlights those of greatest interest to small state SOF leaders such as Danish SOKOM and explores some of the challenges large states, such as the U.S., face in translating them to the future.

To establish a SOF futures baseline, this forecast offers a “corporate view” of future missions from the perspective of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and one of its components, the US Army Special Operations Command (ARSOC), through published documents. This forecast does not include futures documents from other component command headquarters, such as the US Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM), the US Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC), or the US Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) for pragmatic reasons. NAVSPECWARCOM and MARSOC have considerably smaller headquarters staff and rarely have the resources to produce such futures documents. AFSOC, in contrast, does possess a sizeable headquarters staff but most of its futures products, in the author’s opinion, are constrained by the acquisition and incremental improvement of specific airframes, which in turn unduly narrows considerations of future tasks and missions (Air Force Special Operations Command, 2012).

From this American SOF “corporate view,” this forecast offers food for thought about the future along intersecting lines of inquiry. The lines of inquiry offer ways for special operators to consider technologies that are on the horizon, without falling into well-known forecasting traps. These traps include outcomes based on straight-line extrapolations of current data trends and another is overly deterministic speculation. The first line of inquiry outlines three “mega-trends,” derived from analysis of over a dozen public and private sector futures assessment. The second line identifies the potential impact of these trends upon SOF to produce a “market forecast.” This section seeks to answer the question how technologies might lead to reconsiderations about the nature of SOF organizations and what constitutes “special” in future special operations. This forecast concludes by outlining four future possible vectors, or alternative futures scenarios, in which emerging technologies might impact future SOF missions to spur additional thought and discussion and asking a number of questions for further consideration.

FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURES ANALYSIS

The framework for this forecast of future SOF tasks originally appeared in 2006 in the Department of Defense Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). It may seem counterintuitive to begin a forecast of the future with a framework from the past, particularly from a report generated in a review process recently cancelled in order to “to simplify the strategy and policy guidance required of the Pentagon while avoiding the ‘standing bureaucracies’ dedicated to assembling them” (Gould, 2016). The 2006 QDR was anything but the product of a standing bureaucracy. Its authors had a very specific purpose in mind in constructing their overarching framework for their analysis: a shift in Department of Defense thinking about threats and, by extension, the tasks it performs.

The guiding force behind the changes to this QDR was the 2005 National Defense Strategy signed by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. In seeking to operationalize this Strategy, the authors of the 2006 QDR had a simple goal in mind: convince members of the different armed services that the existing portfolio of Department of Defense capabilities was weighted too heavily against traditional, state-based threats and specific countries. They argued what was needed instead was a shift towards a more balanced capabilities portfolio able to perform tasks and confront other challenges as well. The three other challenge areas they identified were irregular, catastrophic, and disruptive (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006). Irregular is self-explanatory, involving terrorism, insurgency, sabotage, and subversion. Catastrophic referred specifically to the nexus of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. Disruptive challenges were technologies that could limit U.S. freedom of maneuver or ability to project power (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006, p. 3).

Put simply, the authors of the 2006 QDR were trying to get the armed services to conceptualize capabilities and force structure differently. In its simplest terms, the authors sought to move away from forces optimized for one set of challenges into a more balanced, maximized set to “become more agile” and “hedge against uncertainty” (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006, p. 1).

The QDR authors depicted the current and desired state of capabilities and mapped these against the different challenge quadrants (see Figure 1). As a departure point for where SOF capabilities are today, this forecast places SOF in original QDR graphic for two reasons. First, American SOF were created to counter threats in the irregular realm defensively in the modern era. Second, as “guerrillas in uniform,” SOF also reside in the irregular realm through their ability to conduct more proactive, offensive special operations against state and non-state threats.

Placing SOF capabilities within the 2006 QDR’s heuristic framework provides a conceptual departure point for considering future operating environments and threats. There are numerous analytic products produced by various public and private agencies that forecast possible futures, such as Global Threats and Global Risks 2035 (Burrows, 2016); (National Intelligence Council, 2017). In addition to analytic products, there is a wide range of analytic methods to conduct forecasting, including the so-called “VUCA” method favored by some in the military and in business, standing for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, as well as the popular framework of Peter Schwartz, labeled the “art of the long view” (Schwartz, 1996). Rather than relying on any one single method or product, and to be more specific to the interest of SOF, this forecast resulted from a survey of a range of different studies and products. These included over

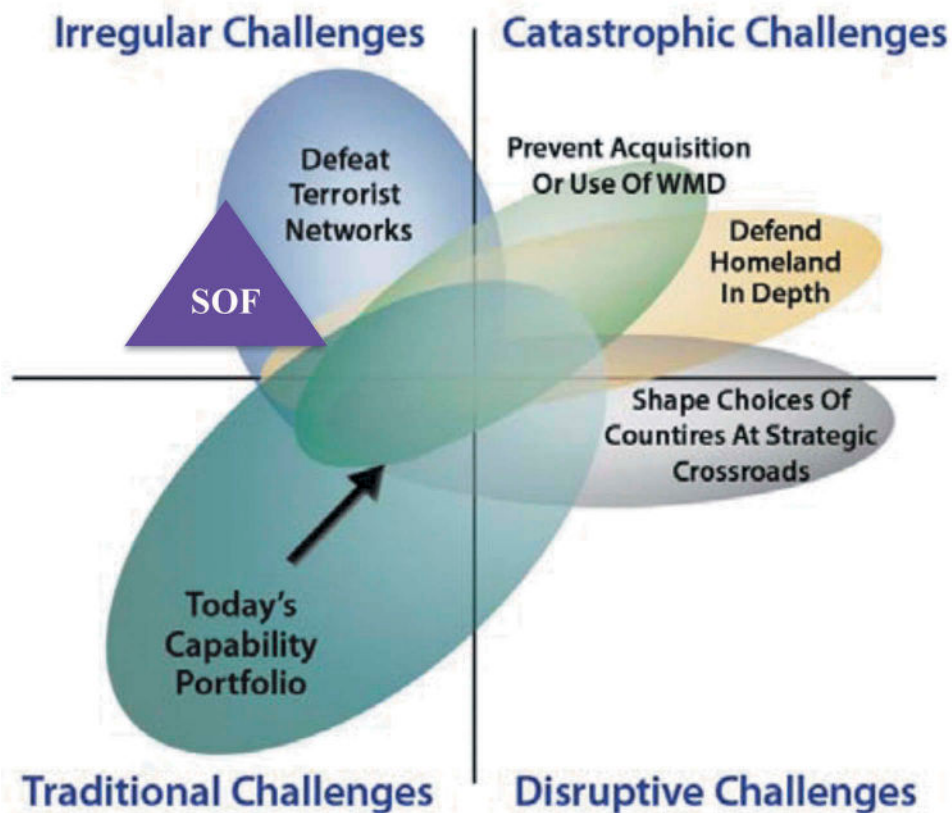


FIGURE 1 Challenges, defense capabilities, and SOF (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006, p. 19).

a dozen academic, practitioner and think-tank books and reports, as well as the USSOCOM key strategic issues for leadership (KSIL) list and the most recent Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) research topics list. One common point of agreement among them was that the world has changed, and will continue to change, as a result of globalization and its technologies.

While scholars will continue to debate the specific impact or even existence of globalization, there are physical and virtual dimensions of its existence. Information technologies at the heart of globalization are designed to facilitate the flow of goods, information, services, and people as quickly and as effortlessly as possible. Globalization has four key attributes: the high degree of connectedness of individuals thanks to the internet and social media; the breaking down of traditional border security and packaging and delivery of goods to facilitate commerce; the considerable mobility of goods and services, as well as people, thanks to transportation methods and routes; and, the increasing urbanization of populations.

These attributes of globalization have three implications for the future. The net effect of globalization first has been to erode the state sovereignty norm. States now have considerably more difficulty in securing their borders thanks to free trade through agreements such as

Schengen in much of Europe. In addition, within Western democracies, leaders are finding it, as the authors of one forecast state laconically, “much more difficult to govern” (National Intelligence Council, 2017, p. 6). In practical terms, an informed citizenry is increasingly dissatisfied with the processes of democracy and prone to question state authority and leader legitimacy making governance problematic. Second, globalization has expanded identity politics, making it easier for individuals to create revisionist histories and forge new political identities. As Mary Kaldor and others have concluded, such histories greatly romanticize the past and create an “us versus them” narrative, mobilizing populations into conflict (Kaldor, 2012, pp. 79–90). Third, globalization empowers a number of actors in different ways. Globalization has allowed state-based rising powers such as Russia and China to use a combination of force, coercion, and other pressure, as well as militias and armed groups, to accomplish their objectives in ways that are increasingly deniable. USSOCOM labeled such activities as occurring within a “gray zone” between war and peace (United States Special Operations Command, 2015b). Practically, such activities allow rising states to either respond to a crafted, shaped narrative or shift the burden of proof to the defender, such as Ukraine, as opposed to the aggressor, Russia in 2014 and 2015. In addition, globalization has empowered non-state actors by giving them access to capabilities that were once the preserve of states—so-called “national capabilities” such as satellite imagery, secure communications, among others (Kilcullen, 2013, p. 64).

Identifying general attributes of the threat environment upon which a number of authors agree has utility to a point. Special operators require more specific attributes to forecast tasks. A useful starting point for this discussion is the evident trends in contemporary threats. Such threats can be broken down into two broad categories: state and non-state threats. American defense planning documents have identified the four specific state-based threats in the most recent National Security Strategy (NSS). These states are China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. The NSS lumps non-state threats into the broad category of terrorism (The Office of the President, 2017). The four states and one category of non-state threats are broadly referred to in American national security vernacular as the “4 + 1” construct for defense planning. Despite their political, geographic, cultural and other differences, all five share a number of common features. They invest in new capabilities but more often than not exploit readily available commercial technologies and resources.

State and non-state actors often combine capabilities together to present a challenge to American and other Western forces in the “gray zone” in which SOF operate. They can do so in a number of mixed but more often combined ways, including physically and virtually; politically and militarily; and, using a mixture of high and low technologies. Several examples from non-state actors serve to illustrate and amplify this point. Members of the Islamic State employed social media and gaming platforms for a variety of purposes, including strategic messaging, recruitment, skills development, and secure voice over internet protocol (VoIP) communications on Sony Playstation networks (Bodine-Baron, Helmus, Magnuson, & Winkelman, 2016; Neagle, 2015). In addition, to assist with recruiting, coders working for the Islamic State co-opted the engine and environment of the popular Grand Theft Auto franchise, in addition to producing their “Call of Duty” knock-off called “The Clanging of Swords” to assist in recruiting (Al-Rawi, 2017). Copies of existing remotely piloted aircraft, including an Iranian knock-off of a Scan Eagle, as well as modified commercial DJI Phantom hobby drones, have been used by the Islamic State to record video of

martyrdom attacks from altitude as well as drop munitions on tanks, mobility vehicles, and troop concentrations in Mosul, Raqqa, and elsewhere (Watson, 2017). Captured documentation reveals the complex supply management the Islamic State use to acquire, modify, and maintain their drones (Schmitt, 2017). More recently, the Taliban specialized “Red Unit” in Afghanistan has been employing a mixture of captured infra-red designators and commercially purchased night vision goggles to assist in their attacks against isolated outposts, challenging SOF’s often-stated ability to “own the night” (Rempfer, 2018). State actors are assured to make U.S. and American attempts at power projection difficult to conduct and sustain due to their investment in anti-access and area denial weapons systems such as the S-400, DF-21, and hypersonic technologies, among others.

Combining technologies to level the playing field in terms of capabilities with Western military forces, including SOF, is one example of convergent trends. More problematic, now and in the future, is the willingness and ability of adversaries to identify and exploit gaps, seams in the capabilities and conduct of Western forces. Some have labeled this phenomenon “fourth generation warfare” or “lawfare” which exploits the Western desire to conform to numerous self-imposed legal and ethical constraints in the use of force (Hammes, 2004, pp. 207–223; Kittrie, 2016, pp. 40–50). Functionally, the application of precision-guided weapons in Iraq against the Islamic State translates these constraints into a real-time dialogue between the requirements for weaponeering and the competing demands of lawyering, often at the same time. Western self-constraints reflect the elusive and changing nature of victory in post-modern societies. Competitors seek the support of populations they seek to influence and mobilize. Both Western powers intervening in local conflicts, and competitors, battle for legitimacy in the eyes of many different populations as well as the broad consent, or tacit ambivalence, of the international community (Simpson, 2013). The outcome of the 2006 Summer War between Israel and Hezbollah, and the specific issue of which side “won” the war, illustrates the convergence of these trends. Both sides claimed victory in the conflict, but among drastically different populations, and neither was able to, nor did they seek, impose their will upon the other (Simpson, 2013, pp. 69–71).

Victory is elusive in most contemporary conflicts because state and non-state challengers of Western powers pursue two goals. The first goal is to seek modest, incremental gains territorially or in other ways while not triggering Western response in the form of military response. These actors attempt to accomplish their actions so quickly, as in the case of the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, or so slowly, as the People’s Republic of China has been doing through its island building efforts in the South China Sea, to avoid crossing the American or Western threshold for response in terms of substantive military force (United States Special Operations Command, 2015b). A second distinct goal is to drive up the costs, in both physical and psychological terms, to compel those powers to quit the struggle once committed, should American or Western powers intervene.

While physical costs, in terms of the destruction of property and killing of soldiers and other citizens, are easily grasped and understood, increasing the psychological costs are not. Such costs and ability to influence are difficult to perceive and measure. For example, segments of the American population are only beginning to realize the extent and reach of Russian and Chinese efforts to condition them through a wide range of subtle influence efforts, including official media such as RT, social media through the generation and spread by troll farms of so-called “fake news,” as well as the creation of Chinese cultural centers and

programs in universities (Chen, 2015) (Peterson, 2017). Information technologies allow state and non-state actors to influence audiences domestically, regionally, and globally, including within Western populations. These independent efforts are often integrated together with visual images of physical destruction and spun into narratives that lead to doubt, anxiety, or exhaustion among Western populations and leaders and wittingly or unwittingly aided by a range of media outlets seeking to break and exploit stories and online “clicks” first (Hammes, 2004, p. 208; Ghosh & Scott, 2018). Increasing costs and broadcasting its message out, using official (RT) or social media platforms, enhances the prestige and perception of power of such actors.

Finally, and most important for SOF retention and recruitment, is the impact globalization is having on the increasing privatization of violence by a range of non-state actors. Western professional militaries have neither the capacity nor the staying power to address the complex range of threats in countries that cannot provide security for their populations. Such interventions, as Theo Farrell assesses Britain’s role in Afghanistan in the first decades of this century, are “unwinnable” from a military standpoint (Farrell, 2017). In addition to making it more difficult to determine who the enemy is precisely, due to the nature of their actions as states or ability of non-state actors to meld with the local populations, Western and other countries have “outsourced” some of their missions and tasks, often at great expense, to a number of private companies. Such companies include Executive Outcomes, Academii (formerly Blackwater), Triple Canopy, or within Denmark, the firm Siras. The contracting of private military companies raises a number of concerns, including a lack of sufficient oversight and accountability of their activities, questions relating to their corporate motivation and trustworthiness, and for SOF forces specifically, the inability of the public sector to compete with the lavish compensation packages offered to former and serving operators, leading to a drain of talented and experienced personnel (Spearin, 2017). The preceding discussion has looked at the impact of globalization structurally on the utility of military force and violence, with few immediate connections to SOF. The next section looks at the impacts of globalization on SOF functionally, in terms of roles and missions.

SOF ROLES AND MISSIONS

Globalization has had an immediate impact on current SOF roles and missions, specifically in terms of their scope and scale. It is unsurprising that a large state such as the U.S., with its global interests and responsibilities, has a much wider range of roles and missions and tasks than small state SOF such as those in Denmark. Too often when discussing tasks, American authors default to the list of roles and missions SOF are explicitly authorized to perform legally. These roles and missions are outlined in Title 10 of the U.S. Code, in Section 167 (United States Congress, 1986). American SOF have five “direct” mission sets and seven “indirect” ones. The missions, their orientation, and examples are contained in Table 1:

Direct and indirect refer to their control and effects, but these mission orientations also have implications in terms of the time horizons. Direct missions tend to be bounded in time and space are conducted and led by U.S. forces, and often have significant military and politically, or strategy consequences should they fail. Indirect missions, in contrast, work by, with, and through host nations and other partners as the primary actor, are characterized by U.S. training

TABLE 1
American SOF Missions, Their Orientation, and Examples

<i>Mission</i>	<i>Orientation</i>	<i>Example</i>
Direct action	Direct	“Night raids” in Afghanistan
Special reconnaissance	Direct	Operation Anaconda
Counter weapons of mass destruction	Direct	Capturing, seizing, rendering safe, and recovering nuclear materials
Counterterrorism	Direct	The raid against Osama bin Laden
Hostage rescue & recovery	Direct	The rescue of PFC Jessica Lynch
Unconventional warfare	Indirect	Afghanistan 2001; Libya 2011
Foreign internal defense	Indirect	Training Afghan and Iraqi armies
Security force assistance	Indirect	Training Niger military
Counterinsurgency	Indirect	Operations in Iraq, 2003–2011
Foreign humanitarian assistance	Indirect	Ebola mission to West Africa
Civil affairs operations	Indirect	Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines (2001–2014)
Military information support operations	Indirect	Operation Enduring Freedom 2001; OEF-P (2001–2014)

and material and non-material support, and often take long periods of time before their effects are known and effectiveness can be assessed.

SOF roles and missions in the American context are not exclusive, and often occur simultaneously. A number of SOF roles and missions come with a form of organizational and institutional “baggage.” This baggage is characterized by specific SOF units claiming stewardship or “ownership” of these missions, to the exclusion of other units. Such missions are core to the traditions and organizational culture and identity of specific units, due to their specific training for them or conditions under which they are conducted. For example, American Special Forces claim ownership over foreign internal defense and unconventional warfare. Navy SEALs, in contrast, claim expertise and ownership over direct action and special reconnaissance missions.

Institutional ownership can add the illusion of the exclusivity of such missions to the unwary or uninitiated. Further sources of confusion results from conflating tactical missions for roles, not accommodating for changes in roles and missions at the operational or strategic level, or mistaking roles and missions—counterterrorism and counterinsurgency in particular—as strategies when they are operational approaches (Simpson, 2013, p. 131). Finally, discussion about changing or modifying roles and missions often devolves into superficial exercises in rebranding without questioning their strategic utility in a meaningful way (Livermore, 2017). Small state SOF forces, including those of Denmark, are most suited operationally in terms of force structure and capacity, as well as socially and politically, with performing the following mission sets: direct action; special reconnaissance; counterterrorism; hostage rescue and recovery; security force assistance; peacekeeping; and foreign humanitarian assistance. These mission sets are most suitable given their limited time horizon or scale, unlike counterinsurgency. In addition, small states are more likely to participate in mission sets that fall under the auspices of regional or supranational authorization, under organizations such as NATO, the EU, or the UN, rather than conduct missions that entail legal or ethical risk such as unconventional warfare, or working by, with, and through proxy forces to overthrow the regimes of state-based actors.

A “MARKET FORECAST” FOR SOF: 2035

Rather than looking at each of the roles and missions in turn, this forecast connects them to the near-term implications of current trends. Many of these connections are evident in the “corporate” SOF forecasts from USSOCOM and ARSOC. This forecast looks beyond these at developments on the horizon, projects them out 20 years, and outlines future pathways for SOF to take. What follows, to use an analog, is a “market forecast” for large and small state Western SOF.

Overall, this market forecast for Western SOF is a rosy one based on demonstrated political and military utility that will continue. This forecast, however, does suggest there is potential volatility in the market and cause for concern. SOF will remain a “force of choice” along with air power, and increasingly, cyber and space power. Political leaders will have a continued need for SOF based on the skills they possess, their ability to accomplish tasks discriminately and precisely, as well as an ability to minimize levels of political risk (Kiras, 2017). In short, for the U.S. and most countries in the West, there will be a strong market demand for SOF for the forecasted future.

Market demand, however, will require expansion to SOF in terms of mission areas and tasks in three primary ways. The first is an expansion in tasks. Over the past decade, US SOF have seen an expansion from nine core missions to 17 “things that SOF do,” a combination of core mission and collateral tasks, according to a recent USSOCOM posture statement.

Expansion in tasks has led to the second expansion: the growth of SOF personnel and units. SOF have expanded in a number of ways. American SOF have increased in size by 65 percent since 1998, from 46,000 to 70,000 personnel (United States Special Operations Command, 1998, p. 17; 2018, p. 4). Much of this expansion, however, has not been in the number of operators, or “trigger pullers” in the vernacular. Only some 25 percent of the growth has occurred in operators. This growth was necessary to sustain a much higher operations tempo of SOF deployed overseas. By way of illustration, in 1998 only 4,500 American SOF personnel were deployed worldwide on any given week (United States Special Operations Command, 1998, p. 13). More recently, approximately 13,000 SOF personnel are within a single region of the world, the Central Command area of responsibility.

Most of the SOF personnel growth, however, has occurred in the support and liaison staff. Growth in this area is necessary to ensure better integration with partner forces—across the interagency, with conventional forces, as well as partner nations—to fill one of the organizational “seams” identified by ARSOC in 2014 (see Figure 2). Such integration requires additional liaison, staff, and planning operators to ensure sufficient coordination of SOF activities. SOF growth has also occurred in “combat support” and “combat service support” in support of deployed operators. Such areas include intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; analysis and exploitation; communications; logistics and resupply; among others.

The primary growth in ARSOC and AFSOC has been in these functional areas, and in units barely known outside of SOF community. For example, ARSOC’s 528th Sustainment Battalion has grown into a Brigade-sized unit. Other newly activated support units include the third Special Operations Squadron and the Joint Intelligence Brigade. Other growth has occurred in deployed and service component command headquarters to ensure adequate command and control, as well as liaison offices and personnel to connect and integrate with coalition and other government partners.

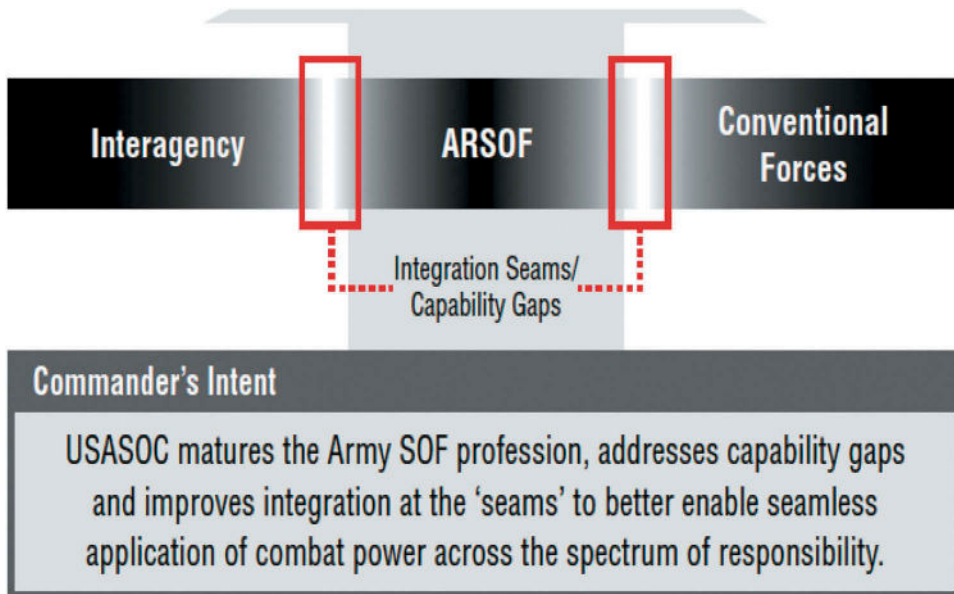


FIGURE 2 SOF integration seams and capability gaps (US Army Special Operations Command, 2013, p. 17).

The third expansion related to SOF missions is related to freedom of maneuver. This expansion has been in terms of authorities and legal permissions, as well as funding for SOF. This expansion seeks to close the operational seams to permit SOF to take action against elusive and fleeting threats as effectively as possible while still remaining within the rule of law, and under sufficient oversight. While SOF funding in the US remains relatively constant—just under two percent of the overall Department of Defense budget—other Congressional authorities have allowed SOF to conduct activities against a range of state and non-actors (United States Special Operation Command, 2018, p. 4). Growth in SOF authorities and funding can expand well beyond the original intent. For example, USSOCOM put forward a request through the Department of Defense to Congress to approve a funding authorization for unconventional warfare. The original authority was proposed in 2003 and approved in 2004 with a budget of US\$25 million. The authority was meant to provide SOF, and in particular US Army Special Forces, with a means to fund non-state partner forces (Hill, 2006, p. 9). The Central Intelligence Agency had existing authorities to do so but SOF did not, resulting in friction, confusion, and lost opportunities in Afghanistan in 2001 and 2002. This initially temporary authority, which evolved into Section 1208, is now permanent as Section 333, includes all SOF units who partner with foreign forces, and has more than doubled beyond \$50 million (Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2017, p. 21).

Other freedom of maneuver comes as a result of increased mission autonomy for SOF. A number of white papers generated during Admiral William McRaven's and General Joseph Votel's tenures as USSOCOM commander, including the "grey zone" concept and SOF operational design, are designed to facilitate eventual "mission command" of SOF forces (United States Special

Operations Command, 2015a). Mission command has a simple goal in mind, driving approvals and authority down to the lowest levels possible to permit SOF to campaign plan more effectively as well as identify threats early and preempt or prevent them wherever possible. In other words, mission command for SOF seeks to shift from a reactive posture to one that is much more proactive and capable of preempting threats before a crisis occurs.

Discussing specific roles and missions, and whether to expand or divest them, is problematic for many of the organizational reasons outlined previously. Rather than doing so, and risking the discussion devolving into organizational equities and heritage, this forecast looks instead at the capabilities to which those roles and missions translate in terms of their effectiveness. ARSOC has identified “pillars of capability,” as opposed to 12 missions or 17 “things SOF do,” in its most recent futures document *USASOC 2035*. The four SOF pillars of capability are: indigenous approach, which is a variation of the old slogan for indirect activities of “by, with, and through” local security and host nation forces, as well as populations and communities; precision targeting, or direct activities, which has been the focus of much of American SOF activity over the past 15 years, to find, fix, and finish terrorists and insurgents; understand and influence, which connects to two SOF goals, returning to more traditional SOF activities but also being better postured to engage in so-called “Phase 0 shaping activities” in order to detect, preempt, and prevent mentioned in the last section; and failing prevention, crisis response, which exploits SOF readiness and strategic mobility for all forms of crisis, from hostage rescues to humanitarian and disaster relief (US Army Special Operations Command, 2017, p. 4).

The pillars of capability are too broad to act as sufficient signposts for future SOF development in themselves. They must be assessed against other forecasting benchmarks. This forecast returns to two benchmarks introduced previously. The first is future defense capabilities, or the relative comparison with conventional forces that allows SOF to remain “special.” The second is future threat challenges. This forecast returns to the framework of the 2006 QDR to assess where SOF capabilities may be headed.

American SOF have traditionally resided in the irregular quadrant of capabilities and defense challenges. Their operations against terrorist and insurgent groups globally over the past two decades have validated SOF effectiveness in the irregular arena. It has also had an unintended consequence as well. American conventional forces have become increasingly irregular in their support to SOF operations. Integration with SOF has allowed conventional forces to become more “SOF-like” in the process, a transformational goal stated in the original 2006 QDR (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006). Transformation has led national decision makers and armed service chiefs to question the ability of conventional forces to meet the range of traditional challenges posed by nation states such as China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea (The Office of the President, 2017). Such transformation of conventional capabilities has put pressure on SOF to redefine what separates them and explore future growth areas directions to expand in terms of capability areas.

For these and other reasons, this forecast suggests a shift in American SOF capabilities away from the irregular and into the realm of two possible vectors: catastrophic and disruptive. American SOF have already begun a major shift towards the former, and in particular, the weapons of mass destruction capabilities of states. In December 2016, USSOCOM assumed the authority as the lead Department of Defense agent for countering weapons of mass destruction (Gerstein, 2017). The repeated use by the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria of chemical weapons against rebels, as well as the recent escalation in tensions with North Korea over nuclear weapons, has highlighted the

importance of this mission nationally, and by extension, of SOF's role in them. Some experts have expressed concern over SOF "getting in front of the headlights" in this capability realm given the requirements necessary to succeed, including sufficiently skilled and trained personnel, the appropriate equipment, as well as sufficiently strong connections to interagency partners to prevent failure (Cox, 2018). Mission failure in this capability realm potentially would live up to its label by having truly catastrophic consequences.

Weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, biological, and chemical ones, have high barriers of entry to manufacture and use. States possess the resources to develop and stockpile weapons of mass destruction but are also the least likely to use them, for fear of reprisal in kind or worse. The foundation of stable deterrence rests on this assumption. Those with the willingness to acquire and use weapons of mass destruction, non-state actors such as terrorist groups, rarely have the resources, including technical expertise, to proceed beyond the rudimentary development stage to a form where they can be weaponized and delivered. Both the Islamic State, as well as its predecessor Al Qaeda in Iraq, have used chemical weapons but they were crude field expedients used poorly to little effect (Greenfield, 2014). The leaders of the Islamic State and Al Qaeda have expressed a continued desire to obtain and use more sophisticated weapons of mass destruction but much of this is part of messaging to influence a range of internal and external audiences, or for inspirational as opposed to operational reasons (Jenkins, 2008). For these reasons and others, state and non-state actors will seek capabilities that have mass effects similar to weapons of mass destruction, but without as many of their normative or technical and resource hurdles. Such capabilities include cyber and other forms of attack in the electromagnetic spectrum, to which modern information-based societies are vulnerable, including electromagnetic pulse (EMP), remote shutdowns of critical infrastructure, the hijacking of systems, and others.

The difficulties inherent in catastrophic challenges, for both competitors and SOF seeking to counter them, are many. For this reason, and given the technological developments outlined in a previous section, this forecast suggests the greatest future challenge for SOF lies in the disruptive realm, as Figure 3 suggests:

The authors of the 2006 QDR, however, offer few insights about this realm of challenges. Most of their discussion refers obliquely to technologies that will prevent American freedom of maneuver and ability to project power. This forecast suggests, and expands upon in the next section, why the pace of technological developments will make disruptive challenges increasingly looming and problematic for SOF. The net effect of this forecast will suggest that in order to meet market demand, future commanders may have to consider violating one of USSOCOM's "SOF truths" and mass-produce SOF (United States Special Operations Command, 2016). Such mass production may be necessary to overcome current and future recruitment, retention, and force health pressures under which SOF increasingly find themselves (Hennington, 2017).

FUTURE MEGA-TRENDS FOR SOF

The bane of forecasting is a sin already present in this one: extending a number of current trends into the future in a linear, progressive manner. Most of the corporate SOF futures documents commit this sin as well either wittingly or unwittingly, limiting their utility to the forecaster. This forecast moves beyond straight-line progressive indicators, and as mentioned previously, some 10–15 years

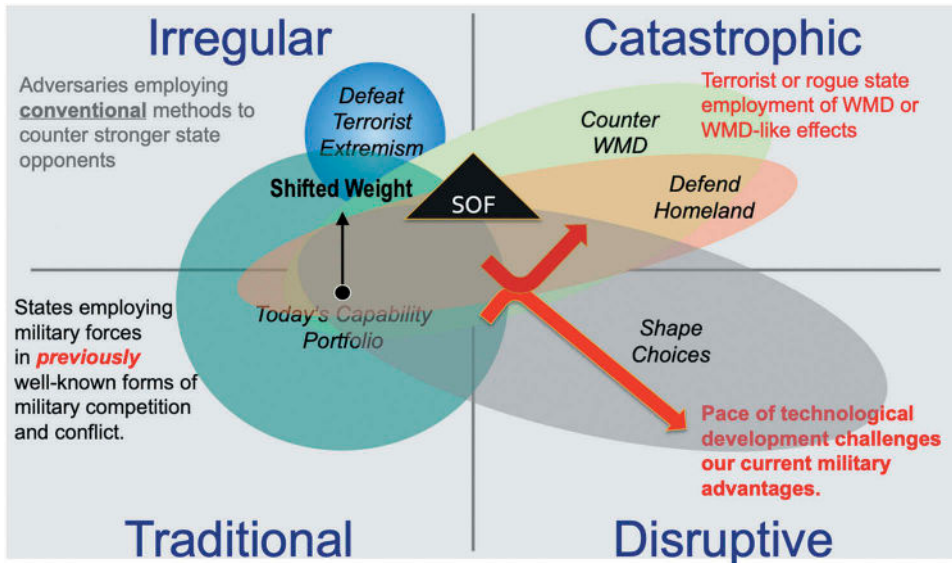


FIGURE 3 Forecasted future direction of SOF (Author's modification).

into the future, and offers up three possible “mega-trends” for consideration. To have greater utility to the SOF community, this forecast bridges some of these trends with future disruptive challenges by looking at changes in the means available to SOF, and those seeking to counter them.

The first mega-trend for SOF involves technological proficiency eclipsing human skills. While war will continue to be a human endeavor, the increased capability and proliferation of unmanned systems, on the ground, in the air, and on and under the seas, will challenge SOF's ability to prevail on the basis of skill and guile alone. For example, countries including the U.S. have tested developed autonomous patrol vehicles operating in swarms to counter under-sea threats, including SOF (Tsu, 2016). Other non-lethal methods make the capture and exploitation of such SOF a possibility (Rehn & Riggs, 2002). While SOF operators continue to place emphasis on exceptional marksmanship and close quarter battle (CQB) skills, technologies inherent in the ambitious but ill-fated Tracking Point's Precision Guided Firearm system potentially makes such skills immediately available to many (Lecher, 2015).

Others have made more grandiose, systematic claims about future technological capabilities well above the level of the SOF operator. Russian President Vladimir Putin has suggested, for example, that the first country to develop practical artificial intelligence (AI) “will rule the world,” and “countries would fight future wars with drones, with the victor being determined by drone supremacy” (Meyer, 2017). Chinese leaders have stated their goal to become the leading power in AI, which may or may not come to pass given the relative advantages in different areas possessed by the U.S. and China (13D Research, 2018).

The second mega-trend is that the operator/support pyramid will invert if it not in the process of doing so already. According to this trend, the emphasis for SOF will be increasingly less on operators who will be in limited contact in increasingly hostile or denied environments. Much of the emphasis for SOF will be placed on the enablers that presently provide the operators with the information,

support, and sustainment necessary to execute well. Numerous current SOF operations serve as a means to continue to feed the support process. Most familiar with the SOF community know of the current targeting methodology embodied in the acronym “F3EAD,” for find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze, and disseminate (Faint & Harris, 2012). This forecast suggests that the finding, fixing, exploiting, analyzing, and disseminate segments will become the focus of direct SOF operations. The finishing segment, in contrast, will become episodic and almost anticlimactic given the risk of such missions relative to their return. The information SOF collect as “global scouts,” and the insights, indications, and warnings it provides for Phase 0 preemptive and prevention actions, will greatly outweigh the value of traditional raids or “direct action” (Petit, 2013). The growth in SOF will lead to a shift in what is considered the most important organizationally. Operations will increasingly drive intelligence, instead of the historical norm the other way around. In other words, the nature of special reconnaissance will change and overshadow all other roles and missions.

The third mega-trend is possibly the most outlandish and fantastical. This trend relates to the operator integrating with technology as a necessity to maintain a competitive edge in one of three ways, primarily as a result of the initial one outlined above. The first way involves SOF increasing technological integration between machines. A simple way of presenting this idea is not relying on a system to support a machine, such as a remotely piloted aircraft, but rather a system of machines to act in swarms loosely commanded by operators. Rather than the operator using a small hand-thrown unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), they would deploy or call down several hundred self-synchronizing micro-UAVs, especially as opponents develop countermeasures to single UAV systems by exploiting control links, jamming, or the like (Department of Defense, 2017). Commercial technology strives to keep down the costs of delivering goods and services by offsetting the greatest source of costs, in the form of expensive labor. Why should SOF be any different?

SOF can integrate in a second, more fanciful way through bioengineering. Gene therapy or splicing may not be as futuristic as some might hope. In the words of one author who put forward a case for bioengineering in the military in 2012, “Technology makes up for our absurd frailty” (Lin, 2012). While there are considerable ethical questions, especially for historical reasons with which Europeans and North Americans are familiar, technology in this field has leapt far beyond cloning Dolly the Sheep. Such advances may be as innocuous as enhancing the performance SOF operators attributes, such as stamina, cardiovascular oxygen transfer, resistance to cold or heat, or the like, to as sinister as you can imagine.

The third and last integration cuts out the genetic middleman within the operator and seeks to marry together human and machine. Cybernetic enhancements already exist, mostly as prostheses, such as replacement eyes, arms, and legs for the damaged or disabled. USSOCOM and DARPA have tried to create a working exoskeleton or “Iron Man suit,” such as the Tactical Assault Light Operator Suit (TALOS), to increase operator range and equipment for more than a decade (Friberg, 2016). The two primary limitations stymieing such efforts are power sources, including battery lifespan and weight, as well as ergonomic ones, making mechanical systems fit within the limitations of human physiology. A next logical step in the evolution of SOF will be integrating operators directly with technology. Human senses and physiology has evolved over thousands and years, and enhanced humans could more quickly adapt to embedded technology much quicker than it takes machine learning to master comparable skills (Lin, 2012). A common theme underpinning all three SOF mega-trends is exploring how SOF can seize the initiative and drive disruptive

approaches to warfare and special operations, rather than react to the disruptive technologies of opponents. In the process, another of the SOF truths can and should be questioned and reevaluated, that humans are more important than hardware. As this section suggests, humans may be more important, or may become the hardware or at least heavily integrated with it, in the near future.

The rationale driving this exercise lies in a prediction made by an astute defense analyst more than 30 years ago. British author Richard Simpkin postulated in 1985 that advancements in land warfare occur in 50-year cycles. He concluded, seemingly presciently, that SOF would be at the center of land force development by 2015 (Simpkin, 1985, p. 189). The basis for his prediction was the logical extension he saw in the growth in capability of airmobile forces and the increased weight, decreasing relative mobility of heavily armored fighting vehicles. The overarching question this forecast grapples with is what will make SOF distinct and unique, or “special,” in the future? Inherent within this overarching question are a number of subordinate questions. These questions include:

- Will it make continued sense for SOF to cover all of its historical tasks?
- What missions can/should SOF divest to others?
- What future missions do SOF anticipate?
- Which pathway for future SOF: technological or traditional?

The answer to these questions, and the depiction of current and emerging trends and the three mega-trends outlined in this forecast, is dependent on your individual and institutional vision of what the future will look like. Should SOF be content to remain the masters of irregular challenges, able to defeat terrorists and insurgents anywhere, anytime? Or should SOF more fully move in the direction to counter catastrophic challenges given the high stakes and unique technical aspects of weapons of mass destruction? Should SOF seize the initiative, and rather than countering different threat realms, forge into the disruptive realm of the mega-trends outlined here and pose a new threat to our opponents, forcing them to react? To simplify matters, this forecast offers four versions of the future based on popular culture, and in particular, movies:

- Elysium, or cybernetics as a matter of necessity;
- Ex Machina, or AI as the next logical step in technological development;
- Fury Road, or the redefinition of social norms due to catastrophe, collapse, and resource scarcity; or
- Rogue One, in which technology is subordinate to the human spirit and the unorthodoxy of operators

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article is not to outline a specific path for SOF in the future. Forecasting can and should take into consideration various systemic inputs and outline a set of possible challenges and opportunities they present for current and future SOF decision makers. Better yet, forecasting should frame issues and ask questions for decision makers to consider. In trying to grapple with future challenges, analysts must consider the

nature of our SOF organizations and what political leaders and publics expect of them. For example, are SOF special because of their historical traditions and proven track records or because of their innovations? Beyond the tactical and technical, specifically should SOF organizations innovate organizationally to meet future challenges?

SOF continue to derive their strategic and political utility as they are a low-cost, high-yield dividend for decision makers. Is this utility primarily because they are valued, trusted, and the most responsive agents of national security—or merely because collectively they are incapable of saying “no” when asked to solve national security problems? A question related to the last one, and connected to a previous one, is does the very responsiveness of SOF foster or confound efforts to retain and innovate? Operators continue to “mow the same lawns,” to use the evocative operational phrase, for little seeming apparent gain and after years of doing so many take their skills to the marketplace on an individual level. A brain and experiential drain may prevent innovation institutionally because responsiveness continues to be valued, or pays off, regardless of its longer-term strategic effectiveness.

The final set of questions relates to the character of the threat and SOF missions for small states. Do Danish SOF and others, for example, envision “more of the same missions,” or “business as usual,” conducting missions such as counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and stability operations in relatively benign environments? Or will the future challenges they face, either because of threats or regional security obligations through organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, be more in the categories of disruptive and catastrophic? These challenges have significant implications for operator recruitment, selection, training, equipping, and retention. Finally, to what extent are small state SOF communities looking beyond the direction set by large state SOF and current threats to more non-traditional sources of change? For example, many of the future technological vectors that comprise disruptive challenges may not be state driven as much as they are commercially driven in pursuit of their goals, by the Amazons, Ali Babas, Space Xs, Teslas, and Facebooks of the world, which are driving social and economic change at a dizzying pace.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The content reflects the research and opinions of the author, and not the United States Air Force, the United States Special Operations Command, the Department of Defense, or the United States Government.

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Funhouse Mirrors: Reflections of Females in Special Operations Forces

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The capability of SOF operators is a reflection of the perceived value the individual brings to a small team setting. Cohesion within the team is partially a function of the identity of each team member, which influences the degree of integration. This article argues that forcing integration based on sex or gender alone overlooks the multiple potential identities of female special operators and of the teams themselves. The article explores some of the different natures of social identity, including negotiated, positional, and intersectional. These natures suggest identity is a more complex and elusive than how the term “gender” is often interpreted and broadens the application of this discussion to include related issues of the integration of any socioculturally defined groups, such as those defined by race, ethnicity, or religion, into any special operations unit. The article argues that identity constructs have and can be manipulated in a military service as well as in the battlespace, and suggests areas for additional research to identify new ways to leverage different perceptions of self and Other to help accomplish SOF missions.

Keywords: Identity, gender, third gender, negotiated identity, intersectionality, translocational positionality, integration, SOF capability

INTRODUCTION

Some funhouse mirrors reflect ourselves as tall and thin, others reflect the same self as wide and short – yet both are “real” reflections, just as “real” as the mirror that presents the self as we ourselves experience it. So might an American female special operator, a member of an elite team active in a battlespace, be perceived in multiple ways. She might be perceived by an Afghan man as a fully legitimate member of a Western military force and of some indeterminate or “third” gender; by members of her own unit as a weak link because of deeply held cultural assumptions about females and so a challenge to both their safety and their own self-image; and by herself as a fully qualified member of a fighting force, a member who happens to be female.

All these identities are “true” and exist, with the exception of an actual female special operator’s self-perception, as there are not yet any females who are members of special operations elite teams in the United States. All these identities hold value, and all influence behavior in that battlespace. So although positions in special operations forces (SOF) in the

United States were recently opened to females as part of a directive from the Secretary of Defense (known as the Women in Service Review, accessed at https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Fact_Sheet_WISR_FINAL.pdf), access to and participation in those positions for females is not as simple as a policy statement.

This article focuses on the integration of females into a specific part of the American SOF community for illustration of points in an argument, although its conclusions can be applied to the integration of other classes of individuals or other capabilities in American or other national forces. For illustrative purposes, this article uses examples from the American SOF small, elite forward-deployed teams such as the Operational Detachment – Alpha (ODA) teams of the Army’s Special Forces (also known as the Green Berets) or the Navy’s SEALs.

Females can be integrated into the SOF community in three ways. Similar to business outsourcing, the teams can acquire the capabilities provided by females for some period of time and then release them when they are no longer needed, or the teams can broaden their own definition to integrally include those capabilities. The third way is through “forcible” integration by decree, law or regulation. The American SOF teams identified here were directed by the Secretary of Defense to open positions to females on 1 January 2016, taking the third course. As of the publication of this article, no females have successfully passed the selection and assessment tests for admission to these elite teams. If and when they do, the question then becomes how their participation on the teams affects the teams’ definition of themselves, their identity (if at all), and how that shift in identity will affect performance.

This article explores the complexity of integrating females into small elite SOF teams through a discussion of identity – of the multiple potential identities of female special operators and of the teams themselves. An introduction to the concepts of negotiated (e.g., Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Swann & Bosson, 2008), positional (e.g., Anthias, 2008) and intersectional (e.g., Crenshaw, [1989] 2018) nature of social identity illustrates the fluidity and complexity of identity, and broadens the application of this discussion to include related issues of the integration of race, ethnic, or religious groups (or any socioculturally defined groups) into any special operations unit. While this article does not present a full literature review, the concepts of identity are introduced in enough depth to stimulate thought as to how identity constructs have and can be manipulated in a military service as well as in the battlespace. These considerations will lead to additional research as well as new ways to leverage different perceptions of self and Other to help accomplish SOF missions.

SEPARATING SEX AND GENDER

Before beginning this metaphorical story of funhouses and mirrors, it is important to distinguish between sex and gender.¹ The Secretary of Defense opened positions in special operations forces to all, regardless of sex. More often, however, issues of gender limit or condition access.

Sex category (male/female) is a function of biology, coded in DNA, and except for extraordinary circumstances, a part of our physicality with which we live from the time we are born. Due to secondary sex characteristics such as reproductive organs, beards, body shapes, and breasts, sex is a visible characteristic. Because it is visible, “we so instantly sex-categorize others that our subsequent categorizations of them as, say, bosses or coworkers, are nested in our prior understandings of them as male or female” (Ridgeway, 2009, p. 148). Individuals are generally

defined first as male or female, and only then and secondarily in a social role. Note that this would be true for any other easily visible characteristic such as race. Ethnicity would also fall into the same category in areas where it is clearly marked by dress or other bodily adornments: however, because dress and adornment are easily changed, ethnicity is not as immutable as skin color or breasts or facial hair and so is subject to other issues which will not be explored here.

Once an individual is sex-categorized, she or he then is assigned certain sets of expected behaviors and psychological predilections that are associated with the sex in that sociocultural environment. Males in Western cultures are associated with assertiveness, toughness, stoicism, and other behaviors which are termed masculine. Western females are expected to be nurturing, compassionate, and emotional, behaviors which are labeled feminine, for example. These sex-associated behavioral and psychological complexes have some universal aspects, but also exhibit local cultural nuance. It is these behaviors, and the psychologies that produce them, that are the basis of gender.

When sex is conflated with gender—when masculine becomes substituted for male, and feminine for female—social interaction can become problematic. In these cases, people engage with others on the basis of sex categories (e.g., recognize that the Other is a female) and consequently expect certain behaviors from that Other (e.g., timidity, nurturing behavior, compassion). The Other, however, may or may not produce those behaviors for a variety of reasons, leading to confirmed or confounded expectations.

Recall that everyone is born into a sex category. Gender, i.e. behaviors which reinforce the assignment to a sex category, are only created by interaction with an Other: they are performative, produced in response to a social situation. An understanding of gender, then, requires an understanding of the social institutions and structures within which the players are embedded. As West and Zimmerman (1987) put it:

When we view gender as an accomplishment, an achieved property of situated conduct, our attention shifts from matters internal to the individual and focuses on interactional and, ultimately, institutional arenas. In one sense, of course, it is individuals who “do” gender. But it is a situated doing, carried out in the virtual or real presence of others who are presumed to be oriented to its production. Rather than as a property of individuals, we conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society. (p. 127)

Additional issues arise when occupations become gendered. A gendered occupation is one that is “symbolically and ideologically described and conceived in terms of a discourse that draws on hegemonically defined masculinities and femininities” (Britton, 2000, p. 420). In a gendered occupation, those who exhibit the traits of the dominant gender while performing occupationally defined or required activities are more likely to have an advantage in that occupation. For example, Kanter’s ([1977] 2008) study of the corporation found that to be an effective manager (in the 1970s) required the exhibition and performance of masculine behavior. She called it a “masculine ethic” which

elevates the traits assumed to belong to some men to necessities for effective management: a tough-minded approach to problems; analytic abilities to abstract and plan; a capacity to set aside personal, emotional considerations in the interests of task accomplishment; and a cognitive superiority in problem-solving and decision-making. (Kanter, [1977] 2008, p. 22)

Feminine behaviors – timidity, compassion, and the like – were perceived to be ineffective in a managerial role. Therefore, in the corporate environment Kanter saw, males – who are more likely than females to exhibit masculine behavior – are advantaged.

The military as a whole is a highly gendered occupation, privileging masculine behaviors and attitudes (see, e.g. Gat, 2000). In general,

Military service offers men unique resources for the construction of a masculine identity defined by emotional control, overt heterosexual desire, physical fitness, self-discipline, self-reliance, the willingness to use aggression and physical violence, and risk-taking, qualities tightly aligned with the military (Higate, 2002, 2007; Higate & Hopton, 2005; Hockey, 2002; Padilla & Riege Laner, 2002; Regan de Bere, 2003; Siebold, 2001). These qualities are also in line with the hegemonic ideal (Connell, 1987, 1995, 2000, 2005). (Hinojosa, 2010, p. 180)

There is a large literature which will not be explored here arguing both for the necessity for the privileging of masculine traits in the military, and against the social violence done by this occupational gendering to women who participate in the military. Social violence includes everything from sexual assault to discrimination in promotion. This article recognizes the (masculine) gendering of the military as highly problematic, but accepts it as a given for purposes of the argument here.

In any gendered occupation, successful performance of the occupation requires exhibition of behavior of the dominant gender. Such behavior has historically been conflated with a sex category in the United States. In these heavily gendered occupational environments, the non-dominant gender participants are usually marked by verbal reference to the non-dominant sex: male nurse, female firefighter and the like. As Knarr, Turnley, Stewart, Rubright and Quirin's (2014) team (of which the author was a part) said during briefings of their work, true gender integration will have been achieved in SOF when there are no "female special operators," just "special operators." At that point, the occupation (special operations) is no longer gendered.

THE THIRD GENDER

Problems of identity and interaction can arise when social behavior is defined and described by only one dimension, such as gender. These problems have emerged for females in the American military when their participation in the battlespace was defined by the military community only (or primarily) by sex/gender.

The earlier section on sex and gender argued that gender is performative, or something that one does rather than part of what one is, like sex category. If this is the case, gender can be separated from sex and used to construct or create an identity. And if gender can be used as part of an identity constructed through performance, the possibility exists for the presence and play in experience of aspects of identity other than gender.

Intersectionality and Identity

The notion of multiple elements simultaneously at play in the construction of an identity was introduced to identity studies through feminist theory, specifically through

Crenshaw's ([1989] 2018) article on the experiences of discrimination by Black women. She took issue with the way in which racial discrimination was conceptualized.

With Black women as the starting point, it becomes more apparent how dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis. (p. 140)

Crenshaw ([1989] 2018) argued that Black women's experience of discrimination is not just a function of their skin color. Rather, she claimed, it is the interaction of race and gender through experience – the intersection of discrimination in the two domains – that creates the unique experience of the Black woman. She pointed out that if subordination (or discrimination) can occur along multiple axes, the experience of the Black man can be recognized as a different experience than that of a Black woman, although both may experience discrimination. He experiences Black-ness and male-ness; she, Black-ness and female-ness.

The two experiences, Crenshaw says, are not comparable. She puts it this way:

Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. (Crenshaw, [1989] 2018, p. 140)

Anthias (2008) took the concept of intersectionality further and added social class as experienced by ethnic minority women:

Here class, gender and 'race' inequalities were treated as separate but as being experienced simultaneously... Intersectional approaches... [treat] each division as constituted via an intersection with the others (Collins, 1993, 1998, Anthias and Yuval Davis, 1992, Crenshaw, 1994, McCall, 2001, Anthias, 2002, 2005 to name a few). (p. 13)

While some aspects of intersectionality defined as a concept of identity as constituted by the intersection of various domains, are still contested (e.g. Nash, 2008), intersectionality has been adopted into identity theory, and extended to domains beyond race and gender.

Intersectionality, the Third Gender, and CSTs

In the context of SOF, consider intersectionality as it plays out as follows. Members of elite SOF teams are simultaneously a) male (or soon perhaps female); b) members of the U.S. military; c) members of one of four military services; d) special operators; e) specialists (a medic, explosives ordnance disposal [EOD] technician, etc.) and so on. Intersectionality theory argues that any member of an elite special operations team operating in a battlespace exhibits an identity that is constituted in some way of the intersection of these elements through engagement with an Other. That Other may be a member of his or her own force, a coalition force, an indigenous force, or a member of a civilian population. The experiences of female Cultural Support Teams (CSTs) and female members of Military Intelligence Support Operations (MISO) teams show that the intersection of these elements of identity in the battlespace can yield some surprising results.

Despite the ban on females in combat positions in American forces until January 2016, American females have operated in the battlespace in Iraq and in Afghanistan in various capacities for several years. They also have, in some contexts, been considered part of the

special operations community. There therefore is some proxy data on how female special operators may be perceived in a combat environment.

The Army's Cultural Support Teams (CSTs), and their equivalents in other services, such as the Marines' Female Engagement Teams (FETs), are examples of a capability that SOF, as part of the military, acquires and deploys to counterbalance its own overwhelming masculinity. CSTs are all-female military teams that special operators take with them into a battlespace when they believe they will have need of feminine gendered behavior, and therefore of females. According to the CST website, <http://www.soc.mil/CST/about.html> accessed March 2018, the task of a CST is to "engage a host nation's female and adolescent population in support of ARSOF [Army Special Operations Forces] where their interaction with male service members may be deemed culturally inappropriate."

In assigning a space of action delimited in these terms to the members of the CST's, the military has identified the members of these teams unidimensionally as females exhibiting gendered behaviors, as women. However, it also has essentialized their definition of "women-ness" by assigning it *a priori* rather than recognizing it as a class of behaviors that emerges as a function of interaction with Others, as described in the preceding discussion on gender. Not surprisingly, when deployed many of these women discovered that their identity as played out in the battlespace was significantly more complex.

The following discussion draws heavily on the work of Doan and Portillo (2017) to illustrate this complexity. Doan and Portillo (2017) conducted focus groups and interviews with members of CSTs and female members of MISO (collectively, as near-as-possible proxies for female special operators), and with male members of the Army Special Forces about specific aspects of their deployment experience. The perception of the identity of the American military women by indigenous forces and other personnel that was reported by Doan and Portillo (2017) is particularly relevant to this discussion.

One of the women in a CST said during a focus group that

Being perceived as not equal in Afghanistan—because you're female—is definitely something that I was like, wow this is going to be a huge challenge because they don't view women the same. But then at the same time, you wear this uniform and it actually makes you significantly different. What I've told the CST courses, and what I've learned on my own also is they do look at you like a different gender. It is truly not like a female that they understand. So when they talk to you, it's approaching a completely different species. So I had the benefit of being able to talk on—not necessarily the same playing field—but a different playing field. And being able to have that unknown on their side allowed them to talk a little bit more freely as opposed to being perceived as an Afghan female and talking to those females only in a certain way. So I was able to actually engage in conversations with Afghan men. (Doan & Portillo, 2017, p. 242)

In this instance (and in others elicited during the Doan & Portillo, 2017 study and also through work with the FETs [Broadwell, 2009; Dyvik, 2014]), indigenous personnel interacting with the CST members saw first not sex category but a uniform and a position that identified the American as a member of a Western military. "Male" might have been assumed by local personnel at the initial instant of contact since local Afghan and Iraqi behavioral (gender) expectations precluded females from combat. The person in uniform – who was female but yet was in a combat role, confounding and confusing local definitions of gender – thus took on aspects of a "third gender," clearly not male, but yet not fully female.

After deployment, American military females defined their identity in the battlespace along similar lines:

Female soldiers ranked their primary identity as American 41% of the time (n = 44), as a soldier 31% of the time (n = 35), as a Western female 18% of the time (n = 20), and as a female 14% of the time (n = 15). In response to our question about a 'third gender', only 25 (21%) respondents indicated that this did not describe their experience at all. (Doan & Portillo, 2017, p. 243)

In terms of both perceptions by Others and in their own eyes, the identity of CST, FET, and female MISO members in that battlespace was colored as much by their nationality and uniform as it was by their sex category. Although the greatest advantage for the females over the males was in dealing with local women, most of the members of the CST did not feel at a disadvantage when dealing with local men.

Such feelings and perceptions are not surprising to the author, for it is a position not uncommon in anthropological fieldwork. It is particularly true in areas where behavior is relatively gendered, that is, where sex category is strongly linked to behavioral expectations. Researchers usually live as members of the community they study, but come from environments where gender-related behaviors are quite different than local practices. For example, the author lived with a local family in Bandung, Indonesia during her fieldwork experience. As a 27-year-old unmarried female with no children, she did not conform to local behavioral expectations which expected her to be married and parenting at her age. Further marginalized by her white skin and blond hair, she was assigned the honorific "*Tante*" ("aunt" in Dutch, the language of the colonizers), and allowed free movement among men's groups and women's groups at various formal and informal social occasions. Conversations with colleagues upon return to the U.S. showed her that her "third gender" experience was not unique in this context. In the highly gendered world of the military, however, this has come as a surprise.

Doan and Portillo's (2017) reporting on the male's perception of females in the battlespace may provide a little insight into the surprise. Interestingly, the perception of the American females by the American males was quite different than the self-perception of the American females. The American females believed that they had access to spaces denied to men because they were female, yet did not sacrifice the ability to project power in a masculine arena in certain cases because of the "third gender" assignment. They thus strengthened the force. The American males, however, perceived these American females quite differently. They saw them as potential weakeners of the (American) force, both from a capabilities standpoint and from the standpoint of the perception of the indigenous forces with whom they had to work.

The concern of the American males was clear about the impact of appearing with American females in a peer role, particularly on the members of the indigenous population amongst whom they had to project force:

Green Berets expressed genuine concern that American women's social positioning in these patriarchal societies would restrict the areas where teams could work or undermine the mission completely. Diego...offered an observation that was representative of these sentiments, "I can't go to a tribal leader and say, sir I know what your perceptions are [about women] but they're just here to help...If I tell him she's a member of my detachment, she is Special Forces, she is a Green Beret, she is equal to me, I may lose respect immediately." (Doan & Portillo, 2017, p. 246)

American males assumed indigenous forces would perceive females in terms of the categories and gender assumptions that the American forces had been taught that they held before they arrived in

theater, e.g. that Iraqis and Afghans believed that females were inferior to males in many aspects. As the Special Forces operators acted on these assumptions, about a third of female soldiers reported in a survey conducted by Doan and Portillo (2017) that American soldiers excluded them from interaction with indigenous personnel. This was about as often as members of the local population themselves refused interaction (Doan & Portillo, 2017, p. 247).

The American male Special Forces operators talked about the performance of American females in or their entrée to their own units in very different terms than those they used when describing how American females would be perceived by indigenous personnel. The concerns the operators expressed in this context were primarily in the area of physical capabilities and associated performance, rather than cultural categories of relative status. Doan and Portillo (2017) also noted that the fluidity that characterized the identity of the CST members was “largely invisible to male soldiers” (Doan & Portillo, 2017, p. 247). Doan and Portillo (2017) summarized the difference perceptions as follows:

American male soldiers discussed gender hierarchies in the U.S. military in terms of the inherent biological differences between men and women, but they attributed gender hierarchies in other countries to cultural factors. (Doan & Portillo, 2017, p. 246)

This discussion will return to the perception of self in biological or physiological terms as described by these Special Forces members later.

The recognition of the “different playing field” or the third gender, demonstrates the usefulness of the concept of intersectionality as described by Crenshaw ([1989] 2018) to illustrate the distinctness of the experiences of Black women. The American military members of the CSTs (all females) and the female members of MISO developed an identity created out of the unique intersection of their femaleness with other dimensions of experience: “Many women stated that the intersection of their Western, female, and military identities provided unexpected benefits overseas, giving them access to local male and female populations” (Doan & Portillo, 2017, p. 243).

The members of the CSTs were deployed because of something they brought to the battlespace that the elite SOF teams to which they were attached could not provide themselves: female-ness and associated feminine behaviors. However, this pre-assigned category was assumed to exist separate from other elements of the CST members’ identity, such as their membership in the military or their nationality. Just as the experience of a Black man is different than that of a Black woman although both are discriminated against because of their Black-ness, so is the experience of an American military woman different from an American military man. In the battlespace, it was military membership and nationality that took precedence over sex in the construction of the American women’s identity by indigenous personnel: hence the third gender. In some parts of the world, it is difficult conceptually to add “female” to American and military, while “male” is easily added.

NEGOTIATED IDENTITY

This discovery of a new reflection of identity for the American military female in this particular context underscores the importance of avoiding static, *a priori* categories such as military status and nationality. Even constructions like nationality can vary based on the place and time of their expression. A first-generation American of Mexican heritage may have a very different

experience of “American-ness” than a first-generation American of Swedish heritage living in Minnesota. To avoid the essentialism of identity categories such as “American” and to accommodate variations in the ways in which categories such as these are experienced, identity theorists have introduced more constructivist and fluid approaches to the theoretical landscape than intersectionality allows. Under these more fluid approaches, identity is negotiated (see, for example, Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Swann, Johnson, & Bosson, 2009) or it is contextually designed (see, for example, Anthias, 2002; 2008).

Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) describe identity negotiation as “an iterative process where the individual endeavors to come to a perceived consensual understanding of his or her identity with those whose opinion is valued” (p.126). Treating identities as negotiated allows a look at the processes by which people establish mutual explanations and expectations of each other (Swann, et al., 2009).

The identity negotiation formulation follows in the interactionist tradition in that it assumes that behavior grows out of the interplay between self, situation, and other. (Swann & Bosson, 2008, p. 451)

In this paradigm, the focus is as much on the *process* of identity formation as it is on the identity itself. Context – spatial, temporal, and experiential – becomes important.

TRANSLOCATION POSITIONALITY AND IDENTITY

Contextually designed identities also are examined under the rubric of “translocational positionality,” which recognizes both the processual nature of identity formation and the fluidity of the context within which it takes place:

‘translocational’ referred to social spaces defined by hierarchies and social boundaries, and ‘positionality’ referred to the process and outcomes of relationships in particular social practices and interactions. The concept of translocational positionality addresses issues of identity in terms of locations which are not fixed but are content, meaning and time related and which therefore involve shifts and contradictions. (Anthias, 2008, p. 5)

Elsewhere, Anthias (2002) points out that “Positionality relates to the space at the intersection of structure (as social position/social effects) and agency (as social positioning/meaning and practice)” (Anthias, 2002, p.501–502). Positionality thus is both a reference to a position in a social structure and the process of creating that position. He also suggests that

The focus on location (and translocation) recognizes the importance of context, the situated nature of claims and attributions and their production in complex and shifting locales. It ... references the complex nature of positionality faced by those who are at the interplay of a range of locations and dislocations in relation to gender, ethnicity, national belonging, class and racialization (see Anthias, 1998). (Anthias, 2002, p. 502)

Taking the essentialist elements of intersectionality such as military status or nationality, and perhaps using them in some way as the basis for negotiated identities, and recognizing that those identities will shift based on the particular social context in which an interaction takes place begins to illustrate the complex nature of identity formation. Identity is as much about identity formation and the nature of the situational engagement as it is about the identity itself.

It is about the shifting shapes of the funhouse mirrors as much as it is about the reflection in those mirrors. Just as a different shape will yield a different reflection, so will a different time and space yield a different definition of identity.

THE DESIRED REFLECTION

Accepting that the military is a heavily gendered (masculine) environment, and accepting for purposes of this argument that the behaviors and attitudes promoted by such a gendered orientation are useful (i.e., effective) for the wielding of state-sponsored force, raises some interesting questions relevant to the integration of females into American SOF. Special operations forces are often categorized as the “elite of the elite.” They are seen as taking men from the right-hand tails (the high end) of normal male distributions of capability in various dimensions (Spulak, 2007). This creates a single-sex occupation populated by those who are the “best” in areas usually culturally attributed to males, such as physicality. This creates a highly gendered occupation where gender is defined by certain attributes such as physicality and by masculine characteristics such as aggression. What, then does the acceptance of females mean for the masculinity (not the male-ness) of the force? If females can do it (whatever “it” is), does that make it less masculine? Do mission requirements really require behavioral performances or physical capabilities usually only ascribed to males? Does outstanding performance of these activities thus require extra-ordinary demonstration of masculine behaviors? Does it then follow that members of these elite SOF teams are “men amongst men?” If so, how does the assignment of a female to an elite special operations team affect performance? And where is there even conceptual space for females?

Capability

When asked to provide a recommendation to the Secretary of Defense as to whether or not special operations should be opened to females, the Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) commissioned a study to “illuminate the specific OS [occupational specialties]/unit aspects of mixed-gender team dynamics that may potentially compromise mission effectiveness” (Knarr et al., 2014, p. 5). The study by Knarr et al. (2014) was in response to this request. As mixed gender American SOF teams did not exist at the time of the Knarr et al. (2014) study, the study looked at teams whose mission or performance space had aspects analogous to those found on SOF missions. These proxy teams included high-altitude mountaineering teams, Arctic over-wintering teams, teams studied by research performed by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration for long-distance space flight, elite wilderness firefighting teams (Smokejumpers), Federal Bureau of Investigation Special Weapons and Tactics teams, and Canadian women who were admitted to Canadian special operations teams.

The study found there does not appear to be any inherent performance barrier to the inclusion of females on these types of teams (Knarr et al., 2014). Although numbers are extremely small, and so results must be caveated, small gender-integrated teams appear to perform as well as single-sex teams in dangerous austere environments. This finding does not mean that gender-integrated teams perform in the same manner as they did prior to integration. Females may perform tasks differently than males because of physical limitations (see, for example, Britton, 2000, p. 429; Ely & Meyerson, 2010), but in the end, females as well as

males have summited Everest or fought fires on gender-integrated teams. It also does not mean that the teams are free from sexual harassment. However, the study did identify that it is possible for such teams to perform effectively with mixed gender membership.

Although the Knarr et al. (2014) study showed that, in general, sex- and gender-integrating the teams did not impact the performance of the teams studied, the position of special operations elite teams at the apex of performance in an occupation as highly gendered as the military raises some additional questions. If the self-images special operators have created is one of males who have succeeded in reaching what many see as the apex of a highly (masculine) gendered occupation, is there room for females in that description? How would integration change the self-image of the men and their teams and so change their identity?

Recall that the members of Special Forces that Doan and Portillo (2017) interviewed (who all were males) claimed that their concerns about females in their units revolved around possible compromises to their own projection of force by the (assumed) perception by indigenous personnel of the Americans' weakened capabilities because of their inclusion of females, and concerns about the actual weakening of their own force by females who do not have the physical capabilities to perform certain missions. It is telling in this context that BUD/s (Basic Underwater Demolition/SEALs training), the selection and assessment gateway for candidates for Navy SEAL teams, is called by many "the most difficult physical test in the military." The Army Special Forces selection and assessment courses come close to being as physically challenging as BUD/s, and share a similarly high attrition rate. Chisholm (2008) also suggests that:

Physical strength continues to be central to creating the soldier in Special Forces. It also continues to be used as the main barrier to women participating both in the combat arms and within Special Forces. Male interviewees in Special Forces and combat arms all expressed that women are not discriminated against but they simply cannot meet the physical standards set and backed by a "complicated and expensive process" (O'Keefe, 2001: 50) incorporating scientists and focus groups made up of subject matter experts. (Chisholm, 2008, p. 115)

The emphasis on the physicality of special operations selection procedures and the centrality of physical strength in the special operators self-construct sets up an echo chamber within the military for the biological/physiological argument against females in these elite units, introduced earlier in this discussion by the Special Forces participants in the Doan and Portillo (2017) study.

The concern held by American SOF operators about the impact of females in their units on the presentation of force was partially challenged by the third gender concept. It also could be addressed through a more nuanced and less flat teaching to members of Special Forces of concepts such as gender and identity and how they might be leveraged and engaged in the battlespace and elsewhere.

The second concern, the concern about the below-par physical capabilities of females and the consequent weakening of the force, was recognized and addressed by the Commander of USSOCOM as he was collecting data on which to base his recommendation of opening/not opening positions to women. At the same time the Knarr et al.'s (2014) study was commissioned, the Commander commissioned a second study (Szayna et al., 2015) which was designed to assess the then-current special operations selection and assessment programs, and ensure that the requirements were mission-based and gender-neutral. Both the Szayna et al. (2015) and the Knarr et al. (2014) study found that for full acceptance of females on the teams they studied, physical standards must be the same for all team members (gender-neutral) and must be based on job-derived requirements. However, it is important to note that:

Even where some women are able to compete and even beat men, they are still judged as being inferior where the visible “mass” of women is typically seen to be slower and less capable than men. This is accentuated where women are sent to branches such as the infantry corps to fill quotas and not selected based on their physical abilities. (Henecken, 2017, p. 215).

Cohesion

Many arguments against integration of all kinds (racial, sexual) in the American military have revolved around yet another concern: the impact including the excluded group would have on group cohesion. The American military has a long history of concern with the cohesion of its units, and has used the cohesion argument as grounds for exclusion of certain groups as recently in the debate in the 1990s about allowing homosexuals to serve. Although now rescinded, part of the legislation barring homosexuals from the military is illustrative in this regard:

One of the most critical elements in combat capability is unit cohesion, that is, the bonds of trust among individual service members that make the combat effectiveness of a military unit greater than the sum of the combat effectiveness of the individual unit members. (U.S. Code Title 10 §654(a)(7))

There is a substantial body of literature on cohesion; a full review of that literature is outside of the scope of this discussion. (For additional depth in this area, see, e.g., MacCoun and Hix (2010); Szayna et al. 2015; also the list of references in Knarr et al. (2014), n.132). For purposes of this argument, one of the important and relevant points is the distinction most studies of cohesion today make between task and social cohesion. The following definitions from MacCoun (1993) delineate the differences:

Social cohesion refers to the nature and quality of the emotional bonds of friendship, liking, caring and closeness among group members. A group is socially cohesive to the extent that its members like each other, prefer to spend their social time together, enjoy each other's company, and feel emotionally close to one another.

Task cohesion refers to the shared commitment among members to achieving a goal that requires the collective efforts of the group. A group with high task cohesion is composed of members who share a common goal and who are motivated to coordinate their efforts as a team to achieve their goal. (p. 291)

Although there are no studies of cohesion in special operations teams, Rosen suggests that small isolated teams of men, such as special operations teams, may create very strong bonds, leading to a form of social cohesion she calls hypermasculinity – “expressions of extreme, exaggerated, or stereotypic masculine attributes” (Rosen et al., 2003, p. 326). A rejection letter written in 1969 to American climber Arlene Blum, denying her request to join a mountaineering expedition in Afghanistan, captures the expression of these values in the pre-1970's sport and suggests the possibility of a hypermasculine environment:

One woman and nine men would seem to me to be unpleasant high on the open ice, not only in excretory situations but in the easy masculine companionship which is so vital a part of the joy of an expedition (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/09/magazine/arlene-blums-crusade-against-household-toxins.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&).

Robertson (2016) discusses some of the 'darker' sides of hypermasculinity in the military in an examination of the Navy's Tailhook '91 scandal. In all cases, hypermasculinity is presented as a self-identity that privileges gender-related behaviors over other identity dimensions.

Operating as elite members of a highly gendered occupation, it would not be surprising if SOF operators would exaggerate some of the defining characteristics of the occupation as a whole and use them as the core of their own identity. Acknowledging that there is no direct research on cohesion in SOF teams, Knarr et al. (2014) also suggested that conditions were in place for the development of high social cohesion, perhaps expressed as hypermasculinity.

The close-knit social environment of the teams, the gendered nature of the military occupation and the elite status of the teams in that occupation, combined with the isolation experienced on deployment has the potential to allow these all-male teams to develop high social cohesion with the attendant dangers of hypermasculinity. (Knarr et al., 2014, p. 50)

Contrary to the message sent by popular films such as “Band of Brothers,” that strong social cohesion such as that found among small groups of men is critical for success in the battlespace, the expression of that cohesion through syndromes such as hypermasculinity may be counterproductive. MacCoun and Hix (2010) reviewed several studies which argued that “it is social cohesion rather than task cohesion (or together with low task cohesion) that is responsible for any negative effects” of cohesion on team performance (p.143). In fact, Knarr et al.’s (2014) study of cohesion as it relates to special operations elite teams found evidence to suggest high levels of task cohesion along with social cohesion on the teams:

The research also suggested that factors found on special operations teams such as the interdependency of team members, the complexity of the tasks, and the stressful environments would lead to very high levels of task cohesion. (Knarr et al., 2014, p. 50)

Since the preponderance of research shows that an emphasis on task cohesion can override issues that may be caused by social cohesion, it is possible that any hypermasculinity that might be present on SOF teams would be overridden through a focus on mission and the task cohesion such a focus could stimulate. This area is ripe for further research.

Integration concerns

Szayna et al.’s (2015) survey of then-current SOF members identified three primary concerns regarding the integration of women into SOF:

First, many SOF personnel were concerned that standards would fall. Second, many SOF personnel were concerned that integrating women into SOF units would erode unit cohesion. Third, many SOF personnel were concerned that integrating women into SOF units would reduce the availability of leaders to resolve conflict between unit members (e.g., leaders might be less willing to engage in managing conflict between men and women in an integrated unit than in an all-male unit). (p. xii)

The concern with the importance of standards is understandable in an occupation that operates in extremely demanding physical environments. That importance is underscored by the descriptions of the special operations selection and assessment courses as “the hardest physical test in the military” and by their high attrition rates. However, Americans associate physicality with males, making it a highly masculine trait. The American tendency to collapse sex and gender,

to merge the behavioral trait (the physicality) with sex definition (male-ness), makes special operations a highly masculine, or gendered occupation. Participation in special operations thus can lead to the development of an identity heavily rooted in gender.

The author, as a small-stature female, experienced a very strong presentation of this hypermasculinity in teaching environments on non-physical subjects with SEALs, particularly with younger and newer members. In classes of young recruits who had just passed BUD/s, body language and self-presentation strongly presented masculinity and exclusion of females, including the instructor. It often took a full hour of the 4-h class to convince the class that the author had something of value to offer, and for them to relax, change the body posture, and begin to engage.

An identity predicated on the physical capabilities of males and espoused by individuals who rank as excellent on valued aspects of performance in a highly gendered occupation, reflect a funhouse mirror image of a very strong masculine identity. Some, like Dyvik (2014), argue that in these hyper-gendered environments, the non-dominant gender would need to “become” the dominant gender through exhibition of behaviors required for success. In such an environment, she argues, integration does not really happen. The females simply “disappear” as they become like males through the exhibition of masculine behavior.

EXPANDING THE FORCE

Until there are females who can pass the physically and otherwise demanding assessment and selection courses in the various services, the military services “contract” or “buy” capabilities they believe only a female can fill. This explains the SOF lifecycle of the CST program and the marginality of the CST participants in the special operations community.

The CSTs run by US Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) are an example of a capability that is “acquired” by an Army Special Forces ODA when necessary, and released when the need is over. Although CSTs are under the command of the Army’s Special Operations Command (USASOC), this same web information page (<http://www.soc.mil/CST/about.html> accessed March 2018) says that they “serve alongside special operations forces...” It is made clear that, in this context, CSTs are not considered special operations forces. In fact, CSTs and several other capabilities are often referred to by the narrower SOF community of members of elite teams as “enablers” – that is, they are something that enables something else to be done, not the thing that needs to be done. And it is that which they enable – the mission of the special operations forces, the activities of the operators – that is the important activity. Femeness and feminine gender-related behaviors are institutionally sidelined, partially through the provision of an identity. “Enabler,” not “do-er,” is yet another reflection of self, an identity the women of the CSTs see.

Examination of the self-definition of “elite” is a useful way to begin the exploration of potential problems in this arena. What makes SOF elite in a particular national environment? Is it race? Class? American SOF define it physiologically or biologically, a definition which became conflated with gender, partially because of the gendered nature of the military occupation. In other countries, the key identity dimension may be different. Other countries such as Norway and Canada already have females on their special operations forces [Editors’ note: as the Steder and Rones article in this issue suggests, inclusion does not equal integration within Norwegian SOF], although even in those cases, participation may not be on equal terms.

If and when females are able to pass the grueling physical tests required for selection to the elite American special operations teams, “feminine stuff” will no longer be an “enabling capability” but an integral part of the team and of its self-definition. Research (Knarr et al., 2014) says this re-definition is possible, but difficult: “there is the potential for the introduction of females, a dimension of diversity, to have a negative impact on cohesion in the near term, but no lasting effects” (Knarr et al., 2014, p. 50). A RAND study for the Department of Defense in 1997 (Harrell & Miller, 1997) suggested that:

... gender differences alone did not appear to erode cohesion. Cohesion was reported high in units where people believed the command emphasized unity and the importance and necessity of all members and divisions [organizations] in accomplishing the mission. (p. 54)

Phrasing it negatively, the Szayna et al.'s (2015) study reached the same conclusion:

we expect that integrating women into SOF units has the potential to reduce unit cohesion if female SOF personnel are not perceived as competent and are not accepted as full members of their teams. (p. 75)

As noted earlier, studies of females who have succeeded in physically demanding professions have often found that the female changed the way tasks were performed in order to accomplish an objective with fewer physical resources. Each of these approaches to identity discussed here could be used to understand barriers or opportunities to expanding elite units in various dimensions as their mission expands.

FUNHOUSE MIRRORS

This article has only scratched the surface of possible ways to engage with concepts of identity by using these concepts to illustrate the complexity of integrating women onto American SOF elite teams. It showed multiple reflections of American military females attached to special operations teams: as a “third” gender capable of access the men did not have; as potential force “weakeners”; as enablers, rather than do-ers; and as threats to social cohesion.

With its brief presentation around the “third gender” and other aspects of identity, this article aimed to show that essentializing an element of identity – taking “female-ness” out of its performative context, for example – runs the very real risk of losing an understanding of how that dimension of identity would play out in a “real” social environment and battlespace. The introduction of other ways to think about identity such as negotiated identities, and translocational positionality, turned identity into a process rather than an attribute. The discussion of these alternate conceptions of identity recognized the impact fluidity and the constant change associated with social context can have on constructs of identity. The discussion of the military as a gendered occupation and of SOF’s place in it suggested the presence of hypermasculinity, and further problematized the addition of females to the teams through the strong challenge they are assumed by the teams to offer to their self-images.

All of these reflections of the American females in the battlespace are “true.” The challenge for any organization is to identify those aspects of identity that it believes are most constructive for its mission and purpose, and then to cultivate them. In all cases, however, it is important to keep in mind that there just might be one more mirror around the corner, shaped a little differently than those already encountered, which will give a slightly different reflection which might add or subtract to effectiveness in the team’s targeted environment. Learning to look for

those mirrors and working to avoid flat and static descriptions of themselves and of the indigenous peoples with whom they will be engaging (e.g., “Afghan men devalue women”) will help SOF, no matter where they are deployed, to fully use their resources in engagements in the battlespace.

NOTE

1. I would have thought this section superfluous, were it not for the following. In 2014, I participated with a team in briefing the results of a special study completed for the Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) on the socio-cultural dynamics of mixed gender special operations elite teams (Knarr et al., 2014). For several of the senior (and some of the junior) military men in the special operations community that we briefed, the most enlightening and eye-opening take-away was the distinction between sex and gender.

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Diversity and SOF: Boon or Bane?

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This article argues that while SOF combat elements cannot be *made* more inclusive, the overall SOF enterprise can. While diversity for diversity's sake might appear to promise certain advantages, it introduces real sources of concern. These must be carefully considered. But so, too, should the need for combat interchangeability and reflexive trust among operators. Consequently, although SOF combat units may not be able to change in quite the ways that proponents of diversity and gender integration would prefer, successful application of 21st century warfare will require more than just operators, especially since organizations should stay together for longer than a single rotation. It is here where heterogeneity should come into its own, and there are historical precedents for this such as Detachment 101 (an Office of Strategic Services unit during World War II).

Keywords: SOF, special forces, diversity, gender integration, small combat unit, combat interchangeability, reflexive trust

The conundrum this article addresses is that the precise, stealthy, smart application of force requires elite-level operators. Because elite-level operators know they are “it” – and that by passing through a rigorous selection they are much better at precise, stealthy, smart physical force than anyone else – they possess healthy egos. Nor is their having healthy egos necessarily detrimental. High self-esteem may actually be necessary for operators to do difficult and sometimes impossible things. High self-regard, however, does tend to hamper operators from working more inclusively with others. Thus, if working more inclusively with others is essential in the twenty-first century – as many suggest it is – how might operator attitudes be made more compatible with national security needs? How might we square this circle? This article suggests that the answer lies in relegating Special Operations Forces (SOF) operators to a critical supporting, but not a domineering role in national defense.

Ultimately this article argues that while SOF combat elements cannot be *made* more inclusive, the overall SOF enterprise can. Whereas Direct Action (DA) and some Special

This article draws on more than 20 years of observations, as well as discussions with SOF operators and officers in the classroom and in the field (to include in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Sahel, and the Horn of Africa). One caveat is that I generalize about SOF, which is always problematic. Even when talking about U.S. SOF, the SOF “tribes” are very different from one another. Unfortunately, trying to account for their differences would yield several books and would require a very different article. Also, U.S. foreign policy is very different from that of other countries. I daresay our American “strategic personality” is as well. Consequently, U.S. SOF might best be used as a foil rather than as a model for other SOF, such as Denmark, to follow.

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Reconnaissance (SR) missions require degrees of mutual dependence that militate against greater diversity and inclusiveness, a “one team, one fight, one problem set” approach *would* significantly broaden operators’ appreciation of others. It is no coincidence that this is also what will be required in order to prevail in the twenty-first-century security environment (Simons, 2013).¹

PREMISES AND WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

When it comes to the topic of diversity and the military – and the perception that Western SOFs are too “white” and too male – one would hope that Western defense establishments already recognize the value in placing different types (or categories) of individuals where those individuals’ **comparative advantages** can be put to best use *while also ensuring* that their presence renders the whole greater than the sum of its parts and greater than the sum would be without these individuals.

As it is, SOF operators will typically embrace anything they suspect will grant them an edge and/or help them maintain their edge – from novel technology to new techniques. The only caveat is that whoever or whatever is introduced must provide value without detracting – *or* distracting. At the same time, operators are prone to reject anything they have reason to believe will jeopardize reflexive trust, although “reflexive trust” is neither a doctrinal term nor one they use.

In the following paragraphs, I introduce two concepts: reflexive trust and combat interchangeability. I do so in order to illustrate why standards remain so important and why a degree of homogeneity in certain kinds of operational units matters more than outsiders realize. At the same time, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that changes in the broader environment make the need for heterogeneous non-operators equally imperative. Consequently, it is worth examining instances when operators *have* behaved more inclusively toward others in order to see whether something cannot be gleaned from these examples.

Before delving into these two concepts I ask the reader first to accept certain truisms. For instance, if the only way to ensure that SOF units remain comprised of individuals with elite-level capabilities is to rigorously screen for those capable of sustained elite-level performance, then we should expect candidates who make it through selection to regard themselves *as* elite; after all, thanks to selection, they now *know* they are better than the rest of us at certain critically important tasks. This invariably results in a status differential, one compounded by the fact that, like most other animals, we humans are wired to respect physical prowess, as well as its proxies: size and strength. Indeed, though we might aver that “physical prowess *plus* mental agility” represents the best of all possible combinations, determining how smart others are is always subjective. Judging others’ speed, strength, and stamina is not (Gardner, 1983) (Post, 2013).²

Consider, then, how such qualities are assessed in the combat arms. Not surprisingly, service in the combat arms has long been predicated on physicality. For obvious reasons, stature, speed, strength, and other physical attributes are important, and being able to haul, heave, climb, swim, and/or otherwise cover distance under heavy loads will continue to matter – at least so long as the need to be able to overpower strong, fast, highly skilled opponents *non-remotely* persists. Though even if everyone could be ergonomically, robotically, and/or pharmaceutically enhanced, this would only serve to raise the bar on baseline requirements such that, from operators’ perspective, anyone

who is discernibly smaller, slower, or weaker than that baseline would still *appear* to be less capable and therefore still could not be considered “*the same as*.” Put more simply, while those of us who are smaller, slower, or weaker may have other attributes that make up for our physical deficiencies, “making up for” will never equate to being “the same as.”

COMBAT INTERCHANGEABILITY AND REFLEXIVE TRUST

While it is often said that a team is only as strong as its weakest link, this aphorism actually understates. SOF teams are already small and split teams are smaller still. To operate behind enemy lines and/or to be able to remain covert in tricky settings means teams cannot afford individuals who cannot readily replace one another at essential combat tasks. Instead, because teams risk casualties whenever they face danger (or an adversary), team members need to *know* they can count on one another as **interchangeable combatants**. This interchangeability means that every operator not only needs to possess some necessary set of subsidiary skills – as a medic/corpsman, communicator, engineer, or what have you – but also needs to be capable of being a highly skilled combatant first.

When it comes to combat tasks, interchangeability is key and being able to count on others’ interchangeability represents a bare minimum; operators’ confidence depends on being sure that fellow operators think enough alike that they will act and react sufficiently predictably. Surprisingly, this paramount need for combat interchangeability is seldom mentioned. Yet, both it and reflexive trust have to be considered foundational for units in the combat arms.

What exactly do I mean by reflexive trust? To answer, let me try to limn a hypothetical SOF operator, one whose teammates have passed through the same difficult assessment and selection process as has he (Office of Strategic Services, 1948) (Waller, 1994) (Couch, 2001) (Couch, 2004) (Couch, 2007).³ One reason screening needs to be stringent is because without it operators are left questioning one another’s capabilities when, instead, every operator needs to be able to count on the fact that all operators can perform above (and never just to) SOF’s already extremely high standard. Our hypothetical SOF operator needs to be certain he can count on others’ mental agility, drive, and other equally critical traits SOF selects for, in addition to their strength, speed, and stamina. Ideally, thanks to everyone knowing that everyone else has been put through the same wringer, no operator will have reason to doubt his fellow operators’ abilities, or their judgment.

This knowledge, confidence, and trust only hold so long as selection is rigorous and realistic. If selection *is* rigorous and realistic, our hypothetical operator should be as sure as it is possible to be that his fellow operators will go the same extra mile that he will go to complete the mission and/or to save others’ lives thanks to his knowing that they are made of enough of the same material as he is. In most settings, this kind of mirror-imaging and the conviction that “everyone is just like me” is not just wrong, but imperiling. If others **should be like me**, however, in terms of combat interchangeability, then this degree of solipsism serves an invaluable purpose. Not only does combat interchangeability represent the ultimate heuristic, so that no one has to second guess what others will do, but operators’ conviction that others will perform as they know they would (and vice versa) take duplicability and turns it into an incomparable force multiplier.

To summarize the preceding discussion, under certain circumstances such as when attrition is likely, homogeneity across combat capabilities is not merely useful but necessary.

Homogeneity is why Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) exist: so that no one has to stop and think. Granted, in the actual real world of non-standard events, SOPs will only ever get operators so far – which is precisely where the concept of reflexive trust enters. With reflexive trust, *knowing* that everyone else shares the same standard operating *capabilities* reassures all involved that everyone will strive to cope with the unexpected in equally effective ways (Klein, 1998) (Gladwell, 2005).⁴ SOPs, meanwhile, represent only one dimension of reflexive trust. To examine another critical dimension, we must also consider what disrupts trust.

Most obviously, an individual who cannot perform as expected or “carry his own weight” undermines trust. In addition, so too does anything that suggests someone might be putting something (or someone) above the team or mission. Other sources of doubt can include different allegiances, different values, and/or fears that selection is not effectively screening these out. Such doubts and their effect on trust highlights another truism: suspicions, once aroused, are hard if not impossible to dispel or to ever fully dismiss (Simons, 2004).⁵

Consider the effect of suspicions associated with the specter of other allegiances, whether loyalty to another country or to some supra-national ideology or religion. Here is where actively recruiting certain types of diversity into SOF can prove more problematic than might initially appear. For example, certain countries of origin can pose extremely difficult counter-intelligence challenges, especially when individuals still have relatives back “home.” China, Iran, and Eritrea, to single out three countries, have proven extremely adept at influencing and coercing members of their overseas communities. Thus, to raise an uncomfortable but nonetheless critical concern: even if counter-intelligence agents can reassure operators that their foreign-born and/or “ethnic other” teammates are trustworthy, *should* team members always be at total ease? *Can* they afford never to wonder? One implication of this discussion for future research is to ask operators what *would* raise doubts in their minds, and what kinds of doubts, spurred by what specific concerns, would be hard and maybe even impossible for them to shake?

Different moral sensibilities, never mind different ethnic backgrounds, can likewise lead to radically different assessments of a situation or of a person. Deep-seated differences born of religious or ideological convictions might never surface among teammates. Alternatively, such concerns might first surface only after a third or fourth deployment or mission. What will happen then to reflexive trust? To what extent might different judgments sow doubts about someone’s judgment overall? Or, to what extent might doubts lead to a misreading of someone’s allegiances?

No matter how important it may seem today to ensure that operators are not all white, male, and of European descent, well-intentioned diversity mistakes are easy to make. For instance, Americans often think Koreans will better accept Korean-Americans than Anglo-Americans. Yet if Korean-Americans do not speak Korean, their acceptance can be difficult. Similarly, the argument that 3rd Special Forces Group (SFG), whose focus region is Africa, should have more black soldiers, turns out to be overly simplistic. Often Africans prefer white American counterparts. Alternatively, 3rd SFG probably should try to attract Haitian recruits, given their ability to communicate and excel when working in Francophone West Africa. Or, given the difficulty of learning a language like Somali, it might be prudent to assign Somali-American soldiers to work with Somali populations in the Horn of Africa. Such prudence, however, will only last as long as it is also understood that no Somali will regard anyone else of Somali descent to be impartial since even foreign-born Somalis can be tied to specific clans.

In short, not only can promoting diversity for the sake of fielding diversity introduce more fidelity issues than is commonly acknowledged, but obtuseness about how locals might read the loyalties of those they are interacting with is equally fraught. Another factor worth bearing in mind is that some affiliations, as well as some allegiances, can affect individuals in ways they themselves cannot articulate and thus are incapable of fully disclosing.

As for that other prominent diversity concern, gender, the push for female operators introduces a whole different suite of fidelity issues. There are at least two ways in which the presence of women erodes reflexive trust among heterosexual men.⁶ First, the specter or prospect of sex – and the tension, rivalry, jealousy, favoritism, or appearance of favoritism this often generates – can shatter cohesion and can wreck families, finances, careers, etc. Second, whenever two individuals form an emotionally exclusive bond, this too introduces unpredictable sources of tension and favoritism, and subverts the “one for all and all for one” ethos small units require (Simons, 1997) (Danielsen, 2018).⁷

Without question, adding women to otherwise all-male units can prove invaluable, and SOF elements have been making use of women for special missions for decades. Nor is it hard to imagine a future scenario in which the deployment of an all-female Direct Action unit could deliver a strategic and not just tactical surprise. However to now push for women as full-time operators under the mistaken notion that this is what teams need in order to be able to interact with the more than 50% of the population that is female is fatuous.

Frequently advocates of gender integration cite the role of Combat Support Teams (CST or equivalent units) in Afghanistan and Iraq to prove the worth of having female operators in SOF. In the author’s opinion, little honest reporting about the impact of CSTs has actually been done. Nor does anyone highlight what would have been even more efficacious: to have female local language speakers search and question local women, especially since female interpreters were often already nearby and possessed cross-cultural skills that enthusiastic, but inexperienced young American servicewomen lacked. Interestingly, too, one hears few stories about liaisons between female interpreters and operators, whereas ample anecdotal evidence points to the opposite occurring with CSTs. CSTs’ presence caused at least some teams to have to be pulled from the field and created yet another source of disciplinary headaches for numerous commanders (Simons, Author’s observations).

Unfortunately, none of the dirty laundry associated with the CSTs has been made public.⁸ To be fair, few enterprises of any kind have been willing to admit to gender integration issues unless forced to—witness the #MeToo movement. Nor are individuals in any career field likely to be forthright about politically charged topics these days. Yet without a frank discussion about politically sensitive subjects, whether gender in the U.S. or the acceptance of immigrants in Europe, policymakers who feel strongly about “diversity” will continue to press for changes they think are wise and/or politically prudent. Ironically, by doing so they often end up creating more problems for the very individuals they seek to help. Such problems result by making it seem as though an entire class of individuals requires intercession from without or from on high, thereby confirming that members of whatever category is being singled out (e.g., women, or members of this or that racial or ethnic group) *are not*, in fact, “the same as”—but are lesser; otherwise they would not need outside support (Lemmon, 2015).

The catch associated with diversity is that without external pressure, there may be no other way to broaden who can become a SOF operator. Then again, if those decision makers applying the pressure are not informed about the costs, even the best-intentioned efforts can have

deleterious effects. Such effects are why SOF and other combat arms leaders have a responsibility to remind policymakers and members of the public why we need combat units in the first place: to go into harm's way, be able to absorb casualties, and *still* attempt to prevail. *Combat* is the reason having the same standard operating capabilities matters; *to prevail* in combat necessitates combat interchangeability and reflexive trust.

A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

However, even if we accept the fact that attrition will remain an enduring combat (and training) reality, this does not mean that other features of the broader operating environment are not changing. Up to this point, I have sought to explain why homogeneity in terms of combat capabilities matters. Increasingly, though, operational units require more than just combat-ready operators.

An illustration of such a requirement is a shift that has occurred over the past several decades in U.S. Army Special Forces (SF, numerically the U.S.'s largest SOF component). SF teams used to pride themselves on cross-training and being able to stay autonomous *and* self-reliant for significant periods of time. For example, as late as 1992, teams seldom had more than a single computer in a team room. Three decades ago, SF teams did not need to depend on information technology or other technical specialists to the extent they do now. The contrast with who and what gets sent abroad with teams today is profound. Teams today *cannot* be self-reliant, given their dependence on drones, jammers, Global Positioning System data, laptops, and so on, or on those who can fix them. It is true that teams may end up stuck, on their own, incommunicado and/or in extremis for periods of time. But how many of today's young operators would be able to execute time-sensitive missions without technological enablers? The answer hints at inescapable new dependencies, while the fact that the term "enabler" is used is revelatory of who still considers whom to be "support"—and not "the same as."

There is an interesting parallel between SOF views of enablers today and the views of airmen within air forces. Interestingly, Ezer Weizman, the founder of Israel's Air Force (IAF), was cognizant of a similar status mismatch prior to standing up his country's air force. Weizman knew fighter pilots were bound to view mechanics and other technicians as essential, but still "less than." In order to mitigate this and drive home a sense of mutual indispensability, he sought to reframe teams in the IAF around the plane rather than the pilot (Weizman, 1979).⁹

If we were to wonder what the equivalent of Weizman's approach might be today in relation to SOF, we would likely find ourselves perplexed. SOF is already platform- and capabilities-centric, whether around different means of ingress and egress, the degree to which operations are partnered or non-partnered, or the extent to which operations are (or are not) kinetic. So, what further adjustments might be called for?

SOF experiences over the past 18 years point to several possibilities. If we look to how effective capabilities-based approaches have been, we might conclude they have been far too generic, as though one size or style of counterinsurgency (COIN) or counterterrorism (CT) can possibly fit all. Neither units nor staffs have been tailored *to* specific adversaries. Yet, glaring differences among adversaries exist, such as those among ISIS, the Taliban, and al Shabaab, to pick just three groups that we continue to target. Consider also the regional politics in each of their theaters and the extent to which these vary as well.

Even the most cursory comparison should reveal that just because one set of approaches seems to work against one set of actors does not mean those approaches will succeed elsewhere. The so-called “Surge” of military forces into Iraq is often cited as an example of something that worked well in that country but failed when exported to Afghanistan in subsequent years. One could say much the same about Village Stability Operations (VSO) or the Afghan Local Police (ALP) within Afghanistan; they worked best wherever locals helped initiate them, but rarely worked well where Afghans needed to be bribed or compelled to accept them. Nor has it proven particularly useful to keep SOF units stove piped according to twentieth-century functional areas either, for example, Psychological Operations, Civil Affairs, Special Forces, and so on, as though security, politics, and governance, good, bad, or indifferent, are easily separable.

As a thought exercise, imagine instead if Weizman’s concept of a Team (with a capital “T”) could be mapped onto real-world problem sets circa 2019. Or, imagine if SOF was re-started from scratch. We would doubtless wind up with something very different looking than what constitutes SOF today. SOF’s building block units were designed *seventy-some* years ago, back when World War II veterans (re)formulated special operations forces to meet the challenges of *their* day.

Imagine, too, the synergies to be gained if, for instance, *a* unit was assigned *an* adversary (or a very specific problem set) as its sole, enduring focus. Then, say each unit’s task was to fully resolve its specific problem—as in rendering al-Qaeda, ISIS, al Shabaab or whomever inert—and that that unit was responsible for both planning the campaign *and* seeing it all the way through. Presumably whoever was in command of such a unit would have to go out of his or her way to recruit in individuals with considerably different capabilities and skills. Such capabilities and skills, for the purposes of the argument in this article, would translate into organic heterogeneity from the outset; no one would have to artificially or politically mandate or manufacture diversity from without; it would be “baked in” to SOF units from the outset.

WIDENING THE APERTURE

To some, it might seem that what I have just described can already be found in Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) or Task Forces (TFs). Certainly, JSOC appears to have done a better job of creating a “one team, one fight” approach than have other SOF entities. Among the organizations’ claims to fame are the following attributes: flatter communications, a flattened hierarchy, strong singular leadership, and a singular command structure (Simons, 2017).¹⁰ These attributes are all self-reinforcing. I would add, too, that by developing its own Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Analyze, and Disseminate (F3EAD) methodology, JSOC made clear to analysts, operators, and others alike that they were all mutually indispensable (McChrystal, 2013) (Munsing and Lamb, 2011) (Naylor, 2015).¹¹ Also contributing to JSOC’s “one team, one fight” ethos has been the nature of the mission—TFs go after *high-value* targets; attention – TFs are *national* mission units; and funding – TFs are much better resourced than anyone else. Not only do TFs operate with a sense of urgency, but they likewise live by easily quantifiable metrics. It helps, too, that, when deployed, all personnel work long hours under austere conditions over the course of relatively short deployments. The fact that the work is so compartmented further assists with a “separate but integral” ethos.

JSOC, however, is not without critics. Members of other SOF units have questioned everything from the worth of kill/capture metrics to the promotion rates of what others pejoratively refer to as

“Death Star” commanders to the most senior ranks of SOF command. Stepping back and considering JSOC’s relations with other USSOF “tribes,” we would have to conclude that the inclusiveness that JSOC appears to have attained within itself has not spilled over to others; if anything, its inclusiveness *excludes*. To be sure, some of this is a function of compartmented work but some is attitudinal. Even within its units, there is a perception among non-operators that the same operators who treat them as essential when everyone is overseas treat them as “lessers” when they are all back home. According to non-operators with whom I have interacted, the status differential of “we’re operators; you’re support” invariably reasserts itself, which means it never entirely goes away.

This same attitude can actually be said to suffuse SOF overall: status differences that tend to be sublimated whenever operations are underway, re-surface once the realm of the ideal—which, for operators, involves dealing with pressing real-world, real-time threats—confronts the realities of belonging to a big, slow, endlessly frustrating and compliance-oriented military bureaucracy. In many ways this response is what typically occurs whenever people find themselves in the midst of a crisis: at the outset of an emergency all comers are usually welcome, and the idea that “everyone/everything depends on us” renders the “us” more (rather than less) inclusive. Once the sense of urgency begins to dissipate, however, normal sources of friction resurface, so-called “rice bowl” politics and interpersonal rivalries reemerge, and inclusiveness contracts.

For all of these reasons, then, the TF approach represents only a partial model for how SOF might better incorporate non-operators in the future. On the one hand, there is operators’ default conviction that they are elite by virtue of belonging to an elite that others cannot join without passing through a selection process they cannot pass. Combine this conviction with Direct Action-centricity *and* with operational churn, and it is very difficult to see how SOF’s internal status differentials might shift, especially since instability in terms of where individuals are deployed, who with, and for how many segmented periods of time militates against building trust across functional specialties, never mind separate communities.¹²

Here is where re-casting SOF’s notion of a Team (capital “T”) offers one obvious means of redress. There is a historical precedent for such a different Team approach. Detachment 101 was an early American Special Operations Force and one of the Office of Strategic Service’s most successful units during World War II (Peers, 1963) (Hilsman, 1990) (Sacquety, 2013).¹³ In every respect, Detachment 101 was a one-off. It was only once the unit’s founder, Carl Eifler, was given his “exact” mission—intelligence gathering and sabotage in support of General Joseph Stilwell’s effort to push the Japanese out of Burma—that he and a hand-picked group of two dozen Americans began to build the ultimate “learning organization” in theater. As they knew nothing about Burma, they recruited in anyone they could find who had local knowledge: ‘indigenous Burmese’ and Anglo-Burmese, expatriate mining engineers, and even local Irish priests, and incorporated them for the length of the unit’s existence. Because Detachment 101 was remote and fairly poorly resourced, the unit’s leaders went out of their way to make it indispensable to everyone they thought might be of assistance, from the U.S. Army Air Corps, whose downed pilots the unit’s members helped to recover, to local villagers from among whom it recruited fighters. Throughout, Detachment 101 stayed relentlessly mission-focused. Detachment 101’s focus was so steadfast that once it had accomplished what it was designed to do – help oust the Japanese from Burma – its leaders insisted that it be disbanded; they refused to allow the unit to be re-purposed. They knew that as successful as all of them had proved to be for the three years they served together, Detachment 101 would not succeed as effectively elsewhere.

If we fast forward to the contemporary security environment and the challenges it presents, the example of Detachment 101 suggests a number of possibilities. First, a Detachment 101-equivalent for al-Qaeda (or Afghanistan) should not look like the Detachment 101-equivalent for ISIS (or Iraq/Syria) or the Detachment 101-equivalent for al Shabaab (Somalia). Second, taking a unit that is tailor-made for one locale and one type of mission and sending it elsewhere defies know-your-area-of-expertise common sense. Significantly, too, when Detachment 101's initial team members left the United States for Asia they had no inkling of what their manning, structure, composition, or the like would – or even should – comprise. All they knew was that they would not be able to tackle whatever they were being sent to do on their own—which meant they had no choice but to be inclusively creative.

CONCLUSION

Based on the preceding discussion, where does this leave American SOF when it comes to diversity in our increasingly identity- and diversity-oriented era? Given that eliteness begets attitude, and accepting that combat requires that operators be worthy of one another's reflexive trust *and* be combat interchangeable, SOF combat units cannot become as diverse-looking as some policymakers or members of the public might like. This does not mean, however, that what constitutes a “*Special Operation*” **Team** cannot be re-framed or reconceptualized.

Change to SOF is overdue for several reasons. Chief among these reasons are the following: SOF's DA-centric orientation has not resulted in the wholesale collapse of a single hostile non-state entity. This (non-)result alone suggests the need to try something new. Tailoring units to, and for, specific adversaries represents one possibility. As it happens, such tailoring would also guarantee diversity in both design *and* in personnel.

Another reason to try something different is that without change, policymakers will remain wedded to using SOF to perpetually try to *outdo* hostile non-state actors and groups. There are two problems with trying to outdo others. First, tit-for-tat competition injects operators into a contest they, and the United States and coalition partners, can never definitively win since, by definition, “outdoing” means never being “rid of.” Use of the terms “whack-a-mole” and “mowing the grass” to describe recent efforts underscore the problem. Second, focusing on *outdoing* rather than *undoing* deflects attention from what is actually needed to get adversaries to permanently renounce violence: either the application of more force than SOF can deliver on its own *or* more finesse than operators alone can manage.

Whether we are talking about using more force and/or greater finesse, either or both requires a widening of SOF's aperture, which in turn should help decision makers inside and outside of the SOF community re-conceptualize who can and *should* serve in special operations. For example, if SOF was re-oriented toward *undoing adversaries*, then operators would no longer represent the main effort and missions such as direct action would become just one among a series of tools. Discuss such matters with operators who are veterans of multiple combat deployments today, and much of this is obvious to them. Ironically, what they cannot voice so explicitly is their immutable need for combat interchangeability and reflexive trust. No doubt this is because they have long internalized their need for both, bolstered by the fact that SOF has not yet experienced *serial* small unit failure.

In order to ensure that serial small unit failure does not occur now or in the future, proponents of greater diversity should be reminded of at least four things. First, attrition is a

combat and training reality. Second, *forcing* operators to accept diverse others because that makes SOF look better, and by extension makes politicians and members of the public feel better, defies why SOF combat units exist, which is to undertake the missions others cannot. Third, if the goal is to encourage operators to be more consistently inclusive, the most effective way to do this is to widen SOF's aperture: from force to finesse. Fourth, there are ample *strategic* reasons why such a reconceptualization of SOF is overdue, particularly when we consider the extent to which the past two decades have warped what twenty-first century SOF *should* be capable of, which is to self-organize in such a way as to use all available talent against specific sets of adversaries with the ultimate aim of getting them to implode or, better yet, undo themselves.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

NOTES

1. For a fuller account of the reasons why, see Anna Simons, *21st Century Cultures of War Advantage Them* (Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2013).
2. On the topic of multiple intelligences, see, for instance, Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (Basic Books, 1983). On the challenges of assessing emotional intelligence, which should be considered a 'must' for anyone in a leadership position, see Jonathan Post, "Thickening the Global SOF Network," Masters thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, December 2013.
3. For some now-classic descriptions of selection processes, see *Assessment of Men: Selection of Personnel for the Office of Strategic Services* (U.S. Office of Strategic Services, 1948); Douglas Waller, *Commandos: The Inside Story of America's Secret Soldiers* (Simon and Schuster, 1994); also Dick Couch, *The Warrior Elite: The Forging of SEAL Class 228* (Crown, 2001); *The Finishing School: Earning the Navy SEAL Trident* (Crown, 2004); and *Chosen Soldier: The Making of a Special Forces Warrior* (Crown, 2007) among others.
4. For the significance of training, practice, decision-making during crises, etc., see Gary Klein, *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions* (MIT Press, 1998). Or for a more popular account, see Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (Little Brown and Company, 2005).
5. For an earlier examination of the detrimental impact of any kind of affirmative action, see Anna Simons, "The Evolution of the SOF Soldier" in Bernd Horn, Paul de B. Taillon, and David Last (eds.), *Force of Choice: Perspectives on Special Operations* (Defence Management Series/Queen's Policy Studies Series, 2004).
6. For the most recent set of arguments I have made, see <https://www.c-span.org/video/?425973-1/discussion-focuses-women-combat-roles>
7. For small unit dynamics in U.S. Army Special Forces, see *The Company They Keep: Life Inside the U.S. Army Special Forces* (The Free Press, 1997); for the nature of small unit dynamics in a 'small nation' SOF, see Tone Danielsen, *Making Warriors in a Global Era: An Ethnographic Study of the Norwegian Naval Special Operations Commando* (Lexington Books, 2018).
8. Again, just the opposite. For a much praised, laudatory work that, in memorializing the death of a singular individual, unfortunately whitewashes the CST program, see Gayle Lemmon, *Ashley's War: The Untold Story of a Team of Women Soldiers on the Special Ops Battlefield* (Harper, 2015).
9. See Ezer Weizman, *On Eagles' Wings: The Personal Story of the Leading Commander of the Israeli Air Force* (Berkley Publishing Group, 1979). Or consider what a USAF targeteer once explained to me with pride: his was the truly essential skill; pilots, in his view, were just the delivery mechanism for his effects.
10. For a fuller description, see Anna Simons, *21st Century Challenges of Command: A View from the Field*, (Strategic Studies Institute, 2017).

11. See, for instance, Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (Portfolio/Penguin, 2013); Evan Munsing and Christopher Lamb, *Joint Interagency Task Force-South: The Best Known, Least Understood Interagency Success*, (Institute for National Strategic Studies, Strategic Perspectives 5, 2011); and Sean Naylor, *Relentless Strike: The Secret History of JSOC* (St Martin's Press, 2015).
12. At best, churn introduces individuals many other individuals, who then try to use their relationships as glue whenever they can. Not only is this an unfortunately serendipitous way to conduct military business, but the fact that people have to resort to informal workarounds highlights what is wrong with the system: it fails to effectively accommodate realities on-the-ground.
13. For more, see William Peers, *Behind the Burma Road: The Story of America's Most Successful Guerrilla Force* (Little Brown, 1963); Roger Hilsman, *American Guerrilla: My War Behind Japanese Lines* (Potomac Books, 1990); Troy Sacquety, *The OSS in Burma: Jungle War Against the Japanese* (University Press of Kansas, 2013).

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“Why Make a Special Platoon for Women?”

An Assessment of the Jegertroppen at the Norwegian Special Operations Commando (NORSOC)

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In 2014, the Norwegian Special Operations Commando (NORSOC) established a pilot project named “Jegertroppen” (the Hunter Troop) to recruit more women for operative military service. This unusual approach, integration of women by separating men and women during education, brought national and international attention, including admiration and wonder. This article explores why NORSOC segregated male and female operators, and assess the effectiveness of the segregated approach for recruiting, selecting, and retaining female operators.

Keywords: Recruit, Jegertroppen, Norway, NORSOC, female operator, gender, diversity, segregation, integration

Ever since the dissolution of the union between Norway and Sweden in 1905 has Norwegian women been organized and participated in Norwegian Armed Forces (NorAF). The positive experience with women in NorAF during the Second World War gradually formed the modern role of the Norwegian military leaders as promoters of women in the armed forces, especially in non-combat positions. With more women in non-combat positions, more men could be recruited to combat positions (Steder et al., 2015).

However, this rather opportunistic version of a gender-based resource allocation management model was not agreed upon with the Norwegian politicians. Despite some drawbacks every now and then in the principle discussions that followed in the postwar period, there was a positive trend for more equal treatment of men and women as well as increased opportunities for women in NorAF. Forty years after the end of World War II, in 1985, the Norwegian Armed Forces, as one of the first NATO countries, opened up all military positions to both men and women (Steder et al., 2015).

One remaining and major issue to resolve was equal terms in regards to military service for men and women. NorAF had more or less practiced military conscription for men since 1814 and opened up all positions for voluntary women in 1985. After the end of the cold war, the number of male conscripts slowly dropped to an all-time low in 2002 which boosted the

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principal discussion of equal treatment in regards to military service. Finally, in 2013, the Norwegian politicians decided to change current practice and introduced the selective gender-neutral conscription service in Norwegian Armed Forces, expected to be fully implemented by the fall of 2016. All men and women at the age of 17 are to complete a self-assessment and later evaluated, interviewed and tested (cognitive and physically) by the Norwegian Armed Forces (Køber, 2017). Only those who are found eligible and motivated, currently about 10–15 percent of the cohort, will be selected for one-year military service. After this one year basic training period they are free to apply for a position as profession soldier or further military education.

Despite the fact that all military positions have been open for qualified Norwegian women since 1985, the share of women has always been low or absent in the combat units. About one year after the political decision to introduce selective gender-neutral conscription in NorAF, the commanders of the *Norwegian Special Operations Commando (NORSOC)* decided to introduce an all-female platoon: the *Jegertroppen* (The Hunter troop). This decision generated a starkly divided debate. How can the Norwegian Armed Forces promote selective gender-neutral conscription at the same time as they are establishing an all-female platoon, denying men to participate?

This article will examine the main reasons why NORSOC chose to organize a separate (pilot) platoon for women only. Then it will be explored whether the *Jegertroppen*, that is a pilot project that ends in 2019, seems to be a good approach and measure to recruit, select and retain women for combat positions. Why did women apply to the *Jegertroppen* and what were their expectations of the one-year military service? Given that gender-differentiated physical requirement, special treatment and affirmative action for women have been considered by many to be unfair, how does it feel to complete a separate selection process and serve in a separate platoon for women? And finally, it will be looked into their motivation and desire for future military service. It will also be explained how the “gender-segregated selection and education” was organized, and why it was organized this way.

THE JEGERTROPPE; A PILOT PROJECT BASED ON NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

The *Jegertroppen* – the all-female SOF-platoon – is one of three platoons in the Training Wing at NORSOC. In addition to the *Jegertroppen*, the Training Wing consists of the “traditional” *Fallskjermjegertroppen* (Paratrooper Platoon) and the more advanced second-year education for SOF-operators.¹ The *Fallskjermjegertroppen* was established in 1965 and recruits conscripted soldiers to undergo their first year of military service. To become part of The *Fallskjermjegertroppen* one needs to complete a physically and mentally demanding selection process where as little as one percent of the total number of applicants is taken up as aspirants in the platoon. The *Fallskjermjegertroppen* opened formally for women in 1985 when all positions in the Norwegian Armed Forces (NorAF) opened for women. Some women have attended the rigorous selection competition, but no women have won a position among the selected few in this hard competition. This is the main reason for why the *Jegertroppen* was established in 2014 as a separate platoon for women only (Rones & Steder, 2017).

The *Jegertroppen* is in many ways a unique and groundbreaking project, and the platoon has gained a lot of media attention; both nationally and internationally. For example, an article in *Foreign Affairs* declared that the *Jegertroppen* is “the world’s first all-female special forces” and “the world’s first all-female military training program” (Braw, 2016). However, this is a truth with some modifications.

Women have been used for special and secret operations in relationship building, intelligence gathering and analysis, reconnaissance, human intelligence, courier service and sabotage for many years (Aleksijevitsj, 2014; Hatledal, 2011; Lemmon, 2015). Several countries have also had own units and/or training programs for women within the special forces, and one can find mention of such capabilities from South Korea, China, and Russia. Furthermore, we know that The United Kingdom has extensive experience with female operators in the Special Operations Executive (SOE) during WW2² as well as in their Special Reconnaissance Regiment since 1973,³ and Lemmon (2015) show that the United States has used women in so-called Cultural Support Teams, in support of their special operations.

In short, female special operators are not a new thing. However, their stories and contributions are rarely known or written about and often the women have been put in service without operational training before deployment and operations (Aleksijevitsj, 2014; Hatledal, 2011; Lemmon, 2015). Given this history of women in the military, especially in the special operations and intelligence community, it can be said that what is new and sensational about the *Jegertroppen* is that NORSOC establishes a separate education for women at the same time as it is known to the public.⁴

METHOD AND DATA COLLECTION

When we studied the *Jegertroppen* in the first three years of its existence we found it useful to use a mixed-method approach (Creswell, 2008; Creswell & Clark, 2010). In this period, both the *Jegertroppen* and the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* participated. Parts of the longitudinal survey have been in common with the Army Brigade survey (Hanson, Steder, & Kvalvik, 2016). It gave us a great opportunity to compare the (quantitative) answers from the respondents in the *Jegertroppen* with female respondents in NorAFs Army Brigade.

This article is using only parts of the collected data material and will refer to the selected and used quotes, interviews and data material from report written in Norwegian (Rones & Steder, 2017). Whether the gender-segregated approach is a good measure to educated women has been discussed in two other articles (Rones, 2017 and Rones & Steder, 2018), while this article is dedicated to the issue of female recruitment, selection, and retention.

WHY DID NORSOC CHOOSE TO SEPARATE MEN AND WOMEN?

The *Jegertroppen* appears, at first glance, the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*’s female twin. On the surface, the purpose of the two platoons seems the same. A year in the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* prepares the soldiers for the selection process to the more advanced Special Forces education (the following year – if selected), but this is not the goal for the *Jegertroppen*. So, what is the goal?

The first time the *Jegertroppen* was made official to the public was at a conference in May 2013. The arguments used at the establishment of the *Jegertroppen* were that NORSOC is not diverse enough. “We are a male-dominated unit consisting of members with similar backgrounds” said the NORSOC commander Eirik Kristoffersen when he received the Chief of Defence (CHOD) equality award in 2014 (Forsvaret, 2014) and he continued:

We seek increased flexibility and increased understanding of tomorrow’s challenges. I think that increased diversity can contribute to this. Having said that, we have experienced in a number of conflict areas, among other in Afghanistan, that there is a specific need for women on the front line (Forsvaret, 2014).

Kristoffersen also pointed out that “the need for women has proved particularly clear in the work of training the Afghan Special Police Unit,” a separate unit with female special police officers. In NORSOCs mentoring work with this police force, it proved to be absolutely necessary with “Female mentors to assist the female special police.”

The goal of the *Jegertroppen* is to increase our own capabilities. We believe that recruiting women to Special Forces through an attractive conscription period can contribute to increased diversity and improve our operative capabilities. We do not want to alter the requirements in the selection process, but let the women systematically work towards the same requirements throughout the education period (Forsvaret, 2014).⁵

These arguments suggest NORSOC promotes increased capability through the establishment of the *Jegertroppen*. The recruiting information for the unit, however, conveys a different message. On NorAFs webpage (Forsvaret, 2018) for the *Jegertroppen*-applicants, it says that after completion of the education⁶ period in the unit, the candidates will be “well qualified for further education in NorAF...[and] combat role contracts in all branches.”⁷ The website describes further service in NORSOC in conditional terms: “an opportunity when the unit has open positions available” (Forsvaret, 2018). The message here stands in contrast to the one for male applicants for the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*: “After completing conscription in NORSOC you are well prepared for the advanced SOF-education and a career as an operator at NORSOC. You are also qualified for the NORSOCs reserve and follow-up force.” (Forsvaret, 2018b)

Given these major differences of the future career advancements for female and male operators, it is tempting to assume that the possible vacancies in NORSOC that qualifies from spending on year in the *Jegertroppen* are not in the combat structure, but in the combat support or non-combat support structure. This observation suggests that the overall aim of The *Jegertroppen* has changed since it was initiated, or silently adapted to the outcome that further career opportunities in NORSOCs combat structure are still limited for women.

When asked about this point in interviews, different leaders in NORSOC claimed that increased capability in the combat structure is perceived as the main purpose of the *Jegertroppen*. All other interpretations of the project “*Jegertroppen*” are only supporting the main purpose: preparing and education women in different SOF and combat roles, inside and outside NORSOC.

Leaders interviewed explained that NORSOC has defined infantry skills such as shooting as a very basic and crucial military core competence and promotes the *Jegertroppen* as a result of

that women have not necessarily gained good enough access to this field of competence. Given this perspective, the purpose of the *Jegertroppen* is educational in nature and is simply about making sure that women possess necessary and basic skills (Rones, 2017).

Despite its criticism of the NorAF, and in particular the Army, for failing their ability to recruit and educate women to combat roles, NORSOC accepts little self-criticism, especially on the subject of women's access to military core competence. The lack of acceptance leads us to the main category of reasons for establishing the *Jegertroppen*, namely challenges with physical gender differences in the recruitment, selection, and education process.

NORSOC acknowledges that physical selection criteria and male-dominated selection process have denied women getting access to the basic military education at the traditional *Fallskjermjegertruppen*:

The Fallskjermjegertruppen has always been open to women. But the women haven't succeeded to win a position. It is ten out of thousand applicants that are admitted. (Instructor Training wing) (Rones & Steder, 2017, p. 31)

NORSOC emphasize that it is neither the formal standardized physical tests nor the requirements that prevented women from entering the *Fallskjermjegertruppen*, but the competition in the selection process itself. The selection process at NORSOC is intense and its purpose is to identify the best candidates in terms of attitude, collaborative skills, situational understanding, etc., among the physically fittest applicants. Women and men's results on the military fitness tests in the selection process for military conscription⁸ illustrate which group NORSOC selects "the best" from given their minimum standards (usually around mark 7 on a scale to 9), and how few women it is in this group compared to men. In the top interval (between mark 7 and 9) for endurance, you will find about 41% men and only 3% women. For muscle strength the share is lower, only 24% men and 1% women. The males competing for a position at NORSOC and *Fallskjermjeger-truppen* are all in the top performance group for men at the physical test (Sesjon) before the conscription period starts. There is just a small fraction of women that are in this group (Køber, 2017).

In the three years we studied the selection process at NORSOC, there have been about 1,400 qualified male applicants for the *Fallskjermjegertruppen*. Approximately 300 qualified and participated in the five-week long selection process where they competed for one of the 15 available positions—as little as 1% of the applicants, or approximately 4% of those who showed up for selection qualified for basic SOF-education. The men who compete are in the upper part of men's normal distribution of physical tests, illustrated by a red line and arrow.

According to an instructor in NORSOC "it should be self-evident" (Rones & Steder, 2017, p. 33) that basically no women can be evaluated fairly when competing in the same selection process with the fittest men through several weeks of physical trials. A potential woman candidate must be an extreme "statistical outlier" in the women's normal distribution in order to qualify or be selected for service at NORSOC. If a woman should be so extraordinary that she competed against the extreme fit men, it is likely that she became a lone woman in a male-dominated environment. Accordingly, as Kristiansen (2017) also points out, she will most likely operate individually or as a member of a regular (male) SOF-team, not as a member of a female SOF-team, which was the NORSOCs argument in order to increase its recruiting pool of candidates.

NORSOC employees started to ask themselves the question: “How can we recruit and select the best women for SOF?” (Rones & Steder, 2017, p. 33) NORSOC leaders exhibited no preference for using affirmative action and let a group of selected women compete on male territory and terms. As a result, they came up with the idea that targeted women eligible for military service should compete with each other, not against men. The education should be based on the same physical and operational requirements as earlier, but the selection process is based on women’s physical terms and capabilities. Therefore the process in the *Jegertroppen* will select and educate the best and most motivated women based on women’s physiological criteria, while the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* will select and educate the best and most motivated persons on men’s. The recruitment and selection process for the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* is still open for women, but the *Jegertroppen* is for women only.

One can claim that the *Jegertroppen* is based on an operational need for women who possess military core competence for combat operations where gender matters. One can also claim a pragmatic and partly pedagogical discussion on how to select, prepare and educate women for a male-dominated arena. Instead of a demand-based recruitment of eligible women, who are then put them into operational use without appropriate training, NORSOC has supply-based their recruitment of eager and eligible women well qualified for military education.

WHY DID WOMEN APPLY TO JEGERTROPPEN AND WHAT ARE THEIR EXPECTATIONS?

The *Jegertroppen* is not only an unusual tool of recruitment and selection of women for combat roles (in Norway). A mixture of a transparent and objective presentation of SOF combined with personal invitations/letter to women with effective results from the physical tests, active posts on social media,⁹ a three-day welcome-and-training camp, participating with an information booth at different educational fairs and school visits¹⁰ has proven to be an effective recruitment strategy, with 319 applicants at the beginning of 2014, 174 applicants in 2015, and 222 qualified applicants in 2016. These numbers exceed the results of other recruitment strategies used by the NorAF.

In the month of April every year, applicants to the *Jegertroppen* are invited to a three-day welcome-and-training camp at Rena military camp. The applicants get a tour of the area, the military base and they are presented for some of the activities that the *Jegertroppen* offers. The primary objective of this weekend camp is to prepare the applicants on what awaits them a few months later, demystify the selection process, and guide them into the physical training exercises to prevent injuries at a later stage. With the right amount of physical training in a 10-week period before selection, one is better prepared and the risk of injuries occurring reduced.

On average there are around 60 applicants present at the welcome-and-training weekend every year. In one of the sessions over the weekend, they are being asked to answer a short electronic survey on their telephone, which most applicants do. Here we asked not only about the training camp itself but also about their motivation and thoughts about the *Jegertroppen*. One of the questions was: “Why did you apply for *Jegertroppen*?” They could use their own words in the answer and the vast majority responded. On average, their responses were short: 125 characters or 22 words. The shortest was less than 30 characters and the longest was over 300 characters (60–75 words). The latter described several reasons in detail:

I have always found the Norwegian Armed Forces as an attractive workplace and now I have the opportunity to be a part of it. I seek a challenging military service that can provide me the best foundation for a further career in NorAF, for example as a conventional soldier i.e., in Telemark battalion.¹¹ I feel that the *Jegertroppen* is something that suits me well and I love challenges and enjoy physical activities. I regard myself to be a little rough, tough and an energetic girl (tomboy) (Rones & Steder, 2017, p. 37)

As illustrated with the example above, we conclude women seek the *Jegertroppen* primarily because they want a challenging, varying and exciting military service where they get to test their own physically and mentally limits. Several respondents also mention that they seek “something extra” from their conscription, not just complete it or “been there, done that.”

Approximately 10% of the survey responders explicitly mention the increased possibility for a further career in the NorAF as one of the main reasons for seeking the *Jegertroppen*. Other reasons mentioned they mentioned were “to be a part of a military unit that obviously regards women as a valuable asset” and that “the Special Forces are a unique asset which I now have a chance to be a part of.” A final reason mentioned is that “it will be a harsh military education together with other women with similar interests and values” (Rones & Steder, 2017, p. 38). In other words, the responder found comfort in completing a military service with women as the majority-group, not as a minority group which is the usual case in the military.

In the following qualitative interviews, among those candidates that qualified and completed the five-week selection process, the reasons for applying and staying motivated throughout the selection process were much the same as the reasons given at the welcome-and-training camp. One difference, however, is the pride of having completed the selection process and being a visible member of a unique unit. Statements in interviews like “it is a hard and demanding selection process that very few are able to complete – something that very few are able to do” and “the opportunity to get a great action-based education in a selected group without the focus on executive training” (Rones & Steder, 2017, pp. 41–42). Another difference was the acknowledgment that the *Jegertroppen* was tailored for women and that it was a tough selection process.

The reasons for applying to the *Jegertroppen* and their expectations for a future career in NorAF are similar to those women applying to officer training schools (Rones, 2015). The women passing initial screening and the selection process for non-commissioned officer candidate school (OTS) are also motivated by similar but also different reasons. Responders mentioned the difficulty of the selection process but the women in the *Jegertroppen* are different in three key areas: most applicants to the *Jegertroppen* had little or no interest in NorAF before it was an option; they did not seek executive training in NorAF; and they were attracted to the idea that the *Jegertroppen* was comprised entirely women.

Through previous research, debates in literature and newspaper articles in Norway we have seen several arguments for that woman in the NorAF should be equally treated and not given any kind of special treatment. The NorAF are considered meritocratic, where both women and men have argued for affirmative action and that different physical requirement is unfair (see, for example, Edström, Lunde, & Matlary, 2010; Eide, Lauritzen, Olsvik, & Stokke, 2014; Gustavsen, 2011; Harsvik, 2010; Hellum, 2010; Olsvik & Lauritzen, 2014; Steder et al., 2015b; Steder, Hellum, & Skutlaberg, 2009; Rones, 2015; Rones & Fasting, 2011; Rones & Hellum, 2013). Based on this consideration, we ask two research questions: How is a separate and gender-based selection perceived among the candidates themselves and how is it perceived among those observing the selection process from the “outside”?

THE COGNITIVE AND PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS IN THE SEGREGATED MODEL

In order to get selected for the *Jegertroppen*, the women must go through a selection process similar to the selection process for the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*. The candidate's cognitive and physical capabilities are evaluated before and during the education at the *Jegertroppen*.

Cognitive capabilities for candidates are measured on a nine-level scale before the conscription period starts; where nine is the highest score (see Køber, 2017). The cognitive requirements to be considered for the *Jegertroppen* are actually higher for *Jegertroppen* than for the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* due to the requirement¹² for the non-commissioned officer education, one of the educational options after completion of *Jegertroppen* (conscription) at NORSOC.

The physical requirements, on the other hand, are adapted to women's difference in physiology and prerequisites. The main argument used by NORSOC is that a number of men have trained and prepared themselves for the selection process from their early teens.¹³ This option makes a number of men more robust and motivated to pass this phase of selection. NORSOC believes that few or no women have had similar preparations, mainly due to the newly created *Jegertroppen* as an option within the Norwegian conscription system. For these reasons, NORSOC concludes the standardized physical tests for the *Jegertroppen* must differ somewhat from the standardized *Fallskjermjegertroppen* ones.

This difference in preparation from early teens is reflected by inserting a principle of progression (see increasing requirements in Figure 1) for the candidates to the *Jegertroppen* until the "identity-statement" static course in late November, about five months into their education. Applicants to the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* must pass the requirements at the primary selection process in June in order to proceed.

The static course as "identity-statement" can be understood as a transitional ritual from recruit to *Jeger* (hunter). Above all, passing the requirements for the static course gives the right to wear the distinctive parachute emblem on the uniform. This emblem is an important identity symbol, and serves as a "quality stamp," as NORSOC does not want anyone to wear it that has not passed the milestone. The physical requirements to the static course are referred to as absolute, and it was never an option to lower the requirements for wearing the "wing" when the *Jegertroppen* was established in 2014. Instead, NORSOC introduced the principle of planned progression for women and trained them for the absolute requirements in the static course, see static course column in Figure 1.

The main reason for the principle of planned progression in physical testing, according to our informants, is that they were worried that NORSOC would have too few women to choose from if the requirements were too difficult up front (see initial selection column in Figure 1). In other words, if there were too few women that came through the initial phase of selection, NORSOC would not succeed in creating the "healthy competition" that the rest of the selection period is characterized by. According to other research on special operations forces, such a competition is an important factor for upholding the reputation and myth of some SOF as "tier one units" (Ben-Ari, Turnley, & Michael, 2018; Danielsen, 2015; Resteigne, 2018; Turnley, Ben-Ari, & Michael, 2018).

THE GENDER-SEGREGATED SELECTION PROCESS

The competitive part of the selection process begins with a hectic recruitment period. During the recruitment period, the recruits acquire skills and knowledge necessary to complete the

Planned Progression in the Physical Testing	Welcome-and-Training Camp (April)	1-year Conscription Period			
		Initial Selection (June)	Selection process (July)	Static Course (November)	Hunter-mark (July)
<u>Backpack Run</u>					
- Length (km)	7	7	7	7	15
- Weight (kg)	15	15	22	22	22
- Time Requirement (min)	no	yes	yes	52	135
Hang-ups	1	1	1	5	6
<u>Sit-ups</u>	35	35	35	35	50
- Time Requirement (min)	no	no	1	1	2
Push-ups	20	20	20	30	40
Hyperextension	20	20	20	20	25
<u>Swimming</u>					
- Length (meter)	200	200	200	no	400
- Time Requirement (min)	no	no	no	no	11
- Under Water (meter)	no	no	no	no	25
Introduction to Tests		Increase in Minimum Requirements			

FIGURE 1 There is a planned progression of the physical testing requirements throughout education (1-year) for Jegertroppen (Forsvarets mediasenter [FMS], 2018). Applicants to Fallskjermjegertroppen must pass the final requirements at the initial selection process.

admission exercise. The five-week recruitment period includes basic training in land navigation (map reading and the use of a compass), weapon education, combat technique, combat medic and physical training. This period involves self-selection because those who do not “make it” or lose motivation are withdrawing voluntarily. Some also drop out for medical reasons and there is a great risk of being selected out if it is obvious that the candidate is unsuitable. Reasons to be selected out may be the inability to follow progression, awkwardness, unwanted attitudes, and like.

At the end of the recruitment period, in the physically and mentally final exercise referred to as “hell week,” all candidates are judged on both individual and team-player achievements in small teams. The final exercise is relatively similar for the two segregated platoons. Even though co-operation and team spirit are required to get through the final exercise, it is still a competition for acceptance into the *Jegertroppen*. It is in this competitive part of the traditional selection process (before the *Jegertroppen* was established) that no female candidate has competed against men sufficiently to be selected for *The Fallskjermjegertroppen*. This is NORSOCs main reason for arranging a separate selection process and final exercise in which women compete with other women. Anyone who wants to take part in the competition for the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*, regardless of gender, can still do so.

Over the three-year period we followed the *Jegertroppen*, the number of applicants ranged from 319 to 174, of which about 60–70 women were summoned to compete for about 15 positions in the platoon. Although there has been some variation in the application number and the number of participants in the recruitment and selection period to the *Jegertroppen*, the “dropout curve” is relatively stable in the period. This curve is illustrated in Figure 2.

The illustrated dropout rate in the selection process is based on the average dropout for the period 2014–2016. Figure 2 clearly illustrates that about 70% fall from relatively objective assessments, such as preliminary test results,¹⁴ security clearance, standardized tests, medical and gradually lack interest and motivation for the *Jegertroppen*. Most people who drop out of the five-week recruit period are volunteer drop-outs without any special negative pressure or assisted “pressure” from NORSOC.

When the final exercise begins, at the end of the five-week recruitment period, NORSOC is left with about 10–20 percent of the original number of applicants of the *Jegertroppen*. At this stage in the selection process, the instructors from NORSOC begin its subjective assessments of the candidates. Based on clear preferences as to who is best suited, as well as the candidate’s performance and rating on the different tests, each candidate is assessed throughout the final exercise. Those who complete the final exercise, but are not given a place in a platoon after an evaluation in the selection council, are usually negatively assessed on their collaborative skills and the relationship with fellow soldiers and instructors. How these subjective criteria are used varies with the number of available candidates, their performance as well as number of seats available.

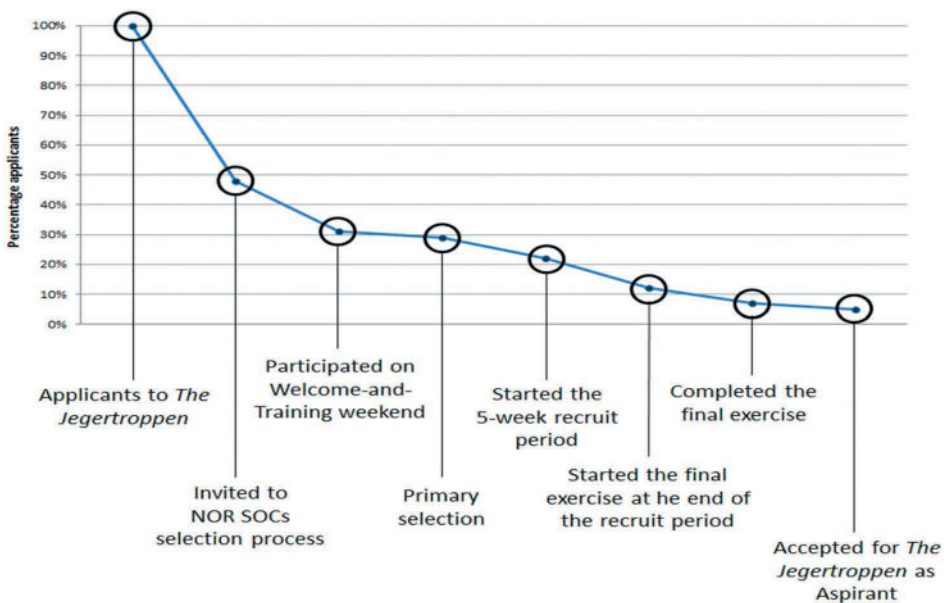


FIGURE 2 Illustrated dropouts in the selection process from submitted application and final selection for the *Jegertroppen* based on the average drop-out in the period 2014–2016.

UNIFORMITY OR DIVERSITY?

Edström et al. (2010) argue uniformity (equality) is important in the military context and that this can be justified in operational need for functionality. Diversity, on the other hand, relates allegedly to political ideas of representation, especially women, in societies where it is possible to ignore operational needs (functionality).

In previous studies of women in the Norwegian Armed Forces, and in line with these arguments, the authors suggest that both men and women must be selected and evaluated through equal tests with equal requirements (uniformity), regardless of education, function, and role for which they are being evaluated (Rones, 2015; Steder et al., 2015). The “best” person is the one that can walk long distances with a heavy backpack, or successfully struggle through a muddy obstacle course. This argument is based on the belief that everybody, both men, and women, must be able to rotate between function and role after a basic education, and everyone must be ready to meet the “requirements of war.”

It is this understanding of fairness that NORSOC violates when they established the *Jegertroppen*. Given the *Jegertroppen*’s specialization in urban special reconnaissance the need for muddy obstacle courses and long walks with heavy backpack are not needed. Hence, NORSOC ranks the uniformity argument behind increased diversity and specialization perspective through prioritizing complementary features in their unit. Diversity is justified through the operational need for personnel with different skills and abilities, including gender, because women are different than men (see Rones & Steder, in review, for an elaboration of how the different view of fairness and functional need affected on the women in the *Jegertroppen*).

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND SPECIAL TREATMENT; THE CREATION OF TWO A-TEAMS

Since NORSOC’s goal was to recruit women, the difference in the selection process and “special treatment” of women is justified. Had the goal been to recruit a higher capacity in carrying heavy backpacks over great distances they could increase the recruitment and size of the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* instead.

I do not see anything wrong with it [the segregation/special treatment of women] that’s the goal here, right? We create an arena for women because it is women that we need. It’s not because we want a larger platoon of parachute jumpers [The *Fallskjermjegertroppen*]. (Instructor in Training Wing) (Rones & Steder, 2017, p. 56)

Another reason and justification for the difference in the selection process, or the “special treatment,” is that NORSOC established the *Jegertroppen* and the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* to serve two different purposes. If NORSOC had selected men and women for the same platoon through different requirements one would risk creating two different teams; an internal A-team (the men) and one internal B-team (the women). In order to reduce this risk, they established slightly different roles and functions through introducing two parallel platoons.

Since the education and training in the *Jegertroppen* are intended for a separate role and functions at NORSOC, they also have a different specialization period from the one of the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*. Interviewees perceive the specialization period in the *Jegertroppen* as

more exciting and action-filled than the specialization period in the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*. The main reason for the variety in disciplines between the two platoons is explained by the fact that the *Jegertroppen* have to reach the educational requirements of urban special reconnaissance, requirements that the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* do not have. These disciplines are traditionally a part of the more advanced SOF education the following year.

In our interviews, we did find some skepticism among the members of the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* towards the women in the *Jegertroppen* upon entry. That skepticism, however, was tempered over the course of the one-year training period:

[...] now that I've been admitted myself, I've seen the added value of them[women]. They are incredibly good, the girls, to lift, carry and push themselves. Having women in certain roles at NORSOC, I think it's of great value (Paratrooper *Fallskjermjegertroppen*) (Rones & Steder, 2017, p. 58)

An important factor that made the separation of the two platoons a success was the equal allocation of resources in the form of materials, training arenas, and skilled instructors. Several women told that they had expected to be perceived as “the B-team,” in accordance with previous experience from high school and in sports. In group conversation with the members of the *Jegertroppen* at the urban shooting course, they enthusiastically mentioned that they “never ever” thought that they should be so highly prioritized. One tells us that she suspected that it could be as it had been on the football¹⁵ team where the girl's team had had to practice on an outdoor gravel without light, while the boy's team was given practice time in the new, well-lit indoor hall. The feeling of being prioritized in the same way as the guys, as well as having access the best equipment, the best training arenas, and the best instructors, have most likely been an important factor in establishing the observed sense of equal status.

There were also notions and among the instructors. In sum, these notions were important in establishing the sense of equality among the women in the *Jegertroppen*. For example, both platoons received a booklet with instructions for the common parachute course (static course). In this, there was a “man in front”-drill to be repeated, prior to jumping out of the airplane. When the instructor introduced them to this drill, he said, “now that we have women here too, we say “parachuter in front” not “man in front” and they consistently used the gender-neutral phrase “parachuter in front” rather than the gender-biased phrase “man in front” in the static course.

Given the sum of all action points completed when establishing the *Jegertroppen*, it seems that NORSOC has succeeded in equipping the women with a sense of equality and high priority, as well as an experience of fairness despite a level of “special treatment” in Training Wing (see Rones, 2017 and Rones & Steder, in review for an elaboration on this topic).

THE GRADUAL ACCEPTANCE

The authors have presented NORSOC's conscious steps to create a sense of equality between the women in the *Jegertroppen* and the men in the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*. It can be argued that NORSOC has taken sufficient steps to prevent unwanted resistance internally in the unit, although everything was not been thought out or planned for in advance.

The proposal to establish the *Jegertroppen* was first launched by NORSOC commander Eirik Kristoffersen at the Chief of Defence (CHOD) Gender Conference in 2013. Those

interviewed in Mørkved's (2017) project at the Norwegian Business School (BI) state that most staff members in NORSOC, including the staff function responsible for planning the department's activity, had not heard or read about the project before it was suggested at this Gender Conference. In the period immediately following the launch of the *Jegertroppen*, according to those we interviewed, there was a rancorous discussion within NORSOC. During the discussion, many arguments were made both in support of and against the suggestion of establishing a segregated platoon for women at NORSOC.

Mørkved (2017), however, found the initial project quickly gained support from both managers and others at all levels in the unit. The reason for this rapid support can be explained by three reasons. First, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) had seen a need for women in SOF over several years. Second, the top management in NORSOC suggested it themselves. Third was the creation of "change agents." These "change agents," innovators at all levels, were exploited in the planning and anchoring process in the unit and thus giving ownership to the female platoon. One of the most important measures to the managers of NORSOC was to pull key people from multiple levels into the design of the platoon, including choosing the symbolic patch and the name of the platoon.

To investigate different attitudes towards the *Jegertroppen*, FFI chose to conduct a survey of all NORSOC staff members¹⁶ and platoon commanders in NorAFs Army Brigade in August 2014. At this point, the first platoon of the *Jegertroppen* had been in service for about three weeks. From these answers, it appears that the majority of NORSOC employees regard the *Jegertroppen* as a good measure. However, we also found a significant group of respondents who tended to regard the *Jegertroppen* as a "completely worthless proposal." This statistically proven difference in attitude¹⁷ may be explained by the difference in exposure and understanding of the *Jegertroppen* internally in NORSOC than outside of NORSOC. At this point in time, there was very little objective information about the *Jegertroppen*,¹⁸ mostly different rumors or stories that was presented by military members that had some sort of interaction with NORSOC. Over time, given improved flow of information regarding the *Jegertroppen*, this difference in attitude is reduced.

IMPROVED RETENTION?

Whether NorAF will succeed in keeping the women from the *Jegertroppen* is difficult to answer now. It is just been three years since the first women finished the education at the platoon. Our indications of success are based on interviews with most of the graduates from the first cohort (n = 7) from the *Jegertroppen* after 8–10 months in continued service, either on a working contract (professional soldiers/or support positions) or in further military education in NorAF (Rones & Steder, 2017, p. 97). All of the women continued in the NorAF after graduation from the *Jegertroppen* because they enjoyed the training and education they received. They hoped that continued military service would offer more of the same opportunities and experiences.

The graduating women also talked about the *Jegertroppen* as the best year in their lives, a period that further service most likely cannot measure. Those graduates who opted for further military education realized some of the factors they have experienced earlier: a demanding selection process that resulted in motivated colleagues willing to make an extra effort, new tests they must stretch against, a demand for progression, and the feeling of being valued or being part of a privileged unit. Accordingly, they were still motivated and satisfied.

Those women on a working contract viewed their experience, and continued opportunities in the NorAF, quite differently. Many are now considering leaving the NorAF:

Researcher: Did you ever consider leaving the *Jegertroppen*?

Graduate: No, I never considered quitting. [...] Except that [the thoughts spinning in your head when you're exhausted on exercises], I never considered quitting.

Researcher: Have you considered quitting your current military position?

Graduate: Eh - yes. But again, I do not know what to do either. I feel that I [negatively] judged this service a bit fast, that I perhaps need to give it more time. But I realize that I am not that fond of it (Rones & Steder, 2017, p. 99).

There are several reasons why the graduates of the *Jegertroppen* who continued in a working contract are dissatisfied with the current service as a professional soldier. First and foremost, they have an "elite orientation," or performance motivation that does not match the more relaxed requirements of current service. Second, they miss the privileged status inherent in elite units, the feeling of being involved, prioritized and being part of a close and cohesive community. In addition, they experienced in the NorAF sexist "men's humor" as well as ridicule and "comments" on their background in an "experimental" SOF unit. The graduates from the *Jegertroppen* also experience that there are insufficient requirements to be a professional soldier compared to their time in NORSOC. In addition, they view the training as "not serious enough," that the opportunities for advancement are lacking, and the service cultures are too "sluggish" compared to NORSOC.

In sum, these stories suggest negative experiences by contracted as a soldier in the NorAF. Graduates from the *Jegertroppen* who have continued as a professional soldier, and especially in operational positions, do not thrive as much. This leads former *Jegertroppen* to the desire to leave NorAF and get back where they want to be, namely in NORSOC. We can conclude from all of our interviews that it is highly uncertain whether NorAF is able to retain the women from the *Jegertroppen* after graduation. The graduates claim to be assigned tasks below or at different levels of their competence, being poorly treated, and in addition experiencing degrading or negative comments about their performance (Rones & Steder, 2017, pp. 100–102).

SHOULD NorAF CONTINUE THE *JEGERTROPPE*N?

Most of SOF leaders, instructors, and platoon commanders we interviewed believe that the *Jegertroppen* is a success. Such beliefs are mainly due to that the young women in the platoon have become impressively skilled in key operational core disciplines and that most of them signed up for continued service or military education in NorAF. There is nevertheless one reservation that every interviewee mentioned: the primary weakness of the all-women SOF project lies in further opportunities within the NORSOC.

Researcher: Do you have any arguments that the *Jegertroppen* should continue as a permanent unit/education?

Graduate: What should I say? Right now, it's not really a very good argument for them to keep it. We were somehow thrown out, or not thrown out, but there was no position for us at NORSOC (Rones & Steder, 2017, p. 106).

Instructor: It might as well be that the model is determined to continue, but it may not necessarily be continued here at NORSOC. This unit does is not aimed to educated soldiers for the NorAF. We produce soldiers for ourselves, and that's what we have the capacity for, as of today (Rones & Steder, 2017, p. 107)

Those we interviewed told us that the *Jegertroppen* was originally implemented because of the operational need for women with military core competence for SOF operations where gender plays a significant role. By creating an arena where women competed with other women, the *Jegertroppen* grant women access to skills needed for NORSOCs operations (see Rones, 2017).

SEGREGATED, EDUCATED, INTEGRATED AND RETAINED?

Based on our analysis over a three-year period, the *Jegertroppen* has succeeded in recruiting women who would not otherwise have chosen a military career. The new and for many a surprising concept of segregated education has appealed to women usually not interested in the military, in part because they do not believe they would thrive in a male-dominated environment. Thus, NORSOC has attracted (military) women who express a far more positive attitude towards other women than we have seen in previous studies. A very common observation in the male-dominated NorAF of women suggests the latter take the role of "one of the boys," distancing themselves from other women as a result from the so-called "queen bee" phenomenon (see Rones and Steder, 2018).

The scheme of a tailored selection based on women's own physical premise and another tailored selection on men's own physical premise has created a sense of creating "two A-teams" at NORSOC. After the one-year conscription period and segregated education at the *Jegertroppen*, the women are far more motivated for further military service than we find in other NorAF units.

No further career ladder, however, has been established to retain these skilled and specialized women at NORSOC. The women are therefore referred to further military education and contract as a professional soldier in regular military units. With such a "dead end" within NORSOC, it is difficult to believe there was a real need for women in special operations that formed the basis of establishing the *Jegertroppen*. It is also uncertain whether the NorAF will succeed in retaining these skilled, development-oriented and partly elite-oriented women. In sum, we can conclude that the *Jegertroppen* has been a very good measure to recruit, select and educate competent women to NorAF, but we are very uncertain whether NorAF will succeed in retaining them.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

NOTES

1. Counter terrorism (CT), Direct Action (DA), Special Reconnaissance (SR) and Military Assistance (MA). In order to start this education one must complete another rigorous set of selection tests.
2. See: <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/The-Female-Spies-Of-SOE/>.

3. See: <http://www.eliteukforces.info/special-reconnaissance-regiment/> and <http://www.eliteukforces.info/the-det/>.
4. On the webpage [strategypage.com](http://www.strategypage.com) it says: «Nearly all the major special operations organizations of the twentieth century have had some female operators. What was unusual about Norway was that they issued a press release» (www.strategypage.com, March 2 2016).
5. One year of military conscription.
6. After one year in Jegertroppen.
7. Army, Navy, and Airforce.
8. Based on a mandatory self-assessment among 17-year-olds (Egenerklæringen) the NorAF selects 20,000–25,000 motivated and eligible candidates for physical screening (Sesjon). As a part of this screening process, about nine-to-18 months before service, they have to complete a set of physical tests (endurance and strength).
9. From NorAF, NORSOC and employees in NORSOC.
10. Military information meetings at different high schools.
11. The only professional conventional mechanized infantry unit in Norway.
12. One year later.
13. See, for example, the background description in the book *Jæger - in war with the elite* written by the Danish SOF Operator Thomas Rathsack (2011).
14. From the selective conscription process before conscription starts; self-assessment questionnaire, physical and cognitive tests as well as interview with an officer.
15. Referred to “soccer” in the US.
16. Most of them in no direct contact with the daily activities of the Jegertroppen. The employees of NORSOC and NorAFs Army Brigade responded to an anonymous survey, which was sent on the NorAFs internal network. The final response rate was about 50%, with 107 respondents from NORSOC and 97 from the Army Brigade.
17. One of many questions proving difference in attitude, using t-test assumed unequal variance, ANOVA and dummy variables in a regression analysis of the survey results.
18. Less than five major articles in national papers presented the platoon before the first cohort started their education in July 2014. It was after a two-hour TV documentary of the second cohort of the platoon that most people, inside and outside of the military, got a good impression of the activity “inside of the fence” at NORSOC.

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Female Specialists as Operational Enablers for Special Operations Forces? – A Pilot Study among Danish Military Linguists

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This article aims to show the many ways gender are important when performing the role as military interpreter/cultural advisor as a specialist attached to a SOF team. Based on interviews with male and female specialists and SOF operators in an exploratory pilot study conducted in Denmark, the article discusses female specialists as “the newcomers” in SOF. Female specialists navigate their gender identity in order to obtain acceptance in the team. The operational advantage of deploying female specialists with SOF teams is their ability to “constitute no threat” to men around them. The data in this study suggest that female specialists can facilitate better communication between parties in operations. The article argues that concerns over the female specialist as an object for overwhelming male attention can be substituted with her role as a competent professional soldier.

Keywords: Gender, female specialists, Danish SOF, military linguists, integration, operational advantage

In Denmark, female soldiers perform various roles in the armed forces but none serve in the Danish Special Operations Forces (SOF). No female has so far been able to pass the selection process for the Danish SOF units. Some female specialists, however, have been attached to and deployed with Danish SOF. The first such deployment occurred in 2011. The female specialists participated in selected SOF training courses in order to be able to join their teams for deployment. This article aims to shift the academic focus away from the debate over *whether* women can be combat soldiers [cf. Simons (2000), Mackenzie (2015) and Collins-Dogrul and Ulrich (2018)]. Instead, I discuss *how* female specialists perform roles as enablers in units such as the Danish special operations forces. Gender has been defined as “a term used to define the flexible and changeable socially constructed roles and attributes you learn through socialization processes and perform in society as both women and men” (DCAF & PfPC, 2016, p. 10). In the military, socially constructed gender roles are important given that it is often dominated by a male majority.

The data in this study are from the Royal Danish Defence Language Academy, where I am one of 25 teachers and researchers educating military linguists for their future role as military interpreter/cultural advisor in military operations. The research question driving this study is: In what way is gender important for the execution of the role as military interpreter/cultural

advisor deployed with Special Operations Forces? I am most grateful to Director Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen and researcher Nikolaj Juul Nielsen from the Royal Danish Defence College for their feedback and comments to earlier versions of this article.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this article, I collected data in a unique military setting – the Royal Danish Defence Language Academy – where the recruitment and admission processes for military linguists support gender equality. In each class of Danish military linguists, the average class starts out evenly divided in terms of gender: 50 percent women and 50 percent men. This equality is based on a policy to meet operational needs, but also to ensure diversity in the classroom. Gender is one requirement out of several admission criteria for the Academy: the recruits are tested in their ability to learn languages (the most important requirement). They are selected according to their physical training ability, age, previous education, personality, and leadership potential.

The qualitative data are from six in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted with four military linguists, two male and two female, who had previously deployed with Danish SOF, and two male operators, who deployed with a SOF team consisting of male operators and a female Danish military linguist. The “SOF environment” is comprised of a network of a limited number of people, especially in a small country like Denmark. Therefore, in order to provide a maximum level of anonymity to the men and women in this study, details about the specific missions, regions/locations, and mission duration are left out. All interviews were conducted in Danish, and translated to English by the author.

In addition, data were collected from a few papers out of 31 written assignments, where 31 Danish military linguist candidates reflected upon gender in relation to future military deployments, and their experiences from training and exercises. The qualitative data set is rather small, but for the purpose of this article—an explorative pilot study—the interviews together with the written reflections will be useful.

IN WHAT WAY IS GENDER IMPORTANT IN THE EXECUTION OF TASKS?

The military linguists in this pilot study worked on different tasks when they deployed with SOF teams abroad. All four worked as interpreters and cultural advisors. They briefed their team on culture and history in the area of operation. They supported the operations in various ways: the collection of information in the intelligence cycle; as information analysts; as interpreters for instructors in training and capacity building; or as part of a boarding team at sea. Some also performed basic language training for their SOF team.

The first finding of the study is that male and female military linguists do not agree whether gender is important for the execution of their daily tasks in missions with SOF. The women interviewed emphasized that “gender matters every single day” (interview B) and “gender pervades every aspect of my job” (interview A). The male interviewees reached a different conclusion, based on utilitarian considerations. They said “gender is primarily important when establishing relations to locals” (interview C) or “my physical fitness is more important than

whether I am a man or a woman” (interview D). Gender seems to be a more obvious overall category of importance to the female military linguists. What advantages do the military linguists see, when they reflect on their own gender as part of the daily tasks in the operations? Males answered: “When I speak to local men to obtain information about the area, the advantage is that I can get a true ‘male-to-male’ conversation. They are very friendly to me, and the conversation follows a special male cant. We speak freely to each other. This atmosphere in the room would not be possible if I weren’t male” (interview C). Another comment was: “The maritime environment is dominated by men. So, you can put it this way: Being a male specialist, I blended in and did not disturb the daily ‘pattern of life’” (interview D). These points suggest that a male military linguist can establish frank “male-to-male” talk—and blend in where men dominate the environment.

Female specialists add other advantages as an operational asset for the team. According to a male SOF instructor, the communication flows very well between SOF team and local partners when a female military linguist is part of the team: “I believe a female military linguist can create comfort and openness in the daily interaction with locals. They believe she is very interesting, because she is a female soldier (in uniform). She is a facilitator of small talk in breaks, and for the daily communication with local partners. I can take advantage of her skills in communication, and my team gains legitimacy in the eyes of the local partners” (interview E). The female respondents tend to agree that there is an increased level of attention directed towards them: “A woman in uniform is exceptional in many settings. I was the ‘exotic animal’ in the flock. The advantage is that people will listen to me instantly, not only because I am a woman, but also because I speak several languages and have in-depth cultural knowledge about the operation area” (interview A). In addition, the attention the women received is not only from national security forces or from military partners: “For the locals, being a female soldier is a weird phenomenon. Men often dominate conservative areas ridden by conflict, and here women have to move around with a male escort. In these areas, a female soldier is something really different” (interview B).

Another element worked in the favor of the women who deployed. Both female respondents agree that they “constitute no threat” to men. “In many war zones, women have less power than men in the public sphere” (interview B), and “I am no threat to the ‘alpha-males’ in the team” (interview A). A SOF operator agrees: “During deployments, I have experienced situations, where the presence of women have a disarming effect. Women are not part of the ongoing struggle for status and power between men” (interview F). Team dynamics and gender will be discussed later in this article.

To “constitute no threat” is also a reflection of how and in what capacity they appear. For example, when the US Marine Corps deployed “all-female-engagement teams” (FET) to Afghanistan, a response from locals were that these female soldiers represented a different type of soldier. Afghans responded to the team by perceiving the FET team in Helmand Province in Afghanistan as “helpers”: “even though we are carrying our weapons we are not viewed as a threat but as someone willing to help” (Adams, 2014).

Despite the fact that the female Marines were wearing combat gear, including weapons, on patrols, the Afghans perceived them differently – only because of their gender. Appearance or posture is important when conducting patrols and collecting information: “The advantage a female specialist has is about appearance. I do not look like any of my tall, ‘Viking’ male colleagues. I am short and small, and I look like a woman – it creates attention. Professionally, I can navigate my gender, and play the game between men and women. If I need authority,

I keep on my uniform during meetings. The uniform represents a role, the military, and emphasizes authority and power. If I want to exploit my femininity, I can take off my uniform jacket to get closer to my personal identity and feminine self” (interview B). To be able to shift roles between the masculine and feminine identity is a considerable benefit for the female specialist. The female military linguists in this study were not tasked to establish relations with local women. Findings from mission areas, however, show that female soldiers can play an important role in supporting projects targeted at local women (cf. Cold-Ravnkilde, Haugegaard, & Albrecht, 2016; United States Institute of Peace [USIP], 2011).

Initial results from my interviews with both male and female military linguists point to the following assumptions about communication and collection of information:

- Male specialists can use their gender and masculinity to facilitate communication and get access to information in operation areas, especially from other men; and
- Female specialists can use their gender and femininity to facilitate communication and get access to information in operation areas, from both women and men. Female specialists can shift between “male-like” authority (obtained through wearing a uniform) and female appearance (activated by their gender as female).

These initial findings/assumptions need further investigation. In this pilot study, the female specialists have the perception that they can “shift identity,” but is this perception shared by all female specialists? And what about the male specialists—can they also “play” their male authority?

Based on my findings in this study, I suggest that the main challenges for the integration of female military linguists exist in the realm of team dynamics. Therefore, my focus is to understand the challenges for integration of female specialists in small SOF teams. A discussion of team dynamics and gender will follow in the next section.

HOW TO INTEGRATE A NEWCOMER

The Norwegian researcher Totland has studied team dynamics among Norwegian SOF in the Telemark Battalion (Totland, 2009). The SOF operators are men. They have tried a few times to integrate a female operator in their team. Totland’s study show how masculinity is negotiated between the male operators in the team. Masculinity is defined as “those behaviors, languages and practices, existing in specific cultural and organizational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine” (Whitehead and Barrett (2001) in Totland, 2009, p. 62).

Masculinity is also a factor during the training of Danish military linguists. Men occasionally exclude female specialists and female soldiers during training in the home unit: “Often, military tactics is considered ‘boys’ talk.’ My male colleagues do not believe that we women can contribute anything when talking about weapons and military tactics. Because I was a soldier before I entered the military linguist training, I can contribute, and I discuss military tactics with the boys. But you have to be well prepared with your facts and what you want to add to the conversation, when you are a woman” (Paper A, March 2018).

Exclusion is one thing, but hostility is another. Another candidate writes: “In my basic military training, a platoon commander said: ‘Women do not belong in the military.’ I am tired of these statements, and I am happy he is only one out of few men in the Danish military who share this opinion. I am prepared to fight back and prove them wrong, because I do belong” (Paper B, March 2018). These are examples of female military linguist candidates, who have experienced exclusion from debates and hostility during training in the military units. The examples show the daily challenges competent women have to deal with when they fight for recognition as soldiers. The fact that you have to fight to be included as a female soldier could be a result of the overall masculine working environment.

In the Norwegian Telemark Battalion, Totland’s data on how masculinity develops in a Norwegian SOF team reveals that the operators make fun of women and imitate female managers. They refer to their light weapons as “girly,” speak about their latest achievements in the local bars, and delimit themselves from everything considered “feminine.” These practices develop in order to define their own masculine soldier identity as opposed to female characteristics (Totland, 2009, pp. 62–66). The Norwegian operators state that a female operator can work together with them, but she will never be part of “the guys” (ibid. 67). I found a similar statement in one of the interviews during this pilot study. To be a female among “the guys” is not easy: “I was never a buddy, a friend. I was ‘the girl’” (interview B). At the social level, it seems a female specialist can never be a full member of “the guys’ club.”

Some military officers and opinion influencers (see Mackenzie, 2015, pp. 75–97) and researchers (see Simons, 2000) argue that women cannot perform well in combat teams. Mackenzie suggests that most of the resistance to women in combat is based on emotional arguments. These emotional arguments, such as “it just doesn’t feel right” to have women in combat roles, “are often attached, interwoven, or harnessed to apparently fact-based positions, including statements about physical standards, troop dynamics, and women’s capabilities” (Mackenzie, 2015, pp. 96–97). In my pilot study, some of the men mention physical standards, but since the expertise military linguists provide is language fluency and cultural knowledge, the military linguists deployed with SOF do not need to impress their team with extraordinary military skills or physical fitness. Of course, they need to be able to follow the team on patrols and other tasks, but according to one female specialist, “I do not need to have the same level of military skills as the SOF operators—in my team they were fully aware that my expertise is language and culture” (interview B).

The reality is that female team members provide advantages and disadvantages. According to one Danish SOF operator, “In general, we have not had any major issues when female specialists have deployed with our teams. In certain situations, I think the advantage is that the presence of women can have a disarming effect. Women are not part of the ongoing fight between men for status and power. The disadvantage is that sometimes the female specialist can disturb the confidentiality between men” (interview F). The tone of conversation and how women disturb the male sphere is also in focus in academia: I agree with Simons (2000) that when a woman enters a male sphere one out of several effects is that “the tone of conversation changes” (ibid. 458) and men tend to direct their attention towards “the woman.” However, I contest Simons’ conclusion that because of these social dynamics and effects, women do not belong in combat.

First, “women” is too broad a generalization. “Women” are different, with different personalities and competencies. Women in the military are equally different. I have trained and observed some female military linguists who have the personality, competencies, and physical

training level to join SOF teams. I have also trained many who would never be able to fit in a SOF team. In other words, gender is just one factor influencing whether a specialist will be able to deploy with a SOF team: “When we select specialists for deployment with SOF teams, gender is not on top of the list. First, we look for maturity and personality. The people chosen need to be able to adjust to new situations and be flexible, and they need to have a high level of self-assurance” (interview C).

Secondly, in some military organizations in countries such as those of Scandinavia, female soldiers perform combat roles in the military. The question of whether female specialists can perform as part of/support for combat teams is very much a question of national policy and cultural perceptions of the role of women in society. Discussions about women in combat are linked to perceptions about the ability of women in general terms, not only perceptions of whether women can work in military job positions (cf. Collins-Dogrul & Ulrich, 2018).

Third, operational advantages of integrating female specialists, linguists or operators (as argued above) in male-dominated SOF teams would outweigh the social challenges as other articles in this edition suggest.

NAVIGATING GENDER

The female military linguists in this pilot study were deployed to mission settings. In these settings, they were unique, in the sense they were the only female soldier, or one out of two female specialists in their team and with no other female soldiers in the larger coalition of special operation forces in the area.

In my data, I found several statements about team cohesion and ways of navigating gender identity, in order to gain respect from the team. A female military linguist says that “I enjoy working with men because of the male jargon. However, as a female soldier, you have to be able to tolerate friendly jokes and teasing as part of the daily routines” (interview A). Here is an example of a female specialist, who actually enjoys working with men, because of their male jargon and masculinity.

In order to work in male-dominated teams, female specialists navigate their identity as females and sometimes change behavior in order to adjust and protect themselves from comments on their female appearance. For instance, a female military linguist was invited to join the men from her team in the swimming pool in the camp, constructed by members of the team. “I said ‘no thanks’ to joining them. I did not want them to look at me as a woman in swimsuit. I wanted to protect my image as their colleague - a professional soldier” (interview B). Another commented, “I often got comments like ‘you are beautiful’ and some local men proposed to me” (interview A). The female military linguists have to deal with this type of attention, and they invented husbands at home and other stories in order to politely decline the attention directed towards them.

These examples show how female specialists avoid social situations that could draw unnecessary attention to their feminine profile. They navigate their gender in order to protect their public reputation. Again, it is in the social sphere that tensions often arise, less in the daily operational tasks in the team. Being an “outsider” in the team is not just related to gender, “because as a specialist you are always considered a newcomer” (interview D). Both the male and the female military linguists agreed that SOF teams are very good at integrating specialists

in their team: “SOF operators are really open and flexible, they are willing to try out new things” (interview A). Respect from the team is based on individual skill and capability, as well as utility to the team. For example, “SOF operators are very hard-working, so if you are hard-working too, they will accept you” (interview C). Another interviewed suggested that “SOF operators are pragmatic and flexible, they always look for the best option” (interview B). These perceptions of SOF have been studied in a research project on innovation in Danish SOF. In that study, a group of researchers from the Royal Danish Defence College found that transparent leadership and experimental problem solving are qualities obtained in the SOF units, enabling innovations for better solutions in the battlefield (Mayland, Haugegaard, & Shapiro, 2017). When SOF teams train to be innovative and flexible, this could point to an easy integration of newcomers, including female specialists. A SOF operator says: “We are judging people on their skills and professionalism. We look at what they deliver to the mission. We are used to working with specialists as enablers” (interview F).

In the interviews, the male perspectives focused on the change in social dynamics in the SOF team when a female specialist joins the team. When asked about the presence of a female specialist in a SOF team, the answers revealed many insights. Their answers centered on the attention that is given to a female soldier: “In military units, where most consist of a majority of men, the presence of a female soldier will often be disturbing. They all want to impress her. However, in an all-male team with a male interpreter there is no woman to impress. There are no rumors about possible sexual relations. It can bring peace and serenity to the group” (interview C). Danielsen argues: “Women and homosexuals appear as a potential threat to the heterosexual male cohesion in the military. *Marinejegers* [editors’ note: Norwegian Navy SOF, comparable to US Navy SEALs or British SBS] are young, socially intelligent, and well-trained warriors—they are sexual beings. Sexual tension might appear in teams with young people living in isolation in dire straits for months...[.]...It is not easy to programme young men to neglect sexual tension, or programme young women to neglect the male operators” (Danielsen, 2015, p. 346).

Findings in Totland’s study (2009) suggest similar considerations. The male operators in the Telemark Battalion are “happy to avoid thinking about women, men spend energy on thinking about a woman, and that is not nice when we deploy abroad” (ibid. 77). These concerns illustrate some of the advantages of forming separate units of male and female SOF operators (see Rones and Steder (2017) and the article by Steder and Rones in this issue).

Acceptance is another social dynamic within SOF teams. As one interviewee mentioned, “The advantage of being a male specialist in a SOF team is that you do not have to prove yourself as much [in contrast to the female specialist, author’s note]. They will often accept you, because you are male” (interview C). The statement calls for further investigation beyond this pilot study: Will female specialists have to work harder in a SOF team, compared to a male specialist, in order to gain acceptance from the team?

For example, one Telemark Battalion operator describes the ideal female operator as a “boy-girl, with the same type of humor as us men” (Totland, 2009, p. 75). Mackenzie argues that most combat teams are born from the same myth that war is ultimately a man’s game, played by a “band of brothers.” She suggests, “the all-male combat unit lies at the heart of gendered depictions of war” (Mackenzie, 2015, p. 4).

SOF teams work in difficult and challenging environments. Social cohesion in the team is often vital for the success of operations and survival of its members. Totland writes that the close bodily contact in a SOF team constitutes an important issue for the male operators. They

sleep together, fight together, and cook together under difficult conditions. An example in Totland's study is patrols in cold weather, where the operators often share a sleeping bag with a male team member. In case a female is part of the team, other team members could interpret such an action as a sexual approach (Totland, 2009, p. 77).

These considerations from male SOF team members are real and necessary to address, but are insufficient in their own right as a reason to exclude female operators or female specialists from the team. As one interviewee concluded, "Most girls enter the team as a professional specialist, competent and with a good sense of team spirit. It is very important that they do not flirt. If they flirt with the boys, their reputation is damaged, and they will not get respect from their team colleagues" (interview F).

Other reasons to consider female operators or as part of teams stem from recent research. Jacobsen, a Danish army officer shows a positive correlation between the Danish Army decision to apply mixed gender rooms for conscripts and the perceived better integration of female soldiers in the army (2017). When female and male soldiers share accommodation in mixed gender rooms during conscription training, they develop a "sister-brother-relation" (Jacobsen, 2017, pp. 36–40).

Jacobsen's data reveals that the female soldiers are described by the male conscripts as "comrades, friends, just like any other" and therefore, in the sister-brother relationship they share, "flirting becomes totally irrelevant" (ibid. 41). Jacobsen's study shows how the occasional flirting tone between male and female soldiers can be minimized through long-term daily interaction and mixed gender accommodation. Whether these findings can be transferred to SOF team dynamics is very relevant, and suggest letting female specialists train together with the male team in the pre-deployment phase, in order to develop "the sister-brother" relationship.

CLOSING REMARKS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this article, I have tried to show the many ways gender are important when performing the role as military interpreter/cultural advisor as a specialist attached to a SOF team. I have discussed how the female specialists navigate their gender identity in order to obtain acceptance in the team. In addition, I argue that the operational advantage of deploying female specialists with SOF teams is first their ability to "constitute no threat" to men around them. One of the positive effects of the "no threat" appearance is that female military linguists facilitate better communication between parties in operations. Further research could establish whether this holds true for most SOF operations, or whether these initial findings are task-specific and limited to capacity-building missions. Another operational advantage is that female specialists most likely can "shift" their identity between "male-like" authority as a soldier, and their female self. In this manner, they are able to obtain information from both local men and women.

This pilot study raises other questions worth of further investigation. Female specialists have the perception that they can "shift identity," but is this perception shared by all female specialists? And what about the male specialists? Can they also "play" their male authority? These questions can be answered with more data in a future research effort. Finally, I argue that concerns over the female specialist as an object for overwhelming male attention can be substituted with her role as a competent professional soldier, who might not be part of the

“band of brothers.” They may instead be able to form a different type of relationship as siblings, moving instead to a “sister to brother” relationship.

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INTERVIEW

Current SOF Tasks and Challenges: The View from a Small State

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Interview with Major General Peter Boysen, Commander of Denmark's Special Operations Command (DNK SOCOM) and Colonel Michael Hyldgaard, Deputy Commander, DNK SOCOM. DNK SOCOM consists of the Jaeger Corps, the Frogman Corps, and SOCOM HQ. The Command was established in 2014.

MG Boysen, who is an Army officer, has previously served as Deputy Chief Joint Operations, Defence Command Denmark. He took command of DNK SOCOM on March 21st, 2018. Colonel Michael Hyldgaard has served as Deputy Commander at DNK SOCOM since the Command was established in 2014. He has a SOF background and has previously served as Commander of the Jaeger Corps.

This interview was carried out on May 2nd, 2018 by Dr. Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, Director of the Institute for Strategy at Royal Danish Defence College and MSc Nicolaj Juul Nielsen, Research Assistant at the Royal Danish Defence Academy. The transcript below represents a condensed version of the original interview.

Interviewers: General, which thoughts went through your head when you first learned that you were going to be the new Commander of DNK SOCOM?

Major General Peter Boysen: First of all, when you receive a message like this, you are very happy. Proud, but also a tad humble in light of the task. But at the same time, you become very motivated and also very dedicated and determined to make the necessary decisions and do what needs to be done, to move this organization in the necessary direction.

Interviewers: When and where have you previously worked with SOF?

Major General Peter Boysen: I have previously worked with SOF, primarily from my post within the Danish Operations Staff,¹ where I worked with

SOF in both international- and national operations. Missions include Danish SOF deployments to Afghanistan and to the Gulf of Aden. I have worked with SOF several times in providing special assistance to the Danish National Police. Together with badged staff members [editor's note: SOF operators who pass through selection are given operational unit insignia, in the form of headgear and/or other distinctive unit "badges," hence the term], my work in the Operations Staff centered on ensuring that deployed Danish SOF contingents were structured and used correctly. I also had the opportunity to work with SOF as a deployed army officer in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan.

Interviewers: If you look back, what would you say has been the best and worst parts of cooperating with SOF?

Major General Peter Boysen: The best part is that SOF quickly identify and suggest ways of tackling an assigned task and do so with relatively few resources and in flexible ways. And the worst part is that at times it has been difficult to convince higher echelons/strategic decision makers to choose the SOF option instead of something else from the overall Danish "military toolbox."

Interviewers: So there might be a challenge linked to how SOF is perceived by people from outside the SOF community? Relatedly, what is the biggest challenge facing Danish SOF currently?

Major General Peter Boysen: From my point of view, the biggest challenge is that between the multiple possible deployment options or missions that Danish SOF are capable of and qualified for, we only utilize a small portion. Mission such as Military Assistance, Special Reconnaissance, Direct Action – we train for it all, but we do not put it all to use.

Major General Peter Boysen: Do you have anything to add, Michael?

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: The way I see it, the challenge is to clarify the connection between Denmark's strategic interests and the military capabilities available— the SOF capability being one of them. And then raising awareness of the SOF capability and how it can be effective by doing things *differently*. The conventional units are defined by and focused on a specific set of platforms and capabilities, whereas SOF is more based on human qualities. As a country, we need to become more clear about how to leverage the differences between the different tools in Denmark's overall military toolbox to achieve the biggest possible effect

Interviewers: The most recent Danish Defence Agreement stipulates that you need to stand up additional SOF teams. How do you

intend to, so to speak, increase the quantity without compromising on quality?

Major General Peter Boysen: The idea is that everyone with a SOF badge can be part of an operational team, even if they are currently assigned to different tasks, e.g., planning, staff work, or education. I think it is a question of mindset and a question of whether people are actually willing to make this change work. To give you an example: right now we have badged trainers dedicated to the selection courses in the Jaeger Corps and the Frogman Corps. The idea is that these trainers will go back to being operators again. Since operations have different levels of intensity, I am convinced that we can find many assignments, especially Military Assistance assignments, where being a more mature, patient individual is a greater asset than being a young operator excelling in fast-roping or jumping out from an airplane. So I see strength in being able to tailor a contribution with the mixture of younger and older operators needed for the mission at hand. Beyond this, I think that in terms of training and education of new operators, we “win” by letting individuals with more recent operational experience train the newcomers. This is something we have promised each other: This will in no way lower the bar in terms of getting through selection and assessment to enter one of the corps.

Interviewers: What are you doing to counter the potential criticism that you are creating different levels of “specialness” in Danish SOF, or to say it more colloquially, an “A and a B team” of operators?

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: I have heard this before, and I usually reply that this is nonsense.

Major General Peter Boysen: This is where our internal communication becomes very important. We also rely on delegation to the heads of the two SOF Corps in this matter. The new operators will go through a course lasting 34–35 weeks, and then they join an operational squad, and then education continues as peer-to-peer training out there, as is the case in many other organizations. In the past, there has been this system where you had to climb mountains and operate in extreme cold, and so on, before you were considered a fully operational squad member. But this is not how we will assess readiness/deployability in future. We will look at what a given assignment requires, and whether the person in question has been through the relevant training needed to complete the tasks at hand. From there, it is up to the heads of the two corps to evaluate whether or not a person is ready to be deployed.

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: In reality, I do not buy into the idea that there is an “A and a B team,” because this is just a new way of doing things, and there are many advantages by doing it this way. It also has to do with using scarce resources in the best possible manner.

Interviewers: If we assume that a new commander has political capital and energy for three major initiatives, and adding more teams is your first obligatory one, what else is on your list?

Major General Peter Boysen: Number one is implementing the recent Danish Defence Agreement and its call for additional operational teams and a new way of educating operators, and this is something we have to carry out really well. The reason for this is that it serves to give us organizational credibility also with other commands and service HQs. We in the SOF community have had this ambition of being the Minister of Defence’s preferred tool, but that is not my point. I think that we need to become as important and relevant as other military tools in the eyes of society

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: ... in order to be tasked to engage in operations that serve Danish interests - that provide value in terms of Danes’ security and safety.

Interviewers: Let us turn towards the security environment. Looking one-to-five years ahead in time, what assignments and missions do you envision Danish SOF undertaking?

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: Basically, it is up to political decision makers to decide how Danish SOF is deployed. Looking at recent Royal Danish Defence College research that maps the priorities and red lines of Danish decision makers, there is potential political support for a very wide range of possible SOF missions –we are not cut off from anything. This means that a small organization like Danish SOF has to be able to do an incredible amount of different things. Where other larger nations will be able to dedicate separate units to different assignments, we will have to be able to solve all the assignments in the SOF portfolio. Therefore, there will be an enormous demand for flexibility within this organization. The portfolio of possible assignments will comprise international stabilization operations, countering hybrid threats, countering violent extremist organizations, and supporting the Danish National Police in domestic counter-terrorism operations. Then we should also add that Danish Defence consists of many different tools. And in the end, it is about matching these tools to the threats and risks. If you look at the whole threat picture, Danish SOF should not be able to cope with everything. In reality, it is about having a glass and pouring stones into it, where the

stones represents the traditional armed forces that almost fill it up, but then you add sand to it, so the glass will fill up completely, and this is what SOF should be able to do—to fill the seams and gaps.

Major General Peter Boysen: We just have to make sure that the politicians know what the “sand” consists of, and this is where DNK SOCOM comes in, so to speak. Ensuring this is a matter of strategic concern for DNK SOCOM.

Interviewers: Do you think that counter terrorism is a lasting mission, an expanding mission or a mission that will diminish?

Major General Peter Boysen: It will be constant or growing.

Interviewers: What about “hybrid threats?” What are your thoughts about how Danish SOF can counter such threats?

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: We certainly have suggestions on this matter, but some of it is classified. We have partners that we collaborate with, also internationally, to cope with this challenge. So it is a huge challenge—and it is not just for SOF. Countering hybrid warfare is a matter for whole nations, coalitions, and alliances such as NATO.

Interviewers: Let us turn towards the theme for this *Special Operations Journal* issue: How to recruit and retain the right people to match future tasks. What does an ideal operator look like in the coming one-to-five years?

Major General Peter Boysen: From my point of view, there should not be significant changes when it comes to the operators. They might need to get up-to-date on new technology. But there is no need to make additional changes. But we need to be better at tailoring our force contributions. We need to be able to add on competences, but we should not have these in house ourselves. I do not believe that it is realistic for us to provide training in a large array of skills and specialties. Therefore, I think it is essential that we establish good co-operation with those that “own” these skills and specialties and then train together. You can focus on who is badged and who is not—does this really matter? I do not think so. Because we need to break down the barriers and then we need to start training together with those that have the capacities and specialties that we will need going forward.

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: It is all about us being good at producing core capabilities operationally. At the same time we would like to have a larger degree of integrated enablers in the unit, because seamless co-operation will at some point become the deciding factor in a life-or-death situation for a deployed unit. But, operational core capability is what we first and foremost have to deliver. This means that the profile, as a point of

departure, may be the one we are already familiar with, maybe with some ongoing adjustments. It is a management responsibility to ensure the presence of diversity in the operative core-capacity in terms of age. It could also be in terms of gender, ethnicity, and competences.

Interviewers: Why is this form of diversity important to you?

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: It relates to what I said earlier, that we need to be able to display an enormous degree of flexibility. And you cannot do this if you only have one archetype.

Major General Peter Boysen: We learned in Afghanistan it can be a huge advantage to have a woman on your team to engage local women. You can debate whether the woman needs to be an operator or not. There are many opinions on this matter, such as should female operators fulfill the same requirements as male operators. You can come up with many ideas, but I think we need to sit down and think about what the future will require, and how we can best match it. Also in terms of linguists, engineering capacities, helicopter support and so on—should such support be integrated or dedicated? Dedicated and co-trained and certified operationally may be the solution.

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: so they know each other, speak a common language, participate in exercises, become familiar with the context and know what to do. Instead of having someone that is brought in two days prior to departure for an international deployment.

Interviewers: Let me see if I have understood this correctly. You need flexibility, and you wish to obtain this by purchasing or by associating specialists, or diversity, and you believe a certification process is the right way ahead. And you wish to increase internal diversity. Can you give me an example of what you are doing on the internal diversity front?

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: We try to hold on to our employees for longer. Experience is what provides strength organizationally, and time provides the possibility of specialization and developing in-depth skills and specialties.

Major General Peter Boysen: Also, the other day the head of the Frogman Corps made a public statement in which he encouraged women to apply. So efforts are being made on the communication side, and there is no doubt that we are going to discuss how to ensure diversity. It is easy to say, but it is a bit harder to realize, and we might still have some way to go.

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: We are still looking for the right answers; no woman has yet graduated from the selection course, so maybe we need to do make some adjustments to make this happen.

Interviewers: As described elsewhere in this issue, Norway has experimented with gender segregating the aspirants for the Jaeger Corps. The women are able to fulfill exactly the same standards as the men, but they need more time to get there. So is a gender-segregated aspirant training something that you have considered?

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: No, we do not have the resources for this. I actually do not think that this is a desirable scenario, because we have previously talked about A and B teams, and here you would really risk creating something perceived [editor's note: within the units] as a B team.

Interviewers: Yes, but the Norwegians would probably point out that the women are reaching exactly the same level, but only need a little longer to get there.

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: Yes, but they also require many resources to do so. Part of the solution might be to ramp up efforts to recruit more women into the armed forces generally.

Major General Peter Boysen: The bigger the recruitment pool, the better for SOF also.

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: In regards to some assignment, for example capacity building, the competencies we need may not need to be provided by female soldiers, because there is a large array of women who are very successful and accomplished within NGO's and many other areas, such as DANIDA,² etc.

Major General Peter Boysen: It is about tailoring to mission.

Interviewers: You have already mentioned that a certification system can be one way ahead to counter potential notions that some people are not up to standards to contribute to a SOF assignment/deployments. Do you plan additional initiatives to convince the typical operator that women can add value?

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: We do not need to do this, because they are already convinced of this. They know this, but listen, it is exemplary physical men that enter these units, and there is no reason to go find the 10 women in Denmark that might be able to do the exact same things, because then we have simply created a female version of this type of man. It is also about identifying the precise things that women are good at, and where this can be used in operations, and then include them there. Before we start pushing all these things out of the same tube, let's define the exact needs.

Major General Peter Boysen: Exactly, tailor to mission

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: And then look for it in the marketplace

Major General Peter Boysen: I totally agree with Michael, operator or not, this is not what is important, it is what you bring to the table, and if we are at ease with what you bring to the table, then we will go with that.

Interviewers: Let's turn to the last question on our list: What are the advantages and disadvantages of cooperating with a research institution, such as ours, from your perspectives?

Major General Peter Boysen: You can help us describe and explain what we do to a broader audience. And since you are research based-and independent, you can do so with credibility. Personally, I see this form of cooperation growing.

Interviewers: And the disadvantages?

Colonel Michael Hyldgaard: None. Really, it is a precondition for developing this SOF capacity to serve Danish interests. And the combination of a research based approach and our practical knowledge is invincible. The cooperation needs to be future-focused, in terms of looking for what is approaching from behind the hill.

Major General Peter Boysen: In reality, all organizations can benefit from cooperating with academics, because you tend to get blind to you own strengths and weaknesses, whereas if you are being challenged, you leave your comfort zone and this is healthy for everyone.

Interviewers: General Boysen and Colonel Hyldgaard, thank you very much for taking the time and sharing your perspectives. Good luck with the tasks ahead and we look forward to continue our research collaboration with DNK SOCOM.

NOTES

1. The Danish Operations Staff is part of the Defence Command Denmark, which is the supreme military command authority of the Armed Forces. Its main responsibility is to plan for the deployment of military capabilities in national and international contingencies and operations.
2. DANIDA is the Danish Government's aid organization, which aims to reduce poverty through promotion of human rights and economic growth.



REVIEW ESSAY

Advancing A Confused Subfield: A Review of Crenshaw and LaFree's Countering Terrorism

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The subfield of terrorism studies remains confused about its principal concept. Few agree on what the term means, which creates obvious problems for operationalization. Crenshaw and LaFree (2016) address this issue directly and find a way to advance the subfield by offering unique analytical insights. They further our knowledge of the rarity of terrorist plots as well as the method for how most are thwarted. Moreover, they provide a fruitful critique of government overclassification of data that makes the production of sound policy-relevant research difficult, which has the perverse effect of making counterterrorism less effective. Nonetheless, the book suffers from conceptual confusion about the tactic of terrorism when it limits its primary scope to a subset of groups that use the tactic frequently, but not exclusively—that is, those Salafi groups that use an extremist interpretation of the term *jihad*. The book should be read widely, by researchers and practitioners, to learn from its insights, but also critically in the hope that future work can advance this subfield to examine terrorism for the full range of ideological groups who use the tactic.

No one will be surprised to learn that two giants in the field of terrorism studies put together an insightful, readable, and extremely useful book on counterterrorism. Martha Crenshaw is a founder of the field of terrorism studies, to which she continues to contribute. Gary LaFree has made large contributions to the field, both as a prolific author of quality scholarship but also, notably, as the director of the Study of Terrorism and the Response to Terrorism (START), which collects and manages the Global Terrorism Database (GTD).

The book is filled with insights for analysts, academics, practitioners, and graduate students alike, despite lacking a particularly groundbreaking thesis—that counterterrorism is more difficult

Official disclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of the author alone and do not represent the Department of Defense, the U.S. Army, or the School of Advanced Military Studies.

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than most people realize. If anyone thinks it is easy, let them cast the first negative review. The contribution lies in *why* counterterrorism is difficult. To begin, the authors argue that counterterrorism is difficult, not because of policymakers or organizational failures, but because terrorism is complex. Despite the rarity of terrorist attacks and the extremely low likelihood that you will be killed by one, the stakes are high for policymakers. The political stakes are high, since ignoring terrorism is a sure strategy for electoral defeat. Moreover, given the possibility of catastrophic attacks, like the 2001 attacks on New York and the Pentagon, the state must take the threat seriously.

However, politicians and societies are likely to overreact in the immediate aftermath of these rare events, limiting our own freedom through policies that are difficult to revise once the fog of terror dissipates. For example, the U.S. Congress transferred many powers to the executive, including an open-ended Authorization of Military Force (AUMF) within a week of 9/11, and the Patriot Act with sweeping surveillance powers in about 6 weeks. While these acts were akin to legislating while in shock, they have had no trouble surviving once the shock wore off. Even with opposed interests on nearly everything, the Republican-led Congress did not attempt to rein in President Obama's extension of the AUMF to support attacking several more countries and some groups that did not even exist when Congress passed the AUMF.¹ Similarly, despite a decade and a half of outrage from activists on both the left and the right, Congress enacted the U.S.A. Freedom Act—which kept several parts of the Patriot Act—one day after the Patriot Act expired in 2015.

Much of the book deals with problems in studying terrorism and counterterrorism (CT). These issues are wide ranging, and many are well known—such as issues of conceptual and operational definitions, to which I will return in my critique below. In reviewing the literature, the authors find a general lack of agreement on the causes of terrorism at the societal and individual levels (pp. 18–20), as well as the effectiveness of terrorism at the tactical or strategic levels (pp. 20–22). Studying terrorism with data is difficult because an operational definition can be as problematic to pin down as a conceptual one. Citing Schmidt and Jongman (1988), the authors note 109 different definitions of terrorism. Not to be dissuaded, the authors present and defend the operational definition for terrorism used by the GTD: “the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by non-state actors to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation” (p. 23, quoted from LaFree, Dugan, & Miller, 2015). Refreshingly, the authors do not take the definition at face value and recognize the complications and consequences for choosing any one definition. They acknowledge the debates around each aspect: whether threatened violence should count, whether states or their proxies can use terrorism, and whether you can distinguish a political goal over a criminal goal. Strangely, this definition leaves out the least controversial part—that terrorism must target non-combatants. Otherwise, terrorism is indistinguishable from insurgency, guerrilla warfare, or any other non-state actor in a civil war. Thankfully, the updated definition at GTD requires that “the violent act was outside the precepts of International Humanitarian Law”; consequently, the book typically refers to those acts that target non-combatants.² Of course, one could quibble further with any definition (and I will present a conceptual critique below), but it is defensible and—most importantly—*usable* as an operational definition.

One highlight from the data concerns is the access to valid data, which of course has implications for findings as well as counterterrorism policy based off those findings. Without credible data from traditional sources for violence (government data, victimization reports, self-reports), researchers rely on media coverage to populate the universe of cases. “This dependence on media coverage obviously has drawbacks: underreporting in some parts of the world, overreporting in others.” In any part of the world, media (especially foreign media) tend to

underreport rural areas, creating an urban reporting bias (Davenport & Ball, 2002). It is worth noting that this problem could be solved, in part, if government data were more accessible and reliable. The authors note that government data is often treated with suspicion, since it could be used for political purposes. These concerns are not unfounded. It is not surprising that groups enter and exit the State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations or State Sponsors of Terror based on political and diplomatic concerns.³ Furthermore, primary data from official government agencies are often classified or listed as For Official Use Only (FOUO), which limits their utility for academic researchers. Though certainly some amount of this information is worthy of classification or FOUO status, the government tends to overclassify to error on the safe side. What they may not recognize is that limiting data for academic research will hurt the robustness of the findings and the effectiveness of CT policy based on it. In this view, overclassifying is not erroring in the safe side, but could in fact be more dangerous.

As the authors expertly discuss, the problems of studying terrorism and CT do not end with definitional and operational struggles. The authors spend whole chapters on the difficulties of identifying terrorist organizations (Chapter 4), how to deal with the attribution problem of who is actually responsible (Chapter 5), and how to tell whether CT policy is effective (Chapter 6), especially dealing with plots that are failed or foiled (Chapter 3). While each chapter is insightful for its own message, I want to highlight the contributions from two: Chapters 3 and 4.

In Chapter 3, "The Tip of the Iceberg," the authors tackle failed and foiled plots. Rather than take the terrorist attack as the unit of the analysis, the authors use the plot itself. While the chapter mostly presents descriptive analysis, which is interesting in its own right, it demonstrates the use of a design that could yield results using inferential analysis. In this chapter, the authors limit their scope to plots against the U.S. homeland ostensibly connected to the ideology using the extreme interpretation of *Salafi-jihad*. (This raises two points to which I will return: appropriate scope and terminology regarding jihad.) The data can match the plot to one of five stages, thus usefully allowing the researchers to identify at which stage, and by whom, the plot was disrupted. The chapter presents several interesting findings. First, both plots and successful attacks—defined by the authors as at least partial completion of the attack—are rare. The data show 113 plots from 1993 to mid-2016, though it is not clear how many more exist that we do not know about.⁴ Plots spiked (i.e., with 10 or more a year) in 2003, 2009–2012, and 2015, likely the results of developments in those years: the beginning of the war in Iraq, the establishment of al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as a territorial power (p. 80). Of those 113 plots, only about one-fifth were at least partially successful (i.e., completed) (p. 87) and about one-ninth resulted in fatalities (p. 82). Of course, most fatalities came from the attacks on 9/11. Outside of this case, the data show 93 victim deaths during the entire period, and half of these were from the Orlando nightclub shooting in 2016 (p. 82). Only nine of the 113 were lone wolf plots, and only one of those wolves displayed overt religiosity. However, all lone wolves in the dataset completed their attack, since these plots are much harder to foil without communications with other extremists. About one-fifth of the plots involved only two people, while about two-thirds can be attributed to al Qa'ida or AQAP. Only three plots linked directly to ISIS or its predecessors (although this does not include ISIS-inspired attacks). Overall, the authors find a motivating theme of revenge for U.S. military action or immoral behavior (p. 98).

With most plots unsuccessful, the authors address the question of how they fail. Authorities foil most plots at early stages via some form of surveillance; however, the authors note that zero

were foiled using the collection of meta-data by the National Security Agency (pp. 87–88). The data show that 14 were foiled by the public, via physical disruption—e.g., tackling the “shoe bomber”—or from tips to the authorities, while 15 were intercepted with tips or assistance from foreign countries (pp. 87–88). While the authors highlight the varying levels of sophistication in plots, especially at early stages when perpetrators communicate an intent, very few plots failed on their own by a mistake or loss of resolve (p. 87).

While the data reveal important insights, the chapter also raises pressing questions. Notably, how do we know when a plot is successful *strategically*, rather than simply tactically? The authors use the completion of a plot as success, but they recognize that it is difficult to know whether these plots are successful for other purposes, such as: creating fear in the U.S. public, prompting a U.S. policy response that favors their narrative, signaling resolve to supporters, or claiming relevance to outbid a rival group.

Chapter 4, “What is a Terrorist Organization?,” also produces useful insights from descriptive data that are worth mentioning. The authors make the case for thinking of terrorist organizations (TOs) as “an abstraction around which there is a great deal of variation” (p. 101). Terrorist organizations vary widely in their organizational characteristics, such as complexity, capacity, and cohesion. From loose groupings of individuals without direction from a formal group to hierarchical resilient organizations, TOs vary greatly in terms of complexity. Furthermore, not all complex organizations are hierarchical, as many have noted how al Qa’ida became more decentralized, even so much as to represent a franchise, after the defeat of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (pp. 109–110).⁵ The argument about TOs as an abstraction notwithstanding, the authors present data on 2,337 distinct TOs from 1970 to 2015. What is notable is that just under half of all TOs in the data carried out just one attack, followed by 16% who carried out just two attacks. “Only 16 percent of all the organizations included in the GTD can be connected with 10 or more attacks” (p. 114). Similarly, most TOs do not last long. About 70% last less than a year, and only 12% last longer than 10 years (pp. 114–116).

Each chapter contains numerous insights, but the approach of the book has drawbacks. My critiques of the book, and in many ways of the subfield of terrorism studies, fall into three categories: (1) conceptual scope; (2) counterterrorism at the political, strategic, and tactical levels; and (3) the role of CT in grand strategy.

The scope of the book—indeed, much of the field and government CT policy—lacks conceptual clarity. Though the book devotes considerable time and thought to conceptual issues, the way it ultimately handles them is unsatisfying. The book defines terrorism a few different ways in different chapters, but the overall definition can be paraphrased as a method of violence characterized by targeting civilians by non-state actors for a wider political purpose. However, the book focuses largely on groups stemming from an extreme interpretation of jihad, which renders its scope both too broad and too narrow. It is too narrow because there are many other types of groups that use terrorism as a tactic. It is too broad because these groups often do not limit themselves to the use of terrorism as defined by the book. What unifies them is a particular cultish extremism and their attempt to tie that extremism to the broader Muslim community. This common conflation or lack of nuance creates confusion for the book, academic studies, as well as the ability to craft CT policy. If you want to talk about countering the specific Salafi ideology that uses a perverse interpretation of jihad, then that should be the organizing principle—not one of the many tactics used by groups espousing this ideology. Countering that ideology may include

many things that are beyond the scope of CT, to include: alliance formation in Middle East, conventional warfare against territorial groups, using the military selectively, information operations, network operations, as well as things we may consider to be CT actions (e.g., surveillance, taking your shoes off at the airport, decapitation operations). In this case, conflating terrorism as a tactic with groups who use it as one of many tactics, limits one's thinking for responding to it, which may need to be at the strategic or political level.

Likewise, if you want to study (or counter) terrorism as a tactic—violence targeting civilians for a wider purpose—then you need the full range of ideologies and groups who employ that tactic. If you are interested in countering domestic terrorism, then you must also include other ideologies beyond Salafi-jihadists, to include racially motivated terrorism (e.g., KKK, Charleston AME Emanuel shooting) and issue-oriented terrorism (e.g., abortion clinic bombers, eco-terrorists). If you are interested in studying terrorism as a tactic in the context of an insurgency, you may want to include the Shining Path of Peru, the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland, or the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, to which the authors make occasional reference. As the authors note, the definition must be based on objective criteria—not just to include violence we all abhor. The most productive works in the field of terrorism studies limit their scope clearly. Examples include: Virginia Page Fortna's (2015) study on whether rebel's use of terrorism as a tactic is effective in the context of a civil war, Andrea Cronin's (2010) work that limits the scope to Al Qa'ida and those with similar ideologies, and Chapter 3 of the book under review. Those that delink their work from the word terrorism are even more promising because they can be more accurate and limit their scope appropriately, such as those studying civilian victimization in war or one-sided violence (e.g., Downes, 2006; Eck & Hultman, 2007; Wood, Kathman, & Gent, 2012).

This distinction is essential for conceptual clarity, which is necessary not only for academic rigor, but especially for practitioners and policymakers. They must have clear conceptual boundaries to craft and enact effective policy. This leads into my next quibble: connecting our thinking about terrorism and counterterrorism to the political and strategic—as opposed to simply tactical—levels.

Crenshaw and LaFree (2016) acknowledge this issue in a few places in the book. Notably, they discuss the issue in their definition of terrorist plot success (pp. 20–22, Chapter 3), when discussing the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) policy of the Obama administration (pp. 97–98), and when noting how CT policy of drone strikes in Afghanistan was disconnected from counterinsurgency policy of winning over the allegiance of the population in the same country. The authors certainly recognize this issue, so dwelling on it is a bit unfair. However, they pay too little attention to how tactical counterterrorism—targeting specific people and organizations—can be detrimental to political counterterrorism, which can be more fruitful. Certainly, we must pay attention to tactical CT to stop attacks, but it is impossible to stop them all. Instead, political CT would try to stop people (or groups) from wanting to use terrorism. CVE efforts in the Obama administration attempted this, but—as the authors note—it had a domestic focus and was disconnected from the policy outside the United States that fuels the desire for terrorism. This ties back to the problem of emphasizing the conflation of terrorism with a particular ideology or set of groups. Political CT, in this sense, isn't just CT—in the tactical sense. It must counter the ideology to curtail recruitment.

If countering the ideology that uses an extremist interpretation of jihad is going to thwart recruitment, then CVE means countering the extremists' narrative. Under no circumstances should we (e.g., academics, practitioners, policymakers) legitimate their narrative by accepting any premise of it. Instead, we should recognize the struggle between extremists and moderates in the Muslim world and work to ensure that the non-extremists' views win to delegitimize the extremists.

Yet when academics adopt the language of the extremists, it accepts their premise, legitimates their narrative, and strengthens their position *vis-à-vis* the non-extremists. It is the extremists who want to associate their movement with Islam and win the constructivist battle over whether jihad means or justifies individual war against infidels.⁶ When we associate them with Islam or we label them jihadists because that is what they call themselves, we are actually furthering their cause.

Last, I want to address the issue of grand strategy. The back cover asks: "Can we construct a grand strategy to counter terrorism?" The answer is no. This question misunderstands what grand strategy is, which is an overarching strategy to manage the entire scope of a state's international relations. CT or CVE is, necessarily, a subset of a grand strategy, unless the state only encounters terrorism as a serious threat. Grand strategies prioritize planning at the conceptual level around a worldview of what counts in the national interest and where the threats to those interests arise.

It is worth recognizing that terrorism is a much lower priority in U.S. grand strategic outlook than is commonly acknowledged. For all the discussion of CT becoming the new bipartisan foreign policy consensus after 9/11, the government has not acted as if that were the case, even within months of the attack itself. The United States has chosen consistently to remove the threat of even small states knowing the likelihood of strengthening transnational terrorists is high by creating power vacuums in Iraq and Libya, or by the choice of alliances. Truthfully, CT should not be the top priority: it is not where the main threats come from, and the United States would likely lose more than it would gain if CT drove grand strategy. At the end of the day, it is the power of states that poses the biggest threat—not small bands of death-cult extremists.

To conclude, Crenshaw and LaFree have crafted a solid book describing and documenting many of the problems that plague our understanding of terrorism and counterterrorism. It should be read widely, but two audiences stand out as the optimal audience for this book. The first is graduate students in research seminars on terrorism, conflict, or international security. We need fresh intellectual eyes on the issues that Crenshaw and LaFree document. Second, practitioners of counterterrorism in the military, intelligence/investigation communities, and other relevant agencies need to read this book. They need to learn from the problems identified in the book, but also to refrain from overclassification, or else find a way to allow controlled access to deidentified data. If CT policy is to learn from academic research, then academics need more access to improve the validity of the findings. Although the temptation to overclassify seems like the cautious choice, it may end up being harmful by denying more robust studies that could inform more sound policy.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

NOTES

1. In practice, the AUMF is hardly necessary for presidents to use force because Congress has shown almost no interest in limiting this power. The Obama administration received little—if any—pushback when it claimed the Libya intervention required no Congressional approval. Ironically, when the Obama administration asked for approval for Syria strikes after Assad crossed the red line of using chemical weapons, he was rebuffed, then criticized—by the leadership of that very same Congress—for *not* acting without authorization. The Trump administration carried out two strikes against Syria for using chemical weapons without Congressional approval or meaningful objection.
2. For more information on coding, see Global Terrorism Database (2018), “Data Collection Methodology” (<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/using-gtd/>).
3. See, for example of the political dimensions: Michael Moran (2006) “Terrorist Groups and Political Legitimacy” from the Council of Foreign Relations (<https://www.cfr.org/background/terrorist-groups-and-political-legitimacy>) and Daniel Byman (2008) “The Changing Nature of State Sponsorship of Terrorism” from Brookings Institution (<https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-changing-nature-of-state-sponsorship-of-terrorism/>). See also: Phillips (2014), “What is a Terrorist Group?”
4. The universe of cases is unknown for several reasons, notably that many likely never reach a level of sophistication sufficient for authorities or researchers to notice and that authorities may not reveal all plans uncovered to researchers or the public.
5. See Douglas Farah and Peter Finn, “Terrorism, Inc.: Al-Qaeda Franchises Brand of Violence to Groups across the World,” *Washington Post* (11/23/2003).
6. For starters, see Hathout (2002) *Jihad vs. Terrorism*.

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BOOK REVIEW



Horn, Bernd. *The Wrecking Crew: Operation Colossus, 10 February 1941*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2019, 192 pp., incl. pictures, maps, notes, index. ISBN: 978-1-45974-338-0

Reviewed by Timothy Heck 
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In February 1941, after a year and a half of strategic and operational defeats at the hands of the Axis, the British launched their first airborne special operations raid against the Italians. Benefiting from Prime Minister Winston Churchill's insistence and focus on offensive operations, Operation Colossus promised to shift the initiative to the British and deliver a crippling blow to the Italian war effort. The target was the Tragino Aqueduct in the province of Apulia. *The Wrecking Crew* recounts the development of British special operations forces (SOF), the planning and execution of the mission, and its aftermath. With its detailed analysis, *The Wrecking Crew* is an engaging look at how British planners conceptualized, created, and employed their fledgling SOF capability.

The book's initial chapters focus on the development of British SOF and airborne capabilities. Created at a time of existential threat to the home island, Horn makes it clear that only through Churchill's pugnacity and leadership were these capabilities created. The book makes clear that the birth of British SOF faced opposition from the War Office and service commanders, revealing the high-level friction between SOF and conventional forces. The forming of an airborne capability within the Army brought to head resource shortfalls, in addition to concerns by commanders that conventional forces would lose many of their best soldiers to these new units. Likewise, the Royal Air Force saw the diversion of aircraft from strategic bombing to troop transport as detrimental to the aerial bombing campaign. Despite these concerns, as Horn elucidates, both British SOF and airborne capabilities were created.

The Tragino Aqueduct was an inviting target as it provided the only source of pure water to the province, which was home to significant industry and shipping ports supporting Italian operations in Albania, Greece, and North Africa. British planners believed its destruction would result in "an immediate change of plans by the Italian High Command of great strategic importance" (p. 49). Furthermore, the raid had potential psychological benefits to the British population. As one pre-raid analysis stated, "a daring operation of this type, if brought to a successful conclusion, cannot fail to hearten the people of this country" (p. 49).

Horn details the operational planning, training, and preparations that preceded the mission. Drawing on archival sources, the book lays out the series of minor mistakes throughout the planning cycle that had rippling effects during the mission's execution. To the book's credit, this analysis is done in a neutral tone, without pointing fingers or assigning blame. For readers accustomed to staff planning processes, these oversights and miscalculations serve as a reminder that mission success starts long before the operation commences.

The preparations for the operation brought even more misfortune to the mission, as Horn adeptly recounts. The commandos were unable to conduct full-mission rehearsals with their new equipment and aircrew. Furthermore, target intelligence and an understanding of the situation on the ground were out-of-date. Technical preparations and the physical state of the aircraft left much to be desired. Nevertheless, the mission was deemed an acceptable risk and, as Horn writes, only execution could validate that the "sweeping assumptions and predicted outcomes would match the reality on the ground" (p. 62). For the 36 commandos, the realities on the ground were different than planned or trained for. The book covers the assault and subsequent failed withdrawal by in lively prose.

The book's concluding chapter focuses on the post-mission analysis in the United Kingdom. Here, the reader is directly reminded that victory has a thousand fathers but defeat is an orphan (p. 110). Even Prime Minister Churchill attempted to evade taking responsibility for authorizing the raid. The nine months between the mission and confirmation of any success were a period of hand-wringing and finger-pointing by all involved. Reports received later converted British analysis from an initial judgement of failure to one judging the mission a success, if a limited one.

The Wrecking Crew has several minor areas for improvement. First, the Tragino aqueduct raid, though the first for British SOF, was not the first airborne SOF raid of the war. While Horn covers other SOF airborne raids briefly in his section on the development of airborne capability worldwide, the book would benefit from framing the raid more completely in other early war SOF missions by both sides. Furthermore, there is room for expansion of how the raid directly impacted the development of British SOF planning and future operations. The book summarizes many of the lessons learned and states they were quickly put into practice, but does not detail which ones were implemented nor their impact on subsequent early-war commando missions. As a result, the analysis of Operation Colossus' impact seems hermetically sealed from the war's larger narrative.

Overall, the creation of British SOF capabilities and their initial employment were a steep learning curve for the War Cabinet and the services. The planning and execution of the Tragino raid revealed significant shortcomings in the nascent capability and its enablers. This evolution and employment are well recounted in *The Wrecking Crew: Operation Colossus, 10 February 1941*. For readers interested in the evolution of British airborne SOF after Tragino, a good source is Taylor Downing's *Night Raid: The True Story of the First Victorious British Para Raid of WWII* (London: Little, Brown, 2013).

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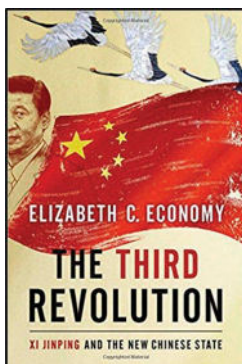
BOOK REVIEW

A Rare Insight into China's Domestic Reaction to Xi Jinping's Reform Policies



Elizabeth C. Economy. *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State*. Oxford University Press, May 3, 2018, 360 pp., English, \$18.95

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In a political and academic atmosphere dominated by the debate over the rise of China and its threat to the United States, Elizabeth C. Economy took a subtly different approach by examining the effects of this rapid transformation on the Middle Kingdom itself. In her recent book *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State*, Economy provides a composite assessment of President Xi Jinping's sweeping reforms since 2012. Her conclusion is that Xi's new direction and vision are truly revolutionary: on par with the legacy of Modern China's two greatest leaders, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Xi's Rejuvenation narrative - that China ought to return to its outward-looking and expansive past - is a powerful one for the collective

Chinese consciousness looking to leave behind the Century of Shame and forge a new identity matching its newly acquired national power. To the same end, Xi's "Chinese Dream" (中国梦) for the country to become an economic, military, and cultural leader on the global stage resonates equally well with an increasingly affluent middle-class society (小康社会). Yet, the author cautions that contradictions abound in Xi's reforms and the current path to rejuvenation is not without its domestic critics. A thorough understanding of the dynamics within Xi's administration and China's domestic reaction, therefore, should be the premise of any Western foreign policy towards China. This is perhaps Economy's most salient prescription for US policymakers and military leaders in today's Sino-phobic political climate.

Economy's book certainly provides a foundational primer for China watchers. Each chapter details one of Xi's six reform priorities – anti-corruption, internet censorship, innovation, economy, environment, and foreign policy. Her writing contains ample viewpoints from both Xi's domestic supporters and skeptics, creating a uniquely objective tone. Chinese domestic

reaction to reforms that are viewed as controversial in the west might come as a surprise to the American pundits. For example, the much-criticized Social Credit System is relatively acceptable to the Chinese public for attuning with a society already obsessed with individual trustworthiness. Other cases illuminate political vulnerabilities more obscure to the west. Xi's anti-corruption campaign has the unintended consequence of paralyzing local officials from taking on new projects for fear of attracting unwanted scrutiny from central government. Paradoxically, the more Xi spotlights government corruption, the more he taints popular perception of the Chinese Communist Party. Both consequences run counter to the reform's intended goals of improving governance efficiency and legitimizing the Party's rule.

The most significant pushback against Xi's reforms, however, stem from its sharp reversal of Deng's Reform and Liberalization Policy (改革开放), which has been the staple of China's socio-economic environment for the past three decades. Academic elites and courageous government officials alike have expressed unease over Xi's increasingly draconian attempt to clamp down on western ideologies - or any system of thoughts that could outcompete the Party for that matter. To the consternation of many, memories from Mao's Cultural Revolution have been rekindled. The lack of competing ideologies has also contributed to a steady decline in the quality of China's research and innovation base, making China even less competitive against western technological giants. Indeed, the illiberal trend has caused a significant "talent drain." Nearly half of China's brightest minds have elected to not to return home after graduating from top western universities. Economy reached the same conclusion as many of Xi's critics: the "Chinese Dream" is an inherent oxymoron. China cannot be a leader in the globalized world without first permitting the world to enter its embrace. A China insisting on undertaking an unilateral endeavor to become the world's leader would only foster resentfulness domestically and internationally. For this reason, Economy assessed China's recent Soft Power ventures, to include aspects of the Belt and Road Initiative, as mostly a hollow but expensive effort that failed to resonate with a skeptical liberal international community. Economy warns that a US withdrawal from its leadership role in international affairs does not automatically mean China would have a smooth path to the top of the pecking order.

Viewing the results from Xi's reforms holistically, the final chapter of Economy's book is dedicated to recommendations for future US engagements with China. Extending the prescriptions from her esteemed peers such as Robert Blackwill, Ashley Tellis, and Lyle Goldstein, Economy advocates for a long-term, US interest-centric approach that is nested in the traditional "engage but hedge" strategy. Her most insightful advice to policymakers, however, is to focus less on China's latest foreign policy moves on the headlines but more on understanding the rapid but unreported domestic changes underway. In this regard, her argument echoes those of another China scholar, Jeffrey W. Legro, whose proactive approach requires the United States to identify potential replacement ideas circulating in China and their current backers — "ones that may someday be conceptual kings."¹ Both Legros and Economy would agree that a viable long-term China policy must deliberately consider not only Xi's actions but also the domestic reactions – the result of which could present new challenges *or* opportunities.

Our lenses inside the Middle Kingdom, unfortunately, is the weakest of all of our tools of national powers when dealing with China. While Economy proposes cultivating a new generation of China experts in the diplomatic realm, US Department of Defense, to include the Special Operations Command (SOCOM) enterprise, should also increase its investment in a parallel effort. These activities do not necessarily have to be sensitive in nature. Traditional military-to-military engagements, in the forms of Subject Matter Expert Exchanges (SMEE) or joint Humanitarian

Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR) exercises, could provide a rare facet to engage and assess intentions. Mid-level military leader interactions could potentially reveal underlying political sentiments previously unknown to the Foreign Policy Advisor at US Embassy in Beijing. Concurrently, SOCOM, with its unique intelligence capabilities and working in conjunction with our interagency partners, should further invest in sensor and analysis processes to not only illuminate China's current domestic dynamics but also to anticipate future changes across the socio-economic spectrum. A cursory review of China's history for the past century reveals every Chinese revolution is followed by a reactionary period – some turned into violent civil wars while others ended without much bloodshed. The aftermath of Xi's Third Revolution will unlikely to be different in this regard. Will US be caught by surprise?

Major Austin Liu is an US Army Civil Affairs officer currently studying at the Department of Defense Analysis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California.

Note

1. Jeffrey W. Legos, "What will China Want: the Future Intention of a Rising Power", *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol 5, Issue 3, (Cambridge University Press, 2007): P. 527.