JSOU

Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream

Jessica Glicken Turnley

JSOU Report 08-2
February 2008

Joint Special Operations University
357 Tully Street
Alison Building
Hurlburt Field, FL 32544

https://jsoupublic.socom.mil

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE **FEB 2008**	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED **00-00-2008 to 00-00-2008**
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream**		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
		5b. GRANT NUMBER
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER
		5e. TASK NUMBER
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **Joint Special Operations University,357 Tully Street,Alison Building,Hurlburt Field,FL,32544**		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT **Approved for public release; distribution unlimited**		
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
14. ABSTRACT		
15. SUBJECT TERMS		

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**	**Same as Report (SAR)**	**46**	

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std Z39-18

Joint Special Operations University and the Strategic Studies Department

The Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) provides its publications to contribute toward expanding the body of knowledge about joint special operations. JSOU publications advance the insights and recommendations of national security professionals and the Special Operations Forces (SOF) students and leaders for consideration by the SOF community and defense leadership.

JSOU is a subordinate organization of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. The JSOU mission is to educate SOF executive, senior, and intermediate leaders and selected other national and international security decision makers, both military and civilian, through teaching, outreach, and research in the science and art of joint special operations. JSOU provides education to the men and women of SOF and to those who enable the SOF mission in a joint environment.

JSOU conducts research through its Strategic Studies Department where effort centers upon the USSOCOM mission and the commander's priorities.

Mission. Provide fully capable special operations forces to defend the United States and its interests. Plan and synchronize operations against terrorist networks.

Priorities.
- Deter, disrupt, and defeat terrorist threats.
- Develop and support our people and their families.
- Sustain and modernize the force.

The Strategic Studies Department also provides teaching and curriculum support to Professional Military Education institutions—the staff colleges and war colleges. It advances SOF strategic influence by its interaction in academic, interagency, and United States military communities.

The JSOU portal is https://jsoupublic.socom.mil.

Joint Special Operations University

Brian A. Maher, Ed.D., Education, *President*
Lieutenant Colonel Michael C. McMahon, *Strategic Studies Department Director*

Colonel (USA, Ret.) William W. Mendel, Colonel (USA, Ret.) Jeffrey W. Nelson, Colonel (USAF, Ret.) Kenneth H. Poole, Captain (USN, Ret.) William S. Wildrick, *resident Senior Fellows*

Editorial Advisory Board

John B. Alexander
Ph.D., Education, *The Apollinaire Group and JSOU Senior Fellow*

Joseph D. Celeski
Colonel, U.S. Army, Ret.
JSOU Senior Fellow

Chuck Cunningham
Lieutenant General, U.S. Air Force, Ret., *Professor of Strategy, Joint Advanced Warfighting School and JSOU Associate Fellow*

Gilbert E. Doan
Major, U.S. Army, Ret., *JSOU Institutional Integration Division Chief*

Thomas H. Henriksen
Ph.D., History, *Hoover Institution Stanford University and JSOU Senior Fellow*

Russell D. Howard
Brigadier General, U.S. Army, Ret.
Director of the Jebsen Center for Counter-Terrorism Studies, The Fletcher School, Tufts University and JSOU Senior Fellow

John D. Jogerst
Colonel, U.S. Air Force, Ret.
18th USAFSOS Commandant

James Kiras
Ph.D., History, *School of Advanced Air and Space Studies and JSOU Associate Fellow*

Alvaro de Souza Pinheiro
Major General, Brazilian Army, Ret.
JSOU Associate Fellow

James F. Powers, Jr.
Colonel, U.S. Army, Ret.
Director of Homeland Security, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and JSOU Associate Fellow

Richard H. Shultz, Jr.
Ph.D., Political Science
Director, International Security Studies Program, The Fletcher School and JSOU Senior Fellow

Stephen Sloan
Ph.D., Comparative Politics
University of Central Florida

Robert G. Spulak, Jr.
Ph.D., Physics/Nuclear Engineering
Sandia National Laboratories and JSOU Associate Fellow

Joseph S. Stringham
Brigadier General, U.S. Army, Ret.
Alutiiq, LLC and JSOU Associate Fellow

J. Paul de B. Taillon
Ph.D., International Affairs
Royal Military College of Canada and JSOU Associate Fellow

Graham H. Turbiville, Jr.
Ph.D., History, *Courage Services, Inc. and JSOU Senior Fellow*

Jessica Glicken Turnley
Ph.D., Cultural Anthropology/Southeast Asian Studies
Galisteo Consulting Group and JSOU Senior Fellow

Rich Yarger
Ph.D., History, *Professor of National Security Policy, U.S. Army War College and JSOU Associate Fellow*

On the cover. 4 August 2006: Marines of G Company, 2nd Marine Special Operations Battalion, Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, in the water off the coast of North Carolina as part of a training mission. Photo: PFC Rebekka Kramp, Marine Corps Air Station New River, North Carolina.

USSOCOM Headquarters, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. U.S. Air Force photo.

Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream

Jessica Glicken Turnley

JSOU Report 08-2
The JSOU Press
Hurlburt Field, Florida
2008

Comments about this publication are invited and should be forwarded to Director, Strategic Studies Department, Joint Special Operations University, 357 Tully Street, Alison Building, Hurlburt Field, Florida 32544. Copies of this publication may be obtained by calling JSOU at 850-884-1569; FAX 850-884-4732. Electronic versions of this and all JSOU Press publications can be found at https://jsoupublic.socom.mil/publications/index.php.

****

The Strategic Studies Department, JSOU is currently accepting written works relevant to special operations for potential publication. For more information please contact Mr. Jim Anderson, JSOU Director of Research, at 850-884-1569, DSN 579-1569, james.d.anderson@hurlburt.af.mil. Thank you for your interest in the JSOU Press.

****

This work was cleared for public release; distribution is unlimited.

ISBN 1-933749-23-7

The views expressed in this publication are entirely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views, policy or position of the U.S. Government, Department of Defense, United States Special Operations Command, or the Joint Special Operations University.

Recent Publications of the JSOU Press

Implications for Network-Centric Warfare, March 2006, Jessica Glicken Turnley

Narcoterrorism in Latin America, April 2006, Alvaro de Souza Pinheiro

The Changing Nature of Warfare, the Factors Mediating Future Conflict, and Implications for SOF, April 2006, John B. Alexander

Civil-Military Operations and Professional Military Education, May 2006, James F. Powers, Jr.

Blogs and Military Information Strategy, June 2006, James Kinniburgh and Dorothy Denning

2006 JSOU/NDIA SO/LIC Chapter Essays, June 2006

One Valley at a Time, August 2006, Adrian T. Bogart III

Special Operations Aviation in NATO, September 2006, Richard D. Newton

Beyond Draining the Swamp: Urban Development and Counterterrorism in Morocco, October 2006, Stephen R. Dalzell

Filling Special Operations Gaps with Civilian Expertise, December 2006, James F. Powers, Jr.

Educating for Strategic Thinking in the SOF Community, January 2007, Harry R. Yarger

The Israeli Approach to Irregular Warfare and Implications for the U.S., February 2007, Thomas H. Henriksen

Psychological Operations: Learning Is Not a Defense Science Project, March 2007, Curtis D. Boyd

2007 JSOU and NDIA SO/LIC Division Essays, April 2007

Hunting Leadership Targets in Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorist Operations, June 2007, Graham H. Turbiville, Jr.

Executive Report, JSOU Second Annual Symposium (30 April–3 May 2007)

A Theory of Special Operations, October 2007, Robert G. Spulak, Jr.

Block by Block: Civic Action in the Battle of Baghdad, November 2007, Adrian T. Bogart III

Private Security Infrastructure Abroad, November 2007, Graham H. Turbiville, Jr.

Intelligence in Denied Areas, December 2007, Russell D. Howard

Is Leaving the Middle East a Viable Option, January 2008, Thomas H. Henriksen

Foreword

The United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and Special Operations Forces (SOF) are growing to meet the increasing irregular warfare challenges posed by violent extremist organizations. Although a tradition of tension exists between conventional military forces and SOF, there is little disagreement within USSOCOM and the broader defense community that the current threats facing the United States require an increased SOF capability. The challenge is how best to implement and manage the growth while retaining the unique capabilities resident in our special operations community.

Jessica Turnley wades into the discussion with a short monograph on the concept of organizational identity or organizational culture and the difficulty of developing and, more importantly, retaining these in the face of changing organizational structures and institutional growth. Her discussion cuts to the heart of what it means to be SOF vice what it means to be a member of USSOCOM. In the current organization, they are not synonymous. A significant percentage of the command is made up of non-SOF members assigned from the various services. As the command grows, these "SOF enablers" will remain a critical element within the command and the SOF community at large.

Underlying much of Dr. Turnley's discussion is the unique position USSOCOM and SOF have within the Department of Defense. It is the only combatant command with Title 10 "Service-like" responsibilities and authorities as well as operational command authority. Jessica's research highlights how this tension in responsibilities and authorities drove USSOCOM to create what she describes as a "blended" organization. As the tensions of growth and the current global struggle continues over the years, this dichotomy of missions will need to be addressed to ensure the formal requirements of the "Service-like" requirements do not undermine the inherent flexibility and creativity associated with traditional SOF activities.

Michael C. McMahon, Lt Col, USAF
Director, JSOU Strategic Studies Department

About the Author

Dr. Jessica Glicken Turnley is president of Galisteo Consulting Group, Inc., Albuquerque, New Mexico and a senior fellow with the JSOU Strategic Studies Department. She provides services in the national security arena, in strategic business planning, organizational development, corporate culture change, policy analysis, and economic development to a wide variety of clients in the public and private sector. Dr. Turnley works directly with the intelligence community, including service on the Defense Intelligence Agency's Advisory Board and with other agencies in both programmatic/analytic and organizational development capacities. She has worked with various offices in the Department of Defense as well as with United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). She also works on a consulting basis with Sandia National Laboratories. Her technical work includes projects focusing on computational social simulations; technologies for smart, secure international borders; explorations of techniques to detect deception; and explorations of the ways in which organizational structures and management approaches affect the practice of warfare, national security, and science.

Dr. Turnley has helped the Environmental Protection Agency develop approaches to assess social, cultural, and economic impacts at Superfund sites; participated in regional economic development efforts; and engaged in organizational audits and development projects for local corporations and organizations. She has also organized and conducted focus groups and workshops on a variety of topics. Prior to Galisteo, Dr. Turnley worked for ecological planning & toxicology, inc., focusing on risk communication and stakeholder involvement in public decision-making. In this capacity, she has given workshops in China and Poland on citizen involvement and participated in efforts

to formalize public participation in environmental management in the United States.

Dr. Turnley served as a technical manager at Sandia National Laboratories for programs ranging from the development of a Geographic Information System based information-management tool on the safety of nuclear reactors around the world to methods for evaluating the success of government-funded research programs. Prior to Sandia, she started and ran a nonprofit business assistance center for women in New Mexico called WESST Corp; as one of its funders, the Small Business Administration praised the center as giving the best value for the dollar. Dr. Turnley also has provided marketing and public relations services for the high technology industry, working in Silicon Valley in its high growth days of the early 1980s and on the East Coast. Dr. Turnley has a B.A. in Anthropology and English Literature from University of California, Santa Cruz; an M.A. in Social Anthropology from University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; and a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology and Southeast Asian Studies from Cornell University. She was a Fulbright Scholar in Indonesia and has published as both Jessica Glicken and Jessica Turnley. JSOU has published two of her monographs, *Implications for Network-Centric Warfare* (March 2006) and with Dr. Robert G. Spulak, Jr., *Theoretical Perspectives of Terrorist Enemies as Networks* (October 2005).

Retaining a Precarious Value as Special Operations Go Mainstream

Background and Introduction

In 1987 it appeared as if the special operations community was going to change from a collection of specialized organizations (such as the Special Forces Groups and Naval Special Warfare units)—reporting independently up through the U.S. military service components—into a joint, independent, and formal part of the U.S. military and defense structures. This shift was catalyzed by the passage of the Nunn-Cohen Amendment to the fiscal year (FY) 1987 National Defense Authorization Act, which established the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD SO/LIC). The Nunn-Cohen Amendment was designed to provide Special Operations Forces (SOF) a formal institutional role and voice in the defense complex, largely by converting a capability (embodied in SOF) into an organization that could be tasked and manage resources (USSOCOM). The "capability" was given a voice in the policy arena through ASD SO/LIC. The legislation was a deliberate and explicit effort by special operations supporters in the military and in Congress to ensure the continuity and strength of what had historically been a marginalized and continuously threatened capability.

The passage of the legislation and the organizational changes that followed raises interesting questions. These questions focus on the retention of "specialness" as special operations are brought into the military mainstream through their management by an organization defined in the same terms as those serving the general-purpose military. The urgency of the questions is underscored by the leading role USSOCOM and, by implication, special operations have acquired in confronting today's primary national security threat.

…questions focus on the retention of "specialness" as special operations are brought into the military mainstream…

The establishment of USSOCOM fundamentally changed (and is still changing) SOF. Prior to 1986/7, SOF were perceived as a loosely coupled group defined by a capability, held together by a core quality

that enabled its defining capability, and located *by design* outside of mainstream activity. After 1986/7 the presence and activities of USSOCOM set up a tension in which this group of special operations personnel (SOF) was pulled toward mainstream activity through an institutional replica of other unified commands and of the services. This tension raises a question about the impact of organizational structure on organizational definition and operation. If USSOCOM reduced the marginal nature of SOF, it may also have changed the nature of SOF in both desirable and undesirable ways.

Strong textual and theoretical evidence exists that locates the distinctiveness of SOF in the quality of their people. However, the long and ongoing debate over the question, as well as interviews and participant-observation work, suggests a key point: Both SOF and non-SOF personnel do not clearly, quickly, and explicitly recognize that it is the quality of SOF personnel that makes SOF special. This unclear expression of the SOF core quality, combined with ongoing resentment of SOF from members of the general-purpose forces, argues that SOF, as a group of specially qualified personnel, can be characterized by a "precarious value"[2]—that the group functions as a *precarious organization*:

a. It occupies an unstable social position within a larger community.
b. It has what it claims to be its own distinctive qualities, but does not clearly articulate them. The persons representing that organization (its functionaries) are not perceived as fully legitimate when interacting with members of the larger community.
c. The organization itself is not fully acceptable to its host population.[3]

Since the value of quality personnel is not strongly behaviorally or operationally recognized either within or outside the special operations community, and because USSOCOM headquarters (the management function) is under strong pressure to organizationally "look like" other commands and the services in order to maintain legitimacy, the core value of SOF—the importance of the quality of the people—is at great risk of being lost. It will be translated into tasks or acquired behaviors and will thus become solutions to problems of a specific time and place rather than potential or capability that can be operationalized anywhere in the world to address a range of different types of problems.

In this case, the *value* (defined as a *capability*) is at risk of becoming redefined into behavioral achievements.

If SOF (considered as a group) comprise a precarious organization and these types of organizations are unstable and subject to assimilation by the mainstream community, has the establishment of USSOCOM had the effect its supporters desired? It did address one of the hallmarks of precariousness—that is, the lack of representatives of the organizations—and thereby helping to ensure stable funding for SOF and more effective inclusion of special operations in war planning and operations. However, if USSOCOM did fully integrate special operations into the defense community through its status as a fully legitimate actor, will this also eliminate the special nature of the contribution of the special operations community? Will it put pressure on SOF to mainstream their core value (the quality of their people)? If so, how well positioned are SOF to resist this pressure?

This monograph will explore the relationship between the group of special operations-qualified personnel embodied in the loosely defined group called "SOF" and USSOCOM, then focus specifically on SOF. It will also address the nature of organizations and the impact organizational structure can have on operational decisions and behavior. It will take the position that SOF is a loosely coupled, precarious organization. Legitimation, as was attempted with the establishment of USSOCOM, comes with benefits and costs for that organization. The histories of USSOCOM generally focus on the benefits to SOF brought through the development of the more formal institution of USSOCOM and its more complete integration into the defense community. The costs of legitimacy, particularly as they relate to SOF, are not discussed. The cost may be the diminishment of the distinctiveness and strength of SOF's core quality: the specialness of SOF personnel. As Philip Selznick writes, "the more readily subject to outside pressure a given value is, the more necessary is [its]…isolation."[4] The thesis of this discussion is that while it may be determined that the benefits may outweigh the costs, both must be considered in the decision process to avoid or mitigate significant unintended consequences.

Legitimation, as was attempted with the establishment of USSOCOM, comes with benefits and costs…

The Relationship Between the Special Operations Community and USSOCOM

Prior to 1986 USSOCOM did not exist. Each service component had its cadre of special operations-qualified personnel. Each service set up its own selection, training, and equipment standards, all driven by similar philosophies but calibrated to different scales. However, although they did "recruit, train, and equip" SOF personnel, military leadership in the service components historically regarded special operations—and SOF—with ambivalence. "Military decisionmakers are well aware of the value of a tank, strategic bomber, or aircraft carrier but find it more difficult to measure the value of a Special Forces military training team working with military forces in Peru."[5] This ambivalence toward and lack of knowledge of SOF led to a crisis-driven budget-allocation process for special operations that often left the various SOF components understaffed and under-resourced. It also, many argued, contributed to issues of joint interoperability that led to such poorly coordinated operations as Grenada and certain high-profile "failures" such as Desert One. These factors stimulated supporters of special operations to develop and pass the Nunn-Cohen Amendment.

What is USSOCOM?

USSOCOM was designed to achieve three major goals: provide SOF with control over their own resources, foster interservice cooperation and interoperability, and give SOF a voice in the Pentagon.[6] Details of the battle behind the legislation and the process by which the command was stood-up are covered elsewhere.[7]

It is important to note one specific aspect of the legislation establishing USSOCOM. This command is different from other unified commands, as it has both mission authority and its own budget authority. It differs from the services for the same reason.[8] The passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986 gave all other unified commands mission authority, but their personnel and equipment are still provided by the services.[9] Although USSOCOM—like the services—recruits, trains, and equips SOF personnel through its Major Force Program (MFP)-11 responsibilities, it also has mission authority (deriving from its role as a unified combatant command), which the service components do not.

Every SOF operator is at the nexus of multiple and sometimes conflicting professional identities. Each operator came into the military through a service component. He then volunteered for special operations qualification and went through some "rite of passage" in order to belong. His rank is a service grade, and his pay comes through his service. USSOCOM pays for his SOF training and SOF-specific equipment. While in theater, he is under operational command of the regional commander, although he works through a Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) funded and staffed by USSOCOM.

This set of multiple identities establishes an interesting tension among USSOCOM, the services, SOF, and the other unified commands. All SOF stationed in the United States are assigned to USSOCOM.[10] However, as USSOCOM is a unified combatant command,[11] the headquarters site at MacDill Air Force Base and the Pentagon office include SOF personnel, nonspecial operations military personnel, and nonmilitary (civilian) personnel.

Note that no formal SOF "organization" exists—only the collection of the special operations personnel from four services. Responses from interviews conducted for this research[12] clearly demonstrated that primary institutional loyalty for SOF was to their services. The primary marker of institutional membership for SOF, as for all military personnel, is still the uniform that is service-specific. The uniform is modified by flashes and tabs, which identify the wearer as a member of a *service-specific* SOF group. Twenty years after the passage of Nunn-Cohen, and despite the establishment of USSOCOM, the SOF identity is far from primary. The USSOCOM Capstone Concept, its forward look beyond the Future Years Defense Plan, contains a section on the Joint Special Operations Warrior—but does not directly address the development of a SOF-specific identity.[13] This monograph explores this tension in more detail in the discussion on legitimacy.

…despite the establishment of USSOCOM, the SOF identity is far from primary.

What is the relationship of USSOCOM to the collection of individuals who make up SOF? What are the consequences of this relationship? Does USSOCOM define institutional identity in a way that SOF do not? As this discussion progresses it is important to keep in mind that, from a statutory and budget standpoint, USSOCOM is a unified command *and* exhibits service-like qualities in ways that no other command does.

USSOCOM and SOF are both groups, but of qualitatively different types. USSOCOM is a formally defined organization with a recognized place in the organization chart of the Department of Defense. SOF are the collection of special operations-qualified personnel from all the services, each of whom may report up through USSOCOM or a theater command (as well as their service component) as the circumstances of the individual change. Furthermore, as USSOCOM is a unified command, military personnel looking for joint postings under Goldwater-Nichols can fulfill the requirement through service at headquarters (HQ) USSOCOM. As a result, a significant number of the personnel participating in the HQ USSOCOM organization are not SOF but come from the general-purpose military or are civilians. Does this matter? One important way in which it matters is that *they* feel the distinction. All SOF interviewed at HQ USSOCOM clearly felt and expressed that they belong to a subgroup within USSOCOM and—perhaps most importantly—belonged to the group USSOCOM was designed to serve. Non-SOF did not see the distinction so clearly. One SOF respondent commented that, "those guys [i.e., non-SOF] don't even know the difference between SOF and USSOCOM. I had to explain it to him *(sic)*." Another said it does matter, but only in certain areas like capabilities assessments and certain types of procurements. SOF felt they were different. Others may or may not recognize that difference.

SOF felt they were different. Others may or may not recognize that difference.

The formal mission statements of USSOCOM reinforce the separateness of the special operations community and USSOCOM. From inception, the mission statements have included SOF in the third person, as a community towards which USSOCOM has certain responsibilities. USSOCOM's initial role was to "prepare SOF" to do certain tasks (1987). A decade later, it was to "Provide Special Operations Forces to…" (1996). Today's mission reflects the dual hats USSOCOM wears:

a. The first part is clearly devoted to USSOCOM's unified command responsibilities and goes far beyond a SOF-only focus. It posits a role for USSOCOM in which it "leads, plans, synchronizes, and, as directed, executes global operations [related to the global war on terrorism, or GWOT]…"

b. The second part is similar to earlier versions and emphasizes USSOCOM's service-like responsibilities: USSOCOM "trains, organizes, equips and deploys combat ready Special Operations Forces…."

As we will see later, under General Brown, USSOCOM developed a bifurcated structure to separately play these two roles.

Interestingly, the command's vision statements over the years give a different message. The vision statements under the first seven commanders[14] reflect a collapse of SOF and USSOCOM, where USSOCOM will "Be the most capable and relevant Special Operations Forces in existence…"[15] The current USSOCOM vision, 10 years later than the previous quote, remains much the same: "To be the premier team of special warriors…."[16] This language suggests strongly that USSOCOM *is* the community of special operations-qualified personnel. However, as mentioned earlier, USSOCOM has a role that goes beyond special operations (a leadership role for global operations related to the war on terrorism). Furthermore, SOF themselves feel that this vision of a collapse between USSOCOM and the special operations community is not realized. If, as the mission statements suggest, USSOCOM's role is to manage a distinctive capability that is embodied in SOF, is it reasonable for the vision to push toward a future in which the two organizations are collapsed?

Operationally, then, HQ USSOCOM (as the most visible operational arm of USSOCOM) is separate from the community of special operations-qualified personnel. Respondents suggested that one could *work for* USSOCOM—but one would *be* SOF, *be a member of* SOF. These are very different types of organizational loyalties and stem from the differing nature of the two types of organizations. In USSOCOM, loyalty is to the rules and procedures that define and operationalize USSOCOM. This cognitively oriented loyalty is common in a bureaucratic organization where ties are to offices, not people. In SOF, loyalty is rooted in a sense of commonality and is more affectively based. Ties are to individuals and are expressed through relationships.[17] It is important for our purposes that members of SOF recognized, commented on, and felt strongly this distinction, and that others did not. The recognition of this distinction leads to the next question.

What are SOF and what makes them special?

If USSOCOM is not the same thing as SOF, what is the cross-service "organization" called SOF? Precisely because special operations historically has been an informal cross-service community within the U.S. military (its historic formal organizations have always been service-specific), its defining characteristics have been matters of long debate. Robert Spulak's exploration of the specialness of SOF makes a strong argument that the "smaller and tighter distribution of personnel with greater average 'attributes' is the source of the nature and capabilities of SOF."[18] Individuals within this distribution are identified through the rigorous selection processes, which are hallmarks of SOF (the "Q course" for Army Special Forces and BUD/S training for Navy SEALs). Selznick points out that "self-insulation" devices or high barriers to entry, including selective recruiting, specialized training, and withdrawal in some way from "everyday pursuits" (activities of the general population)[19] are necessary to maintain what he calls the "autonomy of elites," where elites are those professionals responsible for maintaining group identity. He argues that this autonomy or separateness is critical for the maintenance of social values, particularly for weakly articulated values.[20]

General Brown, the USSOCOM commander from 2003 to 2007, said, "Innovation, initiative and judgment are hallmarks of Special Operators."[21] The official history of SOF emphasizes the quality of special operators.[22] In short, it is the people who make SOF special, not their missions, equipment, or training. Although the absence of special missions would eliminate the need for special men, the hallmark of SOF are the operators, not their tasks. It is these operator qualities—the specialness of the people—that allow SOF to do things that other military components could not do, were not allowed to do, or would not do. The quality and caliber of its personnel thus are a core value of SOF. This value is captured in the SOF truth: "People are more important than hardware."

Textual and theoretical evidence make a strong case for locating the specialness of SOF in the quality of their people. However, the long and ongoing debate over the question, as well as interviews and participant-observation work, suggest that the recognition of this core value is less clear and not well articulated in a behavioral and operational context. This challenge is for SOF because, as Burton

Clark writes, "A value conception stands to be 'lost' as its behavioral meaning becomes diffuse."[23] If USSOCOM did fully eliminate the precariousness nature of the SOF community, would this loss also eliminate the special nature of SOF's contribution?

Organizations Matter

Organizations and their structure matter. They matter because organizations provide formal answers to some of the most universal human questions: who are "we" and who are "they"? Who gets resources—and resources of what type—and who does not? Who has power and what are legitimate ways for them to exercise it—and what are the consequences for stepping outside the bounds of that legitimacy?

What are organizations and why do we care?

Organizations are groups of people connected by a common purpose. That purpose (Allen Batteau's "strategic end"[24]) shapes and is in turn shaped by the organization's structure. An organization's purpose and structure also are constrained by environmental factors such as available resources (including people and money). In turn, an organization acts on its environment to make more resources available and to modify its purpose. Thus constant interaction exists between organizational purpose, structure, and its environment. Therefore, organizational structures are appropriate for certain purposes and certain environmental circumstances, rather than right or wrong.[25] They will change as purpose and circumstance change. Changes in structure also can force changes in purpose and will make different portions of the environment relevant.

This iterative interaction of organizational structure, organizational purpose, and environment puts constraints on the types allowable in each of the following categories:

a. Problems that are reasonable for the organization (and the individuals who populate it) to consider
b. Actions the organization can take
c. Resources that are legitimate for it to pursue.

Formal organization focuses the decision-makers' attention by allowing certain problems and certain solutions to come to his attention

and precluding others.[26] Morton Egeberg writes, "Formal organization provides an administrative milieu that focuses a decision-maker's attention on *certain* problems and solutions, while others are excluded from consideration. The structure thus constrains choices, but at the same time it creates and increases action capacity in certain directions"[27] (emphasis in original). In short—organization matters.

Organizations can be formal or informal. Formal organizations tend to have explicit and strong rules for behavior, and detail clearly the consequences for breaking the rules. Membership in these organizations is clearly marked. (Employment contracts, passports, and, in the military, uniforms with all their identifying insignia are examples of these markers.) In order to become a member of the organization, one must recognize and accept both the rules and the consequences for breaking them. The rules are usually captured in documents or other formal statements. The loci of power are clear, and the mechanisms for the transference of resources and power are spelled out in the rules. These organizations tend to change slowly and persist over time, with the processes of change clearly and explicitly spelled out in documents or other codified materials. Weber's bureaucratic form is the model for this type of organization:[28] it is operationally manifest in many of our government and corporate entities, including the military.

Informal organizations, or what Karl Weick calls "loosely coupled organizations"[29] are harder to identify, control and manage, change quickly, and are much more ephemeral than formal organizations. Social networks or relationship-based organizations are examples of loosely coupled organizations. Membership is generally marked implicitly, not overtly. The organization exists only as relationships are exercised. (No "identity card" exists for belonging to a particular group of friends or the group of "go to" individuals on your contact list.) Power and authority also only exist as they are exercised. Informal organizations thus are less stable than formal organizations as behavioral rules and the organizational values that underpin those rules tend to be uncodified. The values are visible only in shared behavior. If not exercised, the values first become diffuse and then disappear. However, precisely for this reason values increase in importance as mechanisms of control. They thus tend to become more universal within the group than they are in formal organizations. Group cohesion often is based in the acts maintaining the value (adherence to and manifestation of

the value through behavior being the factor marking membership) rather than in the loyalty to the rules, which define the organization as an entity separate from the individuals that compose it.

Organizations with strong and clearly recognized shared values have less need for formal control mechanisms than those without them. Control is exercised through appeal to those values rather than by externally enforced adherence to explicit rules. As Batteau put it, "the greater the degree of homogeneity and shared sentiments among members of the organization, the more subtle will be the mechanisms of command."[30]

Organizational structure and organization performance

Given that organizational structure affects decision-making, it is interesting that little historic research exists on the military as an institution and the influence of institutional factors on decision-making and performance. A brief review of literature on comparative administration (which studies the formal organizations of the public and private sectors)[31] and the specific field of military sociology will contextualize and supplement this research.

Most approaches in comparative administration, which look at the implications of various formal structural configurations on organizational performance, take one of two paths. They either focus on what March and Olsen have called "environmental determinism" (i.e., the influence of contextual factors such as resource availability, culture or general geo-social pressures on organizational performance) or use "reductionist (individualistic)" explanations, which draw upon the literature of psychology and social psychology to explain the behavior of the group through an understanding of individuals.[32] Although a few notable exceptions exist, such as Wilson's *Bureaucracy*[33] and work in contingency theory,[34] these are not the rule.

Compounding the absence of work in this area in general public administration is the lack of work in military sociology on this subject. Military sociology has historically dealt with three areas. Perhaps the most studied is that of the relationship of the individual to the institution. It is represented by such works as Huntington's *The Soldier and the State*[35] and includes the large body of work that addresses both the occupational and professional dimensions of the military. The second area is that of the relationship of small subgroups

such as racial minorities, women, veterans, and others to the larger institution. The journal *Armed Forces and Society*, for example, is filled with articles addressing these types of questions. The final area is one that has received much more attention of late as the U.S. has focused on coalition-building and relationships with nonmilitary organizations. It includes work that explores the relationship of the institution of the military to other institutions. The classic approach to this area has been "civil-military relationships." Conspicuously absent is a significant body of research and analysis that deals directly with the institutions of the military itself as is found in this discussion.

What is suggested here is that the establishment of USSOCOM fundamentally changed the nature of the organization in which SOF participate. Prior to 1986/7, the special operations community (as a cross-service collection of service-specific special operations units and groups) was a loosely coupled group defined by a common capability, held together by a core value (belief in the quality of its people) that underpinned this capability. After 1986/7, HQ USSOCOM set up a tension in which the special operations community was pulled more toward an institutional replica of other unified commands and of other services. The premise that organizational structure constrains the types of problems the organization will address leads to questions about the implications of this change in structure for SOF. The change induced by the establishment of USSOCOM begs the question of the precarious nature of the SOF community, which USSOCOM was designed to stabilize.

… the establishment of USSOCOM fundamentally changed the nature of the organization in which SOF participate.

Precarious Organizations

Clark writes that precarious organizations (which he calls "organizations with precarious values") usually have three characteristics:

1. Core values are undefined.
2. The position of functionaries or those responsible for operationalizing the institution is not fully legitimated.
3. The organization is unacceptable to a host population.[36]

The value of these organizations thus is precarious or unstable in the context of the larger or host organization. Susan Marquis, in her characterization of SOF as an organization defined by a precarious value, says that "Precarious values are those goals or missions within an organization that are in conflict with, or in danger of being overwhelmed by, the primary goals or missions of the organization."[37]

The primary goals or missions of the organization in this case are those of the general-purpose forces that characterize the U.S. military. To avoid confusion over terminology, we recognize that the special operations approach is a precarious value for the U.S. military. When speaking of the organization that embodies this value (the special operations community, which is populated by SOF), the reference is to a precarious organization. This posits that the organization itself (the special operations community) reflects the precariousness of its value position within the host population (the military as a whole). The next sections address each of the three characteristics Clark identifies to support the argument that the special operations community is, indeed, a precarious organization.

Characteristic 1: Values are undefined

Strong, well-understood, and homogeneous values are particularly important in loosely coupled or informal communities such as the special operations community. As described earlier, an informal organization is one in which the rules for behavior, including those defining power, resource allocation, and relationships within the organization and to other organizations are largely implicit. Community control is exercised not by recourse to rules but by the invocation of these values. As a consequence, if the values are tenuous, poorly defined, or unevenly distributed, the integrity of the community is at risk.[38]

The theoretical arguments are strong for the importance of the focus on the quality of people as a core SOF value. This value is clearly expressed by USSOCOM leaders and official documents. It is captured in one of the four SOF "truths." However, it did not exhibit one of the primary characteristics of a core value in interviews with special operations and nonspecial operations personnel in ASD SO/LIC at the Pentagon and with SOF at HQ USSOCOM. (Keep in mind that both of these locations are populated by special operations and nonspecial operations personnel.) Strong core values are quickly recognized and expressed in the same terms by all respondents who are members of

the group defined by that value. In the interviews, even SOF respondents generally were not able to respond directly and clearly to the question, "What makes SOF 'special'?" Although most respondents eventually converged on the intrinsic qualities of people, they arrived at that conclusion almost by walking themselves through the things it was not (e.g., technology, training, and tasks). While the value was recognized, it was not clearly, quickly, and strongly articulated in informal settings by either SOF or nonspecial operations personnel.

The diffuseness of the value is reinforced by the perspective of many nonspecial operations personnel assigned to special operations units. When viewed from outside, the specialness of SOF often gets characterized as behavioral, rather than character, traits. This tendency is an important distinction. Character traits are indicators of the potential for certain types of behavior. Behavior can be learned through training and other mechanisms.

Recent efforts to formalize the Army Special Forces Assessment and Selection process illustrate both the value and the difficulty of this investment in "character." Under a new "whole man" concept, six core Special Forces attributes have been defined as key: intelligence, trainability, judgment, influence, physical fitness, and motivation. Three metrics are used to judge candidates: "his intelligence quotient (IQ) … [which] measures a soldier's cognitive potential and his ability to learn … The physical quotient (PQ)..[which] defines a soldier's physical strength, endurance and level of motivation … [and] the unconventional warfare interpersonal quotient (UWIQ) [which] is hard to define but includes a soldier's judgment and his ability to influence others."[39] Note that these are all measures of potential. The authors go on to say that, once selected, "The most powerful argument for non-selecting a soldier in subsequent phases of the Q-course is that the cadre gave the candidate the tools to better his performance and he failed to use them."[40] Although one can be deselected for failing to exercise the potential, the absence of the potential will not allow a candidate into the course at all. Note that non-selection does not focus on poor performance with a tool, but on the inability to recognize when a tool should be used.

As an example of the behavioral definition of SOF, Vice Admiral Cebrowski, Director of the Office of Force Transformation in the U.S. Department of Defense from 2001 through 2005, said:

> We want forces to be more SOF-like. Not necessarily that we want more special operations forces, but certain characteristics of our Special Operations Forces are enormously valuable, and we'd like to see them spread more into the other forces overall. Ease of insertion, a depth of local knowledge, small unit agility are all very, very powerful attributes that the entire force should possess.[41]

None of the characteristics of SOF that he delineates are character traits:

a. "Ease of insertion" is a problem that can be solved by transportation or technology platforms of various types.
b. Depth of local knowledge can be achieved through training and education.
c. Small unit agility could be interpreted to be a function of the size of the unit rather than of the thinking of the men or women involved.

As another example, several participants at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Culture Training Summit in 2007 commented that SOF "already does the culture stuff," and "has people who do that…" Many other conversations throughout the Department of Defense about the importance of culture and the teaching of cultural skills referenced the cultural *knowledge* SOF had as a benchmark, not the *ability* or potential to operate cross-culturally. On the other side, a SOF perspective on the utilization of cultural knowledge in a military context does describe this as a capability: SOF operate as "forward-deployed warrior-diplomats."[42] An analogy pointing up this distinction would be the dissimilarity between attainment of a certain level of language proficiency (which can be behaviorally measured through different types of tests) and the innate ability to easily learn a foreign language, which one possesses independent of knowledge of a particular language.

While this distinction between definitions based on behavior and character traits may seem subtle, it is about lack of clarity regarding the specialness of SOF. If SOF's specialness lie in *character* traits as Spulak argues from a theoretical perspective, the formal literature states, and as most who are engaged with the special operations community agree at some point, then selection processes such as

the Special Forces' Robin Sage and the Navy SEALs BUD/S training are necessary to sort out those who "have it" from those who do not.[43] If the defining characteristics are *behavioral*, in theory different training, equipment, or organization could allow the general-purpose military to become more SOF-like. The lack of clarity as to whether the distinction lies in the raw material (the people) or the molding of that raw material contributes to the precariousness of the special operations community.

Characteristic 2: Position of functionaries is not fully legitimated

Clark's second characteristic of an organization, which embodies a precarious value, is that the position of functionaries or those responsible for operationalizing the institution is not fully legitimated. This lack of legitimation means that other players do not recognize the right of a particular player to act. Recall that this function is a feature of any organization—to define who is in and who is out (i.e., to identify those who have a voice in a given discussion).

Prior to 1986/7, no recognized voice existed for the cross-service special operations community. SOF participated in national defense as a capability ("special operations"), not as an actor (SOF). As SOF are a very small part of each service component, it was to SOF's general disadvantage. This disadvantage was particularly apparent in SOF's lack of visibility and advocacy in the Washington budget battles and in the special operations community's struggle for appropriate inclusion in battle and operational plans by the theater commander-in-chiefs (CINCs). Prior to the establishment of USSOCOM, special operations personnel and equipment were resourced entirely through the services. The services tended to focus political energy and attention on the types of procurements necessary to support the general-purpose military, which comprised by far the greatest portion of their force structure. Prior to 1987, support for SOF came and went with each political-military crisis in which they were employed, with budgets fluctuating in accordance with immediate needs for their services. This absence of visibility also meant that SOF had no enduring public identity separate from their activities during a crisis (i.e., no identity for the special operations community). Theater CINCs often were unfamiliar with SOF capabilities and, therefore, used them inappropriately or not at all.

Further complicating the question of SOF legitimation is the way in which SOF operate in the field. The general-purpose soldier, sailor, airman, or marine is under fairly tight operational control on a battlefield. The reasons for this control are compelling but are generally outside the purview of this discussion. Suffice it to note that the military is the primary institution that our society has authorized to deal with the application of lethal violence. Its social threat is compounded by the fact that general-purpose troops are generally men of an age at which they are socially and culturally taught to question authority, are dealing with high levels of testosterone, and are generally socially immature and inexperienced. To manage this threat, we have put into place a strong set of institutional controls. "Thus the military profession is very hierarchical (as a means of control), formal (to reinforce control), heavily socialized (for internal control) and full of explicit rules, regulations, checks, and counter-checks (for external control)."[44]

A SOF team turns this control on its head. In a special operation, decision-making and planning are usually located at the lowest possible level, although field commanders still have final approval. SOF generally are older than those in the general-purpose military, and more socially experienced. A deployed SOF unit (an A team or a SEAL platoon) will be given the objective: the team devises the plan. Some significant portion of operational control of the battlefield thus is taken away from both the formal military structure and from the individuals who occupy certain command and control positions in that structure and given to members of a low-level small group. *The very presence of SOF on the battlefield challenges the legitimacy of the conventional military organization.* The commander turns to SOF because they fill a need the general-purpose military cannot—and fill it by negating many of the control structures that characterize the general-purpose force.

Characteristic 3: Unacceptable to a host population

The general-purpose military and the Department of Defense have historically been hostile to SOF. The reasons are legion. The delineation of them here is drawn from many conversations, interviews, as well as formal documents.

The primary resentment of SOF by the general-purpose military centers around what SOF believe is their core value. If, in fact, SOF are men (people) of the highest quality, by definition that means that general-purpose military personnel are not. This understanding is clearly damnation by exclusion. Resentment surfaces in comments about the egos of SOF, questions about the utility of the skills, and—most importantly here—challenges to the very nature of the difference. "They're not really that much better than us. They just think they are." Such statements are a direct attack on the SOF core value.

Other concerns are not surprising. Any funds that go to support SOF are monies that are not available to the general-purpose military. Since SOF do not contribute directly to the services' missions, any funds that go to SOF are monies that are not available for mission achievement—although, as one SOF interviewee pointed out, "I don't know why they are getting their knickers in a twist. All of USSOCOM is such a small part of the defense budget, never mind that designated for SOF activities." (USSOCOM represented only about 1.5 percent of the total Department of Defense budget in FY 2006,[45] for example…and that was one of USSOCOM's richer years.) However, the perception that SOF take away what is "rightfully theirs" is a powerful source of resentment of USSOCOM among the general-purpose forces.

Funding channels can be in conflict with reporting lines and authorities. For example, USSOCOM provides funding and personnel for the TSOCs, but each TSOC reports directly to the geographic combatant commander.[46] Recall also that each SOF operator is a member of a service component to which he also feels loyalty. The regional combatant commander thus has combatant command over the TSOCs in his theater,[47] but does not control the personnel or their equipment.

SOF as a precarious organization

The special operations community, as embodied in SOF, is a loosely coupled, precarious organization. The special operations community does exhibit the three characteristics of such an organization. The lack of clarity as to whether the specialness of SOF lies in the raw material (the capabilities or the potential of people) or achievements that can be gained by the molding of that raw material illustrates the

poor definition of what should be one of the special operations community's core, distinctive values.

The intermittent recognition of the existence of SOF as exemplified by its pre-1987 general absence from budget discussions and subsequent resource allocation exercises established an environment in which SOF (and an informal cross-service special operations community) only existed at the time of immediate need. The community virtually disappeared when it was not operationalized (and so, therefore, did SOF), in stark contrast to the service components. Hence SOF were not equal and therefore legitimate players in that environment. This de-legitimation was underscored by the very nature of SOF operational units. Their command and control structure and consequent mode of operation directly challenged the legitimacy of the conventional military organization, particularly when SOF were successful on the battlefield.

The "host population" of SOF, the general-purpose military, highly resents SOF. The SOF core value of special people by definition classes those who are not SOF as nonspecial people. And resources (both men and materiel) that go to SOF are resources the services (and so the Department of Defense) do not have available for general-purpose warfare.

It is useful to correlate these three characteristics, which define the special operations community as a precarious organization, with the three qualities Spulak identifies that distinguish SOF from other military personnel: they are creative, flexible elite warriors.[48] SOF's core value—the potential of their people—allows SOF to exercise that potentiality in a wide range of behaviors. This lack of behavioral prescription in fact allows the greatest behavioral flexibility. That they are elite warriors generates resentment in the host population. And the absence of legitimacy allowed the special operations community organizational and behavioral creativity, permitting the development of responses tailored to any situation in which SOF might find themselves. If this correlation holds, reducing the precarious nature of the special operations community will impact the very qualities that distinguish SOF and the special operations community from the general-purpose forces. Consequently, this question is addressed in the next section.

Precariousness: the Benefits and the Costs

Marquis writes in her chapter entitled "Survival of a Precarious Value,"

> SOF organizational culture and, to some extent, support from the broader SOF community have enabled at least a skeleton special operations capability to exist since World War II.[49]

This premise is consistent with the nature of informal organizations. However, she argues, the survival of the special operations capability was put in severe jeopardy in the late 1970s post-Vietnam era. Said another way, the following factors threatened to overcome any kind of special operations organizational integrity:

a. Inherent organizational instability engendered by the loose nature of the organization
b. Lack of clarity as to its defining value
c. Absence of legitimacy for its functionaries and operators
d. Resentment of SOF by other service components.

Supporters of the special operations capability believed that formally recognizing SOF and giving them a designated place at the table was necessary for the survival of the capability. This recognition was the genesis for development of the Nunn-Cohen Amendment and the establishment of USSOCOM and ASD SO/LIC.

Legitimizing SOF

The Nunn-Cohen Amendment aimed to reduce the precariousness of SOF by making their functionaries more legitimate. USSOCOM recognized the success of the effort in a 2007 document published for its 20-year anniversary. "The establishment of a four-star Commander in Chief and an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict eventually gave SOF a voice in the highest councils of the Defense Department."[50] The designation by President Bush in 2005 of USSOCOM as the "lead combatant commander for planning, synchronizing, and as directed, executing global operations against terrorist networks in coordination with other combatant commanders"[51] was a very strong stamp of legitimacy. It clearly and publicly recognized USSOCOM as first among equals (the other combatant commands) in the warfighting environment of

the greatest interest to the nation today. This explicit recognition of legitimacy was a step in reducing the precarious nature of SOF and the special operations community.

Almost all histories of the establishment of USSOCOM recognize this benefit.[52] What none of these stories discuss is the possible cost to SOF and to special operations of increased organizational legitimacy. The next subsections will address this question.

What is legitimacy? Legitimacy is a characteristic of an organization whose means and ends appear to conform to social norms, values, and resources. Legitimacy is a function of the perception of others of an organization. Desire for legitimacy thus impacts the way in which an organization manipulates symbols and structures to convince others that its actions meet or adhere to the expectations of the social systems' norms, values, and rules.[53] Another way to put this premise is that the more an organization is like other organizations (or is isomorphic with them), the greater its legitimacy. As Deephouse wrote, "A fundamental proposition of institutional theory is that isomorphism leads to legitimacy."[54]

Legitimacy is important because it justifies the organization in the eyes of others in the same social system (in the military and defense community, in SOF's case). It thus garners support for and can attract resources to an organization. In fact, some have gone so far as to say that "legitimacy is itself a resource."[55]

Organizations seek legitimacy in two ways.[56] The first is through changes in substantive management, and the second is through management of symbolic structures. Changes in substantive management involve real changes in goals, structure, or socially institutionalized practices. It could be argued that many of the changes within the Department of Defense proposed under "defense transformation" fall into this area. Changes in symbolic management focus on making the organization appear as if it is conforming to socially acceptable goals. These changes in symbolic structures may involve statements and pronouncements (think of the liquor companies and their statements about drinking responsibly) or actual redefinition or reinterpretation of means and ends so they appear to be in conformance with such goals.

Any change in legitimacy involves change through both means, and we find this to be the case with the special operations community. The establishment of USSOCOM is a clear example of how the

structure was altered to bestow additional legitimacy on SOF. The establishment of USSOCOM was an effort to help the cross-service special operations community define for itself a place in the broader military/defense community by making it look more like other parts of the community (i.e., establish structural isomorphism).

Interestingly, the legislation that established USSOCOM was able to give it legitimacy in two communities. As explained earlier, USSOCOM simultaneously exhibits command- and service-like qualities. The crafters of the legislation used the mission authority inherent in USSOCOM as a unified combatant command to ensure temporal continuity for SOF. The MFP-11 budget authority USSOCOM was given allowed it control over resources for SOF similar to the services and unlike other unified commands. Later discussion will illustrate how this dual-hatted legitimacy also fostered resentment against USSOCOM and, by extension, the special operations community in other unified commands. Through its MFP-11 budget authority USSOCOM controlled funding in ways in which the other unified commands did not and which had the potential to challenge their operational authorities. Resentment also existed in the service components as USSOCOM could exercise mission authority for its personnel in a way the services could not.

The structural or substantive legitimacy the cross-service special operations community obtained through the establishment of USSOCOM was enhanced by changes in social conditions, which made the type of war SOF were particularly positioned to fight (low intensity conflict) front and center. This environmental change allowed USSOCOM to achieve legitimacy in the symbolic dimension. SOF, through USSOCOM, thus became the embodiment of the social norm (as in the earlier quote by Admiral Cebrowski in which he commented that conventional forces needed to become "more SOF-like"). SOF warfighting techniques (their means) conformed strongly with social goals (winning the war on terrorism). Interestingly and importantly for this argument, it was the social goal that changed to come into conformity with SOF's means, rather than vice versa, as usually happens when organizations seek legitimacy. Because of the change in social goals, the special operations community was able to gain strong additional symbolic legitimacy through USSOCOM's elevation to the supported or lead command for the war on terrorism. This explicit, formal recognition was a statement that the conflict in which we are

engaged is one for which USSOCOM—and, by implication, the capabilities exemplified by SOF—is best suited through its combination of global reach and unique warfighting techniques.

What does legitimacy bring? The benefits of increased legitimacy for an organization in general and for the special operations community in particular are clear. Temporal continuity is certainly critical for SOF with their long personnel selection and development pipeline. A formal place on an organization chart—parity with other joint commands—helps ensure such continuity. Access to resources has been another historic major SOF problem. The establishment of USSOCOM and ASD SO/LIC has given SOF a voice in the resource acquisition process.

The costs of legitimacy, particularly as they relate to SOF, have not been discussed historically. The thesis of this discussion is that both benefits and costs must be considered in the decision process to avoid or mitigate significant unintended consequences.

The costs of isomorphism. Increased legitimacy means increased isomorphism (i.e., to be legitimate, you need to look like your neighbors). As the new kid on the block (to continue the neighborhood analogy), USSOCOM found itself forced to look organizationally more like everyone else. Some of these changes in organizational structure will be described later in this section to illustrate this point. Secondly, one of the demands on players in our governmental system—particularly those who access resources—is accountability for use of those resources. This accountability leads to an increase in formalism for an organization as it becomes required to trace the movement of money, materiel, and personnel because it is now a legitimate player.

The U.S. military as a whole is organized according to the J-staff structure. "The J-Structure is an organizational approach that focuses upon functionality of each of the 'J or Joint Elements'." [57] The J elements are functional staff elements such as J-2 (Intelligence) or J-1 (Personnel). USSOCOM was itself initially set up with the J-staff structure. However, in the late 1990s, General Schoomaker eliminated the J-staff structure to try to set up something more compatible with the unique nature of SOF requirements. He established five "centers of excellence," each of which included like elements from the J structure. This streamlining of operations underscored the different approach of

USSOCOM, freed up billets that were transferred to the TSOCs, and provided core staff for the establishment of the Joint Special Operations University.[58]

An unintended consequence of this reorganization was that USSOCOM's lack of structural compatibility with the rest of the military led to operational confusion. "Guys from other places just don't know who to talk to in USSOCOM because we don't have a J-designation," said an individual interviewed during this period. When USSOCOM assumed the role as the lead command in the GWOT in 2005, General Brown (then commander of USSOCOM) restructured the command in a way that accomplished three goals. First, he regained isomorphism with the other commands by reviving the J-staff structure. Second, he retained the statement of the "uniqueness" of special operations and SOF by locating the directorates within a new version of the functional centers, which has been called a "blended organization."[59] And third, he structurally addressed the dual-hat nature of USSOCOM (a service and a command) by placing responsibility for intelligence, operations, and planning (the traditional J2, J3, and J5 functions) into the Center for Special Operations (CSO). The CSO functions as a GWOT warfighting element, a force provider; and the commander of the CSO can also serve as the commander of a Joint Task Force related to the war on terrorism. All other J-functions—communications (J6), requirements and resources (J8), acquisition (J4), knowledge and futures (J7/9), and a recently established (2007) function addressing irregular warfare (J10)—have been left distinct but are organizationally identified as "centers."[60]

The structural separation of the operational portion of USSOCOM's charter from its more general administrative and leadership responsibilities toward the war on terrorism was meant to help maintain the distinctiveness of the special operations approach in an environment such as that found at HQ USSOCOM and at the Pentagon where many of the players are not SOF. It would accomplish this distinction by clearly delineating that which requires special operations capabilities. This distinctiveness is reinforced by the rigorous selection process SOF personnel must endure.

The SOF selection process takes on increased importance if the core characteristic of a SOF warrior truly is character-based, and if the maintenance of the autonomy or distinctiveness of this group is critical for maintenance of group values. The fieldwork for this monograph,

including formal interviews and conversations in participant-observation environments, supported this argument with statements by informants challenging the legitimacy of certain Air Force members of the special operations community. Although those in the Air Force SOF Special Tactics Group—particularly combat controllers and pararescue jumpers (PJs)—go through extremely strenuous physical testing and a cognitively demanding training regime similar to the Special Forces Q course and the Navy SEALs BUD/S training, others are simply assigned to Air Force SOF positions outside the Special Tactics Group through the normal Air Force assignment process. Even Air Force SOF personnel often question the legitimacy of the SOF designation for these positions. In the same vein, much of the push-back from the special operations community against the elevated SOF levels requested in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review revolve around precisely this point. A high level of attrition in the SOF training pipeline exists because, as Spulak pointed out, the range of the distribution of those with appropriate capabilities is narrow.[61] In order to ensure appropriate screening, the pipeline to produce a SOF warrior is long and narrow. A significant time delay exists from when a recruit enters and a fully competent SOF warrior emerges, and far fewer emerge than enter. Quick increases in troop levels thus would violate a core SOF value.

The belief in the quality of special operations-qualified personnel and the associated ability to push decision-making down to low levels within SOF led to other issues around parity or isomorphism in various cross-service environments. In 2003, prior to USSOCOM's designation as the lead command in the war on terrorism, but concurrent with its increasing participation in planning for the fight, SOF personnel in the Pentagon's USSOCOM office commented that although they might be deemed qualified through character by HQ USSOCOM to participate in certain cross-service meetings or decision processes, the lack of rank parity with members of other services meant that they were either not invited or their opinion/decision was not considered as legitimate as those of others in the meeting or decision chain. The USSOCOM personnel thus found themselves putting inordinate demands for their presence on the

… the lack of rank parity with members of other services meant that they were either not invited or their opinion/decision was not considered as legitimate …

relatively few numbers of flag and general officers at HQ USSOCOM in order to establish command and SOF "service" legitimacy in the cross-service environment. This demand led to an increase in the number of flag officers within USSOCOM and a redefinition upwards of the rank required to command certain elements. Again, in its quest for legitimacy USSOCOM was forced into isomorphism with the other players, leading it to challenge or downplay SOF's core value.

We now return to the disjunction outlined earlier between USSOCOM's mission (to manage a capability that is embodied in SOF) and its vision (to *be* the special operations community). As Marquis points out, the very qualities that make SOF distinctive and successful in an operational context do not translate easily into the administrative or bureaucratic structure within which USSOCOM must work.[62] Efforts to conflate the special operations community with USSOCOM may lead to an erasure of that which makes SOF unique.

Increased accountability means increased formalism. One of the prizes the special operations community was seeking with the establishment of USSOCOM was a resource stream that was free from the short-term, wild, fluctuations it had experienced previously. However, formal access to resources in the U.S. governmental structure as a legitimate actor means increased accountability for expenditure of those resources. This increased accountability means formalism in planning and in the tracking of how funds are used.

In key ways, this formalism is antithetical to the special operations approach. If the organization's greatest value is the capabilities of its people—capabilities that specifically focus on innovation, creativity, and improvisation—the formalism that is required in order to get increased and reliable funding will change the nature of the environment within which the organization's members operate, and thus will select for different successful skills. As one interviewee who had been a special operator for decades said, "We didn't used to have a lot, so we were innovative and creative because you had to be—we had to beg, borrow, and steal. Now we have USSOCOM to get stuff for us the regular ways." He added, "The leaner you are the more creative you are." Another SOF interviewee asked, "Is it harder to manage abundance or to manage scarcity? I think managing abundance is harder." He felt that his skill set did not suit him well for the formalism required.

The formalism required by increased resource levels could change the nature of SOF themselves. If special operators have "the intellectual agility to conceptualize creative, useful solutions to ambiguous problems,"[63] successful special operations depend upon the SOF capability to use resources in previously un-thought-of ways. One interviewee said that, "these are guys who, when everything goes wrong, they can make it right." When this creative and innovative attitude is combined with the mandate to "work by, with, and through the local population" and a history of scarce resources, a culture emerges that is capable of and values exploiting the environment in which it finds itself. These individuals are looking for and likely will use assets and resources that are locally recognized as appropriate to the task.

These types of "found" resources often are outside the formal legitimate resource pool. "This 'hidden in plain sight' nature of some elements…places them outside the normal channels of accountability. It places them outside the normal funding channels as well…"[64] Control over action thus is handed back to the individual operator, which removes the actor from the level of institutional control found in the general-purpose military. The reliance on found resources in special operations thus sets up a strong tension between the SOF value of the quality individual and the USSOCOM requirement for organizational accountability. As the special operations community through USSOCOM becomes more concerned about the maintenance of legitimacy, this tension is at risk of shifting in the direction of increased isomorphism with the other services and unified commands to the detriment (again) of the SOF core value.

Summary and Conclusions

The establishment of USSOCOM and ASD SO/LIC is achieving what its initiators and supporters had hoped. Changes in social values (i.e., our national investment in the war on terrorism) have brought USSOCOM significant symbolic legitimacy. After some experiments with organizational and management structure, HQ USSOCOM is achieving substantive legitimacy through a blended organization that still recognizes the cross-service J-staff structure while promulgating centers of excellence that recognize SOF's unique approaches. And the establishment of the CSO directly addressed the dual-hat nature of USSOCOM, allowing it to look like both a service and a command by

organizationally separating certain operational responsibilities from other command functions.

Achievement of these points is coming at a price. If Spulak's arguments hold, SOF are, by definition, a cadre of creative, flexible, elite warriors. The SOF core value of the quality of personnel argues for a pool of personnel with the potential to creatively exercise behaviors appropriate to a wide range of situations. The historic absence of legitimacy in the military community allowed for flexible organizational structures and operational behaviors that did not conform to standard military regimes. This framework engendered hostility toward SOF among the general-purpose military who resented the cadre of personnel self-styled and regarded by others as "elite warriors." Addressing elements of the precarious nature of the special operations community has the potential to undermine the very qualities that distinguish it and give it value.

HQ USSOCOM has been forced to look like the other services perhaps more than its commanders and personnel would like. Recognizing that organization does matter, HQ USSOCOM tried—and was institutionally "not allowed"—to be organized in a way it felt better fit the types of problems it was best designed to address. The current blended organizational structure is an effort to simultaneously address issues of structural conformity while retaining the structural uniqueness that will allow SOF-appropriate problems and solutions to surface. However, this blend does set up a strong tension that needs to be explicitly managed, as the pull to conformity is strong. The prize for such conformity is funding and recognition. The cost is loss of flexibility.

HQ USSOCOM has been forced to look like the other services perhaps more than its commanders and personnel would like.

Increased funding comes with increased accountability, which in turn takes responsibility for resource acquisition and utilization away from the operator and places it in the system. This situation challenges the strong SOF value placed on individual character and quality, particularly on the ability to improvise and innovate. The need to conform to requirements for rank parity also is a clear and direct challenge to the strong SOF value placed on individual character and quality. The pull to conformity will be felt as a challenge to the SOF

core value. SOF's distinctiveness lies in the quality of its people, in the "raw material," in a potential.

If SOF's ability to achieve certain ends through a particular type of means relies on what Selznick calls an "autonomous elite" or what Spulak describes as a "smaller and tighter distribution of personnel," *by definition* SOF's means cannot become the preferred means of warfighting for the military in general. However, this core value is not well articulated in a behavioral or operational environment. While it is captured as a formal core truth, it is not a ready answer to what makes SOF special. This behavioral diffuseness puts the value in jeopardy. As Marquis says, "Precarious values are those goals or missions within an organization that are in conflict with, *or in danger of being overwhelmed by*, the primary goals or missions of the organization"[65] (emphasis added). Since the value of quality personnel is not clearly behaviorally or operationally recognized either within or outside of SOF, and because USSOCOM is under strong pressure to organizationally look like other commands and services in order to maintain legitimacy, the core value of SOF—the importance of the quality of their people—is at great risk of being lost. It will be translated into tasks or acquired behaviors and will thus become solutions to problems of a specific time and place rather than potential or capability that can be operationalized anywhere in the world to address a range of different types of problems. In this case, the value defined as a capability is at risk of becoming redefined into behavioral achievements. The potential cost here is loss of creativity.

… the core value of SOF—the importance of the quality of their people—is at great risk of being lost.

Finally, the move towards isomorphism and the loss of creativity, combined with the hostility from the host population towards SOF, are an ongoing challenge to the position of the elite warrior. If SOF organizationally look like the general-purpose forces and are held to similar standards of behavioral accountability, they will become more like them. As noted earlier, organizational structures constrain the types of problems that organizations can address, the resources they can access, and the types of solutions they devise. "Elite" by definition is different. And difference generates organizational precariousness.

Loss of difference for SOF and the special operations community is not an inevitable outcome. Some of the mechanisms necessary to sustain SOF distinctiveness include continued push-back on rapid personnel increase requirements justified by a strong focus on selection and maintenance of a pool of personnel with certain qualities. Clear expression of and focus on the role of the core SOF value of the quality of personnel in the selection processes also will be helpful. Focus on the development of a cross-service SOF identity might force more explicit recognition and (more importantly) enable clear expression by both SOF and nonspecial operations personnel of what make SOF different. Since HQ USSOCOM and the high visibility activities in the Pentagon involve a lot of non-SOF personnel, it will be important to keep operational SOF distinct from general-purpose/conventional personnel assigned to HQ USSOCOM and to explicitly recognize that difference (as the mission statements do but the vision statements do not). Finally, if Spulak is correct and it is the particular *distribution* of character traits or attributes within a group (not simply their presence in a particular individual) that characterizes SOF, leveraging that distribution through a different organizational form that allows the full expression of those traits is critical.

The challenge for leadership will be to devise a way to promote and maintain SOF distinctive capabilities without appearing to simultaneously denigrate general-purpose forces. Leadership will need to be able to simultaneously balance the requirements of legitimacy and SOF's creativity and ingenuity in working with "found" resources.

This discussion was intended to highlight some of the costs associated with reducing the precariousness of the cross-service special operations community as an organization within the U.S. defense community so that these costs can be recognized, managed, and mitigated. It is not an argument for reducing legitimacy or for eliminating other benefits associated with the establishment of USSOCOM. Rather, it is a plea to consider both sides of the balance sheet so organizational mechanisms and leadership strategies can be developed to prevent the diminishment of what we are trying to save and strengthen.

Endnotes

1. Allen W. Batteau, "Negations and Ambiguities in the Cultures of Organization," *American Anthropologist* vol. 102 no. 4 (2001): 726-740: p. 728.
2. Susan L. Marquis, *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1997).
3. Burton R. Clark, "Organizational Adaptation and Precarious Values: A Case Study" *American Sociological Review* vol. 21 no. 3 (June 1956): 327-336.
4. Philip Selznick, *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1957), 127.
5. Marquis, op. cit., 4.
6. *United States Special Operations Command History: 1987–2007* www.socom.mil/Docs/Command_History_26Feb07webversion.pdf (accessed July 2007).
7. See, for example, Marquis, op. cit.
8. Colonel Charles J. Dunlap (USAF), "Organizational Change and the New Technologies of War" (paper presented at JSCOPE 98 (XX): Ethics and Leadership During Organizational Change, Washington D.C., January 1998) Note 50.
9. James R. Locher III, "Has it worked?: The Goldwater-Nichols reorganization act," *Naval War College Review* (Autumn 2001).
10. U.S. Code Title 10, Subtitle A, Part 1, Chapter 6, section 167, Unified combatant command for special operations forces. See paragraph (b).
11. *SOF Resource Relationships* https://www.jagcnet.army.mil/JAGCNETInternet/Homepages/AC/CLAMO-Public.nsf/db23ed-d177d0433e85256cff00097fe2/fba07f7f6d2890e285256cf30060aa36/Body/M2/SOF%20Resource%20Relationships.ppt?OpenElement#393 (accessed July 2007).
12. All interviewees for this project were given assertions of anonymity so no names or affiliations are given in the text. Text in quotes is the actual language used by interviewees. When quotes or observations are given from a participant-observation situation, the same caveats apply.
13. *USSOCOM: Capstone Concept for Special Operations* (2006) www.socom.mil/Docs/USSOCOM_CCSO_2006web.pdf (accessed April 2007).
14. As of this writing, Admiral Olson, the current commander of USSOCOM, has held that office for only a few months and has published no official revisions to the vision statement.
15. *United States Special Operations Command History*, op. cit. p. 13 quote from vision statement promulgated by General Schoomaker, CINCSOC 1997-2000.

16. Ibid., 17.
17. See Jessica Glicken Turnley, *Implications for Network-Centric Warfare*, JSOU Report 06-3 (Hurlburt Field, FL::Joint Special Operations University Press, March 2006) for a discussion of rule- and relationship-based organizations.
18. Robert G. Spulak Jr., *A Theory of Special Operations: the Origin, Qualities, and Use of SOF*, JSOU Report 07-7 (Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, October 2007), 12.
19. Selznick, op. cit., 123.
20. Selznick, op. cit., 121.
21. Bryan D. "Doug" Brown, "U.S. Special Operations Command: Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century" *Joint Force Quarterly* issue 40, p. 43.
22. *United States Special Operations Command History*, op. cit., 25-26.
23. Clark, op. cit, 128.
24. Batteau, op. cit.
25. Jay R. Galbraith, *Organization Design* (London: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1977).
26. H. A. Simon, V. A. Thompson, and D. W. Smithburg, *Public Administration* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950); Morten Egeberg, "The Impact of Bureaucratic Structure on Policy Making," *Public Administration* vol. 77, no. 1 (1999): 155-170).; and James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989, New Edition 2000).
27. Egeberg, op.cit., 159.
28. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, trans., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 196.
29. Karl E. Weick, *Making Sense of the Organization* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), see especially pp. 32-56.
30. Batteau, op. cit., 729.
31. Egeberg, op. cit., 155-170.
32. J. G. March and J. P. Olsen, "Institutional perspectives on political institutions," *Governance* 9 (1996): 247-264.
33. Wilson, op. cit.
34. Galbraith, op. cit.
35. Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957).
36. Clark, op. cit., 327-336.
37. Marquis, op. cit., 7.
38. Selznick, op. cit., 120.
39. Major Will Cotty, Captain (P) Brendon Bluestein, Ph.D. and Jat Thompson, Ph.D., "The Whole-Man Concept: Assessing the SF Soldier of the Future," *Special Operations Technology* vol. 3, issue 4 (2005): 68-72.

40. Cotty, et al., op. cit., 72.
41 Arthur Cebrowski, "Planning a Revolution: Mapping the Pentagon's Transformation," *The Heritage Foundation WebMemo* No. 292 (2003), www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/wm292.cfm.
42. *USSOCOM: Capstone Concept for Special Operations* (2006), op. cit.
43. Cotty, et al., op. cit.
44. Guy Siebold, "Core issues and theories in military sociology," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* vol. 29 (summer 2001), 140-159 www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3719/is_200107/ai_n8977420 (accessed January 2008).
45. *USSOCOM: Capstone Concept for Special Operations* (2006), op. cit., 21.
46. USSOCOM Fact Sheet 2007, produced by USSOCOM Public Affairs, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida.
47. U.S. Code Title 10, Subtitle A, Part 1, Chapter 6, section 167, op. cit., paragraph (d).
48. Spulak, op. cit., 18.
49. Marquis, op. cit., 58.
50. *USSOCOM: Capstone Concept for Special Operations* (2006), op. cit., 7.
51. 2004 Unified Command Plan (UCP) 1 March 2005.
52. See, for example, Marquis, op. cit. and *United States Special Operations Command History,* op. cit.
53. Blake E. Ashforth and Barrie W. Gibbs, "The Double-Edge of Organizational Legitimation," *Organization Science* vol. 1 no. 2 (1990): 177-194; David L. Deephouse and Suzanne M. Carter, "An Examination of Differences Between Organizational Legitimacy and Organizational Reputation," *Journal of Management Studies* 42(2) (2005): 329-360; and M.C. Suchman, "Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches," *Academy of Management Review* 20 (1995): 571-610.
54. Deephouse, op. cit., 333.
55. Ashforth, op. cit., 177.
56. Ashforth, op. cit.
57. NATO/Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, www.nato.int/shape/issues/ncs/faq.htm, describes the structure of military organizations.
58. *United States Special Operations Command History*, op. cit., 14.
59. USSOCOM Fact Sheet 2007, op.cit.
60. Ibid.
61. Spulak, op. cit.
62. Marquis, op. cit., 166.
63. USSOCOM Capstone Concept for Special Operations (2006), op. cit., 13.

64. Kerry B. Fosher, Just Thinking Out Loud: How Practitioners Make Homeland Security (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2008, in press).
65. Marquis, op. cit., 7.